



A study and recommendations by
Bay Area Community Council
September 2009

Abbreviated
Version

Immigration in Brown County

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The Urgency of English Language and Assimilation Training

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Why We Needed This Study

Because this is a subset of the BACC's recent Poverty study, we don't need to repeat the implications when people in less than subsistence situations do not get the help they need. It is natural to develop this immigrant-specific study as a separate report.

What we do need to mention, however, is the additional impact that persons of different racial/ethnic backgrounds incur when they enter our community ... especially in these times of heavy influx of illegal immigrants from worse economies in search of a better life, tight budgets for social welfare services, and job turmoil as we convert to a global society.

The fact remains that most immigrants *are* legal, and are pursuing the normal yet complex process of trying to become a U.S. citizen.

The normal sociology, the normal process of assimilation, does yield withdrawal behavior and anxiety. It is normal not to be welcoming, to be offput, to wonder about people who aren't like you. Unfortunately, there have been instances where major public figures have participated too visibly in this reaction, resulting in negative publicity for our community.

This reinforced a point we developed in our research ... that when many long-time citizens see a Hispanic person, they immediately think "illegal immigrant."

That's not a good beginning.

Maria arrived here in the mid-1990s from Seattle, with 5-year-old Amanda, and husband Daniel, who got a job at American Foods. He is still there, and is training to become a supervisor. Baby Victor was born almost immediately, and they also now have a three-year-old who is being taught BOTH Spanish and English in the home. Amanda, now 17 at East, is bright, and has been told her main COLLEGE options will be St. Norbert and Harvard(!). Victor, 12, is at Washington Middle School.

They bought their first car by saving \$400. Her husband recently got his GED from NWTC. Today, Maria has a Literacy Green Bay tutor come to her home on a regular basis to improve her already good English.

When they arrived in GB, Amanda was placed in HeadStart at Kennedy, and no Spanish was spoken. Immersion. The next year, she attended Kindergarten at Howe, again with no Spanish resource. Immersion. She picked it up well. Victor also hasn't been exposed to an ESL or ELL situation; he learned through immersion.

Maria has had a wide assortment of odd jobs in GB, and now works part-time at the Howe Neighborhood Family Resource Center as the receptionist. The family attends St. Willebrod, and is involved in its heavy Spanish family referral and service effort. Because of her experience, she gives guidance to many.

Introduction

In our June 2007 Poverty Study report, we said these three important sentences:

The working poor are an important economic force. Areas with a surplus of willing workers attract new businesses and expansions. Innovation is driven by second- and third-generation immigrants.

From that is derived this study. Immigrants are a critical subset of both Poverty and the Emerging Workforce ... and are also a controversial one. Our memories are short. Most of us are here because of an aspiring immigrant, and those predecessors went through the same “off-putting” reactions that today’s Hmong, Hispanics and thirty other ethnic groups went through or are going through in Brown County right now.

Yet we know that our future depends on them ... as a future taxpayer base, as community leaders, and as innovators. We expand ... or we atrophy as a society. Historically, there is no middle ground that yields progress.

Historically, immigration brings these renewals to our nation:

- **A new round of Creativity.**
- **More rapid Economic Growth.**

(And, very importantly, it will help to offset the negative fiscal impacts of the baby boom generation retirements.)

We know that about 60% of immigrants here are from Mexico and Latin America, and another 30% from Asia, primarily Hmong. Altogether, they compose just over 11%, or 11,000, of the city’s population ... and it is increasing quickly. In the 1920s, the last heyday of immigration, more than 30% of our county population were *recent* immigrants. By 1990, that figure was 2%. We are in another era of immigrant expansion.

The issue is, obviously, how to get immigrants as productive as possible from an economic standpoint, and then assimilated into the social fabric ... as quickly as reasonable. Our research results were very clear and very obvious: **Help them learn the English language, and provide them Adult/Parent Information.** First generation Hmong typically didn’t learn English quickly, and it’s their next generation, born here, that is the first to create significant impact. We are a little more effective in supporting the Hispanic influx ... but **our research says emphatically that we still aren’t strong enough.** We need greater coordination and proactivity in getting new immigrants into English Learner and Adult/Parent Education classes, and in obtaining and training mentors and leaders for them.

When new families get these understandings, we know that they are much more at ease, and move more quickly at assimilating and progressing. If they don’t, major social problems can and do arise from their frustrations.

(There are more than 30 *other* countries and ethnic groups represented by current immigration. They come in smaller numbers, usually encouraged by a tight-knit community from the same country. They need the same attention, and usually have a built-in group embracing them, and pointing them in the right directions.)

Anything we can do to expedite the assimilation process, especially with regard to learning English and developing new adult/parent acculturation skills, will help the Brown County economy and social fabric in major ways. Immigration can’t be avoided. We need it. We must embrace it. We will benefit from that embrace in every way.

September 2009

BACC Immigration Study

Because the major policy reasons for encouraging immigration are ...

- **Economic Development** ... additional workers to support economic expansion, and ...
- **Creativity and Innovation** ... because our nation's major innovation waves have followed major immigration waves, ...

it should be local policy to expedite assimilation into our culture, especially via learning of language skills and of habits that lead most quickly to success.

Therefore, our Key Recommendations are as follows ...

Key Recommendations

A. More Pro-Active English Language Training, Mentoring.

The biggest need by far from all of our interviews is to reach immigrants earlier than we do and with greater resources than we do to help them learn the English language so they can passably navigate life and its complications here.

NWTC and Literacy Green Bay are the primary providers of English Language Learning opportunities for the refugee and immigrant population in this area. NWTC provides a number of English Language Learner (ELL) classes at all levels of instruction. Literacy Green Bay trains and supports volunteer tutors, conducts ELL classes, coordinates a Family Literacy program, and collaborates with other organizations and businesses to provide ELL classes at other sites and worksites throughout the community.

Literacy Green Bay served over 850 adults and children in 2008 in Adult Tutoring, ELL Classes, Family Literacy and Workforce Development. In spring 2009, 179 volunteer tutors are serving almost 200 adults in Adult Tutoring (75 adult learners are on the waiting list for a tutor) and another 250 adults are enrolled in ELL classes. At this time, 34 families are participating in an ELL class in the Family Literacy program (a collaborative effort with NWTC, UWGB and the Howe Resource Center).

Currently, they need funding to train more tutors: (\$500/tutor training workshop, 6 workshops a year), provide staffing for ELL classes onsite and offsite (\$1,600/class/semester), provide childcare for the children of adult learners enrolled in classes, and fund an ELL class instructor via Children First Family Literacy. Volunteer responsibilities at Literacy Green Bay are not short-term, although they have flexible hours.

Professionals indicate it takes an adult immigrant about seven years to become truly proficient in English, but anecdotal evidence shows that children function quite well in less than a year, especially through "immersion", and adult workers can pick up enough understanding to function well within the first six months.

The importance of this cannot be underestimated. Recently, in Binghamton, NY, an Hispanic male killed 13 people in an immigrant service center. Analysis indicated he didn't have adequate language skills, couldn't understand what was needed to navigate through daily life, had become very depressed, and reacted in this terrible way. Think about your own experiences when you didn't know the language in another country, and couldn't express your immediate needs to anyone. The development of our immigrant population and its integration into being societal contributors will be greatly expedited.

We call on the Volunteer Center to publicize the need to attract up to 100 additional tutors and teachers for Literacy Green Bay, so it can support its own and others' programs.

B. More, Pro-Active Adult/Parent Information/Mentoring.

The second-biggest need is for Pro-Active Adult/Parent Education. Interviewees unanimously indicated that new arrivals want to understand the nuances of daily life in Green Bay ... how to navigate the city to fulfill their various needs ... shopping, health, financial, legal, transportation, job seeking, etc. In addition, they want THE BEST for their children ... what is expected of the children, how they can help, etc.

We must make it easy for them to access such training/ learning ... whether through formal courses, or informal support get-togethers. It is no different than the “on-boarding” process for new employees at companies. You want to bring them up-to-speed as quickly as possible on what it takes to succeed.

An important piece of this should be MENTORS for families, volunteers who agree to interact periodically with the family and be a resource for them. The challenge is how to put the Mentoring Program in place, in alliance with parent information efforts and more volunteers?

Several organizations now provide Parent Training as part of their regular programming ... Integrated Community Services (which would like six additional mentors this fall), the Family & Childcare Resource Center (which would like two more this fall, primarily for parenting programming), Family Services and some churches. The demand and usefulness is very great. Example: The F&CR says “Parenting classes always have a waiting list”, adding “many often have some kind of mental illness, whether depression, stress or other” (see D, below). F&CR’s class attendance volume has doubled in the past year, with more than 450 taking parenting classes. Home visits are coupled with the classes, but home visits often deal more with daily survival challenges than parenting tips.

We call on the Volunteer Center to publicize the need for up to 15 additional Mentors and Counselors for ICS, F&CRC, FS and several churches to work with immigrant families on acculturation challenges.

C. Increase the Availability of Trained, Committed Volunteers.

The Volunteer Center struggles with finding volunteers to support immigration and other programs, primarily because many needs are longer-term while most prospects want short projects, with a beginning and an end. (Depressing statistic: The average volunteer time monthly of those who volunteer is 1.5 hours ... when many times that is needed to have impact on individuals/families in need.) Hopefully, the partial retirement of Baby Boomers will provide a reservoir of committed citizens.

More specifically, Volunteer Center head Christine Danielson reports that right now more than 200 local non-profits are requesting more than 3,000 volunteers to work four hours per week efforts ... “one of the highest levels I can remember.” Many of them are for one-on-one work with individuals with specific needs.

We call on the Volunteer Center to work even more creatively to get the message into the community of the need for more volunteers with specific time and talent availabilities!

No language expertise is necessary, just extensive life experiences and a willingness to help. The Volunteer Center is an organized base for making this happen.

D. Increase Access to Mental Health Counselors.

A number of respondents indicated that there is a significant percentage of immigrants going through classes and counseling that are suffering from mild depression and anxiety disorder. (Indeed, some were in severe reactions to their new environment and were suffering schizophrenia and paranoia.)

Currently, there is being funded for three years a program called MORE (Mental Health Outreach Resource Expansion), but it's staffing resource is inadequate. This begins to address the availability of counseling for the poor, including immigrants. Local experts indicate an additional 15 counselors would still not satisfy the need, which is especially acute for child psychiatric care. This being said, most immigrant families are psychologically healthy.

We call on the Community Foundation to work to both maintain and increase resources for the MORE program (by an additional 15 counselors), or another program with similar deliverables.

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Sociology of the Challenge

This is certainly not an unrecognized problem ... that the process of assimilating immigrants into culture and civic life does not go smoothly. It has happened several times in the past in Green Bay, and it has happened many, many times in our country; the research on it, how it happens and progresses, is voluminous. Once again, we watch it play out as it typically does.

Renowned Harvard sociologist/researcher Robert Putnam: "Where levels of social capital are higher, children grow up healthier, safer and better educated, people live longer, happier lives, and democracy and the economy work better. In the short to medium run, however, immigration and ethnic diversity challenge social solidarity and *inhibit* development of social capital. In the medium to long run, on the other hand, successful immigrant societies create new forms of social solidarity and dampen the negative effects of diversity by constructing new, more encompassing identities. Thus, the central challenge for modern, diversifying societies is to create a new, broader sense of 'we'."

Lorena is now a Parent Educator at Family & Childcare Resources. She actually got to Green Bay as a student from south Mexico through a UWGB program, and graduated from there. She says that typically, a family arrives because a relative/friend knows a job is available and initially provides some room for the relative/friend. The family works to save money to move into its own apartment and to buy a used car. Still, there is barely enough money to live on. An example is a single parent with five children who milks cows at a farm and makes tamales to sell for \$10 per dozen.

Two critically important points:

-- **Creativity in general seems to be enhanced by immigration and diversity.**

(Wall Street Journal, 4/27/09: "Immigrants have had a disproportionate role in innovation and technology. Companies founded by immigrants include Yahoo, eBay and Google. Half of Silicon Valley start-ups were founded by immigrants, up from 25% a decade ago. Some 40% of patents in the U.S. are awarded to immigrants.immigrants are 50% likelier to start businesses than natives.")

-- **Immigration is generally associated with more rapid economic growth.**

In advanced countries with aging populations, immigration is important to help **offset the impending fiscal effects of the retirement of the baby-boom generation.**

Tolerance for difference is but a first step. To strengthen shared identities, we need more opportunities for meaningful interaction across ethnic lines where Americans (new and old) work, learn, recreate, and live. Community centers, athletic fields, and schools were among the most efficacious instruments for incorporating new immigrants a century ago, and we need to reinvest in such places and activities once again, enabling us all to become comfortable with diversity.

Harry Dent, Futurist: Regarding Creativity, immigrants in many countries and especially the U.S. have been responsible for major Innovation Waves. Dent's studies conclude that the 1898-1914 immigration wave in the U.S. drove the Roaring Twenties, and that the 1978-1991 one was a major factor in the 1990s dot.com boom. There is more evidence that Second Generation immigrants come from no background of comfort and, hence, are ambitious and aggressive thinkers and employees, and drive even higher levels of innovation.

James H. Miller, Pres., Wisconsin Policy Research in a March 2008 report on Immigration in Green Bay: As Wisconsin's population ages, we will need these immigrants in our future workforce to keep our economy vibrant. In that respect, the impact of immigration on Green Bay may place it in the most advantageous position of any Wisconsin city. They have a work base for the future, and it is not clear that other cities in our state will be able to match Green Bay.

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In 1990, the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce created the Bay Area Community Council as a Brown County citizens' think tank made up of volunteers representing business, education, community and government. You can reference its website at www.bayareacommunitycouncil.org. It regularly researches issues of consequence for the progress of Brown County, and reports its findings to the public. This Immigration Study is a subset of a major study on Poverty in Green Bay, and involved interviews with more than 20 agency leaders and other close observers and workers within the immigration sphere. The full text of the report, as well as the full texts of the interview summaries, is available on the website.

Immigration Study Participants

Phil Hauck, Project Coordinator, past BACC pres.; board pres., Healthy Lifestyles Co-op, TEC Chair.

Randy Lawton, BACC past president; owner, C.A. Lawton Co.; community volunteer.

Harry Maier, retired journalist; Green Bay Redevelopment Authority, community volunteer.

Nan Nelson, executive vice president, Green Bay Chamber of Commerce.

Dennis Rader, retired Green Bay labor law attorney.

Tom Schumacher, principal, Services Plus; former pres., Employer Workforce Development Network.

Rose Smits, BACC president; former executive director, Encompass Early Education and Care.

Other Interviewers:

Rev. George Krempin, pastor emeritus, Grace Lutheran Church; active in housing activities.

Jim Liethen, retired WPS executive; longtime community volunteer.

David Littig, Ph.D., UWGB emeritus professor; former chair, Green Bay Transit Commission.

David Pamperin, president, Green Bay Community Foundation.

Other BACC Members:

Fr. Paul Demuth, Catholic Diocese vicar for ministry; former pastor.

Sandy Duckett, vice president, Northeast Wisconsin Technical Institute; econ. development advocate.

Pat Finder-Stone, past BACC president; nursing instructor; community activist/volunteer.

Dr. Regan A.R. Gurung, UWGB Prof. of Human Development & Psychology; Dept. Chair.

Noel Halvorsen, executive director, NeighborWorks Green Bay.

Greg Hetue, executive director, Brown County United Way.

Patty Hoelt, official, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin.

Paul Jadin, president, Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce; former Green Bay mayor.

Greg Maas, superintendent, Green Bay School System.

Judy Nagel, vice president of investments, Wachovia Securities; community volunteer.

Andy Rosendahl, official, City of Green Bay

Bob Woessner, retired journalist; past BACC president.

Vince Zehren, Ph.D., director emeritus, Schreiber Foods