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■ **IMMIGRATION:** Western University research will lead to settlement advice for small centres

Newcomers fan out from big cities

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The London Free Press

What does Dutton-Dunwich offer immigrants that Toronto can't?

A sense of safety and quiet, cheaper housing and a community where neighbours know and support each other.

But the assistance commonplace in bigger centres — settlement agencies, an established immigrant community and readily available network to help — are often non-existent in smaller places.

Western University researchers will lead a sweeping research project that will look at newcomer attraction and integration in medium-sized and small cities and towns in Canada.

The Social Studies and Humanities Research Council grant is worth \$2.5 million. The research will be spearheaded by Victoria Esses, a professor of psychology and director of the Centre for Research and Migration and Ethnic Relations at Western.

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Victoria Esses

addressing the needs of these communities," Esses said.

"It's very practical research in terms of specific advice about how settlement will be offered."

Until fairly recently, immigrants settled in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, without giving much thought to smaller municipalities, towns or rural areas.

Governments are eager to distribute newcomers more evenly across Canada and the trend has been growing.

In 2001, 23% of immigrants went to small and medium-sized cities. By 2010, that number rose to 37% of immigrants.

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Keeping partners and children of newcomers happy and engaged in the community is also important to retaining immigrants in smaller communities, which may mean organizations that don't primarily work with immigrants — the United Way, for example — to start doing that work.

"There's a level of feeling isolated or not knowing what to do," said Alfredo Marroquin, co-ordinator of the St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership, which is looking at how that region can attract newcomers.

"Some people love big cities, but others prefer small cit-

ies. The attraction of a place like Port Stanley, Bayham or Dutton-Dunwich — established schools, safety, peace, a quiet place to raise a family, those are attractive to many," Marroquin said.

Between 2008 and 2010, about 330 newcomers settled in St. Thomas-Elgin.

Medium-sized cities such as London are able to provide better one-on-one help — newcomers might feel lost in larger places such as Toronto, said Riffat Hussain, the settlement manager at the Cross Cultural Learners Centre.

"We have the agencies and the established ethno-specific communities that can really help people coming here," Hussain said.

The Western grant will work with 50 universities, 100 community and policy partners as well as all levels of governments. The research will be conducted in five parts of Canada — the Atlantic region, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies and British Columbia.

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