

## Remarks to the OLIF Consultation, Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership, Ottawa, May 20, 2010

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### **INTRODUCTION**

- Thank you for this invitation! It is a pleasure to work with you today. OLIP is doing very important work. I will talk about social enterprise as a tool and a pathway for immigrant employment, livelihoods and inclusion.
- I will divide my comments into four segments: 1) A Big Idea; 2) Work on Social Enterprise at Carleton; 3) General Points About Social Enterprise; and 4) What Employers and Economic Development Actors Can Do.

### **A BIG IDEA**

- Let me propose a big idea to you: that over the next five years we mobilize enough resources to build a social enterprise sector in our region that generates 25,000 jobs, to complement the public, technology, tourism and retail sectors here. We would need a coalition like OLIP to sponsor this initiative and a nimble, aggressive secretariat to provide technical assistance, business advice, training, capital (loans, guarantees, equity), and coaching to scale up the size of individual non-profit and cooperative enterprises and the sector as a whole. The project could be called: *Immigrant Social Enterprise Ecosystem, or I-SEE!* To scale up the sector rapidly, we would need \$25M (or \$1,000 per job) from the federal and provincial governments.

### **CARLETON WORK ON SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AND IMMIGRANTS**

- *Carleton Centre for Community Innovation:* Action research on social finance, social innovation and social enterprise, community economic development and social return on investment. Key partners include Causeway Collaborative, OCLF, United Way, CFO, Alterna, others.
- *Evaluation of Alterna Microcredit Program in Toronto:* Found strong positive effects on business development, family income and housing improvements among New Canadian clients.
- *Centre for International Migration and Settlement Studies:* National and local policy research and publications on refugee and immigrant experience; linking with international research on country of origin. Key partners include LASI, others.
- *Lead To Win:* A technology-business ecosystem program supporting 60 new businesses and led by Prof. Tony Bailetti; 30% of LTW entrepreneurs are new Canadians.
- *Rise and Flow:* Free summer camp for 10-14 year olds from disadvantaged neighbourhoods run on Carleton campus, focusing on confidence and skill-building through sports, music and the arts. Started by student Jarratt Best of Black Affinity; now run by new non-profit, ComeUnity.

## **GENERAL POINTS ON SOCIAL ENTERPRISE**

- In general, five points are worth making with regard to immigrants and social enterprise:
  - 1) *Social enterprise—non-profit and cooperative businesses with social and environmental as well as commercial objectives—should and can be an important tool and pathway for immigrant employment, livelihoods and inclusion.* There are thousands of social enterprises across the country, many of them small and in the service sector, but some are larger cooperatives in a variety of sectors. There are dynamic pan-Canadian professional networks and associations on social enterprise, and a growing policy and practice literature.
  - 2) *Social enterprise and community economic development (or the social economy) and the mainstream economy are two sides of the same coin, and both need to be built at the same time.* In our region, we need to support and invest in the animation and revitalization of the technology, tourism, arts and retail sectors while we expand and deepen the social enterprise sector. In fact, social enterprises can and should supply products and services to the other economic sectors, including the federal public sector.
  - 3) *Social enterprises generate a very strong social return on investment.* There is a growing set of tools and studies on SROI, developed and tested by Social Capital Partners, the Roberts Economic Development Foundation, the New Economics Foundation, the Social Economy Centre at OISE/UT and the Carleton Centre for Community Innovation.
  - 4) *The twin challenges for the social enterprise sector are scale and job quality.* It is difficult enough running a business with social objectives! But, the fact is, social enterprises must be bigger and their jobs better paying and with benefits—or their usefulness to immigrants and all Canadians will be limited. Evidence that scale can be achieved is found in the coop sector, with Cooperators Insurance, Gay Lea Foods and Mountain Equipment Coop as prominent examples. Indeed, nine million Canadians are members of coops or credit unions.
  - 5) *We need a large-scale, long-term, robust technical and capital assistance program to provide the support that will accelerate the scaling up of the social enterprise sector in Ottawa.* Among the models we can draw from are CEDTAP, Lead To Win, Social Capital Partners, Community Futures and others. This takes us back to the I-SEE idea!

## **WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO**

Private and public sector employers can support the growth of individual social enterprises and the social enterprise sector as a whole, by:

- Continuing to *hire* immigrant workers at all levels;
- Providing *volunteers* to support the development of social enterprises;

- Assisting with the *sponsorship* of social enterprise activities, increasing public awareness of the role they play;
- Providing direct *grants and loans* to incubate and grow social enterprises, either directly to individual businesses or, perhaps more realistically, through a pool of funds with multiple social investor;
- Participating in *coalitions and networks* to promote social enterprises for and by immigrants;
- Providing low-cost or free *facilities* for social-enterprise incubation, growth and operation.

### **CONCLUSION**

- OLIP is well-positioned to take a multi-sector, region-wide lead in promoting social enterprise as a pathway to employment, livelihoods and inclusion for new Canadians and their families. In my view, the main challenge and opportunity is to address this issue on the scale that is required- *tens of thousands* of jobs. Back to the big idea: I-SEE is one way to meet this requirement.
- Thank you!