



ST. THOMAS • ELGIN  
Local Immigration Partnership  
Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities

# MOVING FORWARD

2014



## **Our Vision**

St. Thomas and Elgin County communities will be a culturally diverse, welcoming, caring, and inclusive community that will retain current residents, welcome newcomers, and provide them the opportunity to successfully integrate, contribute to, and benefit from social, cultural, and economic inclusion

## **Our Principles**

To ensure that the work of those associated with the initiative promotes inclusivity, the following principles have been adopted:

**Inclusivity** – The work of the Council and the members of working committees will be inclusive of all immigrants in the St. Thomas-Elgin community regardless of their immigration status, citizenship, age, gender, health status, sexual orientation, and number of years in the community. The Council shall work towards equal participation while promoting social justice.

**Collaboration** – A working relationship will be developed between the host community and the immigrant community to build a welcoming, caring, and inclusive environment.

**Empowerment** – Our work will strive to promote new immigrants' capacity to live their lives with the ability to be economically stable, live in adequate housing, and provide for themselves and their families through their own means and their own decisions.

**Sustainability** – A plan shall be developed to ensure that the work of the ST-ELIP Council will continue to make improvements to immigrants' experiences and the community as a whole.

## ST-ELIP COUNCIL 2014

<b>Abe Harms</b>	Mennonite Community Services
<b>Adriana Balderas</b>	Community Member
<b>Bob Hammersley</b>	St. Thomas and Area Chamber of Commerce
<b>Debra Mountenay</b>	Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board
<b>Gerry Moniz</b>	Central Community Health Centre
<b>Jeff Kohler</b>	City of St. Thomas Alderman
<b>John Robinson</b>	Royal LePage
<b>Kate Burns</b>	Elgin County Economic Development
<b>Pete Peters</b>	Mennonite Credit Union
<b>Mike Amato</b>	Fanshawe College
<b>Sean Dyke</b>	St. Thomas Economic Development
<b>Shelley Harris</b>	YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
<b>Vicki Luke</b>	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Ministry of Rural Affairs
<b>Member not defined</b>	Employment Services Elgin

## ST-ELIP PROJECT TEAM

<b>Petrusia Hontar</b>	Researcher/Project Assistant
<b>Alfredo Marroquin</b>	Project Coordinator
<b>Shelley Harris</b>	Project Manager

## Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful to our ST-ELIP Council members for the skills, knowledge, and resources they bring to our work. Thanks also to the many community members, organizations, and agencies across St. Thomas and Elgin County for their ongoing support of our project. We continue to be welcomed and are sought out to participate in initiatives that build strong networks across the community. We thank you for validating the important work we are accomplishing.

We also thank Citizenship and Immigration Canada for their funding and commitment to building strong and prosperous communities.

The progress we are achieving can only be accomplished with the concerted and passionate contributions of the many individuals committed to building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities!

### Partners:

Central Community Health Centre  
Elgin Business Resource Centre  
Elgin County Economic Development  
Elgin County Library  
Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning  
and Development Board  
Employment Services Elgin  
Fanshawe College  
Mennonite Savings and Credit Union  
Mennonite Community Services

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food  
Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs  
St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce  
St. Thomas Economic Development  
The City of St. Thomas  
The County of Elgin  
YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

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## Message from ST-ELIP Chair

Dear St. Thomas and Elgin County community,

We are now entering our fourth year of the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership and are so grateful for the support from the newcomer participants, stakeholders, and community agencies from St. Thomas and across Elgin County.

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (ST-ELIP) was created to bring together stakeholders to develop solutions and strategies for the process of newcomer settlement, to raise awareness of the needs and services of our newcomers, and to create a community dialogue to improve our capacity to successfully integrate immigrants.

The ST-ELIP Council members bring a wealth of experience from a variety of sectors, and their work envisions the creation of a healthy community in which all individuals are welcomed and encouraged. We are indebted to their commitment to the project and look forward to developing our next annual action plan in the near future.

Our strategies continue to be developed in consultation with the community and the ST-ELIP Council with a focus on the real issues that impact newcomer settlement. You will find our Settlement Strategies to be proactive tools contributing to our goal of building on our strong local history, strengths, and collaboration.

The last year has seen much activity with the implementation phase of our strategies. This report will highlight the results of our work this year and review our future plans. We are very pleased to have completed the Newcomer Information Package with local content and information to help newcomers find the resources they need. Our many other accomplishments are outlined in this report.

The ST-ELIP team commits to focusing on our vision and guiding principles throughout our project implementation. We present our strategies and encourage you to be a link in developing innovative and local plans in a progressive way to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities across Elgin County and St. Thomas.

Shelley Harris  
ST-ELIP Chair

## **ST-ELIP Highlights of 2013-2014**

The ST-ELIP was established on February 28, 2011 as part of an expansion of Local Immigration Partnerships funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. The 2011-2012 year was dedicated to research and community consultations, which included many community roundtable discussions, surveys, and one-on-one interviews. The months of detailed and inclusive community engagement led to the identification of five priority areas for our region: Coordination of Services; Employment and Labour Market Access; Settlement and Integration; Language, ESL, and Communication; and Public Awareness. The Priority Areas were identified in part based on community needs and in part based on community resources.

The following two years of work focused on the strategic implementation of these five priorities, led by agencies and leaders in the community and the ST-ELIP Council in collaboration with the ST-ELIP team. Notably, the St. Thomas Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee has taken a leadership role in implementing the Public Awareness Priority. This group of community volunteers continues to plan a variety of events and initiatives to inform the public about the many contributions of newcomers to our community and the rich value of cultural diversity.

The ST-ELIP Council is made up of representatives from a range of sectors and skilled staff. We work with community support to build an understanding of our priorities and strategies. We continue to depend on the collaboration of our team, Council, and Cultural Diversity Committee to lead us as we implement our strategies in 2014-15 to create a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community.

The following pages outline our progress in 2013-14, our second year of the implementation phase. We continue to make progress on existing programs, establishing new and exciting initiatives, and laying a strong foundation as we prepare for the upcoming year.

## Coordination of Services

Often when newcomers come to Canada and the communities in Elgin County and St. Thomas, accessing services can be a complicated and daunting task. Newcomers do not always fully understand the extent of available services to meet their needs or how to access these services. The priority of Coordination of Services was established based on this need. When newcomers access a service, the frontline provider can be invaluable in helping them navigate other services that may also assist in their settlement process. With this in mind, the ST-ELIP has developed networking opportunities for service providers to and to better understand the services that are available across Elgin County and in St. Thomas.

### Highlights of 2013-2014

Walk with me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event

Elgin County Delegations

Integrated Services Planning Summit

Elgin County Ambassadors

Low German Networking Conference

Presentation at Western University

Moving Forward 2014: Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities

### Walk With Me

The *Walk with Me* 2013 event was a great success. We welcomed 90 participants to the event, 24 of which were newcomers to the community. Participants were able to gather information from the 22 participating service providers who welcomed the opportunity to introduce their services and make direct contact with newcomers and with one another. The event included a panel discussion with three newcomers and two settlement service providers as well as a guest speaker from CIC, Martine Duviella, who spoke about Cultural Diversity Awareness.

The event was well received and participants were grateful for the networking opportunity.

Participating agencies included:

- Alzheimer Society Elgin-St. Thomas
- Bridges out of Poverty of YWCA
- Canadian Red Cross
- Caring Cupboard
- Central Community Health Centre
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- Contact North
- Ed Corrigan Law Office
- Elgin and St. Thomas Housing Corporation
- Elgin Business Resource Centre



- Elgin Community Nutrition Partnership
- Elgin County Library
- Elgin Oxford Legal Clinic
- Elgin St. Thomas Public Health
- Employment Services Elgin
- Fanshawe College St. Thomas/Elgin Campus
- Habitat for Humanity
- Jeff Yurek, Member of Provincial Parliament Constituency Office
- Joe Preston, Member of Parliament Constituency Office
- Literacy Link South Central
- MCS Aylmer Resource Centre
- Ontario Early Years Centre
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Ministry of Rural Affairs
- Ontario Works
- Oxford Elgin Child and Youth Centre
- Serenity House
- Southwesthealthline.ca
- St. Thomas Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee
- St. Thomas Police Services (Constable)
- St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership
- ST-ELIP Council Community Member
- Thames Valley District School Board
- Town of Aylmer
- Victim Services Elgin
- YMCA of St. Thomas Elgin
- Youth Engagement Program - YWCA
- YWCA English Class
- YWCA St. Thomas Elgin
- YWCA St. Thomas Elgin Settlement Services
- YWCA St. Thomas Elgin Literacy and Basic Skills Program

As a result of this networking event, service providers gained a better understanding of the services offered in the community, especially the services that Settlement Services can provide. As a result of this networking event, newcomer referrals to Settlement Services offices have increased. The positive feedback from the event also demonstrates the need for *Walk with Me* to become an annual networking event.

## **Elgin County Delegations**

In addition to fostering a strong network among the local service providers that assist newcomers in settling into our community, we recognize that the inclusion of municipalities in the settlement process remains very important, especially in the rural areas of Elgin County. As municipalities gain a better understanding of the needs of newcomers in our community they can better support them with their own slate of services as well as refer them to existing community services.

With this in mind, the ST-ELIP team traversed Elgin County, making presentations to each municipal council. The delegations reminded the Councils of the work that has been done and encouraged them to promote collaboration with the ST-ELIP in community events and initiatives. The delegations strengthened our ties with the communities. In all cases there has been positive feedback from the council members and the community members with whom the delegations engaged.

Delegations were held in municipal council chambers in:

- City of St. Thomas
- Town of Aylmer
- Township of Malahide
- Municipality of Central Elgin
- Municipality of Dutton/Dunwich
- Municipality of West Elgin
- Municipality of Bayham
- Township of Southwold

## **Integrated Services Planning Summit**

The ST-ELIP attends the Planning Summit for integrated services in Elgin County. The initiative aims to promote a collective impact approach for service access that accounts for the unique needs of youth under the age of 21, the ST-ELIP provided a strong voice to advocate for the needs of newcomer youth at the planning stage. The work the ST-ELIP and the Settlement Strategy 2012-2015 Report has been identified as a planning resource that will be used to inform the process.

## **Elgin County Ambassadors**

The ST-ELIP team attends meetings for the Elgin County Ambassadors. The meetings provide an opportunity to connect with County residents from rural areas. This group promotes the forging of connections across sectors, specifically with members of the Tourism Elgin Group who work to attract visitors through unique experiences.

## **Low German Networking Conference**

The Mennonite Central Committee hosts an annual networking conference. The format changes yearly to address current concerns and requests in the community. Last year's conference included a keynote speaker and community tours of the elementary school, alternative schools, local businesses, and local churches. The ST-ELIP had the opportunity to set up an information booth at the event where we distributed our reports and provided information on ways to collaborate within the community.

### **Presentation at Western University**

The ST-ELIP presented “Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities in St. Thomas-Elgin: Opportunities and Challenges” to the Centre for Research on Migration and Ethnic Relations. Forty five faculty, graduate students, and members of the community attended. The presentation focused on the history, process, and strategies associated with the establishment of the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership as a community initiative to facilitate the development and implementation of sustainable solutions for the successful integration of newcomers to St. Thomas and Elgin County.

### **Moving Forward 2014**

Our annual *Moving Forward* event celebrates the achievements of the ST-ELIP and the network of newcomers in the community. At this event, we collect feedback to prepare for the upcoming year of project implementation.

## Employment and Labour Market

Employment is the single most important factor in the successful economic integration of newcomers. With the achievement of economic security, newcomers can actively participate in communities.

In response to anticipated future labour shortages, the Elgin St. Thomas Labour Force Development Strategy identified the attraction and retention of newcomers as one of its priorities.

The ST-ELIP identified access to the labour market as an integral aspect of successful integration of newcomers into the community. Labour market integration is contingent on enhancing supports, understanding and utilizing diversity within the workplace, and addressing issues faced by newcomers.

### Highlights of 2013-2014

Workforce Development – Youth Job Strategy

Collaboration with Entrepreneurial Supports – Entrepreneurial Climate Study

Cultural Diversity Awareness

### Workforce Development

The ST-ELIP continues to collaborate with Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Development on common initiatives. Within Elgin County and St. Thomas there is a need to promote jobs and recruit to address labour market shortages, either within the community or from other work pools.

#### *Youth Job Strategy Forum*

The ST-ELIP was identified as a key stakeholder to participate in the Youth Job Strategy Forum. This roundtable discussion informed participants of new programs and opportunities. It also featured an outline of the Youth Job Strategy and Programs offered through the Ministry of Economic Development Trade and Employment, and began a discussion on a process for generating new ideas for funding applications from the County and St. Thomas.

### Collaboration with Entrepreneurial Supports

Another stream of potential employment in Elgin County and St. Thomas is entrepreneurial activity. The Elgin Business Resource Centre (EBRC) offers a wide range of supports to potential entrepreneurs within the community. Further coordination with the EBRC will allow for specialized supports for newcomers to Canada who take on or intend to take on entrepreneurial ventures.

#### *Entrepreneurial Climate Study*

The Elgin Business Resource Centre is beginning an Entrepreneurial Climate Study. The ST-ELIP was included as a key stakeholder to review the goals and methods for the study and ensure that the questions asked will provide the required feedback and consider the profiles of survey participants. The Entrepreneurial Climate Study aims to learn more about the experiences of small business owners, those intending to start a small business, and those who have been held back from doing so. It will also address the attitudes, beliefs, and intentions of the general public in relation to entrepreneurship.

### **Cultural Diversity Awareness**

To better facilitate understanding of diversity in the workplace, diversity training and other similar programs can be adopted. The ST-ELIP has developed a presentation on how to use the understanding of different personal cultures in the work environment. Victim Services Elgin invited the ST-ELIP to share this presentation with their volunteer respondents at their monthly meeting. The program will be further developed so that it can be specialized for any workplace.

The work within the priority of Employment and Labour Market Access will continue as more newcomers enter the labour force and as we address the ongoing changes to workplaces in Elgin County. As the diverse newcomer population continues to grow, labour force needs will increase and change. It is critical that work accomplished in this area is responsive to these ever-changing needs.

## Settlement and Integration

Addressing the immediate needs of an individual or family settling in a new community has traditionally been the responsibility of settlement services agencies, local community groups, and families. Varied immigration streams and origin countries lead to demand for a variety of supports. While adapting to a new community is largely a challenge that newcomers must meet independently, various worthwhile interventions can expedite and support the process.

Although St. Thomas and Elgin County currently have two agencies that provide specialized services to assist in the settlement and integration of newcomers, other community groups can also assist in the process.

### Highlights of 2013-2014

Walk with Me: a Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event  
Information Session for the Low German Speaking Mennonite Community  
Newcomer Information Package  
Fanshawe College International Students  
YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services Events  
Local Food for Local People

### Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event

While the main focus of the *Walk with Me* event is the coordination of services, the positive influence it has for newcomers to the community is also apparent. Newcomers who attended the event reported that their knowledge of available support services had expanded, as had their awareness of the cultural diversity of the region.

An important component of the *Walk with Me* event was the **Panel: Newcomer Stories and Settlement Services**. For this panel, three newcomers with varied immigration experiences spoke alongside Settlement Services agencies to highlight the importance of community support. Successes and challenges were shared, allowing event participants to gain a better understanding of the newcomer settlement process.

### Information Session for the Low German Speaking Mennonite Community

The second annual **Information Session for the Low German Speaking Mennonite Community** was held to inform participants of their rights and responsibilities in a range of areas. The topics covered in this year's session included: housing, language requirements for citizenship applications, mortgages and savings, and insurance. The ST-ELIP partnered with the Mennonite Community Services and Radio DeBrigj CHPD 105.9 FM to present the information in English and Low German.

### Newcomer Information Package

The Newcomer Information package has been updated throughout the year for imminent launch community wide. The information package provides important information for newcomers upon their initial arrival in St. Thomas-Elgin. Topics include:

Settlement Services  
Housing  
Household Items  
Food  
Healthcare

Education  
Finances  
Employment  
Transportation  
Levels of Government

Safety  
Culture and Recreation  
Religion  
Canadian Facts

This document will be available at every library and municipal office, and at the offices of the Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament as reference materials. Copies will also be available at Settlement Service offices for newcomers.

### **Fanshawe College International Students**

The YWCA Settlement Services, in collaboration with ST-ELIP, participated in an orientation meeting for new international students at Fanshawe College, as the majority of the international students to the St. Thomas campus are from India. Currently, Fanshawe's international handbook for students only provides information on services that are located in London. This meeting provided ST-ELIP with an opportunity to explain the role of ST-ELIP and to distribute information that is unique to the community in which these students live.

### **YWCA Settlement Services Events**

Attending events with the newcomers who utilise the services of the YWCA allows for many connections to be made as well as an opportunity to gather feedback on initiatives implemented by the ST-ELIP. It is important to the initiative to stay up-to-date with the needs of the community.

In addition to attending events organized by the YWCA Settlement Services team, the ST-ELIP partnered with them to host events, such as the annual Citizenship Celebration and Family Literacy Day. Through smaller events, positive advancements can be made to help build St. Thomas and Elgin as a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community.

### **Local Food for Local People**

This local initiative involves local farmers, community food supports, service providers, and the Public Health Unit. We meet to discuss increasing access of local people to healthy food. This group has spearheaded an initiative to increase the availability of ethnic food to the local population. The ST-ELIP began to gather information about produce common to the countries of origin of the newcomer population that cannot be easily accessed in the community. This information has been shared with local farmers who will start to introduce these foods into the local market.

## Language, ESL, and Communication

Speaking English in St. Thomas and Elgin County is a positive step to help newcomers adapt to community life. Strong English skills can assist in finding a job, supporting children in their education, and allowing for meaningful communication in everyday activities. In addition, the current citizenship reforms being implemented by Citizenship and Immigration Canada will include stronger English language requirements for citizenship applications.

Language is the key to successful integration, as it allows newcomers to create connections, build a shared understanding, and become prosperous and contributing members of the community.

Highlights of 2013-2014

Information Session for the Low German Speaking Mennonite Community  
Meeting with Schools and School Boards

### Information Session for the Low German Speaking Mennonite Community

The topic of new language requirements for citizenship testing was important to include in this event. Many Low German Speaking Mennonites come to the community with relatively strong English speaking skills yet require significant supports to improve their writing and reading levels to successfully apply for citizenship and pass the citizenship test. New and anticipated language reforms for citizenship will necessitate more support for Permanent Residents in St. Thomas and Elgin County who need to upgrade their language skills.

### Meetings with Schools and School Boards

In Elgin County, most elementary schools offer support to students requiring ESL classes. However, at this time only one secondary school offers an ESL program. This challenge requires students to travel great distances to attend a school with proper supports or forego ESL-specific education altogether. The ST-ELIP is working to make connections with local schools and school boards to address this gap.



## Public Awareness

The work of the ST-ELIP extends beyond newcomers and service providers and, through the Public Awareness priority, includes the whole St. Thomas and Elgin County Community. The main focus of the Public Awareness priority is to celebrate what diversity has historically brought to the community and highlight what an increased newcomer presence can bring.

The majority of the progress in the Public Awareness Priority is achieved through the work of the St. Thomas-Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee (ST-ECDC).

### Highlights of 2013-2014

Springfield Library Summer Reading Program

Fresh Fest 2013

Canada Day Celebration

Great Lakes International Airshow

West Elgin Community Health Centre Fall Family Fun Night

### Springfield Library Summer Reading Program

The Southern Ontario Library system develops a yearly summer reading program. The program for the year is titled *Go!*, with sub-themes including *Taste the World* and *Explore Far*. With these themes in mind, the Springfield library contacted the ST-ELIP to assist them in developing a culminating event for the program in September. The theme of the event was *Travel the World in One Day*.

The ST-ELIP worked with the Springfield library and the community to develop a daylong activity that allowed students from Kindergarten to grade six to experience different aspects of world cultures. The day included international food, sports, and arts and crafts.

### YWCA Auction

The ST-ELIP participates in the annual YWCA auction, an event at which the YWCA showcases its programs and community initiatives. The ST-ELIP has the opportunity to distribute literature and update attendees on the work that has been accomplished as well as provide information on upcoming events and projects. In total there were 140 participants at the 2013 the event.

### West Elgin Community Health Centre Fall Family Fun Night

The West Elgin Community Health Centre (WECHC) invited local community initiatives and service providers to showcase their work in the community and to interact with children and their parents from the surrounding area. The ST-ELIP set up an information booth and interacted with the 250 children and parents by introducing cultural crafts, games, and trivia questions based on the Canadian citizenship test.

### **Fresh Fest 2013**

On the fifth Anniversary of Fresh Fest, a festival that promotes local farmers and food prepared with locally grown fruits and vegetables, the ST-ELIP was invited to contribute by organizing a showcase of culinary arts and music to represent some of the cultural diversity of the community.

The outcome was a great success. Newcomers from different cultural backgrounds presented their culinary talents and shared cultural information about people and food. Participants were excited to try food that is not readily available in Elgin County.

### **Canada Day Celebration**

Through the ST-ECDC, the ST-ELIP participated for the first time in the Canada Day Celebration at Pinafore Park to promote cultural awareness in the region. The ST-ELIP's participation was organized in coordination with the department of Parks and Recreation of the City of St. Thomas and reflects the level of collaboration that is beginning to materialize.

### **Great Lakes International Airshow**

The 2013 *Great Lakes International Airshow* was hosted at the St. Thomas Airport. The ST-ECDC set up a booth with information about the initiative. We engaged in dialogue with community members on the work that has been completed and the benefits of supporting newcomers in Elgin County. Having the booth at this event helped promote the ST-ELIP and raised awareness of our initiative.

### **Media Coverage**

The ST-ELIP team has worked collaboratively with the media to promote positive coverage of immigrant and newcomer stories and experiences. Some examples include:

- Aylmer Express – coverage of the Springfield *Go!* event
- Elgin This Month – positive stories about immigrants and business owners
- Radio De Brigj CHPD 105.9 FM - interviews, English, Low German, and Spanish
- St. Thomas Journal - coverage of Canada Day Event at Pinafore Park

### **Initiatives in Development**

Under the Priority of Public Awareness, many initiatives are in the planning phase. Upcoming initiatives that are being developed by the ST-ELIP and the St. Thomas-Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee (ST-ECDC) include:

#### ***Human Library***

The *Human Library* is an event that encourages dialogue between the community and newcomers from different cultural backgrounds. This event is based on the *Human Library* project that has been adapted by the CBC and implemented in communities across Canada. The event that the ST-ECDC is developing will feature newcomers to Canada, regardless of when they arrived in Canada or where they came from. The event will facilitate a positive space for one-on-one discussions to help participants understand the motivations and challenges of newcomers to Canada.

### *Tell Your Story*

Another project that is being developed by the ST-ECDC is the *Tell Your Story* project. The *Tell Your Story* project will produce a short video highlighting the changing face of immigration in the county as it looks back through the decades of newcomer settlement. The video will emphasize what makes Elgin County and St. Thomas home to us all, as it gives a voice to immigrants to tell their settlement story.

### *Work with Schools and Community Organizations*

In the past implementation year, the ST-ELIP collaborated on two events for children. Children have been identified as an important audience for public awareness. Events at the Springfield Library and with the West Elgin Community Health Centre were designed to allow children to explore different cultures and understand the benefits of diversity. A process is being developed with the ST-ECDC to solidify a relationship with the school boards to allow for standardized programming across the region.

### *Champions Award*

The ST-ELIP will implement annual awards to acknowledge work and dedication in building a welcoming, caring, and inclusive St. Thomas and Elgin County. The current plan is to give awards to recognize four categories of community leadership:

1. An Individual who is working within the community to address the needs of newcomers
2. A newcomer who is working to strengthen the community
3. A business that is working to accommodate and support newcomers
4. A newcomer business that is strengthening the community

The two business-driven awards will be presented through the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce as part of its St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce Free Enterprise Awards.

### *Declaring Municipalities as Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities*

Criteria are currently being developed for the official designation of communities in Elgin County and St. Thomas as Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive. When a community meets the prescribed criteria, it will be presented with a special ST-ELIP sign, publicly declaring that the community is Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive. The signs will be displayed at the town/city lines along with the plaques of its local service clubs and community organizations.

## Partnerships

The ST-ELIP is proud to be a leader in regional efforts to coordinate the work within the Local Immigration Partnership network

- ❖ Welcoming Communities Initiative Paths to Prosperity Research Project
- ❖ South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnership

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership is a partner in the **Welcoming Communities Initiative Paths to Prosperity Research Project** entitled *Pathways to Prosperity: New policy directions and innovative local practices for newcomer integration and attraction*.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada awarded a 2012 Partnership Grant to Victoria Esses and a pan-Canadian team of 13 co-investigators. The project – *Pathways to Prosperity: New Policy Directions and Innovative Local Practices for Newcomer Integration and Attraction* – will equip local institutions with the analytic capacity to address challenges related to migration, integration, local development, and economic and social sustainability. The project will also help federal, provincial, and municipal governments develop and implement policies to attract, settle, and integrate newcomers in centres across Canada. The partnership will comprise of a network of five regional nodes – Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, and British Columbia – with the Welcoming Communities Initiative serving as the project’s Ontario node.

**South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnership (SWOLIP)** is a network of 14 Local Immigration Partnerships in South Western Ontario that meet on a quarterly basis for regular communication and sharing of best practices. The members of this group are at different stages of project implementation, with many of them a few years ahead of the ST-ELIP. Membership in this group has provided the ST-ELIP with support in moving some of their strategies forward with the support of the more established LIPs in the region.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The region of St. Thomas and Elgin County is beginning to recover from the significant results of recent plant closures and layoffs, but progress will be slow. Our small city and rural community will continue to face the challenges of building economic growth and prosperity. While large manufacturers have closed down, small and medium sized businesses will drive the new growth in the area. This may provide entrepreneurial opportunities for newcomers, in particular those looking for agricultural or green sector employment.

Our region encompasses several municipal governments (eight municipalities, towns, townships, and the city), presenting challenges in disbursing information and creating partnerships that will reach our rural population. We need to engage with the many municipal councils and develop strategies to meet local needs as opposed to developing a regional focus.

St. Thomas and Elgin is a rural community where resources are centrally located and the periphery communities are served through satellite offices or smaller service providers. The local leadership has a deep loyalty and rich expertise in smaller communities and are committed to the future of St. Thomas and Elgin. These community leaders are invited to many councils, resulting in a limited amount of time that can be committed to projects and initiatives for job creation, social supports, and economic prosperity. The ST-ELIP has been flexible to address this challenge. We set our Council meetings to accommodate leaders who are already attending meetings with a similar focus. This back-to-back meeting strategy alleviates difficulties in scheduling and improves participation. Furthermore, the ST-ELIP has elected to not have dedicated sub-committees for each of its five priorities, but rather agency led initiatives. This improves the efficiency of working on the strategies and reduces meeting times.

Agencies and individuals are reaching out to ST-ELIP for collaboration and support on initiatives. The following groups have sought out our expertise: Victim Services Elgin, Elgin County Library, Elgin Business Resource Centre and the Incubation Centre for Entrepreneurs, Local food for Local People, Freshfest, and various community members. This growing reputation of accountability certainly validates our dedicated work and we will continue to make new strong community connections.

While these challenges impact our ability to progress with our strategies, we acknowledge that the only option is to move forward with flexible and creative solutions. We will continue to build relationships across the sectors, build understanding across the region, and promote the goal of economic, political, and social prosperity for all members of our community.

## Moving Forward

As we begin our fourth year of the ST-ELIP, we proudly look back over our many accomplishments and revel in the commitment of many in our community. We again highlight the excellent work of the Mennonite Community Services and YWCA Settlement Services in their support of integrating immigrants to our area. Their collaboration and passion for our project helps streamline the implementation process.

The strategies we develop focus on the priorities our community has set out, and we will continue to be transparent as they are implemented. We will work with the community and welcome all feedback as we continue to reach for our goals.

For those who have participated in any small way to our initiative, we thank you sincerely. Please share your experience with others and help us raise the profile of our community and its rich diversity. Your involvement is the foundational piece in building a comprehensive plan that encompasses all of our goals. Your commitment truly captures the vision of the community.

We will continue to build a Welcoming, Caring and Inclusive community!



ST. THOMAS • ELGIN  
**Local Immigration Partnership**  
*Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities*

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