

Immigration and Settlement on PEI
Kevin J. Arsenault, Ph.D.
Executive Director, PEI ANC

Biography:

Dr. Kevin J. Arsenault is the Executive Director of the PEI for the past 9 years and has been a member of the Board of the Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA) since becoming the ED of the PEI ANC. He holds a doctorate in Social Ethics and Theology from McGill University.

Prince Edward Island has been experiencing unprecedented growth in the number of Immigrants coming to the Island in recent years. The statistics speak for themselves:

2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008 (after 7 ½ months)
153	310	355	565	987	750

The quarterly demographic estimates from Statistics Canada revealed that in the 3rd quarter of 2007, PEI had, for the first time ever, the highest immigration rate in Canada (12.1 per thousand).

Immigrants coming to the PEI ANC go through an intake and orientation process, so we have been able to accurately track the impact of increasing numbers of clients on settlement services and programs. In 2007, 951 new clients seeking settlement services registered with the PEI ANC. Of this number, 814 clients were permanent residents. Service agreements with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) allow us to provide settlement assistance only to permanent residents. In 2007 we were also able to assist 61 temporary visitors, 30 temporary workers and 46 international students thanks to funding from the PEI government.

From where are these new settlers coming? The largest source countries for 2007 were China (356), Korea (195), Taiwan (72), and Iran (42), with much fewer numbers originating from 51 other countries. Most residents came through the Provincial Nominee Program (662), under one of four categories: Immigrant Investor: A principal applicant who proposes to make an investment in an existing Prince Edward Island company and to take an active role in that company as a director or senior manager; Immigrant Entrepreneur: A principal applicant who proposes to establish a viable, new business in Prince Edward Island; Skilled Worker: A principal applicant with specialized skills and experience who fills a labour market need in Prince Edward Island; and Immigrant Connections: A principal applicant suggested by a Prince Edward Island based “champion” who meets settlement and employability criteria. Of all PNP clients coming to the PEI ANC in 2007, the breakdown by category was as follows: Immigrant Partner (543) Immigrant Entrepreneur (16) Skilled Worker (39) and Immigrant Connections (64).

In the first 7 ½ months of 2008, over 700 immigrants have registered with the PEIANC. As was the case in 2007, the largest source countries by far are China (346) Taiwan (51) and South Korea (64).

Most PNP applicants who do take up residence in PEI have little or no English, and require Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) training for at least a couple of years. Day-to-day life for these newcomers is extremely difficult and frustrating since they have virtually no ability to communicate in English, and there is little or no capacity within either the private or public sectors of Island society to communicate with these new residents in their own language.

The Impact of Increased Immigration on the PEI ANC

The PEI ANC has been struggling to stay ahead of the demand for services. The PEI Association for Newcomers (PEIANC) was founded in 1993, and for the first fifteen years of operation, four part-time staff offered settlement services to roughly 100 newcomers to PEI each year. Most of these clients (65-75%) were government-assisted refugees (GARs) receiving services through core programs funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), including: the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP); the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation (ISAP) program; Language Eligibility Determination (LED) and the Host program. The PEIANC also offers an Employment Assistance Service (EAS) program funded by Service Canada.

Along with the settlement programs listed above, twenty-four staff now delivers expanded versions of these core programs, as well as many new programs and services. Below is a snapshot of some recent program development, using 2007 calendar year data. An updated, comprehensive overview of all programs and services will be available in the 2007-08 Annual Report at www.peianc.com by October, 2008.

Immigrant Settlement Adaptation Program: This CIC-funded program offers a broad range of services to all classes of immigrants. Each new client participates in a thorough intake process and receives assistance in registering for PEI Health Services; the family doctor registry; applications for the GST Credit, Child-Tax Credit, Social Insurance Numbers, etc. If there are school-age children, the family is referred to our Immigrant Student Liaison (ISL) team which provides the family with an orientation to the PEI School System, and assists in registering their children in school, learning busing schedules, arranging interpreters for parent-teacher meetings, etc.

Employment Program: The EAS Program worked with 215 clients in 2007, up from 140 the previous contract year. The number of clients who found work also increased last year, with 175 clients employed in either full-time or part-time employment. This increase is partly because of a growing number of case-managed clients, but also results from increased efforts made by the EAS Program staff to do more community outreach and develop relationships with employers. With the assistance of PEI Sector Councils, the PEI ANC conducted an online survey of employers in the fall of 2007. 144 employers responded, the majority being small private businesses from Queens County. Respondents also represented medium and large businesses, organizations, government institutions and non-profit organizations from various sectors and locations. The results of the survey determined that 68.6% of island organizations surveyed currently do not hire newcomers. Language level and communication barriers were the largest concerns employers have regarding hiring newcomers. The majority of island businesses surveyed reported that they do not have diversity or employment equity policies in place. Slightly more than half of respondents said they were interested in diversity training, and would be able to commit four hours to such training.

Respondents also indicated they would like training or information on hiring and integrating newcomers to Canada, cultural awareness training for managers and cultural awareness training for employees. Based on this feedback, ANC staff is committed to increasing networking opportunities such as giving presentations, attending business mixers, making direct contact with employers and advocating on behalf of clients.

Multicultural Education Program: This program began in the fall of 2005 and has been key in preparing for the influx of new residents to the Island. There has been a lot of talk at immigration conferences about creating ‘welcoming communities’. The MEP is helping to foster a more understanding and open society on PEI. Although hard to quantify, the PEI ANC staff has seen an amazing transformation of attitudes among the general population. Hundreds of presentations have been delivered to school-aged children, community organizations, government workers, and classes at UPEI and Holland College. New training modules have been developed, including “The Business Case for Diversity” and “Multicultural Sensitivity Training for Service Providers,” which will be offered as professional development group sessions in the coming year.

Francophone Liaison Program: One full-time staff person works in partnership with Francophone and Acadian organizations and schools on PEI to ensure that immigrants wishing to make French their first language also receive the settlement and integration services they need. This francophone settlement worker translates and delivers presentations in French that were first developed in English, provides French interpreting to other ANC staff, and responds to French-speaking clients contacting the PEI ANC.

Host Program: This settlement program’s success lies in the fact that it enlists volunteers from the community to become a ‘match’ with recent immigrants. The expectation is that a Host match will spend a few hours each week with the newcomer, for a minimum of 6-12 months. In the Spring of 2007, the PEI ANC held a “Volunteer Appreciation Night” to pay tribute to over 140 volunteers, many of whom were Host Program matches. In 2006, the PEI ANC Host Program initiated a new ‘Holiday Host’ component which has become a model for ‘Best Practice’ for Host Programs in other jurisdictions. Recently-arrived immigrants and refugees who are not ‘matched’ with a permanent Host family or individual are offered a ‘temporary’ match over the Christmas holidays so they will not spend the Christmas Holiday season alone. Host families are solicited from the community through advertisements and media stories. With the recent hiring of a second Host Program worker (who speaks Spanish, French, English and Mandarin Chinese) the PEI ANC is launching a new matching stream under the Host program that will match immigrants interested in business with local business owners or managers.

Volunteer Tutoring Program: A partnership between the PEI ANC and the Provincial Library was formed in 2007 which initiated a new volunteer-based ESL Tutoring Program for newcomer clients. Through this program, 75 volunteers have each received 16 hours of training on tutoring English as a Second Language (ESL). More than 100 clients have benefitted from this program to date, and interest from both community volunteers and clients remains high with this program, with a waiting list for more training to be offered in the Spring, 2008.

Immigrant Student Liaison (ISL) Program: Four ANC staff currently work with 448 immigrant students in 13 Charlottetown Schools. As can be seen from the following chart, the growth rate with this program is expected to have increased 8-fold in the two year period June, 2006 – June, 2008.

	June, 2006	September, 2006	September, 2007	September, 2008
Number of Clients	57	115	266	448
Number of Schools	6	6	13	17

In September, 2007 the PEI ANC began collecting information from new clients coming through our intake process in order to expedite the school registration and orientation process. We also began collecting immunization records and other health-related information required by the PEI Department of Health's Public Health Division. The ISL Program has also formed a partnership with KidSport PEI which allows us to assist financially-struggling newcomer families to access KidSport funding and participate in various sport programs. For the past several summers, the PEI ANC has been offering an Immigrant summer program, again, with steadily increasing numbers of participants. 100 immigrant students participated in this summer's program.



Summer camp outing to Green Gables

Internationally-Educated Health Professionals (IEHP) project:

The PEI ANC initiated a new IEHP Project in January, 2007 with funding from Health Canada. It was first expected that perhaps 15 or 20 Immigrants would participate in this new program. Again, the interest and usage with this program has been phenomenal. There are currently 48 IEHP clients receiving targeted EAL classes using Medical workplace curriculum, and receiving one-on-one employment counseling and assistance with having their foreign-acquired credentials recognized. The PEI ANC has recently received funding for an additional 'demonstration' project that will research and develop an appropriate Microcredit framework and model over the next couple of years. The aim is to provide IEHPs with a means of overcoming the high cost involved with writing exams, paying Association fees, etc. (especially IEHPs coming to Canada as refugees). An amazing and unforeseen spin-off benefit from this IEHP initiative is that IEHPs have recently formed their own 'support group' to share information and support.

Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP): This CIC-funded program is designed to provide settlement and integration services to refugees coming to PEI. 75 GARs were served at the PEI ANC in 2007. Since the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) came into force in June 28, 2002, the Canadian government has been accepting refugees from 'protracted' situations, often in 'group processing'. These refugees have perhaps lived for 10 years or more in refugee camps, and have had little medical treatment, education, or experience with the amenities of life such as home appliances essential to life in Canada. As a result, recent refugees coming to PEI have significantly increased settlement and integration needs over the past few years. A new 'Canadian Life Skills Program' has been initiated within the past year to provide more one-on-one assistance with adjusting to apartment living, using the public transit system, accessing health services, etc.

What's coming next?

It would appear that the majority of newcomers who take up residence on the Island would sincerely like to stay and make PEI their new home. Many comment that they want their children to learn English, and if they move to Toronto or Vancouver, this may not happen so quickly as they blend into much larger communities speaking their first languages. Both Chinese and Korean newcomers have formed their own PEI Associations and websites. The Chinese community has even established a Saturday School to ensure their children preserve language and culture. So will they stay? This will largely depend on whether they can find a place to work and make a living in our economy. Communication remains a significant barrier, and businesses and government could be doing much more to bring on staff that can speak to and work with new immigrants. The language barrier remains, however, a formidable challenge to coping with the day-to-day requirements of life on PEI.

A new strategy to actively engage and stimulate economic development that engages Immigrant Investors, Entrepreneurs and skilled workers is urgently needed. No one is disputing the urgent need to fill labour market shortages in small and medium-sized businesses across PEI with Immigrants who are Skilled Workers, but it is obvious that much more needs to be done to connect the unemployed newcomers looking for training and work with the businesses crying for new workers.

Given PEI's relatively small size and population, it should be possible for the government to launch a well-coordinated and comprehensive strategy with concrete ways to involve local businesses and

municipalities in welcoming immigrants and refugees across PEI; a strategy that will address labour market shortages, stimulate new economic develop, and create a vibrant multicultural social life in Canada's smallest province. The success of any strategy, however, will ultimately depend on the efforts made by local business owners.