

**MANITOBA RURAL IMMIGRATION  
COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES**

**Parkland**

**RDI Working Paper #2005-5**

**April 2005**

## **Rural Development Institute, Brandon University**

Brandon University established the Rural Development Institute in 1989 as an academic research centre and a leading source of information on issues affecting rural communities in Western Canada and elsewhere.



RDI functions as a not-for-profit research and development organization designed to promote, facilitate, coordinate, initiate and conduct multi-disciplinary academic and applied research on rural issues. The Institute provides an interface between academic research efforts and the community by acting as a conduit of rural research information and by facilitating community involvement in rural development. RDI projects are characterized by cooperative and collaborative efforts of multi-stakeholders.

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**Rural Development Institute  
Brandon University  
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RDI would like to thank Citizenship and Immigration Canada for financial support, Manitoba Labour and Immigration for continued assistance and feedback, and all community members and immigrant subjects who provided invaluable information and commentary. The author would like to thank the RDI team for helpful commentary, editing and assistance with document production.

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# **Introduction to Manitoba Rural Immigration Community Case Studies**

The information contained in this report is part of a series of four case studies of community/regional immigration initiatives in Manitoba. Sponsored by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, these case studies were undertaken with the understanding that the findings from four diverse community/regional experiences with rural immigration in Manitoba can assist in exposing innovative practices, lessons learned and further considerations for communities wishing to develop strategies for immigrant attraction, settlement and retention.

It needs to be stressed that this and other case studies each offer a snapshot in time, a collection of impressions and commentary on immigration goals, challenges and responses at a particular point on the continuum of attraction, settlement, and retention. As such, findings are historical and impressionistic and meant to prove instructive for further research and policy considerations, facilitate collaboration between communities and government and initiate contact between communities and immigrants, all for the purposes of strengthening efforts directed towards regional immigration, settlement and retention.

## ***Methodology and Project Developments***

For the project, four communities/regions were chosen by Manitoba Labour and Immigration (LIM) on the basis of being instructive with regards to processes and initiatives relating to rural immigration. . LIM provided contact information for appropriate stakeholders in each community, who via email, phone and/or in person contact offered input/perspective on community immigration processes. Interviews and/or focus groups were arranged with immigrants through local contacts.

The intent in speaking to immigrants was not to gain quantitative data, but rather to seek impressions on their immigration experience that may be informative and instructive both to the communities they reside in and others hoping to develop immigration welcoming, settlement and retention strategies. Despite the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, vis-à-vis the overall immigrant population of each area, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weakness in attracting and retaining immigrants and strategies that may be employed for such initiatives.

An initial series of working papers of findings was developed in collaboration with personnel from LIM and the communities being studied. This material was then offered during two sessions in Brandon, Manitoba at the end of April:

- to participants at the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation-Rural Development Institute (CRRF-RDI) National Rural Think Tank 2005 on the theme of rural immigration; and
- to Manitoba community representatives attending the “Developing a Community Immigration Strategy” seminar held by RDI and LIM at Manitoba’s Rural Forum.

At the latter, representatives from RDI, LIM and the communities involved also presented findings of the study. Further consultation with LIM and the communities in question was sought to develop the document into its present form.

# Executive Summary

## ***History and Context***

Experiencing difficulty in finding people to take over existing businesses, the Parkland Economic Practitioners Group explored immigration as a possible solution by speaking to Manitoba Labour and Immigration (LIM) and, in 2003, initiating significant research. An elaborate, multi-phased program entitled the *Parkland Immigration Strategy Initiative* was developed from the findings. Prior to pursuing a large number of arrivals, the region and its participating communities have chosen to first organize settlement services and investigate what groups may be best suited to the region and its needs. Immigration to the Parkland Region from 1999-2004 totaled 227, according to LIM.

## ***Existing Supports and Initiatives***

Regional immigration efforts currently have support from businesses, some of which have had contact with immigration consultants and/or explored the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), economic development personnel as well as both regional and municipal actors. Some of the specific existing supports identified during this project include:

- Parkland Immigration and Language Regional Services;
- Dauphin's Settlement Committee;
- Dauphin's Parkland Crossing; and
- Russell's Settlement Committee.

The Parkland Immigration and Language Regional Services (PILRS), based out of Inglis, formed in 2004 to organize and identify settlement and English as a Second Language (ESL) needs and provide ESL services. PILRS is currently seeking funding to provide a coordinator in each of the 4-5 sub regions of Parkland. Communities have de facto settlement point people who have by default taken up the role of first contact for immigrants.

Dauphin's settlement committee is compiling a language bank, a resource list of people in the community who can speak foreign languages and later be called upon for translation services. The administration of Dauphin's Parkland Crossing, a multifaceted community area run by a local church, suggested that a staff member can provide weekly hours towards immigration and settlement services and that the office can act as a hub to connect immigrants to the appropriate services.

Community stakeholders have been identified and are involved in Russell's settlement committee, which has recruited volunteers to assist with settlement.

## ***Immigrants' Perspective***

During a focus group conducted with a number of immigrants and a one-on-one interview, immigrants' perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of community living were shared and discussed. The specific comments of the focus group and interview participants are summarized below:

**Positive Aspects of Living in Community, Pull Factors:** Quality of life factors offered in the region include having weekends off, time to see children, a safe and relaxed atmosphere and proximity to provincial/national parks and regional centres; helpful neighbours and community people; inclusive school system; rural environment positive for children; availability of land; and personal contact (friends, relatives) facilitating move to community.

**Negatives Aspects of Living in Community/Immigration Process:** Isolation: being away from extended family; long distances to an international airport; limits to training/educational opportunities and what one can do and earn in the area; difficulty in finding child care and appropriate housing.

## ***Further Challenges and Observations***

**There is ongoing need for a champion in the Parkland region.** The region and its constituent communities lack a person to dedicate time to the attraction of immigrants. There is insufficient funding to do what is deemed to be the necessary groundwork to attract immigrants and an inability to receive greater funding until immigrants begin arriving. There appears to be impediments at present to preparing for immigration without the people, resources, and knowledge of how many immigrants to expect.

**Connecting arriving immigrants to available resources and helpful individuals remains challenging.** There is no central settlement person in any of the larger centres in the region, either someone has become point person for immigrants by default, unable to devote full attention to the position, or there is no point person. Further local organization, regional assistance and collaboration, community education and a process driven by local interest are required. In Dauphin in particular there remains little knowledge of who is arriving, and many arrivals have difficulty knowing where to access settlement services, as there is no official hub of operations.

**Considerable difficulties exist in the provision of services across a vast region without regularized service delivery in each community.** Immigrants may be unable or unwilling to travel distances themselves to access services. The significant distance from Winnipeg makes it difficult to travel to the region for an exploratory visit, as well.

**Language and credentials recognition issues remain a concern.** The need for more flexible adult ESL remains, however, this is impeded by immigrants arriving at different times with diverse needs, as well as a lack of both volunteers and trained ESL instructors.

**Job opportunities to satisfy all family members** may be hard to come by.

**Lack of suitable available housing for immigrants in some parts of the region,** particularly for a transition from arrival to home owning, remains a concern.



**Getting communities in the region on board may prove challenging.** One interviewee stated that she has already received negative calls from those concerned about immigrants taking jobs.

It remains important to **gauge the prevalence of language and contemporary cultural fits in the region** and the extent to which these might assist a new arrival in immediate and prolonged transition.

## **Conclusion**

The Parkland Region has made strides to develop a regional immigration model without the luxury of considering other salient regional immigration models; therefore, this effort should prove beneficial to others, irrespective of the successes or difficulties encountered in breaking this new ground. As immigrants have not yet arrived in large numbers, it is premature to attempt to gauge the efficacy of Parkland Region's initiatives in the area of immigration. However, how the area responds to challenges to move forward with few committed/available resources for purposes of immigration remains of considerable interest. The region's geographic vastness reinforces the need for further local organization and regularity towards taking up immigration initiatives.

## **Recommendations and Lessons Learned from Parkland Region**

- **Pool community and regional resources** for strategizing around immigration issues. **Recognize basic resources that are available elsewhere** (e.g., settlement plans and volunteer guides).
- **Undertake appropriate background work** to gain a clear understanding of the immigration programs available and what services/initiatives are required to ensure success.
- **Generate and maintain momentum** and have the community firmly behind the initiative in order to have a positive experience with immigration from the beginning..
- **Build recruitment strategies** around conveying the positive experiences of immigrants who have already settled in a region. Determine all motivating factors in relation to settling in an area and what aspects of life immigrants enjoy in particular. Attractive qualities of the region may be more subtle and varied than what long time residents assume.

## **Recommended Further Research on Case Study**

- How long before a “critical mass” of immigrants is established somewhere in the region/throughout the region? What is the region's absorptive capacity for immigrants?
- Satisfaction in employment: are the needs of the entire family being met with the area's job prospects? Are employers satisfied?
- Investigate retention successes and satisfaction of immigrants and wider community in the process. How does the area's relative isolation from larger centres affect immigration successes?

- Have efforts at fostering community receptivity been successful throughout the immigration process?
- Are regional strengths and opportunities leveraged to provide the most salient opportunities for immigrants? Is there/will there be intra-regional mobility?
- Overall, what is the success of the immigration initiative with few committed resources and comparatively low numbers of arrivals?

## Introduction and Methodology

The Parkland area is one of the four community/regional case studies under investigation, chosen after being identified by personnel from Manitoba Labour and Immigration as exhibiting certain challenges with and responses to regional immigration, from which important lessons and recommendations can be drawn.

For the intended purposes of the case studies, qualitative and impressionistic information was sought directly from those involved in the immigration process. Contact was established and information gathered by phone conversation, email correspondence and/or in person contact from individuals in each community/region who had themselves played important roles in immigration processes to date and/or could recommend further key contacts. It should be noted that due to the time and travel constraints of the project, not all recommended contacts were successfully reached. In some cases, those reached felt they had little relevant information to offer to the project.

Interviews were arranged with immigrants through local contacts. Time constraints, the comfort level of immigrant subjects and language concerns were factored into the determination of interview procedure. A focus group was established to permit greater levels of interaction and idea generation amongst immigrant subjects. An open interview with one immigrant subject was conducted, as well, in the case of Parkland.

The intent in speaking to immigrants was not to gain quantitative data, but rather to seek impressions on their immigration experience that may be informative and instructive both to the communities they reside in and others hoping to develop immigration welcoming, settlement and retention strategies. Despite the relatively small numbers of immigrants successfully contacted, vis-à-vis the overall immigrant population of the area, feedback from immigrants should be seen as valuable for the purposes of gauging potential community strengths and weakness in attracting and retaining immigrants and strategies that may be employed for such initiatives.

The information provided by immigrants and additional community contacts has been summarized and analyzed to present general history, trends and impressions. Further input and recommendations have been sought from community contacts and Manitoba Labour and Immigration, and this document reflects their input.

## Immigration to the Parkland Region - History and Context

Immigration to the Parkland region is not a foreign concept, as the area has witnessed the arrival of farmers and a trickle of other immigrants in recent years. More importantly for present purposes, a wider immigration strategy has been initiated in the region with the undertaking of appropriate research on immigration programs and opportunities, organization of resources at both the regional and community level, and adoption of a wait, see and learn approach that allows greater degrees of planning with each immigrant arrival. With this, those in the area responsible for immigration hope to better facilitate the arrival and settlement of greater numbers in a manageable fashion.

The driving force towards pursuing immigration further in the region came from the Parkland Economic Development Practitioners Group, who had originally been seeking people to take over existing businesses. Experiencing difficulties in meeting this goal, the group then endeavoured to explore whether immigration might prove to be a fit for this need and began speaking with Manitoba Labour and Immigration to gain further knowledge of immigration options with business components. The group initiated significant research on the topic of immigration in the summer of 2003.

This research had been sought to ensure that those interested in immigration in the region would have a clear understanding of what programs were available. The group determined that investment requirements for business stream immigration were greater than their particular needs warranted and that an immigration strategy could assist in addressing the considerable demand for labour, particularly in specific trades.

An elaborate, multi-phased program entitled the *Parkland Immigration Strategy Initiative* was developed from the research and its findings. Those concerned with immigration are seeking a slower pace to arrivals in order to have the opportunity to reflect upon the process, determine what further services and strategies are required and learn the appropriate lessons. Prior to larger marketing initiatives, communities and the region itself have chosen to organize settlement services to facilitate a more successful transition for immigrants.

It is hoped that a manageable number of arrivals will prove to be instructive, allowing interested parties to gauge the experiences of new families and determine precisely what the challenges are, whether employers are satisfied, and what further community response/needs can be identified before widening the process. Those involved in attracting immigrants hope to be proactive in determining what groups are best suited to the region and develop the supports for facilitating the transition. Ukrainians are thought to be a potentially appropriate fit due to a similar cultural and linguistic element in much of the Parkland area.

**Table 1: Immigration to Parkland Region, 1999-2004**

<b>Parkland Region Immigration</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>
1999	30
2000	31
2001	29
2002	26
2003	61
2004	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>227</b>

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada; prepared by Manitoba Labour and Immigration, May 2005

## Existing Supports and Initiatives

Language supports to the region had earlier been coordinated out of Brandon. Realizing a growing need in the region and the desire to coordinate regional services more effectively, **Parkland Immigration & Language Regional Services (PILRS)** formed in 2004 with a mandate to organize and identify settlement and English as a Second Language (ESL) needs in the area, as well as provide ESL services. While no specific funding exists yet for settlement activities, the organization is able to provide some of this as an extension of their ESL work. The formation of PILRS has enabled the formalization of language services in the region. Based out of Inglis, PILRS currently seeks funding to provide a coordinator in each of the 4-5 sub regions of Parkland. Communities have de facto settlement point people who have by default taken up the role of first contact for immigrants.

**Dauphin has its own settlement committee**, displaying that members of the community have been willing to come together to talk seriously about immigration prospects and associated challenges. The group is attempting to secure funding for a settlement worker in the city, as they are expecting the arrival of 15 families on the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP).

This committee is currently compiling a language bank, a resource list of people in the community who can speak foreign languages and later be called upon for translation services. Dauphin's committee has sought the input of the city's Cultural Awareness Committee, whose chairperson sits on the settlement committee. Retention remains an issue, as does how to connect newcomers to the wider community. It is hoped that a settlement person will be able to first identify volunteers in the community who can serve as settlement partners and then coordinate this activity.

**Dauphin's Parkland Crossing** is a multifaceted community area run by a local church, offering emergency housing, food bank, affordable housing, gym, catering, cafeteria and meeting space. Its administration has suggested that a staff member can provide weekly hours towards immigration and settlement services and that the office can act as a hub to connect immigrants to the appropriate services.

A contact from **Parkland Community Futures** mentioned that there is a role to play for the organization in supporting research and administering knowledge resources for immigration. However, lack of funds and already occupied human resources make it difficult to coordinate additional activities for immigration.

**Russell's Settlement Committee** convened with the intent of organizing resources and displaying that the community was serious in pursuing immigration. Volunteers have been recruited already to assist with settlement, though it is felt that little can be done until a visible group arrives. Schools are excited about the prospects of an influx of students, and churches, the chamber of commerce, employment services and public health have all been notified and are involved in the settlement committee, according to the town's Economic Development Officer.

The efforts towards immigration in the region currently have support from business, economic development and both regional and municipal actors. What is now required is further local organization and a process that is driven by local interest, resources and

supports, though one that utilizes regional assistance and collaborative efforts, as well. The importance for community education has been identified, but with little practical need to follow up due to the small number of arrivals.

Employers in the region have had contact with immigration consultants to meet human resource needs. For example, one area trucking company has been connected to foreign workers by immigration consultants and is currently exploring options with the PNP. One area businesswoman who employs workers from both Africa and Ukraine stated that immigration has allowed her business to access skills that were otherwise unavailable in the local labour market and she views pursuing more immigrant workers as an integral facet of an aggressive growth plan. Furthermore, she stressed the important role immigration has to play in area development, suggesting that an influx of those enthusiastic to work and live in the region is a positive change to present trends of out migration.

## **Immigrants' Perspective: Key Findings**

Due to the extremely small number of immigrants successfully contacted and the vastness of the region, the information offered by immigrants and presented here is far from representative. Nonetheless, this feedback should be seen as valuable for the purposes of exploring the challenges and opportunities in the area. It should be restated that the intent of contacting immigrants in this study was to receive qualitative feedback and impressions on the immigration and settlement experience to inform future initiatives towards welcoming, settlement and retention.

For the Parkland case, one focus group was held in Inglis and one immigrant interview was conducted in the Russell area. Certain information that might identify the respondents has been withheld to ensure confidentiality.

### ***Positive aspects about the area and what factored in choosing and settling in the area***

Respondents were enthusiastic about the quality of life offered in the region, citing having weekends off, time to see their children, and a safe and relaxed atmosphere. This seemed for many distinct from the experiences in their home countries.

All respondents had very positive impressions of helpful neighbours and community people. For one, neighbours were helpful in moving. Another respondent mentioned that the farmer from whom he purchased his farm remained close by and offered regular assistance. One cited the example of a community newsletter notifying the community of her family's arrival. One family was lent a vehicle by neighbours upon arrival.

One respondent commented on how her family stayed seven weeks in the home of her employer when they first arrived. Though they didn't know anyone in the immediate area, she had felt confident that they could make friends soon because of ties with the church community.

All felt that the rural environment was a positive one for their children and the abundant space a very positive attribute of the region. The availability of land is impressive; one remarked that her and her husband "couldn't afford a garden" in their home country. Similarly, their proximity to national and provincial parks and the larger centres of Roblin and Russell was deemed positive. For further needs, Yorkton is accessible.

Respondents spoke highly of the school system; one family in particular spoke highly of the patience and sensitivities the teachers displayed towards their children surrounding language issues.

One expressed being pleased in finding a positive, progressive work environment in the area.

### ***Negative / Challenging Aspects about Area / Immigration Process***

One female respondent reported experiencing great degrees of isolation at first, as her family arrived without knowing anyone in the region. Despite having English as their first



language, the family had great difficulty learning the lay of the land and took a great amount of time to know the community.

Two expressed concern over limits to what one can do and earn in the area. One interviewee is dependent on her husband's job and feels to be in a precarious position, as there is little other suitable work in the community. There are no opportunities for her to be employed in her field nor pursue further training.

Further comments concerning isolation were made. Some reported that their children had difficulty making friends in school. Being away from extended family is difficult, and the distance from an international airport poses a challenge to family visits.

Childcare is reportedly difficult to find, one noted great difficulty in finding a house in the area and another reported being frustrated in seeing obstacles to growth in the mindset of community.

### ***Additional***

Some personal contact facilitated the move to the area for five of the six people interviewed.

## Challenges and Observations

**Considerable difficulties exist in the provision of services across a vast region without regularized service delivery in each community.** Immigrants may be unable or unwilling to travel distances themselves to access services. As well, the significant distance from Winnipeg makes it difficult to travel to the region for an exploratory visit.

**A challenge remains in connecting arriving immigrants to available resources and helpful individuals.** Without a central settlement person in any of the larger centres in the region, individuals have become the de facto point person for immigrants or there is none. In Dauphin in particular, there remains little knowledge of who is arriving and many of those arrivals have difficulty knowing where to access settlement services, as there is no official hub of operations

There presently exists a Catch 22 situation in the region: **insufficient funding** to do what is deemed to be the necessary groundwork to attract immigrants and an inability to receive greater funding until immigrants begin arriving. There appears to be impediments at present to moving forward with the immigration strategy without the people, resources and knowledge of how many immigrants to expect.

The Parkland Economic Development Practitioners Group, the body that instigated the original immigration research and the *Parklands Immigration Strategy Initiative*, has not met on the matter of immigration in some time. This speaks to **the need of a champion for the project in the region**, as those hoping for greater immigration to the region have found themselves otherwise occupied and unable to devote considerable energies to the project. The region and its constituent communities also lack a person to dedicate time to the attraction of immigrants.

Neither specific communities nor the region as a whole have determined to what specific areas or people they will market. Also, it remains important to **gauge the prevalence of language and contemporary cultural fits in the region** and the extent to which these might assist a new arrival in immediate and prolonged transition.

A contact in Dauphin cited instances in which families have immigrated on a father's job guarantee and others in the family have been disappointed by **job prospects**, having greater expectations. She is concerned about how these unmet expectations lead to a negative experience being conveyed to home countries.

Though arrivals have not been to the extent of other areas in the province, **language and credentials recognition issues** remain a concern here. **Lack of suitable available housing for immigrants** in some parts of the region, particularly for a transition from arrival to home owning, remains a concern. The need for **more flexible adult ESL** remains, however, there are great difficulties in offering ESL, with immigrants arriving at different times and with different needs and a lack of both volunteers and trained ESL instructors.

**Getting communities in the region on board may prove challenging.** One interviewee stated that she has already received negative calls from those concerned about immigrants taking jobs.

**Personal linkages** led many of those contacted to the area and/or assisted them in settling. Such linkages may be explored for further recruitment strategies.

## Conclusion

The Parkland Region has made strides to develop a regional immigration model without the luxury of considering other salient regional immigration models; therefore, this effort should prove beneficial to others, irrespective of the successes or difficulties encountered in breaking this new ground. As immigrants have not yet arrived in large numbers, it is premature to attempt to gauge the efficacy of the Parkland Region's initiatives in the area of immigration. However, how the area responds to challenges to move forward with few committed/available resources for purposes of immigration remains of considerable interest. The region's geographic vastness reinforces the need for further local organization and regularity towards taking up immigration initiatives.

### ***Recommendations and Lessons Learned from Parkland Region***

- **Build recruitment strategies** around conveying the positive experiences of immigrants who have already settled in a region. Determine all motivating factors in relation to settling in an area and what aspects of life immigrants enjoy in particular. These may be more subtle and varied than what long time residents may assume to be the predominant drawing features of the region.
- **Pool community and regional resources** for strategizing around immigration issues. As the Parkland region has not received vast numbers of immigrants to permit access to wider funding for settlement and retention services and strategies, coupled with the desire to attract and retain immigrants, joining regional resources seems critical to the initial successes of an immigration plan. .
- **Recognize basic resources that are available elsewhere**, (e.g., settlement plans and volunteer guides) when initiating immigration projects.
- **Undertake appropriate background work** to gain a clear understanding of the immigration programs available and what services/initiatives are required to ensure successful utilization of these programs and services.
- **Generate and maintain momentum** and have the community firmly behind the initiative in order to have a positive experience with immigration from the beginning..

### ***Recommended Further Research on Case Study***

It will prove useful and instructive to follow the Parkland Region through the various stages of implementation in its regional immigration strategy. Some additional areas suggested for further research are:

- How long before a “critical mass” of immigrants is established somewhere in the region/throughout the region? What is the region's absorptive capacity for immigrants?
- Satisfaction in employment: are the needs of the entire family being met with the area's job prospects? Are employers satisfied?
- Investigate retention successes and satisfaction of immigrants and wider community in the process. How does the area's relative isolation from larger centres affect immigration successes?

- Have efforts at fostering community receptivity been successful throughout the immigration process?
- Are regional strengths and opportunities leveraged to provide the most salient opportunities for immigrants? Is there/will there be intra-regional mobility?
- Overall, what is the success of the immigration initiative with few committed resources and comparatively low numbers of arrivals?

## **Appendix: Resource List and Contact Information**

- Settlement Guide

Guide provides information on community life and contacts to assist newcomers access area services. The settlement guide is being developed and adapted for a number of communities in the Parkland Region.

For further information on material and Parkland's immigration program contact:

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The role of the RDI Advisory Committee is to provide general advice and direction to the Institute on matters of rural concern. On a semi-annual basis the Committee meets to share information about issues of mutual interest in rural Manitoba and foster linkages with the constituencies they represent.