

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The Housing and Neighbouring Experiences of Recent Immigrants to North Bay, Ontario

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Abstract

Access to acceptable housing is necessary for successful integration into any community. To understand the role of neighbourhoods and housing in facilitating or hindering immigrant integration and sense of community, we surveyed and conducted focus groups with recent immigrants and conducted interviews with key informants in the city of North Bay (Northeast Ontario). While participants felt safe and comfortable in their neighbourhoods and with their neighbours, their interactions were superficial and were not a strong source of sense of community. Most participants were satisfied with housing suitability and adequacy but less satisfied with affordability and availability in the community.

Context

The majority of cities in northeastern Ontario experienced a decrease in population between 2011 and 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017a). Within the northeast region, North Bay experienced the largest (-3.9%) decline (Statistics Canada, 2017b). The city faces skill shortages, an aging population, and youth out-migration. Immigration is a key part of current and proposed municipal strategies to address the demographic and economic challenges facing the community.

Research Questions

- What challenges to acquiring acceptable housing do newcomers face during their integration into the North Bay community?
- How have their housing conditions changed over time?
- What are their perceptions of their neighbourhoods and interactions with neighbours?
- How do these experiences and interactions impact the creation of sense of community and their perception of North Bay as a welcoming community?

Data Collection

Phase 1



Recent immigrant (N = 26)

Instrument:

Modified General Social Survey on Social Identity and Sense of Community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986).

Definitions:

Adequate, suitable, and affordable housing (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation).

Phase 2

Recent immigrants (2FG; N = 23):

Focus Group 1:

- Employed
- Financial resources
- Social capital



Focus Group 2:

- Under/Unemployed
- Limited language skills
- Low social capital



Key informants

(1FG; N = 12):

- Settlement workers
- Community volunteers

Results

Phase 1



Profile



40%: 18-30 Y



56%: Females



Median Income:
\$30K – 39.99K



77%: 3 or less
persons



- 30% White
- 26% Chinese
- 22% South Asian



- 32% Economic
- 28% Family

Sense of Community (Mean – 5pt scale)

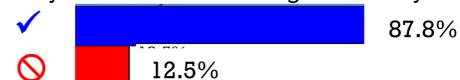


- Membership – 3.30
- Influence – 3.16
- Share Emotional Connection – 3.52
- Integration/Fulfillment of Needs – 3.46
- Overall Sense of Community – 3.46

Welcoming Community

A welcoming community is a community where you would not hesitate to participate in activities for fear of being harassed, ridiculed or discriminated.

Do you live in a welcoming community?



Acceptable Housing (%)

Adequacy

Home requires major repairs – 18.8%
Happy with the state of residence – 81.3%

Suitability (bedrooms)

Happy with # – 81.3%
Enough for family size – 87.5%

Affordability

Housing >30% of gross income – 50.0%
Easy to find home within budget – 31.3%

Neighbours/Neighbourhoods

Interactions (% respondents)

Speak with neighbour at least 1 per week	33.0%
Has never spoken with a neighbour	38.0%
Have been invited into neighbours' homes	31.8%
Have invited neighbours into their homes	22.7%
Neighbour has provided assistance	84.6%

Safety (% who strongly/agree)

I feel safe in my neighbourhood	75.0%
I feel safe with my neighbours	65.0%
My neighbours feel safe around me	65.0%

Phase 2



Access to Acceptable Housing

Gaps in Availability	"I don't think there are enough apartments generally. It's very much shaped by seniors ..." "I think there are very few 3-bedroom apartments in North Bay."
Affordable relative to GTA	"It's so much better. In Toronto, I was paying \$1300 a month ... In North Bay it is much better for \$500-600 you can find a pretty good decent place." "I find that [comparing] Ottawa and here, they are similar, there is no big difference." "People think because it's a small city it should be cheaper ... a 2-bedroom apartment is not cheap."
Adequate & Suitable	"We have enough bedrooms for us and also for my family, my kids."
Landlord Issues	"There have been some landlords who said that they are not willing to rent to refugees." "Some things come up and I say, "No, landlords aren't allowed to do that." The language is such a barrier."
Dual Housing Trajectories	"So now we own our own home. We could not have done that without the support of family members, and without actually finding long-term sustainable employment."

Perceptions of Neighbourhoods and Neighbours

Seniors	"I really like my place. This whole street is seniors. So it's quiet and calm." "So far pretty nice, partly because three of our neighbours are retired ... they like to sit on their porch."
Safe & Quiet	"Generally, I felt my neighbourhood and neighbours are really nice ... peaceful and nice to each other."
Small Talk	"You just say hello and you don't have kind of talk – real talk." "Just like a quick acknowledgment, like a chat really."
Helpful & Kind Neighbours	"I also learned tricks from them." "This older lady gave a flower for the front of the house."
Summer vs Winter	"There was a summer-winter distinction for sure ... it will be like December, they will be like "Yeah, when the snow melts, you know, come on by ... come visit us on the porch." "Yeah, there is nothing in the winter time."

Sense of Community and North Bay as a Welcoming Community

Sense of Belonging	"Good people around you and more generous and more helpful ... it feels like I belong ..."
Great for Kids	"There is an opportunity for me to get transferred ... and my son was crying, "Mommy don't accept it! I don't want to leave North Bay."
Isolated Instances of Discrimination	"Sometimes when they are the first person amongst their neighbours who is a racialized individual they may get comments from neighbours about feeling unsafe [with them] being there."
Unfriendly Transit	"The bus routes are not overly friendly. The bus routes can be convoluted." "The buses are terrible."
Unwelcoming Job Market	"So the job market in North Bay is false and very closed and it is not accessible to newcomers .. I don't believe North Bay is a welcoming community ... just [based] on labour market."

Key Findings

➤ There are gaps in rental availability that particularly impact newcomers: rooms, short-term rentals, and 3-bedroom apartments. Most participants were able to access adequate and suitable housing. The majority of participants reported landlord issues with language skills and lack of knowledge of tenants' rights exacerbating problems.

➤ Housing outcomes improved for most participants with half moving from renters to home owners within 3 years. Others languished with less than suitable housing. Employment, language skills, social networks, and family size were key factors.

➤ Newcomers find their neighbourhoods safe and quiet and their neighbours kind, helpful, and friendly, contributing to sense of community through shared emotional connection (e.g. repeated positive interactions) and integration and fulfillment of needs (e.g. help/advice) dimensions.

➤ Overall, newcomers feel welcomed by the community and its residents. Employment and job market experiences play a bigger role than housing and neighbouring experiences in perceptions of North Bay as a welcoming community.

"For me, I love North Bay, because it's a very small place ... there will always be different cultures, especially for immigrants, but people are really nice and they are friendly."

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