



Qualtrica Associates

Foundational Knowledge, Policy and Practice for Working with Newcomers from
War Affected Areas

A Course Evaluation

Spring 2008

Over the next decade, the Government of Manitoba intends to double the number of immigrants and refugees arriving in the province. One implication of this policy shift is a rise in newcomers from war affected countries, many of whom have experienced emotional and physical trauma as a result of living in regions of conflict.

A needs-assessment conducted in spring 2007 demonstrated that helping professionals¹ require further training to assist in the successful integration of newcomers from war affected countries.² This well-founded need for further training in the delivery of services to newcomers coming from regions of conflict, has led to the development of a series of three courses to help professionals and paraprofessionals receive training, and become better equipped to offer specialized services for this population. These pilot courses are sponsored by *Manitoba Labour and Immigration*. The first and foundational course was offered in the fall and winter 2007-2008. This report focuses on the evaluation of the foundational course.

Between November 2007 and February 2008, 12 participants from community organizations, government agencies, and the health and education sectors attended the 14 weeks of the foundational course.

Among the main topics were: acculturation frameworks; assessment models; issues faced by refugees in countries of origin (including pre and conflict situations); migration, settlement and integration; seeking and receiving help, models of intervention and best practices in the field of service provision for newcomers from conflict affected areas.

¹ The phrase “helping professionals” is an umbrella term that encompasses social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, settlement counselors and educators.

² Blum, E., Heinonen, T. & Powell, N. (2007) *Needs Assessment: Training for Service Providers Working with Newcomers from War Affected Areas* – A report for Labour and Immigration Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB: Qualtrica Associates.

The objectives of the course were:

- To increase capacity for the human service sector working with newcomers from war affected areas;
- To provide foundational knowledge about newcomers from war affected countries;
- To ensure that knowledge is integrated into everyday practice;
- To encourage interdisciplinary networking amongst trained professionals so as to enhance resources to the community, and
- To learn about the Participatory Action Research (PAR) form of program evaluation that could then be used in other venues.

This document is a summary of the course evaluation. The evaluation was intended to demonstrate if and how these objectives were accomplished.

Evaluation Approach and Methods:

We used a PAR evaluation approach. In collaboration with all stakeholders involved in the course we designed an evaluation framework. To evaluate the course, we held a focus group interview with 6 course participants, interviewed 3 other course participants, 3 speakers, 1 course staff, the 2 instructors and the 2 course designers. We also looked at participants' written journals and reviewed other course documentation.

Evaluation Findings:

Course Content and Process

- Overall, participants found new and helpful models or conceptual frameworks with which to examine the experiences of newcomers from conflict areas (e.g., acculturation frameworks)
- The topic of 'triple trauma paradigm' (a model for understanding impacts of trauma on people) was the most significant one for participants. For some of them, the information was new. For others, the information helped structure their already existing knowledge.
- Participants' interaction in the class provided new insight about the experience of newcomers from war-affected areas.
- The course introduced participants to significant new resources (e.g., specific literature and websites).
- The course facilitated a meaningful connection between helping professionals from different service sectors.
- Networking within the course allowed for personalized connections. These contacts led to increased referrals and consultation.
- The course provided a venue for support among professionals.
- The course allowed for the validation and acknowledgment of the immigrant experience among some of the course participants, who were newcomers to Canada.
- Collective sharing and support increased strength in service delivery.
- The course promoted changes in participants' practice:

- More awareness of the underlying issues clients face; course participants have been able to improve the assessment of clients' current problems.
 - Some participants have made practical or instrumental changes to increase rapport building with clients.
 - For some, increased awareness of how one's own culture and values impacts their relationship with clients, has led to changes in approaches.
- The course also promoted potential changes in participants' organizations. Participants brought back ideas for changes in programming, and also shared these with other co-workers.
 - Incorporation of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as an approach for evaluation was not a priority for participants.

Course Delivery

- Incorporation of two instructors ensured continuity throughout the course.
- Instructors brought significant personal experiences and expertise to the course.
- The course was based on many teaching approaches some of which worked better than others.
- The course was better suited for front line workers than for administrators and managers. Participants in different positions (front-line and administrators) might benefit from different teaching approaches. Administrators, for example, may gain from a more in-depth examination of organizational issues.
- Course participants also spoke about the need to know the specific learning objectives for each session or part of the course.
- Written journal assignments allowed for self-reflection; however, participants expected more feedback from instructors on their thoughts and approaches. Increased feedback on other assignments would have also been appreciated.
- Part of the learning was facilitated through small group work. Small groups were established at the beginning of the course. Participants got to know each other very well within these small groups. However, they regretted not having been able to know other participants as well. Since the course was designed for a small number of participants, dividing them into even small groups was unnecessary.
- The content presented by some guest speakers was believed to be disconnected from the rest of the course material. Some of the content was repeated during guest speakers' lectures. Specific feedback to guest speakers would have also been helpful.

Overall, the foundational course was important and necessary for the service providers attending. In addition to the social and professional networking that took place, growth was achieved both in intellectual and practical realms. The following are some key recommendations.

Key Recommendations:

1. The curriculum should be strengthened for an increased seamless delivery. This should include specific learning objectives for each session, and a more conscious

- attempt to incorporate adult education methods of delivery (e.g. more reflexive group discussions).
2. Two co-instructors should be incorporated in each session. Both should share the responsibility of developing and coordinating the delivery of all sessions.
 3. The instructors should be knowledgeable on the issues of the course while also able to embrace adult education learning principles.
 4. Whenever possible and appropriate, the course should include instructors and/or guest speakers with firsthand experience in working with newcomers from war affected areas.
 5. Future courses should include mechanisms for capacity and skill building for instructors and guest speakers.
 6. Invited speakers' presentations should be well coordinated in relation to the specific topics at-hand.
 7. Course developers should explore different approaches to deliver relevant information to administrators and front-line workers. For example, assignments which require a high degree of personal reflection, such as written journals, may not be suitable for managers of organizations.
 8. Collaboration among all course participants as an approach to course evaluation should include a set of activities parallel to the course.
 9. Increasing number of newcomers from war affected areas will be in contact with the many social service sectors in Manitoba. Educational opportunities, such as the foundational course raise awareness about the many issues faced by refugee newcomers. They may also illuminate the many inadequacies of the system. While courses such as this one can initiate change at some levels (e.g., in work with clients), participants need to be supported to effect change at organizational levels. Specific resources should be devoted towards the mobilization of change at those levels. Likewise, continuous capacity building activities should be supported through educational activities at all levels of organizations within the social service system.

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