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**INFORMING AND INVOLVING NEWCOMERS ONLINE:
USERS' PERSPECTIVES OF SETTLEMENT.ORG**

by

Elise H. M. Chien

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Information Studies
Graduate Department of the Faculty of Information Studies
University of Toronto

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INFORMING AND INVOLVING NEWCOMERS ONLINE: USERS' PERSPECTIVES OF SETTLEMENT.ORG

Masters Thesis (2005)
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ABSTRACT

This research explores newcomers' experiences in using information and communication technologies (ICTs) for settlement purposes. In particular, it focuses on their uses of Settlement.Org, a website that provides information and resources about settling in Ontario. The objective of this study is to understand the role played by Settlement.Org both as an informing and involving environment, allowing users to engage in discussion on its online forum. Survey questionnaires (face-to-face and online) and in-depth interviews were conducted with Settlement.Org users and its managing organization, OCASI. The findings show that 'informing' and 'involving' are complementary functions, as Settlement.Org provides information and resources about settling, and encourages the formation of a virtual community. The study also suggests that Settlement.Org is more than a website. It is a resource that has potential to address newcomers' concerns, to encourage participation and dialogue, and to contribute to the broader inclusion of newcomers in Canadian society.

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This work is dedicated to my parents, Johnny and Teresa, who are truly my inspiration. The courage, strength and determination that they show are qualities that I aspire to.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Canada is being shaped and reshaped by the continuous influx of immigrants from all parts of the world. Throughout history, immigrants have contributed to the multicultural landscape that is so engrained in Canadian identity. Not only have immigrants contributed to the demographic composition of Canadian society, but as noted by Broadbent (2003), immigrants also bring diversity, vitality and innovation to Canada – all of which are essential components of a thriving country (p. 2).

Annual immigration numbers in Canada have exceeded well over 200,000 people in the past few years (CIC, 2004b). In addition, historical evidence has indicated that Canadian immigration patterns have shifted from traditionally hosting immigrants of European descent, to accepting immigrants from non-European origins, particularly those from Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and Africa, in the past twenty years (George, 2002). Given the rising population and diversity of immigrants to Canada, increased emphasis has been placed on providing the relevant programs and activities that will help them settle effectively into Canadian life.

Undoubtedly, new immigrants are faced with practical needs that involve issues of housing, health, education and employment. Yet beyond satisfying these needs, the notion of settlement also incorporates a sense of full and equal participation (Omidvar, 2001). Therefore, not only do new immigrants need to know how to survive in their new Canadian home, but they also need to feel as though they belong and can contribute to the society in which they live (Caidi and Allard, 2005).

In this sense, the process of settlement is inextricably linked to the notion of inclusion. If newcomers can achieve success in addressing basic, intermediary and longer-term needs after having arrived in Canada, then they may also be able to familiarize themselves with, and contribute to the social, economic, and political aspects of society. In the words of Omidvar (2001), “we need [to] start at the beginning by recognizing its rightful and important place as a means to full and equal participation in our democratic society” (p. 4).

1.1 Information and the Settlement Process

Recent research has suggested that settlement, and ultimately inclusion is also tied to having the appropriate and relevant information (Caidi and Allard, 2005). Upon arriving to Canada,

newcomers have a range of needs. Getting a job, finding affordable housing, and receiving initial settlement services are a few examples. Addressing these as information problems might therefore render information and resources about the labour market and available employment opportunities, housing and rental listings, and information about ethno-cultural organizations and the services they offer.

In Ontario, the settlement process is addressed through the lens of information by a website called Settlement.Org. This is an information portal developed through a partnership between the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), the federal department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), the provincial government, and other community partners. The purpose of Settlement.Org is to provide a one-stop access to information and resources about settling in Ontario.

The popularity and use of Settlement.Org suggests that the website has become quite important to many people who are either thinking about, preparing, or have arrived in Ontario (i.e. from 2003-2004, the site received approximately 22.5 million hits¹). Due to the flexibility afforded by the Internet, this website can reach users locally, nationally, and internationally. Settlement.Org addresses the various facets of Canadian life, offering a wide range of information on employment, health, housing, education, community life, language, and more. Moreover, the information is complemented by the use of links to external websites and resources.

In addition to providing information, Settlement.Org also encourages participation by users through a discussion board that is offered on the site. Users can post comments and questions about a variety of topics, allowing others to review and possibly reciprocate by providing a response or opinion. The addition of the discussion board occurred after the initial launch of the Settlement.Org website, but it has quickly risen to be one of the most visited areas today.

1.2 Motivation and Purpose of the Study

As Settlement.Org continues to grow and develop, both in terms of its sophistication and user base, one question that might be useful to ask is: what impact does the site have for newcomers (or potential newcomers) who use it? Given its immense popularity, the ability for it to provide

¹ Based on Settlement.Org statistics collected by WebTrends for the 2003-2004 year (see Appendix E).

information, as well as to involve users in discourse about the immigration and settlement process, it would be of value to understand what the site means to newcomers, and how it fits in their lives. Settlement.Org seems to play two major roles. First, the site informs users by providing information, articles and resources about the process of settling in Ontario, Canada. Second, it offers a discussion board, which, by its very nature, facilitates interaction and a discursive environment where members can post questions, receive answers and provide responses to other members.

Thus, this study is an investigation Settlement.Org users (those who visit and engage with the site). It is hoped that the research will not only serve as an evaluation of the initiative, but will also help us understand the particular needs of newcomers and how Settlement.Org has played a role in their settlement process. In the following chapter, (Literature Review) the linkages between information, settlement and inclusion of newcomers will be examined. As Settlement.Org is an information resource that is constantly expanding and gaining popularity, exploring how it may contribute to the social inclusion of newcomers is essential.

1.3 Research Objectives

Given the dual function of Settlement.Org, the research objectives of this study are to investigate users' experiences with the website's 'informing' and 'involving' functions. The first aim is therefore:

1. To understand how newcomers become informed through the use of Settlement.Org, their experiences with the site, and their overall reflections about their information experience.

This objective entails an investigation of newcomers' information needs and uses, and the barriers they encounter in finding relevant information for settlement purposes, and how it assists them in integrating into Canadian society.

A few questions emerge from this first objective:

- What are newcomers' experiences in coming to Canada (Ontario)?
- How have these experiences been translated into information needs?

- What kinds of information do newcomers see as important to the process of settlement?
- What kinds of information do newcomers access on Settlement.Org?
- What can newcomers say about the utility of Settlement.Org?

2. The second aim is to investigate the extent of involvement made possible by the Settlement.Org discussion board.

The objective is to examine the dynamic nature of the discussion board to uncover the types of conversations that newcomers engage in.

Questions raised by this second objective include:

- What kinds of dialogue are fostered on the online discussion board?
- What does the discussion board uncover about newcomers' information needs?
- What is the nature of the dialogues fostered between members of the discussion board?
- What does the discussion board reveal about the experiences of newcomers to Canada?
- How important is the discussion board to Settlement.Org as a whole? To newcomers?

While the study is largely centred on newcomers who use Settlement.Org, the research also investigates the roles and agendas of the many entities that collaborate to develop the website. Investigating how the developers, funders and other associated individuals understand the mission of Settlement.Org and how it relates to the issues of 'settlement' and 'inclusion' is key to this study. Therefore, it is essential to integrate these views in order to acquire additional knowledge about the institutional and operational relationships that may have an influence on the fate of Settlement.Org.

As will be shown in the Methodology Chapter of this document (Chapter 3), the research involves the use of in-depth interviews and online questionnaires with newcomers who use Settlement.Org, along with those who have played a part in developing the site. Moreover, the

analysis of the site itself, along with the discussion board function and even supporting documents, are integral components to the study.

This study is qualitative in nature; that is, it delves into the lives of newcomers and draws out their personal experiences to interpret how Settlement.Org has been part of their settlement experiences. The study is valuable because it examines how initiatives such as Settlement.Org are suited to the situations that newcomers face. It also makes recommendations for potential research and development of the site itself, or similar projects that may follow.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Settlement.Org has been made possible because of the work of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI). This chapter starts with an overview of OCASI (its foundations and developments), then discusses the immigration and settlement sector in Ontario. An analysis of Settlement.Org is also included.

2.1 The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants: An Institutional History

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) is a registered charity dedicated to “act as a collective voice for immigrant serving agencies and to coordinate responses to shared needs and concerns” (OCASI, 2005). Established in 1978, OCASI serves as an umbrella organization for a network of more than 160 immigrant and settlement agencies situated in the province of Ontario. Despite its broad reach and its contribution to the immigration and settlement sector, there is relatively little documentation about the history of OCASI. The information contained in this section has therefore been compiled from existing data (e.g. OCASI annual reports and policy documents), as well as from interviews with OCASI staff and former consultants who have worked with the organization.

2.1.1 OCASI’s Foundations

The Policy Development Project Report (1984) states that “the origins of OCASI can be traced back to November 21, 1977, when agencies from throughout Ontario attended a conference on Settlement Services called Info-Share” (p. 2). At one of the workshops, a few agencies decided to form a Steering Committee of Agencies Serving Immigrants. The aim of such a committee was to discuss and act upon common concerns and mutual interests surrounding the immigration and settlement sector in Ontario.

The following year (1978), the steering committee officially became the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (or OCASI). OCASI’s mission was to “achieve equality, access and full participation for immigrants and refugees in every aspect of Canadian life” (OCASI, 2005). This mission remains unchanged today. The mission statement was crafted with diligence and care in order to serve as a goal towards which members could aspire. Indeed, there seemed

to be a need and a call for collective governance and awareness about issues related to immigration policies, funding, and language training for immigrants. OCASI was formed to address these needs.

Twenty member agencies comprised OCASI when it was first established, and each agency appointed one delegate to be part of an executive committee, which managed and put into practice the activities of the group as a whole. The committee convened once a month to discuss pressing matters, and throughout the year it was responsible for implementing policies, sharing information and taking leadership on issues that affected immigrant service agencies (OCASI Annual Report 1983-84, 1984).

In 1981, OCASI applied for funding to support an outreach project. With only 21 member agencies at the time, the executive recognized the need to expand the OCASI membership. In early 1982, the government granted funding for OCASI to hire an outreach/project coordinator to travel throughout Ontario and promote OCASI and recruit new members for the Council. In addition, a part-time administrative assistant was also hired.

The early 1980s were a difficult time for OCASI, as it was limited in resources, funding and representation. While members of OCASI were committed to the work of the Council, they had to contend with pressures from their own full-time employment at their respective agencies. In addition, funding was a major challenge, as it constrained the deployment of campaigns and activities. As noted in the 1983-84 OCASI Annual Report (1984), "if dollars and cents are a measure of recognition, the inadequate budgets allocated for the programs which support our work indicate that our unique role has yet to be fully accepted at the federal, provincial or municipal levels" (p. 4). Still another limitation was that OCASI was overwhelmingly focused on Toronto. In fact, at the time funding was received to perform the abovementioned outreach activities, only 5 of the 21 agencies were headquartered outside of the Greater Toronto Area.

For most of 1982, OCASI aimed to establish a greater membership base to drive its mission forward. By the fall, 37 organizations had joined the OCASI network. Additional funding received from the government during the summer supported the first OCASI Policy Development Workshop, held in October 1982. The Workshop, which was held at the Geneva Park Conference Centre in Orillia, Ontario, has since become an annual gathering that is known today as the OCASI Professional Development Conference. The first Workshop brought together OCASI member agencies in "a collective examination of the organizational role of OCASI and

its relationship to the needs of immigrants and immigrant services in Ontario” (Policy Development Project Report (1984, p. 3).

Furthermore, the first Workshop also solidified OCASI’s identity as an entity that strived to improve government policy, and as a body in charge of thinking critically and challenging criteria laid out by the government. Advocacy was integral to the essence of the Council. It was believed that through hard work and commitment, OCASI could enhance the rights of immigrants and refugees, and support community organizations and agencies that assist them.

Finally, the Workshop also raised the issue of staffing for OCASI. Due to the demands of the outreach project, the expanding membership, and the ambitious agenda that the Council had set, it was recognized that OCASI needed more operational staff. Therefore, OCASI approached Multiculturalism Canada (the federal department now known as the Department of Canadian Heritage) for operational support funding. Following this proposal, the summer of 1983 brought core federal funding to OCASI, which made possible the hiring of an Executive Director (the former outreach/project coordinator), as well as a full-time outreach coordinator, and a full-time administrative assistant. The funding also enabled OCASI to acquire more effective office space, along with basic necessities such as furniture, office equipment and computers.

Since OCASI’s early years, the expansion of the Council’s network has never ceased, and further funding and partnerships have been established with all sectors – government, not for profit, and private organizations. The mission and values of OCASI have also been the driving force behind the many activities that have been carried out by the Council. As a result, the collective voice that asserts the diversity and rights of immigrant communities in cities and towns in Ontario has continued to thrive.

2.1.2 OCASI Today: Philosophy, Mission, Values, Principles and Objectives²

The mission of OCASI, as already mentioned, is “to achieve equality, access and full participation for immigrants and refugees in every aspect of Canadian life.” The principles that OCASI asserts include:

- The right of all persons to participate fully and equitably in the social, cultural, political and economic life of Ontario;

² Listing of mission, principles and objectives are from the OCASI website, “Mission / Statement of Principles and Objectives”. Retrieved on June 13, 2005 from http://www.ocasi.org/about/statement_principles.asp.

- The right of immigrants and refugees to Canada to be guaranteed equitable access to all services and programs;
- The belief that Canada must be a land of refuge and opportunity, a country known for humanity and justice in its treatment of immigrants and refugees;
- The belief that in cooperation with other groups and communities which promote human rights and struggle against discrimination, OCASI will see these principles realized.

OCASI's stated objectives are:

- To act as a collective voice for member agencies serving immigrants in all matters related to immigrants;
- To work to improve services provided to immigrants in Ontario;
- To act as an advisory and resource body for community service agencies, government, and other stakeholders in regard to matters of immigrant services;
- To stimulate and conduct research on the needs of immigrants and the effectiveness of services being provided as well as methods of delivery of services;
- To encourage the exchange of information among Member Agencies.

In order to fulfill its mandate, OCASI engages in a variety of activities on behalf of its membership. Some of these activities were established at OCASI's inception, while others have developed in response to the current political, economic and cultural situations faced by Ontario immigration and settlement sector.

The underpinnings of OCASI's values have been rooted in the belief in **advocacy**. Even at the time of the establishment of the steering committee at the Info-Share conference in 1977, community representatives were keen on communicating their needs openly, on addressing the inequalities they saw, and calling for changes to assist their work with immigrants and refugees. When OCASI was established, its first Policy Development Workshop brought forth advocacy as a main issue, as it was often raised in the various discussions and ranked as the first priority for the Council. As noted by the Policy Development Project Report (1984), "it was clear that the delegates perceived OCASI as an important vehicle for advocating change in the area of improved services to immigrants" (p. 13).

Among the key areas for which the members thought OCASI should direct its advocacy efforts are: government funding, government programs and policies, legislation, employment, skills and language training, immigrant women, rights of immigrant workers, seniors and refugees. Today, OCASI continues to observe the tradition of advocacy. Most notably, the Council's efforts are directed toward changing the power relationship that exists between immigrants and Canadian institutions that may affect immigrants' abilities to fully participate and contribute to society. As stated on the OCASI website (2005), "the Council advocates for positive and accurate representation of immigrant and refugee issues in the media, in public debate and in political discourse. OCASI promotes access and anti-discrimination in health, housing, youth, employment and other key areas."

As an example of the work that OCASI has performed in the area of advocacy, the Council spearheaded the efforts to introduce funding programs for settlement in the 1980s. In particular, OCASI collaborated with Canadian Heritage to develop a funding program for long-term settlement needs. This was significant because at the time, funding programs focused mainly on initial settlement. OCASI was also involved in designing the application and reporting systems for what is now known as the Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP). This was the first provincial government program that dealt specifically with settlement services.

Aside from advocacy, **information sharing** always ranked highly in the original vision of OCASI's role. Because of the nature of the Council (as an umbrella organization), emphasis was placed on building an effective network to distribute information regarding resources, programs, policy, and local and regional issues throughout the province (Policy Development Project Report, 1984). Providing information to OCASI members has been essential in keeping abreast of evolving issues and concerns, thereby allowing the Council to act efficiently. Today, information about OCASI is passed on through various means such as the Council's website, community groups in which staff members are involved, as well as through various partnerships.

Another role that OCASI has continued to play involves **public education**. Closely related to the concept of advocacy, the Council continues to heighten public awareness and support for the promotion of equal opportunity and the understanding of multiculturalism, ethnic and racial diversity through increased public and media awareness about immigrant and refugee issues. Moreover, OCASI has established coalitions to respond and create awareness of issues at both the federal and provincial level (OCASI, 2005). To do so, the Council has used many

techniques and venues to fulfill its role of public educator. Traditionally, these have included media and workshops, but now include the OCASI website, conferences, panel discussions, regional meetings, and academic venues.

Other priorities for OCASI that have surfaced over the years are **policy and research, sector capacity building, professional training, and technology initiatives**. OCASI creates partnerships with government and community organizations, as well as academic researchers to investigate how Canada's economic, social and political life are enriched by the diversity, expertise and skills that immigrants and refugees bring (OCASI Annual Report 1991, 1991). OCASI plays a part in shaping broad policy issues by participating in committees and working groups. Some of the issues that are researched include the implications of government policies on immigrants and refugees, employment equity, language training, immigrant women, and more. Between 1993 and 1995, for instance, OCASI facilitated discussion and recommendations from the community regarding the settlement renewal process, which essentially brought forth key recommendations on best practices and processes. By continuing to participate in research and policy activities, the knowledge base and impact of OCASI are strengthened.

Sector capacity building has also been an integral part of OCASI's activities. Professional development and training is key for the sector, as well as for immigrants and refugees in Ontario. The Council continues to work with administrators, counsellors, trainers, board members and volunteers to identify the required skills needed, and to facilitate ongoing capacity building. In addition, OCASI has published training guides (such as the *Settlement Training Guide*, and *Splash and Ripple: Using Outcomes to Design and Guide Community Work*), launched training programs, and has organized local and regional workshops. As mentioned earlier, OCASI also organizes the Annual Professional Development Conference, which is the biggest provincial grassroots training event for the sector (OCASI Annual Report 2000, 2000). OCASI sees professional development as a key to enhancing discussions, consultations and consensus building in the sector (OCASI, 2005).

In the past decade, technology has become a main priority for OCASI. With the vast changes in the technological environment, the ability to acquire a solid understanding of technology has been instrumental in strengthening the role of the Council. "OCASI plays a key role in promoting the use of technology within immigrant-serving agencies and has been instrumental in increasing the level of computerization in the immigrant-serving sector" (OCASI,

2005). In particular, OCASI, in collaboration with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, played a key role in installing close to 600 workstations and network servers across 76 service agencies, in training sector staff and volunteers, and in developing online information resources for the sector (OCASI Annual Report 1999, 1999). Moreover, OCASI has continued to use technology creatively, particularly through the constant development of the Settlement.Org websites and by allowing member agencies to leverage its technological expertise.

2.1.3 Organizational Structure

OCASI has grown from the initial steering committee in the late 1970s to an office with a staff of about 20 staff members and a handful of volunteers, all of whom are located in the central Toronto office. The day-to-day tasks of the staff are guided by the recommendations of the OCASI Board of Directors, which is elected yearly at the OCASI Annual General Meeting (AGM). This volunteer board is comprised of individuals drawn from OCASI's member agencies. OCASI's Executive Director ensures that the Board's directives are implemented. Positions on the OCASI Board of Directors include a President, three Vice-Presidents, a Treasurer, a Secretary and eight Regional Directors. Six Members-At-Large contribute to the discussions as well.

The Board sets the policy directions for OCASI. It meets quarterly to review the Council's operation and is responsible for conducting the AGM. In addition, to ensure balanced representation and inclusiveness, the Regional Directors communicate local regional issues, needs and perspectives.

OCASI has also formed various committees that provide recommendations on pressing matters in the sector. Standing committees are ongoing committees struck by the Board of Directors. There are also advisory committees, which are formed in relation to specific projects. The representation of an advisory committee is usually related to funding and consequently may include members from the government and/or representatives from educational institutions. Finally, ad hoc committees are sometimes formed to address a specific purpose for a limited time period. Ad hoc committees may be formed on the recommendations of the Board, or as sub-committees of the standing committees.

2.1.4 Funding

OCASI receives funding from all levels of government, as well as non-governmental organizations. Federal funders include Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Canadian Heritage, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and the Department of Justice Canada. Provincial partners include the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Additionally, various municipalities have played an important role in supporting the settlement sector. For example, the City of Toronto (which has a significant immigrant population) has supported settlement services through access, equity and service grants. It has also provided funding to support OCASI's advocacy work. Finally, OCASI has received funding from organizations such as the Ontario Trillium Foundation, as well as the United Way of Greater Toronto.

2.1.5 Partnerships

Many provincial and community agencies also partner with OCASI members to deliver services to immigrants and refugees. While there have been variations in partnerships over the years, essential services for settlement and adaptation are provided to immigrants and refugees. These include services for employment, legal services, health, housing, language training, social support, and culture and recreation. Outcomes of the partnerships have resulted in information and training sessions, publications, research reports, clinics, and more.

2.1.6 The OCASI Network: Membership Agencies

Membership in OCASI is open to non-profit community-based agencies incorporated in Ontario. To be eligible, at least 50 percent of their services, programs or activities must be focused toward and used by immigrants and/or refugees. In addition, agencies must be willing to endorse and demonstrate the active commitment to OCASI's principles. As mentioned, the essence of OCASI (its vision, mission, principles and objectives and the activities that the Council conducts) is centred on the membership.

The OCASI network has been constantly growing since the Council's inception. At the time of the study, there are over 170 member agencies within the province of Ontario. These organizations are located in cities and towns across Ontario (Toronto, Thunder Bay, Kenora, Kingston, Ottawa, Ajax, Pickering, Bradford, Brampton, Welland, Windsor and so on). Combined, these agencies help more than 500,000 people a year.

OCASI member agencies provide a variety of programs and services to immigrants and refugees to help them settle and integrate in Ontario. Some agencies also specialize in providing services for women, seniors, refugees or young people. According to the OCASI website (2005), membership agencies are involved in:

- advocacy, community development and social action
- language and orientation classes
- individual, family and vocational counselling
- interpretation and translation
- information and referral
- job training
- legal assistance
- health services

It is the ongoing evolution and expansion of the membership base that drives OCASI's mission forward. In serving its membership agencies, OCASI brings forward the concerns of the membership and mobilizes immigrant service workers, volunteers and the public by advocating for better and more efficient standards, legislation and programs in the sector. "Together with its member agencies, OCASI plays a unique role in strengthening the voice of immigrants in Ontario" (OCASI, 2005).

2.2 OCASI and the Immigration and Settlement Sector in Ontario

2.2.1 Immigration Trends in Canada and Ontario

In the past decade, the growing number of immigrants arriving in Canada has influenced the delivery of services to newcomers and the role of agencies serving multicultural and/or immigrant populations. Statistics Canada's (1997) data reports that in the 1996 Census, "immigrants represented 17.4 percent of the population, the largest share in more than 50 years. This share had remained at around 15 percent to 16 percent between 1951 and 1991." In the subsequent 2001 Census, the immigrant population represented 18.4 percent of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2001). In the recent projections made by Statistics Canada (2005), by 2017, immigrants will likely account for 22 percent of Canada's total population. To provide

an indication of actual numbers of immigrants, it was reported by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) (2005) that, in 2004, a total of 235,808 people immigrated to Canada.

Given that the focus of this study centers on the experiences of newcomers to Ontario, emphasis will be placed on provincial immigration numbers. The abovementioned study by CIC (2005) showed that Ontario continues to receive, by far, the largest share of immigrants arriving in Canada. It was reported that 53 percent (i.e., 125,123) of immigrants were to settle in Ontario in 2004. Furthermore, as Papillon (2002) describes, immigration is an urban phenomenon: new immigrants are in general more likely to settle in urban areas. Correspondingly, immigration patterns showed that 40 percent of all immigrants went to Toronto (CIC, 2005).

2.2.2 Overview of the Settlement Sector in Ontario

Considering the great numbers of immigrants arriving in Ontario yearly, it is likely that intense demands are placed on the various institutional and community supports that assist newcomers. Settlement services are negotiated with federal, provincial and municipal governments. Reitz (2003), in summarizing the roles of federal and provincial governments, indicated that while the federal government is responsible for setting immigration policies and selecting immigrants based on guidelines that are reflective of national objectives, it is both federal and provincial governments that are responsible for the administration of funding for settlement services, in addition to facilitating access to government services to newcomers. It is important to know that while federal-provincial/territorial agreements have been reached in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Yukon and Prince Edward Island, there is no agreement established with Ontario (CIC, 2004b). However, on May 7, 2004, a Letter of Intent was signed by the federal and provincial minister dealing with immigration issues, in hopes of establishing a Canada-Ontario immigration agreement within a year³ (Government of Ontario, 2004).

At the municipal level, local governments are very equally as many support a range of settlement-focused initiatives. For instance, the City of Toronto has initiated special projects and working groups for immigrant and refugee issues (City of Toronto, 2005). As well, non-governmental agencies (NGOs), such as immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs), are community agencies that are not necessarily guided by central planning (Reitz, 2003). On a day-to-day basis,

³ The agreement has still not been signed as of the time of this research (August 2005)

these organizations are responsible for carrying out settlement programs and working directly with new immigrants by utilizing the funding provided by the government. Many activities in local municipalities are also funded by the local United Way agency.

Three major settlement programs for newcomers to Canada are funded by the federal government: the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), the Host Program, and the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Program (CIC, 2002; Papillon, 2002; Sadiq, 2004).

The first program, ISAP, funds service providing organizations to deliver direct services to newcomers. These include reception and orientation, translation and interpretation, referral to community resources, para-professional counselling, general information and employment-related services (CIC, 2002). ISAP also provides funding for activities that complement settlement services. These might include seminar and conference presentations, research projects and papers, and the training of ISAP-supported agency staff (CIC, 2002). Funding for the dissemination of pre-departure orientation and information on Canadian life, climate, housing, and so on, is also allocated through ISAP.

The HOST program links new immigrants with volunteer Canadians who are familiar with Canadian society and culture. Volunteers may help newcomers learn about essential public services, help them practice English or French, or help them establish a social network to aid with employment and to gain new friends (CIC, 2002). In turn, volunteers learn about the cultures and customs of the newcomers they are assisting. Overall, the program supports a strong sense of friendship and community life.

The LINC program funds basic instruction of English or French to help newcomers integrate into society. This program is offered in partnership with provincial governments, school boards, libraries, community colleges and immigrant serving agencies (CIC, 2002).

While the abovementioned are the main programs offered to newcomers in Canada, the federal government also provides other programs that deal with the economic, social and physical well-being of newcomers. These include the Resettlement Assistant Program, the Immigrant Loans Program, the Interim Federal Health Program, and the Canada Student Loans Program (Robson-Haddow and Ladner, 2005)

At the provincial level, the Ontario division of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, known as the Settlement Directorate, Ontario Region (or the Ontario Region Settlement

Directorate), is responsible for administering the funding through ISAP, HOST and LINC. This directorate contracts not-for-profit agencies in Ontario (through purchase-of-service agreements) to directly carry out the services and work with newcomers closely (George, 2002; Sadiq, 2004).

Aside from the federal funding that immigrant-serving agencies in Ontario receive, the provincial government also provides funding through the Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP). This program “supports the early and effective settlement of newcomers to Ontario. Its objective is to help newcomers settle, adjust and contribute to life in Ontario” (Government of Ontario, 2005). All applications for funding from the NSP must include what are known as core services, i.e., assessment, referral, information and orientation, and general settlement assistance. In addition to these core services, applications may also be directed to employment facilitation services (Sadiq, 2004). The range of activities funded by the Ontario NSP may include identifying client needs, assisting clients with acquiring training, organizing job workshops and events, or providing technologies (e.g. computers) for clients to prepare their resumé (Government of Ontario, 2005b). The annual provincial investment in the NSP is currently about \$4 million across a network of 78 community-based agencies, which combine this money with their ISAP funding from the federal government (Robson-Haddow and Ladner, 2005).

Other provincial initiatives such as the Access to Professions and Trades Initiative by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, have provided funding to reduce/remove barriers to licensure and certification in the professions and trades (Government of Ontario, 2005a). It is through this initiative that “improving access for internationally trained individuals to get licensed or registered to work in the occupations in which they have been educated/trained contributes to Ontario's economic prosperity.”

2.2.3 Restructuring and Funding Cutbacks: Implications for the Settlement Sector

The past decade has been difficult for Ontario's settlement sector. The main issue is that funding cutbacks have severely impeded non-profit and voluntary agencies' activities in pursuing their missions and carrying out day-to-day activities. Furthermore, the federal government has continued to download responsibility for settlement services (and in general, many social services) to its provincial counterparts through specific agreements, which in turn, hand off these responsibilities to municipalities (CCSD, 2003; Mwarigha, 1997; Owen, 1999; Richmond, 1996; Richmond and Shields, 2004).

To set the context for the current state of the settlement sector in Ontario, it is essential to note that the elimination of core funding has been devastating for the social sector as a whole. According to a CCSD (2003) Fact Sheet, it has been observed that historically, governments have been the biggest funders of non-profit and voluntary organizations, but starting in the 1990s, they have severed this direct support to many organizations.

In Ontario's case, it was around 1994 that funding peaked for immigrant serving agencies, with about \$70 million primarily from federal and provincial governments, but also from municipal governments, and other foundations and NGOs (Richmond, 1996). Since then, reductions in funding from all levels of government have caused immense strain and limitations on the ability of these organizations to operate effectively (Mwarigha, 1997; Owen, 1999; Richmond, 1996).

In fact, of all provinces, Ontario has experienced the most dramatic cutbacks in core funding. "In 1995 the Province of Ontario revamped its settlement program, cutting it by almost 50%" (Richmond and Shields, 2004, p. 14). The following year, larger, multi-service agencies were cut by approximately 20 percent, while smaller agencies were reduced by 40 percent (Sadiq, 2004). These and other cutbacks have been devastating because Ontario, despite receiving the most immigrants per year, already receives a disproportionately low amount of funding for settlement (OCASI, 2005; Reitz, 2003).

Essentially, a new funding scheme has been introduced for the non-profit and voluntary sector of Canada. Because of the cuts, organizations and agencies now have to deal with a volatile funding environment, a change in their operations (by pursuing project-based funding), and an overall weakening of social sector voices as cutbacks threaten long-term sustainability. Furthermore, funders attach many more conditions to their contributions, and the sector is expected to operate in a fashion similar to that of the private sector (CCSD, 2003).

Thus, alongside the funding cutbacks, Canada's social sector has also been marked by the funnelling of responsibility downwards by the federal government. Richmond and Shields (2004) observe that a devolving role for the government is not new, and it has been going on since the 1970s. However, throughout the 1990s, the pace of this devolution of government responsibilities increased immensely. As the authors note,

the general trend has been to shift responsibility downwards with the municipalities experiencing the most negative impacts among Government

bodies. Cities have been saddled with greatly expanded responsibilities without the benefit of an adequate funding/tax base (p. 4).

From federal to provincial, and in turn, from provincial to municipal, responsibilities for services such as settlement and integration have ultimately created immense pressures on NGOs that work with immigrants and refugees.

The changing role of the government has led to a restructuring of the way in which the non-profit sector operates. NGOs such as immigrant-serving agencies are contracted by government to provide services to immigrants and refugees. In turn, their traditional roles – advocacy, research, and social support, amongst others – have been shifted by the constant focus on the production of services (Owen, 1999; Richmond and Shields, 2004; Sadiq, 2004). As a result, pressures to follow strict funding guidelines and maintain accountability have turned the sector into a competitive and commercialized environment. Sadiq (2004) summarizes the situation in this manner: “ostensibly, NGOs will secure subsequent contracts if they develop a good working relationship with government funders, and demonstrate the capacity to provide cost-effective services” (p. 5). Another implication of the contractual obligations of NGOs is the possibility of abandoning best practices for the sake of lowest cost practices that would more likely receive approval for government funding. “That is to choose between diminishing quality of service and going out of business” (Owen, 1999).

2.2.4 OCASI’s Role in the Sector

The complex relationships between governments and community agencies, along with the ongoing reductions in funding have created a difficult climate in the settlement sector of Ontario. As stated, the federal government and the Province of Ontario have yet to come to an agreement regarding the sharing of financial responsibility for settlement services. Consequently, Papillon (2002) observes, “local service providers and the municipal government are left in a sort of limbo as to who is responsible for long-term policy planning and resource allocation” (p. 21, as quoted in Kwan).

Owen (1999) asserts that agencies in Ontario are addressing the challenges by forging relationships with larger umbrella organizations – OCASI being a primary entity. Reflecting back to the mandate of OCASI to act as a collective voice for its membership agencies, the Council has brought forth the concerns of the sector and responded to decisions and actions of

both the federal and provincial government. For example, in 2004, OCASI developed a position paper to address the potential agreement on immigration and settlement between the federal government and the Province of Ontario. The paper

presents several recommendations organized in the areas of foundation principles, service delivery, stakeholders, accountability and transition. It raises questions that remain unanswered regarding what kind of relationship should exist between the sector and various levels of government, and how to ensure accountability to immigrants and refugees (OCASI, 2005, p. 1).

Furthermore, the recent release of the Ontario Budget 2005 drew another response from OCASI. As reported on the OCASI website, the “Ontario Budget 2005 offers a mixed bag for immigrants with investment in labour market integration and financial relief for students. OCASI is disappointed that critical needs of low-income immigrants are virtually ignored” (2005).

Beyond responding to legislative and fiscal policies of the federal and provincial governments, OCASI partakes in activities and projects dealing with the areas of advocacy, public education, policy and research, training and professional development and information technology, as outlined in the history. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that OCASI has also experienced the detrimental effects of funding cutbacks. In pursuing its own activities (research, analysis and advocacy, in particular), the Council must first access project funding by securing contracts with the government, as outlined by the Ontario’s funding process. Overall, OCASI strives to show that “the sector is clearly more than a service provider or a third-party sub-contractor for government services” (OCASI, 2005, p. 1). It asserts the sector’s legitimacy in addressing the needs of immigrants and refugees, and not simply for settlement. While settlement may be the immediate concern of newcomers to Ontario, values of inclusion, equity and anti-oppression should be considered for the long-term (OCASI, 2005, p.1).

2.3 The History of Settlement.Org

In 1997, OCASI approached the Ontario Administration of Settlement and Integration Services (OASIS) of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) (presently named the Settlement Directorate, Ontario Region) showing interest in and intent to apply for funding to build the technological capacity of the sector. At the time, there was \$35 million available for the province to engage in initiatives that would assess and improve the current technological environment of the immigration and settlement sector. OCASI formed a consortium that included Community-

Based Information Technology Support and Services (C:>BITs) (a program sponsored by COSTI, an organization that serves immigrants and refugees), Web Networks (a non-profit organization that provided web services to socially-minded agencies), and Yale Communications (a division of Michael Miloff and Associates, a private firm).

2.3.1 Computerization Assessment Study of the ISAP and HOST Funded Agencies

In November 1997, OASIS commissioned the consortium to review the computerization needs of the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) and the HOST-funded agencies. The motivation for the study stemmed from the history of underdevelopment in the sector. Despite the importance of the ISAP and HOST-funded agencies in Ontario, they lacked the essential equipment and software to perform their duties effectively in the emerging information environment. These agencies supplied a diverse range of services for newcomers, such as providing initial settlement assistance, language training, employment counselling, housing assistance, and more. Without moving forward with the current technological advancements, their roles as information brokers – that is, being able to refer newcomers to specialized services in order to assist with the settlement process – were constrained. By conducting the assessment study, it was hoped that strategies could be devised to leverage technology in the sector, thereby improving the efficiency of service delivery, and in turn, benefiting newcomers to Canada.

The impact of the efforts would potentially affect the 563,000 (and growing) recent immigrants⁴ to Ontario, which constituted over half of all immigrants to Canada (Statistics Canada, 1997). At the time of the study, over 70 agencies were receiving funding through CIC's ISAP and HOST programs, and approximately 340 front-line workers were providing assistance to newcomers to Canada.

Each partner from the consortium (which was subsequently referred to as the Project Management Team) provided a different, yet valuable perspective to the project. This included OCASI's solid reputation and work in the immigration and settlement sector, the expertise of the Web Networks representative, Howard Sinclair-Jones, who was formerly the Executive Director of OCASI, and the knowledge held by Yale Communications and C:>BITs regarding the information technology and communications industry.

⁴ "Recent immigrant" refers to people who immigrated to Canada between 1991 and 1996; that is, one who has been in Canada for 5 years or less (see Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, Tuesday, November 4, 1997).

In a report that was delivered to CIC on January 14, 1998 by the consortium, the key activities of the study were described. These were:

- an inventory of the current technological capacity and level of utilization of the ISAP/HOST funded agencies in Ontario
- an assessment of the settlement sector's information gathering and sharing needs
- an assessment of how computer technology can best meet the agencies' needs
- recommendations on the most effective methods of acquiring, installing and providing ongoing support for technology
- analysis of, and recommendations on, the training needs of agency staff and volunteers, and recommendations on how to meet those needs in the short and long-term
- analysis of, and recommendations on, the ongoing technical support required, and the need to coordinate the support
- analysis of, and recommendations on, how the World Wide Web and Internet could be used to support the settlement activities of agencies in Ontario (subsequent funding for this recommendation ultimately led to Settlement.Org)

As a result of the study, two streams of recommendations were formulated: one that dealt with the acquisition, installation, and training related to hardware, software and connectivity in the sector; and the other that involved the development of a web site and related resources to assist immigrant serving agencies in their gathering and use of information.

2.3.2 Implementing Recommendations from the Assessment Study

Stream 1: Hardware, software, connectivity and training

In response to the recommendations, CIC proceeded with the requisition and purchase of the hardware and software in March 1998. 3000 computers were purchased for over 600 ISAP/HOST, as well as LINC funded agencies.

Recognizing the complexity and interrelationships among the different aspects of the remaining work, CIC decided to proceed with three consecutive projects to complete the hardware, software, connectivity and training process for the sector. The first focused on developing an effective implementation plan for all future areas, in addition to the design and implementation of the first phase of a sector-wide Extranet, which was to be called

Settlement.Org (this will be discussed later). The second project involved the implementation of the pilot installation, detailed designs and action plans for technical support, and the training of settlement workers to use the Extranet while it underwent further enhancement. The third project implemented the full installation, technical support, and continued training of settlement workers of the full sector-wide Extranet.

After a comprehensive RFP (Request for Proposal) process was conducted, a local firm, Compucentre Toronto Inc. (CTI), was selected for the installation and technical support components of the project. CTI installed workstations with Internet access on the desk of every frontline worker, a dedicated server and secure local area network (LAN), as well as additional computers for public use for the 76 ISAP/HOST program funded agencies throughout Ontario. Prior to the rollout, pilot installations were provided in seven agencies including four in the Greater Toronto Area, and one each in Ottawa, Sudbury and London.

Concurrent to the hardware and connectivity rollout, plans were also being taken to train the sector staff on the usage of computers and the Internet. To guide the training process, the Project Management Team commissioned three independent sources with expertise in the design and delivery of computer training from a community agency perspective to conduct research regarding the sector's needs. From these results, a comprehensive training program was developed for the sector.

Overall, more than 400 frontline workers and managers participated in the training program delivered by ExecuTrain, the trainer selected to conduct the sessions from December 1998 and February 1999. The training covered computer basics, along with an introduction to Windows 95 and Microsoft Word, as well as an orientation to the use of the Internet and Settlement.Org (the Extranet site). Furthermore, one person from each agency was trained by CTI to provide assistance in troubleshooting matters and network administration. These individuals acted as the liaisons between their agencies and CTI.

Throughout the course of the project, many challenges needed to be addressed and managed appropriately to ensure that the outcome would be successful. For example, settlement workers had to accept changes to their established (manual) work methods. Seeing client after client, making phone calls, and writing reports were their main priorities, which did not include learning about computer technology. Settlement workers were hired based on their knowledge, skills and aptitudes in working with newcomers, and not necessarily for their computer skills. As

a result, there was a range of competencies that the trainer had to contend with – from absolute beginners, to those having a more sophisticated understanding of technology. In addition, management in funded agencies needed to support the project fully and formulate policies to adjust to the transition to a computerized office.

Stream 2: Sector-Wide Extranet and Public Online Information Site

Aside from the hardware, software, connectivity and training recommendations that resulted from the assessment study, another initiative that was undertaken in the fiscal year 1998-1999 was the creation of a sector-wide Extranet. This consisted of an online information network that supported the sector. Named “Settlement.Org”, the purpose of the Extranet was to provide settlement workers in the Ontario with an electronic space to which they could log in to post and share information and discuss projects, much like an online community.

The back-end technology that supported the Extranet was a sophisticated database structure developed by Maple System Inc., which was contracted by the Project Management Team. Despite the high cost of the database, and the intense deadlines surrounding it, having such a powerful structure was supposed to allow for content to be managed more effectively in the long run. Indeed, the robustness of the database effectively led to a reduction in maintenance costs. Overall, the investment was very significant, but in forecasting the future development of the site, the Project Management Team understood that maintenance would decrease, both financially and in terms of time.

Beyond the database structure, the content development for the Extranet had short- and long-term goals. The short-term priority was to ensure that the Extranet could be launched to coincide with the completion of the installation of computers and Internet connectivity in the agencies. Therefore, content (such as descriptions of selected documents, announcements from a number of agencies, and selected project listings) was compiled for the Extranet at the time of the launch. In addition, the Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre was sub-contracted to provide over 250 URLs on employment and other sector related issues. Other potential content sources were identified, along with the need to develop an effective content management process.

The fiscal year 1999-2000 brought further development of the Extranet strategy. The focus was placed on developing a governance model, implementing outreach and training

strategies, as well as expanding the membership of the Extranet. Additionally, an Extra/Internet Advisory Committee with community and regional representatives was formed and developed the Extranet User Access policies, expanding access to the site to more users and groups. Eventually, those who subscribed to the Extranet included “all OCASI member agencies, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) providers, Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP) funded agencies, SETP, JSW and sponsorship agreement holders” (OCASI Annual Report, 2000, p. 4).

Alongside the initial conception of the Extranet, there was also another initiative to build a public Internet site that would serve as an information resource for newcomers to Canada. The rationale, according to the Project Management Team’s report to CIC, dated April 29, 1999, was that this public site would leverage and provide access to Extranet data for clients and the public (p. 15). Despite being an offshoot of the Extranet site, the site became very popular, and by the next fiscal year (1999-2000), it had gained a lot of momentum. In the 2000 OCASI Annual Report, which chronicled activities in 1999-2000, this public site was deemed “a great Internet destination for new Canadians and people considering a visit to Canada” (p. 4). The site received hits from all locations around the world.

There were many reasons for the popularity of the newcomers’ site. In October 1999 CIC’s Ontario Region appointed Community Information Toronto (CIT) as the contractor in charge of collecting settlement-related content to be incorporated into the existing database that served as the foundation for the sector-wide Extranet. In gathering the information for the Newcomers’ site, CIT embarked in extensive research that involved surveys and focus groups with over 200 newcomers, settlement workers, and LINC and ESL instructors across Ontario. As a result of these efforts, content was developed to cover ten major topics: community and recreation, consumer information, education, employment, health, housing, immigration and citizenship, language and literacy, legal information and human rights and social services. CIT also coordinated the creation of a database of more than 10,000 community and government organizations and programs across Ontario. Following the completion of CIT’s work, the Settlement.Org Newcomers’ site was officially launched in November 2000.

Aside from the ongoing development of content on both the Extranet and the public Internet site, enhancements to the ‘look and feel’ were also made. Thus, the user-friendliness of both sites was improved, allowing users to navigate the site more easily and effectively.

Both sites were promoted to their respective target groups. The Extranet was promoted to the sector, while the Settlement.Org Newcomers' site was promoted to newcomers arriving in Ontario. OCASI assisted in the promotional efforts by providing a personal touch to the outreach activities, by providing onsite orientation to the Extranet along with training and participation at sector conferences.

Given the extensive improvement and expansion of both sites, an increase in allocation of project resources was also required. The maintenance of the sites included constant monitoring, updating and upgrading of content. For the Extranet site, managing 'permissions' was also important. Allowing individual access to the Extranet and advising agencies on access issues, as well as coaching and encouraging participants to post content directly to various sections was facilitated efficiently.

Further changes included the transition of the abovementioned Extra/Internet advisory committee into the Settlement.Org Steering Committee (SOSC). Its role was to provide advice and guidance to the project staff, ultimately leading to the dissolution of the Project Management Team.

2.3.3 Recent Changes to the Extranet and Internet Sites

The Settlement.Org project staff has strived to uphold an ongoing commitment to the success of both the Extranet and Internet sites; thus, staff members have consistently paid close attention to the activity and operations of the site. Monitoring aspects such as where users are from, the most utilized areas of the sites, and the average duration of users' visits, for example, have given the project staff insights into the effectiveness of the sites, in addition to ideas on how the sites could be improved.

In early 2003, the project staff presented to the SOSC for approval an idea that was contrary to the initial vision for the sites. They believed that having two very separate websites resulted in confusion and inefficiencies in site usage by the sector workers. The project staff proposed that changes to the Extranet would better serve the settlement community. Changes included having a single site with two access points: one for settlement workers and one for the general public.

After extensive consultations, a consensus was reached to transform the Extranet site into a site that could be publicly accessed. Having considered the costs and the effort that were

associated with the database structure that supported the extranet specifically, and the overwhelming response from the sector, it was believed that releasing information to the public would render a more transparent and informative approach to service delivery in the immigration and settlement sector (Settlement.Org Annual Report, 2004). Therefore, the extranet was redesigned and became Settlement.Org/At Work – a site for settlement workers and sector representatives to share information, find jobs, and become familiar with policy, legislation, and other important information.

2.3.4 Settlement.Org Today

As described above, Settlement.Org has undergone a considerable number of changes to achieve its current state. The site has attracted great numbers of people, who face differing situations. This includes newcomers, potential immigrants, friends and family who are looking for information on behalf of others, settlement workers, and funders.

In addition, the site is unique in that it offers a ‘one-stop-shop’ for users who are in Ontario or who want to immigrate to Ontario. Other websites may be too broad (offering information on Canada as a whole, yet not targeting any specific province) or too specialized (offering information for particular ethnic or religious communities only, or addressing narrow topics such as employment, education). Settlement.Org, on the other hand, provides information for people who are immigrating to Ontario, with links and resources leading to specific information.

Given that Settlement.Org compiles and distributes its information, users may be able to find what they are looking for without having to search extensively on the Internet, gathering information little by little, and from many sources. It is not surprising, therefore, that Settlement.Org is extremely popular. A report generated in June 2004⁵ shows that the site had an average number of 3,646 users per day for the Newcomers’ side, and 4,702 user per day for Settlement/At Work. Other statistics also include a monthly average of well over 2 million hits for the Newcomers’ site, and a monthly average of 202,386 hits for Settlement.Org/At Work.

To reinforce the commitment to Settlement.Org, ongoing attention is placed on expanding and ensuring that the site meets users’ needs. The Settlement.Org staff agrees that the site must continue to grow and adapt so that it can continue to play a role in providing relevant

⁵ These statistics are based on documentation provided by OCASI/Settlement.Org staff to the researcher.

and useful information on settlement and immigration to Ontario. A testament to these efforts was shown in March 2003 when an online discussion forum was introduced on the Newcomers' site. The purpose of this forum was to field questions that the site was receiving from individual users so that answers could be made available to a wider audience. Ultimately, opening up the questions and answers brought forth a more transparent approach to information and referral regarding the immigration and settlement process. Not only have users become more involved with the site via the forum, but a sense of loyalty amongst users has also been established. The discussion board has since become one of the most popular areas of the site, and ranks third in the category of most requested pages, with 26,391 user sessions in the year 2003.⁶ Given that the discussion board is a relatively new area on the site, this is a great achievement.

Funders and Partners of Settlement.Org

Since the site was initiated, it has been supported by key partnerships and funding relationships. As indicated, the original funder of the site was, and continues to be the Settlement Directorate, Ontario Region of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. CIC has played an ongoing and significant role in the development of Settlement.Org, as it has continuously provided funding for technical infrastructure, content development, as well as marketing activities and promotional initiatives. The other source of funding is the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, which has been funding content development for the Settlement.Org Newcomers site. It should be noted that even though the site is supported by public funds, it is not required to comply with the Common Look and Feel (CLF) standards and other e-Government information regulations that most federal sites must adhere to⁷.

Over time, Settlement.Org has also acquired a set of content partners and marketing partners to add valuable information to the site and to promote awareness and usage of the site. Information about these partners and their contributions is found on Settlement.Org's partnership page⁸.

In terms of content, Settlement.Org seeks partnerships with human service agencies that provide timely and relevant information for newcomers. Essentially, these partners provide content such as newsletter articles, fact sheets, informational workshop handouts, and so on

⁶ These statistics are provided by a WebTrends report for 2003-2004.

⁷ For an overview of Common Look and Feel (CLF) standards, see http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/clf-nsi/index_e.asp

(OCASI, 2005). As these partnerships evolve, the content of the site becomes more enriched by the variety of information and resources provided, and by the multiple formats that users can access. Moreover, a conscious effort has been made to respond effectively to the changing demographics and environment regarding immigration and settlement in Canada and in Ontario. As a result, the content provided by Settlement.Org, along with its content partnerships, reflects these efforts by ensuring that newcomers continue to receive timely, accurate and relevant information suited to their needs.

The marketing partnership program at Settlement.Org has been established to maximize promotional activities for Settlement.Org in various communities of interest, raise the profile and usage of the site, and enhance the support provided to Settlement.Org initiatives and funding requests (OCASI, 2005). Some of the activities that are carried out through the partnership include the development of promotional materials, creation of web pages for the purpose of promotion, the distribution of collateral materials, dissemination of promotional emails, and in-person promotion (OCASI, 2005).

Governance: The Settlement.Org Steering Committee

As previously mentioned, Settlement.Org is governed by the Settlement.Org Steering Committee (SOSC). SOSC is comprised of a Chair and up to twelve members from immigrant human service agencies around Ontario that are involved with immigrant and refugee issues. In addition, funders are represented on the SOSC in a non-voting capacity. The SOSC is involved in providing general advice and guidance for facilitating the operations that surround Settlement.Org, rather than being directly involved in the day-to-day operation of the project.

The role of the SOSC is integral to the operations and development of Settlement.Org. It is continuously involved in the visioning of the site – exploring where it is going, asking if the needs of stakeholders are being met, examining strategies for improvement, along with other activities. In the 2004 *Settlement.Org Annual Report*, it was reported that “to add depth and expertise and to enhance SOSC effectiveness, it was decided that relevant experts and other voices from different communities and geographic regions of the province would be invited to each meeting” (p. 6).

⁸ <http://www.settlement.org/site/OUTREACH/partners.asp>

In addition to facilitating the work to be done on the site, the SOSC's composition as a coalition of community groups validates the site as a sector- or community-driven entity. The multi-sector composition of the committee shows that in essence, Settlement.Org is owned by the settlement sector of Ontario and managed by OCASI. Settlement.Org is a site that is autonomous from government, and it represents the interests of the immigration and settlement sector in Ontario, providing information and resources which allow people to navigate through the system.

2.4 Immigrant Settlement Through the Lens of Information

Moving and starting a new life in another country is challenging for anyone. With the decision to leave one's homeland and to live elsewhere, immigrants are faced with many uncertainties, particularly in the realms of employment, social exclusion from the community, and the challenges of educating their children (Reitz, 2003).

The immigration levels in countries such as Canada are rising each year. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2005) reported a total of 221,352 immigrants in 2003, and 235,808 immigrants in 2004. Given the rising numbers, increased pressures are being felt by societies to ensure that newcomers have access to settlement resources and programs to ensure their efficient and successful integration into and participation in Canadian society.

This section lays out the fundamental elements of immigrant settlement and addresses it through the lens of information. Key components include the definition of settlement, its linkage to social inclusion, and an investigation on the means by which a successful integration experience may be achieved.

2.4.1 Settlement and Inclusion: Inseparable Entities

As noted by many scholars, settlement does not simply occur at a specific point in time; rather, it is a continuum or a process that immigrants go through as they become acquainted with the social, economic and political aspects of the host country (Caidi and Allard, 2005; Mwarigha, 2002; Papillon, 2002). In writing about the settlement process of newcomers into urban areas such as Toronto, Mwarigha (2002) outlines the three stages of settlement. The first stage involves immediate needs such as food, shelter, clothing, orientation to Canadian life, and language training; following this initial stage is an intermediate stage in which immigrants need to access Canadian systems, institutions, and the labour market; and finally, a long-term, or final

(although not concluding stage) involves the perseverance by newcomers to become involved in Canada's social, economic, cultural and political life.

Similarly, the Ontario settlement sector labels the stages of settlement as: adjustment, adaptation, and integration. Adjustment refers to familiarizing oneself with Canadian culture, language and the environment. Coping personally with the situation also occurs at this stage. In adapting to society, new immigrants try to learn about and manage the everyday tasks and necessities. Finally, integration refers to newcomers who actively participate and who are involved in the many aspects of Canadian life (OCASI and COSTI, 1999).

Settling in a new country therefore means much more than simply acquiring the adequate resources to survive. For settlement to be fully realized, all stages must be exercised thoroughly and successfully, ultimately enabling immigrants to participate and engage fully in Canadian society. Thus, as suggested by Omidvar (2001) in an address to the delegates of the 2001 National Settlement Conference, settlement should really be replaced with the concept of "inclusion". She states,

If we are to truly rethink settlement, we need start at the beginning by recognizing its rightful and important place as a means to full and equal participation in our democratic society. After all, immigration is about nation-building. And in this nation, thankfully, nation-building is about democracy and participation (p. 4).

Thus, settlement and inclusion are concepts that are inextricably linked. While settlement is a personal journey (filled with both challenges and successes), inclusion is not only a goal for immigrants, but also, for countries like Canada that benefit from having new citizens fully contribute to the social, political and economic spheres.

2.4.2 Origins of Social Inclusion

To discuss the notion of inclusion, it is useful to examine its counterpart, social exclusion. It was in the early 1970s that René Lenoir referred to the 'excluded' in France – social misfits comprised of mentally and physically handicapped individuals, substance abusers, delinquents, illegitimate children, and single parents amongst others (Barata, 2000; Sen, 2000). These individuals, who were attributed the term, the 'undeserving poor', were viewed as a threat to the cohesion of French society, and were accused of being resistant and unwilling to integrate into French culture (Caidi and Allard, 2005).

In the United Kingdom, after a decade of insistent dialogue regarding the 'underclass', the term social exclusion was picked up by the New Labour government in the early 1990s. In fact, the European Union, as a whole, used the term 'social exclusion' to refer to the weakening of the economic climate and the increasing problems related to employment, poverty and family structure (Barata, 2000). It appeared that in reconceptualizing the term, focus was placed on the external forces of society, rather than on those who were socially excluded (Caidi and Allard, 2005; Barata, 2000).

Since this early research on social exclusion, it has been noted that the concept has further been associated with the lack of such things as:

A livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit, or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; humanity, respect, fulfillment and understanding (Silver, as quoted in Sen, 2000, p. 1).

The term social exclusion is now used to refer to any portion of the general population that is marginalized socially, economically and politically. Sen (2000) argues that exclusion can be active or passive. Active exclusion involves situations where there is a deliberate attempt to exclude segments of the population from accessing the social, political and economic elements of society. Passive exclusion occurs when environmental factors lead to the marginalization of groups. The experiences and situations of immigrants throughout history have been marked both by active and passive exclusion. In Germany and France, for example, acquiring citizenship is difficult to obtain; thus, immigrants do not have voting rights and are excluded from the political life in these societies (Sen, 2000). Active exclusion has also been historically prevalent in Canada. For instance, after bringing in close to 15,000 Chinese labourers to construct the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s (3,000 of whom died), the government introduced head taxes that increased from \$50, to \$500 to limit immigration (Siemiatycki et al, 2003).

Passive exclusion has also marginalized many groups in society. Sen (2000) provides the example of current economic situations which may lead certain groups to be left out of the labour market. Although there may be no deliberate attempt to exclude individuals from employment (e.g. there are no policies, legislations or set rules to prohibit employment of certain groups), exclusion still exists. In recent years, employment has been a pressing matter for the immigrant population in Canada. The situation is well captured by Carolyn Harris' (2005) article: "Third

World Loses a Ph.D, Canada gets a cab driver.” Moreover, the economic situation of Canada has resulted in a passive exclusion that has recently come under scrutiny as studies have found that professional licensing bodies that recognize foreign credentials are discriminatory (CBC, 2005; CRR, 2005). These suggest that barriers to employment are, in fact, a form of active exclusion imposed by regulating bodies.

Regardless of the active or passive nature of exclusion, social exclusion seems to have persisted throughout history, and needs to be addressed. Strategies have been developed to promote the idea of social *inclusion*, that is, promoting access and participation in the areas that are denied to certain individuals. In Europe, for example, the Lisbon Accord and the Nice Accord were two major gatherings held in the early 2000s to define the constructs of social inclusion and to shape policies surrounding it (Caidi and Allard, 2005).

2.4.3 Social Inclusion and Immigrants in Canada

In Canadian society, the rhetoric of social inclusion has surfaced in relation to policies such as the Multiculturalism Act. This policy “recognizes the potential of all Canadians, encouraging them to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs” (Canadian Heritage, as quoted in Caidi and Allard, 2005). The idea is that both national unity and diversity of cultures is possible. Not everyone may share a uniform cultural, social or political space, yet society can still be successful (Papillon, 2002).

An attempt to unravel the term ‘multiculturalism’ can lead to a complex debate. As Palmer Seiler (2002) notes, there are different ways in which multiculturalism can be approached. She writes,

Beyond its general meaning as a means of accommodating diversity, it can also be understood in at least four other ways – as an empirical description of a heterogeneous society, as an ideology advocating equity and a lived appreciation of difference, as a specific governmental policy that has been implemented with varying degrees of success, and as a political process whereby minority groups negotiate their claims to space, status and power in the social order (p. 6).

It was Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau who introduced multiculturalism into Canada’s official policy in 1971. The multiculturalism policy was created in response to concerns expressed by ethnic minorities regarding their position in society, as well as to address Canada’s changing immigration policies (particularly the Immigration Act of 1967), which opened doors to immigrants of all races, national origins, religions and cultures (Esses and Gardner, 1996;

Gundara, 2002). Additionally, as Esses and Gardner (1996) observe, the notion of multiculturalism was set up as a national symbol for Canadians. "By adopting multiculturalism as part of their collective identity, a distinctive Canadian identity, which could serve as a source of pride, was also established."

Thus, the official commitment to multiculturalism reinforces the idea that Canada is a nation that is open to all people. It promotes the inclusion of the various ethnic, religious and linguistic groups that are part of Canadian society, in addition to encouraging the maintenance of cultural differences (Esses and Gardner, 1996; Howard-Hassmann, 1999; Li, 2003). Canada has adopted the 'mosaic' approach where each culture is recognized and valued, and where all cultures receive equal treatment. Unlike the 'melting pot' theory, cultural differences can remain as differences, and are not expected to disappear over time (Qadeer, 2003). Furthermore, "the liberal values enshrined in Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* symbolize a change from religio-ethnic exclusivity to religio-ethnic openness" (Howard-Hassmann, 1999, p. 527).

Alternatively, critics see the federal discourse around multiculturalism as threatening to Canadian unity (Li, 2003; Palmer Seiler, 2002). While these critics see diversity as a strength of Canadian society, multiculturalism policies (which continually encourage various cultural, religious, and ethnic groups to maintain their values, identities and practices) might actually counter the fundamental principles of national unity. Li (2003), in reviewing the work by immigration critics such as Daniel Stoffman shows that "in short, cultural differences are seen as essential and unbridgeable and as eventually leading to a clash with the basic values of civil society. Accordingly, it would be difficult to integrate immigrants coming from very different cultures because of their irreconcilable differences" (p. 6). Thus, in the critics' view, the effect of long-term multiculturalism policies may encourage immigrants to maintain their differences, which might impede their inclusion into Canadian society.

Another type of discourse surrounding the notion of multiculturalism is the academic view, which attempts to understand how immigration has affected the social order. Given the various backgrounds of immigrants to Canada, knowing how immigrants fare compared to native-born Canadians is a common notion used to measure the effect of multiculturalism. For example, studies might include the examination of how successful immigrants can integrate into the labour market, or how quickly they can adopt one of Canada's official languages. (Li, 2003).

Clearly, the debate on multiculturalism thrives, and it becomes difficult to achieve a complete understanding about what the term means, given the many definitions that are associated with it. However, each of the philosophies underscores the value of creating a balance between immigrants and Canadian society. On one hand, it is necessary for immigrants to accept common values such as democracy, freedom of speech, and respect for fellow Canadians, but on the other hand, there are increasing pressures for institutions and agencies to accommodate the needs of the heterogeneous nature of immigrants (Gundara, 2002; Howard-Hassmann, 1999; Li, 2003).

In analyzing the state of multiculturalism in Canada, Britain and Australia, Gundara (2002) writes,

it is important to develop an agenda for public educational and social policy and create spaces where states can negotiate the complexity of societies, both in rural areas and cities. Such an analysis should be inclusive of all groups who live in them. In establishing such a context the past and current exclusions can be put to rights. This, therefore, makes it possible to initiate a dialogue between the various groups who live in different societies” (p. 44).

Therefore, exploring how multiculturalism, Canadian unity, and immigration can co-exist is a challenge for Canada as it strives to become an inclusive society for immigrants.

Unfortunately, challenges to social inclusion still persist in Canadian society. In fact, patterns of socio-economic exclusion have continually surfaced as immigration levels have risen. Over the past decade, an unsettling pattern of poverty amongst immigrants in Canada continues to be related to the challenging and prolonged inclusion of newcomers (Papillon, 2002; Richmond, 2004; Robson-Haddow and Ladner, 2005). In a study conducted by Robson-Haddow and Ladner (2005), it was stated that:

The increase in poverty crossed educational, age and linguistic lines among newcomers and affected newcomers in all family types. Immigrants are now over-represented among Canada’s poor: 29% of all persons living in low-income are immigrants but only 22% of all persons living in Canada are immigrants (p. 10).

Moreover, a number of factors that contribute to these patterns have been identified. For example, the high rates of un- and underemployment of newcomers are linked to the lack of recognition of formal credentials. Even though it was found that on average, immigrants are more highly educated than Canadian-born citizens, their skills and knowledge are not properly

recognized, which might explain their lower incomes. A consequence of the lower incomes of immigrants might involve inadequate housing. Finally, racial and ethnic discrimination, and systemic and institutional barriers also hinder the inclusion process of immigrants. (Mwarigha, 2001; Omidvar, 2001; Papillon, 2002; Robson-Haddow and Ladner, 2005).

Papillon (2002) acknowledges that it is in the early stages of settlement that newcomers face the greatest challenges. "Finding a job and housing, obtaining access to public services, and developing a social network for support and cultural expression are all part of this phase" (p. 4). If newcomers are unable to conquer such initial problems, then the latter stages of settlement, and ultimately, social inclusion, are threatened.

Beyond the policies and regulations of the federal government mentioned earlier, Caidi and Allard (2005) also reviewed other initiatives that have been established to promote social inclusion. For example, the federal department Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) collaborated in 2003 on a conference that would help shape policies geared towards social inclusion. Projects such as the Social and Economic Inclusion Project by the Atlantic Canada Women's Centre have also been established to help policy makers, educators and social sector organizations to facilitate participation and community development in fostering social and economic inclusion. Finally, private foundations such as the Laidlaw Foundation have conducted extensive research on the intricacies of social inclusion and have worked with other entities to promote awareness and advocate for better policies.

2.4.4 Settlement, Inclusion and Information

While there has been a plethora of research conducted on settlement and inclusion of immigrants in the ethnic studies, sociology, social work, and policy studies fields, Caidi and Allard (2005) are among the few to suggest that settlement and inclusion are directly linked to the provision of information and to advocate for a holistic approach that encompasses a closer examination of theories and principles of social inclusion, social capital and information-seeking behaviours. Indeed, if aspects such as accommodation, employment, health care and social services, amongst other areas, are part of the larger Canadian system and society, then gaining access and knowing about such aspects are essential for newcomers to become included into Canadian life.

While they possess a range of social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, any immigrant would presumably need information and resources to address the pressing matters that come with the settlement process. This assumption is guided by a long tradition of studies in the information science field, which stress that information is needed to make sense of situations of uncertainty and conflict. For example, according to Belkin's (1980) ASK paradigm (anomalous state of knowledge), individuals are motivated to search for information when they realize that there is a gap in their state of knowledge. Similarly, Dervin's (1983) sense-making theory suggests that information helps individuals to make sense of a current situation. She asserts that sense-making is any internal or external communication activity that helps the individual resolve an information gap.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the process of settlement is highly personalized, depending on the various characteristics of an individual. Not only is the population of immigrants extremely diverse, but also, the time it takes to settle, and the information and resources needed is different for each individual (Caidi and Allard, 2005; Fisher, Durrance and Hinton, 2004). Thus, the journey of settlement is contextualized in the individual experiences of newcomers who face varying conditions upon their arrival to Canada.

In a study conducted by Fisher, Durrance and Hinton (2004), the authors observe that there have not been many studies on special populations such as immigrants and their use of information. However, research by Taylor (1984), as well as Dervin and Nilan (1986), serve as precursors to studying the individualized information experiences of such groups. Taylor's study, for example, revealed that "a critical point to keep in mind is that the emphasis on the value-added approach is on the user – the person who makes use of the information – and on his perceptions of utility and value" (Taylor, as quoted in Goodall, n.d. p. 6). This statement appears to suggest that information is useful to individuals in various ways, based on their personal characteristics. Moreover, Dervin and Nilan's excellent overview of the field of information needs and uses, which emerged in the early 1980s, emphasizes the 'alternative' paradigm that portrays "information as something that is constructed by human beings" (Dervin and Nilan, as quoted in Goodall, n.d. p. 6). Information is not only a tangible 'thing' that exists inside a system and to which users have to comply. Rather, the importance of context is a key element in the alternative paradigm. Ultimately, it is the user who determines what information is, and how it will be used. In thinking about the situation of newcomers, these studies imply that in

developing and providing information resources for immigrants, it is essential to keep in mind that they represent a range of characteristics and individual preferences, which in turn influences their needs and uses of that information.

Given Papillon's (2002) assertion that it is the initial stages of settlement that are most challenging for immigrants, one might consider how these translate into information needs. Typically, the type of information that newcomers search for upon arriving to their host country includes information on employment, housing, social services, and education. These sources, and the way to make them accessible to users in need of them, led to a research area on 'everyday life information seeking' and 'community information' (Carey and McKechnie, 2001; Pettigrew and Durrance, 2001; Pettigrew, Durrance and Unruh, 2004; Pettigrew and Wilkinson, 1996; Savolainen, 1995; Spink and Gole, 2001). Finding a range of information on these topics, along with receiving immediate assistance such as reception services and orientation to Canada, is therefore necessary to help newcomers move along with their settlement process.

In Canada, and particularly in Ontario, the provision of information for newcomers has traditionally been one of the many services provided by immigrant serving agencies, governments, and other institutions such as libraries and community centres. During the time of Ontario's peak funding period in 1994, many immigrant serving agencies were able to address the diversity of their clients by developing specialized information and resources that pertained to their needs (Richmond, 1996). As well, libraries have dedicated whole collections and have developed initiatives to serve immigrant and ethno-cultural groups in their communities. The Toronto Public Library (TPL) system,⁹ for example, provides various programs in conjunction with local agencies, offers information on settlement, and has also created partnerships to deliver many programs for newcomers (Mylopoulos, 2000). TPL has also paired up with initiatives such as Settlement.Org to improve the delivery of information for newcomers. Generally speaking, all of these examples suggest the recognition of information as an important element in the settlement process.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet have also revolutionized the way individuals acquire and receive information, as well as the methods by which they communicate and interact. As indicated by Preece (2002), who examined the new

⁹ See the 'Multicultural Connections' section of the Toronto Public Library website: http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/mul_index.jsp

and unique role that ICTs play, “interaction via existing technologies, such as e-mail, chat rooms and instant messaging, entices millions of people online” (p. 38).

Therefore, in comparison to traditional mass media, new technologies offer an element that was previously unavailable through channels such as newspapers, television or radio – an environment that is ‘involving.’ As described by Lievrouw (1994), society has experienced a shift from an ‘informing’ environment to one that is ‘involving.’¹⁰ Informing environments tend to be associated with mass media: they deliver information one-way to large audiences and generally reflect consensus views. On the other hand, involving environments tend to incorporate multi-channel message delivery, a distributed set of voices, and encourage discourse and dialogue, ultimately being participatory in nature.

Moreover, the borderless nature of the Internet allows users to transcend both time (they can access information at their leisure) and space (they can communicate with others, or retrieve information from all over the world). In relating to the information landscape, the benefits of the Internet are observed by Pettigrew, Durrance and Unruh (2002), who state, “the architecture of the Internet makes digital [community information] possible by linking information files created not only by single organizations such as libraries, but by agencies, organizations, and individuals throughout the community (and, of course, the world)” (p. 895).

The fact that there is an increasing prevalence of online information means that great possibilities exist for users to gain access to it. For newcomers, the availability of information on the Internet greatly expands the opportunity to acquire the community information they need on employment, education, accommodation and social services initially, in addition to being a reference point to go to, as the settlement process continues. In browsing through the Internet, users can become acquainted with many information sources that are also in different formats. In support of this claim, Hiller and Franz (2004), who examine the experiences of migrants from Newfoundland, indicate that “the continuing importance of the Internet over time and through the various stages of the migrant experience as developed here is consistent with the notion in migration literature that migration is not just an event but also a process that continues over time” (p. 748). In their study, the authors identify three types of migrants who are at different stages of the settlement process, and who rely on the use of the Internet to meet their differing needs.

¹⁰ See Lievrouw (1994) for a more comprehensive definition of informing and involving information environments.

When considering the notion of using ICTs, however, one must keep in mind the vast literature on the 'digital divide'; that is, the growing inequalities between those who have access to technology, and those who do not. For ethno-cultural and immigrant communities, the digital divide is a real issue. Warschauer (2003) notes that in a study by the Benton Foundation, it was found that only 31 percent of African-American households, and 32 percent of Hispanic households had Internet access in the United States. 55 percent of Caucasian households, on the other hand, had Internet access (p. 44). These findings raise serious implications when assessing whether ethno-cultural or immigrant communities would even be able to access the information they need online. If information is integral to the process of settlement, and if settlement is linked to the concept of social inclusion, the lack of information, caused by the lack of access to technologies results in the exclusion of newcomers to society.

2.4.5 Social Networks of Immigrant Communities

Beyond accessing information through organizations, institutions, or the Internet, research has indicated that social networks are very important for immigrants in accessing the relevant information and resources for their settlement processes. Social networks is a term used to describe the various relationships that surround an individual (Haythornthwaite, 2002; Wellman, 1988). Robert Putnam (1995) indicated that establishing social networks is important, as they intersect with elements of trust, reciprocity, mutual interests and group culture. As a whole, these entities combined constitute what is known as social capital. Consequently, an important source of social capital is the personal relations that people have in their family and community. These relations can provide information, influence, social credentials and reinforcement (Lin, as quoted in Doody, 2004, p. 5).

The social network of an individual is often composed of strong and weak ties. Strong ties (which are also known as close ties) are formed between individuals who possess similar attributes, such as resources and socio-economic conditions. As well, strong ties tend to exhibit a higher degree of intimacy, self-disclosure, and frequency of interaction (Coleman, 1988; Haythornthwaite, 2002; Johnson, 2004). Alternatively, weak ties are relationships between people who possess different social statuses and resources, and who fall across different levels of social network structure (Lin, 2001). Therefore, because strong ties tend to provide access to similar resources, the 'strength of weak ties' proposition allows individuals who are connected

through weak ties to access new and diverse information and resources (Lin, 2001; Granovetter, 1973 as quoted in Johnson, 2004). Overall, the combination of strong and weak ties in a social network allows individuals to reinforce the information and resources they already have, in addition to acquiring new resources to meet their needs.

Being part of a social network is essential for newcomers to receive assistance in meeting their information needs. In their study of the 'information grounds' of immigrants in Queens, New York, Fisher et al (2004) suggest that immigrants require information to become acquainted with and become a part of American life. In particular,

Immigrants achieve greater understanding of their social context as they engage in social networks, develop new relationships, maintain connections to their native culture, learn about foreign cultures, and begin to understand their new American culture – all of which helps to integrate them into the social fabric of community (p. 761).

Furthermore, the authors identified many spaces (beyond the library) as 'information grounds'. An information ground is a synergistic "environment temporarily created by the behaviour of people who have come together to perform a given task, but from which emerges a social atmosphere that fosters the spontaneous and serendipitous sharing of information" (Pettigrew, as quoted in Fisher, Durrance and Hinton, p. 756). Therefore, an information ground provides the opportunity for immigrants to establish a social network and to become actively involved in exchanging information.

Similarly, in a study about the initial settlement experiences of Ethiopian and Somali refugees in Toronto, Danso (2001), asserted that refugee resettlement in Canada largely involves providing relevant information and proper counselling and orientation sessions to clients so that they know how Canadian society functions. The study found that social networks continued to be very important to refugees in finding information on topics such as employment, housing, education and language training.

George and Esme Fuller-Thomson's (1997) study showed that social networks played an integral role in newcomers' decisions to remain in Canada. They write: "Supportive friends and relatives provide a sense of security to newcomers who know they have someone to turn to in case of an emergency. Furthermore, those with an extensive social support network may be motivated to stay in Canada so as to remain near their friends and relatives" (p. 189). The authors went on to say that such findings underscore the value of government programs such as the

HOST program, which link newcomers who may not necessarily have a social network with Canadian families, as well as connecting newcomers with ethno-cultural agencies and other community organizations to develop support networks and acquire the information they need.

In the current information environment, it has been suggested various scholars (Aizlewood and Doody, 2002; Doody, 2004; Hiller and Franz, 2004; Haythornwaite, 2002; Wellman, 2003) that social networks are supported and transformed through the use of the Internet. Reflecting on the increasing prevalence of such technologies, Wellman (2003) states,

Many people and organizations communicate with others in ways that ramify across group boundaries. Rather than relating to one group, they cycle through interactions with a variety of others, at work or in the community. Their work and community networks are diffuse and sparsely knit with vague overlapping social and spatial boundaries. Their computer-mediated communication has become part of their everyday lives, rather than being a separate set of relationships (p. 2031).

Indeed, the embedded nature of the Internet in today's society has affected the way social networks are formed and maintained.

Considering that social networks are important for newcomers to acquire the information they need for settlement purposes, it is also necessary to consider how ICTs affect these relationships. There are, however, few studies that deal with immigrants' use of technology for settlement purposes. One example is Yang et al's (2004) research, which showed that the use of media and technologies by Chinese students in the United States correlated to their acculturation process.

Instead, many of the studies regarding the use of ICTs by immigrant or ethno-cultural groups reaffirm the nature of networked technologies as social entities (Wellman, 2003). Aizlewood and Doody's (2002) study on the ethno-cultural uses of ICTs indicated that there exists what are known as virtual ethno-cultural communities. Virtual communities are "those that exist through communications in cyberspace and can include members of either geographically concentrated or dispersed communities" (p. 6). Thus, virtual *ethno-cultural* communities are those communities that share ethno-cultural identification.

Other studies have been conducted on the notion of diasporas, and indicate that in the reality of migration and movement of peoples (along with their cultures, beliefs and values), the Internet is employed to articulate a sense of identity (Franklin, 2003; Ignacio, 2005; Mitra, 2001). Through the use of tools such as online discussion boards, chat rooms and mass e-mail

lists, diasporic communities come together to articulate who they are. The Internet has afforded the possibility of allowing members of an ethno-cultural group, who may be in different locations, to communicate with each other and share their experiences. Silverstone (2001) affirms this novelty, indicating that, “providing a network for multiple communication between the dispersed groups as well as between those dispersed and left behind, is, now, the Internet” (p. 19).

2.4.6 Summary

Information is integral to the settlement experiences of newcomers. Having the relevant information and resources to address pressing needs plays an essential role in the process of settlement. It is also established that social networks – relationships among people – are key for newcomers as they attempt to adjust to the host country, its culture and policies.

With the emergence of information and communication technologies, newcomers also have new and dynamic ways to acquire information. Technologies such as the Internet also contribute to an increasingly involving environment. Not only can individuals receive information in various ways, but also, they can communicate and interact with people from all over the world. However, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that not everyone has access to technologies or the skills to use them.

The implications of the current information environment are vast for immigrant and ethno-cultural communities. Understanding the ways that newcomers access, use and make sense of information is essential in knowing how this will affect the settlement process. However, as mentioned earlier, there is still little research that examines the uses of ICTs for settlement purposes.

Moreover, if settlement is associated with the notion of inclusion, more research on the relationship between information, emerging technologies and inclusion is necessary. As acknowledged by Caidi and Allard (2005), the term inclusion should be explored further, particularly as immigration levels continue to rise. The authors ask the question of *what does social inclusion really mean*, and more importantly, social inclusion to *what*? All of these questions might be explored further to uncover the essence of settlement and the inclusion process.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to investigate users' experiences with Settlement.Org, and particularly, its two main functions of informing and involving. Thus, the research objectives are twofold: first, the study will attempt to understand how newcomers become informed through the use of Settlement.Org, their experiences with the site, and their overall reflections on their information experience. Second, the study will examine the extent of involvement facilitated by the Settlement.Org Discussion Board, particularly as members attempt to make sense of the settlement process.

The research undertaken for this thesis brings together a variety of disciplines, most notably, information studies, communication and media studies, social work, and ethnic and migration studies. The study is predominantly qualitative in nature. It focuses on interviewing techniques and an interpretive approach.

3.1 Theoretical Framework: The Interpretive Approach

The framework that surrounds this research involves an interpretive approach. According to Jackson (1999), this approach is “a tool for understanding the reality experienced by people” (p. 11). In other words, one of the main goals of interpretive research is to provide adequate accounts of people's lived experiences.

As described in the following sections, the research design of this study supports the interpretive approach by incorporating in-depth interviews and document analyses through a case study of Settlement.Org. The research seeks to uncover the experiences of newcomers who use the Settlement.Org website – what the process of settlement revealed for them, what kinds of information they have needed, and the value that Settlement.Org has provided in addressing their situations.

The research also examines the historical underpinnings of the Settlement.Org website, as well as the opportunities and constraints that face the website's development to drive the mandate of the OCASI. Another aim is to understand how “immigration” and “settlement” are conceptualized by the developers of Settlement.Org, and how the terms are in the selection of content on the website, along with the presentation of the information.

Two key perspectives of the interpretive approach are utilized in this study. Regarding the newcomers who use the website, the type of inquiry used involved an ethnomethodological perspective. “Ethnomethodologists elucidate what a complete stranger would have to learn to become a routinely functioning member of a group, a program, or a culture” (Patton, 1990, p. 74). The aim of the study was therefore to understand how newcomers who use Settlement.Org go about settling in Ontario through the acquisition and negotiation of information online.

Beyond understanding the newcomers’ perspectives, the other approach involved understanding the sector through a functionalist perspective. As indicated by Jackson (1999),

The functionalists ... using an organic analogy that compared societies to living organisms, emphasized the interrelationships of the various parts of a society and how they complement one another. Functionalists argue that there is a tendency for societies to move toward balance and harmony. Functionalists ask about how different cultural features contribute to balance, to the maintenance of the social system (p. 56).

This research suggests that immigrating and settling in Ontario is a systematic process defined by governing forces. The themes found on the Settlement.Org website can therefore be seen as necessary elements of the processes of immigrating and settling in Canada, and more specifically in Ontario. Therefore, how well newcomers deal with the information can determine the quality of their experiences. As newcomers acquire information to settle and adapt to life in Canada, they also contribute to the various economic, social, and political facets of society.

3.2 Research Design: Using a Case Study

As indicated by Patton (1990), “case studies ... become particularly useful where one needs to understand some special people, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth, and where one can identify cases rich in information” (p. 54). Leaving one’s homeland to live in another is a situation that is logistically, emotionally and personally complicated. Therefore, studying how newcomers and potential newcomers to Ontario cope with the intense changes in their lives, from an information perspective, is an extremely valuable endeavour. Using Settlement.Org as a case study has allowed the researcher to uncover the expectations and methods of newcomers’ information acquisition, as well as to suggest various interpretations for the outcomes of these activities. Certainly, information has an important role to play in newcomers’ settlement experiences. Therefore, articulating the meanings associated with having information, and understanding the processes involved in gathering information, have been essential in this study.

The nature of the Settlement.Org website has also lent itself well to a case study approach. At a cursory glance, the sheer numbers in terms of hits and user base of the website signify its popularity and importance in Ontario, and even in the Canadian immigration and settlement scene. In addition, as mentioned in earlier sections of this thesis, Settlement.Org is a unique website that serves as a one-stop access point to information for immigrants who are in various stages of the settlement process. Conducting this case study has therefore provided insights into how potential, new, and more experienced immigrants to Ontario may use to similar services elsewhere.

Finally, utilizing the case study approach was worthwhile to unravel the inherent complexity that is embedded in Settlement.Org. Stake (2000) indicates that a case tends to operate within several contexts – physical, economic, ethical and so on. Thus, discovering the essence of each aspect of the case is very rewarding. As an information resource that exists only online, that is managed by a social sector organization, governed by a steering committee comprised of local/regional agency representatives, yet funded by federal government, and partnered with other government, private, and not-for-profit entities, Settlement.Org is perhaps fraught with conflicting issues and priorities when trying to serve the most important stakeholders – its clients. Therefore, through the case study, the various discourses surrounding Settlement.Org have been revealed in this research.

3.3 Selection and Description of Virtual Sites and Documentation

For this study, was on two components of the Settlement.Org website: a) the Settlement.Org section for newcomers, and b) the Discussion Board. Participants selected for this study included a) newcomers who have used the Settlement.Org website, b) OCASI staff members who are involved with the development of the website, and c) other partners of the project such as government representatives and external consultants. Complementary documentation was reviewed to provide additional support to the research. In the following sections, descriptions of the websites and participants will be provided, in addition to the strategies for data gathering.

3.3.1 Settlement.Org (For Newcomers)

Settlement.Org is located at <http://www.settlement.org> and is available fully in English and partially in French. Upon choosing a language option from the directory page, users are asked to choose between *Settlement.Org for Newcomers* and *Settlement.Org At Work*. As mentioned, this

study mainly deals with the former; therefore, all subsequent references to Settlement.Org will refer to the **English version of *Settlement.Org for Newcomers***.

Settlement.Org is predominantly a form of pull technology; particularly, it is what Kendall and Kendall (1999) call alpha-pull technology, which are tools used to acquire information on the Internet. "Alpha-pull technology is simply going to the Web, seeking out websites of interest, pulling information from the Web, and bookmarking them for future reference. This process has been referred to as 'surfing the Web'" (p. 6). Settlement.Org consolidates information and links regarding settling in Ontario on its website.

Looking at the main page of the website, one will see that the information is organized by categories, topics and sub-topics that are complemented by news and events, resources, and step-by-step instructions. Moreover, there are website highlights, feedback options, search and website map options, and administrative information about the website. To navigate the website, there are top and left navigation bars. Each page has also been created with a template that makes the layout of each page consistent.

Categories are broad themes that users of the website would likely browse through for information. The main categories that can be found on Settlement.Org are:

- Community & Recreation
- Consumer Information
- Education
- Employment
- Health
- Housing
- Immigration & Citizenship
- Language & Literacy
- Legal Services
- Services for Specific Groups

After clicking on a category link, the user is brought to the category page, where more specific topics are provided. For example, when a user is in the Community & Recreation category, s/he can select the topic Arts & Culture, Libraries, and Media, amongst others. Users will also see that under each topic, there are sub-topics, which can be clicked on and are usually written in article format, and which provide links to external websites. Three sub-sections also complement

the category page: “News and Events”, “Resources”, and “How Do I?” Under these sections are links to external web pages that also provide other relevant information. Furthermore, there is a variety of resources that can be downloaded in different languages. However, as previously mentioned, the site is generally English-oriented.

When navigating deeper into the topic and sub-topic pages, users will also find that Settlement.Org brings information and resources from other sources. The following diagram shows this structure. On the topic pages, there is a Related Links section, and on the sub-topic pages (articles), there are Related Articles, along with an option to provide comments and questions through related threads of the discussion board.

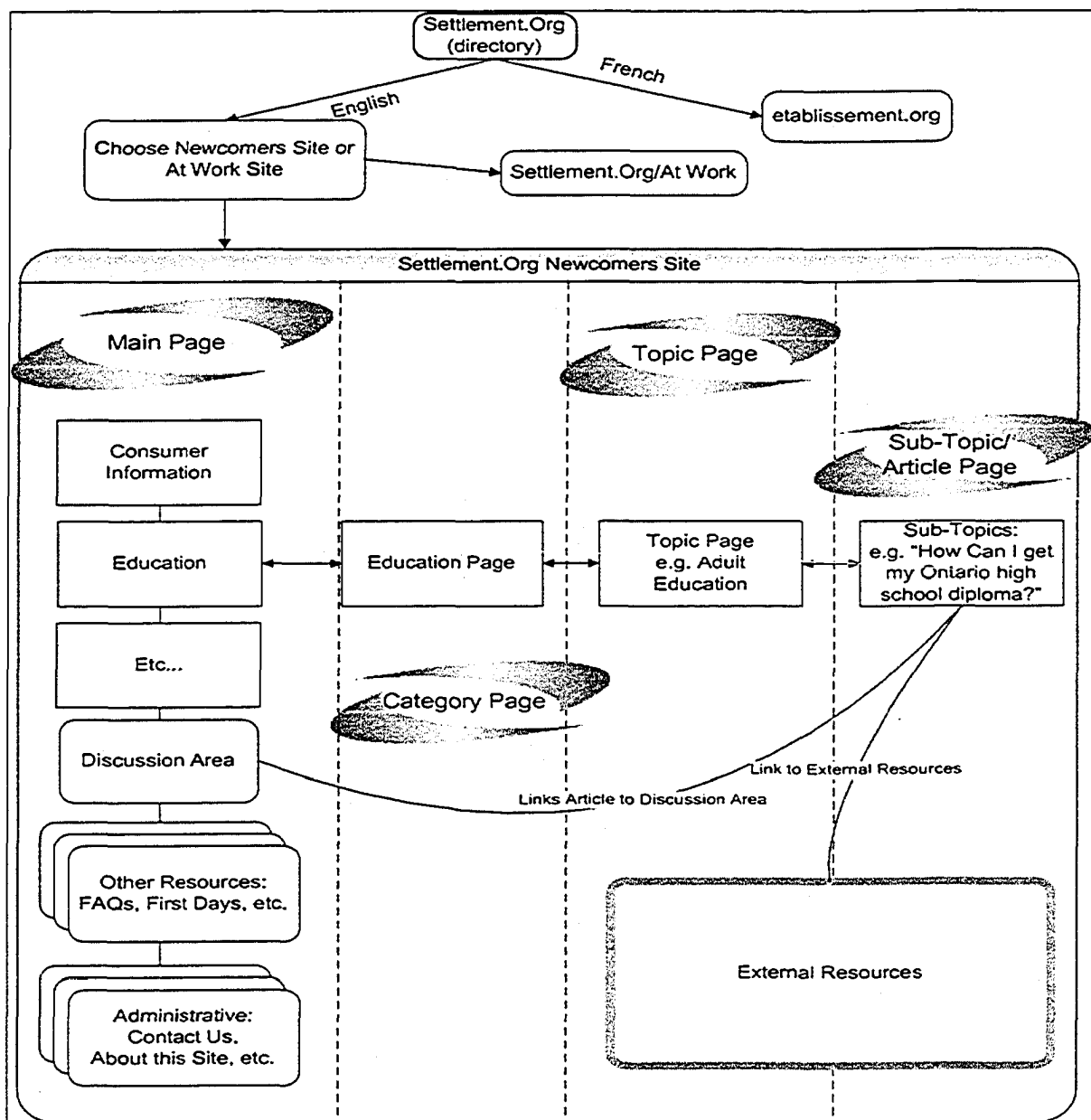


Figure 1: Example of Settlement.Org Layout

Aside from the information categories, topics and sub-topics, there are also website highlights found on Settlement.Org. To access these, users can click on the top navigation bar, or, if users are on the main page, the highlights section is featured at the bottom left of the page. The highlights found on Settlement.Org include such areas as:

- The Discussion Board – the online forum, which will be described later;
- Events – a listing of events by date and location;
- FAQs – most frequently asked questions by newcomers;

- First Days – a guide for the first two weeks in Ontario;
- Forms – downloadable forms sorted by category; Organizations – a listing of ethno-cultural organizations by region and city;
- Quizzes – quizzes for educating newcomers on various topics; and Reference Shelf – publications, reports, and booklets.

Settlement.Org also provides a variety of opportunities for users to submit feedback about the website. On the top navigation bar, users can click on Feedback, Contact Us or Website Survey. In addition, they can go to the Discussion Board to post comments about the website. The Feedback page provides a form for which users can provide comments, some of which may be posted on the testimonials page; the Contact Us page provides a list of ways in which users can get involved; finally, the Website Survey provides the users with a quick, form-based evaluation of the website.

Information about the Settlement.Org website can generally be accessed at the bottom of each page, with the exception of information about partnerships, which can be found at the bottom right of the main page, and in the Contact Us section. Administrative information includes the Privacy Policy of the website, information about the website's mandate, its funders and collaborators, and the Terms and Conditions governing the website.

Furthermore, there is also a site map available on Settlement.Org, as well as a Search function that can be used. Finally, Settlement.Org has established some innovative features such as the ability to sign up for the Settlement.Org newsletter, and the ability to subscribe to Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, thereby incorporating a few 'push' technologies as well. This means that content is actively delivered to the users, rather than having them search for it themselves (Kendall and Kendall, 1999).

3.3.2 Settlement.Org Discussion Board¹¹

The Settlement.Org Discussion Board is the online discussion forum in which users can read and post questions, comments and responses to other users. To access the discussion board, users can either choose the Discuss link from the top navigation bar, or choose discussion topics that have been linked to articles.

¹¹ Information from this section comes from the Settlement.Org Discussion Forum Help Page: <http://settlement.org/discuss/faq.asp>.

While any user of the website can read all the messages on the discussion forum, actual members of the discussion board are those who have registered for the forum and have the ability to post. To register, Settlement.Org asks users to provide a username and an e-mail address. The forum allows its users to e-mail each other through the forum system without revealing personal e-mail addresses. However, users can opt out of receiving personal messages from other users of the forum.

Another feature worth noting is that the Settlement.Org discussion forum is moderated, which means that discussion posts are not posted in real-time, and thus will not appear immediately once a member has submitted a message. As indicated in the Help (or FAQ) section of the Discussion Forum:

To make sure that no one is posting any messages that are not appropriate, your messages will be viewed before they are posted to the discussion forum. A moderator will decide if your question or message should be posted and then add it to the discussion forum. Your messages must meet the Terms and Conditions you agreed to when you signed up for the discussion forum.

After the moderator has viewed the posting and deemed it appropriate for the discussion board, an e-mail message will be sent to the member, indicating where the message can be found.

Once a user has registered for the discussion forum (by providing an e-mail address and creating a username), a user profile is established. This profile consists of the username, location, and the option of providing a first and last name. Registered members have access to the forum's membership list, where they can view others' profiles. Along with the information mentioned, a profile will also indicate the number of posts a member has created, the date when the member first joined the discussion forum, and when the member last posted a message. In addition, Settlement.Org has assigned titles for each member. Starting Members are members who have posted 0-49 times; New Members are members who have posted 50-99 times; Junior Members have posted over 100 times. The rationale for having titles are simply to identify roughly how many posts a particular user has created.

The discussion forum is powered by Snitz Forums, an external developer. There are a variety of functions supported by the forum. First, the use of Forum Code allows members to change the colour and fonts of their message, add emoticons such as 'smileys', and add links to their messages. Second, members can edit their own posts, add a personal signature to their

posts, and search posts. They will also be provided with information about which threads have been added to since their last visit. Third, members can subscribe to discussion threads so that they can receive e-mail messages when new posts are created under their subscribed topics, they can also send discussion topics to their friends. Finally, some statistics are provided by the forum, which include the number of members and number of posts, the date of the last post, the newest member, and active topics. More detailed statistics about members' posting patterns are also provided, such as the number of posts and rate of posts per day, and the ability to see all non-archived posts by a particular member.


The posts on the discussion forum are organized in a similar hierarchical fashion as the Settlement.Org website. Categories distinguish broad themes of discussion, and they are followed by subjects, topics (members' questions), and posts (the actual questions and replies to the topics). The major category forums are: About this Discussion Area, Employment, Education, Immigration and Citizenship, Health, Housing, and Other Discussion Categories. Members of the discussion forum can view how many topics fall under a particular subject, along with how many times the topic has been read and the number of replies associated. Please see Figure 2.1 and 2.2 for screen captures of the Settlement.Org Discussion Forum.

According to the discussion board statistics collected at the end of May 2005, 3,327 members have joined forum since it was introduced on Settlement.Org, and have collectively made 9294 posts. Moreover, there are 5091 topics of discussion, with the number growing each day.

Home > Discussions > Topics To post a message you have to: REGISTER and/or Login below

Help | Search | New Postings | My Profile

Register and/or Login to Post a Message >>



New! Settlement.Org is pleased to announce that housing experts are now available to answer your Landlord and Tenant related questions in the Discussion Area. We invite you to [visit the forum](#) and post your questions.

Username: _____ Password: _____ Login

Save Password [Forgot your Password?](#)


Forum	Topics	Posts	Last Post
About This Discussion Area			
<input type="checkbox"/> Welcome and Rules of Posting Welcome and how to use this discussion area.	12	19	11/23/2004 18:17:51 by: marco
Employment			
<input type="checkbox"/> Finding a Job / Working Finding a Job, Job Listings, Labour Market Information (LMI), Starting a Business, Social Insurance Number, Volunteering...	584	976	07/23/2005 10:45:53 by: Deepakkumar
<input type="checkbox"/> Professions and Trades Information and questions related to employment in professions and trades, regulated and unregulated, in Ontario.	286	550	07/17/2005 17:46:27 by: Angie
Education			
<input type="checkbox"/> University and College Education Colleges, Universities and Institutes, Evaluating Educational Credentials...	121	247	07/18/2005 16:17:02 by: Moderator
<input type="checkbox"/> Elementary and Secondary School Adult Education, Elementary and Secondary School...	79	156	07/06/2005 19:27:51 by: Moderator
Immigration and Citizenship			
<input type="checkbox"/> General Citizenship Questions Citizenship tests, timelines, oaths, eligibility, application process, requirements	317	964	07/23/2005 10:06:01

Figure 2.1 Categories and Subjects on Settlement.Org Discussion Board

Home > Discussions > Topics To post a message you have to: REGISTER and/or Login below

Help | Search | New Postings | My Profile

Register and/or Login to Post a Message >>



New! Settlement.Org is pleased to announce that housing experts are now available to answer your Landlord and Tenant related questions in the Discussion Area. We invite you to [visit the forum](#) and post your questions.

Username: _____ Password: _____ Login

Save Password [Forgot your Password?](#)

All Forums

- [-] Employment
 - [-] Finding a Job / Working New Topic

You are on Page: 1 of 9 Show all topics

Topic	Author	Replies	Read	Last Post
<input type="checkbox"/> Welcome - Please read this before you post	Moderator	0	1269	02/21/2003 11:33:40 by: Moderator
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficult Job Prospects for Foreign Trained	gabriela M.	6	435	07/23/2005 10:45:53 by: Deepakkumar
<input type="checkbox"/> Immigrants' real experiences	Jim Davis	6	355	07/21/2005 08:28:38 by: Jim Davis
<input type="checkbox"/> Finding Job in Canada - Support for New Immigrant	selshobokshy	5	760	07/20/2005 17:48:17 by: asadiive
<input type="checkbox"/> When is the employving season?	GCHINESE	2	162	07/18/2005 13:52:24 by: Moderator
<input type="checkbox"/> Jobs for All - new government initiative	ralph	3	236	07/16/2005 10:03:48 by: Jim Davis
<input type="checkbox"/> Why it is hard to find work in Canada	user	3	508	07/16/2005 09:53:01 by: Deepakkumar
<input type="checkbox"/> Free Internet Access for job search	user	3	70	07/15/2005 07:34:24 by: Flver
<input type="checkbox"/> Visitor wants to get a job	eqd12	2	92	07/14/2005 14:11:39

Figure 2.2 Examples of Topics (members' questions) on Settlement.Org Discussion Board

3.3.3 Analysis of the Settlement.Org Website

The Settlement.Org website was examined carefully by the researcher, who created personalized notes for research purposes. A table for comparison was drafted to assist the researcher in breaking down the information found on the website. The basic structure of the website (i.e. category, topic and sub-topic) was then used to assess the description of the content, the intended audience, and the organizations involved in developing the content. The goal of this analysis was to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Settlement.Org website content

3.3.4 Analysis of the Settlement.Org Discussion Board

Given the extensive use made of the Settlement.Org Discussion Board by its members, the qualitative software program, NVivo, was employed to analyze the topics of discussion. NVivo assists researchers who are conducting qualitative studies by allowing them to store information about people and cases. With the program, researchers can code texts and apply attributes to data, which can then be analyzed more easily and efficiently.

The data that were chosen for the analysis included approximately two months of topics (questions submitted by members) and their corresponding replies from the discussion board. For each category, the subjects that contained at least five topics were analyzed. Only topics that contained replies from April 1, 2005 to June 17, 2005 were used for the research.

The analysis of the discussion board proved to be time consuming, as over 400 topics were collected as part of the data set (the Findings chapter will provide a more comprehensive breakdown of the data set). As well, each topic contained a range of replies, which expanded the scope of analysis even further. Furthermore, a slight drawback to NVivo is the inability to import HTML files, meaning that the researcher had to engage in one extra step before actually working with the data. The researcher had to copy each posting that was to be analyzed from the online discussion board, paste it into a Microsoft Word document without formatting, and save the file in Rich Text Format (RTF). Each RTF file represented one topic and its subsequent replies. Once each of these files were saved and organized in appropriate categories, the analysis could then be conducted.

To perform the analysis, the researcher read through each topic and its subsequent replies carefully, coding the messages with broad descriptors, which in NVivo, are called 'nodes'. An

iterative approach was taken, so the researcher revisited the threads of discussion at a later date. As the research progressed, the researcher amended the coding to be more specific, in addition to organizing the nodes into hierarchical categories. (See Appendices C and D for NVivo Coding Scheme and Coding View)

The activity on the discussion board provided an indication about the most frequently discussed topics. Further analysis with NVivo helped to establish commonalities in regards to the questions, feelings and experiences of newcomers who participate in the discussion board.

3.3.5 Other Relevant Documentation Used for the Study

In addition to the analysis of Settlement.Org and the Settlement.Org Discussion Board, the researcher also obtained other relevant documentation from OCASI staff, which included some results from the website's Visitor Survey, results from an evaluation study that was conducted for the website in the month of October 2004, Settlement.Org web statistics, as well as OCASI Annual Reports, Settlement.Org Annual Reports, project documentation and policy reports. The information that was provided to the researcher was reviewed for additional insights about Settlement.Org.

Settlement.Org Visitor Survey and Online Evaluation Results

Settlement.Org has an area of the website where users can provide feedback about their visit¹². The survey asks a few general background questions about the user, how s/he came to know about Settlement.Org, their uses of the website, frequency of visits, and any further feedback they may wish to comment on. This data proved useful for our understanding of how users come to Settlement.Org, what they use the website for, and their experience with using it.

In addition, a more comprehensive evaluation of Settlement.Org was conducted by OCASI staff in October 2004 using the service of Survey Monkey¹³. This survey delved into demographic information about participants, their uses of Settlement.Org and the Settlement.Org discussion board, the perceived quality of the information received, the uses of the information and services on the website, and feedback regarding possible improvements to the website. Again, the researcher was able to obtain this data from OCASI staff. Along with the Visitor

¹² http://www.settlement.org/website/OUTREACH/Outreach_Survey.asp.

¹³ <http://www.surveymonkey.com>

Survey page on the website, this evaluation was useful to compare with responses from the interviews, as well as the online questionnaires with Group 1.

Settlement.Org Web Statistics

In addition to the textual data from Settlement.Org, the researcher was also able to gain access to web statistics collected about the usage of the website for the year 2004. As an ongoing process, collecting web statistics provides data about the number of hits per month, the average number of sessions per day, the number of unique users per month, the most popular downloads, and so on.

OCASI Annual Reports, Settlement.Org Annual Reports, Project Documentation and Policy Reports

A series of OCASI Annual Reports and other documents, ranging from 1983 to 2004 were also examined. Reviewing such documentation was necessary to piece together the history of OCASI: how it first came into being, and how it has expanded and has developed over the years. Coupled with the interviews with Group 2, these documents helped the researcher to understand the historical underpinnings of the organization, its future directions, as well as implications for Settlement.Org.

3.4 Group 1: Newcomers Who Use Settlement.Org

The participants that have been selected for this study are newcomers who use the Settlement.Org website. 'Newcomers' will be used interchangeably with the term 'recent immigrants,' and both terms refer to anyone who has been in Canada for five years or less (Statistics Canada, 1997). Because the research involves the use of Settlement.Org, one assumption is that participants have enough familiarity with Internet technology to browse through the website. In addition, since the website is most comprehensive in English, and the research is conducted in English, another assumption is that participants will have at least a basic understanding of the English language.

To uncover Group 1's settlement experiences, information needs, and reflections on Settlement.Org, the researcher chose interviewing as a primary technique for the project. Patton (1990) asserts that interviews are useful because they allow the researcher to recognize aspects

that might not necessarily be observable. In other words, it was essential in this study to acquire the inner perspective of respondents such as how they think, feel and what their intentions and expectations are.

Prior to engaging in the research phase, the researcher sent an ethics protocol request to the Ethics Review Office on October 18, 2004, which was approved on November 1, 2004. As will be described later, the scope of the study was slightly altered to include an online questionnaire component for which the researcher submitted an amendment to the ethics approval. This amendment was granted on December 8, 2004.

3.4.1 Recruitment

Since the study involves newcomers who use the Settlement.Org website, participants were recruited through a website message that was posted on the Settlement.Org website, in the top portion of the discussion area after the ethics approval was granted. Starting on the third week of November 2004, a brief message was posted regarding the study, and users were encouraged to click through to the next page to find out more.

Upon clicking the message, users were provided with a more comprehensive explanation of the study, such as the purpose and objectives, as well as a description of their role in study. The message indicated that the research involved an interview that would run approximately 45-60 minutes. If users were interested in the study, they were asked to e-mail the researcher with basic contact information so that she could follow-up with them. (See Appendix A for the recruitment message.)

In addition to recruiting participants through the Settlement.Org website, the same message was advertised in Settlement.Org's monthly newsletter which is disseminated via an e-mail distribution list. Assistance was received from OCASI staff for the posting of the recruitment message on the Settlement.Org website, as well as the Settlement.Org newsletter.

3.4.2 Logistical Issues

Recruiting participants from Group 1 (newcomers who have used Settlement.Org) was a particularly difficult endeavour. On several occasions, the researcher received e-mails from users of Settlement.Org who asked for information or settlement advice – issues that were completely unrelated to the study. The researcher responded by reiterating the purpose of the study and redirected respondents to the Settlement.Org discussion board.

When the researcher received messages from users who were interested in the study, scheduling the interviews was conducted via e-mail. The location of the interviews was an issue that contributed to holding up the scheduling process. While the researcher had intended to conduct the interviews in one of two locations – either the OCASI office in central Toronto or the Faculty of Information Studies building at the University of Toronto – some respondents from Group 1 were limited in their ability to travel. As a result, the researcher ended up conducting interviews with respondents from Group 1 in the abovementioned locations, as well as in branches of the Toronto Public Library system, coffee shops, and by telephone based on their individual preferences. Due to these logistical limitations, a web version of the interview questions was also produced. Because some respondents who were interested in the study could not meet at all, the development of the web survey method was most welcome.

The duration of the interview with participants from Group 1 lasted approximately 45-80 minutes. Originally, the researcher intended to cap the interviews at 60 minutes; however, the respondents came rich with information and experiences, and were willing to express themselves for a longer period of time. The interviewer took notes while conducting the interview. As well, all interviews were recorded with a Sony Digital Recorder, and all digital files were kept on the researcher's personal, password-protected laptop computer.

3.4.3 Interview Format

Prior to the interviews with respondents from Group 1, the researcher developed an interview guide (see Appendix C) to facilitate the interviews. The researcher received feedback from her thesis supervisor and some OCASI staff who are involved with Settlement.Org for developing the guide. Once finalized, the interview guide was e-mailed to the respondents in Group 1 at least two days before the interview.

The interview guide consisted of questions that fell under five main themes. Part 1 involved asking background and demographic questions; Part 2 dealt with the respondent's settlement experience; Part 3 involved the respondent's information needs; Part 4 included questions about the respondent's use of the Settlement.Org website; finally, Part 5 included questions about the respondent's use of the Settlement.Org discussion board. Following these sections, a few concluding questions were asked.

The format of the interviews for Group 1 entailed a combination of directive and nondirective questions (Frey, et al., 1991). Demographic and background information, for example, was predominantly directive and closed, allowing for the researcher to ask quick, multiple choice questions, and limiting the answers to a few choices. Other sections included nondirective, open-ended questions, which allowed the user to elaborate on his/her experiences.

3.4.4 Analysis of Interviews with Newcomers

Transcription

The primary task that had to be conducted prior to analyzing the data collected from the interviews with newcomers who use the Settlement.Org website was transcription. As stated by Patton (1990), “because the raw data of interviews are quotations, the most desirable data to obtain would be full transcription of interviews” (p. 349). The time needed to transcribe one interview took an average of four hours, four times as long as the interview itself.

The transcription of the digital recordings of the interview was completed verbatim. Luckily, the researcher was assisted by a useful feature of Sony’s play-back software, which allowed the researcher to listen to the recording at different speeds. All identifying information about the respondents (i.e. their names) or other sensitive details was removed.

The act of transcribing provided an opportunity to revisit the interview and become reacquainted with each participant. As remarked by Tilley (2003), “[since] analysis and deeper understandings of the data occur during the act of transcribing, then it could be argued that researchers, whenever possible, transcribe research tapes themselves” (p. 770).

Analysis

After all the interviews were transcribed, the researcher developed a grid for comparison for the interview respondents. The grid, which showed each question and a synopsis of each participant’s response, gave the researcher a broad overview of the feedback solicited. The researcher was able to quickly select any question and see how each participant responded. Moreover, a number of themes and categories started to emerge, which is discussed in the Findings section (Chapter 4) of this document.

3.4.5 Presentation of Group 1 Interview Results

Character Sketches

The elaborate descriptions provided by newcomers about their experiences, information needs, and uses of Settlement.Org serve as valuable qualitative data, rich with opportunities for presentation. One of the ways that has been chosen to present the results of the interviews with Group 1 is the use of anonymous character sketches. Presented in the Findings section, the character sketches depict the experiences of newcomers and how Settlement.Org fits into their lives. In addition, to add to the study, quotations and testimonials from the findings of both the interviews and the online questionnaire will also be presented.

Chenail (1995) indicates that using character sketches is part of the Narrative Logic technique for presenting qualitative findings. These methods are very useful in showing the richness, breadth and depth of the data itself. "Data are arranged with an eye for storytelling. Researchers plot out the data in a fashion which allows them to transition from one exemplar to another, just as narrators arrange details in order to best relate the particulars of a story."

Thematic Presentation

Aside from providing vignettes and narratives, the findings have also been presented by clustering the data into themes. This is generally the most common technique to organize findings (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Results of interviews with Group 1 have been divided into key themes and described extensively, using results from the online questionnaire as support the data.

3.5 Group 1: Online Questionnaire Component

In early December 2004, the recruitment strategy needed to be revised, due in part to the low rates of response from Group 1. The need for an online questionnaire was evident by the requests received from potential participants, as well as logistical difficulties with regard to meeting times and places. An online questionnaire was more convenient for respondents in that they could respond at their convenience and at their own pace, without necessarily having to travel away from home. The researcher developed the online questionnaire by using the same questions as used in the interviews. The only slight alterations that were made included a brief lead-in sentence for each section of the questionnaire, to provide an indication of what point in the

survey the respondent was, and an introduction and conclusion were added. The online questionnaire added more flexibility to participants' involvement, allowing them to describe their experiences and answer research questions without having to meet the researcher in person. Once the ethics amendment was approved, the messages on the website and on the newsletter were updated to reflect the change.

3.5.1 Recruitment

The questionnaire host that was chosen was Advanced Survey¹⁴. After researching a number of free, online survey developers, it was found that Advanced Survey suited the research the most, as it allows for an unlimited number of questions to be asked, is anonymous, and is password-protected.

Once the questionnaire was developed and made available online, users were provided with a link to the Advanced Survey website from the recruitment messages on the Settlement.Org website, as well as on the Settlement.Org's newsletter, which had been changed accordingly. After being directed to the Advanced Survey website, participants were asked to submit the survey number, which was provided in the recruitment message, and take the survey. In the introduction message of the questionnaire, it was indicated that proceeding to the first question signified the users' consent to participate. However, the message also indicated to respondents that they could cease their participation in the questionnaire at any time.

3.5.2 Logistical Issues Resulting from the Online Questionnaire

While the Internet provides a flexible, innovative and low-cost way to collect data from participants, conducting online research poses a few significant challenges. Zhang (1999) outlines some of the problems associated with conducting online questionnaires, some of which have also surfaced in this study.

For example, online questionnaires carry a slight bias in returning results. Generally, respondents of online questionnaires tend to be those who have access to computer networks, who are technologically savvy, and who are comfortable in using the Internet well enough to participate. As well, "for web-based surveys, particularly, participants can easily submit their replies many times. Consequently, the overall results may overrepresent these respondents" (p.

¹⁴ <http://www.advancedsurvey.com>

59). Yet another difficulty is the lack of personalized responses and understanding of the surrounding contexts of web questionnaire participants. While in face-to-face meetings, the interviewer can probe for more details for better understanding, it is often quite difficult to do so when using the online method. Moreover, Zhang (1999) contends that it is also difficult to acquire personalized contact information from the respondents for further consultation. Finally, technical issues may prevent participants from completing the online questionnaire in an efficient fashion (Sax, Gilmartin and Bryant, 2003). Due to these constraints (and other problems, which have not been identified), the online questionnaire responses seemed to drop off significantly as the survey progressed.

Advanced Survey also posed a major problem in looking at the results. For all the closed questions (e.g. age, gender, length of stay in Canada, etc.), Advanced Survey compiles the responses into a percentage, which left a significant gap in knowing which respondent provided what response for a closed question. This has resulted in difficulties in analyzing the background/demographic data of the respondents. While it has been possible to infer some of the data, given the open responses of participants, the data collected from the online questionnaires are, unfortunately, not as complete as the researcher had hoped. This issue will be addressed again in the Findings section (Chapter 4) of this study.

3.5.3 Analysis of Online Questionnaire Responses

To analyze the data collected from the online questionnaire with newcomers, the researcher used the same grid for comparison that was developed for the interviews with newcomers. As previously mentioned, the online questionnaire did not allow for the viewing of individual responses for closed questions, and as a result, some of the cells in the grid for comparison have been left blank. However, the researcher was able to fill in some of the blanks by reviewing the subsequent open-ended responses. Still, the descriptive, open responses provided very useful data, and the researcher was able to compare the responses from each participant.

3.5.4 Presentation of Group 1 Online Questionnaire Results

As mentioned, the results from the online questionnaire have been used as supporting data in the thematic presentation of research results for Group 1 as a whole. The written responses from the online questionnaire participants are rich with details; thus, they reinforce ideas and themes that emerged from the face-to-face interviews with newcomers.

3.6 Group 2: OCASI Staff

In addition to newcomers who use Settlement.Org, other participants interviewed include OCASI staff members. These participants are valuable to the research for they are involved directly with the development of the website. These participants have been essential in providing information about the history of the website, its relationship to OCASI, the rationale and mandate for the website's existence.

3.6.1 Recruitment

Group 2 consisted of OCASI staff members who are involved directly with the development or daily operations and administration of Settlement.Org. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher spent several afternoons through a two-month period observing the organizational culture at the OCASI office, reviewing documents, informally discussing the study, and becoming acquainted with some of the staff.

Recruitment for the study of Group 2 members was therefore very straightforward. The researcher knew exactly who was involved with Settlement.Org, and spoke to these individuals about the study. Dates and times for the interviews were easy to arrange through in-person consultation, with confirmation via e-mail. The researcher also used e-mail to provide participants with a general overview of questions that would be asked.

Given the complex history of OCASI, the development of Settlement.Org, and initiatives and issues related to the immigration and settlement sector, interviewing OCASI staff members was seen as an essential part of the research. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive documentation regarding the history of OCASI and the Settlement.Org posed some challenges to the study. Therefore, the feedback obtained from OCASI staff members was integral to the research and helped fill in the gaps in OCASI's institutional memory.

3.6.2 Logistical Issues

There were no major logistical challenges in terms of interviewing participants from Group 2. All interviews were held at the OCASI office at a date and time that was suitable for the respondents and the researcher. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45-60 minutes. Again, the researcher digitally recorded the interviews and took notes while the respondents spoke.

3.6.3 Interview Format

Semi-structured interviews were used for investigating the experiences of members in Group 2. Particularly, the researcher wanted to know the background of the respondents and the roles that they played in the historical development of OCASI and Settlement.Org. Similar to the interviews with newcomers, these interviews were also digitally recorded. Having some existing knowledge of the respondents' roles, the researcher also delved into questions that were more specific to their situation (e.g. when the moderator of the discussion board was asked questions that more thoroughly involved this resource).

3.6.4 Analysis and Presentation of Group 2 Interview Results

As with the interviews with newcomers of Settlement.Org, the interviews with Group 2 (OCASI staff) were transcribed manually by the researcher. The analysis involved examining core themes that were shared by each respondent in Group 2, yet also involved an in-depth look at each respondent's specific duties and expertise regarding Settlement.Org. In general, the analysis involved examining the organizational aspects that governed, constrained, or provided opportunities for Settlement.Org.

The findings from Group 2's interviews have been utilized for development of the institutional history of OCASI, as well as the history of Settlement.Org, both which are found in the Literature Review chapter at the beginning of this work. As well, a brief description, summarizing the interviews with Group 2 has been included in the Findings chapter (Chapter 4) of this document.

3.7 Group 3: Government Partners and External Consultants

The third group of interviewees included individuals who were involved with the development of Settlement.Org, but are who not OCASI staff members. Such individuals are either government partners or external consultants.

3.7.1 Recruitment

To gain familiarity with respondents from Group 3, the researcher requested input from OCASI staff in terms of who such key figures were. These individuals were informally advised about the research study through communication with OCASI staff members. Subsequently, the researcher

drafted and sent an e-mail to these individuals, indicating the purpose and objectives of the study, the participants' involvement, and anticipated outcomes of the study.

Interviewing government partners and external consultants was a means of adding value to the understanding of the historical, current and future developments of OCASI and the Settlement.Org website. These meetings were to complement the interviews from Group 2 and provide the researcher with a better understanding of the historical underpinnings for the study.

3.7.2 Logistical Issues

Interviews with Group 3 came with a different set of logistical challenges. All respondents in the group held fairly senior positions in their professions, and thus, their time was limited.

The duration of the interviews with participants in Group 3 lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Again, the researcher recorded the interviews and took notes during the meeting. Prior to the sessions, the researcher e-mailed the respondents with a general briefing of what the interviews would entail.

3.7.3 Interview Format

An interview guide was developed for respondents in Group 3. Similar to the interviews with Group 2 (OCASI staff members), interviews with Group 3 took a semi-structured approach. After the first interview with a respondent from this group, the researcher quickly came to realize that each respondent had a different experience with OCASI and Settlement.Org. Some respondents were involved in the establishment of OCASI as an organization, while others mainly dealt with the Settlement.Org website; some of them continue to be involved with OCASI and Settlement.Org, while others' participation is very minimal. Respondents were able to speak extensively about their experiences with OCASI and the Settlement.Org website.

3.7.4 Analysis and Presentation of Group 3 Interview Results

Along with the interviews with Group 2, the interviews with government partners and external consultants served as a basis for the Literature Review chapter and have provided an external perspective about OCASI's mandate and mission, along with the initial development and rise of Settlement.Org

3.8 Validity and Trustworthiness of Data

The research was designed to incorporate triangulation in order to achieve validity and trustworthiness. According to Maxwell (1996), triangulation refers to “collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods” (p. 93). Simply relying on one method brings a threat to validity as the research risks systematic bias and exclusivity.

In this study, using the various methods of data collection, and reviewing a variety of documents associated with OCASI and Settlement.Org provided a more holistic approach to the study. Indeed, if the study had incorporated only interviews with newcomers, the research would likely have been limited. By incorporating a mixture of data, sources and techniques, the findings reveal a broader picture. By complementing the face-to-face interviews with online questionnaires, and by interviewing a broader range of subjects (newcomers, OCASI staff members, policymakers and consultants), a richer and more detailed understanding of the issues is achieved.

When crafting the history of OCASI and Settlement.Org, the researcher ensured that feedback was received from OCASI staff. Because of the multiple interviews conducted to develop these descriptions, it was important to verify that the information presented was accurate.

In fact, throughout the research process, while being mindful of their potential biases, consultations were also held with OCASI staff so that the researcher could receive comments and feedback. Moreover, the researcher had frequent and consistent meetings with her academic supervisor to discuss the progress and issues related to the research. Again, as indicated by Maxwell (1996), getting feedback from others is useful to identify one’s own biases and assumptions, in addition to verifying the logic of the methodology used.

A lot of care was put into the wording of the interviews and online questionnaire. The use of interview guides and semi-structured questions was useful in ensuring that participants were all asked the same questions and thus provided a set of comparable data. The completeness of the data has been ensured by the recordings of the interviews with newcomers, as well as OCASI staff members, government partners and external consultants, in addition to the verbatim transcriptions. The researcher can go back to these sources at any time to verify responses received from the interviews.

As mentioned, a threat to the validity of the online questionnaire data includes the results of close-ended questions, which have been combined to form a percentage result. However, given the emphasis on the open-ended responses, this threat has had minimal impact on the research as a whole.

3.9 Limitations of the Methodology

There were some challenges that arose while conducting the study. These involved the user-friendliness of software and tools such as the online questionnaire and NVivo. Another challenge was to secure enough respondents from Group 1 (newcomers who use, or have used the Settlement.Org site). At the conclusion of the data gathering phase, the researcher had conducted seven in-person interviews with newcomers, and had complete responses from eight participants in the online questionnaire.

Due to the small sample, results cannot be generalized to the larger population. However, they offer a wealth of qualitative data. Much of this study has been centred on gathering information about the experiences, feelings and needs of newcomers upon arriving in Canada; thus, testimonials, stories, and quotes from the respondents constitute the core of the study. In the subsequent “Findings” chapter, the seven newcomers who were interviewed personally by the researcher will serve as a basis for the vignettes, while responses from the online questionnaire will be used to corroborate the results. Common themes that have emerged from the research will also be provided. The findings from the discussion board analysis reinforce and add to the findings.

The researcher has been attentive to the fact that the methodology used in this study involves the non-probability technique of quota sampling. As indicated by Jackson (1999), “in a quota sample, respondents are selected on the basis of meeting certain criteria” (p. 385). The criteria used for this study included participants who first, know about and use (or have used) the Settlement.Org website, and secondly, have a proficiency with the English language that would allow them to use the website and to participate in the study. As a result, while the research has explored the experiences of a certain type of Settlement.Org user, future endeavours might bring forth questions about non-users of the website, or users who fall outside of the set criteria.

Regarding language, it was also recognized that a majority, if not all respondents would likely have a mother tongue, or commonly speak a language, that is not English. Therefore, the

researcher paid special attention to the use of English by participants to describe their experiences. Moreover, the researcher strived to remain neutral, following the interview guide and asking questions that were relevant to the study, rather than offering opinions and imposing her views.

Finally, the methodology that was used for this study was carried out in several phases. The following chart provides a snapshot of the activities taken to complete the study, starting from October 2004 and ending in July 2005, keeping in mind the iterative nature of the research process.

Activity	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July
Prepare Ethics Protocol	→									
Prepare interview guide	→	→								
Gather and review documents from OCASI		→	→	→				→		
Spend time at OCASI office		→	→	→						
Interviews with Group 1 – newcomers		→	→	→						
Interviews with Group 2 – OCASI staff			→							
Interviews with Group 3 – Government Partners and external consultants			→	→						
Prepare and administer online questionnaire			→	→	→	→				
Transcribe interviews					→	→	→			
Analyze data from interviews							→	→	→	
Analyze discussion forum									→	→
Write-up of thesis									→	→

Table 1: Overview of Time Period of Study and Activities Conducted

4. FINDINGS

The following chapter presents a detailed overview of the findings from the data collected. At the conclusion of the data gathering phase, the researcher conducted personal interviews with seven participants from Group 1 (newcomers who use Settlement.Org), three members from Group 2 (OCASI staff), and four interviews with members from Group 3 (government partners and external consultants). In addition, eight semi-completed questionnaires were collected from members from Group 1.

Given that the study is predominantly qualitative in nature, the researcher has chosen the stories of newcomers as the crux of the write-up. This is simply one of many techniques that can be used in a qualitative study. Sandelowski (1998) emphasizes this point, stating, "Qualitative researchers must choose which story, of the many stories available to them in a data set, to tell in a given article or book chapter" (p. 376). At the outset of the study, it was indicated that the main goals of the research were to explore how the process of settlement is influenced by newcomers' information needs, their use of Settlement.Org, and their involvement on the website via the discussion board. Therefore, it is necessary to present the findings according to newcomers' views, emphasizing their situations and feelings, and re-presenting their accounts accurately (Sandelowski, 1998).

The findings will be divided into four sections. First, a description of the participants from Group 1 will be provided. This group is described elaborately through the use of character sketches, based on the seven personal interviews conducted. The sketches will present the different sections of the interview (background of the respondents, settlement experiences, information needs, use of the Settlement.Org website, and use of the discussion board).

Second, common themes that have emerged from responses of Group 1 will be presented. Responses from the in-person interviews will be used as the basis of the thematic presentation, while the online questionnaire results will corroborate these accounts. Again, themes will be presented according to the structure of the interview.

Third, Groups 2 and 3 – OCASI staff and government partners and external consultants, respectively, will be described generally, as their contributions to the study have been more prevalent in the crafting of the institutional history of OCASI, as well as telling the story of Settlement.Org's development.

Finally, a separate section will be devoted to detailing findings from the discussion board analysis. While themes from the interviews and online questionnaire will likely emerge, the discussion board findings will reveal the nature of interaction between members of the forum. More specifically, these findings will provide an indication of what questions users ask, along with how they respond to one another, how they share information, and how they reflect using the discussion board.

4.1 Character Sketches

To present findings about the disposition of several Settlement.Org users, character sketches will be employed. According to Chenail (1995), this technique is useful to relate a particular story, which in the case of this study, is the story of newcomers. Moreover, the following sketches may also be considered a series of realist tales, which Glesne and Peshkin (1992) describe as documenting in detail, the lives of people and carefully selecting and editing quotations to portray their points of view (p. 162).

For each character sketch, the following information will be presented: 1) background information about the individual; 2) a description of the individual's settlement experience; 3) an indication of information needs (as perceived by the individual); and 4) a report on the individual's experience with Settlement.Org.

4.1.1 Mr. A

Background

Mr. A, a man in his mid-40s, recently moved to Canada with his wife and eight-year-old son from the former Yugoslavia. He is a Permanent Resident who has lived in Canada for two years in the Greater Toronto Area. Mr. A also has an eighteen-year old son who still lives overseas; this son is from a previous marriage.

In speaking about himself, Mr. A likes to refer to himself as Yugoslav, regardless of the fact that the nation no longer exists. He most often speaks Serbo-Croatian, the language that he first learned at home. Besides this language and English, he can also understand Russian, Slovakian, Bosnian and Croatian – all which are very similar. In school, Mr. A was taught Russian, and throughout his adult life, he has been improving his English. Particularly, he has said that using the Internet has helped him in reading and writing, but he chuckles that his conversation skills are not as advanced since he spends most of his time on the computer without

anyone to talk to. However, the ESL classes that he took after having first arrived in Toronto were helpful, along with his co-operative education program and now his work.

Moreover, Mr. A considers himself a heavy computer and Internet user. He says that he has been using computers ever since they first appeared in the early 1980s, and he relies on the Internet to get any type of information. He jokes that he would not know what he would do without the computer. Mr. A's preferred website for information searching is Google, but he also uses web-based e-mail extensively and often reads news about his former country. Mr. A also likes to search the Internet for movies, and interest-related news and articles. As well, he looks for online resources to help educate his son.

Settlement Experience

When asked about his reasons for coming to Canada, Mr. A says, "actually, I think Canada is one of the best countries for living. After all the problems in my country, I decided to move somewhere." His brother and mother have also lived in Canada for about 10 years, so he has had a chance to visit Canada and become acquainted with the Canadian way of life. In fact, he had stayed in Canada for about a year and a half with a tourist visa, and after that, he was "absolutely sure" that he wanted to come.

Because of his initial visit and familiarity with Canada, Mr. A feels that his settlement experience has been quite satisfying. He cannot think of any difficulties or major problems in adapting to Canadian life. He stresses that he had a lot of information and a lot of assistance when he first arrived. For example, his brother had already arranged for Mr. A and his family to live in an apartment close by. He also helped them in finding local grocery stores, banks and the required amenities. Mr. A has also depended on information from the Internet to further his knowledge of Canada. With such a positive experience, Mr. A is happy that despite the major change in their lives, they have adjusted well to living in Canada.

Currently, Mr. A works as a research assistant for a multi-sector project, which involves government, academia and community organizations. He works both full- and part-time hours, but lately, he has been busy. Mr. A acquired this occupation through a government-sponsored cooperative education program, which helps immigrants become familiarized with the Canadian workforce by providing workshops and then creates placements for voluntary work. After the three-month placement with his employer, Mr. A was then hired as a research assistant. He also

remarks that he met many friends through this co-op program and in general, the program was successful in helping others gain employment.

One day, though, Mr. A would like to go back to his chosen profession. Prior to coming to Canada, he was a psychologist for approximately 20 years. He dealt mainly with patients who had mental health issues, and so if he were to work again in this profession in Canada, he would like to pursue the same career, perhaps even with patients who are immigrants. However, Mr. A seems very patient with his employment situation, and he knows that he will have to upgrade his skills to go back to being a psychologist. He says that it just takes time.

I know I need to finish my Masters here, and then probably [get a] licence. Then, I will be able to work as a counsellor. Because I don't want to abandon my experience. I think I have a really precious experience, 20 years experience in that field, and I don't like to change that or abandon it.

Mr. A also recalls some of his friends' disappointments in finding employment, and he thinks that newcomers perhaps have very high expectations that possibly cannot be met. This is why he has kept an open mind and has been patient.

In terms of his social life, Mr. A is also very happy. Besides the friends from the co-op program, Mr. A was also reacquainted with a former colleague from Yugoslavia in Toronto, and as mentioned, he had previously visited Canada, so he had friends and family who were already here when he and his family came.

Information Needs

Mr. A says that he needed all sorts of information to prepare himself for coming to Canada. He used the Internet heavily, especially Google, to research information about his occupation – what he could expect when coming here, how he could work in his field, and so on. His former colleague, who now lives in Toronto, also gave him advice and information. At the time of the study, Mr. A was looking for information about how to bring his older son, who was still overseas, to Canada. “He’s in Yugoslavia now and next year he will finish secondary school and we would like to bring him to study here. So I must know all conditions I must meet to bring him here.”

Mr. A says that he watches television and reads the newspaper, but when asked to choose between those types of media and the Internet, he chooses the Internet. Not only is it a resource that is full of information, but also, it is an excellent communication tool. He says, “we left our

old computer to my wife's parents and she is talking with them every day. Her mother has 74 years and she is using the computer and programs for communication. That's really great!" Overall, Mr. A trusts sources from the Internet, particularly government or official websites. He does not find the need to visit any organization or agency because he feels he can find the information online, not to mention that he is very confident in his Internet and information searching skills. As a result, he has rarely experienced problems in finding the information that he needs.

Settlement.Org

Mr A. did not know about Settlement.Org when he first started to search for information about Canada. It was not until he searched on Google that he came upon the site. In the beginning, Mr. A used Settlement.Org extensively to search for anything he could think of. Now, he says he uses the site when he receives the Settlement.Org newsletter, and when he needs to look up information. Predominantly, Mr. A uses Settlement.Org on an as-needed basis.

In evaluating Settlement.Org, Mr. A contends that the home page simply has too much information. He would like the site to incorporate techniques such as Flash and Java, and perhaps incorporate interesting graphics or video on the home page. He says, "too much information in one place is sometimes counterproductive."

Regardless of the aesthetics of the site, Mr. A finds Settlement.Org, as a whole, very useful. "I like that I can find there anything I need to know about ... And that's why I think this site is really great and really, really helpful for newcomers. They need something like that – one place where they will be able to find all answers to their questions." He cannot say which topic in particular has helped him the most because all have been useful.

When asked about possible improvements to the site, Mr. A refers back to the aesthetics. He thinks that Settlement.Org should be trendy and flashy. He believes that making the site more dynamic will attract a greater number of users. He says that he currently is looking for ways to improve the look of his own workplace's web page, and the goal is to make it more impressive in terms of its look and feel. He would like to see Settlement.Org do something similar.

In terms of content, Mr. A reflects on some of his friends' experiences in coming to Canada. He says that many of them were disappointed because they did not know what to expect. He thinks that Settlement.Org should add a section on information for people who are thinking

about coming to Canada, perhaps in cooperation with embassies overseas, or any organizations that help potential immigrants. “They will know in advance what they can expect and then can decide if they will go or not. But if they decide to come, they will know exactly what they can expect and won’t be disappointed.”

Having English as the primary language for Settlement.Org does not seem to affect Mr. A. He finds the level of language suitable, and has no problems with the language. Also, he has used the search function and is satisfied with the results that are returned. The organization of the site is also satisfactory, but again, he says that information should be reduced in some way, particularly on the home page. In addition, Mr. A believes that the site should aim to provide direct and specific information, perhaps a step-by-step guide for some topics and a concrete answer.

Mr. A says he quite enjoys browsing through the topics on at the Settlement.Org discussion board to see other people’s experiences. Even though he has not set up his own membership to the discussion function, he finds the forum extremely useful. He thinks that sharing experiences is important.

Moreover, beyond the discussion function, Mr. A thinks that being able to chat with an information specialist would be extremely useful. In fact, he thinks that being able to provide counselling services via online chat seems quite promising.

I think it’s actually the future of counselling. It’s more easier; of course face-to-face is better, but sometimes many people will like to have distance. They can be anonymous and some of them might like it. So in this case, they can be absolutely anonymous, and on the other hand, they will have some real person on the other side to answer their question

He reflects on the effectiveness of his former occupation as a psychologist – one time, he had to use the Internet to communicate with a patient and he found it very effective.

Finally, in speaking of the moderated function of the discussion board, Mr. A states, “I saw some questions, they are asking for some websites or something like that. People can do that by themselves. But some of them, they do not know it, or they want a closer relationship, personal relationship – on that way, they are usually disappointed.” Therefore, he believes that incorporating a chat function would allow users to receive personalized assistance in answering their questions, rather than simply referring them to other sources that they must browse by themselves.

4.1.2 Mr. B

Background

Mr. B is a married man who is between the ages of 31-40. He moved to Canada from South America with his wife and child approximately one year ago and now lives in a suburb in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Mr. B identifies himself as Hispanic or Latin American, and he most often speaks Spanish and English (at home and work, respectively). He has taken French lessons, but is not comfortable enough to hold a conversation in it. It was in school that he learned English, but he says that now, his work, and everyday experiences help him improve. Moreover, he presently takes English lessons at a local college.

The level of study that Mr. B has completed is a Master of Business Administration from Mexico. Prior to arriving in Canada, he was a systems manager so he is very familiar with computers and Internet technology. He has been using a computer for close to ten years, and is a frequent user of the Internet. Some of the activities Mr. B engages in include e-mail, reading news about Mexico, looking for employment information, and the various types of services he and his family can receive in Canada.

Settlement Experience

Mr. B chose to come to Canada to improve his family's standard of life. He has found that the people, land and weather are what he expected, but he has experienced difficulties in relation to his career. He believes that employers' expectations of language skills are very high. In explaining this belief, Mr. A states,

The truth is that the employer wants people who speak English very well, and it's... I think it's very hard to have a good level of English. You can communicate good with another person, but they want someone with a very good English level. I think they are very demanding in what they expect from us – the people that comes to Canada.

Aside from this problem, Mr. B also says that he does not think immigrants are taken seriously, particularly when they are trying to find a job. He says that he would have liked more assistance in securing the appropriate employment, and thinks his experience in coming to Canada could have been easier because of this.

In terms of lifestyle and social experiences, Mr. B says that he does not have any favourite memories of Canada so far. He does feel comfortable here though, and his son's first birthday was spent in Canada. He describes himself as not too social, but his wife has a few friends.

Mr. B is currently a telemarketer. As mentioned, he was once a systems manager so being a telemarketer is "not really" his chosen profession. He found the job by searching on the Internet. Also, Mr. B takes English lessons at a local college because he believes it is very important for his professional experience. He knows that it is a slow process to improve one's linguistic abilities, yet sometimes he is impatient. Overall though, he seems happy and jokes that he hopes he can claim the English classes on his tax report.

Information Needs

In thinking about the types of information Mr. B needed when coming to Canada, he says, "well I need a lot of information. As you can think, it's a big, big change in your life." Particularly, he notes that he needed information about where to live – for example, maps of Toronto, neighbourhood and community information. In addition, he needed to find information about employment. He says that he researched all this information in English because Spanish sources were not thorough enough and mostly dealt with tourism. Mr. B believes that local information sources all come in English anyway. At the present time, Mr. B is looking for information that is relevant to his English course, education and employment situation.

In addition to using the Internet to find information, Mr. B also indicates that when he first came to Canada, he visited the a community centre in the Greater Toronto Area. There he met a person who spoke Spanish, and who helped him find English classes, as well as an immigration lawyer. In addition, he uses the television to watch local Spanish programs, and he reads the Toronto Star on Saturdays. He mentions that his wife also has a colleague from Guatemala, and they converse extensively about immigration issues and their feelings. However, he says that he does not have many friends.

Mr. B believes that the most useful feature of the Internet is the abundance of information. He trusts sites that are specific and that are credible (e.g. University of Toronto). The problems that he has encountered in finding information online mainly include the timeliness of the sources. In general though, he finds the Internet very reliable.

Settlement.Org

It was during his first visit to the Canadian embassy in Mexico that Mr. B came to know about Settlement.Org. He saw a small poster for the site when he was there. Mr. B says he was surprised. "I know that Canadian government has an open immigrant policy, but I never think that those exist some kind of support for immigration." As soon as he was home, he looked at the site and was "amazed" with all the information.

Mr. B's current use of Settlement.Org entails visiting two or three times a month. However, when he was preparing to come to Canada, he used it everyday. In particular, he says that information about the Ontario driver's licence was needed, in addition to the process of immigrating, and deciding whether he should hire an immigration consultant or field the process himself. From Settlement.Org, Mr. B has downloaded the booklet for newcomers to Canada, in addition to a list of local agencies, and tax information. He also finds it useful that the site provides both a basic orientation to the information and the ability for users to delve more deeply by clicking through the links.

In describing what he likes best about Settlement.Org Mr. B says that it is easy to navigate, particularly with the main topics on the left navigation bar. Therefore, it is easy to know what kinds of information are offered on the site. However, he suggests that Settlement.Org should be more specific. For example, when he and his family first came to Canada, he needed to find a family doctor; however, he did not know which doctors were accepting new patients. When he finally found a doctor, it was difficult to communicate with him and he felt that the doctor did not care about his health. Mr. B says that perhaps knowing doctors who spoke Spanish would have also been helpful.

Mr. B also states that he had difficulty in insuring his car. He wonders if there are any specific groups of brokers who assist immigrants. He reflects back on his experience in trying to get insurance:

When I went to the transportation [office] to ask for my licence, I show them my licence in Mexico and they say, 'okay, you have special treatment because you already drive in Mexico,' and they recognized my experience as a driver. But when I go to the insurance broker, they told me, 'no, you only have three months with your G card and we cannot give your insurance policy.' Why not if the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario say I have a lot of experience to drive a

car, why not you recognize this experience? Okay, I will give you a policy, a very expensive policy. I think that this is very discriminating.

Thinking about this difficulty, Mr. B believes that Settlement.Org could do more than provide basic information. He believes that the site should work with the government and community organizations and private companies to develop specific information resources and services for newcomers. For example, Mr. B suggests that providing a list of financial institutions that grant credit cards to newcomers would be useful. If no such service exists, then Mr. B believes that Settlement.Org can advocate with other organizations for this service to help newcomers. “The problem is that I think they [the government and Settlement.Org] are not working with Canadian society to show that newcomers are coming, we are educated person, we have good reputation like drivers...” In essence, Mr. B wants more action generated from Settlement.Org to guide and assist newcomers to Canada.

In reflecting on the language used on the site, Mr. B has no difficulty with English. He says, however, that the site could always improve by providing more information in Spanish. He does realize that it would be a lot of work, but suggests translating the most important things, such as health and tax information. Mr. B also indicates that the visual aspects of the site could be improved on, but he is aware that it may hinder the loading speed of the site. Mr. B finds the navigation of the site to be very easy. He rarely uses the search function, and instead clicks on links.

When asked about the use of the discussion board on Settlement.Org, Mr. B says that he does not use it. He simply feels that he does not need to. He knows of other people who use the Settlement.Org site, but he does not know if they use the discussion board.

Overall, Mr. B likes to use Settlement.Org as he finds it very useful. He says, “I think it is the best source for information for the people that are coming to Canada. I think that there is not another site, another sort of information so useful to someone. I think it is the only one, and I don’t know another one.” He reiterates his belief that Settlement.Org has a lot of negotiation power to help newcomers. Again, he refers back to the examples he provided about doctors, insurance and banks.

4.1.3 Ms. C

Background

Ms. C is a divorcee in between the ages of 51-60. She came to Canada about four years ago from the Middle East. Her current status is that of a permanent resident and she lives in a suburb in the Greater Toronto Area. Ms. C says that she should probably apply for Canadian citizenship because she is eligible to do so.

Ms. C identifies herself as South Asian or East Indian, and she most often speaks English. However, when she was growing up, her household was filled with English, Hindi and Punjabi. She gained more formal training in the English language in school and it has been the main language she has used in her career.

Having completed her college education, Ms. C now works as a full time office manager and assistant for an academic department at a university. She has access to a computer and Internet connection both at home and at work, and she classifies herself as a heavy computer user. Ms. C uses the computer for a variety of activities, particularly for work, e-mail, shopping, chatting and for personal interests. She says that she would feel very lost without the computer. For the most part, Ms. C uses the computer on an as-needed basis. She says,

Well, usually, if I need to find out anything, I just go to the computer. Any kind of information that I want, any type of reference that I want. Like if I want to book air tickets I go in there; if I want theatre tickets I go in there, if I want to see if any books are available I go in there. There are various websites who email me stuff everyday. Like I can do my, you can say, morning meditation. My daily biblical readings, and they all come in through the Internet, through the e-mail. I use it a lot. I chat with my family instead of using the phone, and stuff like that. I'm a heavy user. You can say that.

Some of the sites that Ms. C visits most often are her workplace's website, BeliefNet and Google.

Settlement Experience

Ms. C says that she came to Canada because she wanted to continue working, but in a different place than where she lived in the Middle East. She finds Canada a good mix of the United Kingdom and the United States, not to mention that she had visited many times before and likes the country. She also has a relative who lives in Toronto, so she thought it would be a good place to move to.

The Canadian society, landscape and openness are what Ms. C had originally expected, however, in terms of her work experience Ms. C says that she is extremely disillusioned. She

says that when she applied to come to Canada, her life was examined intensely, and finally, she was given the impression that she was qualified to work in Canada. However, even though she says she is comparatively luckier than other newcomers she knows, she worked very low-paying, low-level clerical jobs. Having been a senior administrator at an international bank, she says that this has been upsetting.

Because my first job, when I went into it, everyone treated me as, 'oh she's new, she doesn't know anything.' All my thirty years of administrative experience were not at all considered. Just because I was new, I just had to, you know, start from scratch. When I started applying for permanent positions, they wouldn't look at the experience, the wealth of experience that I had. I mean, they kept on saying Canadian experience, and I thought, 'I have international experience, you know. I could teach you a couple of things instead.' You know?

Ms. C says that she was lucky to get a temporary position with the university, and has worked there for the past few years. Even though the job is not challenging enough, she enjoys the fact that she is treated with respect and she is happy in the work environment. She also comments on her friends' situation, saying, "I know a whole lot of friends who are much more highly qualified than me, they have had to haul cartons and be garbage collectors and stuff like that, even though they are engineers and things like that. It's a little upsetting."

Socially, though, Ms. C is very happy. She has made many friends and is quite active in her community. She is a board member and volunteer at a community agency that helps many newcomers to Canada, and she has joined a church, which keeps her busy as well. She has had no problems adjusting to the social aspects of Canadian life, and she says that enjoys the multiculturalism that exists in Toronto. She states:

I like Canada. I've met some very nice people here. I've been fortunate to settle down in East York, in a community which has accepted me for who I am, not what my nationality is, or what my job is, but who I am as a person, and I'm happy to have had an opportunity to be on this board as a volunteer member and help out people who you know, need help.

Information Needs

In thinking about the information she needed when she first arrived in Canada, Ms. C says that she simply would have liked to know where to go. For example, initially she wanted to print her CV somewhere, but had no idea where. She eventually went to the public library and was informed about an employment centre for people who are older. She states that she had no idea, and does not think these resources are made available to new immigrants enough. If she had

known about this employment centre, then she would have saved herself a lot of trouble. In addition, she would have liked to receive relevant information and resources from someone in her local neighbourhood when she landed.

Ms. C also refers to skilled immigrants who lack access to information and resources, and therefore become disappointed. “We are the people who really get messed up out here. You know, people who come in from refugees, they are very happy because they are coming from worse conditions. We are not coming from worse conditions. We come in by choice.”

In terms of her current information needs, Ms. C says that she looks for information that might be relevant to any other newcomers who go to her community organization. At the time of the study, she did not have any pressing information needs for herself.

As already mentioned, Ms. C is a heavy Internet user, but she also listens to radio and watches television. In addition, she likes to speak with friends to exchange advice and opinions. She would trust the Internet the most though, as long as the information was up to date. She believes that the Internet would provide more specific information than the radio or television. The difficulty is the reliability of the information; in particular, currency is sometimes an issue with online resources. Also, when searching on websites, it is easy become distracted from the original intent of the information due to the amount of information offered online.

Settlement.Org

Ms. C became aware of the Settlement.Org website through her friend. She uses the site mainly to look for information for others; thus, she plays what is known as the ‘gatekeeper’ role. She subscribes to the newsletter and browses through the website when she receives the notices. She also uses the site on an as-needed basis. She tends to bookmark the information that she finds useful, either for herself or for her volunteer work to help other newcomers.

Ms. C is seems satisfied with all aspects of the site. She has used the site extensively to look for information on behalf of others. Topics and features that she found particularly useful include information for teachers who have arrived in Ontario, legal resources and assistance for coping with stress in the immigration process. Overall, Ms. C believes that the value of Settlement.Org lies in the fact that it consolidates information onto one platform. “[Newcomers] don’t have to go running around to other, you know, to different organizations. They can just

find it there. It's like a portal for different organizations, because you have links to other websites, so it's a good thing."

Reflecting on her experience, Ms. C wishes she had known about, or had something like Settlement.Org before she came to Canada. By the time she came to know about the website, she says she had pretty much adjusted to Canadian life. However, she continues to use it to help others. She has passed on the site to her immigration lawyer, who also did not know about it. Moreover, Ms. C has recommended Settlement.Org to many of her friends who plan on coming to Canada. Because of her experiences, Ms. C suggests that Settlement.Org be part of the immigration procedure. "Before I came to Canada, I got this little package from the immigration in Canada, they gave you a book in Canada – very basic information. Maybe you can mention that you're there. That would be nice."

4.1.4 Mr. D

Background

Mr. D is a man between the ages of 51-60 who has lived in Canada for two and a half years as a permanent resident. He, his wife, and three sons came to Canada from South Asia and they now live in a suburb in the GTA.

Mr. D describes himself and his family as Pushtoon, which is also his mother tongue. However, the rest of his family can only communicate verbally in this language, while he can read, write and speak. The other language that his family can speak is Urdu, since it is widely used in the region that they are from. Mr. D also comments that the English lessons are a main component of the secondary and post-secondary education system. Presently, Mr. D is not working; however, he is taking the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes. In addition, Mr. D has completed a Masters of Science and Agriculture overseas.

Mr. D has not been using the computer for many years. It was during the first quarter of 2002 that he started using the computer and the Internet to find information. Now, he uses the computer at home and at the school where he takes LINC classes. Generally, he uses the Internet to find information on topics such as education, employment and news. He also uses web-based e-mail extensively. Among the sites he visits the most, Mr. D mentions Hotmail, Yahoo!, and Settlement.Org.

Settlement Experience

When asked about why he came to Canada, Mr. D states that the decision was made to improve the lives of his children, particularly for acquiring a better education experience. He also adds that he enjoys the liberal society of Canada. He finds that people in Canada are very nice and friendly, but he was expecting that the area would be cleaner, which it is not.

The main difficulty that Mr. D had when he first arrived in Canada was finding accommodation. He states,

My friend rented out some place for me in a hotel and on my arrival I checked in there. I felt no problem, but I was thinking that if I had no friends in Canada it would be very difficult for me. How to, after going out from immigration and custom, where would I go? This was my first impression to note. Then there was another friend who arranged for me the renting out of apartment, so they ask me about my job letters, they asked me about whom I know, so it was really embarrassing and really difficult. Also, my friend guaranteed, because he was employed, so he guaranteed my stay here until the time I got my own employment or my son was on the job.

Moreover, Mr. D says that it would have been nice to have assistance upon arrival at the airport – someone to answer questions and to direct newcomers to the appropriate information and services. Mr. D says that perhaps even providing a place to stay for newcomers would be helpful because lodging at a hotel is quite expensive.

During the interview, Mr. D emphasizes and reiterates the great financial costs associated with of initially arriving.

Whatever I brought, that was spent very rapidly, to convert my own currency to Canadian, and really I couldn't know how I could have spent it. I landed on 30th of April, 3 or 4 p.m., and after custom and immigration, and when we visit to the hotel. The next day we started searching at the realty agents at realty store, so this was the first job on the first day. So when we shifted to the other place, we just search some places in the garbage, we found a mattress, and I brought one carpet with me, and I brought some pillows with me also.

Mr. D also states that if it he did not have the help from his friend (who actually resided outside of Toronto), the conditions would have been worse.

When speaking of his professional experience, Mr. D talks about how he and his two older sons went out to look for employment. He found a job in a factory, one son found work in a meat factory, and the other found work as a dishwasher in a hotel. They all felt quite

discouraged. "Everyone tell us we had to do these jobs, because there are no opportunities for the white collar jobs." Eventually, they decided that he and his eldest son should continue working full-time while his two younger sons continue with education in Canada while working part-time. Furthermore, Mr. D's job in the factory was extremely inconvenient to get to, since the commute was quite time consuming. He eventually found another job a security agency, but after a few months, he was let go. He then found work at a gas station with his son in Orillia, but fell ill. Since his operation, he has not worked and only his eldest son works full time now as a truck driver.

Mr. D also remarks that he would like to continue with his education, but given his age and his health, he is hesitant. He has had his credentials evaluated by York University, which assessed his degree as a Bachelor of Agricultural Science, yet he has not had luck finding work in his field. Moreover, Mr. D comments that in his experience, government workers, such as employment counsellors who are affiliated with Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) are not acquainted with the field of agriculture.

Information Needs

In thinking about the type of information that was required for the immigration process, Mr. D says that consumer information was very important. For example, what kind of clothes can they wear and buy? What are the immediate necessities? He asked his friend in Windsor about this sort of information. He also needed information about accommodation. He did not require as much information about education because his friends had informed him about the system in Canada.

At the time of the study Mr. D was looking for information about getting a loan for education, and whether it would be enough to pursue an education and support his family. He also said that his age is a factor in his decisions. "I don't know what the program regarding the education for people over 50." Given his medical condition, he feels he has to think carefully about whether he should pursue further studies.

Mr. D uses a variety of sources to search for information. Prior to coming to Canada, he went to a workshop that was held in Pakistan by the International Migration Organization. This event brought together people who were going to Canada, and provided a briefing on Canadian life. Also, Mr. D has asked friends who live in Canada about life in Canada and for advice

regarding education, employment and accommodation. Mr. D says that he enjoys reading immensely, and when he's travelling on the subway, he likes to read the free publication, Metro.

However, it is about the Internet that Mr. D says, "I find that the Internet is the most vital part of the dissemination of information." He has used sites such as Settlement.Org and 211 extensively to find information about settling in Canada. In addition, he likes to read the Toronto Star online, along with other news sources.

In addition, Mr. D reflects on meeting with a settlement worker when he first arrived. He found that that she provided very general information, but he would have liked to receive more detailed assistance.

She help me with a reference letter to be sent to some places, because I get all my help through my friend. I was unaware. She gave me some names of some people, but it was difficult. She didn't make arrangement for making appointment with these people, which I thought was the requirement at the time.

Settlement.Org

Mr. D had initially found out about Settlement.Org through the advertisements posted in Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) vehicles. As well, when he called 211 (Community Information Toronto), the representative on the telephone also recommended that he look at the website.

Usually, Mr. D goes to Settlement.Org every other day. He has also subscribed to the Settlement.Org newsletter. His information search on Settlement.Org is driven mostly on an as-needed basis, but he also browses through the site for interest. For example, he has used the site to look for rules and regulations such as for renting an apartment or securing a deposit.

When he was on the site for the first time, Mr. D found that it was a bit difficult to get accustomed to it. Yet, he states, "but to tell you the truth, it was not due to the site. It was due to my own perception that I could not perceive. Now I feel it is very easy to roam anywhere on the site." Furthermore, he says that he has observed improvements on the site and finds every topic useful.

In terms of providing a suggestion as to how the site could be easier to use, Mr. D says that he thinks the site is complete, and perhaps perfect. However, he thinks it might be better if more marketing were conducted, such as having a poster displayed at the Canadian embassy.

Because between the interviews, medical and the issuance of visa, there is a lot of time... almost one year time, like this. In the meantime, people can learn a lot

from the Settlement website. This is the time when people should learn. When the time the person sends the application and when they acknowledge the receipt of application, they should advise the people to log into the site, and they will find information. Targeting and specifying something, it is really helpful. Instead of roaming and finding out something. If something is specified and targeted, then the people use to get benefits from them.

Other aspects such as language and aesthetics are appealing to Mr. D. He reiterates that he is satisfied with what is going on with the site, especially in terms of new improvements and functions. Mr. D's impression of Settlement.Org is that the information is extremely useful. In fact, he once had a dispute regarding his car insurance and through Settlement.Org, he found an organization to help with his appeal the claim, which resulted in a reimbursement

Mr. D has subscribed to the Settlement.Org Discussion Forum. He has used the forum several times to ask questions on an as-needed basis. Most recently for immigration information for himself as well as for his son, who was recently married. In describing his experience in using the discussion board, Mr. D notes that he once saw another member who might be from his clan with whom he exchanged information with; he also finds the discussion board useful in learning about others' experiences. He says, "it is more authentic if it is a story from the mouth of the other person."

Most often, Mr. D uses the discussion board to look for information on jobs and accommodation. In addition, he has used it to learn about immigration and education. He notices that people are describing similar situation: "crying for a job and complaining of difficult times." If he finds useful information on the discussion forum, Mr. D likes to print out the discussion and keep it in a file with other articles he has found on Settlement.Org.

To sum up, Mr. D states three reasons why he thinks Settlement.Org is useful:

Settlement.Org can be advantageous for people who are aspiring for immigration; two, people who are in the process of immigration, and number three, for people who are landed and experiencing difficulties day to day. Describe the government, the community. They can find their answer on this site.

Mr. D shows his trust for the Settlement.Org site by recommending it to friends who are thinking about coming to Canada and people who he meets.

4.1.5 Mr. E

Background

Mr. E is a permanent resident, who has been in Canada for less than one year. He is between the ages of 31-40 and he came with his wife from South Asia. Currently, they live in a suburb in the GTA.

Mr. E describes himself as Hindu, and the languages he speaks most often include Gujarati and English. He sometimes speaks Hindi as well. English was a compulsory subject while he was in his school, and it was also a requirement for him to pass an English test before coming to Canada. Mr. E currently works full time in Scarborough, in addition to being enrolled in a post-graduate program at a local college. While his employment situation is disappointing, he finds his course very interesting and better than what he had initially expected. Prior to arriving, Mr. E attained a post-graduate diploma in business management back in his homeland.

In terms of computer use, Mr. E states that he has used a computer for about 8 years and at the moment, uses it every day. Some of his uses include office-related work, games, entertainment, and e-mail. Mostly though, he uses the computer for chat and technologies such as Voice Over IP (VoIP). The information he searches for with the computer and Internet generally includes news-related items – some of the sites he goes to are CNBC, CBC and CNN. In addition, he uses Hotmail and Google.

Settlement Experience

Mr. E came to Canada because he believed that there would be much more opportunity to grow and develop in his career, compared to his homeland. In addition, he would not have had the chance to study and work concurrently, as he is doing now. Finally, he mentions that life in Canada is much easier.

When asked about whether Canada is what he initially thought it would be, Mr. E says he is surprised about the job situation. Given the plethora of employment sites and postings, he thought that it would be very easy to get a job in his field, but this has not been the case. He also observes that taking the English lessons prior to coming to Canada to pass the test was simply a formality, but employers do not seem to care about the score he received.

Delving further into his difficult situation with employment, Mr. E says:

I'm talking only of jobs because other things, I can inquire by telephone, or I can do that, but except the job. This is the only part, which I fail mostly. It's necessary to get a job otherwise you can't survive here, right? And I just one and a half month just searching job. Nobody was giving me any kind of work. I was about to

planning to go back to my country because I was not able to get a job, in my uh... any kind of job. Except I was able to accept this labour job, then I was able to. But I didn't want to take those jobs.

The labour job that Mr. E refers to is in the fast food industry; he currently works as a manager at a local chain restaurant. He found this job by going to an employment centre in his community. At this centre, he also met others in a similar situation. He keeps in contact with the centre, hoping to hire for the restaurant.

Mr. E seems happy with the social system and services in Canada. He uses the example of public transportation: "If you want to go anywhere, you certainly have a bus to go. They will treat you politely, they respect you, and everything else in general, the systems are very good."

Information Needs

Mr. E's information search for immigrating to Canada began long before he came. He downloaded all sorts of information, essentially anything he could think of. He reiterates his disappointment with employment: "I downloaded every kind of information and printed before I came here... the only thing is job, I was not able to get a job." Currently, Mr. E is looking for information on how to rent an apartment because he and his wife want to move.

Mr. E says that his main source for information is the Internet. He does not watch television because he does not have time. He does, however, speak with friends who have been in Canada longer than him, and he trusts them because they he feels they may be the best to ask since they have already gone through the initial experience of settling.

Some of the problems that Mr. E has encountered in trying to find the information he needs involve logistical issues. Particularly, since he works from Monday to Saturday during the day, and also goes to class. Almost all offices are closed when he is free, so he must take time away from work to run the errands that he needs to do. For example, his wife has recently been inquiring about studies, so he had to take a leave from work to bring her to a local college. Mr. E finds that is rather inconvenient and is not accommodating to his situation.

Settlement.Org

Mr. E came across Settlement.Org on the Internet when he was browsing for information prior to coming to Canada. He recalls that he searched by using a search engine, but cannot

remember which one. Now, Mr. E uses Settlement.Org approximately once per month. He has subscribed to the Settlement.Org newsletter as well.

Some of the most useful information that Mr. E has received from Settlement.Org includes information about the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), tenants' rights, employment, and insurance, amongst other topics. He uses Settlement.Org on an as-needed basis, mainly focusing on getting settled in Canada. He finds all the information on the site very useful.

When looking at the main page of the site, however, Mr. E states that the site might be confusing for some users. Settlement.Org is a huge information resource and it is difficult to read everything. As well, Mr. E was not sure what the discussion forum was. In describing the site further, Mr. E states, "And at the time you really need information you find more and more, you get confused. It gives very lengthy descriptions." He suggests that the site offer bullet point information with the exact steps to follow. When asked about the organization of the site, he says, "no, it's very broad. When you want to get something specific it gives you more and more information."

Mr. E thinks that the information offered on Settlement.Org is too general. For example, "if someone wants to inquire about the mail, or to get help for the job, or apartment, the site should be able to guide them about how to do that." For example, he says that during the first few months after he and his wife had arrived, they were not yet eligible to receive Ontario's health coverage. The information that he found on Settlement.Org had suggested that they buy insurance, however, his dilemma was that he did not know which companies were the best. This was something that was missing.

In terms of the language, Mr. E is comfortable with English being the primary language. However, when talking about the visual aspects, Mr. E would like to see improvements because "it is looking like a Government of Canada site." He would like to see a more trendy design, with useful, but not lengthy information.

Basically, Mr. E wants tangible assistance, but he realizes that this is out of Settlement.Org's scope. "I was getting all kind of job site and health site, but it just give you an idea to go to those sides. Nobody actually helps to get a job. You go there and nobody listens to you. But I cannot complain because Settlement.Org is not meant for getting you a job, it just

gives you information.” By his response, it appears that Mr. E sees Settlement.Org as an information and referral resource.

Mr. E is not familiar with the discussion function on Settlement.Org. He says that he had seen this area of the Settlement.Org site before, but did not know what people were discussing. After having it explained, he says that he may consider looking at it.

Overall, despite the generality and lengthy, descriptive information offered by Settlement.Org, Mr. E says that the site is good for anyone who has newly arrived in Canada. The site offers everything that is needed. Other websites that Mr. E uses are government sites such as the Canadian Customs and Revenue Agency and Human Resources Skills Development Canada.

4.1.6 Ms. F

Background

Ms. F is a woman in her early thirties who has been living in Canada with her husband and young daughter for less than a year. Her family came to Canada from South Asia and they now live in a suburb in the Greater Toronto Area.

When describing herself, Ms. F identifies with the term Indian, or sometimes East Indian or South Asian. The language that she most often speaks is Urdu, and in terms of English, she learned the language while in school.

Currently, Ms. F is not working, nor going to school, but this is by choice. She says her daughter is just too young to be left alone. Once her daughter goes to school, she would then like to return to work. Ms. F has a Master of Business Administration granted from a university in her homeland.

At home, Ms. F has a computer, which is shared by her husband, her cousin and even her four-year-old daughter. She has been using a computer for over five years, and she uses it daily for a variety of tasks, mainly games, entertainment, e-mail, shopping, office-related work and so on. The type of information that she usually searches for revolves around possible education opportunities for herself, parenting information, and location details in Toronto such as maps and addresses. She does not name many specific websites that she goes to the most, but she says that Google is definitely the first point for her information search.

Settlement Experience

Ms. F decided to come to Canada for a sense of permanence and stability. She was living in India as an expatriate because for most of her life, she grew up in the Middle East. She wanted a place where she could get settled in, and this guided the decision.

In terms of her expectations, Ms. F says that she tried to come with an open mind. She had heard stories from various friends about good settlement experiences and also disappointing ones, however she has set those aside. Coming from a place that is continuously warm, she says she was very happy to see snow for the first time. In addition, she is happy about where her family lives in the GTA – they have a nice apartment and a good view.

When speaking of the social aspects of her life, Ms. F remarks, “I have a cousin here and she stays with me. There are other relatives, and there are friends, so I haven’t been part of any clubs or organizations, but we have a circle here. Old university friends, family friends, so there’s a circle here... there’s no problem.”

Ms. F was once a management consultant and market analyst. While she is not currently working, due to her daughter’s young age, she hopes to go back into business when she can. At the moment, she enjoys researching online various e-learning opportunities or on-line education options to keep herself occupied and knowledgeable of the current business environment.

Overall, Ms. F says that she always has had someone to help her upon arriving in Canada. She says:

When we first moved, because I have a sister here; so her house was here, so she was there to pick me up, bring me home, take me around for whatever important things I had. And I mean, basically, she was there, I had two or three other friends who were there, just to drop me off, or anything... somebody was there.

Information Needs

When thinking about the type of information that was needed upon her arrival to Canada, Ms. F says she wanted location details; for example, how to get to a location, which location is closest to her home. Moreover, she needed information about consumer goods and prices, and types of clothing Ms. F says that there are many people who provide her with advice about what to buy, but she still must consider the information carefully, as she needs cost-effective items.

Currently, the information that Ms. F is pursuing involves banking and education. Ms. F requires banking and investment information because she is trying to familiarize herself with concepts such as RRSPs, RESPs, and so on. While she receives information from the bank, other friends tell her different things, so she is trying to find the most comprehensive information. Ms. F is also looking for information about education that she can pursue while at home. She comments that she is wary of online education scams, so she is looking closely and carefully at the various options.

Ms. F uses the Internet extensively to find information. She also reads the newspaper, but she says, “the Internet is more dynamic.” Even though she also goes to friends and family for their opinions, she says that everyone always has a different opinion, so she must use the Internet to do more research on the topics they speak about. She does, however, trust that her friends and family know her well enough to understand her own situation “They know me, they know my background, they know what I can do, what I cannot do, so they would give me a clearer idea.”

Some of the problems that Ms. F has encountered while trying to find the information she needs is the great amount of information that she must deal with. She is sometimes overwhelmed by it all and wishes that it could be filtered out some way, to meet her needs specifically. She uses the example of online education. “Especially when it comes to education, I was looking at online education, so there is a lot. So I don’t know what to do, so I am just putting it aside – thinking about it later.”

Settlement.Org

Ms. F stumbled on Settlement.Org while she was still back in her homeland. She was looking for information on settling in Canada, what she should take, what to do prior to leaving, and so on. She used Google to find the site with the search words ‘settlement’ and ‘Toronto’. Ms. F subscribes to the Settlement.Org newsletter, so when she receives it, she looks at the articles that she is interested in. Lately, she says she has been using the site more to find information about schools, doctors, and the Ontario health card and driver’s licence. Generally, Ms. F says that she uses the site on an as-needed basis.

The clarity of Settlement.Org is generally good, however, Ms. F has trouble finding detailed information, particularly as she looking for information on how to start a business in Canada. Being associated with companies abroad, she is currently trying to find out how easy it

would be for these companies to start up a business in Canada as well. However, she has not yet received an answer. She believes that the site could be more detailed by providing systematic, sequential information. "So if they tell me today, first you need to register your company, second thing is get a corporate lawyer, I don't know, but sort of a systematic approach – that I could not find."

Furthermore, another example that Ms. F provides is detailed information for people specifically from warmer climates.

One thing they can possibly look at, so small things... I came from a very hot country from the Middle East – from extreme heat. When I come here, I had people to guide me, but I still had no idea how to prepare for the winter. So those small things... I mean, and I don't know, say my daughter goes to school, I don't know how to dress her for school, inside, outside.

The other issue that Ms. F mentions is when she clicks on a link outside of Settlement.Org, she often does not go back to the website.

Ms. F does think that the website is helpful. From the site, she has been able to find a doctor, she has been able to go to offices to get her driver's licence and health card, and she has been able to solve problems with the administration of government services. In addition, Ms. F has downloaded publications such as the newcomers' guide, and the guide for elementary education.

When asked about what she thinks could be added to Settlement.Org to make the site easier to use, Ms. F says that having a rating or review would be useful. She says:

Review possibly, but for specific things – 'you asked me to go to this site, this site solved my problem, I had three options, I took this option and it solved my problems' so I just rate, or write back. Say this one has helped me, this particular answer of yours, or site. If I am looking for education, there are three online universities available for me, or three online institutes – I can look at these three and then get back to you that number 2 solved my problem, number 1 didn't help me at all, they're too expensive.

Essentially, Ms. F would like to know what the other newcomers have thought of the information provided to them.

Ms. F is accustomed to using English to browse the Internet, so the language of Settlement.Org is not a problem. She reiterates, though, that the information should be more direct and systematic. Ms. F also thinks that the site is appealing, and it is well organized. In

terms of the search function, however, Ms. F says that the site returns too many results, but she is only talking about her experience in finding information about starting a business.

In addition, Ms. F has joined the Settlement.Org Discussion Forum, but has only posted one question about starting businesses in Canada, which has not yet been answered, and another question about moving, which was solved. Mainly, she says she is an observer who does not really participate in the conversations on the forum. She does feel a sense of satisfaction when people explain their experiences in solving their problems. Ms. F is cautious in the individual answers though, “you can’t take them for granted. If someone says ‘I did it like that’, it doesn’t mean that he did the correct thing or that it’s the only option.”

Generally speaking, Ms. F does enjoy the discussion board because she sees that others have the same experiences as she does. Moreover, she believes that the moderators and administrators of the discussion forum are helpful.

One final suggestion that Ms. F provides is that Settlement.Org could have a place to post volunteer work, or activities that newcomers can do if they often stay at home. The site perhaps could be a place where work is outsourced. She has noticed some that members of the discussion board exchange information about freelancing or volunteering opportunities, and thinks it would be beneficial for Settlement.Org to have a page with such information. Ms. F uses the site elance.com as an example.

Overall, Ms. F says that Settlement.Org has helped her to settle in Canada. She started looking at the site before arriving in Canada, and now that she has settled in, it plays what she calls a companion role in her life. “I am here and I am asking people who are new as well, and I am looking at the site, so it’s a companion. But before I came, it was the primary source of information for me, preparing to come, what to expect.”

4.1.7 Ms. G

Background

Ms. G came to Canada with her husband and two young sons (ages 6 and 2) about one and a half years ago. She is between the ages of 25-30 and is from Southeast Asia. Currently, she and her family live in the Greater Toronto Area.

Ms. G identifies with being part of the Filipino cultural group. She most often speaks Tagalog, which is the language she learned at home. In addition, her family is starting to learn

French. The schooling system in the Philippines incorporates English as a second language for instruction, so this is how she learned the language.

Ms. G is not currently employed, but she is looking into continuing her studies. She holds a Bachelor degree in Physical Therapy from a university in her homeland. Generally, Ms. G uses the computer everyday. She has been using it for more than five years and generally conducts her banking online, sends and receives e-mails, and looks for entertainment and games. Moreover, she uses the computer for chatting. In terms of information uses, Ms. G likes to read the local Philippine newspaper online, she checks the weather and she corresponds with her friends.

Settlement Experience

Ms. G says that life in the Philippines is very difficult and unstable, so she believes that Canada will provide many opportunities for her family to experience the values of democracy and equality. In addition, compared to her homeland, the education system is better in Canada because it is 'free.' In the Philippines, parents can send their children to public schools, but a better education can only be acquired in costly private schools. Moreover, given that she has a child who is asthmatic, Ms. G believes that Canada has a good health care system that is far superior to the health care system in her homeland.

When Ms. G came to Canada, she took an open-minded approach. She remarks that if a person does not receive adequate information or is not provided with an appropriate briefing of the life in Canada, then s/he might get disappointed. However, if a person has experienced life outside the homeland, then perhaps it would not be difficult to immigrate to Canada. She notes that some of her friends have been very disappointed when coming here. She also offers her husband's perspective. Ms. G says that he is an electrical engineer, but he must undergo a lot of further training to work in this profession in Canada. Elaborating further, Ms. G explains,

In my husband's point of view, he gets disappointed with the system here, and of course, lots of people here get discouraged. But in the Philippines, it's hard for me, especially for a married woman to find a job, because they're kind of discriminatory... because for a entry level job, I'm fine with that, so there's not problem in my case.

Later on, Ms. G also says that immigrating to Canada tests the relationship between partners. She has had arguments with her husband about finances and working, along with the

issues of parenting. She remarks that the lifestyle is different in Canada compared to back home. "I mean, it's hard for men to accept the new ways of bringing up children, I think."

In general, Ms. G and her family are very happy in Canada. While she and her family had some problems adjusting to the weather, these issues have now subsided. The children are the main priority, and they seem to get along well with classmates and friends, so Ms. G is happy about that. Moreover, Ms. G and her family seek out clubs in the Filipino community. They also go to church, and have joined information sessions held by local cultural organization. Socially, Ms. G finds it easy to get along with others in Canada.

Information Needs

When coming to Canada, Ms. G recalls needing information about housing and currency. Before arriving, she and her husband went to an organization in the Philippines that is associated with Canada to find information on immigration and settlement. Additionally, they needed information about schools for their children, along with employment. They did not have any relatives or friends here upon arriving in Canada initially, so it was important for them to obtain this information.

Currently, Ms. G is looking for information related to the development of her 6-year-old son. His teacher has told Ms. G that he is a gifted child, so she is looking for information that would assist in his development. She has been asking the teacher for some feedback. In addition to asking for advice in-person, Ms. G also searches on the Internet for information and visits the public library. She often borrows educational videos for her children and tries to encourage them. Much of the information that she has needed has been accessible, so Ms. G says that she has not experienced any difficulties.

Settlement.Org

Ms. G says that she discovered Settlement.Org through a Canadian government website (she does not explain which one). She was looking for information related to immigration and Settlement.Org was one of the links that was offered. She uses the website about once a week and has looked for information about residences, the Ontario Health Insurance Plan, immigration and employment.

Looking at the main page of Settlement.Org, Ms. G responds 'yes' when asked if it is easy to tell what kinds of information are offered on the site. Some of the information that she has found particularly useful are the checklist for newcomers, how to obtain OHIP information, and banking information.

Ms. G has not experienced any problems with Settlement.Org; she thinks that the newcomer relations are expressed well, so she does not feel alone. She cannot think of anything to add or change. As well, Ms. G thinks the language and the visual aspects of the site are good, along with the level of detail of the content offered. Overall, Ms. G thinks that the site is very user-friendly, it is informative and it has many resources to offer. She has not used the search function on the site.

In terms of the discussion board, Ms. G has seen it and looked through the postings, however, she did not realize that actual newcomers contribute to the forum. After having it explained to her, she indicates that the value would be that people are exchanging their views and experiences.

To conclude, Ms. G says that she appreciates the information offered by Settlement.Org, especially for those who are like her, that is, who have a family and who have a computer. She believes that the site welcomes diversity and offers information for users, regardless of their cultural or religious background.

4.1.8 Summary of Character Sketches

The following chart provides a brief summary of the responses from each participant over the course of the interview.

	Mr. A	Mr. B	Ms. C	Mr. D	Mr. E	Ms. F	Ms. G
Background Information							
Demographics	41-50; Male; Married; has children	31-40; Male; Married; 1 child (1 year, 7 months)	51-60; Female; Divorced; has one son	51-60; Male; Married; has three adult children	31-40; Male; Married; No children	31-40; Married; 1 young daughter	25-30; Married; 2 young sons (6, 2)
Immigration Status	Permanent Resident status; 2 years in Canada;	Permanent Resident status; In Canada less than one year	Permanent Resident status; Came 4 years ago	Permanent Resident status; in Canada for 2.5 years	Permanent Resident status; in Canada for less than one year	Permanent Resident status; in Canada for less one year	Permanent Resident status; in Canada for 1.5 years
Culture/Language	Yugoslav /former Yugoslav; Speaks Serbo-Croatian; Self-taught English, also learned by using Internet	Latino, Latin-American; Hispanic; Speaks English and Spanish	South Asian, East Indian; most often speaks English but knows Hindi and Punjabi;	Pushtoon; he can speak English and Pushtoon, as well as Urdu	Identifies as Hindu; Speaks English, Gujarati and sometimes Hindi	Identifies with Indian or East Indian; speaks English and Urdu	Filipino; speaks English and Tagalog
Education and Employment	Completed university; Employed as Research Assistant, formerly a psychologist	Has MBA; Taking English classes at Seneca; Employed as a telemarketer, used to be a Systems Analyst	Completed college; employed as office manager at local university; used to work in financial administration	Has Masters of Science and Agriculture; not working now (health problems); taking LINC classes	Has post-graduate diploma in Business Management; taking courses at college now (HR); works as a manager in fast food restaurant	Not working right now, taking care of her daughter; graduated with an MBA	Has a Bachelor of Physical Therapy; does not work now; looking into continuing her studies
Computer Use	Heavy computer user; Access at home and work	Heavy computer user; Access at home and at work	Heavy computer user; Access at home and at work	Has used computer since 2002	Heavy computer user; uses computer for many things; Access at home;	Has computer at home; uses it for many tasks; Access at home	Uses the computer for a variety of things; Access at home
Settlement Experience							
Rationale for coming to Canada	Thinks that Canada is one of the best places to	Good standard of life; Canadians are nice	Wanted to continue working, but somewhere else;	Improve the lives of his children, for better education;	Thought there would be a lot of opportunity to grow	Felt that Canada could provide a stable life;	More opportunities for family and their children; good

	Mr. A	Mr. B	Ms. C	Mr. D	Mr. E	Ms. F	Ms. G
	live		finds that Canada is a good mix of US and UK; likes Canada	enjoys liberal society of Canada	and develop his career; better opportunities to work and study simultaneously		health system
Feelings about settlement experience so far	Good – because he had a lot of information, had family here, and visited before actually immigrating	Finds employers' expectations are high; not easy to get a job; does not think people take immigrants seriously	Enjoys the Canadian landscape, society, etc.; upset with employment situation	Main problem was finding accommodation; thinks that if it had not been for a friend, he would have had a lot more trouble; was embarrassed at all the questions he was asked when trying to rent an apartment; would have been nice to have initial help; costs very high	Very surprised about the job situation; frustrated that he cannot find a job in his field; Canadian systems are good	Came with an open mind; hears good and bad stories; happy when she saw snow for the first time; happy about current living situation	Came with an open-mind; thinks that people who don't know what to expect might be disappointed
Employment experience	Good – he acquired current employment via a co-op program; Wants to go back to being a psychologist one day	Would have liked more assistance in finding a job; not in profession of choice	Feels that she is overqualified for her position now; frustrated with the employment process; felt that employers did not want to try her out, despite her credentials and experience	Found survival jobs; now, he has health problems so he cannot work	Not happy; not in preferred profession	Used to be a management-consultant and market analyst; would like to go back once her daughter is old enough to go to school; for now, she is looking for online education opportunities	She is fine that she does not work; Her husband is disappointed with his work situation
Social experience	Good – met a lot of friends and reacquainted with former colleagues	He is not very social, but his wife has friends and family here; is part of a cultural centre	Excellent, no problems; active in community; assists other immigrants	No problems with social experience	Keeps in touch with community centre	She has a social circle here; friends and family	Good; she gets along with many people; part of the church, seek out activities with Filipino

	Mr. A	Mr. B	Ms. C	Mr. D	Mr. E	Ms. F	Ms. G
							community, etc.
Information Needs							
Information need when first arrived	Needed all sorts of information; Used Google and Internet; Wanted to know what he can expect, info about jobs, etc.	Needed a lot of information; needed information about neighbourhood and community, employment	Needed to find information on the process of finding a job, printing out resume, etc;	Consumer information; accommodation;	Needed all sorts of information prior to coming; mainly, job opportunities; used the Internet	Location details were important; consumer goods/prices; etc; had a lot of help from friends and family	Housing and currency; prior to arriving, she went to an agency that helped her; needed information about schools for the children; employment information
Current information needs	Need to find information on how to bring son from former marriage to Canada	Continues to look at the Seneca College website, University of Toronto; ESL courses	Searches for information on others' behalf, but does not have any pressing information needs	Looking for education options for seniors like himself;	Looking for information about renting an apartment	Searching for education information, as well as banking information	Looking for information about gifted children (her child is gifted)
Sources of information	Primarily Internet; Television and newspaper too	Internet; went to the York Catholic Centre; Toronto Star newspaper;	Internet mainly; also uses radio and watches television; speaks with friends to exchange advice and opinions	Went to a workshop before coming; Uses Internet – thinks it is vital; has used Settlement.Org and 211 extensively	Internet; no time to watch TV; speaks with friends who have immigrated too	Internet; also reads newspaper, but says that the Internet is more dynamic; verifies what she reads with others, asks for their opinions	Uses the Internet; visits public library; has asked son's teacher (about information for gifted child)
Trust/ reliability	Trusts the Internet the most, particularly government or official websites	Believes that there are a lot of credible sources on the Internet	Relies on the Internet	Internet	Trusts friends the most	Trusts friends and family the most	(did not answer)
Information problems	Has not really experienced problems; confident in his information searching skills	Sources are not up to date	Information is sometimes not up to date; maybe gets distracted because too much information	Thinks that the help he received was too general	Logistical issues – e.g. offices are not open on Saturdays or after 5pm.	Too much information; overwhelming; needs to be filtered out	Has not experienced difficulties
Use of Settlement.Org							

	Mr. A	Mr. B	Ms. C	Mr. D	Mr. E	Ms. F	Ms. G
First knew about Settlement.Org	Found the site on Google	Saw it in the Canadian embassy when first applying for immigration	Did not know about the site until she was practically settled; learned from a friend	TTC ads; also heard from 211	Found the site when browsing the Internet for information about immigrating to Canada	Did a Google search prior to coming to Canada	Was directed to the site from a link on a government site
Frequency of use	In the beginning – a lot; now, when he gets the newsletter and on an as-needed basis	Used it everyday when applying; now he does not go so often	As-needed basis; subscribed to the newsletter	Every other day; also subscribed to the newsletter	Once a month, or as-needed; has subscribed to the newsletter	As-needed basis; lately it has been more frequent; has subscribed to the newsletter	Once a week
What participant likes about the site	Thinks there is too much information on home page; Should be more trendy and flashy; use graphics, videos, etc.	Easy to navigate; found many useful resources (e.g. driver's licence)	Enjoys that site consolidates relevant information; no need to go to many different sources	Thinks the site is perfect	Finds information very useful; good for anyone who has arrived; offers everything that is needed	Has played a good role in her life; offers a lot of useful information	Thinks it is easy to use; lots of good resources; very user-friendly
Possible improvements, additions or changes	Should provide info for people who are thinking of coming; adding a chat function; info should be reduced	Thinks that Settlement.Org has a lot of negotiating power; wants to see more action (e.g. work with government and community to provide special deals for newcomers)	Needs more marketing	Suggests that more marketing would be useful	Sometimes info is too general; looks like a government site; information is lengthy, wants bullet-point format	Would like user ratings for the topics; need more specific or personalized information; need to approach information more systematically; perhaps add information about volunteer exchange opportunities	Could not think of anything
Discussion Board use	Browses topics, but does not post	Does not use it because he does not feel he needs to	Doesn't use	Uses the forum, both for browsing topics and posting topics; thinks it is authentic	Has seen it, but did not know what it is about	Has posted twice; notices similar experiences to her own; moderators are helpful	Saw the discussion board and has read topics; did not realize that newcomers are the ones who post

Table 2: Summary of Responses from Interview Participants

4.2. Emerging Themes

Several themes emerged from the responses that were received from participants in Group 1, both from the in-person interviews, as well as the online questionnaires. Given that the interviews (and questionnaires) explored such categories as the background of the participants, their settlement experiences, their information needs, and their uses of Settlement.Org, these will be used to organize the themes that emerged most prominently in the interview and questionnaire process. Precedence will be given to the responses provided by the seven newcomers who were interviewed; however, the online questionnaire findings will be utilized to support these findings.

4.2.1 Background of the Respondent

Demographics

Having already presented the character sketches based on the seven respondents of the personal interview, it is useful to review general information such as gender, age, and length of time in Canada so far. The age and gender of the respondents are depicted in the table below (Table 3).

Gender	Under 25	25-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Over 60	Total M/F
Male	0	0	2	1	1	0	4
Female	0	1	1	1	0	0	3
Total Age	--	1	3	2	1	--	7

Table 3: Gender and Age Ranges of Interview Respondents

Six of the respondents were married, and one was divorced. Aside from one respondent, the participants from the interviews all had at least one child. Due to the complications of the online survey, the researcher was unable to collect specific findings from the online questionnaire in terms of gender and age to make a comparison.

In regards to the country of origin¹⁵ of interview respondents, the table below (Table 4) outlines the findings.

¹⁵ Designation of region has been ascribed according to *The CIA World Fact Book*
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>

Region of Origin	In-depth Interviews	Online Questionnaire	Totals
North America	--	1	1
South America	1	--	1
Caribbean	--	1	1
Southeast Europe	1	1	2
Middle East	1	--	1
South Asia	3	4	7
Southeast Asia	1	1	2
Totals	8	7	15

Table 4: Region of Origin of Interview and Questionnaire Respondents

All but one of the respondents from the two methods combined indicated that his/her native language that was not English.

The spent in Canada at the time of the study rendered similar results, with a few exceptions. At the time the interviews were conducted, three of the respondents had been living in Canada for less than a year; another three respondents had been living in Canada for about two years; and one respondent had been living in Canada for approximately four years. Likewise, the respondents from the online questionnaire had mostly indicated that they had been living in Canada for less than three years.

Not surprisingly, the newcomers who were interviewed currently reside in the Greater Toronto Area. However, the responses from the online questionnaire varied. While four respondents indicated that they lived in the GTA, one respondent lived in Ottawa, and another indicated 'Ontario', without specifying the city or region. Finally two others indicated that they were outside of Canada; however, it seems that they have had the opportunity to experience Canadian life, or might have misunderstood the question because both respondents answered the questions dealing with settling and adjusting to Canada.

Education and Employment

All interview respondents received post-secondary education, as three respondents had an undergraduate degree, and four respondents had a graduate degree. Moreover, some of the respondents currently participate (or have participated) in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in the early stages of the settlement process. One respondent is now pursuing further education in his/her related professional field (concurrent to being employed). Similarly, while only four of the eight respondents from the online questionnaire answered the question regarding

level of education, their responses also add to the findings that respondents from the study are well educated. All four responses indicated that the respondents had graduate degrees.

In reflecting upon the employment status of the interview respondents, the responses largely showed that respondents that were employed were not working in their profession of choice. The following table provides a more detailed look at the employment situation faced by the respondents. The issue of employment will be explored further, as it has emerged as a main difficulty for newcomers arriving in Canada.

Employment Situation	In-depth Interviews	Online Questionnaires
Employed in Profession of Choice	--	1
Not employed in Profession of Choice	4	3
Unemployed by Choice ¹⁶	3	--
Unemployed but Looking for Work	--	4
TOTAL	7	8

Table 5: Employment Situation of Interview and Questionnaire Respondents

Computer and Internet Use

The majority of respondents also seemed to be familiar with computer technology and the Internet. Aside from one respondent, who had been using the computer for approximately three years, all respondents had been using a computer for over six years. Moreover, each of the respondents said that they used the computer daily. In addition, these respondents all had a computer and Internet connection at home; and for the most part, those who were employed also had a computer and Internet connection at their workplace. Because these types of questions were close-ended questions, it was difficult to tell which responses belonged to the group of eight that filled out the online questionnaire. However, given the rest of the respondents' responses on the questionnaire, it seems likely that these respondents also had regular access to a computer and Internet connection.

Respondents from both groups cited many different uses for the computer and Internet technology. Some responses entailed activities such as searching for information, browsing and sending and receiving e-mails, while other activities incorporated more sophisticated uses such as Internet banking, chatting and using Voice Over IP (VoIP) technology, entertainment, gaming

¹⁶ Unemployed by choice is meant to describe situations where individuals are unemployed, yet are not looking for work due to their personal situations (e.g. health reasons, to raise children, etc.)

and shopping. The responses were also varied when it came to the kinds of information participants searched for on the Internet. Many answers centred on hobbies and interests, however, some commonalities included searching for information about employment, education, immigration, and news about the homeland. Many respondents indicated web-based e-mail sites as one of the sites they often use. Google was often mentioned by respondents. Mr. A and Ms. F, for example, both indicated that Google is their starting point for any information search on the Internet.

4.2.2 Settlement Experience

Findings from the research have also provided insight on the settlement experiences of newcomers. In particular, respondents reflected on their decisions to come to Canada, in addition to the unique characteristics of Canadian life. Respondents spoke of their experiences in regards to employment, education, and housing and accommodation, upon their arrival in Canada. Respondents also shared their social experiences with the researcher, highlighting their personal connections and relationships with others who also live in Canada.

Canadian Life

The first question that was asked in terms of participants' settlement experiences was, "Why did you choose to come to Canada?" Even though the responses varied, a few themes emerged. Many participants, both from the face-to-face interviews and from the online questionnaire, indicated that Canada had a **better standard of living** compared to their homeland. A few cited specifically that Canada was a **democratic nation** with a **good social system**. Another set of responses suggested that respondents believed Canada had more **educational and employment opportunities** compared to their country of origin. Finally, **family** played a part in some respondents' decisions to move to Canada; this mostly involved reunification with family members, or a move for the sake of family (particularly for their children).

In terms of their expectations, some of the respondents (face-to-face interviews) indicated that aspects such as **people and land** correspond with their initial beliefs of what Canada would be like. However, two respondents indicated that the **employment situation** was completely different from their expectations by stating that they were "shocked" or "disillusioned". Still,

there were other respondents who indicated that they tried to keep an open mind and gather as much information as they could before coming. For example, Ms. F said, "I didn't come with too much of... I mean I try to come with an open mind, not expecting too much or expecting too little. It was... it is, I mean I have heard both sides of the story, so I try to keep it aside."

On the other hand, responses from the online questionnaire were somewhat more negative. Of the eight respondents, only two said that Canada has turned out to be what they had expected. While not every respondent was completely forthcoming with their answers, some of the negative responses entailed, again, the **employment situation**, as well as the **unexpected bureaucratic nature of the immigration process**, the **lack of cleanliness in public places**, and the **cold weather**.

Employment Experiences

Employment emerged as a major difficulty for newcomers when trying to adapt to Canadian life; many interview respondents said that **finding the right job in their field** was problematic. As mentioned earlier, many of the respondents from both the interviews and the online questionnaire are not working in their chosen profession. A few of the respondents' answers suggested that employers do not take into consideration the wealth of experience and expertise of newcomers. For example, in recalling the interview with Ms. C, she stated,

My main difficulty was breaking into, you know... and I still feel if I want to apply for a position that is more senior, that I know I can do, having worked in a bank for 20 years, like I know what finances are. I haven't been able to do that because if I apply, my application is not at all considered. I don't even get a reply because I don't have experience out here. Even though I've done courses from the University of Toronto and all that, because I don't have enough experience in time, they say. They don't even try me out.

Other employment difficulties included the **formal recognition of credentials and experience**. Ms. F, for example, spoke of her husband's experience: "Especially with my husband, his profession is the electrical engineer and here it would take a long time to... he'd have to undergo a lot to be registered and stuff. You have to upgrade your skills." She said that her husband is disappointed with this situation. Moreover, other difficulties revolved around the expectation and anticipation that employment would be easily secured upon arriving in Canada. In fact, Mr. E had stated,

Yeah, in terms of the job, I'm surprised a lot. I was thinking... I was browsing the net, [...] I most see Workopolis, Monster, to see the job postings. So when I was in my home country I was seeing a lot of websites related to jobs here in Canada, I was thinking that it was very easy to get a job because the postings mentioned in the web are what I was doing earlier. But after coming here, I was shocked because no one was calling me for an interview.

The above sentiments were also echoed in the online questionnaire findings. Four out of the eight respondents from the questionnaire mentioned that finding a job was difficult. The following are some of the responses that were provided:

- “I came with lots of hope and excitement. Until I experience myself the difficulties in finding a real job.”
- “Only thing I got good in Canada is my degree’s evaluation. Than there are no jobs for the people who are getting immigration in particular field. Bad.”
- “Overseas experience in a profession is totally ignored.”

A few respondents seemed to approach their employment situation with more optimism, however. For example, in reflecting upon his own experience, Mr. A indicated that he was not necessarily working in his chosen profession – he once was a psychologist and now he is a research assistant. However, he said, “But I know I need to finish my Masters here, and then probably [get a] licence. Then, I will be able to work as a counsellor.” Later in the interview, he also stated, “I feel that I can’t work in mental health counselling when I came here, and I know I need time to reach the position that I had in my country and I have no problems with it.” Similarly, Ms. F, who is not employed because she is taking care of her young daughter, did not seem to be too concerned at the moment with regards to employment. While she is at home, Ms. F stated that she liked to find things to do for herself, either researching future education opportunities, or doing volunteer work.

Educational Experience

Only a few interview respondents said that they were continuing with further education at the moment. These respondents chose further education to **improve their chances of finding a better job**. One interview respondent, who was taking college courses in his specialized field while continuing to work a full-time job, indicated that the course is better than expected. He

hoped to gain further knowledge from this course and wished to go back into his own field of work. A few other respondents from the online questionnaire also completed continuing education or professional training courses upon settling in Ontario, and used this education to **leverage better employment opportunities**.

Furthermore, a few other respondents said that they took, or were taking ESL classes, which they enjoyed. However, these classes have not yet led to the desired employment. For example, a respondent from the online questionnaire wrote, "I joined ESL classes but could not get any job".

Accommodation and Housing Issues

Other difficulties that surfaced included finding accommodation and dealing with housing issues. From the character sketches, Mr. D said that if it were not for his friend who helped him, it would have been extremely difficult for him and his family. In thinking about the actual process of renting an apartment, he recalled, "then there was another friend who arranged for me the renting out of apartment, so they ask me about my job letters, they asked me about whom I know, so it was really embarrassing and really difficult." The character sketch of Mr. D also reflects his concern with cost, particularly in finding accommodation most cost-effectively.

A few respondents from the online questionnaire also shared concerns regarding accommodation and housing. For example, one respondent said a difficulty was mistreatment by property owners. This response was not elaborated upon further. Another respondent indicated that it was difficult to find subsidized housing.

Social Experiences

All of the respondents from both the interviews and the online questionnaires did not have any negative social experiences to report. Many of the respondents were **reunited with family and friends** upon arriving in Canada, while others **met new friends** at community centres, religious venues, sports events, and other activities.

The majority of respondents also provided very personal responses when asked about their happiest memory thus far. Some of these memories involved actually **coming to, and getting settled in Canada**; others referred to their **children's accomplishments, meeting new**

friends and having a **good lifestyle**; and still, other respondents cited they were happiest when they experienced a unique aspect of Canada, such as **seeing snow for the first time**.

4.2.3 Information Needs¹⁷

Primary Information Needs

When asked to think about what kinds of information were needed when first arriving in Canada, a variety of responses were provided from both the interview respondents and the online questionnaire participants. A common response was **employment-related information**. Some respondents immediately searched for job opportunities in their field, in addition to finding contacts and possible employers. Other respondents also said they searched for employment agencies, and places that would allow them to create and/or print their resumé. Many of the respondents have indicated that finding such information was arduous, yet incredibly important. For example, Mr. E said, “It is necessary to get a job otherwise you can’t survive here, right? And I just one and a half month just searching for job.”

Many of the respondents also indicated a need for information on that employment, whether they wished to find a better job (i.e. they were not in the profession of their choice), or did not have a job yet.

Another type of information that often emerged in the answers of respondents (especially in the initial phase) was information related to **where the respondents would live**; for example, housing details and neighbourhood information. This type of information was associated with other areas of concern, such as community life, employment, and schooling. For example, Mr. B said, “You need to learn where you live, you need Toronto maps, you need information about neighbourhoods, the community, the work.” As well, another respondent from the online questionnaire indicated that information about housing and community services was needed upon arriving.

Consumer information and costs was also cited quite a few times by respondents. Information about what to buy and where, as well as the relative costs of items was important to many of the participants. Mr. D described his situation when first coming to Canada:

The most important thing was the consumer market, like what are the different items, food items, clothes because every culture has its own tradition. We used to

¹⁷ It should be noted that one of the online questionnaire respondents appeared to have dropped out of the survey, as there were no more responses from the participant starting from the information needs section.

wear cotton clothes back home, but here I find them very expensive and not durable. So actually, our status has come down. I can't buy the cotton due to the higher prices and short life, because the synthetic fibre is more long lasting compared to cotton.

Other information that was mentioned by respondents upon first arriving in Canada included **banking and currency information, government service information**, such as getting a driver's licence, health cards and so on, **Canadian culture and lifestyle**, and **immigration information**. These were listed by the respondents, but were not discussed in detail.

As stated, information about employment was a recurring information need for the respondents, along with information about education opportunities, sponsorship and immigration procedures, and legal aid.

Information Sources

When asked where, or who respondents went to in order to find the information they needed, all interview respondents listed the **Internet** as the primary source. Other information sources included **friends and family**, the use of **television, newspapers, radio, and community venues** such as the public library or local organizations. Furthermore, when these participants were asked about whom or what they would trust the most in providing them with the information they need, two responses emerged – the Internet or the people they know. Regarding the Internet, one respondent indicated, “The most useful [aspect] of the Internet is that you have a lot of information, and if you go to specific site, you can have the most truthful information.” Another respondent stated, “I find that the Internet the most vital part of the dissemination of information.” In terms of people as an information source, other respondents stated, “I trust my friends more, because they've already got experience so they may be the best to ask” or “Friends and family would be there ... they are the ones who would sort of understand the reason why I am doing something. They know me, they know my background.”

It was difficult to tell what kinds of information sources were used by respondents from the online questionnaire as this was another closed question. However, the responses regarding trusted sources of information corresponded with responses from the interviews. In other words, responses about trust in information sources either involved the Internet (and certain websites),

or trusting the information and advice provided by other immigrants. In particular, three of the respondents indicated Settlement.Org as a site they would trust the most.

Information Problems

Respondents were also asked about the types of problems they have had when trying to access the information they needed. The question of **validity and authenticity of information** emerged. Two respondents specifically stated that if information is **not updated**, then it is a major problem.

Another information problem that was cited involved the **amount of information** newcomers had to contend with when searching for what they need. A few respondents indicated that there is often too much information, particularly on the Internet. As a result, one interview respondent said that she has been confused and overwhelmed. As well, another respondent said that she has been distracted from the main purpose of her information search. She stated, “sometimes when you are looking for information you kind of get... you detract from it and go to a different direction.”

The majority of respondents from the interviews and the online questionnaires, combined, spoke about the **conflicting and erroneous information** they have received from various sources. Reflecting his situation, Mr. E stated that he was given the impression that he could get a job easily because of the many job sites and employment opportunities that were being offered in his field; however, this was not the case. Similarly, from the online questionnaire, one respondent wrote, “I am constantly told not only conflicting but also erroneous information that has cost me greatly.” In fact, this particular respondent also cited such problems as the main difficulty when trying to settle in Canada. Another respondent from the online questionnaire wrote, “there is always one thing said and when u call the call centre it’s another.” Still, another participant wrote, “apparently, the information is provided gracefully but the experience with that information is repulsive and sometimes discouraging. Rules change.”

Other information problems that respondents spoke about included the **generality (and perhaps superficial nature)** of the information received. Mr. D had shared the experience of meeting a settlement worker, who simply gave him a list of names for employment and housing, yet did not help to arrange meetings for him. Moreover, another respondent from the online

questionnaire reiterated this concern: “as a landed immigrant, one has to go from pillar to post to find a real job. There is not real help available – only lip service is offered.”

The last type of information problem described by respondents involved the experiences of **having to personally go to an office or centre for the information**. Given the limited amount of free time newcomers have – for example, due to employment or education obligations – the working hours of information centres and/or offices are quite inconvenient. Mr. E spoke to the researcher directly about this problem:

Sometimes here in Canada, nobody is working on Saturday and after 5 o'clock, so if I want to ask, if I want to get any kind of information which is very important... because I am not getting time on daytime right? So daytime only or on Sunday, so I am not able to find information after office hours or on Sundays. Say there was something... I was inquiring about my wife's studies, so I have to go and take a leave from my workplace and go with her to get the things done. I cannot do it on Saturday or Sundays because they or not open.

In addition to the operating hours of offices, another problem that was also mentioned involved **discriminatory attitudes towards newcomers by office staff**.

It should also be mentioned that a few respondents – two from the interviews, and one from the online questionnaire – indicated that they had no problems in finding the information they needed. One of the respondents, Mr. A, was quite confident in his Internet searching skills, and attributes this to his ease in finding information.

4.2.4 Use of Settlement.Org

Initial Awareness and Frequency of Use

Participants were asked about their initial encounter and subsequent experiences with the Settlement.Org website. From the interviews and the online questionnaire, it was found that respondents became acquainted with Settlement.Org through a variety of channels. The following chart provides a summary of the respondents' answers.

How did you first learn about Settlement.Org?	Responses
Browsing the web	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saw link to Settlement.Org on another website • Used keyword search (e.g. 'settlement' and 'Ontario') in search engine such as Google 	(2) (3)
Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) advertisements on buses and subways	3

Referral by local community centre or community information resource	3
Saw poster at the Canadian consulate while still in their homeland	2
Word of mouth	1
Total	14

Table 6: Responses on How Respondents First Learned of Settlement.Org

The average frequency of use also varied amongst respondents. Again, a chart will be used to depict their responses:

How frequently do you use Settlement.Org?	Responses
Daily	2
Once a week	5
A few times a week	1
Bi-weekly	1
Once a month	2
A few times a month	3
Total	14

Table 7: Frequency of Usage of Settlement.Org

Many of the respondents said that initially, they used the site every day. As they become better adjusted to Canada, they tend to use the site less frequently. For example, Mr. B said, "When I was working on my application in Mexico, I went everyday [...] In this moment, I went to or three times a month, because the information that I obtain in Settlement [.Org] is not at this moment so useful than in the beginning."

The majority of respondents indicated that they visited the site on an as-needed basis; therefore, at times, they would visit the site less frequently than what they stated to the researcher, and on other occasions, they would visit the site more. Finally, some respondents also said they were directed to the website through the Settlement.Org Newsletter, which is received via e-mail. From the newsletter, they said they generally click on the links, which then automatically opens a new browser window and loads the page.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Site

The **range of information** offered on Settlement.Org was cited by all participants from the study as the major strength of the site. Many respondents, when asked what they have found

useful on the site, said, “everything is useful.” A few detailed responses from the participants indicated their appreciation for the **diverse utility** of the site; that is, the site is used in different ways by newcomers, depending on their needs and situations. For example, some respondents enjoyed downloading booklets to read while away from the computer, while others enjoyed browsing through the newest topics and discussion items that were added to the site. In addition, information related specifically to the **various stages of the immigration and settlement process** were also said to be useful to the participants. The guide, *Your First Days in Ontario*, was often mentioned as an example. Other respondents indicated that they enjoyed using the **Settlement.Org Discussion Board**, and a few people who used the site indicated that they found **out many important things** that they did not know about, or that they were not familiar with (“I had no idea I could go to a clinic even though I do not have an OHIP card yet. I read about it there”). Finally, it was found that the information participants searched for corresponded to their information needs, such as information about employment conditions, education, accommodation, health, and so on.

Respondents did not have much to report in terms of experiencing major problems with the site. Many of the respondents could not think of any problems; some even said they were extremely pleased with the site. However, a few comments alluded to the **broad scope and general nature** of the information provided. For example, one interview respondent, Mr. B, recalled his dilemma in finding a doctor who was accepting patients, and who could communicate in Spanish. While he was able to acquire a list of doctors from one of the links on Settlement.Org, he still spent a fair amount of time finding the appropriate doctor for him and his wife. Similarly, another interview participant, Ms. F said, “I came from a very hot country from the Middle East – from extreme heat. When I come here, I had people to guide me, but I still had no idea how to prepare for the winter.” Beyond knowing what the temperatures and weather conditions would be like in Ontario, Ms. F indicated that it would be beneficial if newcomers could receive a more detailed response according to where they came from. Other respondents also indicated that information about **neighbourhoods, accommodation, employment**, and so on, should be much more detailed.

Furthermore, a few respondents commented on the dilemma of having **too much information**. Although respondents contended that they never had any significant problems with the site, they suggested the use of bullet points, and a more systematic way to present

information. Referring back to Ms. F, for example, during her interview she spoke about opening a business. She noted that there was an abundance of information that was useful, however, summarizing the steps in opening a business could have enhanced her understanding of the information provided. She stated, “if I, for instance, I want to start my own company, they [Settlement.Org] will tell me you have to do this, this, this, but not in a sequence. So if they tell me, today, first you need to register your company, second thing is get a corporate lawyer. I don’t know what... but sort of a systematic approach – that, I could not find.”

Two interview respondents commented on the need for **more marketing** generated for the site, as they felt not enough newcomers knew of Settlement.Org. Ms. C and Mr. D both asserted this point. Ms. C, in recalling her own experience, said that she did not even know about Settlement.Org until four years after her arrival when she was already settled. Ms. C acknowledged that she came to know about Settlement.Org by word of mouth, but suggested that referral to the site should be part of the immigration process – part of any packages, pamphlets or information that immigrants receive prior to departing for Canada. Mr. D, as well, indicated that in between processing the application, medical requirements, and receiving the visa, there is a fair amount of time that could be spent browsing through a site like Settlement.Org.

Possible Changes and Additions to the Site

In terms of changing features that currently exist on Settlement.Org, only a few answers were provided by participants. The majority of respondents **could not think of anything that could be changed on the site**. Mr. A from the interviews indicated that there was too much information on the home page. He thought that Settlement.Org should be **more dynamic and trendy**, not to mention that, “too much information in one place is sometimes counter productive.” Another suggestion dealt with the Discussion Forum. A respondent from the online questionnaire indicated that **changing the format of the Discussion Forum** would be useful. This respondent wrote, “there should be a separate pop-up screen listing all the posting by self since the last visit to which answers have been given for the attention.” Currently, the Discussion Forum shows new posts since last visit by changing the colour of the icon in front of the subject.

In a blunt response to the question, one participant from the online questionnaire indicated that a problem of the site was that **“the help they gave u never works.”** When this respondent was asked about what existing feature on the site could be changed, the response was

“to get the right help.” As a response that hints at negativity and frustration, the Discussion section (Chapter 6) of this thesis will address the role of information in fitting in the continuum of the settlement experience.

The respondents were also asked to consider what additional features that currently do not exist would enhance Settlement.Org. Mr. A was quite enthusiastic about **adding an online chat function** to the site. He spoke specifically about having a **counsellor or social worker provide guidance to newcomers** through the chat, saying that this was “the future of counselling.” Furthermore, Mr. A said, “actually, when people come here, they need a best friend. Somebody who is their best friend, someone who can lead them and answer all their questions to help them, somebody who will have time to listen to them and their problems.” The chat function was also suggested by a respondent of the online questionnaire.

Mr. A also mentioned that information specifically for people who are **thinking about coming to Canada** would be useful. During the interview he described the **experiences** of some of his friends who had come to Canada and become disappointed because they could not find a job and faced other difficult situations. He stated,

I think that it is psychologically very important for them because if they know exactly what they can expect, what will happen when they come here, they won't be disappointed. They will know in advance what they can expect and then can decide will they go or not. But if they come, they will know exactly what they can expect and won't be disappointed.

Partially related, was a response from a participant from the online questionnaire. The respondent wanted to see **true stories of newcomers after six months of landing in Canada**; the respondent believed that these stories would bring great value in learning about the settlement experiences of immigrants. Similar to Mr. A, this respondent also thought that specialized information for potential immigrants “would send clear signal to whoever want to come to Canada.”

Some of the respondents also wanted a **rating system**, or at least something that could provide them with an idea of how other newcomers have fared in dealing with the different aspects of Canada. Ms. F, for example, had said that having users rate the information provided on the site, followed by an explanation of their rating would be extremely helpful and it would inform her own decisions about options to take. As well, a respondent from the online questionnaire wrote, “I would suggest we have a rating for people's answer. So that we can see

how true the answer base on the rating.” Likewise, one respondent from the online questionnaire said that **having tips from other newcomers** in terms of buying a vehicle, along with a description of their problems encountered, would be useful too.

Ms. F also provided another suggestion later on during her interview. She thought that it would be useful to set up an **online exchange system for volunteer work**. For example, if someone had volunteer opportunities for newcomers to do, which would help them gain experience, then it could be facilitated on the site. Ms. F mainly spoke of this due to the fact that she was looking for activities while she was taking care of her young daughter and not working.

Finally, it was in Mr. B’s opinion that Settlement.Org should do more for newcomers and that information provision is not enough. Mr. B believed that Settlement.Org could do more for newcomers; he wanted the site to work **in cooperation with government and other community entities** to create special services and arrangements for newcomers. He listed the examples of credit cards and special automobile insurance programs. Given the many frustrating experiences of the other respondents, Mr. B’s suggestion might be well-received.

Language, Visual Aspects, Organization and Search

All of the respondents from the interviews and the online questionnaires had no problem with English being used as the primary language for the site. Some of them indicated that if Settlement.Org were to improve, then perhaps offering the most important information in a range of languages might be useful. One respondent from the online questionnaire also said, “as per the demographics of the immigration process, at least the top three community may be provided with their language assistance.” Moreover, another respondent from the online questionnaire said that correcting members’ postings on the discussion board for grammatical and spelling errors so that they do not distract the attention of the readers would be beneficial.

The majority of interview respondents said that they found the site appealing, with the exception of two participants. According to Mr. A, the site should be more visually appealing, perhaps incorporating interactivity, graphics, and programming languages such as Java and Flash. Another respondent, Mr. E, said, “yeah I would like to see more graphics; it should be eye catching... because it’s looking like a Government of Canada site.” When asked to elaborate, he said that the Settlement.Org site had a lot of text without a lot of headings. In terms of the online

questionnaire respondents, all of them said that they were satisfied with the visual aspects of the site.

All respondents also indicated that they were satisfied with the organization of the site. Finally, it was found that not all participants from the interviews used the search function on the site. Rather, they simply clicked through the links and navigation bars. In terms of those who used the search function, the majority did not experience any major problems. One respondent, however, indicated that she thought the search returned too many results. All of the participants from the online questionnaire were satisfied with the search function.

4.2.5 Use of Settlement.Org Discussion Board

The final section of the interview (and the online questionnaire) dealt with the participants' use of the Settlement.Org Discussion Board. In terms of the face-to-face interview respondents, six out of the seven respondents knew about the discussion board, but only two people had subscribed as members and had posted questions. One of these two users indicated that he was quite active in the discussion board (Mr. D), while the other had only posted two questions at the time of the interview. Among the participants who did not assign themselves a username and password for the discussion board, two participants (Mr. A and Ms. G), stated that they browse through the various subjects and read the topics, questions and replies. Ms. G, while she said that she browsed through the topics, but it was not until the interview with the researcher that she realized that newcomers could post questions and replies. Others who did not use the discussion board, but were aware of it, stated that they did not feel the need to use it. One respondent said that the information on the website is good enough for him (Mr. B), while the other indicated that by the time she became aware of Settlement.Org, most of her questions were already answered (Ms. C).

Five respondents from the online questionnaire knew about the Settlement.Org Discussion Board, and four of them used it. Two participants said that they log on to post questions, as well as to deliver replies to others; however, the other two respondents who use the discussion board specifically said that they only log on to find answers to their problems. The participant who knew about the discussion board, but did not use it said that he did not pay attention to the discussions that were being facilitated. Finally, one of the two respondents who did not know about the discussion board wrote they would start using it, having now become

aware of it: "I have just realized that there is a discussion board and I was not aware of this facility earlier on. I will use it now."

In reflecting on their own use of the discussion board, or at least browsing through the posts, participants indicated that the site was valuable to many people, regardless of where they came from. Also, the discussion board brought potential for members to become acquainted with others who are from the same country, are part of the same ethnic group or religion, or share the same problems. For example, when speaking with the researcher, Mr. D said,

Everyday I see that there are people from many parts of the world. I found that there is a guy he might be from my clan, but I don't know because he doesn't visit day by day, and it's not clear. So he asked about some information about settling, when I came to learn his name, I thought he might belong to my area, and I don't know if he is here... he was just in the process of immigration. I learned that people from outside of Canada can also take advantage of the site.

Similarly, another respondent from the online questionnaire said, "I get a feeling of comradeship at that time as we all face some or the other problems."

Therefore, it appears that the use of the discussion board can engage members in meaningful discussions about common experiences. For example, one respondent indicated "some [people] are asking questions that I have asked in the past", and another respondent said, "they all agree with us and reply with appropriate comments or explain their own experiences to the issues involved."

Finally, the issue of authenticity came up again when some participants were describing their satisfaction with the discussion board. Ms. F, who only posted a few questions so far, said, "I mean, if somebody who is answering himself... 'I have this problem, I solved this problem,' so it sort of gives the feeling of satisfaction. Others go through it, it's a solvable problem. It's not out of the ordinary." Similarly, Mr. D said, "I think it is more authentic if it is a story from the mouth of the other person." Additional comments about the discussion board included acknowledgment of the moderator and other administrators, their wealth of knowledge, frankness and prompt reply. Contrary to these comments, however, a respondent such as Mr. A did not find the current discussions useful. He said, "I saw some questions, they are asking for some websites or something like that. People can do that by themselves." Further, he later said, "Answer must be concrete, not direct for some other website or something like that. Sometimes people are confused."

4.2.6 Overall Impressions of Settlement.Org and Concluding Statements by Respondents

Ultimately, there is a strong indication that participants in this study have a high level of satisfaction with Settlement.Org. All respondents asserted that the site is extremely useful, and has helped them in the various facets of the immigration and settlement process. Concluding statements that were made about the site involved Settlement.Org's unique ability to consolidate information in one place; its flexibility in addressing issues for newcomers in all stages of the immigration and settlement process; its ability to allow one to see others' experiences and share one's views; and the good reputation of the site, based on the information and resources provided. The following testimonials are just a few indicators of users' satisfaction level.

- "I never knew immigrating to Canada was going to be so stressful but it helps knowing that I am not alone."
- "It has helped me in preparing to settle... first of all. I started looking before I came here; I knew what things are there. And after that, actually settling in, it's more of a companion role – I am here and I am asking people who are new as well, and I am looking at the site, so it's a companion. But before I came, it was the primary source of information for me, preparing to come, what to expect."
- "It is very useful, for sure. I think it is the best source for information for the people that are coming to Canada. I think that there is not another site, another sorts of information so useful to someone. I think that it is the only one, and I don't know another one."

From the responses, it appears that in spite of the various situations that newcomers face in settling in Canada, Settlement.Org plays a role in assisting them with that process.

Settlement.Org is perceived by the respondents as an excellent tool for finding the information about the settlement process in Ontario.

Furthermore, respondents seem to appreciate the role of Settlement.Org as an information resource, regardless of the situations that currently face them. Taking a comment from Mr. D, who was talking about employment agencies, he said, "you go there and nobody listens to you. But I cannot complain because Settlement.Org is not meant for getting you a job, it just gives you information." From this response, Mr. D recognizes the role of Settlement.Org for providing

information, yet as indicated in the next Findings chapter (Chapter 5), the issue of whether information is enough is raised.

4.3 Group 2: OCASI Staff and Group 3: Government Partners and External Consultants

Findings from Group 2 and Group 3 will be described briefly, as their feedback contributed mainly to the gathering of data about the historical roots of OCASI as an organization and provided accounts of the development of the Settlement.Org website.

All of the members of Group 2 have been involved with OCASI for over 3 years. Thus, they have witnessed, and have been a part of the initial launch and subsequent changes that have affected Settlement.Org. As a result, each of the staff members has inevitably acquired valuable knowledge and insight about the project and how it fits within the OCASI mandate. The organizational culture was described as friendly, dedicated and cooperative. One respondent, when asked about the motivation to continue with the work surrounding Settlement.Org, said, "The team also motivates me. The new content, the new ideas for Settlement.Org, the different ways that we're going with the information."

The respondents from this group expressed a deep sense of commitment to their work. Each respondent originally came from a background of community/social work, specializing in helping traditionally marginalized groups such as immigrants, refugees, as well as women, and all said that their work at OCASI and with Settlement.Org is extremely rewarding. Respondents said that they strive to continuously understand the needs of the users through the use of the Settlement.Org Feedback page, as well as the informal user evaluations hosted on the site. Furthermore, some of the development activities that have been conducted to directly address the users' needs include the addition of the Settlement.Org discussion board and the conscious effort to write the content of the site with a Grade 6 level of English.

Additionally, referring to the Settlement.Org slogan, *information newcomers can trust*, one respondent said, "we feel like we've developed a relationship and trust with users. We're useful and we're an important part of someone's settlement experience."

Members from Group 3 (government partners and external consultants) have been involved extensively in areas such as immigration and settlement, and non-profit, community issues. The group brings expertise from a variety of areas: strategic management and consulting,

policy and governance, systems and technology, and advocacy work, among others. As well, many members of this group have been affiliated with OCASI directly, as part of the organization, or the administrative, technological, content development and governance of Settlement.Org.

All of the respondents in Group 3 expressed a high degree of confidence and satisfaction in the outcomes of the computerization project, which eventually led to the creation of Settlement.Org. In fact, there were many references to the successful partnership established between OCASI, government, private and community and non-profit sectors.

4.4 Settlement.Org Discussion Board Findings

4.4.1 Total Numbers: Nodes and Documents

The discussion board analysis, which was conducted over a two-month period from April 1 to June 17, 2005, resulted in an examination of topics (discussion threads) from every subject of every category, with the exception of 'Other Discussion Categories', where only two subjects were analyzed. Each topic from the data set contained a range of replies – having at least one, to having over 20, which means that the content that was analyzed far exceeded the original topic that was posted. The following chart indicates the number of topics that were analyzed in each subject and category. The numbers generated for the categories are a sum of the numbers in the subjects.

Category – Subject	# of Topics ¹⁸ Analyzed	% Result	
		of Total	of Category
Employment	48	11.48	100
Finding a Job / Working	28	6.67	58.33
Professions and Trades	20	4.78	41.67
Education	30	7.18	100
University and College Education	19	4.55	63.33
Elementary and Secondary School	11	2.63	36.67
Immigration and Citizenship	275	65.79	100
General Citizenship Questions	46	11.00	16.73
General Immigration Questions	42	10.05	15.27
Living in Ontario	8	1.91	2.90
Permanent Resident Card	43	10.29	15.64

¹⁸ An example of a topic is "How can I get security clearances?" under the Employment Category and in the subject of Finding a Job / Working

Sponsoring Family	79	18.90	28.73
The Landing Experience	57	13.64	20.73
Health	21	5.02	100
Finding a Doctor or other Health Care Professional	2	0.48	9.52
Getting Health Care (OHIP)	19	4.55	90.48
Housing	24	5.74	100
Finding a Place to Live	13	3.11	54.17
Landlord and Tenant Information Issues	11	2.63	45.83
Other Discussion Categories	20	4.78	100
Consumer Information	15	3.59	75
Language and Literacy	5	1.20	25
TOTAL NUMBER OF TOPICS	418	--	--

Table 8: Number of Topics Analyzed in Discussion Board Categories/Topics

An extensive list of nodes (NVivo's terminology for codes) was developed by the researcher to perform the analysis. Each node represents a theme that can be attributed to a phrase or text. For each document, which represented a discussion thread (one topic and subsequent replies), the researcher examined all messages and coded them with relevant nodes. As a result, it was very common to have a document coded with a variety of different nodes.

In addition, phrases could be coded simultaneously with different nodes across or within node levels. For example, in the topic "Parents sponsorship delayed"¹⁹, under the Immigration and Citizenship category, and in subject of Sponsoring Family, a member of the discussion board posted: "I applied to sponsor my parents and dependent sister on July 2nd, 2003. I paid around 4 000 CAD to Immigration more than 18 months ago and I received NOTHING from immigration". From this comment, the member had simultaneously shared status information, described a personal experience, and reflected on the situation by indicating that no response had been received.

Because of the nature of the analysis and the coding scheme, the numbers that describe the total numbers of documents coded at a node are greater than the total number of documents that the researcher began with.

Since the discussion board is moderated, many of the posts on the forum are responses from the moderator of the discussion board, or other OCASI staff who work on Settlement.Org.

¹⁹ http://www.settlement.org/discuss/topic.asp?FORUM_ID=27&TOPIC_ID=2830

These posts were not included in the analysis, as the goal was to discover the types of dialogue that were engaged in by members of the discussion board.

Given that the analysis involved an iterative process, three levels of nodes were created. Initially when the researcher began the analysis, broader nodes were first used to code the documents. As the analysis progressed, the detailed nature of the coding scheme also evolved. Nodes were constantly refined and reorganized for the analysis, and documents that were coded were moved accordingly. The following chart represents the micro, meso and macro levels of the coding scheme, along with the total numbers of documents coded at each node.

CODING SCHEME – NODES USED	Micro Total²⁰	Meso Total	Macro Total
SHARING			376
Sharing Personal Information	2	202	
Sharing status info	142		
Sharing information about family	26		
Sharing qualifications, occupation	32		
Sharing personal feelings	58	58	
(List of different feelings)			
Sharing situation		116	
Telling a story or experience	113		
Share photos, personal links	3		
REFLECTING			121
Reflecting on the Canadian system, and policies	9	40	
Canadian labour market	20		
Canadian social services	2		
Canadian immigration	3		
Need to evoke action	6		
Life as an immigrant	8	8	
Comparing with home		8	
Should have stayed	0		
Want to go back	2		
Situation at home is/was good	3		
Reconsidering immigration	3		
Information needs		31	
Have not received response	13		
Cannot find info, or info not clear	8		
Received wrong information	10		
Commenting on the discussion board	34	34	

²⁰ Some micro-level codes were assigned values because the researcher was unsure as to where certain dialogues fit.

CODING SCHEME – NODES USED	Micro Total²⁰	Meso Total	Macro Total
RESPONDING			484
Follow-up with outcomes	28		
Disagree with information	8		
Provide response, possibly with information and resources	134		
Request more information	69		
Offer opinion	58		
Related situation	43		
Agree with information	8		
Offer further correspondence	7		
Sharing similar experience	43		
Addressing member directly			
You're welcome	1		
Offer support	2		
Offer congratulations	10		
Wish them well	11		
Thank you	62		
ASKING A QUESTION			546
Landing questions	27	27	
Employment, business, jobs,	50	50	
SIN Card	1		
Health		22	
Eligibility for health coverage	6		
Health card application	6		
Finding medical professional	2		
Coverage details	8		
Housing	1	24	
Tenant rights	6		
Leasing issues	3		
Buying a home	2		
Renting	11		
Landlord dilemma with tenants	1		
Double-checking and Verifying	42	42	
Education		54	
Elementary and secondary	1		
Public, private catholic	7		
Admission and eligibility	3		
University and college	4		
Eligibility	6		
Program information	4		
Equivalencies	0		
Funding studies	4		

CODING SCHEME – NODES USED	Micro Total²⁰	Meso Total	Macro Total
Choosing a school	5		
Credential Evaluation	12		
ESL, FSL, LINC	5		
Immigration and Citizenship	1	237	
Timelines and procedures	82		
Eligibility	11		
Status of application	11		
Tests, examinations	5		
Applicant requirements	60		
PR Card	1		
Processing Timeline	7		
Application issues	14		
Family sponsorship	39		
Adoption	1		
Conjugal partner	5		
Request opinions of people who had similar experiences	51	51	
Living in Ontario	2	39	
Services for newcomers	14		
Costs	5		
Transportation	7		
City information	4		
Can. Standards and customs	1		
Insurance	2		
Taxes	2		
Travelling	1		
Weather	1		

Table 9: Number of Documents Coded by Node

4.4.2 Overview of the Two-Month Time Period

The above charts provide an indication of the usage of the discussion board, and the types of discourse that occur. Over the duration of the two-month period, the category of Immigration and Citizenship was, by far, the most active with a total of 275 topics posted across the six subjects. Following this was the category of Employment, with 48 topics posted, and Education, with 30 topics posted. The rest of the categories, Health, Housing and Other, received 21, 24 and 20 postings, respectively. In reviewing an archived version of Settlement.Org²¹ from near the

²¹ The site, Web Archive (<http://webarchive.org>) was used to examine Settlement.Org from October 29, 2004.

commencement of the study, the findings were quite similar in terms of the frequency of posts in each category.

An enormous amount of activity was therefore generated on the discussion board. For the most part, during the period of analysis, members appeared to sign on to the discussion board to ask questions (546 counts). Responding to others' postings was the second most recorded activity (484 counts). Sharing personal information and experiences was also quite important (376 counts). It is possible, though, that the number is higher, considering that people could simultaneously respond to questions, and share a similar experience or opinion. Many people used the discussion board to reflect on the larger Canadian system, their status as immigrants, and their information experiences; this type of dialogue also included members' comments about the utility of the discussion board.

In the next section, the various types of dialogue will be examined in more detail, employing the quotes and testimonials of discussion board members, and delving further into the micro-level nodes that typify the kinds of dialogues amongst members (only the most popular will be described, since the charts already provide an indication of basic findings). By examining coding reports generated by NVivo, the researcher has been able to draw out written accounts of newcomers' experiences from the Settlement.Org Discussion Board. Also, please note that spelling and grammar have *not* been edited, to retain a true sense of the data.

4.4.3 Asking a Question

As discovered through the analysis of the Settlement.Org Discussion Board, the majority of members who sign-on use the discussion board to ask a question. More specifically, members often asked questions about immigration and citizenship, employment, and education. Many people also asked for others' opinions and similar experiences, as they wanted to know if anyone else had been in the same situation as them before.

Immigration and Citizenship

In terms of immigration and citizenship, one type of question that the majority of members asked on the discussion board involved timelines and procedures. Members wanted to know how long it would take for applications, medical examinations, Permanent Resident cards, and so on, to be processed. In addition, they wanted to know what measures or actions they could

take to ensure the process of immigrating, settling and/or gaining citizenship status. Some examples are:

- “I’m wondering if there is anything else I should submit with my application and what to expect in an interview... and is it mandatory that I get a medical exam?”
- “I also have a question. How long time usually takes from this point to be PR? Any inputs from people with similar experiences or knowledge would be appreciated.”
- “I’m just curious: does the processing time for citizenship depend on the place where you live? For example, does someone who lives in Nova Scotia have a shorter processing time than someone who lives in Toronto (which receives roughly half of all the yearly immigrants to Canada)?”

Besides asking about timelines and procedures, members of the discussion board also asked questions about the specific requirements of the applicant, along with how particular circumstances would affect their application. In other words, members wanted to know what they were expected to do in compliance with the Canadian immigration policies and procedures, and what might affect their standing.

- “Am I obliged to stay in Canada after submitting my application for citizenship? Is my understanding correct that I can go anywhere outside Canada and stay as long as I want, as long as I come back to write the citizenship test?”
- “If I was living with my husband abroad, does this count for days for citizenship? My husband is Canadian citizen and he was working for a Canadian company abroad.”
- “What am I required to do? Do I have to get a visa to go back to Trinidad? I’m new to the place and don’t know much.”

Finally, members of the discussion board were also active in asking questions about sponsoring family, such as sponsoring a spouse, parent, child or conjugal partner. For example,

- “I am going to get married soon, Can I bring my wife on visit visa from backhome for 1-2 months while immigration case in process..”
- “Hi there! I would like to make an inquiry about sponsoring a family member, my kids... since I am separated (not legally) from my husband and we have 3 kids I decided to come to Canada all by myself and sponsor them at a later date. I

understand that there is a sponsoring income level requirement, and for me to be able to sponsor all of them i have to have a full time work and extra's. Could you please assist me in finding out how to overcome this situation? I am a single parent and receive nothing from my ex husband in support to our kids. Thank you”

- “I have just received my confirmation of permanent resident and I intend to live in Ontario. I have a brother who is currently studying in Vancouver, may I sponsor him while he continues his studies in Vancouver?”

Education

Moving on, the second most sought out answers were those that surrounded the category of education, in particular, questions about Canadian university and education options for family members (what kinds of programs are offered, eligibility requirements, how to fund further studies, and so on). Some of the questions gathered on the discussion board include:

- “Can you please send me the names and web of universities in toronto or mississauga for master studies other the Toronto univ.”
- “Tell me the best way to apply for funding my studies. As time is running and I am not sure which option suit /belong to me (EI recipients) for this reason can I apply both programs?”
- “if i decided to study master what can i do to reach the admission requirements of univercites ?”

In addition to finding out about post-secondary education in Canada, members of the discussion board also asked many questions about the recognition of credentials they have received from their country of origin:

- “Do I get any exemptions in main Law course in view of my LL.B. degree and being an practicing Advocate in India?”
- “Evaluation of educational qualification issued by WES is valid for whole Canada or valid only in Ontario, please advise”
- “Please can you inform me is it possible to evaluate my College diploma form X-Yugoslavia, and after evaluation my diploma in which university can I continue studying for Bachelor Degree.”

Furthermore, members of the discussion board also asked about elementary and secondary schools. Some of these questions involved the eligibility of their children to attend schools, the difference between public, private and Catholic schools in Ontario, and the education system in general. With a combined number of 10 documents coded at this node, though, these questions appeared not to be as popular as the abovementioned questions on education. Finally, a few members asked questions about language programs for Canada's two official languages.

Employment

Questions about employment were not divided into detailed categories, except for a section on the Social Insurance Number card. It seemed that the majority of questioning revolved around two streams: finding a job, or opening a business. For example:

- “Where can I found information about the roles, loans and new ideas to start your bussines in Canada (Ontario)?”
- “Is there a possibility for me to join a police force in Ontario? (Toronto)”
- “Finally, where can I find a help to find a job in Mississauga? I have more than 12 years of experience selling IT solutions and I have BS in Electronics Engineering and I recently granted a MBA degree from a US university.”

In addition to these main questions, there were also inquiries about the Canadian labour market (e.g. how is the IT market in Toronto?), and administrative issues such as taxes and paid-time off.

The topic of employment will be revisited in the latter sections of the discussion board analysis, as many members of the discussion board appeared to reflect upon their own employment situation in relation to their arrival to Canada.

Requesting Opinions of People Who Have Had Similar Experiences

A significant number of documents (51) asked for opinions of people who might have had the same experiences as them. These types of questions were often coupled with the other

themes found on the discussion board (e.g. immigration and citizenship, education, employment, etc.) A few examples of these types of dialogue include:

- “I wonder if anyone has experience and could comment on the possibility of having a permanent resident visa abroad while living in Canada as a landed immigrant.”
- “I have sponsored my fiancée under the conjugal partner category, and we are currently waiting for the application to be processed. I have come across a conflict in the requirements for conjugal partner. Does anyone have any experience with this?”
- “Did anybody have experience in landing at Victoria, BC? I am currently live in Canada and want to make a u-turn at Victoria. Is that possible? Thanks a lot.”

Double-Checking and Verifying

The Settlement.Org discussion board also appears to be a place where members go to double-check and verify information they have received from other channels. This was indicated by discussion board members who prefaced their questions with ‘I have heard...’, or ‘I was told that...’. As well, members used the discussion board to verify conflicting information they have received from different sources. Overall, 42 documents were coded at this node; a few examples include:

- “Please correct me if I am wrong. I heard that after acquiring PR card, if you are working for a Canadian company even outside Canada then the days you worked for that Canadian company will be counted as residency days.”
- “Someone told us that a spouse of Canadian citizen can still count the days they live outside Canada and apply after it has been about 3 years. Is that true?”
- “Airport immigrant authority told me that 16 weeks will be required for issuing PR cards for travelling abroad. But I found in the CIC website that they will issue PR card within 30 days. Which one is correct?”

4.4.4 Responding to Others

The second most common type of discursive activity found on the Settlement.Org Discussion Board involved members responding to other members’ questions. Despite the moderated nature of the discussion board, a great number of members decided to provide answers as well.

Members were considered to be responding when their posting followed an existing question or comment.

Providing a Response, Possibly with Information and Resources

134 documents were coded with members providing answers to others' questions, sometimes bringing links to other related topics and resources. These answers were characterized as straightforward and to-the-point. The following are a few excerpts depicting such occurrences:

- <question> “Can we adopt a child from another country and can the child get a visa on arrival or how should we do it?”

<response>I can answer the first of your questions. [...] On checking with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services of Ontario, I was informed that if you are a permanent resident of Canada (specifically Ontario) and wish to adopt a child, you will need to first return to Ontario, establish residence, and then apply to adopt a child. The link to their adoption page is:

<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/CS/en/programs/Adoption/default.htm>

Only a biological child can be brought into Canada with a visit visa and then sponsored from within Canada.

Regards – RCM

- <question> “I have just landed in Canada, from Guyana. I am thinking about spending some time a three month period and go to Trinidad. What am I required to do? Do I have to get a visa to go back to Trinidad? I'm new to the place and don't know much.”

<response> “As a citizen of Guyana you require a visitor visa for Trinidad so contact the High Commission for Trinidad and Tobago.”

PMM

Addressing Other Members

In addition, there was a considerable number of responses that addressed other members of the discussion board sentimentally. Exchanges of gratitude and well wishes between the members were quite common in the analysis. In addition, those who responded would often address others by their name.

- “scorpionkami,
Congratulations and thanks for sharing your thoughts and experiences!”
- “So sorry to hear about your situation. Hopefully everything will be resolved in your favor eventually.”
- “thanks for replying nelson... i didnt think u'd ever come back to post but i was hoping you would. i needed to get advise from people who are in the same situation.”

Request for More Information

Upon receiving information and or answers from other members or the moderator, members also tended to go back to the discussion board to request for more information. On the one hand, members requested further information about a question they had originally asked, while on the other hand, members also requested further information

- “If you could be kind enough to help me lil more. I have been working full-time and really have no time to read newspaper or see news. Apart from the Book "look at canada", is there any other website which is helpful to know the current govt, its policies etc”
- “Sorry, I have one more question - regarding the letters from friends and family that have knowledge of our relationship to proof our common-law relationship - the CIC site states that they have to be Statutory Declarations - what does this mean?”
- “Great, thanks. The letter should arrive today, and hopefully it will hold good news. If you don't mind my asking, why was your application rejected?”

Offering an Opinion and Sharing a Similar Experience

Two other nodes that were assigned to ‘Responding’ included offering an opinion, and sharing a similar experience. These two nodes were found to be linked at times – for example, if someone offered an opinion, it was guided by a similar experience – however, the researcher

decided to keep the nodes separate because there were many occasions where an opinion was offered, yet was not associated with a similar experience, and vice versa. Nevertheless, both nodes were coded heavily (i.e. offering an opinion was coded at 58 documents, and sharing a similar experience was coded at 43). These types of expressions differed from simply providing responses because they tended not to be as factual; rather, they incorporated personal circumstances and views of the situation. A few examples include:

- “We went thru this a month ago. It's not very difficult if your officer is good. We had a very good officer and she asked specific questions pertaining to the job and profession of the principal applicant (in our case my wife). I was asked only a few questions and the interview was over in about 15-20 min. Quite smooth in our case.”
- “Its a pretty big step, so take your partner if you want, as you may want to celebrate after you're ‘landed’”
- “It is perhaps advisable to return to Canada a bit before that date so that you have a few days spare just in case you need to leave Canada once more for a short while in the following two years”

Posting a Related Situation

Another significant type of dialogue that fell under ‘Responding’ involved members asking questions that were related to a question or comment that was previously posted, but not similar. This accounted for 43 documents. For example:

- “My situation is a bit different. I landed in April 2004. Then after a month I came back to my contry to complete my studies. I intend to go back in July 2006. As per description of the law I will have 2 years and 9months left in five year period. So I can complete residency requirement of 2 years in years. I have a bank account, driving licence and SIN cards for me and my family. Am I right in thinking so? Please reply.”

Following-up and Providing Outcomes

After having their questions answered, some members returned to the discussion board to report the outcomes of the advice they received. This is partially encouraged by others, but at times, it is also self-initiated.

- “Thanks for your help, after I contacted with the organizations your provided above ,I found my satisfied lawyer who is very confidence in my case. It also gives me more confidence, I hope this is a good start for my appeal even there is a long time to wait. Ths very much again.”
- “Just want to update my situation. Today, my e-case status changed to "decision made". CIC have sent approval in principle (AIP) and decision made letters. Hopefully, I will receive them by Monday.”

4.4.5 Sharing Personal Details and Experiences

In addition to asking questions and providing responses, numbers from the analysis also showed that when using the discussion board, many members share personal details and experiences. Not only do they provide information about their personal situation – their status, their families, their aptitudes and qualifications – but also, appear to talk openly about their experiences of immigrating and settling in Canada, as they provide stories, share their feelings, and relate to others. While members of the discussion board could respond to another member’s question by relating to a similar experience (mentioned above), the documents coded with the ‘Sharing’ node indicate that a member initiated a posting by sharing personal details, information and experiences. Overall, ‘sharing’ received 376 counts in the analysis.

Sharing Personal Information

Before posting their comments or questions, members of the discussion board will quite often provide personal information about themselves first, perhaps by way of introducing themselves. The majority of such personal details include information about the member’s immigration status – for example, how long the member has been in the process of immigrating, how long the member has lived in Canada, when the member is set to land, and so on. Another type of information that is usually shared, particularly when speaking of topics involving education and employment is educational qualifications and/or information about one’s professional experience. Finally, other personal information that is often shared includes information about family. For example, members reveal whether they have a spouse, child, parents, siblings, or other relatives.

- “I will be independent immigrant from Turkey until July 2005, This's why I'm looking for a suitable job for me How can you help me about this. I am an Architect. I have Master's degree.”
- “I got married over telephone. I want to bring my spouse immediately to me in Canada. I am a landed immigrant and I am 18+. I am not in job nor receiving any social assistance from Canadian government.”
- “I will land in Toronto next month. I have BS degree in industrial engineering from Iran university. I am 10 years experienced engineer work in a car manufacturer co. I decided to continue my education in master degree in industrial engineering in Canada”

Sharing a Situation, Experience

In addition to providing personal details about themselves, members of the discussion board also share their personal situations and experiences in immigrating and settling in Canada. For example,

- “I am in desperate need for information. My situation is the following:
My wife sponsored me to become permanent resident. Eight months ago I obtained PR status and lived happily together with my wife....or so I thought. A couple of weeks ago I travelled overseas to finally ship my "goods to follow" to Canada. Two days later, after I arrived in overseas, I received an e-mail from my wife, saying that she has sold our apartment, emptied our common bank account, and won't be around anymore when I come back.”
- “Please don't make the mistake which I did...I applied for citizenship in 2003 and then in 2004 June, I went out of Canada. I informed CIC centre about my departure and they said that it will not slow the process at all.”
- “I delivered the title personally to the US customs a week before landing. She landed and imported her car only and had a list of goods to follow. She stopped at the US export control, they inspected the vehicle to verify the VIN. The entire process took about an hour.”

In addition to sharing personal situations, some members also ask questions on behalf of their friends or other family members. A few examples of these situations are:

- “a friend of mine is asking regarding renewal of health card. she said, she already got an approval for her landed immigrant and still waiting for her interview until now. she wants to know-if she can renew her health card now even though she doesn't have yet her schedule for interview.”
- “One of my friend and his wife emigrated to canada together 5 years ago. Now they are canadian citizens. But unluckily due to some serious conflicts with her husband wife got divorced from him. Now she want to marry a boy from his home country(India)”

Sharing Feelings

Usually in conjunction with sharing personal stories and experiences, members of the discussion board seem also to reveal emotions and feelings. Many members openly say that they are confused about application requirements and policies, for example, while others do not show their emotions up front; rather, members imply their feelings through the punctuation and style of their message.

- “Finally, I am Canadian Citizen - for some reason I thought there was no photography allowed. But it was sweet deal, taking oath, singing national anthem (in french too), going up and shaking hands, getting the certificate, signing.”
- “Because I was a newcomer, I had no job. I had to stay 2 weeks in a very small hotel room (w/o window). Discrimination against immigrants started right there in searching for a place to live.”
- “THANK GOD, AT LAST I GOT MY TEST LETTER TODAY, IT'S ON JUNE 22 AT 1 PM off HURONTARIO somewhere. I will start hitting the book again. Designed give me some detail about your test, or some questions, well I have done a lot of studying. What is the format (other than its multiple choice), how are the questions worded, exact same as the Richmond Public Library???? ... So excited. After such a long wait....Its time for me to say HURRAY”

4.4.6 Reflecting on the Immigration and Settlement Experience

Another discursive activity that occurred on the discussion board during the two-month period of analysis involved reflections on the immigration and settlement experience. At times, members questioned the validity and efficiency of the Canadian system, while on other occasions members spoke about life as a Canadian immigrant. Other kinds of reflection included comparing the country of origin with Canada. Members of the discussion board also reflected on their experiences in finding the relevant information for immigrating and settling in Canada. Finally, members also provided comments about the discussion board itself.

Reflecting on the Canadian System, Policies and Legislation

40 counts were collected about members who used the discussion board to reflect on the Canadian system, policies and legislation. The topics that were most popular included debates about the labour market and the Canadian immigration policies.

- “Regarding the new bill passed on February 18, 2005. I kind of find it somewhat contradicting with the way the law has been passed vis-a-vis the fact regarding the embassies' stand on spouses of Canadian citizen getting a temporary / visitor's visa.”
- “I understand the fact that its completely unjustified in the case of sponsoring parents. CIC is completely unable to answer our questions and they do not have any clear poilcy or direction. I have been busy calling everybody since last 6 months, from cic call centre, to my MP to ottawa, but no body is willing to give me any definate answer. In fact it appears that they want to hide since they do not have any answer to our questions.”
- “My concerns are about why the Canada is accepting so many immigrants and why the Canadian Government Institutions are skewing the actual situation in the Canadian economy?”

Additionally, there were members who wanted to evoke action and initiate advocacy activities for immigrants' cause. These members seemed not to be satisfied with what was currently happening. Instead, they hoped that through their actions, their needs would be addressed.

- “What I propose to all you good folks who are waiting for an answer from CIC, is to start an online petition to the Minister, asking him to look into the situation and to improve the lead times for getting our citizenship applications approved right up to the oath-taking stage, reducing the time from the present 12 to 15 months to a more reasonable 6 to 9 months.”
- “All sponsors who has the same situation please contact me We have to do something otherwise you won't see your parents in next 10 years.”
- “CIC is in process of making new Citizenship act, below is the link where you can tell them your story and frustration, suggestions on the improvement etc. This is very good chance to improve the process.”

Life as an Immigrant

Members of the discussion board also had lively discussions about what it has been like to be a Canadian immigrant. Unfortunately, the majority of responses were quite negative.

- “I have landed in Canada for at least over 6 months, I had been trying to find a job really hard, whatever I tried, people just trying to fool you around and treat you like a complete idiot without telling you anything.
Is it how it is in Canada as a new immigrant?!”
- “I assure all that no matter what were the reasons for coming to Canada to live, we expected some hardship. We expected a long period of adaptation and cultural assimilation that didn't start as soon as we landed. That it was going to take time. I can readily say that us immigrants expected all of this things. But we also expected this excuses to stop soon.”
- “There is always something that reminds us vividly that we came here from somewhere else and for some reason we need to prove ourselves first in order to be accepted.”

Comparing with the Former Home

Members often compared their new life in Canada with their life in their home country; and, on some occasions, where members had not yet arrived in Canada, they underwent the same sort of reflection. At times, members simply compared the two; but there were other times when

members of the discussion board seriously reconsidered or questioned their choice to immigrate to Canada.

- “I am Egyptian with PR Status and currently working in Dubai, United Arab Emirates as a Pro Engineer having 20 y of exp and with an income equal to over CAN\$ 80,000. Do you expect that I will leave such job and start roaming in Canada for a job that would not pay more than half of that.”
- “Sometimes it's so ridiculous that I have given thought of turning around my dreams and returning to the place I once called home.”
- Personally I was lucky enough to be accepted in a M.Sc. program in Canadian University, but I think that it would be better for me to leave this country and to pursue other opportunities back in Europe.”

Reflecting on Personal Information Needs

Members often commented about the role of information in their immigration and settlement process; 31 counts of this node were recorded in the analysis. They spoke about times when they could not find any information on a topic, or they did not receive any information about it; they also recalled times when erroneous information affected their situations; finally, they also wrote about times when they received information that was not clear or not comprehensive enough to answer their question. Some examples of these incidents include:

- “I applied to sponsor my parents and dependent sister on July 2nd, 2003. I paid around 4 000 CAD to Immigration more than 18 months ago and i received NOTHING from immigration.”
- “MAINTAINING PERMANENT RESIDENCY is the issue that?s bothering me now, since I can?t find any clear explanation about my situation”
- “When I told them that I already asked them about this matter and at that time they gave me the wrong information, they say that may be they made a mistake or something..(how convenient to say that)”

Commenting on the Settlement.Org Discussion Board

Finally, many members (34 counts) commented on the utility of the Settlement.Org discussion board. As shown, many members ‘reflected’ on negative experiences associated with

immigrating and settling in Canada. However, comments about the discussion board as a space to post experiences and thoughts were overwhelmingly positive. Many of the members appreciated the basic ability to communicate with others about their immigration and settlement situation, while others indicated their satisfaction with the moderators, the advice and information they have received, and their use of the site.

- “I have been an avid reader of these forums for the past 12 months or more and they have been extremely helpful and encouraging. The users and moderators have been absolutely amazing in giving their responses and It has helped me alot and I am sure it has helped others also”
- “I have been looking for a forum like this, where we would be able to unite and communicate our voice.”
- “I'm new to this forum. But I found it terrific. Thank you all for your sharing. After my landing, I'd do the same.”

5. DISCUSSION

This study began with the intent to explore users' experiences with Settlement.Org's informing and involving functions. The research delved into the lives of newcomers to investigate how newcomers become informed through the use of Settlement.Org, their experiences with the site, and their overall reflections about their information experience. In addition, the extent of involvement made possible by the Settlement.Org discussion board was examined. The wider context of immigration and settlement was also explored by interviewing OCASI staff, as well as government partners and external consultants who have been instrumental in the development of Settlement.Org.

The research shows that, newcomers who use Settlement.Org are generally satisfied with the site. They consult it regularly for information about settling in Canada and Ontario, and they have found the information to be useful in addressing their situations. Additionally, all respondents indicated that the Internet is their primary information source, stating that its dynamic and versatile nature is what makes it superior to other channels. Thus, many respondents, if not all, were able to acquire information from sites such as Settlement.Org before actually arriving to Canada. The question that might be raised, then, is whether the emergence of information and communication technologies (such as the Internet) has affected immigrants' experiences. The use of technologies to acquire as much information as possible prior to arriving in the host country, and then throughout the various stages of immigrant settlement has changed the way immigrants seek and use information, and has perhaps altered the way settlement is conceptualized. In an age where information is increasingly becoming digitized and made available on the Internet, these questions need to be explored.

Findings also show that respondents gave a lot of weight to the advice and information provided by other people. Many described the words and experiences of fellow immigrants as authentic and meaningful, as they provide a familiar or personal context to which information can be attached. It was also observed in the discussion board analysis that people actively seek out the opinions of others in trying to address their own information needs. These findings illustrate importance of social networks, which Johnson (2004) describes as social structures that can grant access to a variety of information and resources. In effect, the transfer of information occurs horizontally through close ties (e.g. friends and family), as well as vertically through

weak ties (e.g. acquaintances and initial strangers). The combination of the two allows access to a range of resources and to other services that are not always or easily attainable.

Throughout the research, participants mentioned the significance of both close and weak ties. They trusted the advice of friends and family (close ties), but also saw value in learning about the experiences of people who they do not actually know (weak ties). It appears that Settlement.Org predominantly facilitates the connections with the latter. The discussion board brings together people who come from varying backgrounds and who have different types of information to share. The members may not know each other personally, but the many discussions generated on the discussion board suggests that weak ties are useful in acquiring information and knowledge about the settlement process.

Furthermore, it might also be argued that Settlement.Org enables a sense of virtual community shared amongst its users. As suggested by Siemiatycki et al (2003), certain social forces bring people together to form a community, which then remains cohesive due to a shared space, interests or identity. Arguably, the process of immigrating to and settling in Canada, and more specifically Ontario, is the factor that brings people to Settlement.Org. Through their discussions online, the relationships in this community strengthen as experiences, needs, and ambitions and challenges are shared. Investigating the dynamics of community is therefore useful in uncovering the extent to which newcomers become personally, socially and emotionally involved through their uses of Settlement.Org.

Finally, it is necessary to examine whether a resource such as Settlement.Org is enough to encourage a satisfactory and/or successful settlement process. As discovered in the study, the respondents had predominantly positive reviews of Settlement.Org, however, not all of them have had positive settlement experiences. Thus, while Settlement.Org has developed an impressive array of trustworthy and reliable information that addresses the various stages of settlement and the multi-faceted nature of Canadian society, it is questionable whether, by virtue of using the site, one will be able to address all the challenges faced when settling in Canada. It would be difficult to assert that having the “right” information will automatically lead to a job that meets an individual’s qualifications; just like it would be difficult to say that having information will help a newcomer avoid discriminatory practices when trying to access social services. These are some challenges that are beyond the scope of information alone. What is needed, then, is an understanding of how Settlement.Org attempts to address the dynamic nature

of settlement, and what other components could be paired with the site to ensure an even better experience for immigrants to Canada.

Overall, in investigating the informing and involving aspects of Settlement.Org, a few key questions have emerged about the relationship of the site to the overall process of settlement. First, given that Settlement.Org is an online information resource, how has the use of Internet and other information and communication technologies affected the immigration process? Second, what can be said about social networks, as individuals who are inherently strangers come together on Settlement.Org to acquire the information they need? Somewhat related to this question is the third inquiry, which attempts to position Settlement.Org as a (virtual) community. Lastly, what impact does an initiative such as Settlement.Org have on the overall experience of newcomers, and how can this be improved? This chapter will address each of these themes.

5.1 The Shaping of Settlement Through the Use of the Internet

5.1.1 Patterns of ICT Usage Amongst Immigrant and Ethno-Cultural Communities

Information and communication technologies such as the Internet have transformed all aspects of life. The globalization of the world economy has also meant an increased diffusion of technologies around the world. In fact, as Maitland and Bauer (2001) state, “interactive networks, such as the Internet and wireless telephony, in addition to computing hardware and applications, are being adopted at phenomenally rapid rates across the globe” (p. 87).

It is not surprising, then, that adoption of the Internet has taken place in all corners of the world, and not just in western societies. Looking at the statistics about the number of Internet users by country²², at least four continents are represented: Asia, Europe, North America and South America. The following chart provides a more detailed look at the number of Internet users per country.

#	Country	Number of Internet Users
1	China	94 million
2	Japan	57.2 million
3	Germany	39 million
4	South Korea	29.22 million

²² Statistics taken from Nationmaster http://www.nationmaster.com/graph-T/int_use, where source is from the CIA Fact Book, March 2005.

5	France	21.9 million
6	Italy	18.5 million
7	India	18.481 million
8	Canada	16.11 million
9	Brazil	14.3 million
10	Mexico	10.033 million

Table 10: Number of Internet Users by Country
(Source: Nationmaster.com/CIA World Fact Book, March 2005)

The figures suggest that there is a diverse base of Internet users who have varying ethnicities, languages, and religions, amongst other characteristics. In relation to this particular study, the composition of respondents shows that they represent a wide array of origins and backgrounds.

The usage of traditional and emerging media by ethno-cultural groups has been of particular interest in cultural studies, information science, and communications studies. Given the constant pattern of migration within and across nations and continents, studies on how ethno-cultural or diasporic groups use the Internet to adapt to their host societies has emerged as a valuable area of research. For example, the research by Yang et al (2004) on Chinese students in the United States showed that media use, such as news-based websites and online discussion forums, is related to the acculturation process of these students. Similarly, Aizlewood and Doody (2002) suggest that ICTs can drive forward the use of ethno-cultural information, thus, possibly enhancing the integration process of immigrants, as well as promoting cross-cultural understanding in a host society.

The implications of these studies are important for Settlement.Org, as it strives to address the settlement process by providing a plethora of information and resources. If the use of ICTs are increasingly being accessed on a global scale, and if tools such as the Internet can help improve the settlement and integration process for immigrants, then users of Settlement.Org have the opportunity to access the site even before they arrive to Canada, not to mention that what they find may facilitate their experiences overall. The importance of tools such as Settlement.Org is highlighted by Hiller and Franz's (2004) study on the Internet use of migrants. The authors describe the pre-migrant,

who is essentially information-seeking and finds the computer enormously useful in obtaining information, making contacts and obtaining assistance and advice about the possible move. It is in this phase that the computer as a search tool is particularly valuable. Simple things such as learning about the destination, its

weather, tourist attractions, dominant industries and job postings through both narrative discussions and pictures help to stimulate pre-migration excitement (p. 738).

Furthermore, having reviewed the work of scholars such as Papillon (2002), Mwarigha (2002), and others, it has been shown that the initial stages of settlement are perhaps the most challenging and urgent. Newcomers need to find housing, work, and other basic amenities; they need to establish a social network, and they need to know where to go and what to do to acquire initial settlement services. This is not to say that the latter stages are less important though. Establishing oneself in the labour market, accessing Canadian institutions, and participating in the social, political and economic life of Canada, are also part of the settlement process of immigrants. Moreover, the nature of the immigrant population is quite heterogeneous as well (Caidi and Allard, 2005; Fisher, Durrance and Hinton, 2004). Immigrants come from all over the world and they differ in many aspects of life – financial situation, cultural and religious values, family composition, and so on.

The findings from this study show that Settlement.Org appears to address the continuum known as the process of settlement adequately, in addition to providing information to the diverse group of users who go to the site. To provide an example, in the site's 'Housing' section²³, a range of information is offered. Not only is there information renting an apartment, there is also information about finding subsidized housing, leasing a home, and buying a home. The site addresses the different situations that immigrants might find themselves in when adapting to Canadian life. There is also information for government-sponsored refugees who are in need of accommodation services. Similarly, as expected in the 'Employment' section²⁴, there is information about finding a job in Ontario; yet there is also other content that involves gaining Canadian experience through volunteering, the procedures to start your own business, and information and directions on how to gain financial assistance through employment programs.

As a result, Settlement.Org is flexible enough to reach users who are in different stages of the settlement process. Ratna Omidvar (2001) reiterates this sentiment:

Settlement, therefore, cannot end at speaking English to a certain level; it should mean speaking enough English so that we can vote or sit around a boardroom. Settlement should not end at a referral to housing. Yes, it should start there, but it should also include one of the most meaningful and sadly forgotten indicators of

²³ <http://www.settlement.org/site/HO/home.asp>

²⁴ <http://www.settlement.org/site/EM/home.asp>

settlement: home ownership. Settlement should not end at showing people how to find jobs; it should start there and go with them into the workplace (p. 6).

In addition, the rising numbers of Internet users are also reflected in the growing user base of Settlement.Org²⁵. Consequently, as the site becomes more popular, increased pressures to keep the content relevant and useful also surface as core priorities.

5.1.2 Access to ICTs = A Better Settlement Experience?

In trying to assess the current information environment, which is characterized by innovative and dynamic technologies, recognition must also be given to the increasing gap between the information haves and have-nots, otherwise known as the digital divide. Warschauer (2003) describes the digital divide as “a societal split between those with and those without access to computers and the Internet” (p. 42). Furthermore, those who have no access, or lack access to technologies have generally been characterized with lower economic, education and social statuses (Caidi and Allard, 2005).

Given that ICTs facilitate the acquisition of information (convenience), to provide a dynamic and interactive environment, and perhaps facilitate social, economic and political participation, those who have access may benefit from having their information needs met quickly and comprehensively. On the other hand, those who do not have access fall further behind as the fast-paced, digital environment advances. Consequently, the question of access comes into play in the context of settlement. Since ICTs offer ethno-cultural and immigrant groups vast potential to access information and resources for settlement purposes, not having access to ICTs might ostensibly hinder the settlement process altogether.

While the research shows that Settlement.Org attempts to address the process of settlement through the provision of adequate and relevant information, the issue of access inevitably persists; that is, who exactly benefits from the use of the site? Is the site being utilized by all of its intended users? If, as found by Papillon (2002), Richmond (2004), and Robson-Haddow and Ladner (2005), patterns of racialized poverty are becoming more prevalent, then are immigrants who fall in the lower economic statuses using Settlement.Org? The findings of the study have shown that all respondents have the leisure of accessing a computer and Internet connection readily and frequently. As well, most if not all respondents have achieved some form

²⁵ The number of users recorded in the 2003-2004 statistics for Settlement.Org was 813, 352.

of post-secondary education, and their English language skills appear to be sufficient. Arguably, one might assert that given the findings of this, and other studies, Settlement.Org is being accessed mostly by *privileged* immigrants. Of course, further research should be taken to understand the user base of Settlement.Org more comprehensively, since this study drew from a small sample and thus results cannot be generalized.

Settlement.Org takes advantage of the usefulness of today's emerging information environment. In one sitting, users can quickly find answers to pressing information needs, they can click on a link and be referred to external sites and organizations, they can access the site whenever they wish, and they can connect with others through the site's discussion board. Conversely, though, when thinking about those who do not have access to Settlement.Org, one might wonder about the process of acquiring the necessary resources for settlement purposes. Quite possibly, newcomers who do not have access to the Internet or this site might need to undergo the painstaking process of going from place to place to find the information they need. While not negating the importance of ethno-cultural and community organizations, libraries, and other institutions where information can be acquired, newcomers who can only go to these sources may be limited by operating hours, or face external constraints such as transportation if they only rely on these sources for information.

In addition, more research is needed to examine the channels by which information for immigrants is delivered. Is information increasingly being disseminated online, and if so, what is the resulting effectiveness of traditional means such as print sources? More simply put, is being online an advantage in itself? Again, the concept of the digital divide is manifested in the process of information delivery.

Over the past decade, access has also been linked with the concept of literacy; that is, having the skills and education to navigate information and information technologies to reach a desired goal. As Caidi and Allard (2005) stress, simply having access to the Internet is not enough; knowing how to use the technology and accessing the right information is equally important.

As the findings from this study show, respondents seemed to be quite savvy in terms of their computer and Internet skills, and they did not seem to experience any major problems in navigating Settlement.Org. Although the research did not have the opportunity to explore the experience of novice users of the site (the closest was Mr. D), this type of research warrants

investigation. Tools such as usability or heuristic evaluations are useful in determining what types of problems users of diverse skill levels face in browsing a website.

Through the interviews with OCASI staff, as well as with government partners and external consultants, it was revealed that Settlement.Org was written to accommodate a Grade 6 level of English. No participants reported experiencing major problems with the terminology and language used on the site. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (2004) data showed that between 1994 and 2003, economic class immigrants comprised the greatest numbers of immigrants²⁶. Ostensibly, these groups would have sufficient English language skills. However, one may still question whether having basic English skills is a privilege that determines who can access Settlement.Org.

Overall, access, literacy and technological skills are linked to the acquisition of information for settlement. When immigrants are able to use the Internet, navigate and make sense of the information about housing, employment, education, social services, they can then achieve an understanding of how Canadian society operates and weigh the options that are available to them. However, without the appropriate access or skills to guide their decisions or contextualize their situations, immigrants face a more challenging and delayed process of settlement. Moreover, given the linkage between successful settlement and the social inclusion, one might also argue that being able to access information might lead to the participation and engagement of immigrants in Canadian society in the future.

In effect, Settlement.Org is a comprehensive resource that offers considerable opportunity to provide information and resources to immigrant communities to help them settle into Canadian life. Yet, it should be kept in mind that if individuals do not have access to the technology nor the aptitudes to use the site, then the effectiveness of Settlement.Org is also weakened.

5.1.3 Changing Roles in Immigrant Settlement

In addition to transforming access and delivery of information and resources, the rise of ICTs has changed the state of organizations. There is no question that the adoption of ICTs has resulted in changes in the way information and resources are acquired and delivered, as well as the expediency of the processes (Gascó, 2003). At the same time, roles of personnel also change.

Governance must be taken into account, and employee duties are altered when computers and the Internet are introduced into an organization.

The growing technological environment has similarly affected the settlement sector in Ontario. The push to computerize the sector in Ontario in the late 1990s revolutionized the way immigrant settlement agencies provided services to immigrants and refugees. As reflected in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), the result of the initiative to build the technological capacity of the sector brought it into the emerging information age.

As a product of these initiatives, Settlement.Org has also redefined its task of information delivery to newcomers, who depend on the sector for informational support. Individuals who have the access and ability to navigate Settlement.Org can acquire the information they need in one place, and perhaps at their leisure. Given that information and referral is traditionally a service offered by immigrant settlement agencies in Ontario, one might wonder if Settlement.Org reduces the importance or minimizes their role. In climate where the sector has increasingly turned into a competitive, commercialized environment (Owen, 1999, Richmond and Shields, 2004), Settlement.Org's model of information delivery may seem cost-efficient and easy compared to the traditional methods. Therefore, the question that might be asked is whether the need to visit community agencies is reduced as the site gains an increasing user base and popularity.

Looking back at the original mandate of the initiative that produced Settlement.Org, it is shown that the site was (and still is) supposed to be a tool that *supports* the settlement sector in Ontario. In the initial conceptualization of the site, it was hoped that settlement workers would benefit from the ability to share ideas and information about their work. The newcomer site was established so that new and potential immigrants could go online to find information and resources that complemented the services offered by the sector.

The findings from this research show that Settlement.Org keeps to these original goals, as it offers extensive information about settling in Ontario, but also encourages the use of agencies by providing a comprehensive listing of where to go to find settlement services. Because the process of settlement consists of various activities, and not simply information, linking online information to offline activity is absolutely essential.

²⁶ See CIC's Facts and Figures 2003: Immigration Overview – Permanent Residents
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub/facts2003/permanent/19.html>. Retrieved July 10, 2005.

Due to the increasing role of information technologies in society today, perhaps an emerging role for immigrant serving agencies in Ontario is to offer services to promote access, literacy and technological skills. As outlined above, these three elements are essential for newcomers' acquisition and use of relevant information and resources that would help in their settlement process. Rather than seeing Settlement.Org as an entity that competes with the information delivery service of agencies, perhaps a more complementary approach can be taken. Agencies might serve to provide access, as well as literacy and technology training as an integral component of their services to help newcomers cope with the dizzying and dynamic nature of today's information environment.

Public sector responsibilities have also shifted as technologies continue to affect everyday life. The Government of Canada, for example, has recognized the crucial role of ICTs in shaping the social, economic and political aspects of Canadian society and has thus developed federal programs that are geared towards fostering connectivity throughout the nation. For example, the Community Access Program (CAP) "aims to provide Canadians with affordable public access to the Internet and the skills they need to use it effectively" (Industry Canada, 2005a). Schools, libraries, and community organizations are some of the venues for which CAP programs are implemented, as they serve as public access points to the information highway. Also, in addressing the needs of rural, remote and/or Aboriginal communities, a pilot program has been initiated by industry Canada to promote broadband access in such communities (Industry Canada, 2005b). Both of these initiatives indicate the government's commitment to issues of access, literacy and technological skill. These programs, among others, signify the government's commitment to ensuring a connected Canada. In turn, as information and resources for immigrants and ethno-cultural communities are progressively driven by ICTs, government support is vital in helping them cope with the digital era.

Furthermore, government has the primary responsibility of shaping and implementing policies and legislation. Through the use of ICTs, great opportunities exist in establishing a stronger relationship with the public. Gascó (2003) notes that ICTs affect the relationships between governments and their citizens, as governments can use technologies to improve their effectiveness, efficiency and political legitimacy (p. 8).

As was shown in this study, the majority of posts on the Settlement.Org Discussion Board involved members who asked questions, reflected on, and evaluated federal policies and

legislation, particularly in the area of citizenship and immigration. Given the huge amount of discussion generated, this might serve as a prime opportunity for the government to see the forum as a vehicle in which citizens offer feedback, opinions and evaluations regarding its programs and policies. In fact, many of the members of the discussion board commented that Settlement.Org was the only place where they could voice their opinions and concerns. Thus, government might be able to seize the opportunity to deliver transparent and relevant policies by looking to Settlement.Org and other similar tools. If government is truly committed to the well being of immigrants in Canada, then striking a balance between people's voices and policy development is a necessity in the age of ICT-driven initiatives like Settlement.Org.

5.2 Social Networks and Settlement.Org

5.2.1 The Importance of Ties

This research shows that respondents regard relationships with other people as very important in the acquisition of information, in developing a sense of belonging, and in receiving emotional support. As one respondent said, "I like Canada. I've met some very nice people here. I've been fortunate to settle down [...], in a community which has accepted me for who I am, not what my nationality is, or what my job is, but who I am as a person." Similarly, another respondent remarked that he has seen people from all over the world on the Settlement.Org Discussion Board. On the whole, he stated, "the discussion is generally very good [...] It is useful in every respect."

These testaments signify the value of creating connections. As Haythornthwaite (2002) states, "a tie is said to exist between communicators wherever they exchange or share resources such as goods, services, social support or information" (p. 386). People are bound to have a range of ties associated to them, and the strength of ties is influenced by factors such as trust, reciprocity, intimacy, frequency of contact, and kinship.

The ties that are associated with an individual constitute his or her social network. Studies on social networks are prominent in the information studies field. Johnson (2004) indicated that social networks are organized in hierarchical structures; thus, individuals can move horizontally and/or vertically throughout such structures to acquire the resources they need. On the other hand, Chatman's (1990) study on janitorial workers showed the repercussions of being socially isolated. Janitorial staff in her study lacked a sense of trust and limited their ties with

others. Her study showed that the lack of a social network in one's life can contribute to poverty, alienation, and deficiencies in information.

Social networks also play a role in the provision of information and resources to newcomers, in addition to giving them social and emotional support. It should also be kept in mind that newcomers' social networks may not be fully or adequately developed upon initially arriving in a host country. Depending on how quickly and effectively social networks are established, newcomers' settlement experiences may be affected positively or delayed (Caidi and Allard, 2005). Studies by Danso (2001), and George and Fuller-Thomson (1997), have shown that for new immigrants, going to people is one of the most valuable methods of acquiring information, of feeling a sense of stability and security, and of gaining support in the settlement process. In relation to this particular study, the testimonials offered above, in addition to the respondents' positive association of happiness, reliability and importance to friends, family, and an overall social circle, supports the necessity of having human ties, structured in a social network.

No discussion of social networks would be complete without acknowledging that the combination of trust and reciprocity, mutual interest, and group norms strengthen what is known as social capital (Putnam, 1995). In an interview with Robert Putnam (1995), a scholar who popularized the topic of social capital, he said:

For a variety of reasons, life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. In the first place, networks or civic engagement foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved (p. 67).

Therefore, it might be useful to consider how the social capital of newcomers to Canada might be strengthened as ties are formed and social networks expand. Studying the variables that affect social capital as a whole in newcomers' lives is a topic worthy of intensive study.

5.2.2 Supporting Social Networks Through ICTs

The great amount of research on social networks in the current information age by many scholars (Haythornthwaite, 2002; Hiller and Franz, 2004; Preece, 2002; and Wellman, 2001) has shown that computer networks essentially foster social networks through the use of the Internet. Unlike its media predecessors such as print, television and radio, the Internet is a place where people can

simultaneously receive, produce and disseminate information, and, thus communicate with other individuals and institutions. Through the multiple, ongoing and overlapping conversations that are being conducted online, social ties are established and maintained between users, which inevitably lead to and strengthen social network structures.

ICTs can also influence the strength of ties between people in a social network. If a technology such as the Internet is seen as another method to communicate and establish a relationship with individuals, then it has been suggested that strong ties may benefit from this complementary form of communication, and weak ties can be maintained. ICTs can bring previously unknown individuals together into a new social relationship (Haythornthwaite, 2002).

Settlement.Org appears to play a role in establishing and maintaining relationships between strangers. The discussion board analysis showed an immense amount of activity between users who appeared not to know each other personally, but discussed issues and concerns avidly on the site. Hence, it seems that the presence of the discussion board has brought together people of varying circumstance to talk about issues that matter.

Settlement.Org embodies what Wellman (2001) describes as the computer-supported social network. "Often computer networks and social networks work conjointly, with computer networks linking people in social networks and with people bringing their offline situations to bear when they use computer networks to interact" (p. 2031). Thus, the conversations that are conducted online dealt with the real life situations and experiences of people who were preparing to arrive, or who have recently arrived in Canada. Furthermore, as postings often revealed the intricacies and personal details of members' situations, the discussion board also seems to serve a type of sounding board, or perhaps a support group. This assertion is supported by Hiller and Franz's (2004) study, as it was observed that, "the opportunity to discuss feelings and concerns about migration in a personal manner, particularly in chatrooms, suggests that there may also be cathartic value in this kind of interchange" (pp. 739-40).

The value of the discussion function on Settlement.Org is also represented by statistics collected on the website. Given that the discussion board is the second most accessed area on Settlement.Org beyond the home page (the first is the Employment page), it is perhaps fitting to say that for the most part, users value access to the information, experiences, and opinions of people, rather than going through a more solitary information search.

Furthermore, as Haythornthwaite (2002) suggests, technology, and in particular computer-mediated communication tools, can benefit weaker ties by bringing people together and maintaining these relationships. The absence of such tools can be detrimental to these relationships. "It is argued here that where weak ties are dependent on organizationally established media, the social networks their ties describe are particularly susceptible to dissolution given a change in that medium, or even a change in organizational mandate regarding its use" (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p. 386).

These findings imply that careful considerations should be taken if future development of the Settlement.Org Discussion Board were to take place. As it stands now, the forum is moderated by an Information and Referral Specialist, yet exchanges occur amongst anyone who uses the discussion board. Any changes to this current structure would also likely cause changes to the dynamics of the discussion board. Hypothetically speaking, if Settlement.Org were to introduce another moderator or remove the moderated function, these changes would likely affect the kinds of interactions that take place on the site now. Further study on increasing the technological capacity of Settlement.Org may also be beneficial to determine how social networks can be established, maintained and strengthened. For example, a few respondents had suggested the addition of an online chat function to Settlement.Org so that newcomers can establish alternate ways to create ties and get the information and resources they need to settle in Canada.

5.3 Settlement.Org as a Virtual Community

5.3.1 Beyond Social Networks and into Community

Defining the concept of community is difficult and the topic has been scrutinized from every angle in social research. In her work on investigating the constructs of community, Effrat (1974) outlines three common views of what it is. First, community might be seen as solidarity institutions, where families, ethnic groupings, neighbourhoods and the like are institutions that strive for unity and cohesion. Community may also be seen as primary interaction, in that the way they communicate and interact with each other may also lead to relationships between them. The third idea is of community as "institutionally distinct groups ... community refers to a *segment of the population* who tend to interact with one another by overlapping friendship networks, to share similar interests and outlook, and to participate in common institutions" (p. 3).

In each of these views, Effrat notes that the idea of social relationships and informal exchanges, which lead to a sense of solidarity within the community are a common theme. Thus, the notion of social networks weaves community together.

In another view, theories have also been generated regarding how community comes into being. As noted previously, due to specific situations and dynamics of the environment, individuals are brought together, either in shared space, interest or sense of identity (Siemiatycki et al, 2003). In relation to this particular study, a sense of community could arguably be established amongst newcomers who have undergone the immigration process and are coping with the challenges of settlement.

Given the multitude of opinions and perceptions of what community is, one will realize that the concept of community is dynamic, malleable and is in a constant state of flux. It has been also been asserted that these ICTs are also redefining what community is today (Aizlewood and Doody, 2002; Doody, 2004; Haythornthwaite, 2002, Jones, 1995; Wellman, 2001). The ability for users to interact, exchange and communicate dynamically, often without constraints of time and geographical location, are certainly affecting the nature of their relationships. Thus, as Jones (1995) suggests,

increasingly, fewer comments are made about the wonders of technology and more about the new forms of community brought about by [computer-mediated communication] ... This notion of community depends on CMC and on the ability to share thoughts and information instantaneously across vast distances (p. 2).

The communities that are created through the networked technologies are often labeled online or virtual communities.

In this research, it appears that beyond being a place where social networks are fostered, the discussion board on Settlement.Org also provides a virtual community in which members can join and speak about their experiences about the immigration and settlement process. This community has been formed through the dynamics of the immigration and settlement process. As well, the constructs of the Settlement.Org community also resemble the various definitions of community provided by Effrat (1974). First, the community is comprised of a group of people who share similar characteristics (being immigrants or potential immigrants). Secondly, there is no doubt that an enormous amount of interaction and exchanges occur between members of the discussion board. Finally, members also share similar situations, challenges and procedures as they are moving through the immigration and settlement process.

Furthermore, the findings have shown that the discussion board facilitates sharing of personal stories of the journey to Canada, that members recognize and empathize with the situations of others, and that everyone strives to find information and resources to help them settle in Canada successfully. Members interact socially and personally, as they freely offer advice and information, express concern for others' well-being, and treat one another with familiarity.

Like a traditional community, members of the discussion board come and go. The analysis has shown that it is common for members to go to different areas of the discussion board to post messages regarding different topics, or to see members appear at different points in time. In addition, their roles vary in that aside from initiating their membership in the discussion board (generally by asking a question) it was found that in subsequent visits, members used the forum to provide answers to questions, to update their situation or to share their experiences. One of the first scholars who attempted to define community, Ferdinand Tönnies, argued that community lives, grows and evolves as though it were a living organism (Ladd, 1998).

The prevalence of trust and reciprocity among members of the discussion board have been outlined as key elements in the concept of community, as well as in social networks and social capital. What is interesting to note is that even though members presumably do not know each other personally, it appears that a considerable amount of trust is exercised as members divulge personal details and stories about their lives, in addition to sharing feelings of fear, excitement, happiness, and disappointment. In turn, others reply to these posts, indicating that they share the same sentiments, providing advice, or offering emotional support.

The constant reciprocation of posts appears to encourage a sense of trust on the discussion board. The findings have shown that an overwhelming number of members thanked others for providing answers to their questions or for sharing their experiences. What is valuable, then, is perhaps the ability to disclose personal stories and information, and receive the same things in return. Recalling a response from one of the interview respondents, it was remarked the discussion board gave her a sense of satisfaction, knowing that others went through the same thing and their problems were solved.

Settlement.Org has also built trust on the discussion board by having a moderator provide answers to members' questions, or ensure that information provided by other members is correct. The presence of the moderator reinforces the commitment of Settlement.Org to provide

authoritative and credible information. In fact, the study has shown that members appreciate the moderator's responses, by going back to the discussion board and reporting on how the information was used. As Preece (2002) writes, "trust develops when there is a history of favorable past interactions that lead participants to expect positive future interactions" (p. 38). As the discussion board is used to find the relevant answers to pressing questions, a considerable degree of satisfaction is attained by the members and they tend to go back for more queries, strengthening the sense of trust.

5.3.2 Enhancing/Sustaining Community on Settlement.Org

As suggested in the research surrounding the effects of technologies on the notion of community, there is vast potential for communities to form and thrive in this new information era. Through technologies such as the Internet, people, regardless of where they are located, can come together into a common space online and discuss mutual interests and shared identities. Wellman (2001) confirms this statement, when he states, "although the support of collaborative work was the initial purpose of the Internet (both e-mail and the Web), it is an excellent medium for supporting far-flung, intermittent, networked communities" (p. 2031).

The research has shown that the Settlement.Org discussion board can be viewed as a virtual community that brings potential and new immigrants together in an online space to ask questions, discuss, and reflect on the immigration and settlement process. Also, the findings showed that although individuals may not post comments or questions on the discussion board, they may feel as though they are a part of this community. Finally, the research reveals that the discussion board is incredibly popular amongst the users of Settlement.Org – a great achievement as this area is relatively new.

As a result, there appears to be tremendous potential for the discussion board to extend the notion of community that currently exists. For example, given that there is some evidence of advocacy and mobilization on the discussion board (e.g. members who encourage others to sign a petition), can Settlement.Org eventually become a tool to enhance political and civic participation? Even though research by Longford (2005) on community networking and civic participation revealed a considerable debate about whether ICTs actually invoke participation, the fact of the matter is that these technologies are simply an increasing part of everyday life.

Thus, Longford calls for further investigation of the ways in which ICTs do foster participation, and a search for strategies that support this activity.

Another question regarding the potential of Settlement.Org one might ask is whether it can invigorate a sense of ethno-cultural identity. The discussion board involves members from all over the world, thus, it is rich in cultural diversity. The research showed that members typically reveal information such as their cultural background and country of origin. One interview respondent said, "everyday I see that there are people from many parts of the world. I found that there is a guy he might be from my clan, but I don't know because he doesn't visit [the discussion board] day by day." Therefore, one might wonder whether in the future, users of Settlement.Org would break off into ethnic or cultural groups to discuss common issues and interests.

This is a distinct possibility, given that research by Aizlewood and Doody (2002) highlighted the nature of virtual ethno-cultural communities. Their research showed that members of ethno-cultural communities (who generally were immigrants), use ICTs to maintain their ethno-cultural identity, as well as to explore their ethno-cultural identity. In Canada, this research poses wider implications as the nation boasts an atmosphere of multiculturalism. While ICTs can be used to enhance one's sense of self, particularly through ethno-cultural identification, sharing the Canadian identity is also important. Therefore, as asserted by the authors,

Nations seeking to be considered an attractive destination for potential immigrants need to be sensitive to the force of multiple identities. At the same time, however, integration and settlement policies and programs should be strengthened so that national and local communities remain cohesive (Aizlewood and Doody, 2002, pp. 9-10).

Overall, while Settlement.Org's discussion board is currently marked by discussions about immigrating and settling in Canada, it may be worth exploring the potential for it to foster ethno-cultural communities online. Given that ICTs can bring people together in a common electronic space, Settlement.Org too, can extend its utility beyond providing information, thus tapping into the ways in which communities of immigrants are formed and strengthened.

5.4 Doing More with Settlement

5.4.1 Settlement.Org as a Transparent Approach

By examining experiences of newcomers who participated in this study, it has been shown that information plays an integral role in the settlement process of immigrants. Mr. A, for instance, felt very well prepared by having a lot of information prior to arriving in Canada. He was an avid Internet user, and has always looked for as much information as possible to give him an idea of what to expect. Moreover, he said he had not experienced information problems, and was confident in his information searching skills. It was clear in the interview that Mr. A did not feel a sense of regret or disappointment in choosing to immigrate to Canada.

However, other respondents expressed sentiments of disappointment and discontent in some aspects of their lives. Mr. E's interview revealed that while there was an abundance of information about employment opportunities, the fact remained that he was unable to acquire the appropriate employment. Likewise, Mr. D, when trying to find accommodations, felt "embarrassed" by all the questions that the building manager asked of him, in addition to asking his friend to act as his guarantor.

These scenarios suggest that information could be useful in providing transparency about the situations that newcomers face when trying to settle in Canada. Resources that involve all spectra of a particular topic would perhaps give newcomers various insights and options, and thus allow them to become more aware about how Canadian life is. Arguably, if the relevant information were provided to newcomers, then there would neither be surprises nor false expectations.

These assertions are supported by a recent project carried out by the University of Toronto's Faculty of Nursing, which involved the development of a website to assist female immigrants in Canada (Harris, 2005). The site, which features true stories of immigrant women and a plethora of resources and information, provides a comprehensive look at the immigration and settlement process of minority women in Canada. It is hoped that through this website, women will not base their decisions on false assumptions or misguided expectations; rather they will make their choices through an educated, situated and comprehensive approach.

Likewise, Settlement.Org faces a challenge in ensuring that the information it offers provides such transparency. This research has revealed that Settlement.Org provides a wealth of

information that is indicative of the many facets of Canadian life. Looking at the site's Employment category²⁷, there is not only information about finding a job, but also, newcomers can look at labour market information, Social Insurance Number information, volunteering opportunities and so on.

Moreover, the Settlement.Org discussion board is a complementary component to the informational aspect of the site. Transparency is exercised on the discussion board as newcomers reveal the situations and experiences they have faced, in addition to their feelings and outcomes of events. Not only can Settlement.Org users become informed by the wealth of information and resources offered to them, but also, they can contextualize this information as they read about the experiences of others, in addition to sharing their own.

In actual fact, this study has shown that the complementary functions of 'informing' and 'involving' are encouraged by the layout of the site, thereby embodying transparency itself. At the bottom of each article page, a corresponding link to a related discussion thread is provided. Settlement.Org encourages a transparent approach by providing both factual information, as well as offering the experiences of those who have gone through (or are going through) the process of immigrating and settling.

5.4.2 More than Just Information: Advocacy and Settlement.Org

At the conclusion of the study, one might wonder whether information is truly enough. As mentioned, Settlement.Org has done well to address the complexities of settling into a new Canadian life through the dynamic use of the Internet. Not only does the site offer useful and relevant information, but also, it provides a venue in which social networks and communities can grow. It is truly a transparent approach to information delivery, incorporating factual and personal/contextualized information and resources. However, one should be mindful that the concept of settlement should not, and does not exist in the vacuum of information provision. Settlement is a multi-faced, multi-sector, multi-directional process that includes practical needs, as well as social, psychological, political and legal considerations.

Settlement.Org, despite being a popular, reputable, and useful site, does not solve wider problems such as discrimination, or the fact that many newcomers cannot get an appropriate job.

²⁷ <http://www.settlement.org/site/EM/home.asp>

While the site addresses these issues, both from factual presentation, as well as from the accounts presented on the discussion board; in the end, these problems are real and difficult. Some respondents recognized this situation, stating, “you go there [to employment agencies] and nobody listens to you. But I cannot complain because Settlement.Org is not meant for getting you a job, it just gives you information” (Mr. E); or, “actually, in my opinion, there are more problems than the available solutions. The website is only indicative of the means and not an end in itself” (online questionnaire respondent).

Perhaps what is needed is not simply an understanding of what information is available and how it can assist, but also the act of raising awareness and engendering action in an attempt to correct systemic and institutional barriers, societal challenges, and economic biases. Having the capacity to reach millions of people around the world, it appears that great opportunities are on the horizon for Settlement.Org to link information together with activities to raise issues that are important to immigrants in Canada. As mentioned above, there seems to be interest by members in evoking political and societal action on the discussion board.

There is a wide range of evidence that ICTs are being harnessed for advocacy activities. Perhaps the most well known is the online activities of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). This group is comprised of peasants who are fighting for land rights as the North American Free Trade Agreement has devastated the farming families of Mexico. The Zapatistas’ website is the main mode of communication for the group. It brings together a number of organizations that support their movement, along with articles, frequently asked questions, and a history of events. There is a wide recognition that the Internet, while a useful vehicle to transmit the ideas, values and mandate of the Zapatistas, is not the only tool to advocate the Zapatistas’ issues; offline action must still occur. As stated, “the crisis in Chiapas will not be solved in Cyberspace; yet, the Internet can be a powerful tool for activism and information dissemination (hence, the page’s existence)” (EZLN, 2001). Since the Zapatistas were the first to use the Internet to advocate for their cause, they have encouraged other diasporic groups, activists, and ethnic bodies whose aim to is protest globalization and to use online communication to advance their agenda.

In another example, Yang (2003) highlights the use of the Internet in the Chinese diasporas worldwide to organize protest events. In 1996, an online campaign united people around the world to protest NBC’s coverage of the 1996 Olympic games. In that same year,

another online campaign was launched against the Japanese ultra-nationalists' construction of a lighthouse on Diaoyutai Islands. In 1998, online protests were combined with offline demonstrations against ethnic violence in Indonesia (p. 481). These examples show that the Internet is a great vehicle for bringing together individuals in an online space to assert and advocate their rights and concerns.

It is also somewhat paradoxical that the managing organization for Settlement.Org, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), is in fact an organization dedicated to promoting the rights, equality and full participation of immigrants and refugees in Canada, yet the site itself is predominantly practical in nature. Given the progressive use of advocacy activities online, as well as the influential presence of OCASI in the sector, would creating more of a linkage between Settlement.Org and OCASI be useful in acknowledging the broad scope of settlement beyond information provision? As a knowledgeable, prominent and respected organization, weaving OCASI with Settlement.Org more tightly can perhaps establish a partnership beyond organization-to-project, and help address issues outside of the scope of information.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Throughout this study, the experiences of newcomers to Canada with Settlement.Org and its informing and involving functions. The objectives of the study included an exploration of how newcomers became informed through the use of Settlement.Org, and the extent to which the discussion board involved users of the site. In addition, the concepts of immigration and settlement were investigated by interviewing OCASI staff, as well as government partners and external consultants who are involved with Settlement.Org.

The research process led to the examination of the experiences of 15 newcomers (Group 1). Seven newcomers were interviewed by the researcher, while eight newcomers filled out the online questionnaire. In addition, three members from Group 2 (OCASI staff) and four members of Group 3 (government partners and external consultants) were interviewed. A comprehensive analysis of the Settlement.Org discussion board was also conducted, and a general review of the website, along with other documentation was performed.

The results of the study have shown that informing and involving are complementary functions of Settlement.Org. The site attempts to address the various stages of the settlement process by providing comprehensive and trustworthy information about the multiple facets of Canadian life. As well, Settlement.Org also offers a discussion board so that members of the immigrant community can be more involved by asking questions to clarify issues, waiting for responses, and sharing their personal experiences, feelings and opinions. By doing so, users of Settlement.Org receive invaluable insights from people who are also going through the process of immigrating and settling.

The completion of the research resulted in a few questions and considerations that need to be taken into account. Given that Settlement.Org is a resource that is only available online, one must be mindful of the issues of access, language and literacy. Despite the wide range of information and resources available on the site, its value may be undermined by the fact that it may not be reaching a substantial portion of the community – those who do not have access to a computer, the Internet or do not possess skills to access or use the information offered by the site. As well, it is important to recognize that information and communication technologies have led to great changes in society. With the introduction of Settlement.Org and other web-based

initiatives, examining how entities such as immigrant serving agencies and governments can complement the new information environment is also essential.

The research also revealed that Settlement.Org encourages social activity through the discussion board. In particular, it has been found that social networks are formed as the site connects thousands of users who share their personal experiences, discuss common issues, reflect on their experiences, and ask questions about the immigration and settlement process. In turn, the trust and reciprocity, and the familiarity expressed by the users of the discussion board show that Settlement.Org exhibits characteristics of a virtual community. Exploring how the site can engage users further might make for valuable future research.

Finally, the challenging experiences of newcomers reported in this study indicate that providing information is not the only element in achieving a successful settlement process. While Settlement.Org is a useful information resource, it has been suggested that incorporating other activities, such as advocacy and awareness efforts, either directly or indirectly, would be extremely beneficial to address the convoluted nature of immigrant settlement.

The results of this study have been interpreted through the premise that if information is important to the settlement process, and if the process of settlement is also linked to the notion of inclusion, then perhaps Settlement.Org is a tool that facilitates the inclusion of newcomers into Canadian (Ontario) society. By receiving the appropriate and relevant information, and by being able to participate in various dialogues to clarify one's understanding, as well as to assert comments and opinions about the surrounding environment, newcomers become equipped with the information and knowledge to help them navigate through the Canadian system. Thus, while on the surface, Settlement.Org is an information resource, it has immense potential to not only address newcomers' initial needs upon arriving to Canada, but also, to foster longer-term issues and contribute to the inclusion of newcomers.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

The research undertaken to complete this Masters thesis elicits some important findings particularly with regard to the understanding of the informing and involving functions of Settlement.Org. The study was valuable in that the experiences of newcomers, their quotes, testimonials and sentiments were utilized to represent how Settlement.Org has played a role in their lives. There were, however, a few limitations of the study that can be discussed.

As already mentioned in the Methodology section (Chapter 3) some limitations of the study included the small sample collected, as well as the use of online questionnaires as a data gathering tool. The small sample of respondents makes it difficult to generalize the findings and only suggests that the findings of this study can happen on a broader scale. The use of online questionnaires was difficult because of the high drop-off rate and other technical problems that impeded the complete collection of data.

Additionally, after having completed the study, it appears that the research could have been separated into distinct research projects. In retrospect, investigating the informing and involving functions could have been separate studies altogether, not to mention that studying the organizational relationships that surround a multi-sector partnership effort such as Settlement.Org would be fruitful in itself. Because of the far-reaching nature of this study, it was quite challenging to address all elements as thoroughly as possible in the course of one research project.

Finally, it is recognized that it is difficult to truly study the experiences of newcomers and the relationship of their use of Settlement.Org in relation to the concept of inclusion within the span of a few months. While attempts have been made to link the literature of social inclusion, information needs, the experiences of newcomers, and the outcomes of the study, what might have been ideal would have been to employ a longitudinal study of the respondents, going back to them at various points in time, and understanding how their settlement process has evolved, in addition to investigating how they have continued to use Settlement.Org. Somewhat related is the fact that in general, most respondents had been in Canada for an average of two years; therefore, another rendition of the study that might improve its utility could involve seeking the opinions and experiences of respondents who are at different stages of the settlement process.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations of the study also serve to guide recommendations for further research. As stated, performing a longitudinal study, or investigating the experiences of a range of newcomers might provide further insight.

Moreover, it is recommended that studying the experiences of those who do not use Settlement.Org and comparing it with those who do use the site would be beneficial to see what difference to immigrants' lives the site makes. Questions that could be explored might involve

who non-users are – the demography, background and socioeconomic status, for example – as well as what sources do non-users go to, in order to find the information they need for settlement purposes.

Further study could also incorporate delving into the lives of immigrants who use Settlement.Org, accompanying them in their everyday experiences. Does use of the site contribute to their socioeconomic status, literacy skills, political participation, and so on? Understanding these aspects may provide further knowledge of the level of impact the site has on its users.

Additionally, practical research such as usability evaluations and user studies with a range of users might address the technical usage of the site, whether it is effective and how it might be changed to address users who have different needs, skill levels and technical aptitudes.

6.3 Suggestions for Improvement to Settlement.Org

After having interviewed respondents and conducted the questionnaire, suggestions were provided as to how Settlement.Org could be improved. While it is difficult to address all the responses that were provided, this research also presents a few key suggestions that emerged from the participants' responses. It should also be emphasized that by no means, do these recommendations suggest that Settlement.Org is inefficient, rather, they are simply options that could be further explored to enhance the utility of the website.

6.3.1 Personalization and Customization

From the research stage, it was revealed that newcomers have **specific information needs** that are often associated with their personal circumstances. When asked about current information needs, for example, all of the interview respondents indicated something different. The question is, how can users keep track and manage the flux of information that they must contend with on a daily basis?

One option might be to incorporate basic **personalization** onto the site. If users were given the option to log onto the site, then perhaps they could also go immediately to pages that they want to bookmark. As well, users might be able to know which discussion board postings have been replied to upon logging into the site.

Furthermore, personalization might also allow users to customize preferences, such as choosing whether they want to receive communication from Settlement.Org, or what page should

be viewed upon entry to the site. Even though personalized and non-personalized uses of Settlement.Org present the same content, the difference is that personalization would allow the user to make the site his/her own.

It was also suggested by a few respondents that having a **rating system** for the various articles would be incredibly useful, so that that users would know how the information fared in newcomers' personal settlement experiences. Thus, having a personalized feature that indicates who rated an article may lead to further discussion between members about the topic of interest.

It is recognized, however, that incorporating such aspects to Settlement.Org will not only create immense financial and time costs, it will also create challenges in terms of access and literacy of the site. It is hard to say whether users of the site would use the personalization option effectively. Still, it might be an option to consider, given the great numbers of users on the site, and to the importance placed on context and personal circumstances in acquiring the information needed to settle in Canada.

6.3.2 Introducing Topics with an Overview

Besides the possibility of personalization and customization, providing **different ways to view the information** on Settlement.Org might be useful. This suggestion has been made to address the concerns of respondents who felt that there is an overwhelming amount of information on Settlement.Org. Many of the respondents said that at times, they wanted a straightforward, perhaps bulleted list, providing simply an overview of the topic of interest.

Given that many of the pages on Settlement.Org are written in paragraph format, introducing the page with a bulleted list of the main points for individuals might be useful for users who do not have a lot of time to browse through the site, who are looking for information on behalf of someone else, or who are looking for a simple answer. If users wished to read on, then they could continue with the rest of the page.

6.3.3 Visual Aspects

Some respondents also suggested that **improving the graphics and images** may enhance the look and feel of the Settlement.Org website. In addition, changes to the appearance of the site might also lessen the perception of an overwhelming amount of information. Adding images and graphics presumably reduces the degree of accessibility of the site for those who have visual conditions that impede reading and viewing. However, if Settlement.Org wanted to incorporate

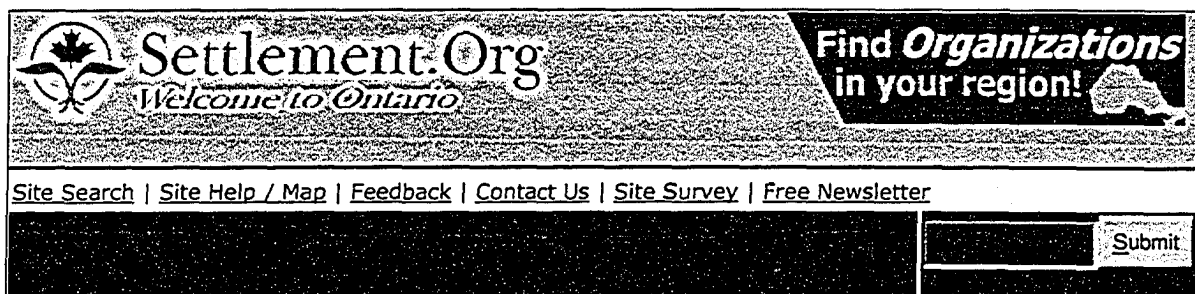
more images, then perhaps having a 'graphics-friendly' and 'no-graphics' version of the site could be considered.

6.3.4 Other Suggestions

Other suggestions that have already been mentioned include the possible **expansions of the involving function** or having Settlement.Org become **more than an information and referral resource** (e.g. online chat was suggested as a possibility by respondents). From the research, it appears that future developments of the site would be welcomed by users as they were enthusiastic and provided positive comments. It is understood though, that there are many organizational and economic factors that must be considered before any changes take place on the site.

7. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Group 1 Recruitment Message on Settlement.Org Website





[Home](#) > [Links and Documents](#)


 [Print this Page](#)


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Join Us for a Study to Improve Settlement.Org!

Settlement.Org Study is Now Online!

To Settlement.Org users:

Newcomers to Canada who use Settlement.Org are invited to participate in a research project.

All newcomers to Canada who use the Settlement.Org site can now participate online in the research project conducted by Elise Chien, a Masters student at the University of Toronto. Under the supervision of Professor Nadia Caidi, Elise will be examining how newcomers to Canada make use of the Settlement.Org website for their information needs.

Elise has designed an online survey for individuals who wish to participate in the study but cannot meet with her. The online survey will take approximately 30 minutes of your time, as it is organized into four main parts:

- demographic information
- your settlement experience
- your information needs
- your use of Settlement.Org and your use of Settlement.Org's discussion area.

Please be assured that the survey responses will be kept confidential, and all results are password-protected. These questions will help Elise

evaluate our site, and hopefully, with her results we'll be able to make Settlement.Org more relevant to you.

To access this survey, please go to <http://www.advancedsurvey.com> and enter survey number **19985** in the **Take A Survey** box. If you have any questions or difficulties with the survey, please contact Elise at elise@ocasi.org.

If you are in the Greater Toronto Area and would like to meet with Elise instead of taking the online survey, please e-mail her with the following information and she will contact you at a later date:

Name:
Phone Number:
E-mail:
Comments:

Thanks again for your interest and participation in this exciting study!

This page last updated:
Tuesday, January 11, 2005

Appendix B: Consent Form for Participants



FACULTY OF INFORMATION STUDIES

University of Toronto
140 St. George Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 3G6
www.fis.utoronto.ca

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN SETTLEMENT.ORG STUDY

Research conducted by:

Elise Chien (Masters Candidate) c/o Professor Nadia Caidi
Faculty of Information Studies, 140 St. George Street, Room 646
elise@ocasi.org or chien@fis.utoronto.ca
Office: 416-978-4715 / Mobile: 416-994-5692

I understand that the purpose of this research is to examine whether the Settlement.org website falls within the framework of information behaviours of newcomers. I also understand that a second part of the study will entail examining what kinds of relationships exist between those who use the site.

I have freely volunteered to participate in this study.

I have been informed in advance about the nature of the study, what my tasks will be and what procedures will be followed.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had my questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that the information I provide will be treated confidentially and that my identity will not be revealed in the reporting of the study results. My name will appear only on this sheet and this sheet will be stored separately from any data collected for the study.

I am aware that I have the right to withdraw my consent, decline to answer any question or discontinue participation at any time.

I understand that, with my permission, this interview will be tape recorded. My name will not appear on the tape, which will be stored in a secure place and will be erased once a transcript of the interview has been prepared.

I agree to have the interview tape recorded YES NO

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (printed): _____

(For your records, a copy of this consent form will be provided to you as a participant)

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Group 1: Newcomers who use Settlement.Org

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR USERS OF SETTLEMENT.ORG

PART I: Demographics / Background of the Participant

(Interviewer will read out the possible categories)

1. Age: (Please specify the appropriate age range)
 - Under 25 years
 - 25-30 years
 - 31-40 years
 - 41-50 years
 - 51-60 years
 - Over 60 years

2. Gender:
 - Male
 - Female

3. How long have you lived in Canada for?
 - Less than 1 year
 - 1-2 years
 - 3 to 5 years
 - More than 5 years

4. Where are you originally from (city, country)?

5. Where do you currently live (city, province)?

6. What is your marital status?
 - Single
 - Common law
 - Married
 - Divorced
 - Separated
 - Widowed

7. Do you have any children?
 - If yes, how many do you have and how old are they?
 - No, I do not have children.

8. What is your current status in Canada?
 - Canadian citizen
 - Permanent resident / Landed immigrant
 - Refugee claimant

- Visitor (temporary worker or student)
 - Other: _____
9. What cultural background do you feel you belong to (e.g., South Asian, Chinese, European, etc.)?
10. What is the language that you most often speak?
11. Is this different from the language that you first learned at home?
- Yes –what was the first language that you learned at home?
 - No, it's the same
12. Besides English and the language(s) you mentioned, are there any other languages that you communicate in well enough to hold a conversation?
13. How did you acquire your English language skills?
- Was taught in school
 - Took English lessons outside of the curriculum (e.g. ESL)
 - Through family, friends
 - Other: _____
14. Are you employed?
- Yes – what is your occupation?
 - i. Full-time
 - ii. Part-time
 - iii. Are you working in your chosen profession (yes/no)?
 - No
15. Are you a student? What level of study are you currently in?
- Adult education programme
 - Post-secondary college
 - University – undergraduate
 - University – graduate
 - University – post-doctoral
 - Not a student
16. What level of study have you completed?
- Primary
 - Secondary
 - Post-secondary college
 - University – undergraduate
 - University – graduate
17. Do you have access to a computer?
- Yes
 - No

18. Do you share a computer with other people?

- Yes
- No

19. How long have you been using a computer?

- < 6 months
- 6 months – 2 years
- 3 - 4 years
- 5 – 6 years
- Over 6 years

20. How often do you use the computer?

- Daily
- Five times a week
- Three times a week
- Weekly
- Every two weeks
- Monthly
- Less often than monthly

21. What do you use the computer for?

- Homework
- Office-related work
- Games or entertainment
- Email
- Browsing the Internet
- Shopping

22. What type of information do you normally search for?

23. What are your top three websites that you go to most often? Please list.

PART II: Settlement Experience

1. Why did you choose to come to Canada?

2. Is Canada what you thought it would be?

3. Can you describe some of the difficulties you experienced in getting settled in Canada?

4. What is the happiest memory you have of settling in Canada so far?

5. How has your social experience been so far in Canada? Have you made many friends? Are you a part of clubs, organizations, sports, etc.?

6. How has your professional or educational experience been so far in Canada?

PART III: Information Behaviours

1. When you first arrived, what kinds of information did you need to adjust to your new life in Canada?
2. Is there information that you are currently searching for?
3. Where or who do you go to, to find this information?
 - a. What sources of media do you use?
 - b. Do you go to any organizations or associations?
 - c. Do you go to friends and family?
 - d. Other sources?
4. Of the above sources, can you tell me who you would trust the most in providing you with the information you need?
5. What kinds of problems have you encountered in trying to find the information that you need?

PART IV: Information on Settlement.Org

1. How did you learn about Settlement.Org?
2. How frequently do you use Settlement.Org? What do you use it for?
3. Is it easy to tell what kinds of information are on the site? Why or why not?
4. What do you like about this site?
5. What have you found useful on this site (topics, features, or types of information, etc.)?
6. What do you not like about the Settlement.Org site?
 - a. What problems do you have with this site?
 - b. If you could change something about the Settlement.Org site, what would it be?
7. What do you think would make this site easier to use?
 - a. If you could add something to the Settlement.Org site, what would it be?
8. Are you satisfied with the LANGUAGE used on the site?
 - a. Are you satisfied with English as being the PRIMARY language used on the site?

- b. Do you ever find that the language used on the site is difficult to understand? If so, could you please provide some examples?
 - c. What improvements would you like to see with regard to the languages used on the site?
9. Are you satisfied with the VISUAL aspects (graphics, images, logos, icons) used on the site?
- a. What improvements would you like to see with regard to the use of graphics used on the site?
10. Are you satisfied with the CONTENT included in the site? Does it meet your needs?
- a. What improvements would you like to see with regard to the selection of the content on the site?
11. Are you satisfied with the ORGANIZATION of the site?
- a. Do you find it easy to find your way through the site?
 - b. What improvements would you like to see with regard to the organization of the site?
12. Are you satisfied with the SEARCH possibilities of the site?
- a. Can you find information easily on the website?
 - b. What improvements would you like to see with regard to the search features on the site?

PART V: Participation in Settlement.Org

1. Are you aware of the of on-line discussion board?
- a. Yes (go to next question)
 - b. No
 - i. The Settlement.Org discussion board allows you to post messages and/or questions to other users of the site. Now that you know that it exists, would you use it?
 - 1. Yes
 - 2. No – Why would you not use it? (Go to Concluding Questions)
2. Do you use the on-line discussion board?
- a. If so, can you please describe what you have used it for?
 - i. How frequently do you use it?
 - b. If not, why do you not use it? (Then go to 3, then Concluding Questions)
3. Do you personally know others who use the discussion board?
- a. Do you talk to them through the discussion board?
 - b. If so, how often do you talk them?
4. Do you talk to people on the discussion board who you have never met?
- a. Would you consider them your on-line friends?
 - b. How often do you talk to them?

5. Can you please describe how you feel when you talk to others on the discussion board?
6. Do you notice that many people who use the Discussion Board have had the same experiences as you?
7. Overall, do you enjoy using the Discussion Board?

PART VI: CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

1. Can you describe the overall benefit of Settlement.Org?
2. Can you please describe your overall satisfaction with the Settlement.Org site on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest?
3. Do you have any additional comments about Settlement.Org or yourself in general?

Appendix D: NVivo Coding Scheme: Nodes and Descriptions

Node	Description
SHARING	When a user provides personal information about him/herself (e.g. "I am...", "I have been...", etc.)
Sharing Personal Information	Providing information specifically about oneself
Sharing status info	Providing personal information regarding the status of immigration, plans for citizenship, financial situation, etc. (e.g. "Been in Canada as a PR for 2 years", "Hoping to apply for immigration next year", "Going to Canada next month")
Sharing information about family	Providing information about family (e.g. "I have a husband and two children", "I live here with my aunt", etc.)
Sharing qualifications, occupation	Providing information about one's academic and work experiences (e.g. "I have an MBA from India", "I am a certified chemist with 10 years experience").
Sharing personal feelings	Expressing one's emotions
(List of different feelings)	(Based on tone and syntax, the words used, etc.)
Sharing situation	Recalling an incident, experience, situation, etc.
Telling a story or experience	Providing an example of one's own experience (e.g. "When I submitted my application, they told me to..." or "I'd like to share my timeline and experience with you all...", etc.)
Share photos, personal links	Adding on links to photos, other web pages that relate to one's personal experience
REFLECTING	When a user comments on his/her satisfaction level; When a person compares situations; when a person questions their situation
Reflecting on the Canadian system, and policies	A person comments on the efficiency, his/her satisfaction, and/or result of interaction with Canadian policies, systems, etc.
Canadian labour market	Reflecting on the employment situation in Canada, labour market, etc.
Canadian social services	Reflecting on services such as health, transportation, etc.
Canadian immigration	Reflecting on the process of immigrating to Canada
Need to evoke action	Calling for a change, or calling for action to take place to foster change.
Life as an immigrant	Commenting on the life of an immigrant in Canada
Comparing with home	Reflecting on life back in the homeland; comparing it to new life in Canada.
Should have stayed	Sentiments about staying back in the home land
Want to go back	Wishing to go back, due to problems here
Situation at home is/was good	People who are unsure as to whether they should (or should have) come because they have (or had) a good life in the

Node	Description
	homeland
Reconsidering immigration	Not sure if they want to come due to what has been spoken about on the board and other negative factors
Information needs	Any topic that reveals a need for information
Have not received response	Requested information has not yet arrived
Cannot find info, or info not clear	Hasn't been able to find information about a topic, or has received information, but it is unclear
Received wrong information	Received erroneous information.
Commenting on the discussion board	Commenting the satisfaction with the discussion board. (e.g. "thank you for this wonderful forum", etc.)
RESPONDING	When a user replies to someone's post, whether it is a query or simply a statement.
Follow-up with outcomes	Post the results of the original question (e.g. "thanks, after I took your advice, I did this and this is what happened")
Disagree with information	Indicating that the information is inaccurate, or has not been the case
Provide response, possibly with information and resources	Provide factual information (without saying "I think..." or "In my opinion..."), possibly with links to other resources
Request more information	Following up on a response and asking for further information
Offer opinion	Provide opinion on a situation by saying ("in my opinion" or "I think")
Related situation	Replying to a post by providing a different, yet related scenario "I have a similar question related to a situation I have."
Agree with information	Agreeing with what someone has said
Offer further correspondence	Indicating that one is open to accept further questions and correspondence about this manner (e.g. "feel free to contact me..." etc.)
Sharing similar experience	Acknowledging that the situation someone posted is similar to their own
Addressing member directly	Saying thanks, your welcome, offering support such as congratulations or wishing them well, etc.
ASKING A QUESTION	Asking a question on the forum
Employment, business, jobs,	Ask for information about jobs, setting up a business, professions, etc.
SIN Card	Ask for information about the SIN card
Health	Ask question about health services, system
Eligibility for health coverage	Ask about whether they are eligible to get health services
Health card application	Issues regarding applying for the health card

Node	Description
Finding medical professional	How to find a doctor, dentist, etc.
Coverage details	What is included in the coverage?
Housing	Ask question about finding places to live, etc.
Tenant rights	e.g. What are the rights as a tenant?
Leasing issues	e.g. can I break a lease? I didn't sign a lease, etc.
Buying a home	e.g. How to buy a home, how to finance a home, etc.
Renting	e.g. What are the procedures for renting? Where can I rent?
Landlord dilemma with tenants	e.g. I am a landlord – my tenants are causing havoc, etc.
Education	Ask question about elementary/secondary school; ask about higher ed; ask about credential evaluation; LINC or ESL
Elementary and secondary	Questions about elementary and secondary school – fees, eligibility, differences between systems, where to go
University and college	Program info, credential evaluation/recognition, tuition, etc.
Immigration and Citizenship	Ask questions about immigration and settlement.
Timelines and procedures	What to do and when?
Eligibility	What criteria should be met in order to apply (for immigration or for citizenship)
Status of application	Unsure what happened to the form; want to find out status
Tests, examinations	What kinds of things will CIC ask? Test for citizenship, etc.
Applicant requirements	What would affect the status of an application, etc.
PR Card	Questions about the PR Card specifically
Family sponsorship	Questions on how to sponsor family – child, parent, brother, conjugal partner, etc.
Request opinions of people who had similar experiences	Asking if anyone has had a similar experience
Living in Ontario	General questions about living in Ontario
Services for newcomers	Asking about specific services for newcomers
Costs	Questions about costs of living, food, clothing, etc.
Transportation	Questions about how to issue a licence, buy a car, use the bus
City information	Questions about a particular city in Ontario
Canadian Standards and customs	Questions about Canadian culture, standards, customs, etc.
Insurance	How to buy home, car, life insurance, etc.
Taxes	Questions about what to claim on taxes, etc.

Appendix E: Example of Document View, with Coder

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Cannot Find Landing Document - Document Browser". The browser's address bar contains "Cannot Find Landing Docur". The browser's menu bar includes "Browser", "Document", "Edit", "View", "Format", "Links", and "Coding". The browser's toolbar shows "Normal", "Times New Roman", "12", and "Black".

The main content area displays a forum post titled "Cannot Find Landing Document". The post is by user "rajeev28" from "toronto" and has "65 Posts". The post was made on "04/22/2005" at "03:54:20". The post text is: "Have Test in 10 Days, have PR. Card though?". Below the post text is a redacted section. The post is moderated by "Ontario" (3098 Posts). A reply was made on "04/22/2005" at "12:51:49" with the text: "Hello there, We suggest you call the CIC Call Centre and ask them if the documents you have will be sufficient and what you will need. They may be able to give you additional information regarding your own situation and your own file because there may be information that we are not aware of".

On the right side of the browser window, a coding tool is overlaid. The tool has a title bar "Cannot Find Landing Document" and a close button. It includes a "Show:" dropdown set to "All Nodes, Explorer Style" and a "Scope of coding:" dropdown set to "Document". A list of nodes is shown with checkboxes: "Double-checking, veri...", "Immigration and Citize...", "Education, credential...", "Request opinions...", "Addressing moderator", "Living in Ontario or Ca...", "Cases (0)", and "Sets (1)". Below the list are "Find", "Code", and "UnCode" buttons. At the bottom, there is a "Working Set" section with "Add Node(s)" and "Remove All" buttons.

The browser's status bar at the bottom shows "Section: 0", "Paragraph: 17", and "Coding:".

Appendix F: Portion of WebTrends™ Statistics for Settlement.Org (2003-2004)

General Statistics

The User Profile by Regions graph identifies the general location of the visitors to your Web site. The General Statistics table includes statistics on the total activity for this web site during the designated time frame.

General Statistics	
Date & Time This Report was Generated	Monday April 19, 2004 - 11:20:25
Timeframe	04/01/03 20:00:10 - 03/31/04 18:59:53
Number of Hits for Home Page	1,065,143
Number of Successful Hits for Entire Site	22,531,603
Number of Page Views (Impressions)	4,984,294
Number of Document Views	2,083,717
Number of User Sessions	813,352
User Sessions from United States	0%
International User Sessions	0%
User Sessions of Unknown Origin	100%
Average Number of Hits Per Day	61,730
Average Number of Page Views Per Day	13,655
Average Number of User Sessions Per Day	2,228
Average User Session Length	00:11:59
Number of Unique Users	289,624
Number of Users Who Visited Once	234,867
Number of Users Who Visited More Than Once	54,757

Most Requested Pages

This section identifies the most popular web site pages and how often they were accessed. The average time a user spends viewing a page is also indicated in the table.

Most Requested Pages					
	Pages	Views	% of Total Views	User Sessions	Avg. Time Viewed
1	Settlement.Org - Providing information and answers to settle in Ontario, Canada. http://www.settlement.org/	1,065,143	51.11%	226,481	00:00:48
2	Settlement.Org: Employment and volunteer information, job listings in http://www.settlement.org/site/EM/	56,079	2.69%	42,242	00:00:57
3	Settlement.Org Discussion Area http://www.settlement.org/discuss/	50,362	2.41%	26,391	00:00:57

4	http://www.settlement.org/robots.txt	36,023	1.72%	33,169	00:02:45
5	Settlement.Org Search Results http://www.settlement.org/sys/site_search_results.asp	34,949	1.67%	15,924	00:00:50
6	Settlement.Org - Providing information and answers to settle in Ontario, Canada http://www.settlement.org/path.html	33,840	1.62%	29,449	00:01:10
7	Settlement.Org: Immigration Information for Ontario, Canada http://www.settlement.org/site/IC/	33,260	1.59%	26,295	00:00:44
8	Settlement.Org: Ontario by Region http://www.settlement.org/site/REGIONS/	31,148	1.49%	25,140	00:00:59
9	Settlement.Org: Education and OSAP Information for Ontario, Canada http://www.settlement.org/site/ED/	24,050	1.15%	18,469	00:00:46
10	Settlement.Org: Employment > Finding a Job http://www.settlement.org/site/EM/finding_a_job.asp	21,969	1.05%	18,000	00:01:01

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