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Community Skills Training by and for Immigrant Women

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Training programs that originate within communities can be enormously successful when the needs of the people in the community are the focus for the development of the program and the programs are developed and run by the community itself. Examples of how well community-based training can work are best illustrated from programs established by two distinct women's groups in 1978 and 1984 in Toronto – training programs that still exist today. The insight into the needs of immigrant women, the shaping of training programs to meet these needs, and the ability to adapt to changing economic and political circumstances have allowed these programs not only to continue for a long period of time but also to remain successful. This does not mean, however, that these programs have not experienced considerable stress as the funding nature of training has changed. The dramatic downsizing of federal government involvement in providing direct funding for training has forced these groups to shift their focus to who can be served. This has been done in order to accommodate the different and changing priorities of provincial and local governments as well as the dictates of a more market-based approach to training.

Need for Specialized Programs

The distinct problems that immigrant women face when they come to Canada, particularly those from war-torn or politically and economically stressed countries, are fairly well documented today.[1] However, when the Working Women Community Centre in Toronto began dealing with immigrant women from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries in the mid-1970s, the magnitude of issues that needed to be addressed was only beginning to be understood and documented and certainly had not been addressed by government.[2] While this community centre could provide a community base and some aid to women in coping with life in Canada, the women at the centre recognized that a community centre's programs alone could not address the enormous barriers these women

faced. Immigrant women needed help getting jobs, and for this they needed literacy skills in English, job training, and skills that would enable them both to understand the specifics of employers' expectations in Canada and to function well in a very different culture. For the latter, they needed a set of skills known by the term "employment preparation."[3]

The barriers to a successful life for immigrant women in Canada usually centred on issues related to poverty: having an adequate income was the crucial issue. Related to this was their ability to function in English or French: immigrant women as a whole were not treated to the types of language and skills training that immigrant men could receive. Although immigrant "heads of households" (men) were entitled to substantial language training while receiving government income support, immigrant women's language training was mainly limited to night classes in local schools.[4] Most significantly, they could receive no income support while taking this training. For many women, this was an impossible route for learning English because their time was amply filled with low-waged work and caring for children: few had extra time or energy for night classes. The cycle of dependency on their "sponsors," and their isolation from the society at large, was ensured by their lack of English language skills.

When these women looked for work the best they could do would be to work either at a perpetual round of minimum wage jobs in small-scale factories where they were grouped together with other people from the same language backgrounds or as cleaners in homes or offices where they were even more isolated. But even this work was hard to find without a certain level of English language competency. Getting decent work in Canada was almost impossible without Canadian experience, and even when women did have substantial education, training, and experience in their home countries, the inability to have this recognized as significant in Canada placed insurmountable barriers to their changing the outlook for a future that looked dismal and mean.

The underlying notion of the nature of government language and skills training programs for immigrants was that sponsored immigrant women were either not to be destined for the labour market or would not, at any time, be suited for anything other than very low-wage jobs that would require few language or recognized work skills.[5] Interviews with women who came through the Working Women Community Centre document the truly frustrating experiences of those who attempted to receive training.[6] One Chilean woman who tried to enrol in an English course was told that she would not be eligible until after she had lived in Toronto for six months. The Manpower officer sent her to a hotel for a job as a maid, which she held for the requisite six months.[7] When she returned to Manpower to apply for language training, she was told that she was not eligible for the English course because she was working and obviously did not

need to learn English for her job. By the time she came to the centre she had been working at the same hotel for three and a half years, never making more than the minimum wage.

Another Chilean woman who held an honours BA and was a high school teacher was ineligible for English classes because her husband was employed and he had sponsored her. She worked as a domestic cleaner and attended night classes run by volunteer ESL teachers because she had been told by Manpower that her English was not sufficient to enable her to enter skills-training programs. Ultimately, she purchased an advanced English course at the University of Toronto, although the family was living on a very low income. After these efforts she became proficient at English, but when she attempted to get into government-sponsored skills training classes she was told that Manpower was not an education centre and that she could not expect help from it.

These stories were typical of the experiences immigrant women encountered whenever they tried to improve their employability. The government's profound rejection of the legitimacy of their claims was rooted in a very male-oriented notion of what constituted significant and important work and what women's contribution to their families should be. These were assumptions that the immigrant women's community would not accept. Their mission was to find a way to provide crucial language and skills training to women despite the problems inherent in the existing programs. Establishing an independent training program that gave language instruction, job training, and job experience in Canada would give these women a chance at finding decent, reasonably well-paid, and interesting work. Combining this training with "life skills" training that also gave considerable attention to the process of finding work and keeping a job would round out the program. They understood that only by themselves creating programs that provided this holistic, or integrated, approach to skills development was this likely to happen.

Fortunately the late 1970s, a time when the federal government appeared more committed to social development and improving programs for immigrants, was more conducive than is the current political climate to creative approaches to training. It was a time that allowed space for the development of integrated, community-based training programs. In 1976 the Canadian Immigration Act broke new ground by delineating the principles of Canadian immigration policy and by imposing on the government the responsibility to plan immigration for the future, to create a separate class for refugees, and to enter into agreements with provinces for implementing policies for immigrants.[8] At the same time, according to one federal government caseworker involved in immigrant training, the atmosphere created by the Trudeau years was a time "when there was an emphasis on social development and when there was still a belief that social

development was a role of government."[9] It was an era when local initiatives of many types were encouraged and funded, and it was aided by the fact that many people in government departments responsible for the programs came out of the Company of Young Canadians and had been influenced by the vision of a just and equitable society. While creating employable people was a goal of programs for immigrants, equally, if not more, important was the need to "provide them with accessibility to Canadian society." The way to do that was through "language training, support, community building and exposure to the standards of Canadian work places."[10]

The late 1970s was also a time when the power of feminism was beginning to be taken seriously. Feminist groups in the Toronto area had been active in public policy issues for most of the decade, and immigrant women's groups were beginning to have their voices heard as well. This was aided considerably by the Liberal Party's recognition that immigrants were future voters and an important constituency in many Toronto ridings. Organizations like the Working Women Community Centre, which was run by and for women in the Latin American and Portuguese women's community, received government funding to aid immigrant women in finding jobs. But the programs it could provide related more to giving advice and providing a supportive community: it did not have the resources to provide the direct job-ready training that the women really needed. The combination of the recognition of a real need by this community-based organization and the increased availability of government funding for local initiatives led the Working Women Community Centre to try to initiate the first Toronto-area program specifically aimed at job training for immigrant women within their own community – the Working Skills Centre.

Working Skills Centre

The relative openness of the federal government to community development and training for immigrant women did not mean, however, that the programs through which this could occur were truly adequate or that they were well funded. When the Working Skills Centre (WSC) was created in 1978 to provide an integrated training program for Portuguese and Latin American immigrant women, the criteria under which it could receive government funding was strict, and the funding was limited. The main constraints were a short initial training period of sixteen weeks, very little money for capital equipment for training, and the requirement that the training program create a commercial enterprise that would not only provide on-the-job training for women but would also generate an income to partially cover the expenses of the program. The creation of a viable business was further handicapped by the requirement that it not compete directly with private enterprise.

These parameters were difficult and strict and not very promising: the original creators of the WSC understood that meaningful language and skills training could not be achieved with so few resources and such limited time for skills and language training. Nevertheless, the sheer ability to allow women some access to training while they received a modest income, to a supportive community, and to job-related English language training made trying to do the almost impossible a worthwhile effort. The hope was that, over time and with some successful outcomes, the government would commit more resources, extend the training period, and relax the requirements for income generation through the business. The initial funding constraints and short training period meant that the actual nature of job training would produce a relatively slight "skill," but the hope was that the accompanying support and encouragement with language would allow the women to be placed in jobs that were better than those from which they came.

This proved to be a good strategy, and the dedication, experience, and planning of the immigrant community responsible for the centre generated an extraordinarily successful program. In fact, it was so successful that it became a model for other programs. This success allowed the program to expand its length of training time, engage in a more capital-intensive training program, and pursue a wider variety of skills training. In the initial years of the program the skills training and business was related to bulk mailing. This was something that could be learned in a few weeks, and it gave the WSC an opportunity to place its trainees in the mailing departments of non-profit and charitable corporations; that is, it combined the requirements of generating an income-earning business with on-the-job training and job-related language skills.

One crucial aspect of the training period involved treating the women as employees and paying them wages rather than training allowances.[11] Being treated as an employee imposed a specific work discipline that was part of the training process. The trainees learned what was involved in paid employment, starting with checking in on time, making arrangements for time spent away from work, and generally participating in the business environment as an employee. The pay was at the minimum wage level, but it was able to help offset expenses incurred from training (such as transportation costs and childcare). It also helped ease the burden for families that had to rely upon a sole income earner while the women were involved in their training program.[12]

The successes of the training scheme were considerable, and the WSC continued to be funded through various iterations of federal government programs.[13] The number of women who were placed in jobs, and the number who continued to be employed after training, defined these successes.[14] In fact, WSC had one of the best records of any training program

and became a model for other programs starting up. As the original founder of the program, Eugenia Valenzuela, noted, the value of the training was not simply the acquiring of English language and job-related skills, although these were important, but, rather, the job placement experience and aid in finding permanent jobs, which were essential features of the system. Most significant was the fact that the program was located within the immigrant women's community itself. This aspect of the training "provided opportunities for women who were isolated, and often depressed, to meet friends and find support and counselling, if necessary. Access to education was their only means of social mobility and they appreciated the opportunity to move from working as cleaners in office buildings, often at night when they would be isolated and at risk of sexual harassment, to working in businesses that offered opportunities for advancement into other jobs."[15]

Over time and through creative initiatives on the part of the staff at WSC, government funding expanded to allow more extensive training as well as an expansion of the job-skills component beyond what was needed for bulk mailing. Interestingly, when the program was first envisioned the feminists involved in securing the initial funding were particularly interested in training the women in some type of work that was sex-atypical and not specifically seen as women's work. This notion was ultimately rejected for two reasons: (1) the capital start-up costs for any type of trades training were much greater than could be obtained through government funding, and (2) the immigrant women were not interested in doing this type of "pioneer" work. They understood that their difficulties in the labour force were serious enough without having to try to break gender barriers as well.

As might be imagined, over the years the training program has expanded both with regard to the number of people involved and the type of training received. In the first year two separate groups, each with nine women, were trained: now about 200 women go through the centre each year. And, while job training was originally confined to bulk mailing, it now encompasses a variety of different programs, including those that require relatively little time and are devoted to everything from job preparation to full-time comprehensive six- to eight-month programs associated with general clerical and bookkeeping training programs. These are conducted through computer software classes that deal with the whole range of preparation for this work. Introductory courses that offer extensive training in accounting software are available to people with no previous background.

All trainees are given Canadian work experience through the in-house business. The businesses conducted through the WSC include bookkeeping business service and direct mail. Trainees in the bookkeeping program

apply their skills through direct work. Clerical trainees receive a range of practical experience in both businesses through database management, maintaining administration systems, and the production of flyers and spreadsheets. Those enrolled in the direct mail program gain work experience in bulk mail sorting as well as in processing other types of mail; the operation of various types of mailing equipment; and activities related to tracking documentation, shipping documents, and completing mailing statements. Trainees are also given on-the-job experience in businesses and organizations that are willing to hire them for a short period. This is a crucial part of the job-readiness aspect of the skills training because it gives the trainees a useful reference when they begin their permanent job search, although occasionally the firms who provide this experience hire from the WSC.

Because the government has funded the businesses of WSC and the workers have received government wage subsidies, the private sector has been vocal in ensuring that the businesses do not compete in its markets. As a result, the work performed is targeted for the non-profit, charitable, and community-based sector. As it became clear that the goals of the WSC's businesses were related to meeting social rather than commercial objectives, the for-profit business sector has been supportive in accepting two- or four-week training placements and in hiring the workers when their training is complete.

The language training the women received was specifically created by WSC to meet their needs. It focused on an intensive initial six-week period during which English for Special Purposes was taught in a classroom setting in the mornings, followed by classroom-type work in office-type situations where language training was combined with such skills-training as that related to keyboard work.[16]

Crucial Changes

The changes that occurred at the WSC were often the result of responding to the different needs of new groups of immigrants. However, too often the changes to the program involved desperate measures to cope with declining government funding and changes in government criteria for training programs.

Over time the origins of the new immigrants in Toronto changed, so, during the 1980s, WSC shifted its exclusive focus on Latin American and Portuguese immigrant women in order to become more eclectic in its selection of people for the program. Meeting the needs of immigrants from different countries sometimes necessitated a shift in program emphases. Occasionally, special groups of immigrants, such as refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, needed special treatment and required their own programs. To this end, WSC was instrumental in establishing

organizations such as Skills for Change, and Davenport Immigrant Women's Services: two programs that focused on the needs of Vietnamese women. While, originally, WSC staff used to start up the programs, the goal was to have the Vietnamese women run them themselves. This was the model that worked for WSC, and it was successfully replicated in these new programs.[17] However, even with a new mix of trainees, which included women from a variety of backgrounds, the WSC was able to continue to meet its original goals.

This began to alter, however, with the changes in the way that the federal government dealt with immigrants and training. The dismantling of the National Training Act in 1996 was particularly threatening to programs like the WSC. As one former director noted, "It was a real tragedy for the immigrant community. It created an insurmountable obstacle to training and marked the beginning of the total abandonment of commitment to training by the federal government."[18] The most significant changes related to the wages that the women were paid. As noted above, this was considered to be an essential and integral feature of the training program not only because it allowed the trainers to insist on treating the program as a worksite but also because it provided an essential income to women who otherwise would not be able to afford training. By 1992 federal government grants would not provide funds for trainee wages. Because the WSC had been successful in the businesses it ran, it was able to continue to pay wages to trainees for another two years, although ultimately this had to be abandoned. Nonetheless, the WSC was one of the last training programs in the country to pay wages to trainees.

The significance of this change cannot be overstated. Once the shift from wages to training allowances occurs (i.e., funds that come from either unemployment insurance or social assistance go to individuals rather than to the program itself), "then you are providing income support and the trainees are not earning their wages – they are provided charity rather than work."[19] But, most significantly, it meant that the women who were most in need of training often could no longer receive any income assistance because they did not qualify for allowances that were established with unemployment insurance or social assistance criteria in mind.

Throughout the existence of the WSC federal government programs have changed in substantial ways; ultimately, what resulted was that the two main aspects of training for immigrants were separated into different ministries. In 1991 the Liberal government separated settlement and training programs by creating two new ministries – the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the Ministry of Human Resources Development Canada. This separated language training for immigrants into two different ministries, one dealing with language as a settlement issue (Language

Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) and the other dealing with language as an employment issue (HRDC). This seriously complicated funding responsibilities for a program that combined language training for both employment and "settlement."[20]

With the devolution of training to the provinces in 1996, WSC lost its core funding and had to shift the nature of its training in order to deal with this. Ontario did not sign a training agreement with the federal government, so the levels of responsibility became opaque and resulted in the virtual elimination of federal funding transfers to the province for training. In an attempt to deal with this crucial funding issue, the WSC has downsized its programs, has shifted to a fee-for-training basis, and has pursued a wide variety of funding sources. This process is not simple and involves considerable staff resources – resources that used to be focused more on training. The WSC can no longer continue with an integrated training program as its core work. To generate income, the program has had to shift to a fee-for-service model that focuses on discrete modules or schools that can be sold to students as training units. All training is now "purchased" by students. The days of being able to target those immigrant women most in need of training are over: those who train now are those who either qualify through Employment Insurance or some other type of assistance, or those who can afford to pay for the programs on their own. The revenue from the business provides some funding so that bursaries can be made available to women who have no other source of income, and United Way funds twenty-two seats so that women living in shelters can enrol in the Freight Fowarding and Logistics Training Program.[21]

WSC continues to struggle with maintaining programming, particularly as the retrenchment in government funding continues. The situation is exacerbated by provincial cutbacks to community-based employability and language training programs. HRDC will fund assessment and placement programs, but the WSC has to find alternative ways to fund training. This takes the form of entering into a partnership with the Toronto Catholic School Board for ESL trainers, applying for funding through United Way, making applications to private foundations, entering into a barter-type arrangement with other community groups, and doing more in-house businesses.[22] Although the in-house businesses have been self-sufficient, and have generated sufficient revenue to pay for the salaries of three staff members (all of whom are graduates of WSC), generating a profit is more difficult. WSC is now considering moving into establishing a call centre business that would offer telemarketing to firms that need women with foreign language skills to reach immigrant communities. It also hopes to increase its mailing business by using the foreign language skills of the trainees by targeting freight from their countries of origin.

Community MicroSkills Development Centre

The early successes of the WSC provided a model for the development of another training centre for immigrant women in the Toronto area. A multicultural women's centre, Rexdale Women's Centre, initiated the project, and in 1984 Rexdale MicroSkills (later Microskills Development Centre) opened its doors for training immigrant women from a variety of countries in language, skills, and life skills training.[23] As with the WSC, the federal government provided start-up funding and wages for trainees, but the initial funding for skills training was fairly meagre, so finding an appropriate skill component was a challenge. The former executive director of WSC and the economist who had done the feasibility study for the WSC were once again asked to set up the program and to decide, given government parameters, what type of business and training would be possible.[24] Ultimately, it was decided that the preparation of microfiche for libraries and businesses would be appropriate and would not interfere with the business of established firms in the area.

Obviously the rapidly changing nature of information technology would give this type of training a fairly short shelf life, but, during the initial period, it served to meet the requirements of government funding, to provide women an entry to the labour market, and to generate a reasonable income for the whole program. Establishing a micrographics business provided an on-site business where women could learn business skills, practise precise record keeping, and have a way to receive Canadian employment credentials. When MicroSkills (MS) first trained women with microfilm it made strong connections with the microfilm industry and actually pioneered in bringing a level of professionalism to the industry. MS became certified to test anyone in the industry, and MS trainers were called upon to train outside the organization.[25]

In the early years of the program women were selected for this integrated training program on the basis of who could benefit most from the type of language and skills training that was provided.[26] This was possible because government funding allocated a training wage for the immigrant women who were selected. But the program also appealed to many candidates who needed training and Canadian work experience and who also faced additional and specific problems: some experienced violence in the home and some were political refugees who had been tortured in their home countries. The political refugees were often highly educated, skilled people who had had their lives turned upside down. They often had all the skills to succeed but, due to their devastating experiences, did not have control over their lives. The "holistic" program that MS offered was effective with regard to providing needed support, and, while these women often did not end up working in jobs requiring the skills training that MS

provided, they were nonetheless integrated into the Canadian workforce through the initiatives of the MS programs.

Over the years the composition of the immigrant women's community changed, depending on the waves of immigration and refugee population, along with the wars, economics, and political climates in their home countries. The women experienced different barriers, which could vary from a lack of very specific skill sets and English language skills to inhibiting experiences with racism in Canada. Leaving dead-end, low-paying, and otherwise unsatisfactory employment required a great deal of resources and support in addition to the skills that are provided in more usual types of skills training programs. This was what made both WSC and MS unique: they were able to integrate responses to the multitude of barriers that immigrant women experienced.

During the 1990s MS went through a major reorganization not only in order to cope with the obvious changes that needed to be made in the skills training component of the program but also in order to deal with the radical changes in government funding. From the 1980s to the 1990s the work environment became driven by computer applications, and MS adapted to this change by introducing them to its programs. Programs were initiated to teach computer skills training in Word, Excel, Lotus, Access, and Power Point 2000. Courses in accounting software included those that focused on Simply Accounting and ACC PaC, PC repairs and technical help desk support, A+ Service Technician, Network+, and iNet+ entry-level skills training. Business English language training was also provided to accompany the computer programming training.

While the program changes in the 1990s were significant, several major changes occurred that transformed the character and direction of MS, most of which were related to coping with changes in government funding. These included instituting a fee-for-services basis for training; delinking the language and skills training programs; and, in many programs, shifting the focus for training to both men and women in the immigrant community.

These changes resulted in the retention of a substantial focus on immigrant women through programs designed to provide technical skills development, job-specific skills, language training, and job search, but they shifted substantially towards more discrete, fee-for-service programs offered to a wider public. This involved expanding certain training initiatives (like language training and computer skills training) so that people who were not part of the original target group could take them for a fee. Language training is delivered through two programs, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), which provides ESL training to about 250 participants a year, and the Language Employment Related

Needs (LERN) program, a pilot program that targets information technology professionals for English language training. Thirty-four people received training under this fee-for-service program in 1999-2000.[27] MS also manages the HRDC Employment Resource Centre, a walk-in service that is open to the public but housed within the MS facility, and a women's enterprise and resource centre that offers support services to women pursuing self-employment. In addition, it has become a designated certified solutions provider for Microsoft programs. The wide variety of programs vary in intensity, with some requiring a year of training (the Women's Technology Institute pilot project) and others involving relatively brief consultations. Altogether MS services a huge number of people requiring some type of assistance: in 1999-2000 it served 12,527 clients.[28]

As with its original model, MS continues to operate a business in conjunction with its training program. MS Technical Solutions is a company that provides computer support services and computerized accounting. This involves providing technical services ranging from system set-up and installation, to hardware and software upgrades, to network solutions, to database development and management, to Web development, to troubleshooting and maintenance. The business is an integrated part of the training program, providing both funding for the program and a valuable way for trainees to gain work experience.[29]

One of the successful survival tactics that MS has used has involved developing diversified funding sources that are linked to its widely diversified programming. In large part this was a result of radical federal government changes in 1995 and the lack of provisions to accommodate funding cuts experienced by community-based training programs. The scramble to find funding meant that relatively few of all the trainees who go through MS each year are funded, and most now pay for training. However, with a variety of funding sources MS does not have to depend on a single funder for any particular program, and the organization is less vulnerable than others to changes in funders' priorities.[30] MicroSkills funding includes money from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments; the United Way; private foundations; corporate donors; individual donors; the Rexdale MicroSkills Alumni Association; and MS business services. But chasing funding is an ongoing challenge, and it takes considerable staff time that could otherwise be focused on the training initiatives themselves.

MS has made the changes that were necessary to its survival, but it is very clear that the government needs to re-invest in training if immigrant women are going to be able to find long-term meaningful work in Canada. The integrated nature of the goals of MS were well thought out, and they have worked; but they cannot reach the people who need training most without adequate funding for training, training allowances for immigrant

women, and funding for support services that will enable women to take the training.[31]

Radical Changes

The changes in the nature of government funding through the shift of training responsibilities to the provinces, the shift from Unemployment Insurance to Employment Insurance, and the change in focus and expectations for training outcomes has greatly affected community-based programs like Working Skills Centre and Rexdale MicroSkills. As a review of Metro Toronto Immigrant Employment Services notes, the community-based, non-profit sector that has been developed with the active participation of users of services "has been at the forefront of program development for immigrants and refugees."[32]

The immigrants who participated in these programs consistently rated them very highly, much more highly then they did the traditional community college certificate and diploma programs, standard school board adult education programs, and private sector trainers. On three occasions the HRDC Employment Development Branch singled out WSC, from among all the non-profit community programs, as an exemplary model for training programs.[33] The federal governments have been so pleased with the efficiency and success rates at WSC and MS that both were frequently on the tour route of foreign government officials so that they could learn about their innovative model for incorporating language training into employment, counselling, and placement.

Yet, despite the obvious successes of community-based and comprehensive training for immigrants, the ability to target programs to reach those truly in need becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, as government criteria changes. Both organizations operate on an eclectic funding basis, always chasing small grants put together to fund permanent positions. Usually the grants are on a year-to-year basis and necessitate constant scrambling to keep together funding from a variety of sources. Funding is always tenuous.

The primary objective of government now appears to be saving money rather than training immigrants to improve market-ready skills. The community-based programs are so hampered by the shift to a market-based delivery system that they cannot target those truly in need; rather, they increasingly provide programs only to those who can afford them. As the above report noted, "it is becoming just as difficult for the sector to respond to the needs of unskilled recent immigrants as it is to meet the needs of the new class of professionals."[34] The women that WSC and Rexdale MicroSkills were designed to serve – that is, sponsored immigrants, those who lacked Canadian experience, those who were returning to the labour market after intense child responsibilities, and those who

experienced labour market discrimination – are those who are most at risk for being excluded from training programs. This is because these are not only the women who are least likely to fit new criteria for training but also the women who do not have the resources to pay for the new training programs.

The emphasis now is on "self-reliance," pre-employment counselling, and market-based training services: all approaches that reduce government costs but that also considerably reduce the outstanding outcomes that were associated with community-based training and that allowed people with meagre resources to receive an income while working to improve their employability.

These community-based programs have succeeded so spectacularly because they have responded to what immigrant women said they wanted and what the women who worked with immigrant women said was essential to achieving these goals.[35] Equally significant has been the careful attention paid to the changes in the labour market: since these are employability training programs rather than formal education or career-oriented programs, their designers knew they had to be conscious of the changes in the labour markets. However, probably the most significant factor contributing to their success is that these programs are situated within, and run by, the community they serve. This means that they are more than simply training centres; rather, they are created and run by people who have a strong stake in meeting immigrant women's needs. Their role is one of advocacy and, as such, they are not removed from government policies but, rather, are important players when it comes to seeing what should be done and feeling the impact of what ultimately happens.

Notes

1 See, for example, Monica Boyd, "Migration Policy, Female Dependency, and Family Membership: Canada and Germany," in *Women and the Canadian Welfare State*, ed. Patricia M. Evans and Gerda R. Wekerle (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 142-69; Tania Das Gupta, *Racism and Paid Work* (Toronto: Garamond, 1996); Andrea Brouwer, *Immigrants Need Not Apply* (Ottawa: Caledon Institute, 1999); Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva K. Stasiulis, "Foreign Domestic Worker Policy in Canada," *Science and Society* 58 (Spring 1994): 7-33; Sedef Arat-Koc, "Immigration Policies, Migrant Domestic Workers, and the Definition of Citizenship in Canada," in *Deconstructing a Nation: Immigration, Multiculturalism and Racism in '90s Canada*, ed. Vic Satzewich (Halifax: Fernwood, 1992), 229-42; Roxana Ng, "Racism, Sexism and Immigrant Women," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, ed. Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, and Lindsay Dorney, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 279-301.

2 One of the early reports on the conditions of immigrant women was written by Sheila McLeod Arnopoulos, *Problems of Immigrant Women in the Canadian Labour Force* (Ottawa: Advisory Council on the Status of Women, January 1979).

3 This was originally known as "life skills" but has since changed because HRDC prefers the term "employment preparation."
4 Ravi Pendakur, *Immigrants and the Labour* Force (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 13.
5 *Steps to Change Language Training: A Lobbying Kit for Immigrant, Refugee and Visible Minority Women's Groups* (1986-87) is available from ACTEW Reference Library, 401 Richmond St. West, Ste. 355, Toronto, ON, M5V 3A8.
6 Marjorie Cohen, *Evaluation of the Working Skills Centre* (Toronto: Working Skills Centre, 1979).
7 "Manpower" was the name of the federal government office that dealt with employment issues at that time.
8 Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Milestones of the 20th Century: Citizenship and Immigration Canada,* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, July 2000), cat. no. Ci51-92/2000; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Forging Our Legacy, Canadian Citizenship and Immigration, 1900-1997* (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2000), cat. no. Ci51-93/2000E), chap. 6.
9 Interview with Michael Barkley, June 2001. Barkley was the federal government representative from the Employment Development Branch at Canadian Immigration responsible for overseeing the WSC in the early years.
10 Ibid.
11 This was funded through the Local Employment Assistance Projects (LEAP).
12 Interview with Annamaria Menozzi, executive director of WSC from 1981 to 1991, June 2001.
13 The program was initially funded through LEAP, then LIP (Local Incentives Program).
14 The success rate, defined as three months of employment in the six months immediately following the completion of the program, ranged from 75 percent to 90 percent and was highly correlated to the health of the economy. Interview with Annamaria Menozzi, June 2001.
15 Interview with Eugenia Valenzuela, WSC's first executive director, May 2001. The stresses of immigration mean that immigrant women are unusually susceptible to violence. One of the senior trainees at WSC, who had been trained as a bookkeeper and was placed with the Bank of Montreal, was murdered by her ex-husband in 1990. A former executive director of WSC estimates that between 30 percent and 60 percent of the women in the training program were victims of violence in their homes.
16 English for Special Purposes involved tailoring the language lessons specifically to the actual situations these women were experiencing or were likely to experience. WSC created its own training manual, and this was used in the classroom. See, WSC, *Working Skills for Immigrant Women,* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Working Skills Centre of Ontario, 1996).
17 Interview with Annamaria Menozzi, June 2001.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Nakanyike B. Musisi and Jane Turritin, *African Women and the Metropolitan Toronto Labour Market in the 1990s* (Toronto: The African Training and Education Centre, June 1995).
21 Interview with Minerva Hui, June 2001.
22 This barter system is formally known as the LETS system. It is a computerized community-based trading system that allows members of the non-profit sector to accumulate and draw down credits by exchanging goods and services with other community members.
23 When Rexdale MicroSkills shifted its training and business away from preparing microfiche it changed its name to Community MicroSkills Development Centre, or MS.
24 These women were Eugenia Valenzuela and Marjorie Griffin Cohen (one of the authors of this study).
25 Interview with Hazel Webb, June 2001.
26 Interview with Shelly Gordon, first coordinator, June 2001.
27 MicroSkills Annual Report, 31 March 2001.

28 Ibid.
29 *MicroSkills Informs*, 2 (October to December 2000): 1. Rexdale: Community MicroSkills Development Centre.
30 Interview with Kay Blair, MS executive director, and Hazel Webb, MS director of communications and resource development, June 2001.
31 Ibid.
32 Annamarie Menozzi and Associates, and Quail Community Consulting Ltd., *Metro Toronto Immigrant Employment Services Review* (Ottawa: HRDC, January 1997).
33 Interview with Annamaria Menozzi, June 2001.
34 Ibid.
35 Interview with Jane Wilson, director of training and career development, June 2001.