

Summary of Findings - BIPT Focus Groups

1. Introduction

Seven focus groups with Burnaby immigrants were conducted over December 2014 and January 2015. Approximately 84 immigrants, 59 women and 25 men, participated in the focus groups. Participants originated from 25 countries, the majority of them are working age adults and have lived in Canada somewhere between 2 months and 20+ years; the majority have been here less than 10 years.

Participant comments and opinions have been organized and analyzed by question. It is recommended to use the frequency of associated with each theme with caution. Because the notes for each focus group have been aggregated, the frequency cited in this document only illustrates the frequency found in the notes not the frequency of comment. Under each theme, interesting or outstanding comments have also been listed. To keep the summary concise, repeated comments have been removed.

2. Questions and Summary of Comments

1) Why did you choose Burnaby?

Location: Centrally located amongst the cities; easy access to other Metro Vancouver communities, especially City of Vancouver (11)

- Feel need to live close to Vancouver – all main services are in Vancouver
- Burnaby locates in the centre of Metro Vancouver – easy to go every where
- Close to City of Vancouver
- Close to everything, e.g. shopping
- Close to Metrotown

Beautiful natural resources and weather (9)

- Parks and nature
- Came from a country with lots of mountains. “When living in Toronto, missed mountains. Moved to Burnaby to close to mountains”.
- Warmer than Toronto and Montreal
- Mountains are beautiful
- No flooding (elevation)

Safe community (5)

- Safe and welcoming
- Burnaby is safe

Quiet community and moderate population (2)

- Quiet city
- Not as crowded

Diverse and friendly community (9)

- Did not choose Coquitlam where more Iranians live in; chose Burnaby so more opportunities to practice English
- Food and culture – amalgamation of culture – it is a very accessible community
- Amalgamation of different cultures – everybody’s here – there isn’t a dominant culture
- In Burnaby one of the commonalities is the experience of coming from somewhere else
- Ethnic specific and diverse foods and grocery stores
- In Metrotown Caucasians are the minority

Religious tolerance (1)

- Religious tolerance

English speaking community (1)

- English is main language in Burnaby (moved from Montreal)

Live close with friends, families, and their ethnic community (6)

- Members of their community live there
- Close to family

Friendly people (2)

- People are friendly

Relatively better affordability of living (8)

- Rent is cheaper than Vancouver – though it is not cheap in Burnaby as where
- Middle class
- Closest to Vancouver yet affordable properties

Great education system, including post-secondary education (7)

- Close to post-secondary education
- Wanting kids and future generation to become successful in Canada
- Bigger schools (came from Chilliwack)
- Close to education – BCIT

Community facilities (5)

- Good facilities
- Metrotown – “don’t know anywhere in Burnaby, just Metrotown”

Accessibility of community, services and resources (3)

- Community centres – activities, programs, family-oriented events
- Amenities: Libraries, community centres, activities for children
- Mix of residential and commercial

Great public transit system (4)

- The two Sky Train lines
- Good bus services

Job opportunities (3)

- 80% of film studios (economic and job opportunities)
- Good job opportunities (came from Chilliwack)

Others

- In Canadian households there inherent opportunities - access to resources and common knowledge that is second nature to Canadian households, that don't register for immigrant families

2) What does settlement and integration mean for you? An immigrant has successfully settled and integrated when.....what needs to be in place? What are the ingredients?

Socially connection with the community – going beyond the surface (6)

- Socially connected in the community – knowing your neighbours, family community participation, religious affiliations, having a strong support system made up of friends from various cultures (not based on interest in multiculturalism but in a true desire to know you - Fiona)
- Having good friends, going beyond the surface (people here are friendly but distant and this takes time)
- Social connection for a common reason
- Having a place of belonging (school/job)

Understanding and acceptance of multiculturalism and diversity by the community at large (6)

- When people stop asking you where you are from and stop making assumptions about you
- When you are accepted people stop noticing you for your colour, accent, etc.
- Connecting with other cultures
- Need your culture to be understood
- People need to understand why immigrants are needed

Meaningful employment opportunities (5)

- Meaningful employment in your field of interest and financial stability
- Moving up within a job (moving beyond the glass ceiling)
- Economic stability

Sense of achievement (5)

- When you have the opportunity to give back – volunteering.
- When we can make a contribution
- Fully scheduled – that your days are full – you have a mission
- Making a contribution, but it does depend on the circumstances. Volunteering that provides individuals dignity leads to belonging.

Housing (3)

- The house price in Burnaby is getting higher

Equal access to services, business and government offices (3)

- Equal access to services, businesses, government offices
- Receiving information from the City and its developments – caring about the city (ownership)
- Knowing that you have a voice, being less afraid to speak

Community events and festival (1)

- Community events (Christmas)

Language capacity (1)

- Knowing the language helps you feel part of the society

Weather (1)

- Weather – being accustomed to it

Healthcare (1)

- Good healthcare

Transportation (1)

- Easy to drive – the streets are more crowded than it was 14 years ago – “Burnaby become a new city”.

Comfortable environment for family (1)

- When kids feel comfortable

3) What people, programs, services, activities, etc. helped you to settle and integrate?

Programs and Services

Language programs (7)

- English night classes – I have long standing friends from these classes
- VCC programs
- More educational institutes to recognize CLB and LINC
- LINC was free and had childcare, most practical

Employment programs and services (6)

- Canadian work experience (paid, volunteer, practicum)
- Opportunities like university co-op positions for immigrants
- Skills connect program
- Training and workshops

General settlement services: information orientations and program referrals (5)

- Filing forms
- Service referral

- Workshops of laws, Canadian culture, tax return, etc.

Volunteer opportunities (3)

- Giving rather than receiving

Religious services (2)

- Places of worship
- Church

CANN (2)

- Airport packet

Childcare services (2)

- Edmonds day-care & meals
- Strongstart

Counselling programs (1)

- Counselling programs

Buddy programs (1)

- “When I (an Iranian lady) came to Burnaby, friends helped me connect with a volunteer (a Chinese resident) who was very good to me and helped me a lot.”

Continuing education (1)

- Continuing education – dogwood diploma
- Universities (BCIT)

Transportation (1)

- Transportation and accessibility of Burnaby helps

SWIS program (1)

- Settlement workers in Schools (SWIS)

Recycling services (1)

- BC Hydro comes and takes your old fridge for free!

Settlement service providers

- **MOSAIC (3)**
“not entirely effective- they need more resources to support newcomers, and good consultants”
- **ISSofBC (4)**
- **WorkBC (2 comments)**
“easy access to services in Burnaby”
- **S.U.C.C.E.S.S. – programs on settlement into Canada (2)**
- **Neighbourhood houses (1)**
- **Back in Motion (1)**

Community agencies and business

Public libraries (4)

- Libraries are a great source of information
- Library for kids, moms socializing, programs and services for parents

Community agencies (4)

- Small grants from Vancouver Foundation for city engagement projects
- Community centers
- YMCA

Media (1)

- CBC News – local / social context

Business (1)

- Banks (credit cards, mentoring)

People

Friends and family (9)

- People are very friendly – During the first few days landing in Burnaby, received helps and felt welcome when visiting banks and businesses
- People are friendly. In 1994, after dining out at a DimSum place, a young man was waiting my family in the parking lot. He witnessed a car scratched on my car and waited next to my car to provide the information of the accident.
- Friends introduced me to services
- Practical, personal support is much more useful than print package (CANN)

4) What is/was difficult about settling in Burnaby?

Barriers to finding meaningful jobs (10)

- A young woman who left Iran because of wars, does not like Canada. She would love to live in her own country – Iran. It was difficult to find a job and make enough money for living. She had challenges to find a job because of English barriers. Her sister speaks in English very well but still cannot find a meaningful job.
- Recognition of foreign credentials
- My son graduated from British and has a Ph.D. It was still very difficult from him to find a job at the beginning because of no local degree. He is working in a university in Montreal now.
- Expected more recognition for my professional background – the reality does not align with the images / pictures presented by friends and other immigrants
- The immigration system sets up expectations of career entry that that are not matched by the experiences locally and professionally

Lack of sufficient information of Burnaby and its services (6)

- No good videos introducing you to Burnaby on YouTube
- “Don’t know anywhere”
- Burnaby is a good place but don’t know where the service are

Transportation (6)

- City too big, divided by highways
- Need more buses because of increasing population
- Transit is a problem – no bus services after 1 am

High cost of living, including housing, childcare, services for seniors (6)

- Access to affordable daycare
- Cost of living / housing?
- Expensive programs/services for seniors
- Housing – will move to Surrey to live in a bigger house

Hard to make new friends (4)

- No friend
- Feel isolated
- Different to make connection with the community. “I came from Tibet and there are not many Tibetan immigrants in Burnaby”

Lack of entertainment (3)

- No pubs or clubs – have to go Vancouver and then can't get back because no transit after a certain time
- Youth are the “heart of the city” and there should be places for them to enjoy
- no night life

Environment – dirty at some places; marijuana users; too many crows (3)

- Dirty skytrain stations + fast food restaurants
- People smoke marijuana everywhere and no one says anything about it
- Too many crows

Lack of sufficient language skills (2)

- Language – stops you from doing anything

Learning a new culture (1)

- Learning about/becoming accustomed to new cultures

Weather – felt depressed in winter (1)

- Winter is terrible: The lady, who moved from a country where is always bright, cried for three month when she landed in Burnaby in winter. Years after, she feels happy in general but still feels bad in winter.

5) What could be done to assist immigrants achieve a greater sense of belonging to Burnaby?

Meaningful community engagement, including parties, events and festivals (13)

- Meaningful community engagement – monthly parties in each neighbourhood, hosted by someone who can take responsibility so people can meet their neighbours and allow for a deeper level of interaction (not just surface conversations)

- Celebrating New Year's as a city
- New year festivals cross-cultural, celebrating with fireworks
- Welcome party every 1-2 months for newcomers
- City hall should create a calendar of all religious and cultural celebrations
- Block parties, Whistler style (like Hats Off Day)
- Dog parks - to help you meet people
- Culture exchange at a community level – street festivals, interfaith initiatives

Help immigrant find meaningful employment (7)

- More info about local employment opportunities
- More education needed for the employers on the contributions of immigrants
- At a City level – alter selection processes to give immigrants a break, e.g. offer leniency to immigrants' resumes and applications
- A sense of trust of newcomers by employers. Employers often underestimate newcomers

Enhance accessibility to information (4)

- A newcomer centre where all languages are represented and information is available
- The city is waiting for us to go to them and we are waiting for the city to find us.
Distribution of, promotion and access to information
- Have people come to programs; come and deliver information sessions, and talk about opportunities for newcomers
- Immigrant magazine is too philosophical, we need a special website for immigrants

Offer more volunteer opportunities (2)

- Making more volunteer opportunities that are accessible
- Volunteer experiences war helpful in finding a job

Improve road system (2)

- More sidewalks
- Well-lit streets

More education opportunities (1)

- More educational opportunities to improve quality of life

Greater support to improve language (1)

- Greater government support for English programs. (it was noted that) English programs are shifting with the shifts in immigration policy / practice

Advocacy of immigrants and their stories (1)

- Storytelling as an approach towards understanding each other