

Needs Assessment

For the

Somali Immigrant Aid Organization -

September 21, 1997.

Table of Contents

Background	2
Contemporary History and Culture	2
Population Characteristics	3
Earlier Assessments	8
Current Program Delivery	9
Strengths and Weaknesses	1 n
The Way Ahead	1 1

Background

The Somali Immigrant Aid Organization first began to deliver information and referral services to members of the Somali Newcomer community in 1987. Over time, the Organization has expanded its response to community needs by adding a range of direct service programming in language training, employment, community health, food and nutrition, youth services, and housing. Some of these have been designed and developed as agency programs. Equally often, programming has been a product of community partnerships with other delivery agents.

In the spring of 1997, as part of a broader strategic planning exercise, the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization commissioned a new needs assessment. Janet Maher was retained to review agency operations over the past decade, to assess current trends, and to consult with members of the Organization in an effort to come to a new consensus on the needs of the Somali Newcomer community in West Metro.

This report took advantage of several earlier assessments, interviews of key individuals in the organization and the broader Somali Newcomer community, and in late August, a focus group with a cross-section of newcomers, with a view to testing hypotheses formulated in the course of the earlier review and interviews.

Contemporary History and Culture

Until about 1990 there were fewer than 25,000 Somalis in Canada, the great majority of them in the Greater Toronto Area and the great majority of those arrived in the 1980s. Somalis who have come to Canada as refugees or refugee claimants have fled a very dangerous situation in their own country. Currently there is no central government, and many institutions formerly run by the government, such as schools are no longer functional.

Single women head many Somali families in Canada. During the political upheavals in Somalia, most of the men were separated from their families. Many were killed or imprisoned during the fighting, and many others spent time in the military and so could not maintain the safety of their families.

All Somalis speak the Somali language, for which a written script was developed in 1972. Depending on which part of Somali they come from and on their level of education, they may also speak Italian, English, Arabic or French.

Virtually all Somalis are Muslim, which means they attempt to live according to the Koran, which instructs in how to behave in all aspects of life, including personal, family, social, and political.

Among their duties of faith:

- Ritual prayers to be performed at 5 specified times daily;
- Contribution to charity;
- Fasting during the month of Ramadan;
- Abstaining from the use of pork or pork byproducts in the diet. Population

Characteristics

The influx of Somalis to Canada is still relatively new, and it is difficult to determine current numbers reliably. At the 1991 census, however, it seems reasonable to suggest that the total population of Somalis in Metropolitan Toronto was in the range of 25,000. (Data from the 1996 census on ethnic and racial origin are only expected to be released about mid-November, 1997).

Since 1991, data provided by Immigration Canada suggest an average of 2,500 to 3,000 a year of those entering Ontario are of Somali origin. That would yield a total of about 15,000 to 20,000 since the 1991 Census. As time goes on, there are an increasing number of children born in Canada, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the grand total of newcomers of Somali origin still would still not exceed about 50,000 as of mid-1997. While the number of ports of entry is theoretically as large as the number of international airports, it seems likely that the great majority of newcomers eventually make their way to the Greater Toronto Area.

In the absence of access to detailed census tract data on those reflected in the 1991 census, we have made a series of computations from data on the entry between 1991 and 1996 of those born in Somali prepared by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. The material is instructive, as noted

below.

Table 1. Landings in Metro Toronto of persons born in Somalia by immigrant class'

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total
Total	1127	2114	1586	685	1026	424,	6962
Family	6.3%	12.2%	34.2%	59.9%	47.1%	52.4%	28.5%
Refugee	92.7%	84.0%	62.5%	37.4%	51.3%	38.7%	68.3%
Independent	1.0%	3.9%	3.2%	2.8%	1.5%	6.4%	2.9%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	2.6%	0.2%

Whereas refugees clearly accounted for the majority of entrants in the early part of the period and on average, it is clear that the overall numbers declined substantially over the period, and that the shift to family reunification had begun by 1993-94. The negligible proportions in the classes of independent and other immigrants speak to the reality that few Somali-, were either interested in or qualified for those classes.

Table 2. Landings in Metro Toronto of persons born in Somalia by Education ²

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total
Total	1127	2114	1586	685	1026	424	6962
Secondary School or less	78.3%	80.8%	87.5%	87.4%	90.0%	90.1%	84.5%
Some Post Secondary	13.4%	12.2%	7.9%	8.2%	6.2%	6.4%	9.8%
One or more graduate degree	8.3%	7.0%	4.6%	4.4%	5.7%	3.5%	5.7%

Similarly, these data confirm the impressions of key informants in the community, who have a sense of the more recent immigration, both of refugees and of family class immigrants consisting of those with less formal education and less access to Canadian society, because of their poorer command of either official language. Moreover, in each year, a significant minority of entrants will have had no formal education.

¹ Compiled from data prepared by Research & Data Group, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture & Recreation

² Compiled from data prepared by Research & Data Group, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture & Recreation

As expected, immigrants landing at Toronto are much more likely to speak English than French. It should also be noted that, although nearly half or more claim some capacity throughout the period, this may be limited to a year or two of English language training at the primary or secondary school level. However, among those with one or more graduate degree are individuals who have had all or most of their post-secondary training in Europe or North America -frequently the US, Italy or Scandinavian countries, and who will have scientific publications in English on their curriculum vitae. The other observation that should be made from this data in the increasing proportion who have no capacity in either official language.

The preponderance of those in the early working years, is conspicuous in this distribution of Somalian immigrant - especially at the point in the early 1990s when the great majority of entrants came as refugees. This would also be consistent with

Table 3. Landings in Metro Toronto of persons born in Somalia by Official Language Capacity'

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total
Total	1127	2114	1586	685	1026	424	6962
English	72.0%	80.0%	62.7%	41.6%	54.8%	46.9%	65.3%
French	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Bilingual	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
No Official Language Capacity	27.4%	19.5%	36.9%	58.2%	45.0%	53.1%	34.4%

observations of some of our key informants of much more significant issues relating to the accommodation of seniors. The social isolation to which the older generation will inevitably be subject, given limitations on language training, and their lack of independent income, raises very significant concerns for family members who already live under incredible pressures in maintaining their immediate families. Moreover, the relatively high rates of unemployment for this immigrant group, seem to be particularly marked in the 41 to 60 age group.

³ Compiled from data prepared by Research & Data Group, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture & Recreation

Table 4. Landings in Metro Toronto of persons born in Somalia by Age Group⁴

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total
Total	1127	2114	1586	685	1026	424.	6962
0 - 20 years	22.0%	33.7%	47.0%	65.1%	44.2%	47.9%	38.9%
21 - 40 years	70.9%	60.5%	44.2%	23.8%	41.8%	37.7%	52.1%
41 - 60 years	6.7%	4.6%	6.0%	8.5%	9.3%	9.7%	6.7%
60 + years	0.4%	1.2%	2.8%	2.6%	4.7%	4.7%	2.3%

Finally, the preponderance of males in the early years of the immigration, and among those designated as convention refugees, is consistent with the observations of key informants, as well as with trends in refugee inflows from elsewhere in the world. Toward the end of the period, it should be noted that the proportions have levelled off, consistent both with the entry of more family class immigrants, and the reunification of families from other refugee intake points elsewhere in the world.

In sum, it seems fair to describe the Somali immigration over the past 10 years as one of predominantly younger working age population. While their language capacity and educational attainments leave many of them at some disadvantage in Canadian society, the great majority of the population is eager, resourceful, and with minimal support, are making a remarkably successful transition to urban Canadian life.

Table 5. Landings in Metro Toronto of persons born in Somalia by Genders⁵

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total
Total	1127	2114	1586	685	1026	424	6962
Male	64.3%	57.5%	45.1%	48.5%	47.2%	47.9%	52.8%
Female	35.7%	42.5%	54.9%	51.5%	52.8%	52.1%	47.2%

A number of social trends suggest that, whereas the character of the early newcomers was relatively homogeneous and generally required less in the way of settlement support, more recent arrivals have more diverse backgrounds, and are much more likely to be less fluent in English or French and to have less formal educational qualifications than those who arrived even five years earlier.

⁴ Compiled from data prepared by Research & Data Group, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture & Recreation

⁵ Compiled from data prepared by Research & Data Group, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture & Recreation

All key informants agreed that first people to come from Somalia - particularly in the 1980s - were predominantly male, generally young (under 40 years), and with some professional background or post-secondary education either in Somalia, in Italy, or occasionally elsewhere in Europe or North America. Since 1990 or 1991, however the character of the immigration has changed significantly. By comparison, immigrants and refugees since 1990 are twice as likely to be women, often with one or more children, with less education and foreign language skills and often fewer personal resources to cope in a new country.

Especially since the implementation of the Midaynta Family Reunification Project in 1994-95, the age distribution of Somali Newcomers has come to reflect more closely the full range of the population. The arrival of seniors, for example, has had mixed results. While providing a generally welcome additional support for young families, there has also been pressure on agencies to develop new health and recreational programming for individuals who are much less likely to be integrated easily into mainstream Canadian society.

The great majority of Somali Newcomers are of working age and predominantly in the 25 to 50 years range. Even if they have come to Canada alone, they are likely to have family (parents, children or siblings) with whom they would like to be reunited. Canada has a program of sponsorship which make reunification possible, but only after new arrivals have become somewhat settled, and are able to "guarantee" financial support for those they sponsor. The security of employment is, naturally, an issue for such families.

For the most part, Somali Newcomers arrive here with relatively few English language skills, and so need a period of language training and orientation to be able to operate effectively and independently. This is particularly the case with those who have come since 1991, who on average have had less exposure to post-secondary education and particularly to postsecondary education outside Somalia.

Moreover, whereas a significant minority of the early arrivals had professional qualifications and experience - in medicine and other health care professions, law, education, journalism, and planning - more recent migrants are more likely to have skills in trades and service occupations, and to have had experience in those sectors in Somalia.

Recommendations from Earlier Needs Assessments

The most comprehensive earlier needs assessment was completed through the Multicultural Access Program at York Community Services in 1991. It made recommendations which have guided program development in a number of areas including the following:

Outreach

- Expand and improve educational materials in the Somali language;
- Participate in recreational and cultural activities, for example in Soccer and Eid celebrations;
- Advocate for heritage culture programs for children in schools.

Volunteer Development

- Involve newcomers in outreach programming;
- Train volunteers for various sectors, including health, legal and human services.

Housing

- Improve tenant placement programs;
- Consider housing development with larger units to accommodate extended families.

Employment and Training

- Negotiate placement programs for Somali professionals;
- Advocate with professional associations for training and internships for newcomers;
- Extend and improve English as a second language for seniors and women.

Health and Human Services

- Improve prenatal and nutritional education in partnership with Somali women's groups;