

Comprehensive and Diversified Supports for Low Literacy to Mid Literacy Immigrant Women

From Learning Challenges and Literacy Issues to Employment

Theresa Wall
March 31, 2017



CIWA

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

Objectives

Why?

- Why develop specialized programs for women with limited schooling?

What?

- What specialized programs exist?

How?

- How do these programs offer targeted support?

About CIWA

- Non-profit immigrant serving agency
- Started 1982 – 35 years!
- Established to meet the needs of immigrant women and their families
- Broad spectrum of services
- In 2015/16 CIWA served 17,926 clients through individual and group services
- Staff speak 30+ languages collectively
- Services in 119 locations

CIWA Clientele

- Women from all backgrounds
- Refugee claimants
- Conventional refugees
- Work visa/foreign workers
- Canadian citizens
- Permanent residents
- From 146 different countries
speaking 134 different languages



CIWA's Mandate

VISION

Empower immigrant women.
Enrich Canadian society.

MISSION

To engage and integrate immigrant women and their families in the community.

VALUES

Integrity, Equity, Empowerment, Relevance,
Collaboration

Why

- Why develop specialized programs for women with limited schooling?

Gender, Literacy and Equality

Today, nearly 17% of the world's adult population is still not literate; two thirds of them women, making gender equality even harder to achieve.

~ UNESCO
Statistics on Literacy



Literacy and Everything Else

“The literacy issue is intrinsically intertwined with their daily struggle for survival and dignity (so called “settlement issues”) in their new land. Simply put, literacy cannot be isolated from the more basic issues of daily survival for a refugee or immigrant who is just beginning to acclimatize to Canadian society, both figuratively and literally speaking. Basic needs such as housing, health care, and employment are compounded by low literacy skills.”

~ Geronimo, Folinsbee & Goveas. 2001

Identified Need

In a rapidly growing city

In a female focused agency:

- women missing foundational learning and not equipped to function fully in a text driven society
- refugee women from countries torn apart by war
- women from countries where access to schooling and opportunities for employment are highly gendered
- from (2012-17 Business Plan)

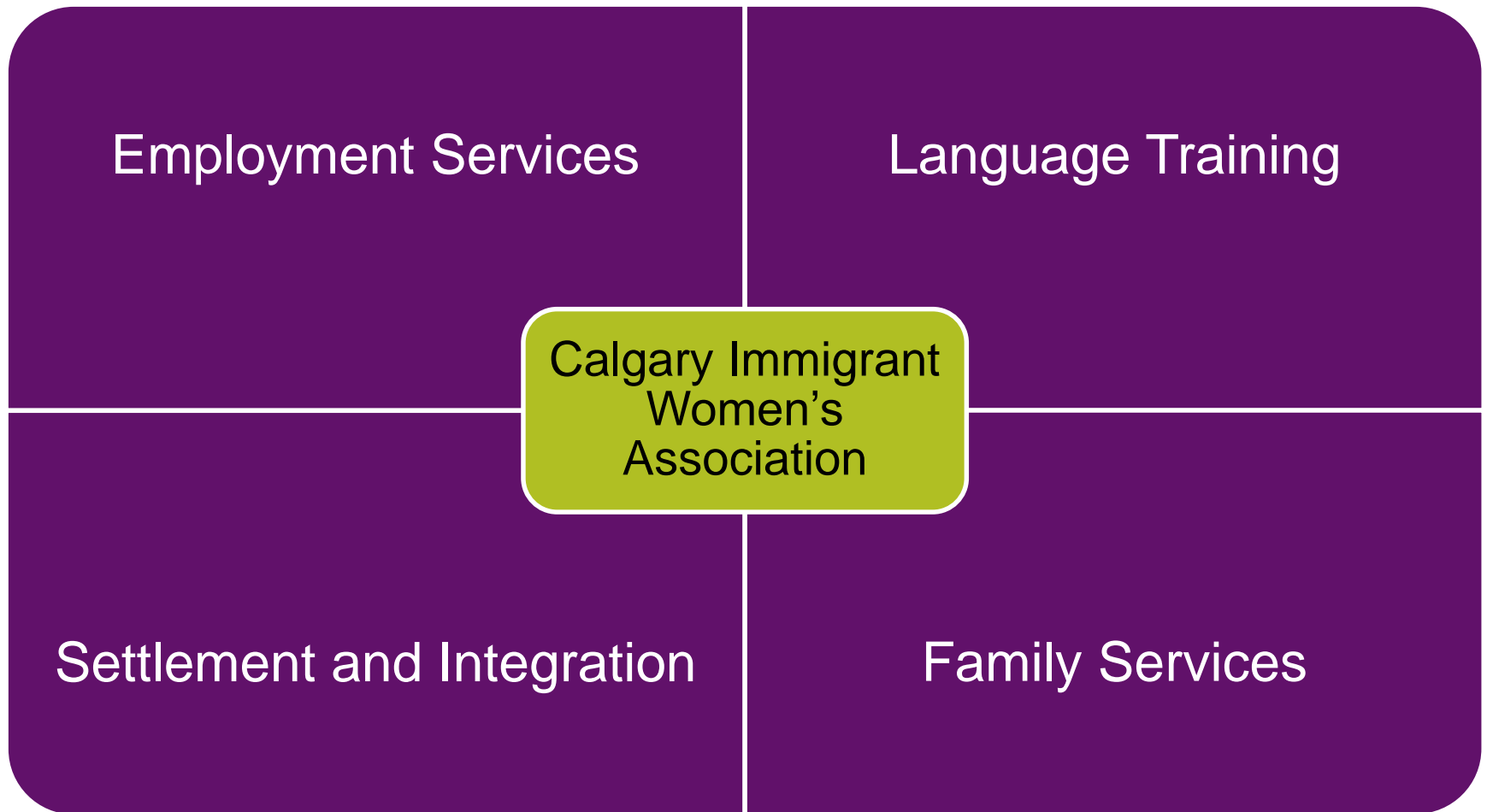
Funder interest in gender-specific programming and skills training for newcomers with low- to mid-literacy



What?

- What specialized programs exist?

The Organization



Second Language and Literacy Programs



- Community-based ESL Literacy classes (0-6 years schooling)
- Family literacy program
- Learning Support Services

Pebbles in the Sand ESL Literacy Program

Clients:

38% with no L1 schooling
31% with 0-6 years of L1 schooling

Features

- Community-based
- Small class sizes
- One teacher and one tutor per class
- Multilingual staff
- Childcare
- Classes meet two mornings or afternoons a week



Learning Support Services

- Available to staff and students at CIWA and in the community
- Provides learning strategies to students
- Refers learners to services
- Provides teaching strategies to instructors
- Offers professional development



Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)

Clients: parents of children 3-5 years old
36% with no to 6 years of L1 schooling
25% with 7-12 years of schooling

Features

- Weekly home visits
- Up to 3 years enrollment
- Parents learn how to help their children develop pre-literacy skills



Employment Training Programs

- Childcare Training
(0-7 years schooling)
- Retail Training
(0-12 years schooling)
- Modular Training
cleaning, hotel housekeeping,
kitchen help
(0-12 years schooling)



Most Popular Employment Program for L1 Learners

Modular Training

Cleaning, Hotel Housekeeping,
Kitchen Help

Features

- Oral language focus
- Occupation-specific
- Open, continuous entry
- Flexible schedule
- 7 to 12 modules to complete
- Resume prepared
- Job search support
- Recognized with 2 national awards



What can be accomplished?

- language programs for women with 0-6 years of prior schooling
- innovative low to mid literacy employment training programs in multiple fields designed and launched
- development of appropriate training resources
- an evolving agency culture of awareness
- advocacy for clients with partner agencies
- services available in 30+ languages



How?

- How do these programs offer targeted support?

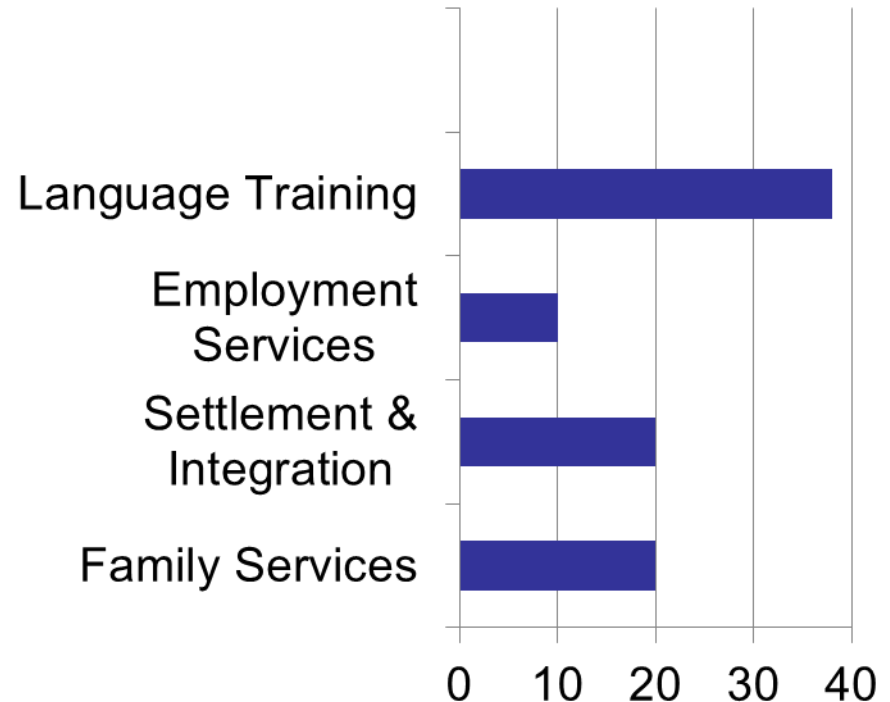
Collaborate

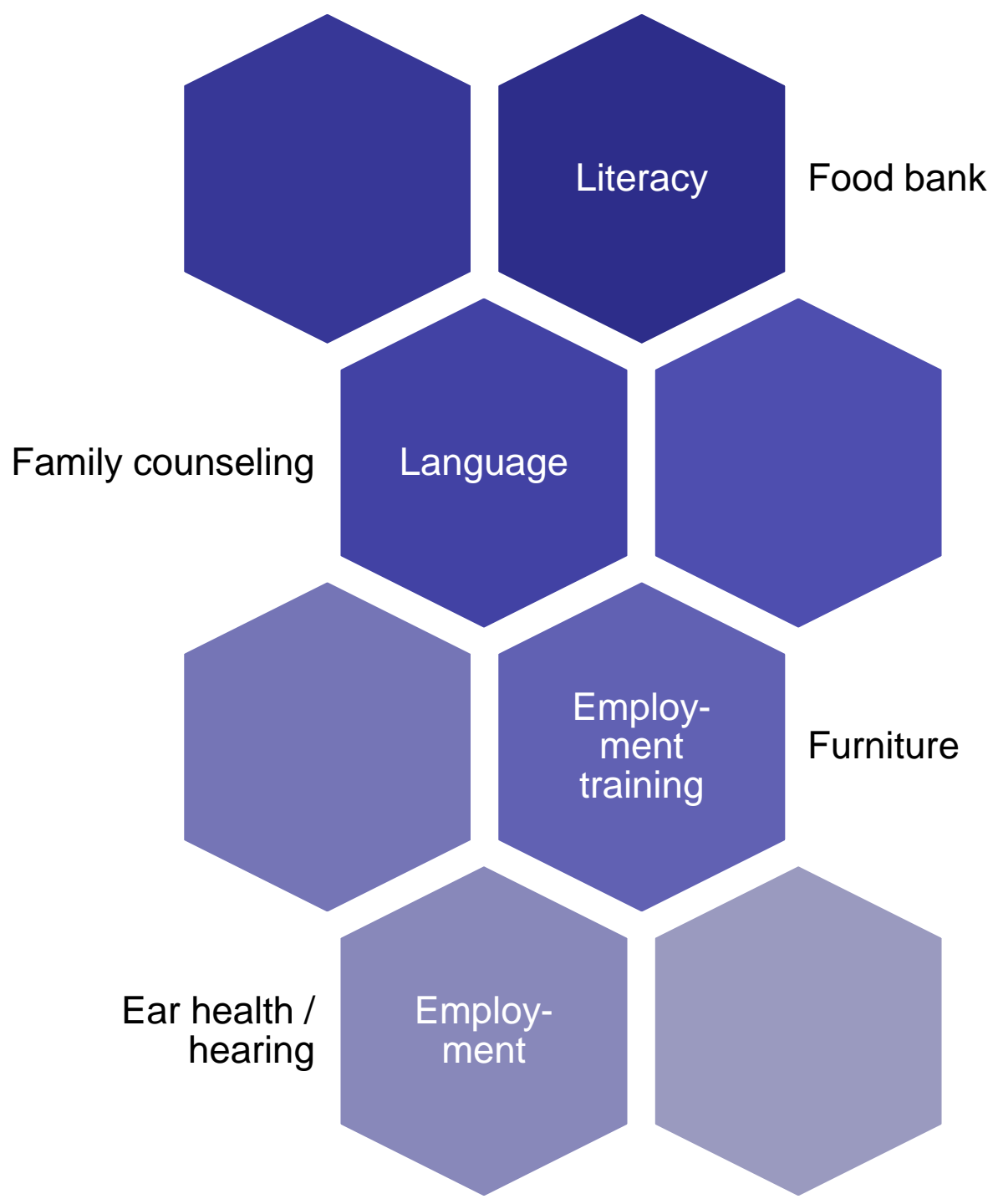
Pebbles in the Sand

2016-2017

- 178 learners served
- 69.1% with <0-6 years L1 schooling

Internal Referrals





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Challenges

- immediate vs. long-term results
- programming defined by funding / funder, training often limited to weeks/months
- challenging navigation within and between agencies
- that 'great Canadian life' may take more than a generation to achieve

What works to reduce barriers to services?



- A Relationships-based approach
- Working closely with service providers
- Help with that extra step (forms, phone call...)
- L1 support
- Support services including childcare and transportation

Comments? Questions?

Theresa Wall
Learning Support Services
theresaw@ciwa-online.com



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