



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

MOVING FORWARD

2015



Our Vision

St. Thomas and Elgin County communities will be a culturally diverse, welcoming, caring, and inclusive region that will retain current residents, welcome newcomers, and provide everyone 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 STELIP Council will continue to make improvements to immigrants' experiences and the community as a whole.

STELIP COUNCIL 2015

Abe Harms	Mennonite Community Services
Adriana Balderas	Community Member
Bob Hammersley	St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce
Cathy Grondin	Employment Services Elgin
Cindy Hastings	St. Thomas Economic Development
Debra Moutenay	Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board
Gary Clarke	City of St. Thomas
Gerry Moniz	Central Community Health Centre
John Robinson	Community Member
Kate Burns Gallagher	Elgin County Economic Development
Mike Amato	Fanshawe College
Pete Peters	Mennonite Savings and Credit Union
Sharen Symondson	Elgin Business Resource Centre
Shelley Harris	YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
Vicki Luke	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

STELIP PROJECT TEAM

Petrusia Hontar	Researcher/Project Facilitator
Fabiana Estrela	Project Coordinator
Shelley Harris	Project Director

Acknowledgements

Over the last four years the St. Thomas Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) has focused on fostering relationships within the community and developing partnerships with local stakeholders. The role of immigration and the people who support them is being realized as a priority across the county, the conversations are just beginning. Every year we receive more invitations to collaborate and to help strengthen the networks and resources of the local community.

We are extremely grateful to our STELIP Council members for their expertise, skills, knowledge, and resources they bring to our work. We would like to thank the members of the Cultural Diversity Committee for their energy, passion, and creativity to drive the important and extensive work of public awareness. Thanks also to the many municipalities, community members, organizations, and agencies across St. Thomas and Elgin County for their ongoing support of our project. We thank you for recognizing and 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 in this community has been achieved from the dedication of many individuals committed to building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities!

Partners:

Canadian Mental Health Association – Elgin Branch	Mennonite Community Services
Central Community Health Centre	Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
Elgin Business Resource Centre	Oxford Elgin Child and Youth Centre
Elgin County Economic Development	St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce
Elgin County Library	St. Thomas Economic Development
Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board	St. Thomas Library
Elgin – Oxford Legal Clinic	Scotiabank - St. Thomas and Belmont branches
Elgin St. Thomas Public Health	The City of St. Thomas
Employment Services Elgin	The County of Elgin
Fanshawe College	YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
Mennonite Savings and Credit Union	

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Message from STELIP Chair

Dear St. Thomas and Elgin County community,

We are now entering our fifth year of the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership. This partnership would not be possible without the support of newcomers, stakeholders, and community agencies from St. Thomas and across Elgin County.

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) was created to make the communities of Elgin and St. Thomas caring, welcoming and inclusive. This has been done by bringing the community together to develop strategies for 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 STELIP Council members bring a wealth of experience from across the region. The Diversity Committee is an active group that has been integral in raising the profile of STELIP. This partnership is successful because of the dedication of our stakeholders and volunteers. Our strategies continue to be developed in consultation with the community and the STELIP Council with a focus on the real issues that impact newcomer settlement. This past year saw the release of the Newcomer Information Package, a resource for newcomers to our communities. The Information Package provides useful information on medical care to housing and support services available in our communities.

This report highlights the results of our work this year and our future plans, including the launch of the signage program that indicates the communities that have committed to being welcoming, caring and inclusive. Our many other accomplishments are outlined in this report. On behalf of the STELIP Council, we must thank our staff. Their dedication, hard work and support keep the Partnership alive and moving forward.

The STELIP team is committed to developing innovative and local plans in a progressive way to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities across Elgin County and St. Thomas. Please join us in celebrating these endeavours.



Kate Burns Gallagher
STELIP Chair

STELIP Highlights of 2014-2015

The STELIP project is completing its fourth year of implementation in the community. The project itself received funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2011 for a year of research. The first year of the project engaged the communities across Elgin County and St. Thomas to understand the needs of the residents, the communication between these communities continues into the implementation of the project. Through the research of the STELIP, five areas of focus emerged as priorities: Coordination of Services; Employment, Entrepreneurship and Labour Market Access; Settlement and Integration; English Language Learning and Literacy; and Public Awareness.

After the first year of research, the project moved into the implementation phase led by agencies and leaders in the community and the STELIP Council in collaboration with the STELIP team. In the second year of implementation a dedicated group of volunteers formed the St. Thomas Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee, a group that has taken a leadership role in implementing the Public Awareness Priority.

The STELIP Council is made up of representatives from a range of sectors each bringing insight onto the priority areas, however strong partnerships have been formed with community partners who are not members of the Council themselves. We work with community support to build an understanding of our priorities and strategies. We continue to strengthen the collaboration of our team, Council, and Cultural Diversity Committee to lead us as we implement our strategies in 2015-16 to continue creating a welcoming, caring, and inclusive community.

The following report outlines our progress in 2014-15, our third year of the implementation phase. We continue to make progress on existing programs, establish new and exciting initiatives, and lay a strong foundation as we prepare for the upcoming year.



Coordination of Services

Today more and more community strategies, especially services directed at youth, are implementing an integrated service delivery. This service delivery model is a client driven, wrap around service. There are strong merits to this model of delivery; however, there are financial constraints to implementation. Businesses, government, and agencies need to be up-to-date with programming and contacts in the community and feel comfortable that they can refer or at least find the information to guide the newcomers. A strong community referral system will ensure clients can be directed to agencies that can support their needs. Newcomers have no context for Canadian services and often do not know that support is available to them as Permanent Residents and tax payers. With this in mind, the STELIP has developed and promoted networking opportunities and information sessions for service providers to better understand the services that are available across Elgin County and in St. Thomas.

Highlights of 2014-2015

- » **Moving Forward 2014: Building Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities**
- » **Walk with me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event**
- » **Elgin County Ambassadors**
- » **Low German Networking Conference**
- » **Elgin County Delegations**

Moving Forward 2014

Our annual *Moving Forward* event celebrates the achievements of the STELIP and the network of newcomers in the community. At this event, we celebrate the year's achievements and collect feedback to prepare for the upcoming year of project implementation. In 2014 the event was celebrated with impactful accounts of newcomers

in the region, presentations from the STELIP Council and Cultural Diversity Committee, and a provocative keynote address from Avril Saunders-Currie titled *Taking a Leadership Role in Building Welcoming, Caring and Inclusive Communities: A Conscious Decision for 'Newcomer' Inclusion*. This event is driven by the community and brings people together to celebrate our diversity and strength.

Walk With Me

The Walk with Me: A Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event continues to be a very successful community event. We welcomed over 100 participants including more than 20 newcomers as well 45 service providers represented. Participants were able to gather information from the service providers during the showcase, they welcomed the opportunity to introduce their services and make direct contact with newcomers and other service providers. The event included a service quiz show, video testimonials from newcomers, case studies, and a guest speaker, Avril Currie, *Collaboration: Learning together in a community of service for inclusion*. The event was well received by all participants and agencies; there is great community support to continue this as an annual event.

This event gave service providers a better understanding of the needs that different newcomers have as well as services offered in the community, especially the services that Settlement Services can provide. As a result of this networking event, newcomer referrals from the community to Settlement Services offices have increased.



Coordination of Services

Elgin County Ambassadors

The STELIP team attends quarterly meetings for the Elgin County Ambassadors. The meetings provide an opportunity to connect with County residents from rural areas and exchange information about ongoing projects and collect information. 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.

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 municipalities' engagement and commitment to build welcoming, caring and inclusive communities remain 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 STELIP team traversed Elgin County, making presentations to each municipal council. The delegations reminded the Councils of the great progress that has been made and encouraged them to promote collaboration with the STELIP 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 as well as the community members with whom the delegations engaged. Delegations were held in every municipal council chamber.

Low German Networking Conference

The Mennonite Central Committee hosts an annual networking conference. The format changes yearly to address current concerns and requests of the community. Last year's conference included keynote speaker Kathryn Edmunds *We are Tired of Thinking and Working with Poverty: Challenging Mindsets* and an assortment of workshops ranging from Basic Low German Language to working with school boards, interpreters, and how to work with groups of strong religious ties. This event is a concrete way to get the community working together to help support the needs of the Low-German community, migrants, permanent residents and citizens as a whole.

The main objective of this priority is to strengthen the supports that are currently offered within the community. The task is twofold; first, increasing an understanding of the variety of services; secondly, to increase service providers understanding of the needs of the clients. With services providers better versed in these two areas, there is a greater chance that newcomers will access supports they need more effectively.



Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Labour Market Access



Through research done by STELIP, Employment was identified as the most important factor in the successful economic integration of newcomers. When newcomers successfully secure a job in a related field to their qualifications, they can achieve economic security and participate fully in their new community with dignity and pride.

Highlights of 2014-2015

- » **Cultural Diversity Awareness**
- » **Workforce Development – Priority Setting**
- » **Industry Breakfast and Other Community Collaborations**

Cultural Diversity Awareness

To better facilitate understanding of diversity in the workplace, diversity training and other similar programs can be adopted. The STELIP has developed an interactive workshop on how to use the understanding of different personal cultures in the work environment. The presentation has been delivered for the School Age Focus Group, Early Learning Centre, and the Elgin Business Women's Network. The presentation is adapted for each audience to focus on the areas that are most relevant to each group.

Workforce Development

The Elgin- Middlesex-Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board is a great asset to have as a member on the STELIP Council and a strong partnership continues with collaboration on common initiatives. Within Elgin County and St. Thomas there is a focus on many aspects that affect newcomers, and specifically ways to recruit to address apprenticeship and skilled trade labour market shortages. STELIP attended several priority setting meetings for the community to help identify the community needs.

Industry Breakfast and Other Community Collaborations

In partnership with Employment Services Elgin, the STELIP team plans to strategize and strengthen relationships within local employers and develop collaborations to help fill skills shortages. STELIP's objectives is to ensure that local employers are aware of new economic immigration streams to meet job vacancies that have not been able to be filled by local residents or newcomers, and therefore can access an international pool of candidates. In addition, in partnership with St. Thomas Chambers of Commerce, the STELIP team plans to deliver the same information to local small and medium business owners.

STELIP also partners with Elgin Economic Development to support the attraction and retention of newcomer investors and entrepreneurs as we recognize that many newcomers land with capital and are looking for business investment opportunities Elgin County. This is a clear pathway for economic and social integration while strengthening our local economy and cultural diversity landscape.

The work within the priority of Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Labour Market Access will continue as more newcomers enter the labour force and as we address the ongoing changes to Elgin County workplaces. 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

Regardless of the immigration stream used to come to Canada, all newcomers benefit from having the opportunity to access a settlement services agency. These agencies provide specialized services to assist in settlement, networking, and integration. There are two established agencies in Elgin and St. Thomas: YWCA Settlement Services and Mennonite Community Services (MCS).

These agencies have the expertise to provide the support required by newcomers and work with other agencies to provide referrals when needed. The STELIP team work to increase the awareness of these services, and partner with them in a variety of ways.

Highlights of 2014-2015

- » **Walk with Me: a Newcomer and Service Provider Networking Event**
- » **Newcomer Information Package**
- » **Newcomer Events Affiliated with Settlement Services**

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 access to information by newcomers is very valuable. Newcomers who attended the event were able to get information about available services, but more importantly make a connection with the service providers.

At the *Walk with Me* event we also launched the *Tell your Story* Project, a series of short testimonials of newcomers who settled in the region. The videos tell powerful stories of what motivated people to move to the region, and recounted their settlement process. Two videos were shared with the participants.

Newcomer Information Package

The Information Package provides important localized information for newcomers upon their initial arrival in St. Thomas-Elgin. The newcomer Information package has been distributed across the County. This document is now available at every library, municipal office, at both community health centres, and at the offices of the Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament as reference materials. Copies are available at the YWCA Settlement Service and Mennonite Community Services offices for newcomers to borrow or make copies. Online versions are also available with links to our partners' websites including each municipality and at www.stelip.ca

Did you know?

Malahide is ranked number 9 for recent immigrants as a percent of the population in communities of partially non-metro census subdivisions.

People born outside of Canada who settled in the municipality between 2006 and 2011 comprise 4.3% of the population.

Hot Spots of Recent Immigrant Arrivals at the Community Level in Canada, Pathways to Prosperity 2015

Settlement and Integration

The STELIP values feedback from the newcomer population and attends events developed by or are affiliated with the various settlement programs. Becoming part of the newcomer community allows for candid feedback and a better connection to responding to their needs.

Specific events that built on the network of newcomers included:

- » FESPA Year-end celebration
- » YWCA Settlement Services Canada Day Picnic
- » YWCA Settlement Services Citizenship Celebration

- » MCC Auction
- » MCS Annual General Meeting
- » YWCA Settlement Services Winter Holiday Potluck

The Settlement and Integration priority mainly focuses on supporting and raising the awareness of the wide range of services of the Settlement agencies. Close collaboration between the two service providers ensures the work helps build capacity and in fact enhances the services.

English Language Learning and Literacy

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. Speaking English in St. Thomas and Elgin County is a positive and crucial step for newcomers to 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 include stronger English language requirements for citizenship applications.

Currently there are some English language classes available in the community; the low density of newcomers in the rural areas matched with funding restrictions make it difficult to offer classes that

match the flexibility required by the community. There is a challenge to access English language at the high school level with only one school in Aylmer offering English Language Learning support. There is a need to advocate for an innovative approach and funding to provide newcomers with the resources they need to learn English.





Public Awareness

The scope of the STELIP extends to everyone in St. Thomas and Elgin County, beyond newcomers and service providers. The main purpose of the Public Awareness priority is to understand the value of welcoming newcomers into the community. Many of the active contributions to the Public Awareness Priority are achieved through the work of the St. Thomas-Elgin Cultural Diversity Committee (STECDC). This group of volunteers works to develop innovative and interactive ways to engage the residents of Elgin and St. Thomas and encourage them to start thinking about cultural diversity and welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities.

Highlights of 2014-2015

- » Canada Day Celebration
- » West Elgin Community Health Centre Fall Family Fun Night
- » Declaring Municipalities as Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities
- » Cultural Diversity Committee Initiatives
 - » Living Library
 - » Tell Your Story
 - » Cultural Community Festival

Canada Day Celebration

The STELIP participated for the first time in the Canada Day Celebration in Dutton/Dunwich to promote cultural awareness in the region. STELIP had a booth with activities for children and adults to test their knowledge of cultures and national flags, as well as participate in some international games. The STELIP's participation was requested by the Recreation Committee in Dutton/Dunwich and reflects the level of collaboration that is a result of the tireless commitment to our work.

Community Events

The STELIP is always looking for ways to engage different populations by attending a variety of events. The level of participation varies with each event but the display is always interactive inviting adults and children to engage. Some events in the county that the STELIP participated this year include:

- » West Elgin Community Health Centre Fall Family Fun Night
- » Algoma University Block Party

Declaring Municipalities as Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive Communities

Community proclamations and declarations have been drafted to acknowledge the work that the municipalities of Elgin County and the City of St. Thomas are doing to become welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities. Along with the declaration, each community will be presented with signs that will be displayed at the town/city along the signs for the other local service clubs and community organizations. At the municipal 2014 Canada Day celebration, Dutton/Dunwich became the first community to deliver its proclamation and install the sign. The STELIP team was well received and welcomed at all other municipalities, and arrangements have begun across the County to make the community declarations and hang the signs in the coming months.

Public Awareness



We are St. Thomas-Elgin

We are proud to be partnering with the London Middlesex Oxford LIP to promote our regions. They will be producing six television shows that highlight the services highlights the services that newcomer's access, a true life account of a newcomer accessing the service, and an entertainment segment that highlights traditional cuisine from a newcomer. This project will be aired locally on Rogers, and will be available online. There are strong ties between this project and the *Walk with Me* event that we host annually.

Newcomer Champion Awards

The STELIP will implement annual awards to acknowledge work and dedication in building a welcoming, caring, and inclusive St. Thomas and Elgin County. The award has two categories:

Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion:

An Individual, group or organization who is working with the community to address the needs of newcomers by recognizing and responding to the needs of the community (one award for an individual and one award for an organization).

Newcomer Community Leader:

A newcomer who is working to strengthen the community and build positive changes by giving back in some capacity in a progressive way; demonstrating commitment to making a difference by creating welcoming communities.

The STELIP is working with the St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce to include two awards that acknowledge diversity and inclusion as part of their Free Enterprise Awards in 2016.

Media Coverage

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

- » Moving Forward 2014
- » Walk with Me event at St. Thomas Senior Centre
- » Living Library at St. Thomas Public Art Centre
- » Citizenship Celebration at the YWCA
- » Newcomer Champion Awards
- » Express Entry introduction

Along with coverage of specific event and initiatives, the St. Thomas Times Journal is working to increase the presence of newcomers in their TJ Smile section. This is a daily inclusion that highlights someone from the community.

Initiatives of the Cultural Diversity Committee

The Cultural Diversity Committee (CDC) has had a busy year! The innovative work that they do promotes inclusion and provides a variety of interactions to increase the networking of people from all walks of life.

Public Awareness



Living Library

The *Living Library* is an event that enables the community to engage with local newcomers from different cultural backgrounds and immigration experiences. This event is based on the *Human Library* project that has been adapted by the CBC and implemented in communities across Canada. The event facilitates a positive space for one-on-one discussions to help participants understand the motivations and challenges of newcomers to Canada. The participants of the event, newcomers and community members, both found the event empowering and engaging. The STECDC would like to continue providing similar events in the community.

Tell Your Story

The *Tell Your Story* project's objective is to collect and share stories about the unique lives of newcomers in the region; it works to give a voice to immigrants to tell their settlement story.

The project is well underway with four videos available online and two more in the early stages of production. The newcomers and immigrants that are showcased in the videos come from a mix of countries and have settled in our area over the past six decades; the story of immigration in the County has a long history and all of the stories are worth sharing. The videos will be available at www.stelip.ca, YouTube, and at the St. Thomas Cultural Diversity Facebook page.

Diversity BBQs

Five BBQ's were delivered during summer 2014 with great success! In order to incorporate cultural diversity theme to the BBQ's, STECDC offered over 20 international toppings to go with the burgers and hot dogs. During BBQ days, culturally diverse activities, quiz and games were delivered to engage the local community. STECDC is planning to repeat this successful initiative during summer 2015, with potential dates to expand to other parts of the County.

Iron Horse – Children's Junction

STECDC had a booth during this local community festival. The objective was to provide entertainment to children and their families that were attending to the Iron Horse Festival. STECDC provided international crafts and games to children of different ages.

Did you Know?

Elgin County and St. Thomas has a long history of immigration. Today, 12% of the population was born outside of Canada. Despite relatively high levels of immigration, only 2.7% of the population are classified as visible minorities.

National Household Survey 2011,
Statistics Canada



Public Awareness

Cultural Community Festival

The STECDC has been involved in beginning the process of establishing a local cultural festival. Over 115 surveys from the community were collected to get a sense of the type of activities the festival should include and grants have been explored to fund the project. After funding is secured, a volunteer steering committee will be formed and the project will continue independently from the committee.

The Public Awareness priority works to engage the whole community and focuses on breaking down perceptions while building welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities. Strategies engage community members of all ages across all ranges of the spectrum of cultural diversity awareness. The work leads people from cultural denial and indifference, past tolerance to truly welcoming, caring, and inclusive mindsets.



Did you know?

There are over 58 different languages spoken by people across Elgin County and St. Thomas.

The two main non-English languages are Low German and Dutch.

National Household Survey 2011,
Statistics Canada

Partnerships

The STELIP works hard to create fruitful partnerships within the community. The network of support and influence is expanded to include regional partnerships including:

- » Welcoming Communities Initiative Pathways to Prosperity Research Project
- » South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnership (SWOLIP)

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership is a partner in the **Welcoming Communities Initiative 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 co-investigators. The project is an alliance dedicated to fostering welcoming communities that promote economic, social and civics participation of migrants. The project will also help federal, provincial, and municipal governments develop and implement policies to attract, settle, and integrate newcomers in centres across Canada.

South Western Ontario Local Immigration Partnership (SWOLIP) is a network of 12 Local Immigration Partnerships in South Western Ontario and the regional francophone immigration network 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 depending on their community makeup. Membership in this group has provided the STELIP with support in moving some of their strategies forward with the support of the more established LIPs in the region. Projects are being developed that can be worked on collaboratively by the network as a means of resource sharing and benchmarking

Challenges and Opportunities

The region of St. Thomas and Elgin County spans an area of 1880 km²; service providers face challenges such as low population densities and long distances to travel. Our region encompasses eight municipal governments (four municipalities, one town, two townships, and one city), presenting challenges in disbursing information and creating partnerships that will reach our rural population. The level of immigration varies greatly in each region, as do the needs of the newcomers and community. We need to engage with the many municipal councils and develop strategies to meet local needs as opposed to developing a regional focus.

This region is beginning to recover from the recent closures and layoffs from large employers with new job growth in small and medium sized businesses. This may provide entrepreneurial opportunities for newcomers, in particular those looking for agricultural or green sector employment. To sustain this economic growth, these businesses will need to have access to skilled trades and apprenticeships. The newly implemented changes in the immigration process paired with the large proportion of Small and Medium size businesses provides an opportunity to attract Economic Class immigrants into the community. The information about the process and the potential benefits to employers of the new Express Entry will need to be shared across the County and within St. Thomas.

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 a large number of 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 STELIP has addressed this challenge and 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. Council meetings are scheduled months in advance to accommodate leaders with time restrictions. Furthermore, the number of meetings per year is limited to four, with individual meetings set as needs arise.

Agencies and individuals that are not members of the STELIP Council are reaching out to STELIP for collaboration and support on existing initiatives. The following groups have sought out our expertise and collaboration in 2014: St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital Foundation, Elgin St. Thomas Public Health, Elgin County Libraries, St. Thomas Library, St. Thomas Elgin Public Art Centre, and the Early Learning Centre.

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

The four years since the inception of the STELIP have been marked with many accomplishments and increased dedication from the community.

We especially would like to highlight the dedicated work of the Mennonite Community Services and YWCA Settlement Services in their support of integrating immigrants to our area. Their continuous collaboration and passion for our project drives the implementation of initiatives that more efficiently reach the newcomer populations.

The daily work we do focuses on the five priority areas, and we strive to be transparent in the implementation and we continually collect feedback on the initiative. We work directly with the community and value the input that is provided to us.

For the many community members who have participated in any way to our initiative, we thank you sincerely. We hope that you share your positive experiences with others as we work to bring awareness to the community and its diversity. We know that without the support of the community the work we do would not progress at the same rates it has.

Through the work of this initiative, its council, committee members, and volunteers, we will continue to build Welcoming, Caring, and Inclusive communities!





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

16 Mary Street West, St. Thomas ON N5P 2S3

Phone: 519-631-9800

Fax: 519-631-6411

www.stelip.ca

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