Sierra Leone Newcomers in Winnipeg: Their Experiences with Seeking Help

by

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ABSTRACT

African refugees and immigrants are arriving in Manitoba in vastly increasing numbers and a review of the literature indicates that they are experiencing barriers to successful integration. The goals of this research are to understand the experiences of Sierra Leonean newcomers with seeking support and identify specific needs and services that might be helpful. Using qualitative methods, interviews were conducted with Sierra Leonean newcomers. The analysis of the data indicates that newcomers want financial independence and to fit into Canadian life. The process to get their foreign credentials accredited is difficult and affects their ability to gain economic security. They rely on informal networks with other Sierra Leoneans for assistance to acquire resources when they are unable to get help from service providers. As well, newcomers are concerned about their community image, feelings of isolation and sacrificing all of their dreams. Recommendations from this study include the need to recognize and support African community leaders in connecting with newcomers to share accurate and vital information. In addition, services for employment and the accreditation of foreign credentials should be appropriate, affordable and timely. Changes to policies and to the provision of settlement services are necessary to improve the accessibility and availability of resources required for the successful integration of African newcomers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Newcomers are "a stressed migrant group which is vulnerable to economic and social hardships" (Morris, 1988, p. 22) and encounter many challenges related to the adjustment to their new life (such as learning a new language, finding employment and building social supports). African newcomers are arriving in Manitoba in vastly increasing numbers. Support services are available to assist in the social and economic integration of newcomers as they navigate the challenges of starting over and adapting to their new environment.

Studies conducted by government agencies and settlement service agencies indicate that African newcomers continue to experience challenges in their ability to adapt to their new lives. Research findings show that many difficulties African newcomers encounter are connected to the accessibility and availability of appropriate support in their host community (George, 2002; Simich, Mawani, Wu, & Noor, 2004; Segal & Mayadas, 2005). To improve the supports available to newcomers it is essential to understand the challenges they experience from their point of view. Understanding their experiences can illuminate issues and remedies that are specific to their settlement needs. This research examines the settlement experiences of Winnipeg newcomers from Sierra Leone.

Statistics on African communities in Manitoba show that, in the last decade, Ethiopia, Sudan and Sierra Leone are the top three countries of origin for African newcomers (Simbandumwe, 2007). The Sierra Leonean newcomer community in Winnipeg has grown exponentially from the migration of hundreds of newcomers since the year 1999.

I was introduced to Sierra Leonean newcomers during the first year they began arriving in Manitoba. Sierra Leonean community leaders and I collaborated to initiate programs for newcomers and I became acquainted with many newcomers during that time. A recurring issue discussed among them was their struggle to find appropriate help within their neighbourhood and the Winnipeg community. I was encouraged by their efforts to assist one another and wanted to understand more about their experiences in seeking help.

Sierra Leonean Newcomers

'Newcomers' is a term that includes both refugees and immigrants and will be used in this capacity throughout this research. There are fundamental differences between refugees and immigrants and the voluntary and involuntary nature of their departure from their country of origin sets them apart. Refugees are a displaced group of people; they relinquish all their possessions and relationships to start a new life, in hopes of escaping fear and persecution. They are unable or, owing to such fear, are unwilling to return to their country of origin (UNHCR, 1996). As well, refugees in Canada receive government funding in the form of transportation loans, extended health coverage (beyond what is available from the provincial health system) and resettlement assistance. Immigrants do not receive this funding but can access support services (settlement, health and social services). Immigrants usually have a voluntary, planned departure plan and can usually return to their country of origin. Sierra Leonean newcomers in Winnipeg are identified as refugees and immigrants based on their immigration classification. I refer to them as newcomers in this research.

It is necessary to provide a frame of reference for understanding the settlement experiences of Sierra Leonean newcomers. To do so, I review the pre-migration situation in Sierra Leone as it offers insight into the circumstances newcomers had to endure. It is important to understand the pre-migration experiences as they can influence a newcomer's behaviour, attitude and help-seeking experiences (Herberg, 1993). This section also provides an overview of the migration statistics for Sierra Leone newcomers in Winnipeg.

The Crisis in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a republic country ruled by a democratic government. Its culture is regulated by norms and values about respect, dignity, honour, and family. Christianity, Islam, and Native-African religions are present across the country. Family is comprised of close, extended family relations and interpersonal kinship bonds. Educational institutions range from elementary to post-secondary schools. Employment ranges from subsistence farming and farm-related work to business and government jobs. (Jackson, 2004; Jarrett, 1991).

Sierra Leone is situated in West Africa and has a population of over 5 million people. One of its main natural resources is diamonds. The diamond trade has been the source of much of the country's turmoil (Jackson, 2004; and Jarrett, 1990). War in Sierra Leone began in 1991 with a clash between the ruling government and the rebel group RUF (Revolutionary United Front) who were opposed to the decisions the government made. The RUF used violence to gain control of many diamond-rich areas in Sierra Leone and used the profits from the diamond trade to fund their militia (purchases of

various weapons, training, etc). The RUF continued to monopolize the diamond trade for several years and eventually took control of Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone.

The war, which lasted 11 years, was officially declared to be over in January 2002. Eleven years of war in Sierra Leone has brought about human rights violations including rape, murder, dismemberment, and severe violence against Sierra Leone citizens and people from neighbouring countries such as Guinea and Liberia. Rebels used violent methods to control the population. Many citizens had upper limbs (arms, hands, and wrists) amputated as punishment for voting for the wrong government; others were gang raped and/or forced to engage in sexual intercourse with a close family member (parent, sibling, etc.) or face death. Many children were abducted, forced to use illicit drugs until they became addicted, and trained as child soldiers. Houses were destroyed and neighbourhoods and communities were burned and demolished; and many people were beaten, tortured, stripped of their belongings, and physically separated from their families. (Human Rights Watch, 2003; and Jackson, 2004).

The war has resulted in the deaths of people from all age groups, classes, and genders. A great number of survivors are child soldiers, have been mutilated, physically and sexually abused, and have very few or no surviving family members. Entire villages have been destroyed and there are thousands of displaced people who are still living in refugee camps in neighbouring countries such as Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Guinea (Jackson, 2004; Kamya, 1997), also known as countries of asylum. For the purpose of this study, country of asylum is defined as the country in which the refugee first settles, after fleeing her/his country of nationality.

Those who were separated from family searched for lost family members and tried to confirm the deaths of loved ones. Many tried to find employment in their country of asylum. Some of those countries, such as Ghana, Liberia and Guinea, were already facing their own economic problems and high rates of poverty among the nationals (Jarrett, 1990). The relocation of massive numbers of Sierra Leone refugees put a strain on the economic resources of the countries of asylum. Hence, Canada and other countries offered permanent residency to some Sierra Leone refugees. Before they left for Canada these refugees united with family (if possible) and collected whatever possessions they could, many times leaving with very little.

Migrating to Winnipeg

Prior to 1999, there were less than thirty Sierra Leoneans in Winnipeg. The most recent statistics show that over 700 Sierra Leonean newcomers have migrated to Winnipeg since 1999 (Manitoba Labour & Immigration, n.d.). However, these statistics are limited to only those who, at first port of entry into Canada, declared Winnipeg as their final destination. It is possible that there are more newcomers in Winnipeg than the statistics indicate as some may have relocated from other provinces. Sierra Leone newcomers in Winnipeg have been sponsored privately and by church groups, by immediate and distant family members, and by a joint effort of the government of Canada and the provincial government of Manitoba (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 1998; Government of Canada, 1998). Most newcomers initially settled in the inner-city of Winnipeg but relocated throughout the city after a few years. The largest numbers of

Sierra Leoneans are now residing in the east and south Winnipeg neighbourhoods

(Manitoba Labour and Immigration, n.d.).

Settlement Needs of Newcomers in Winnipeg

Integration is where newcomers "become part of the social, institutional and

cultural fabric of society" (Opoku-Dapaah, 1994a, p. 1) by acquiring information and

using resources to function effectively in the resettlement country. In my conversations

with Sierra Leonean newcomers and community leaders, they identify skills training and

employment as vital settlement needs that support their integration. Prior to the war many

Sierra Leone newcomers in Winnipeg held occupations in Sierra Leone as professionals

(educators, nurses, and other professions). Others owned small businesses, were students

or were unemployed. While many are now employed, their jobs include manual labour

work such as cleaners and factory workers. Thus, many have been forced to accept

employment in areas that do not recognize their training and experience.

Occupational deflection refers to substantial discrepancies between intended and

actual occupations, where newcomers are either unemployed or under employed in a field

not related to their expertise and education (Guo & Andersson, 2005; Israelite, Herman,

Alim, Mohamed, & Khan, 1999; Nyakabwa, 1989; Wasik, 2006). Some of the key issues

for these professionals seem to be recertifying their existing professional skills to meet

Canadian standards and paying for the costly examinations to receive accreditation of

their foreign education and training (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007). This is a lengthy and

costly process which deters newcomers from accessing suitable employment and limits

the use of skilled foreign professionals (Guo & Andersson, 2005; Wasik, 2006).

Relevant research on the settlement experiences of African newcomers in Winnipeg indicates that barriers to successful integration include limited social support networks to provide guidance to newcomers, limited options for affordable housing, difficulty in getting foreign credentials recognized and a need for quality employment (Blum & Heinonen, 2007; Carter & Osborne, 2009; Simbandumwe; 2007).

Settlement Services

There are many settlement service agencies in Winnipeg and they provide for the settlement needs of newcomers. They offer a range of services including English and French language training, assistance with access to housing, employment and employment preparation services, counseling, learning about Canadian customs and norms, as well as social support (Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc., 2010; Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998; and George & Mwarigha, 1999). Winnipeg-based research on the experiences of newcomers show that newcomers are grateful for the settlement services they receive (Blum & Heinonen, 2007; MacKinnon, Stephens & Salah, 2007; Simbandumwe, 2007). However, newcomers are still experiencing difficulties in accessing community supports (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2007).

Recommendations for the provision of settlement services include adopting a fluid service delivery method that allows agencies to adapt to the changing needs of newcomer populations and provide appropriate and timely services (George, 2002). As well, Mackinnon et al. (2007) suggests that settlement services should be holistic and provide services that encompass support for all the newcomer's needs on a long-term basis.

The Manitoba government has followed recent Canadian trends to reevaluate and modify its settlement services to meet the changing needs of the newcomer population. This resulted in the formation of The Manitoba Settlement Strategy (initiated in 2007) which identifies settlement needs and corresponding strategies based on consultation with settlement service providers, newcomers and others working directly with newcomers (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2007). This strategy indicates that some areas of settlement service delivery require improvement such as fostering collaboration among settlement service agencies and centralizing the newcomer assessment and referral process.

Research Objectives

Integration is a long-term process that requires ongoing support as the needs of newcomers change over many years and sometimes many generations. When supports are unavailable or inaccessible, newcomers try other methods of finding help in order to meet their needs. They rely on social networks for socializing, sharing information and supporting one another (Simich, Beiser, Stewart, & Mwakarimba, 2005; Simich et al., 2004). In finding help for themselves, newcomers are trying to change their situation and are empowered, by their own actions, to make changes. This research explores the experiences of Sierra Leone newcomers in Winnipeg with seeking help. The research questions that guide this study are:

1. How are newcomers getting the help that they need?
   a) How is help defined by newcomers?
   b) What services do newcomers need and what help do they require?

c) Who do newcomers approach when in need of assistance?

2. What have been the newcomers' experiences in receiving help?

a) Have they felt they have been understood?

b) Have their needs been met?

My intentions for this study are to provide an understanding of the challenges affecting Sierra Leonean newcomers and offer recommendations that may be useful for service providers, policy makers and others who support newcomers. Chapter 2 offers a review of the literature about the experiences of newcomers and also provides the theoretical framework that guides this research. Chapter 3 reviews the qualitative methods used to conduct this research and analyze the data. Chapter 4 presents the findings derived from the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 offers a discussion on the findings and their implications about the role of social support. The final chapter, Chapter 6, provides the conclusion of this research and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout my professional career I have had many opportunities to work with newcomers from various ethno-cultural backgrounds and with varied pre-migration experiences. These connections usually result in discussions about the challenges and remedies related to settlement experiences and about their personal achievements. The challenges and successes newcomers share in relation to their settlement experiences can be understood using different theoretical perspectives and frameworks that enlighten our own knowledge of their experiences. The theoretical framework I use to guide my research will be presented at the end of this chapter. The following literature review presents an overview of the most relevant research on the settlement experiences of newcomers and discusses how these research findings contribute to the understanding of the issues that affect newcomers.

Overview of the Literature Review

In the beginning of my research I reviewed literature on settlement experiences of newcomers. I also considered literature on settlement services, settlement service providers, and a very broad review of issues related to refugees, immigrants, newcomers and Africans. Using those key words I generated information on working papers from various refugee and immigrant research bodies within Canada and research studies reported in peer-reviewed journals.

Research is available on many different models of settlement service delivery and on policy changes needed among the various levels of government. But, I am more interested in hearing first-hand views about what it was like to navigate through

community and settlement services and what impact it had on the lives of the newcomers. It is important to understand the newcomer's perspective on seeking help as this information could affect how policy is changed to support a positive effect on the settlement service agencies and newcomers using those services. The literature presented here will be discussed as it pertains to the objectives of this research:

- Settlement needs of newcomers: What are newcomers looking for?

- Settlement and other support services: Who do they go to for help?

- Meaning of coping: What do they find? Settlement experiences of newcomers

Settlement Needs of Newcomers

Settlement needs are most generally identified as resources required during the initial stages of settlement, such as education, employment, housing, health care and host country language training; and, in the later stages of settlement, such as career advancement, racial/ethno-cultural identity, and social and political participation in mainstream society (Ager & Strang, 2008; George, 2002; Hutton, 1993; Nyakabwa, 1989). The settlement experiences of newcomers can vary depending on the types of support and services available to them as this affects their ability to meet their needs.

George (2002) conducted a study on the settlement needs of African newcomers in Ontario. The author held focus groups that included newcomers, their cultural community leaders and settlement service providers. The author reported that the settlement needs of newcomers are consistent and independent of the newcomers' country of origin. The differences in settlement needs among newcomer groups are in the

priority of specific needs and in the cultural and linguistic needs of individual newcomer groups.

Blum & Heinonen (2007) conducted interviews with newcomers from over 30 different countries; most participants were from Eastern Europe, Latin America, India, the Philippines, parts of the Middle East, Korea and China; participants from Africa represented a small percentage of the participants in this study. They researched the settlement experiences of newcomers who lived in Winnipeg for no more than three years. Their findings indicated that most participants were aware of the services available in the city and were grateful for the assistance they received from these services during the first few weeks and months after their arrival in Winnipeg. However, after the initial settlement period, participants experienced stress, racism, discrimination, frustration, loneliness and sadness. They also felt there was less contact from the service agencies that assisted them during their initial settlement period.

Throughout the relevant literature on settlement needs, there are consistent resources that are identified as vital to support newcomers as they adapt to their new lives. Newcomers identify that they want:

- Recognition of foreign credentials
- Education and quality employment
- English/French language training
- Safe and affordable housing
- Appropriate mental health services

Recognition of Foreign Credentials

Canada actively recruits highly educated professionals for immigration to Canada. These include engineers, health care professionals such as doctors and nurses, and certain trade professionals. To protect the health and safety of the public, foreign trained professionals must first have their credentials accredited and, in some cases, they must also return to a Canadian university for practical, Canadian experience in their field.

The process of recertifying foreign credentials often acts as a barrier to the full utilization of the professional's skills (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2002). Foreign trained professionals can not work in their profession until their foreign credentials are recognized by the governing body of their profession. At the same time, they often need to have Canadian experience as a requirement of the accreditation process. Foreign trained professionals have to find employment sufficient to meet their needs and usually accept employment in a profession that does not require the use of their specialized skills. They are often underemployed which perpetuates the barriers to the accreditation process as they struggle to afford the costly and lengthy process of having their foreign credentials recognized in Canada (Guo & Andersson, 2005).

Israelite et al. (1999) explored the settlement experiences of Somali refugee women in Toronto. These women expressed frustration with the accreditation process as they were unable to work in Canada even though they held professional jobs in their country of origin. For example, there are newcomers who are doctors or engineers, trained at the university level in their country of origin, and are unable to work in their profession in Canada. They require assistance to recertify their credentials to Canadian standards. This can be a costly and time-consuming process and not an available option

for those who are often employed in marginalized jobs (Guo & Andersson, 2005; Wasik, 2006).

Boyd & Schellenberg (2007) reported that, based on the 2001 Canadian Census, 55% of foreign educated doctors continued to work in their field once they moved to Canada; this is in comparison to 90% of Canadian educated doctors who worked as doctors in Canada. Of the remaining 45 % of foreign educated doctors, 12% worked in other health related jobs while 33% of foreign educated doctors worked in jobs completely unrelated to their medical education and experience. Similarly, foreign educated engineers were shown to be older and have spent more years in formal training than their Canadian educated counterparts. Yet, only 26% of the foreign educated engineers were working as engineers, almost 50% were working in a managerial or technical position related to engineers, and 35% of foreign educated engineers worked in jobs unrelated to their engineering education and experience.

For newcomers, the effects of non-recognition of foreign credentials are realized through every aspect of life. It affects their capacity to find quality employment, that matches their skill and experience, which, in turn, prevents them from gaining the Canadian experience required to remain competitive in their field. It diminishes their ability to earn sufficient income to meet their needs. As well, it affects their self-esteem and confidence as they feel less valuable if they can not contribute to society and have to rely on financial assistance to meet their needs (Guo & Andersson, 2005; Wasik, 2006).

Guo & Andersson (2005) also indicate that female, foreign educated professionals experience more difficulties than their male counterparts. The authors support that devaluing skilled, female newcomers is perpetuated by racist and oppressive perceptions

and attitudes among some employers where female newcomers are classifed as "cheap" labour. They are often forced to accept manual labour jobs that require minimal skills or are faced with unemployment.

Education and Employment

Those who cannot afford the process of recertifying their credentials will need training in another field of work. As well, there are newcomers who were self-employed in their country of origin (farm labour, small business, etc.) and these skills are not readily transferable to modern, urban Canadian life. There are processes and regulations that newcomers must follow prior to opening a small business in Canada. For example, a newcomer whose small business was to sell items at a local market would not initially find the same opportunities in Canada that would provide sufficient income to meet her/his needs. That newcomer would need to register her/his business, locate funding for start-up costs and find a suitable location to start their business. This is an expensive and time consuming process requiring networking skills that would not be expected from a newcomer in the initial stages of settlement and integration.

Newcomers are responsible for providing for themselves and their families and they require employment sufficient to meet their needs. Pre-employment training, skill training and employment support are necessary to assist newcomers in finding suitable employment (Nyakabwa, 1989; Israelite et al, 1999; and George & Mwarigha, 1999). Pre-employment training includes support in resume writing, interview skills, appropriate work-place etiquette and assistance with job searching. Skills training can range from learning to operate a computer and access the internet to specialized training that results

in a college diploma or univeristy degree. As Ager & Strang (2008) note, "education clearly provides skills and competencies in support of subsequent employment enabling people to become more constructive and active members of society" (p. 172). Without access to education newcomers would need to rely on manual labour jobs that require limited skills. These jobs do not always offer upward mobility towards a career nor do they provide for long-term or permanent employment (Francis, 2009; Wasik, 2006). As well, these jobs are connected to the economic markets and can often result in frequent layoffs or reduced hours. This limits newcomers' earning capacity and, in turn, also affects their ability to meet their financial needs.

English Language Training

English as an additional language (EAL) services are required to assist newcomers with learning the host language and communicating in the local community, the workplace, and in schools. Newcomers identify their need for language services to increase their ability to function in the community. While EAL classes are offered through Manitoba Labour and Immigration at a variety of institutions, at no cost to the newcomer (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2007), single parents and female newcomers experience difficulties attending these classes. Female newcomers are more often single parents and are expected to be the main caregivers in their home (MacKinnon et al., 2007; McLaren & Dyck, 2002). These are often cultural expectations determined by the norms and traditions of their country of origin. They are most likely to be responsible for caring for their pre-school and school-aged children and for their elderly relatives who may live in the same home. Female newcomers and single parents

require access to childcare and/or respite services to enable them to leave the home to attend EAL classes.

In Winnipeg, respite services are not provided for newcomers to attend EAL classes. Access to childcare is an issue for the community as private and licensed daycares are running at full capacity (Government of Manitoba, 2009). While the provincial government is increasing funding to daycares in order to create more childcare spaces, newcomers are faced with waiting many months or over one year to access childcare that will enable them to attend EAL classes.

Housing

Safe and affordable housing is an integral component in the successful settlement and integration of newcomers (Carter & Osborne, 2009; Francis, 2009; Israelite et al., 1999). Israelite et al. (1999) explain that the conditions of the newcomers' homes, in urban high rises, are discomforting and culturally inappropriate. They fear for the safety of their family given the high crime rate in their neighbourhood and the dangers of living in a high-rise with small children (who may fall out of windows). As well, the Somali women interviewed in that study were offended by having to share the high-rise elevators with animals. It was against their customs to touch or be touched by dogs and other tenants always travelled in the elevators with their dogs. These women wanted safe, culturally appropriate housing that did not isolate them from their community. They would have liked other options for housing that would consider their specific needs.

Carter & Osborne (2009) looked at the housing and neighbourhood challenges of newcomers in Winnipeg. The authors explained that inner-city housing is in close

proximity to settlement service providers and allows access to amenities such as transit, shopping, and health and social services. However, too often newcomers are provided with housing choices in inner cities where there is urban decline and high housing competition among marginalized groups (newcomers, transient people and Aboriginal people who left the reserve or were from remote areas). Poor housing conditions have a negative effect on integration and are related to poor health and employment opportunities (Carter & Osborne, 2009; Israelite et al., 1999). As well, poor housing options perpetuate poverty and newcomer insecurity as many newcomers struggle to find housing appropriate to their cultural and physical needs. They often accept substandard housing that is unsuitable, inadequate and expensive (Francis, 2009).

Mental Health Services

Mental health services are provided for the general public. While immigrants may be in need of mental health services, research shows that refugees have a higher rate of mental, behavioural, and emotional disorders and negative emotions related to acculturation, integration, post-traumatic stress, depression, feelings of isolation, phobias, and associated symptoms (Drachman, 1992; & Hulewat, 1996; Hutton, 1994; Kamya, 1997; Nicholson, 1997). Their experiences can have long-term and sometimes permanent effects on their level of functioning (Drachman, 1995; Moussa, 1994). The migration experience is always traumatic in some way for all newcomers because they are abandoning all they know and have to face the hazards of displacement (Hulewat, 1996; and Kamya, 1997).

Many newcomers may not be aware of available health services and may not know how or be willing to access these services (White, 2001). They need assistance in understanding the health care system in Canada (Blum & Heinonen; 2007). For many, they are less likely to disclose their mental or social problems and are reluctant to seek assistance for their ailments because of linguistic and cultural difficulties associated with communicating with health care workers.

Opoku-Dapaah (1995) discussed the lived experience of shame and perceived feelings of unimportance among Somalian women in Toronto. These women perceived feelings of shame from within their families and communities and were reluctant to reach out to counsellors, physicians, and mental health practitioners as a result. At the same time, they desired ethno-cultural organizations that could facilitate their sharing of information and social support.

Settlement and Support Services in Manitoba

The province of Manitoba accepts over ten thousand newcomers each year and the province plans to accept more than 20,000 each year by the year 2016 (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2009). Some authors suggest that with the increasing numbers of newcomers entering the country, settlement services may not be able to meet the needs of newcomers (Esfandiari & MacQueen, 2000; Law & Hasenfeld, 1989). Settlement services are necessary for the adequate and timely integration of newcomers into the Canadian culture (Cooper, 2000; Government of Canada, 1998; Opoku-Dapaah, 1994b). These services are regulated by shared agreements between the Government of Canada and the individual provincial and territory governments. The Canada-Manitoba

Agreement to Realign Responsibilities for Immigrant Settlement Services calls for settlement services to be flexible and responsive to the needs of the newcomer and fully integrated to eliminate overlap and duplication of services (Government of Manitoba, 1998).

Nyman (1992) reported on a project regarding developing culturally accessible mental health and social services for all newcomers in Winnipeg. The author reported that accessibility and availability of these services were the major barriers for the use of these services by newcomers. The author presented a list of barriers (accompanied by potential remedies) to mental health care. Some of the barriers discussed in Nyman's study include: newcomers lack information about specific services; newcomers perceive a stigma attached to some services; the large size of some institutions may be overwhelming and confusing; a lengthy time to receive an appointment; services offer limited work hours; a lack of sensitivity towards including newcomers in planning and evaluation; and, services are not culturally sensitive.

Since Nyman's report was published, there have been many improvements to the accessibility of mental health and social services. Some written material is now provided in several languages; regional health authorities now offer translation and interpretation services at no cost to the newcomer and in any language as long as there is an available translator. There are information sessions held at various ethno-cultural community clubs; cultural sensitivity training is offered to service providers; and health and social services have been integrated into community areas, using locations within existing neighbourhoods.

Over the years, settlement service agencies and all levels of government have continuously tried to predict immigration trends and alter the provision of settlement services in order to accommodate the changing needs of each newcomer group. In 2007, the Manitoba Settlement Strategy was initiated to improve services and expand programs available to newcomers (Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2007). This was in response to the research findings of several studies which indicated that newcomers were not receiving appropriate and timely services as there were gaps in the services that were available. This strategy outlined key service areas that required changes and included:

- Provide accessible and clear information to newcomers preparing to migrate to Canada and to those supporting newcomers such as family members and community members;

- Centralized assessment, referrals, information and orientation;

- Financial support for communities and settlement service agencies to improve and expand their programs such as programs for children and youth, interpretation and translation services, and ongoing assistance for refugees including increased follow-up contact;

- Employment supports such as specialized job training and enhanced employer connections to promote better communication between newcomers and their employers;

- Consolidating information, advice and assistance on the recognition of foreign credentials by expanding orientation and work experience opportunities.
(Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2007).

Community organizations, churches, sponsors, ethno-cultural community members and family members also provide settlement and support services to newcomers in an informal nature. Simbandumwe (2007) presents an overview of African communities in Winnipeg and identifies that many of the ethno-cultural community organizations and its members provide invaluable support to newcomers, usually in their native language, and without financial support or incentive from the government or settlement service agencies. The author indicates that ethno-cultural community organizations and other individuals and groups supporting newcomers need access to accurate information about all the available services in Winnipeg in order for them to make accurate referrals to the appropriate settlement service agencies. As well, the findings show that newcomers need more one-to-one support that could best be facilitated by individuals from the same linguistic and/or ethno-cultural community.

Meanings of Finding Help

Past research on settlement services focused on settlement service providers and their suggestions for appropriate services. More recently, there has been a shift in the target groups for research about settlement services. Researchers are also listening to the voices of the ethno-cultural community leaders and newcomers themselves. It is important to understand the individual and common experiences of newcomer migration in order to target specific newcomer needs (Hulewat, 1996; Collins, 1995; Drachman, 1995).

There is a relationship between the significant experiences reported by newcomers and the perception of availability of resources (MacKinnon et al., 2007;

Simich, et al., 2005). Newcomers explain that the challenges they encounter with accessing services, their perceptions of being treated properly, and their feelings of isolation depend on their ability to find help on their own when support is needed (Francis, 2009; Simich et al., 2005; Simich et al., 2004; Wasik, 2006). Newcomers are actively pursuing economic and social integration. They are trying to return to a sense of 'normal' in their lives by filling the voids in their level of functioning with the resources they require.

Newcomers identify employment as their most important need (Blum & Heinonen, 2007; Francis, 2009; Wasik, 2006) yet their experiences with finding appropriate employment are often negative. Francis (2009) and Israelite et al. (1999) explain that newcomers experience difficulty in finding higher wage employment because some employers are unwilling to hire newcomers with temporary work permits or a strong accent and are unsure of the newcomer's cultural acceptance in the workplace. As well, the authors support that systemic racism perpetuates discrimination in hiring practices that devalue newcomers' foreign and Canadian work experience.

Wasik (2006) explains that newcomers experience anxiety as they struggle to find employment sufficient to meet their needs. They reluctantly accept provincial social assistance when they can not find employment but the provincial social assistance rates could only cover their most basic necessities. By the time newcomers need to use the food bank there is usually no money left in their budget to afford child care, work clothing and public transportation costs. Wasik finds that female newcomers who remain at home to care for their children feel isolated because they cannot attend language classes with their children or socialize outside the home without their children. They

discuss feeling helpless because they are receiving social assistance and not contributing to society. These women are used to working each day in their country of origin and they are used to having family, friends and neighbours to assist them with free childcare.

Wasik (2006) supports that newcomers can experience a cycle of poverty created by economic instability. Their feelings of isolation and helplessness are perpetuated by social policies that limit the full participation of newcomers in the workplace and community life. Some of these policies include limitations on the amount of time individuals can access subsidized child care while looking for employment without recognizing that newcomers may experience longer periods of unemployment and may need more time to search for employment.

George (1999) indicates that newcomers have many negative experiences with settlement services as they encounter competition among service providers and difficulty in accessing services. When settlement service agencies compete to offer services they create barriers for newcomers trying to access services as they can duplicate services among themselves and fail to give newcomers referrals to more appropriate settlement services (Alberta Human Resources and Employment, 2000). As well, newcomers experience confusion and can easily be overwhelmed when there is too much information and ambiguity about the types of available services.

Newcomers are more likely to achieve their goals and have a positive help-seeking experience when they are met with professional, caring service providers who assist them and do not create further barriers to accessing resources (Simich et al., 2004). MacKinnon et al., (2007) indentify that newcomers want settlement service agencies and other service providers to understand their needs, recognize their culture and ethnicity

and show them compassion. Female newcomers want others to understand their responsibilities in their homes, their marriages (if applicable) and to their children and provide opportunities for social, recreational and educational activities that include everyone in their families. Newcomers also want to make social connections with others from their ethno-cultural background where they could share experiences and communicate in their ethno-cultural languages.

Seeking Help Through Social Connections

African families rely on extended family members for their social support system (Kibreab, 1985; & Kamya, 1997). In many African cultures, close interpersonal relationships are equated to familial bonds and are a necessary part of life. Relocating to Canada, without any family ties and close relationships, disrupts the social support system to which they are accustomed. Hence, many newcomers experience feelings of isolation and depression associated with the loss of familial kinships (Simich et al., 2009). The formation of friendships initiated by ethno-cultural connections helps build and maintain social support networks.

Opoku-Dapaah (1995) examined the Somali women's organizations in the Toronto area and Israelite et al. (1999) studied the settlement experiences of Somali women in Toronto. The Somali women formed small groups of their own community members to support each other. They found success when they used their own resources to find solutions to their problems and fulfill their needs. Wasik (2006) reported that the African newcomers in Vancouver experienced greater success at getting appropriate help from other Africans than they did from settlement service providers. They explained that

finding support from other Africans in their city was instrumental in helping them initially navigate their way. Newcomers relied on their cultural similarities to forge relationships and were hopeful when they connected with other Africans in their city.

Strong social support connections help newcomers successfully integrate into society (MacKinnon et al., 2007; Simich et al., 2009). Newcomers find ways of connecting with others with ethnic and cultural similarities as they reach out to those like themselves for support. Simich et al. (2004) examined the meanings of social support and help seeking behaviours of Somali newcomers in Toronto. They found that having access to ethno-cultural service providers, who were of similar ethnicity to the newcomers, was beneficial to newcomers. As well, having access to familiar social networks was favourable to newcomers who practiced the same help-seeking behaviours they were accustomed to using in their country of origin.

Theoretical Framework

Looking back at social work theories historically there is a shift in the language used to identify newcomers. Some theories would contend that newcomers are a burden to society and face barriers because of their inability to meet their own needs. Other theories point to systemic and structural deficiencies that prevent the active participation of community members. The review of the literature indicates a willingness of newcomers to seek help and attempt to meet their needs. The challenges newcomers encounter with finding help can best be understood through a combination of the ecosystems perspective and the concept of empowerment.

Eco-Systems Perspective

According to Rothery (2008), "when systems concepts are used to understand how people...achieve (or fail to acheive) a goodness of fit with the various aspects of their environment, eco-systems thinking is the result" (p. 96). The eco-systems perspective promotes a thorough understanding of the issues people encounter with a focus on the relationships among the various systems interconnected with each person (Rothery, 2008). This perspective is a blend of the ecological perspective and systems perspective.

The central concept of the ecological perspective is concerned with the 'goodness of fit' between people and their environment. Dubois & Miley (1992) discuss this as a continuous and reciprocal process of adaptation as "humans change and are changed by their physical and social environment" (p. 59). People seek-out resources to assist them in meeting their needs. A 'good fit' occurs when sufficient personal and environmental resources are available.

Systems concepts are used to understand the interconnection rooted in different social systems and the reciprocal influence among those systems (Gitterman & Germain, 2008; Rothery, 2008). Social systems can include nuclear family units, extended family units, small group networks and larger community networks. These systems are all connected and form a larger system in itself. At the same time, these systems often include smaller systems referred to as subsystems (Miley, O'Melia & Dubois, 2007). For example, the newcomer parents and their children comprise a family system that is connected to the community system. At the same time, the family system is also comprised of subsystems that include a separate parent system and child system. Together, these systems co-exist and are mutually dependent on each other such that the

child depends on the parent for support and access to resources while the parent and the child rely on the community for support and access to resources.

The interconnections between the systems and subsystems are always present yet constantly changing over the course of life. When challenges arise and the needs of individuals and families change then the interaction between the systems and subsystems will also change. Thus, the nature of those interactions is dependent on the ability of the systems to provide the necessary resources to meet the needs of the other systems.

The terms 'system' (systems theory) and 'environment' (ecological perspective) are interchangeable as they both refer to the same setting. To use the previous example, a community is a system connected to the family system. The community is also the environment in which the family system exists. Gitterman & Germain's (2008) life model explains that people continuously strive to improve themselves or to have a 'good fit' between themselves and their environment. Stress and personal difficulty result when a good fit can not be attained. In the same way, newcomers navigate the challenges they experience when trying to adapt to their new lives and integrate into their new community. When newcomers experience stress and difficulties arise as a result of the challenges they encounter, the influence and support involved in the reciprocal relationships between newcomers, their community, settlement service agencies and the larger community are important to consider.

Empowerment

Empowerment has many different definitions that fit personal, political and social contexts. When I consider empowerment in relation to the ecosystems perspective as it

applies to newcomers, I draw upon the following definitions: empowerment is to "view challenges and strengths in context, to identify the many possible paths to solutions, and to recognize that change in any given system reverberates through other system levels" (Miley et al., 2007, p. 104). To assist in the empowerment of newcomers is to help equip them with the skills and available resources necessary for them to make positive choices and create change towards successful settlement and integration. To help empower parents who are newcomers is to pass on the strengths to a new generation.

Newcomer parents are often single women (Francis, 2009). Heinonen & Spearman (2001) illustrate that women often are responsible for the health and care of children and adult family members and they encounter significant stress in balancing work, life and family responsibilities. The literature points to the difficulties experienced by female newcomers as they realize the same challenges in balancing work, life and family responsibilities while trying to adjust to their new lives, access resources and meet their needs and the needs of their family (MacKinnon et al., 2007). This can best be understood in terms of gender-based social and systemic limitations and resource deficits as these restrictions are connected to and interact with the individual and other systems (Coady & Lehmann, 2008).

The resilience in newcomers, in their efforts to meet their needs and form social connections for assistance, are strengths that are encouraged and supported towards a goal of empowerment. An empowering approach with newcomers recognizes their experiences, knowledge and skills as valuable strengths. It acknowledges their ability to help themselves by finding alternate means of support (Miley et al., 2007). Accepting and sustaining alternate means of support and assistance expands the availability of

appropriate resources and gives newcomers the ability to create and choose resources for themselves (Miley et al).

Empowerment, as it pertains to newcomers, emphasizes the capacity of newcomers to find solutions to their own problems. The ecosystems perspective explains that when newcomers can effectively meet the challenges they encounter they will diminish their own stress, successfully change their environment, and positively affect their other environments (other aspects of their lives, their families, community, work life, social life and other agencies with which they interact). Positive change can have a ripple effect and create a better livelihood and future prospects for newcomers. It is with this theoretical framework that I guide my research.

Summary of the Literature Review

The review of the literature illuminates key themes inherent in the help-seeking experiences of newcomers. Newcomers are grateful for the assistance they receive from settlement service agencies but continue to experiences challenges in meeting their needs. The significance of their experiences are linked to their perception of the availability of the resources they require, about being treated fairly and are linked to their feelings about their ability to assist themselves. They convey feelings of isolation, frustration, confusion and sadness and their perceptions of their lack of confidence and competence negatively affects their self esteem. They strive for economic stability through better paying jobs that recognize and utilizes their skills and experience; they work towards social integration and becoming productive members in their community.

The ecosystems perspective and the concept of empowerment guide my understanding of the literature about newcomer experiences with finding help. From the literature it is evident that the interactions between the various systems and subsystems connected to the newcomer are important to understand as there is a reciprocal relationship where one system can affect some or all the other systems. When newcomer's needs are met they are empowered, through access to information and support, to make the changes required to integrate into society and succeed in their endeavours. Newcomers rely on settlement services for assistance but also benefit from receiving support from others who share the same linguistic and/or ethno-cultural background.

A good social support system, good command of the host country language, access to recertification of foreign credentials and employment within their field of training, adequate and safe housing, and access to services required to sustain and promote healthy behaviour are all settlement needs that, when met, promote integration and success.

In my research, I explore the settlement experiences of Sierra Leone newcomers in Winnipeg with seeking assistance for their specific needs, their successes and challenges. The methods I use to conduct this research are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study design uses qualitative methods as it allows for in-depth and personal explorations of the topic in order to capture the lived experiences of the participants with regard to knowledge, learned behaviour, culture, and traditions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996). There are several reasons for choosing qualitative research and some of those reasons apply to my research: a) I want to explore a topic about which little is known, b) I am pursuing a topic of sensitivity and emotional depth, and c) I want to capture the 'lived experience' from the perspectives of those who lived it and created meaning from it (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Essentially, I want to capture the participants' point of view and I want to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

My role as the researcher was to develop an understanding about observed patterns of behaviour, traditions, culture and customs of the group. I intended to study the learned patterns of behaviour and traditions associated with 'helping' within the Sierra Leone community in Winnipeg. To do so I needed to look at the newcomers' help-seeking experiences, particularly regarding meeting settlement needs.

Sierra Leonean Community in Winnipeg

My understanding of the Sierra Leone population in Manitoba was crucial in my interpretation of the participant's experiences. Through prolonged observation of the community I learned their traditions, norms, values and culture and the important issues that challenged them. Prior to conducting this research I spent many years involved with the community in many aspects. I was invited into the Sierra Leonean community, by the

only Sierra Leonean I knew then, to assist the children in finding a suitable activity that would entice them off the city streets to unite, form and maintain lasting social connections. With the help of parents and senior members within the community we formed a dance group open to all the children, male and female. The result was a lasting connection with the twenty-five members of the dance group, the parents and community members involved. The dance group has since evolved and is still in existence today.

I was invited many times after to add my ideas and offer any assistance to the planning of programs for the community. I became involved with the community soccer team for several years. This was of particular interest to me because I love the game of football (Canadian soccer) and relished the opportunity to assist a strong team in its pursuit for excellence. As well, I became acquainted with the young Sierra Leonean football players, their families and team staff.

At first I was treated as an outsider and was not privy to the conversations and activities within the community. However, through active participation in community events and a leadership role in helping the young newcomers, I built trusting relationships with many Sierra Leoneans. There were many occasions over the years to celebrate successes on the field, within the dance group, within the dancers and football players' families and within the community at large. These interactions afforded me sufficient time to become acquainted with and understand the culture (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I developed lasting relationships with other Sierra Leoneans and good rapport with community members. I learned of their customs, their taboos and the issues that were of importance to them.

It was during those years that I learned about their issues with getting appropriate help to meet their needs. At many social gatherings men and women would discuss the challenges and successes they experienced when seeking some kind of assistance. When I considered exploring their experiences with finding help I was encouraged by many Sierra Leoneans to research this topic and report my findings to illuminate their struggles. I also wanted to focus on their successes as I found Sierra Leoneans to be a resilient community.

Data Collection

Sample Population

I considered using community information sessions to introduce the study to potential participants and to secure the research sample. However, I felt that community information sessions would be ineffective in soliciting participants as many community members acknowledged their feelings of exhaustion with small forums and were weary of attending other such gatherings.

As is the custom in many African communities, information about this study was spread through word-of-mouth. Two facilitators discussed the study with Sierra Leoneans at private gatherings, chance encounters and at social events. Facilitators were used in this study as they were knowledgeable insiders who assisted me throughout the study with their guidance and translation of colloquial terms, norms, and traditions (Padgett, 1998; Fontana & Frey, 2003). The facilitators were helpful in identifying potential participants.

According to Browne (2005) "recruiting research participants can be problematic when research focuses upon specific individuals, groups or experiences…. Another way to gain initial contacts is to use personal networks and ask friends and acquaintances to be involved. They in turn ask their friends and partners if they would be willing to participate" (p. 47). I used snow-ball sampling to connect with potential participants from among Sierra Leone community member's personal networks. The facilitators were helpful in identifying potential participants. These same potential participants helped to identify other community members who might have been interested in participating in the research. The facilitators introduced me to potential participants and helped to arrange informal information sharing between community members and myself.

Once there was a generated interest in the study I mailed or hand delivered an information flyer (see Appendix A) and the consent form (see Appendix B) to each potential participant and I called each of them within a week of sending out the flyers. I gave consent forms to potential participants as I believed it could help alleviate any misconceptions about the study. Some potential participants contacted me directly once they received the flyer. Others responded only after I placed a follow-up telephone call to them. I used the follow-up telephone calls as an opportunity to answer any questions and quell any fears the potential participants may have had regarding the research. I also scheduled interview dates and times during those telephone calls.

In total, I received contact information from twelve potential participants of which I confirmed eight willing participants and conducted 7 interviews. The participants who refused to participate did so for similar reasons: either they did not have time or they no longer wished to discuss their settlement experiences.

Participants immigrated to Winnipeg during and after the war in Sierra Leone (the war officially ended in 2002) and resided in Winnipeg less than seven years at the time of the interviews. They were from varying economic and educational backgrounds, were of both genders, and were of varying ages. At the time of the interviews all male participants were single and all female participants were single parents.

Interviews

Surveys are useful tools for data collection but for this research they were not appropriate. The type of questions used in surveys can be a barrier to the participant's full expression of their experiences as survey questions (closed and open-ended questions) do not allow the researcher to explore the participants' answers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Bryman, 2001). As well, in my experience with the Sierra Leone community, completing a survey individually would be difficult as translation and interpretation might be required. This would deny the participants' confidentiality if they needed to rely on a third party to complete the survey.

I wanted a method of data collection that would yield rich data about specific experiences and allow the participant to fully explain themselves in an informal manner. For these reasons I decided to conduct individual interviews as I believed that the participants would be willing to openly discuss their experiences in the privacy of a personal, confidential interview (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. I initially expected the interviews to take place at a room in a selected community center. However, many small community gatherings were usually

held in family homes where a meal was shared. All the participants preferred having the

interviews in their own or a friend's home instead of having the interview in a

community center. Some interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants

where I shared a meal with the participant. Other interviews took place in the home of a

mutually trusted community member (one of the two facilitators).

At the beginning of each interview I reviewed the letter of consent (see Appendix

B) with each participant. Some participants expressed fears that their participation in the

research would affect their current situation, such as immigration status and employment.

To overcome this potential bias and issue of power (on my part) the participants were

advised (verbally at the interview and in writing in the letter of consent) that this research

was private and their responses to the questions would remain confidential. Participants

voluntarily signed the letter of consent declaring their willingness to participate in the

research and understanding that they had the option to withdraw from the research at any

time. There were no stated or observed concerns from the participants about their

participation in this research.

Given the nature of some of the interview questions I was concerned that some

participants would have issues or feelings that might have resurfaced, from reliving some

of their traumatic experiences during the interview. I enlisted the help of Mount Carmel

Clinic where participants could be referred for counselling if necessary. Mount Carmel

Clinic has a cross-cultural counselling service available to all refugees and immigrants in

Winnipeg. I gave a copy of the signed letter of consent to each participant and the letter

included contact information for the clinic so participants would not need to request the

information directly from me. As well, I reminded participants that they could stop the interview at anytime if they felt upset or overwhelmed.

For myself, I was able to remain calm and empathetic during the interviews. On one occasion I debriefed with my thesis advisor as some of the information I learned made me extremely emotional. The debriefing was necessary and it allowed me to vent my frustration with the situation in a confidential, safe and non-judgmental environment without the possibility of exposing the participant or any other person involved. I was able to refrain from discussing any issues with people not associated with the research in order to protect confidentiality of the participants and the information they shared.

The interviews were two-tiered:

1. The first part of the interview consisted of questions regarding demographic and personal information about the participant (see Appendix C). This included questions about age, gender, education level, current employment status and occupation, employment in country of origin and housing.

2. The second part of the interview consisted of guided, open-ended questions about the participant's experiences with seeking help in Winnipeg (see Appendix D). These questions explored the participant's personal experiences, interpersonal relationships, community affiliation, and personal difficulties. They focused on accomplishments, needs, wants, their current situation, and future hopes of the participants. The questions also examined the participants' experiences with settlement services and actions taken to meet other needs that were unmet by these services. Participants were given the opportunity to add any other information and experiences regarding resettlement in Winnipeg.

I added questions during the first interview and to the subsequent interviews as I found that further discussion regarding the topics were warranted. During the first interview there was a natural flow of unscripted questions that resulted in rich data about the participants' preparation to immigrating to Canada in their home country or country of asylum. I included questions about this topic as I found myself wanting to hear more about their pre-immigration period. I wanted to explore any possible link between the participants' help-seeking behaviours during their preparation to immigrate and their initial settlement experiences.

Herberg (1993) discusses a 'frame of reference' that influences an individual's future. She shows that an individual's experiences are affected by their frame of reference (i.e. their previous experiences). In the settlement phase, newcomers' behaviours, attitudes and experiences are influenced by their pre-settlement and migration experiences. For example, a participant's experiences in her/his country of asylum may influence her/his willingness to seek specific kinds of help and may also influence expectations about what kind of help can be obtained. In this study, I included interview questions about help-seeking experiences in the country of asylum and/or country of origin. These questions were necessary to establish a frame of reference for each participant about their help-seeking experiences prior to migrating to Canada.

At the beginning of the interviews it was obvious that the participants were paying attention to the digital recorder which was sitting on a table or chair between us. Some participants would stare at the recorder after I asked them a question. Each participant glanced at the recorder when they were sharing sensitive information of an

emotional nature. But, that slowly dissipated during the course of the interview as the participants appeared relaxed and comfortable when discussing their experiences. They stopped watching the recorder, sat back in their chair, made eye contact with me and joked about some of their amusing experiences.

I requested that the participant be alone if we were meeting in their home as it was important that we were not disturbed during the interview. During one interview, while we were discussing the participant's experiences with seeking employment, the participant's telephone was ringing and the answering machine turned on. We both heard the message which was from a potential employer requesting a date for a job interview. That incident pre-empted a detailed conversation about how that participant was referred to the employer and what it would mean to the participant to be employed by that employer. Prior to that message the participant had offered little information about current employment-seeking experiences.

The end of the interviews came with relief as the length and breadth of the interviews was exhausting to both the participants and me. On every occasion, once I formally closed the interview and turned off the recorder, the participants would continue in a casual conversation about their problems. I found myself wishing I had the recorder on to capture the information. But, the essence of their experiences was memorable and I captured the basic ideas the participants shared in memos. I also used memos during and shortly after the interviews to collect visual data about the participants' reactions and non-verbal responses to questions. The participants were aware of the memos and their uses as I explained to the participants that the information collected in the memos (during and after the interviews) would be included as data. The information in the memos was

added to the interview during the transcription of the interview, prior to the analysis of the data.

Seven interviews were conducted and these were sufficient as the data became saturated after the fifth participant. The data is said to be saturated if conducting further interviews will likely repeat what was found in the previous interviews or not add anything new to the data (Creswell, 2007). The participants who refused to participate did so for similar reasons: either they did not have time or they no longer wished to discuss their settlement experiences.

Translation of the Data

Prior to the war there were less than twenty-five Sierra Leoneans in Winnipeg and they had been in Winnipeg for several years. The migration of more than 300 Sierra Leone newcomers created a new Sierra Leonean community in Winnipeg. Many Sierra Leonean newcomers were proficient in the English language. However, there were some newcomers who were learning English as an additional language (EAL). Sierra Leoneans speak English, English-Creole, and a variety of tribal dialects. My command of English-Creole was not useful when conducting an in-depth interview. Thus, this research was limited only to those Sierra Leoneans with adequate command of the English language.

As my financial resources for this study were limited, I was not able to have an interpreter or translator to conduct interviews or assist in transcribing and translating the data. I used a translator to consult with after the collection of data, for phrases not completely understood in English. Translation services were provided by one informant from within the community. Only one translator was used as I was concerned about

having too many people involved in the translation process. The translator did not have

access to the interview data or any information that could identify the participant. The

translator and I would either meet in person or on the phone to discuss phrases used by

the participants. I did not give the translator complete sentences as I did not want to share

any information that could be used to identify the participant. To avoid confusion with

the translation I checked with the participant to ensure that the translation of the phrase

was correct. The use of the translator was only necessary for two participants whose

command of the English language was fairly new as they were still enrolled in EAL

classes.

Data Analysis

The taped interviews were transcribed personally using Microsoft Word. I

transcribed each interview within days of the audio recording to avoid involuntary

omissions of anything that might not have been captured by the audio recording or the

memos (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). During the interviews it

was possible to miss a participant's reaction to a question or their non-verbal responses

when they were sharing their experiences. I collected these observations in memos that

were written during and after each interview. I also used memos to collect information

the participant shared after the interview was complete and the recorder was turned off.

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant I omitted the names

and any other identifying information about each participant from the transcripts. Each

interviewee was given a common West-African name as an alias. I decided not to solely

use Sierra Leonean names as aliases to avoid the potential for mistaken identities or

subjective linkages to other Sierra Leoneans by any reader familiar with the community. The aliases were gender-specific, chosen alphabetically and assigned randomly. The aliases also contained no obvious links to the participant. I removed any identifying information if the participant referred to someone or an organization by name or referred to an event that occurred within the Sierra Leone community. I replaced the missing information with generic descriptors. For example, if a participant said a family member's name I would replace it with "a family member". The paper and electronic transcripts bear no identifying markers to the participant and the demographic information is kept separately from the actual transcripts.

I transferred the transcribed data to NVIVO which is a qualitative research program used to sort and code data. Physically sorting through interview data is a lengthy, continuous process and I did not have the space necessary to organize the paper version of the data. I chose to use NVIVO as it was an appropriate electronic tool to assist me in sorting and coding the data. Using this program also minimized the need for physical space and the time needed to sort the data.

I used NVIVO to sort and code the data in hopes of finding explicit themes. The coding scheme consisted of using open coding, colour coding and thematic coding to filter the data into recognizable themes. Open coding and colour coding worked together as they were both useful in identifying similarities and differences among the data (Morse & Field, 1995). The purpose of colour coding was to visually separate the open codes as I assigned colours to specific categories. For example, all references about 'employment' were highlighted red and all references about 'housing' were highlighted purple. In doing

so, I could look at the data and see the predominant categories and themes based on the assigned colours of the categories.

Thematic coding was used to refine the similarities based on specific inferences (Morse & Field, 1995). For example, open coding was used to identify all references about housing. Thematic coding was used to identify references about the variations related to housing such as 'seeking help to find housing' and 'finding housing without help'.

The first three interviews were colour-coded separately and similarities within the data were identified. The remaining interviews were colour-coded using most of the coding categories found in the first three interviews. However, there were still new categories that emerged in the subsequent interviews. I coded without discrimination or guidance as I wanted to code all the data without filtering it according to the research goals. This generated an exhaustive listing of categories on many topics regarding the immigration experience.

A review of the categories in each interview resulted in some being combined because of similarities. Combining categories created a workable list congruent to the research issues. The categories in each interview were compared to find connections among the interviews. Those connections were used to identify underlying themes. This was a continuous process as I continued to move categories between the themes to find the most relevant fit.

Some of the information fit into multiple groupings as the data in the category pertained to different topics. For example: information about seeking employment, accessing employment services and understanding how the system worked were all

captured in one sentence from one participant. It was necessary to keep all parts of the sentence to maintain the full meaning of the participant's experience. However, as each part of the sentence was coded separately; the information was placed into three different categories.

I sorted the categories in each group and created sub-groups that were separate from the main grouping but still related (Padgett, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Morse & Field, 1995). For example: in the group about accessing services there were sub-groups about accessing each specific service such as education, employment or housing. These services were connected to each other simply because they were services that were accessed by the participants. Yet, each service was different from the other and the participants had varying experiences accessing each separate service.

I reviewed the groups and removed those groups that were not immediately relevant to the research. It was particularly difficult to exclude those groups as the information within them was intriguing and thought provoking. For example, participants were asked questions about their help-seeking experiences in Sierra Leone. The data from these questions resulted in several categories related to help-seeking experiences in Sierra Leone and also about childhood events and polygamy within families. The latter were excluded because there were no connections to the focus of this research.

The remaining groups and sub-groups were compared to each other to find further similarities and a set of themes and sub-themes were created. During the thematic coding process I created titles for each theme that incorporated words or phrases used by the participants. The demographic information was compared to the data to determine if the themes were related with any of the demographic variables of age, gender, education,

employment, and housing. The final themes and subthemes are illustrated in Table 3.1.

This table also identifies the original codes and categories fundamental to each theme.

Table 3.1

Codes, Categories and Themes and Subthemes

Related Codes	Thematic Categories	Themes Subthemes
Women did…men did	Life in Sierra Leone	*Women Providing for Children*
Gave me hope Pray to God I need this Giving help	My faith helped me This is good for me	*Fundamental Values* Having faith and hope Being independent Giving back to the community
My needs are… I can do this I want to be independent Feeling understood Worried about my kids Working the system	Learning and knowing	*Understanding The New Life* Wanting financial independence Trying to fit in
Connection Family and Friends Meeting others like me They gave me advice Looking after us	I am Sierra Leonean	*Family and Community As First Contact* Family: Supportive and comfortable Meeting other Sierra Leoneans: Socializing and support Community members are informal helpers
Asking others Others offering Government did this Go back to school Work to live Safe place to live	Where I went for help	*Reaching Out to The Unfamiliar* The public Sponsors and government departments Accessing services
Bad image Community not helping Giving it all up Not what I want Just a big problem	Bad for me	*Difficult Situations* Problems within the Sierra Leonean community Sacrificing dreams Feeling isolated

Validating Qualitative Research

Some may argue that issues of reliability and validity of research have no place in

qualitative research. Others may consider that the criteria used to determine the reliability

and validity of quantitative research need to be altered to account for the subjective

nature of qualitative research. In this research, I establish the validity and reliability of

my qualitative research using criteria that have been proven by qualitative researchers:

credibility, dependability and confirmability (Bryman, 2001; Padgett, 1998).

Credibility

Credibility is the believability and trustworthiness of the research findings

(Bryman, 2001). The raw data and the research findings must be seen as a truthful

interpretation of the participant's lived experiences. Each interview is independent of the

other and was conducted with a short period of time between each interview. Conducting

multiple interviews in a short span of time reduces the chances that participants could

share information about the interview with each other. It was not very likely that

participants talked to one another about the interviews as the interviews were scheduled

close together and I did not disclose the participants' identities. Participants either did not

know each other or were merely acquaintances.

In this research I show how prolonged observation and member checking

establish credibility in my interpretation of the data (Bryman, 2001).

P*rolonged observation***.** My involvement in the community has helped me to

become oriented to their situation with an appreciation and understanding of the context

in which they live and have lived in the past (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Their struggles and desire for success are understood from their perspective and not through my own understanding. My own preconceptions, formed through my own newcomer experiences, are not sufficient when trying to understand their experiences. Yes, I share some similarities with the Sierra Leone population as I have my own newcomer experience as a visible minority in a drastically different and strange country. But, that is the extent of our similarities. My involvement in the community has helped me blend in with them such that I have been welcomed to the community. The participants trusted me (some simply by my reputation as they had never met me prior to this research) and felt comfortable sharing their personal experiences.

Member-checking. During the interviews I often checked with the participants to confirm if I understood the meaning of the information they shared (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Sometimes I would ask a question at the end of their sentence or I would make a note and ask them at the end of the interview. During the analysis I consulted with the facilitators and some of the participants (through informal telephone calls or meetings at their homes) to confirm if I understood and interpreted their experiences correctly. The themes and sub-themes were reviewed and their suggestions and comments were incorporated where needed. For example, one participant's frustration with the health care system appeared to be directed at the health care staff. After checking with her she explained that her frustration was also directed at her spouse for not knowing where to go to find her help or how to help her navigate the health care system. Through member-

checking I was able to understand the full scope of the participant's experience and she was given the opportunity to confirm and correct my interpretation of her experiences.

Dependability

It is important to consider how the findings were derived and whether they represent a dependable and realistic interpretation of the data. As well, I need to question if the data could be reproduced or if my own researcher bias could have an effect on the data. One method of testing the dependability of the research is to have an audit trail in order for others to review the same data and understand the basis for my conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail demonstrates the connections between the participants, their spoken words and the meanings derived from their experiences.

There is an audit trail that shows each aspect of the research process from the beginning to the end. The audio recording of each interview, the memos and the interview transcripts are available. The audit trail also leads to the coding process used to form the themes and sub-themes and the findings reported here. The coding process shows my rationale for sorting the raw data, reducing the data by moving and/or removing irrelevant data, and creating the themes and sub-themes as they are presented here. The resulting thematic parallels within the data show the congruence between the interviews and the association of similar experiences among the participants. This dispels the possibility of the researcher generating connections and themes that are not present in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

My interpretation of the data resulted from discovering underlying themes and connections within and between the data from each interview. There was a rationale to

discovering the connections and the formation of like themes. When I reviewed the data I

searched for repetition in ideas, experiences and words. For example, the first set of

categories about family seemed connected because of the participants' reference to

family support when they were in need. Each time a participant spoke about their family

a code about family was created. On another viewing of the categories I recognized the

differences between relying on family, supporting family, and having available family

close by. These differences were recognizable in the language used by the participants.

> When we want to get an apartment when [the family] look for an apartment for us
> the family [and] some friends they come over, some people they donate money,
> food, clothing. So before we moved [she sighed with relief] everything is
> organized. (Bintou)
>
> Family has what we like, talking our own language, I feel comfortable. (Duba)
> Family I have here, when we have problem we just discuss it within ourselves. If
> there is any way to help each other we do. But they don't believe in going to other
> community members. (Ayo)

The above excerpts are from three different participants and are coded under the

sub-theme "Importance of family and friends". What separates the coding of these

excerpts is the context in which the participants discuss 'family'. Bintou described the

help she received from her family member and the impact it had on her life. Duba

described the comfort he finds in his family in something as easy as having a

conversation. Ayo explains how he and his family rely on and seek help from each other.

The above three participants share a connection about the importance of their own family

even though their experiences vary. In the above examples, the data can be seen to be

dependable in that it is likely that the same conclusions can be made about the coding of

these excerpts based on the understanding of the meanings of these experiences.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the extent to which the researcher's own values have influenced the collection and interpretation of data (Bryman, 2001). I am aware that my presence and reactions during the interview may lead to some researcher effects in the data. However, it is important to understand my own perspective and the implications thereof for this research. For someone without the realistic exposure to life as a newcomer, hearing traumatic and shocking life stories for the first time could yield unexpected and potentially obtrusive reactions from the interviewer. This can contaminate the data collection such that the participant may hold back their responses to minimize the researcher's reactions or over-embellish in details to form a more appealing story (Bryman, 2001). My personal experience in working with the public and my professional experience with counselling and listening to such life stories allowed me the privilege of relating, to some extent, to the realities of the participants' situation, without becoming too emotionally involved.

It was important to be aware of my role in the interview and not become too immersed in the issues so that I would not forgo my role as the researcher (Padgett, 1998; and Fontana & Frey, 2003). During the collection of the data I relied on maintaining professional distance as I reminded myself to remain focused and restated questions to assist the participant in remaining focused as well. During the analysis of the data I relied on the facilitators and my advisor to review the findings and identify areas in my interpretation of the data that appeared biased.

My empathy toward the participants was a valuable tool towards conducting an effective interview as it showed that I cared about the participants' experiences and their willingness to share them (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). My involvement in the social aspects of the community was an advantage to my rapport with participants as I have been associated with the Sierra Leone population for many years and most of the participants knew of this commitment. My personal experience as an immigrant and visible minority in Winnipeg was an advantage to building trust with participants as they were able to identify with me on some levels. My connection with the Sierra Leone community maintained my interest in conducting the interviews and exploring the meanings of the participants' experiences.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Resources were limited and I was not able to employ an interpreter or a translator for all the interviews. As a result, this research was restricted to Sierra Leoneans with a basic knowledge of the English language. This meant that Sierra Leoneans with partial knowledge of the English language could not be included in this study. I expected that these Sierra Leoneans would have valuable help-seeking experiences to share especially because of their language barrier. This is a limitation to the study because I was not able to explore the effects of the language barrier on help-seeking behaviours and the related outcomes.

This study did not include elderly Sierra Leoneans as I was unable to interview any elderly Sierra Leonean newcomers. There are a significant number of elderly women (and a few men) who have migrated to Canada with or after their adult children. In

speaking with other Sierra Leoneans we anticipated that these elderly Sierra Leoneans would have significantly different experiences with seeking help. The community has recognized that there is a necessity for social programming for the elderly Sierra Leoneans as their needs are different. Their social and economic situation and their age and ability might influence their help-seeking behaviours. If I had access to funding for translation services I could have expanded the study to include these newcomers. Their unique experiences would have further enriched the data and added more value to our understanding of their experiences with seeking help.

Even with the above limitations I was able to interview participants of both genders, from a variety of economic and social backgrounds and from both major religions. My affiliation with the community afforded me the insider knowledge about and rapport with the participants. This improved my ability to understand and report on their experiences. The participants who were interviewed were sufficient to this study as the data became saturated prior to the final interview. The use of the computer program, NVIVO, to assist in the sorting and coding of the data assisted me in organizing and analyzing the data. When I consider the many times I coded and recoded the data or shuffled codes within the categories or needed to use a single code for multiple categories, I am grateful that the computer program minimized the chaos, confusion and mistakes that I could have made when analyzing the data.

Summary

This study design used qualitative methods as the basis for understanding help-seeking experiences of Sierra Leone newcomers in Winnipeg. It enabled an in-depth

exploration into sensitive and emotional issues from the perspective of the participants. Through the use of qualitative methods the participants' lived experiences were captured and interpreted to show the meaning of those experiences. Snowball sampling was used to generate potential participants; open-ended questions were asked in an interview format. The interviews created rich data that was analyzed through sorting and coding to find similarities and shared experiences. Emerging categories were compared to find parallel connections and generate final themes and sub-themes.

Different criteria were used to substantiate the validity of this research. My established trust within the Sierra Leone population was instrumental to building trust and rapport with the participants as they were more willing to share a detailed description of their experiences with a trusted ally. This trust and familiarity with the community also enabled me to accurately interpret the data and give credible meaning to the participants' experiences. As well, participants and the facilitators were consulted to verify my interpretation of the data and validate the findings.

While the data collected is representative of some Sierra Leone newcomers in Winnipeg it does not include Sierra Leoneans without a good command of the English language. The findings presented in the next chapter are a description of those participants' interviewed and their lived experiences about finding help in Winnipeg.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The data collected from the interviews offered an abundance of information related to the immigration and settlement experiences of the Sierra Leoneans interviewed. The aim of this research was to explore the participants' experiences with finding help. The data discussed in this chapter will be specifically about seeking help and the issues that arose from these experiences. Personal experiences, lifestyle and social customs in Sierra Leone were often mentioned during the interviews. This information was included in the findings as it was an important lens to understand the differences the participants experienced when seeking help in Winnipeg.

Representing Participants' Experiences

Throughout this chapter there are references to the participants' words used in describing their experiences. To allow the reader to understand each participant's own point of view, excerpts from the interviews are used. Often there are issues that all the participants agree on or discuss. The excerpts used are the ones that best portray the participants' individual or united views or experiences.

All identifying information has been removed from the data in order to protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants. Participant's names have been changed and aliases were allocated in random order. References to specific places, agencies, occupations, and individuals that could potentially identify a participant were removed and replaced with common names and generic references.

The Research Question

Throughout the analysis of the data continuous reflection on the research question was necessary to enable an accurate sorting of the relevant data. As the data provided rich information on the immigration experience, the findings reported here are the participants' comments immediately relevant to the research question: *Sierra Leonean Newcomers and their experiences with finding help*. Other information included in this chapter is necessary in framing the experiences of the participants in relation to the research question.

Sierra Leonean Participants

Table 4.1 demonstrates the demographic data that was collected for the seven participants. The Sierra Leone population in Manitoba is relatively new and fairly small. The participants' demographics have been combined to protect confidentiality as individual descriptions would likely enable a reader to easily identify a participant.

Table 4.1

Demographic Information about Participants

Age	Age range 25 – 50 years; average 35 years
Gender	3 female; 4 male
Marital status	3 single; 2 married; 2 widowed
Family size	5 with children; 2 without children
Location in Sierra Leone	4 rural; 3 urban
Education completed	1 elementary; 3 high school; 3 college/university
Arrived in Canada between	2000 – 2007
Family status in Winnipeg	6 with family; 1 without family in Winnipeg
Immediate family	4 with children/spouse remaining in Sierra Leone
Travelled to Canada	5 travelled alone; 2 travelled with extended family
Occupation in Sierra Leone	3 professionals; 1 student; 2 self-employed; 1 unemployed
Occupation in Winnipeg	3 professionals; 3 in social/health services; 1 in general labour

In total, seven participants were interviewed. All were adult newcomers from Sierra Leone who had been in Canada less than 5 years at the time of the interviews. All seven participants migrated to Winnipeg directly from a country of asylum in West Africa, as a result of the war in Sierra Leone. They all spoke English and Creole and each participant was also fluent in a tribal dialect. Six participants had immediate family members already established in Winnipeg and this was the reason they chose to migrate to Winnipeg. One participant came to Winnipeg as it was the destination chosen by immigration officials. Since migrating to Winnipeg, four participants had relatives who also migrated to Winnipeg themselves.

Experiences with Finding Help

The interviews consist of questions related to seeking help prior to the participants' migration to Winnipeg and during the early stages of settlement in Winnipeg. It is essential to explore the participants' help-seeking experiences prior to their migration experience in order to understand and frame their settlement experiences and the effect those experiences have on their lives.

Introduction to Themes and Sub-themes

Table 4.2 outlines the themes and subthemes. The relevant codes emerged from the initial coding of the data and were grouped in categories. The themes and sub-themes are derived from those categories and presented in this chapter. Another analysis of the data and the themes identified two underlying themes that are used as a lens to frame the participants' experiences. They are: gender-based differences between the female and male participants and fundamental values shared by each participant. These differences underlying themes are included in the next table and are discussed in this section of the chapter.

Table 4.2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes and subthemes

Women Providing for Children

Fundamental Values
       Having faith and hope
       Being independent
       Giving back to the community

Understanding The New Life
       Wanting financial independence
       Trying to fit in

Family and Community As First Contact
       Family: Supportive and comfortable
       Meeting other Sierra Leoneans: Socializing and support
       Community members are informal helpers

Reaching Out to The Unfamiliar
       The public
       Sponsors and government departments
       Accessing services

Difficult Situations
       Problems within the Sierra Leonean community
       Sacrificing dreams
       Feeling isolated

Women Providing for Children

There are differences among the help-seeking experiences of female and male participants. Most of the gender-based experiences are imbedded in the themes as it was necessary for those experiences to remain in context. Presented here are highlights of the major issues that separated the experiences between female and male participants.

The three female participants were single parents and the experiences they shared weren't just about helping themselves but also about finding and providing help for their children. While three of the four male participants were parents, their children were not in their care and all but one of the men identified that they did not make any decisions about the care of their children. One male participant provided financial assistance for his child that was not in his care. He was also available for guidance and support to his child.

While they shared the same goals as the male participants, the female participants were also concerned with their children's well-being and their own ability to help their children become successful young adults. They wanted to establish routines for their families and ensure that their children had settled before considering education, training, and/or employment for themselves. They spoke about the additional stresses of parenthood and caring for others in their home. The difference for these participants was that in Sierra Leone participants could rely on others for assistance with caring for their children. Female participants had help in the home when they lived in Sierra Leone. If they needed to assist their children with home work they could be assured that someone else (a family member or friend) would be cooking supper or looking after the other children. In Canada, these participants did not have this support and the additional responsibilities became a source of stress.

> I came here as a single parent and I have to do all the thinking by myself. And with the children, I have to make sure they are led the right way, they don't go astray. And I have to do all of it alone. I have to help them think about doing things that are right. And make sure I help them with their homework. There was no one I could turn to like a brother and say could you help them with their homework. (Gaya)

A challenging issue for the female participants concerned the effects of Canadian culture on their family life. They struggled with finding a balance between the two that would complement their own upbringing and their choices for their children's upbringing.

> With my children we came in and we had our own culture. They would go to school and be taught something else from what we knew. They would come home and we would talk about it. For me that was a little bit of a problem: getting them to know what to choose between my culture and what is existing here. It was difficult to blend those two together so they would be able to fit in the society. So I had problems with that. (Gaya)

Female participants spoke about their struggles with the school system and trying to get educational support for their children in school. They spoke about accessing services solely for their children's use and learning to network with health, education and recreation services for their children. Their experiences were mostly positive and they were very relieved and grateful for all the support they received.

> The older one didn't have the education when we moved here. He started to learn the ABCs in Canada. So it's really difficult for him to able to pick up from the grade where they put him. They just put him in grade 5 when we came. But they had to move him from there because of the age. They put him in Grade 8. So it is really difficult for him to pick up. He is [a teenager]. He is still in grade 9 and is having a lot of hard time with the school [work] and is not getting extra help…. Only me, I have to stand if I have the way to meet some people to look for to help my son to be able to recover. He is going to grade 10 and he doesn't know nothing and they are taking him to grade 10. (Bintou)

Bintou was concerned about the education one of her children. She stated that he was traumatized from the war and the school provided links with other services within the school to assist the child. She was happy for the support and referrals from the school as she explained that her child made progress as a result. However, Bintou could not understand why the school administration continued to allow her child to move to the next grade when his education was slow to improve or not improving at all. She was concerned that her child would graduate with a grade 12 diploma but not be able to function at the grade 12 level and struggle to continue his education once the school was no longer involved.

When they spoke about economic security and finding employment that provided sufficient income, female participants expressed feeling unhappy about the menial labour jobs that paid very little and did not offer fulltime hours. "The very first job I had was a cleaning job at [a community place]. It lasted about a year and half. Not that I really liked it" (Gaya). Yet, they were happy to have employment as they were most concerned with affording the necessities for their children.

Female participants spoke about needing sufficient time to provide support and guidance and be actively involved in their children's lives. Managing several jobs or long work hours each day created a work-life imbalance for them as their work obligations decreased the amount of time and available energy they had to devote to their children. Participants spoke about fatigue and trying to get through the day.

> Now, I have a permanent job. I go to work 8:30 – 4:30. I come home and have to get things ready for my family. Food and whatever we have to talk about. It is a longer day than I am used to. When I come home I am tired and I just manage to do my responsibilities at home. By the time I am done with that I am so tired. And if I have to go out I am just forcing myself to go. Back home I had people in the

home who helped with the children. They would help keep an eye on the children and everything so I wouldn't have to do it alone. It is a very big difference for me. (Gaya)

All participants expressed a desire to financially support themselves as soon as possible as they did not like relying on others for financial aid. The female participants took a longer time to find employment and be financially dependent. They relied on federal and provincial social assistance to support their children until their employment income was sufficient to meet their needs. None of the male participants identified needing provincial social assistance and they all stated they were employed within a few months after arriving in Winnipeg. Two female participants identified that they received provincial social assistance some time after their first year in Canada.

One participant tried to attend school for skills based training. She experienced some family and financial issues which she tried to resolve by working part-time while attending school. The burden became too much for her and her school work was negatively affected. She spoke about receiving provincial social assistance as a last resort to enable her to meet her financial obligations. Her feelings of reluctance and shame at relying on financial assistance were echoed by other participants. However, participants stated that receiving financial assistance gave them the opportunity to refocus their goals and take the necessary steps to move forward with their lives.

It was very tough for me. I had to go on welfare for about a year for me to get on my feet. I was going to school but it wasn't working because things were getting out of hand. Once I get a job then things started getting easier. I am not on social welfare anymore. It was hard going on welfare. (Chi Chi)

Fundamental Values

There are common, underlying values inherent in the shared experiences among all the participants: having faith and hope, being independent and giving back to the community. These values are identified as themes as each participant acknowledges these as important values in their lives.

Having Faith and Hope

Each participant spoke about the importance of having faith. Whether they were Christian or Muslim participants referenced their faith continuously throughout the interviews. "Everyday [God] is watching and He is telling me, what are you doing, what are your goals" (Bintou). These references were about knowing that they were not alone in their life journey and that their travels to Canada and their progress in Canada was not all by chance but through divine intervention.

> That's the program that gave me hope. If I just came in Canada and did not meet any program that gave me hope I would just sit down eating and watching TV and forget about my future. But now I am improving myself because every time I need help I would just go there and say I need job I need help. (Bintou)

Participants also spoke about their feelings of hope derived from the assistance they received from someone. Hope meant knowing there was someone or someplace they could go to when they were in need. They explained that hope was not just about having faith and knowing that everything would be okay. To the participants, hope meant seeing the progress they made, knowing what they had to do next and where their lives would lead them. They were optimistic about their future and spoke about laying a foundation for their children's future so their children would not have to struggle in the same way.

We are the parents that have to build for the future for our kids. Maybe we will not last in Canada. Maybe we plan to return when we get old. Our children will live in the land so we have to plant a good foundation. When parents plant a good foundation for their children the children will just come and grow in the foundation that their parents leave. That's why we are working… (Bintou)

Being Independent

Each participant spoke about helping themselves before asking for help from someone else. They explained that this was how they functioned in Sierra Leone. They spoke about their family encouraging them to do well and succeed. This prepared them for coping and functioning on their own.

Normally what I do is wait, try to see what I could do for myself and if it is not working I'll know and I will ask for help. I really try to do it myself if I can handle it and if I can't I reach out for help. (Gaya)

Three participants spoke about "not [being] used to those skills and attitudes to be a keener. [They relied] on others more… and were used to being spoon-fed and given everything" (Dube). However, they enjoyed their new independence and relished in being able to provide for themselves in Winnipeg.

I get the idea that kids work here which is very responsible because they don't have to ask their parents for everything. They get a job. … The most part I like is not having to stay with my parents because it teaches me responsibility. I like living on my own in Winnipeg. (Chi Chi)

Self starter, keeners and seekers were the words they used to describe their independence. Participants associated their help-seeking experiences with feelings of pride and a desire to achieve their goals on their own. In the following excerpt, Dube expressed joy and relief in his ability to locate his own safe and affordable housing at a

standard of living that he could afford. It was especially liberating to him as he did so

without the assistance of his sponsors and he accomplished more for himself than his

sponsors could.

> [My sponsors] were putting me in low income housing and as I told you about my
> lifestyle I wanted something different. I walked around the city and saw those tall
> buildings there. I just walked in and said that I want a place to rent. They gave me
> the papers…. The landlord of the building I went to called. [My sponsors] were
> surprised I did all that by myself. (Dube)

Participants showed a strong desire to succeed at being responsible because they

did not have the support in Winnipeg as they had in Sierra Leone. Participants equated

their ideas of being responsible with being independent.

> I am really trying because I am an adult. I am really trying to improve myself to
> be a good mother, a good woman, to stand by myself because I used to be
> independent for myself. I don't want all the time to ask someone to help. (Bintou)

Throughout the interview with Bintou she expressed happiness and gratitude

about the help she received from her family member. However, she was also conscious of

the strain it placed on the family member's own family life and she wanted to be

independent again. She spoke at length about the various activities of daily living that she

learned to do on her own (such as using an automated teller machine or taking the bus).

Her new independence was an indication to her that she had made much progress in

settling in Winnipeg.

Giving Back To The Community

Though the interviews focused mainly on the participants' experiences with

finding help, each participant shared that they were able to help others as well. "I give my

services for free to [help] them … and I even help them move from their houses if they want to settle in different places. And I give them advice, a lot of them" (Ayo). They explained that giving help to others made them feel that they had accomplished much because they were no longer in a position of need themselves. Participants were able to help other Sierra Leoneans by giving them referrals to other agencies that the participants themselves used, guidance and counseling for family and personal issues that others were experiencing and practical or physical help (such as helping someone move or complete a form). Participants also wanted to help their family members back in Sierra Leone. They expressed their desire to secure better jobs in order to provide financial assistance to their family members in Sierra Leone.

Understanding the New Life

Participants identified that the immigration and settlement period created opportunities for self-reflection and growth. They spoke about their need to earn sufficient income; to establish or reorganize their goals and long term plans; and, to determine the aspects of their own culture they wanted to maintain. They also wanted to understand the Canadian culture, how to function and where to fit in this new community. The subthemes discussed in this section are:

- Wanting Financial Independence; and,
- Trying to fit in.

Wanting Financial Independence

Pride was a major component in participants' motivation to be financially independent. Participants were thankful for the employment opportunities they were

offered and the ability to provide for themselves. They did not want a hand out; they wanted a hand up to learn the skills necessary to remain standing on their own two feet. It was difficult for some participants to strive towards financial independence as they faced many obstacles that deterred their success.

> Well, at least I have a small job and I get money to buy what I want. I don't really need somebody to give me money and I am not used to it. I do things for myself. I don't want somebody to give me money but to give me the way to get the money. (Fume)

A common goal among the participants was to secure financial independence through employment that would generate the most amount of money. They stressed the importance of gaining higher paying jobs as soon as possible and recognized that they needed to return to school to upgrade their skills in order to gain employment sufficient to meet their needs.

> Sometimes we say that up to now we don't have a degree. We just keep on working. What can we do? Depending on wage! What if we say, 'let the money stay for a while, let's go to school.' Maybe … after finishing the education, getting a degree, then the money will multiply. (Emeka)

Five participants returned to school to upgrade their skills in order to secure better employment. Four participants chose to enter a health services program; one participant entered a social sciences program. Two of those participants had previously completed university or college in Sierra Leone but needed Canadian certification to continue working in their chosen career. Another two participants needed to upgrade their high school subjects prior to entering a post-secondary program.

I asked people about what to study. They said that if I go into the health care system I would get big money. People keep on telling you, look at this person they went through this [education program] and they never get a job. (Emeka)

Four participants were working in the health care field and one participant was considering a career in health care. All five participants were referred to the health care career by someone from within their family or community. Participants wanted a career, not just a job and all of the participants who worked in health care expected to use their training to help them advance towards their future career "because of the income and [it] is a future something, for a career" (Bintou).

When participants spoke about their future goals many spoke about understanding their own needs first, prior to making a career decision. They wanted time to: research their career choices, consider returning to school and "plan life for the future, [by having] a stepping stone from one point to another" (Ayo). They spoke about the pressures they felt to secure employment in order to be self sufficient and the struggle between securing part-time and full-time employment.

"You are working 6 hours, 7 hours. But if we are not busy you just have to work 4 hours. I said oh! Let me leave here. And I leave the job. … But the problem again is no full time. Only 5 hours, 6 hours. I said, now I have to find a job. (Bintou)

Bintou held 3 part-time minimum-wage jobs in order to make sufficient money to provide for her family. She was a single parent and was concerned with fulfilling her financial responsibilities. She was also very grateful for the help she received from her family members in Winnipeg but stressed the importance of being able to "do for herself". Her search finally paid off when she found employment at a company that paid higher wages and offered benefits. For Bintou, finding quality employment changed her

life and her ability to support her children as it gave her the financial freedom to make

substantial contributions to her family: it meant that she could leave her other 2 jobs and

have more energy and time to spend with her family.

Trying To Fit In

Participants spoke about the importance of fitting into Canadian life. Each

participant relied on her/his own observations and interactions with Canadians to learn

about Canadian culture. Participants relied on their sponsors, community members and/or

family for information on Canadian values, norms and expectations. They expressed that

it was important for them to understand the way they were expected to behave and

interact with others.

One participant mobilized small, informal gatherings within the community to

facilitate group training on Canadian culture and expectations. She was sponsored by the

government and she did not have any family members in Canada. She tried some of the

community resources but found that she did not always get the information she sought.

To help her understand the Canadian system this participant relied on an informal

network of friends she acquired during her initial period of settlement in Winnipeg. This

group was the foundation for a network of friends that still exists today.

> I called [the women] and said that we need to be meeting so that we just don't go
> our separate ways. So we met once a week and had someone who advised us and
> talked to us about Canada: what we were supposed to do; what was good and
> what was not accepted. She was Canadian. … When we used to meet when we
> just came it was to find out what the country wants us to do to help us and our
> kids without offending anybody. We had people we invited to tell us about safety.
> The Canadian friend was instrumental in helping get those people come in.
> (Gaya)

Participants also relied on settlement services to gain the knowledge they wanted about Canadian life and available resources. One participant gained access to a community based program for newcomers through information from a family member. "This program they are paying people to do the course, to do the program to learn the country. ... It is a program to help you learn how to live in this country" (Bintou).

Other participants spoke about understanding how to do a specific task in Canada. This created a varied list of topics ranging from how the transit system worked to finding government offices and understanding new technology.

> They gave me money, we went to the bank. They said everything is in the card. I found it very difficult even to use the card. My family member gave me money, open an account for me, put [money] in. The command, press this if it is a cheque, press this. It took me a long time to understand. I forget most time. I never used a card. We always used to carry money in our pocket. That's why I found it difficult. Even my PIN number, I forget my PIN number, then I have to write it in my wallet, then I have to watch it and press. Then sometimes I have to call and say what to press and they [family or customer service at the bank] tell me what to press. I found it difficult. (Emeka)

Successfully completing these tasks was vital to the participants as they felt it was necessary to be able to function by being able to perform tasks on their own. Acquiring the knowledge to function in the community was integral to the participants' feelings of success and ability to overcome their challenges.

Participants struggled to understand the boundaries of personal space as they felt obliged to assist anyone in need. It was a social expectation in Sierra Leone that the community cared for its elders and those in need. Participants expressed concern that in Canada "it is like you don't know someone; that is a stranger. You don't get anything to do with them" (Gaya). Gaya spoke about trying to assist an elderly Canadian who fell and

she was cautioned by others to leave the woman alone until help arrived. She was

perplexed that no one would assist the elder in fear that they may injure her and be liable

for those injuries. Participants explained that these cultural differences made them feel

distant with the Canadians whom they wanted to consider as friends.

When participants spoke about trying to understand how to function in Canada

they spoke about making mistakes and feeling "stupid" or unintelligent. "The confidence

we have [back home] is gone. Here is just a big problem" (Emeka). They were upset with

how others judged them for not knowing how to perform a task or not understanding a

process or action. One participant unknowingly sacrificed his credit because he was not

aware of what credit meant in Canada. This mistake cost him his borrowing power and

affected his financial well being for years. It was a source of much stress in his life at that

time. He was very emotional and showed exasperation when he described his experience

here.

> You don't know how the system operates. They can put you in a big hold. Okay,
> you ask, "help me I don't have this one" they come and help you. I didn't know
> what was bad credit and I just keep working so hard. In Africa signing doesn't
> mean anything. So you come and somebody says, "I don't have a car, come and
> sign with me. I say okay". I'm cosigning, I'm the person buying this car. Nobody
> explain that to me, even the dealer doesn't explain that to me. I bought like 2-3
> cars because my credit was so good. Some of them paid but they all defaulted.
> They take the car back to the place. Nobody explain. When I needed a car they
> said I have bad credit because I take a car and didn't pay. I said no I just signed
> for this person and they say no, you bought the car in your name. They think that I
> am stupid and crazy, ignorant of the law, no excuse. (Emeka)

Summary: Understanding the New Life

Each participant expressed a desire to fit into Canadian life and they spoke about

spending considerable time and energy sorting out their own wishes for their life.

Employment and financial independence was their immediate focus. They set personal

goals to help them achieve financial independence through gainful employment.

Each participant also shared a common experience of struggling to find their place

in society. They experienced difficulties in understanding Canadian expectations of

appropriate behaviour and learning to navigate their lives in Canadian society. Some

participants relied on settlement services that assisted newcomers with some of this

information. But, all participants were able to create their own community support

network, with other newcomer Sierra Leoneans, to share information about Canadian

traditions and available resources within the city. Through these informal support

networks participants were also able to secure lasting friendships.

Family and Community as First Contact

To understand the meaning of the participants' experiences with finding help I

needed to frame their definition of help from their previous experiences with finding help

in their country of origin. In Sierra Leone all the participants spoke about a communal

responsibility to each other where each person was not only responsible for themselves

but for their family, friends and neighbours.

> You consult your friends or relatives. It is a communal labour. People will come
> and help you. If you have a problem your friends will come around and help.
> Some people can do it if they have the means. If they don't have the means they
> would call friends. (Fume)

The support received from family and friends was integral to each participant.

One participant spoke about the support he received from his family in the form of

having a roof over his head without having to pay the bills. He explained that he could

still survive and have a life in Sierra Leone even if he did not have a job because his family provided for him.

> I know it is different here. It is not back home where by I would stay without working but I can still live. It is impossible [here]. … We have been used to family houses, not paying bills, so many things that are socially different….You are not responsible just for yourself and especially when you have some little status there you have to look after people. And people will come to me for little things because most of the time people don't have. People will come and think that I have. (Dube)

Participants spoke about having 'status' in the community and this meant: being an elder, a person with a solid financial background, coming from a family with money or with a history of prestige, being a person who had successfully helped others in the past and, having a good reputation and being held in high regard. Showing respect to those with status was an important value in the Sierra Leonean community.

Each participant viewed the Sierra Leone community in Winnipeg as the main source for meeting others and disseminating information. Meeting other Sierra Leoneans was vital to the participants' feelings of belonging and national identity. All the participants spoke about getting together to celebrate someone's success (such as a graduation), a special occasion (such as the birth of a child), or the annual celebration of Sierra Leone's independence. They felt safe and connected to their community. The participants spoke intensely about the importance of meeting other Sierra Leoneans and the help they received from individuals from within the Sierra Leone community. The sub-themes discussed in this section are:

- Family as supportive and comfortable

- Meeting other Sierra Leoneans: Familiarity, Socializing and Support; and

- Community Members are Informal Helpers.

Family: Supportive and Comfortable

In Sierra Leone, many people lived at home with their parents or in their own home in their family's compound until they were married or moved out of the city. Families who owned land would build their family home on that land. Extended family members and adult children could also build their homes on the same land if there was room. Often a family compound would include the main house and a home for the older children or each child. It was normal and expected that a person could rely on their family for all of their needs.

Being in Winnipeg without family removed that additional support. However, each participant relied on someone informal to assist them when they were in need. For those participants with family members in the city, they relied on one specific family or family member until they secured other resources.

> So it's really good. Before we move, food was ready 24 hours. The family member is good. She took care of everything. So it is not hard. And when we want to get an apartment then they look for an apartment for us. The family, some friends, they come over. Some people they donate money, food, clothing. So before we moved everything is organized. …The thing that I have in here is my family member is a caring person. He cares about the kids. He really cares about me. (Bintou)

The contribution Bintou's family members gave was to support the family and assist Bintou in caring for her children. Another participant spoke about the financial support he received from his family member in Winnipeg. The family member did not actually give the participant money but the arrangement they made in the home enabled

the participant to financially support himself without the full financial burden of living on

his own.

> A job out there even $6.00 [per hour] you can do it although you're living with your family you can still live a better life. Because, if you're living with your family, that's the roof. Only the family is paying for the roof. You will be there to work, to save money for yourself, to go to school to get a better education. (Ayo)

Participants spoke about feeling comfortable with their family as they were able

to speak their native language. Several of the participants spoke about their feelings of

relief in being able to explain themselves without struggling with the English language:

"Family has what we like, talking our own language, I feel comfortable. We don't forget

our language" (Emeka).

It was observed that the participants expressed a general happiness when

discussing their family support in Winnipeg. However, participants also felt badly about

constantly needing help from their family members and they were concerned about the

burden on their family members. "My family member is trying so hard to follow up with

the kids all the time. But he has his family too. Not everyday he has to ask everybody

how they are doing" (Bintou). This same participant spoke about repeatedly relying on

her family member and about feeling proud once she was able to assist herself. Her

family member referred her to a settlement service and, since then, she was able to access

those services in her own.

> In the beginning it was very difficult. Every time I called my family member. He was the big person to help me. … [Now] when I need help I will call my family member or go to the [agency]. (Bintou)

Meeting other Sierra Leoneans: Socializing and Support

Participants spoke about their way of life when they lived in Sierra Leone and that spending time with family and friends to socialize and relax was a necessary part of their work-life balance. The participants all indicated that a positive community connection was important. These connections fostered respect for those with 'status' in the community; it was a channel to share information and learn about traditions and expectations of behaviour; and, it was an outlet for having fun, relaxing and forging lasting relationships. This participant explains how he spent his free time in Sierra Leone.

> Easy life! I went to work 9 am – 2 pm. By 2 pm I was off duty and be home with nothing to do in the evening. Just relax and have drinks with my friends. And I can have drinks anywhere, be out, I can be out socializing with people. And I have a lot of friends to socialize and there is time for it. (Dube)

In Winnipeg, participants wanted to form and maintain connections with other Sierra Leoneans as they had done when they were in Sierra Leone. However, they experienced difficulties in visiting those community members because participants relied on city transit and getting rides from friends, families or sponsors. They found it difficult to take a long bus ride, in the cold weather, to have a short visit with another community member. As well, they were not used to calling ahead to confirm if the person was home and sometimes they would reach their destination only to find that no one was there to greet them.

> I can't leave here today and say that I am going to so and so's place to eat. I have to call you before I go otherwise it is just a waste of time…moving around was a little bit difficult because the distances were far and communication was poor. You know, you take a long time to go anywhere and you have to inform people to go and meet them. And sometimes, even Africans here, especially after they have a family, they become busy (Fume)

Fume spoke about families being too busy to socialize. It was common in Sierra Leone to have others in the home to help parents care for their children. Sometimes there were aunts, uncles, older cousins, neighbours and housekeepers that would be available to look after the children when the parents were busy. Participants explained that in Canada they did not have the supports they were accustomed to in Sierra Leone.

Participants remedied the problems of connecting with other community members by returning to their traditional ways of socializing. As they were used to gathering and celebrating in Sierra Leone, in Canada participants started celebrating every success they achieved.

> Most people have birthday parties for their children. So if they invite you, you go over and meet new people. When I had my baby we did a party and [the baby's father] knows most of those people and he invited them. And now most of those people whenever they have something they invite me. (Chi Chi)

Community social events usually occurred on weekends in a recreation center that was in a central location and easily accessible by transit. Social events were also held at a community member's home, for smaller groups. But, a recreation center was necessary as it was customary to have more than 100 people attend the social event. It was common to see entire families at these events where children were usually welcomed. These events occurred for a variety of reasons: a graduation; the birth of a child; a community member's birthday; an engagement or marriage within the community; and, to mourn the death of a Sierra Leonean's family member in Sierra Leone or elsewhere in the world. These interactions always included ethnic food cooked by Sierra Leoneans and popular music in Sierra Leone. Through these events the participants met other Sierra Leoneans and formed meaningful friendships.

> I met others through some friends when I came. In our culture we like making parties and one friend would invite you to one and continue to invite you and eventually you meet everybody. That's how I met most people. (Dube)

Feelings of comfort were associated with these social events as participants could converse in their mother tongue, reminisce about life and participate in a social event that stirred feelings of nostalgia, cultural identity and joy.

> I think it's good when you meet together and speak the language then you go there and the food. Every one is eating. Just the friendship and relax. Not everybody I want to relax with. (Emeka)

Participants expressed feeling at ease at community social events because they did not feel guarded as they often did around non Sierra-Leoneans. They did not want to be judged by those who did not understand their traditions and cultural norms. They spoke about their interactions with non-Sierra Leoneans: the fear of offending others and struggling each day to function in a formal manner. Community social events provided the participants with an outlet for their frustrations through dancing, sharing a meal and conversing with others. These social events were great opportunities to share experiences and seek support from other Sierra Leoneans. Participants shared their successes and challenges with their friends. They networked with members of the community to discuss strategies used by other Sierra Leoneans and brain-storm possible solutions to their problems. It was an informal network providing guidance and support for those in need.

Not all the social events and interactions were positive. A view expressed by some participants was that they did not want to socialize with everyone. The Sierra Leonean community included members from various tribes and very different lifestyles

who shared different political and social views. There were individuals who lived in the

rural villages of Sierra Leone and there were those who lived in the cities. Some

community members had received formal education and/or came from families with

financial and social standing while others had little formal education and few financial

resources.

> And the difference is everybody came from a different part of the world in Sierra Leone. And then only people met here. So it is not easy for you to get used to somebody you never met before that is only here you have to meet. … A lot of people came from the villages back home from Sierra Leone. Some people this is their first time to travel, they don't even know what is going on in the society. (Ayo)

Participants were conscious of the differences among Sierra Leoneans in

Winnipeg and were aware that not everyone could get along. They spoke about some

community members' inability to function in a respectable manner at social functions and

those who ignored their parenting responsibilities when they were at social events with

their children. These were not isolated incidents or individuals. Participants all

acknowledged that events organized by specific community members usually involved

situations that were not favorable to the participants. They disclosed that they had to be

selective in the events they chose to attend. Female participants were very cautious about

where they socialized with their children. One participant felt that children were not

always treated well at some events.

> I have been to a place where my children were just put into a room and they didn't have chairs and they were sitting on the floor and they forgot about them. I have a feeling they were put there because some of the adults wanted to enjoy themselves, bend their elbows and enjoy themselves. Say what they want to say without the kids there looking at them. I didn't feel good about that. I realize that the group of people that have been called are the people who will be drinking or

yelling out any kind of language. I don't go there and I don't send my kids there. I will decide. (Gaya)

Despite experiencing some difficulties with specific individuals or groups in the community the participants each equated their community connection with feeling safe. Their feelings of safety were related to being around familiar things: people familiar to them, language and food.

The Sierra Leoneans that came told other Sierra Leoneans about us and some of them came over to visit us and that was how I got to know them and sometimes I'll go to meetings and meet with some of them. I just felt I was in a safe place. (Gaya)

Community Members are Informal Helpers

There was an expressed desire to seek help from within the Sierra Leonean community. Participants spoke about the ease and comfort in being able to reach out to one of their own to find help. Key individuals from within the community emerged as knowledgeable, caring people with the ability to successfully guide the newcomers.

Well when we first came we had to move around and we didn't have a means of transportation and I usually called people like this one guy in the community to give [me] a ride. He was always ready to and he really helped us. He also helped because he would come home and sit down right in my living room and tell my children what they needed to do. He would come in and give a talk and they would listen to him. Really those were very, very good and they turned out to be very helpful. (Gaya)

Each participant discussed how beneficial informal support within the community was to them and their families. Participants relied on informal helpers to advise them on information related to all aspects of life to "help them get stuff for their apartment like

furniture, taking them to the store, helping them with school and how to start [life again]"
(Chi Chi).

Participants all identified the same informal helpers by name. "Some of them are
not part of [a Sierra Leonean community organization]. They are just doing all this on
their own" (Chi Chi). These informal helpers took time from their busy lives to reach out
to and help Sierra Leonean newcomers in need. They organized themselves into smaller
groups or acted individually to become a source of information and support and to be
mentors to the participants. The participants spoke about asking for counseling, guidance
in achieving their set goals, friendship and simply someone they could reach out to when
in need. They equated the help they received from the informal helpers to the kind of
support they would have received back in Sierra Leone.

Qualities of reliability, trust and confidentiality were consistently identified by the
participants as the qualities they expected from informal helpers. It was important to the
participants that those who offered their assistance would consistently be available to
help. The participants characterized the informal helpers as individuals who could be
trusted to keep the participants' personal issues private and confidential.

The kinship bond that developed through seeking support from these informal
helpers created new families for the participants; where "friends are like family" (Chi
Chi) and "everybody is your family. I know you… you are my brother" (Emeka).
Participants treated their close friends like family and would refer to their friends as
sisters, brothers or cousins. Children referred to their parent's friends as 'auntie' or
'uncle'. Participants formed lasting social ties and deep friendships with other Sierra
Leoneans they met in Winnipeg. It was through these friendships that they formed social

networks. These are the people they reached out to for help as they could rely on them for support, friendship and guidance.

Summary: Family and Community as First Contact

Participants felt comfortable with their own family and Sierra Leone community members. They relied on their family and the Sierra Leone community: to support them during their settlement in Winnipeg; as an informal contact for networking and sharing settlement information; and, to help them meet other Sierra Leoneans. They equated having community contact with increased feelings of safety. However, participants were cognizant that they had to use their own judgment when forming friendships and socializing with other Sierra Leoneans.

Reaching Out to the Unfamiliar

A strong sense of community was vital to participants. The process of immigration disabled their support systems and created feelings of isolation, frustration, bewilderment and confusion. However, it also created opportunities for independence and self initiative. While they found independence and relished in their ability to support themselves, participants also needed to reach out to others and rely on help from unfamiliar individuals, those who were outside of their family and ethno-cultural community, to meet some of their needs. They reached out to the general public, government agencies, their sponsors and various settlement service agencies and community service agencies.

The sub-themes discussed in this section highlight their experiences. They are:

- The Public;

- Sponsors and Government Departments; and,

- Accessing services.

The Public

Each participant spoke about seeking help from within the general population when they were not able to gain the help they needed from family or the Sierra Leone community. They approached the general public with caution as they explained that they were reluctant to trust that unfamiliar individuals would be able to assist them. Participants were wary of divulging their personal issues to a complete stranger as they did not function in this manner in Sierra Leone. They usually went to a trusted advisor and now they had no choice but to reach out to unfamiliar individuals.

> We have a culture. If I never see you before I can not tell you my mind [personal problems]. If you know me, we talk together, you know much about me then I will be open to you and explain to you. (Emeka)

Getting confused easily was a common experience among all the participants. Many times participants assumed they were sufficiently prepared to complete their task only to become confused later on. Each participant expressed feelings of disbelief that what seemed so simple to them now, created such confusion for them when they first moved to Winnipeg.

> I thought taking the bus was easier but I got lost all the time. The last time I wanted to apply for a job I took the bus to Portage Avenue and I couldn't get back home. I took the same bus to come back but walking on my way home I got lost. I had to turn around and ask people. I knew my address. The funny thing is that I was standing right below my building and I remembered that if I am in my

apartment I can see a park. So I am down and I am seeing the park but I didn't know where to go. (Chi Chi)

Feeling inadequate was often expressed by the participants when discussing their experiences with seeking help from non Sierra Leoneans. As well, some participants did not want to be perceived as inept and admitted to intentionally appearing as though they understood, especially when they did not understand, by agreeing or saying 'yes' to any question that was asked. The language barrier was a significant cause of stress and confusion when seeking help.

> But one thing with Sierra Leoneans something they don't understand: instead of them asking you to repeat again they won't ask you. If I am there they will go back behind you and ask me "what did she say?". That is the big thing if they get here newly. They agree but they don't understand. (Emeka)

Participants were interested in information on a variety of issues including getting directions, finding employment, education and training, health and wellbeing, finding safe and affordable housing and caring for their families. One participant expressed his discouragement when asking for help as a result of the negative responses he received. In making this statement this participant's voice rose and he became distressed. During the interview about this topic he continued to prompt me for affirmation that he was not "stupid" for wanting to ask questions.

> Sometimes I don't want someone to look down on me, like going out and you want to ask for help. They say, 'how long you been here' and 'you supposed to know these things'. But you don't know and you don't know that those are the facilities that they have. One time I needed help and the person asked me 'where do you live'. You know that I live in Winnipeg. It seems as I am supposed to know those stuff, why they are asking me. So I back-off and decide not to ask those things. (Emeka)

Participants explained that their reluctance to reach out to the general public wasn't just about feeling "stupid"; it was also about fearing rejection from others. One participant was introduced to some Canadians through a mutual friend. These individuals offered to assist the participant if she ever needed help. This participant took the time to call one of the individuals and felt dejected by the negative response she received as well as the fact that they did not even remember her.

> But with some of the problems I have sometimes it is like I have to reach out to Canadians. And sometimes I sit down and I don't even know who to go to or where to go still at this point in time. They welcome you and give you open hands and you call them and they are like, "who is this?". They don't remember you. When somebody responds that way you feel bad. (Gaya) I added the '?'.

In seeking help, all the participants shared the same commonalities: they each had to rely on someone for basic information, they all felt confused at one time or another, they all spoke about being rejected, and they expressed feeling inadequate because they did not know how to do something that seemed so simple to them a few months or years later.

Sponsors and Government Departments

At the time of the interviews each participant's period of sponsorship had expired. Participants were sponsored by the Canadian government, a group sponsor (church community) or a family member for one or two years. Government sponsorship included basic health coverage and a monthly stipend to cover the cost of basic necessities (rent, groceries, clothing, public transportation and school supplies). Group sponsorship included the same coverage as the government sponsorship and it allowed more

flexibility to cover additional costs such as short-term training programs (e.g. computer courses) and recreation costs (e.g. outdoor soccer registration) for participants and their children. Some family sponsors provided sleeping arrangements for the participant in the sponsor's own home where they were able to provide for the costs of food and shelter. Other family sponsors provided payment for the participant's own apartment and basic necessities.

Gratitude was expressed for the role sponsors played in the early settlement experiences of the participants. Each participant relied on their sponsors during the early stages of settlement. Participants with children in their care relied on their sponsors for a longer period of time than did the participants without children. They indicated that having a sponsor for that first year or two was vital as it enabled them to remain in the home at convenient times to support their children. It also allowed the participants the time needed to organize their own lives and schedules and prepare for education and employment.

> It took me about two years from when I first came to be self sufficient. I would say it wasn't too long because I needed that time to find out what I really wanted. And while I was doing that I was being sponsored by the government and the church. So the income from them ... at least it gave me time to settle down and think about what I had to do. I didn't have to rush to find a job. (Gaya)

Participants were relieved that they received financial support from their sponsors and the government. It enabled them to focus on setting goals and making progress rather than struggling to financially support themselves and their families. Participants also relied on government assistance in the form of transportation loans. They accepted transportation loans from the federal government of Canada in order to afford the air fare

from their home country or country of asylum to Canada. These transportation loans also

included the costs of lodging and meals in between flight connections.

Participants were thankful for the transportation loans but also expressed feeling

confused and disillusioned. Three participants stated that they were not completely aware

of the details of the loan for which they signed. They each spoke about feeling the

pressure to repay the loans when payments became due. Participants explained that the

additional financial burden to repay the loans was maintaining their financial

disadvantage.

> The other problem was paying our tickets, the transportation loan. That was a
> surprise to me. One month in Canada people phoned me from Ottawa and said I
> should start paying my ticket. I was not working and that's what I told them over
> the phone that I came as a foreign trained professional and I'm trying to get into
> my field, where do you think I can get a job. They wanted me to start making an
> installment towards my ticket loan. I was trying to figure out how to get into my
> field, I have to pay my rent and somebody is calling me from Ottawa asking me to
> pay my ticket loan. That's the worst nightmare for me. One of the things that I
> think would not happen. (Dube)

Dube expressed that he was not pleased with the limited assistance the federal

government offered. He explained that the Canadian Embassy in his country of asylum

did not offer an orientation to Canada. Thus, he was not advised about the loan

repayment expectations or about the challenges he would face once he migrated to

Canada. Participants were vocal about feeling let down by the government and they were

concerned with getting government support that would enable them to be economically

equal to the rest of the general public.

> For us to get at the same level as people here we have to be exempted from some
> things here for us to develop. … Even if they could organize that, because we
> have to pay all that debt as we are just coming in, some of the income tax could

go to our transportation loan. Just for us to breathe out and get to that level as everyone else. How do they expect us to buy clothes and jackets and live? (Dube)

Dube explained that the government could use income tax refunds as a source of income to repay transportation loans instead of requesting a monthly payment. It was easier for him to meet his financial obligations each month if he did not have to deduct money from his limited income for a loan repayment.

Accessing Services

When participants spoke about their experiences with accessing services their major concerns were about having their foreign credentials accredited, the pursuit of higher education, and finding suitable employment, safe housing and affordable health care.

Accreditation of foreign credentials. The three participants, who were foreign trained professionals, encountered many difficulties in continuing their careers in Canada. They were disappointed with the government's lack of planning and ability to assist foreign trained professionals. Participants stated that if they were aware of the accreditation process in Canada they would have tried to get more of their education and training credentials prior to migrating to Canada. They all stated that the process to get their foreign credentials accredited was difficult, expensive and time consuming.

> I thought everything would be on a plate ready to go and somebody would lead you through it and you would get it easily. But it wasn't like that. Especially with trying to get my papers ready, where to send them to so that it could get assessed, so I would know what I have to do. I have been [working in my profession] back home and I wanted to [continue doing that]. I didn't know where to go, what to

do, how to start. I eventually got somebody's name who normally helps to look at people's transcripts and tell them what to do. But it took me over a year to get that person. (Gaya)

Each foreign trained participant spent considerable time trying to navigate through the accreditation process while supporting her/himself with minimum wage jobs and repaying their transportation loans. One participant explained that the difficulties he faced in trying to recertify his skills only perpetuated his limited finances and restricted his ability to find financial independence. He hoped that the government would have a simplified, inexpensive and fair process in place to make the accreditation process and returning to their chosen profession a realistic possibility for newcomers.

> "And getting in touch with the professional body, that was another thing that was very difficult. I remember asking people and many people don't know where the [career specific organization] of Manitoba is. … When we come there should be structures to help us go through some of these things. … We come disadvantaged and they hit us with everything right away and we continue to be disadvantaged and if we get a break then we could get to a level like everyone else. (Dube)

The following participant enrolled in several educational programs as a last resort while waiting for her foreign credentials to be assessed. Her experience with getting her credentials assessed was creating feelings of anxiety and frustration and was the cause of much stress during those five months of her life.

> Then it took a long time, close to five months. And I was waiting. I didn't know what to do and I didn't want to wait. I was growing impatient. … I wanted to do [another career] and they said I had to do five years, that was straight because they didn't see my transcript. I applied for [two different programs] and they accepted me from both. They called me and said how come you have applied to both programs and you are taking space in both programs when they have people waiting to get into the program. They asked me to tell them what I wanted to do. I said I am confused, I am in a dilemma. I have sent in my papers and everything [for accreditation] and I haven't gotten a reply. I'm waiting to make my decision

whether it is [one or the other degree program]. I want to know which one will have less time and then I will make up my mind. That is my problem. They said "oh, now we understand your plight". So they decided to call [provincial department assessing the foreign credentials] and find out. The lady turned around … and said that I had been certified already and my letter was on the way. I didn't have to go back to school and waste five years that they asked me to do. (Gaya)

This participant explained that she did not want to continue in employment that involved manual labour. Her goal was to find a career that would provide intellectual stimulation and offer her an opportunity to use her skills as she had done in Sierra Leone. She was willing to try anything and her desperation actually enabled her success. Finally, her credentials were assessed and she was approved to work in her previous profession. This desirable outcome greatly changed Gaya's life: she did not have to return to school and spend years studying something she already knew; she did not have to find the funds to pay years of tuition; and she did not have to spend years of her life unavailable for her children because she was studying. Gaya was the only participant who received accreditation for her foreign education.

Education. In Sierra Leone, four participants did not have a chosen career, were unemployed or underemployed (not working full time or receiving a very low wage) and were still living at home with their parents or reliant on their family for financial support; and, 43 % of participants completed university or college training, worked in their field of study for several years prior to migration and were self sufficient (they supported themselves with their own income).

In Canada, all four participants without a career in Sierra Leone wanted to upgrade their skills through the completion of a post-secondary training program. Three

of those participants entered a training program and one participant chose not to return to school until their children were older and their financial situation had improved. Of the three participants who had careers in Sierra Leone: one received accreditation for their foreign credentials and did not need to return to school, one found jobs in a similar field without receiving accreditation, and one entered university for skills training in a career similar to the career they held in Sierra Leone.

The pursuit of higher learning was important to the participants as they all explained that a better education would make their lives better. Each participant enrolled in some form of training and education program during their first year in Canada. They attended courses for high school upgrading, computer courses and basic skills courses in order to occupy their time while job searching. It was important for them to keep learning and not feel stagnant or "useless" while they waited.

> My very first job, it took me a year to get it. During that year I did some volunteer work and I went to school to learn about computers, which we did not do back home. I kept myself busy trying to upgrade my skills. I volunteered and I helped to take care of kids and women's work. It was not specific to my [previous training]. (Gaya)

Participants felt encouraged by their family members to attend an educational program to improve their English and to learn new skills towards employment. One participant completed an ESL program to enable her to help her children with school related issues. She explained that being a good parent was synonymous with being aware of her children's school performance and activities and being able to help her children with their homework.

My family member said that we have to go to school because we don't know how to read and write. We have to try to do something about little education because I have children. The children have to bring their report card and I have to read the report card and sign. The children have to bring some papers from school to take them some places and you have to read those papers and sign and return them. If you don't know how to do those things you won't be able to take care of your kids. And some homework you have to help your kids. (Bintou)

Bintou was the only participant who needed to complete ESL. She expressed happiness that the ESL training helped her function independently in her daily life.

The first time when I start the ESL at school the teacher was teaching us the basic things like how to say hi and how to return hi, how to greet someone and how to ask when you want something from someone. How you have to present yourself to the person and we learn some of those basic things and now I am getting better on those ones. I really improving myself with those ones. I know how to speak. I know anything that I need. I don't have to ask someone to help me. I just go there and do whatever I want to do. (Bintou)

Participants sought the advice of their family and community members in deciding when to return to school and what they should study at school. However, they all expressed feeling ambivalent about what they should study. Participants spoke about their experiences with feelings of frustration and confusion. They wanted career guidance to explain the various jobs available to them and assist them in making their decisions.

We need security which is education. But [we] don't know which area to go. Now, I don't even have a first degree…. I need help; someone to give me the advantage and disadvantage [of each career], to help me choose a career. Even not me alone, a lot of my friends the same thing. (Emeka)

Three participants eventually enlisted the help of school advisors or counselors to assist them with finalizing their decisions about what they should study at school.

Sometimes I think four years is too much to go to school and sometimes I want to change my career, sometimes not. I am in the middle and I need help deciding.

My counselor at school listens to everything I have to say and I would call her. (Chi Chi)

Two participants who spoke with their school counselors still felt that their needs were not met. They wanted specific information about their career choices and were reliant on the counselor to give them a clear career path. They eventually chose career paths based on information shared with family and their community networks.

Employment. In Sierra Leone, three participants worked in a career related to post-secondary training they received prior to migrating to Canada; two participants worked in a small business they created themselves; one participant worked casually doing odd-jobs; and, one participant was unemployed but had recently completed high school.

At the time of the interviews each participant was employed and two were job searching for a higher paying job. All participants shared an abundance of experiences about seeking employment. Participants explained that it was difficult to know where to go to find employment. They were accustomed to buildings with identifying markers that indicated the services that were offered. This participant explained that finding a job was difficult as he expected to be given a job based on his credentials.

> In Sierra Leone…I went straight away to the ministry [government dept]. I know some people and I put in my credentials that I am there. It was just a letter requesting that I want a job and my diploma. Here you have to do your resume, the job search. I did not know that everything was in [a specific place]. I would walk the whole day around and not see the [building]. Back home the buildings would be labeled the ministry of this. [Here] these tall buildings they are all incorporated [and] multi functional. You have to go in there and sometimes you go in there and you don't even see it. It is more evident to us [in Sierra Leone] I know when I am in [a specific government department] it is there. But here with

the multistory buildings you can have more than just one department or section. That was the most difficult thing for me, finding a job. (Dube)

Four of the six participants who had family members in Winnipeg gained employment from referrals from their family members. They were able to get direct support from their family members about finding employment.

> Because I had people like my family member I never really went to any settlement group. And besides, I got a job 2 weeks after I came so I never really had to go to anybody….I think my family friend used his influence because I came to understand that you can't easily get a job if you don't know somebody in that place. They called me, I went for an interview. It was not really an interview I can fail if they want to take me. They said I got the job and I started the job. My family friend was really good at helping me. (Fume)

Other participants relied on informal networks to advise them on employment.

> I know somebody who works at a place and she gave me a phone number. I went there myself and fill out an application. My other job too, I met this guy, not a friend, we were talking about jobs. He said he knew this place that was hiring and he gave me the information. I went there and he said I should put his name on my resume and they hired me. (Chi Chi)

When asked as to why they did not approach service providers for employment support most of the participants spoke about issues of trust and feeling confused when speaking to service providers. One participant made a clear distinction that it is not just about the comfort level they feel when speaking their own language and speaking with other Sierra Leoneans, but it is also comfortable for them to speak to those who are not Sierra Leonean but were familiar with and trusted by the community. These trusted individuals included sponsors who were very active within the community, service

providers who were familiar with the community and the non-Sierra Leonean spouses of community members.

Six participants still needed help with creating a resume and preparing for a job interview even after getting employment assistance from family members. Participants accessed a variety of services that specialized in pre-employment skills training (i.e., training on work-place etiquette, interview skills, internet and computer skills, etc.) and resume preparation. Participants initially approached service providers, those who offered programs targeting newcomers, for assistance. Some participants were more familiar with these services because they were referred to and received information about these services from their sponsors, community members and family members. But, four participants approached employment focused service providers who provided services for the general public. Their experiences with the general employment services were mostly positive.

> There was one [general resource center]. I knew that through a friend also that went there to do his resume. He told me to go there. They were helpful in the sense that they told me what I had to put on paper to get a job. We just come, we don't know what to say, we never use a resume before. We don't know what to say and how to say it to people. So they helped. One of the people there started telling us what we should do if we are looking for a job. (Dube)

Three participants experienced confusion when trying to decide which service provider they would approach for employment support. They explained that there were too many service providers providing the same services and it became confusing to decipher the differences among the services offered. Those participants relied on sharing information with other Sierra Leonean newcomers to determine which service provider they would approach for help.

> Because a lot of immigrants know things from other people and other services they are getting. But let's say if they go to this office, their information there is quite different from another office which also give information. So it's kind of different information they are getting about the same thing. Like you can go there and they say this is what you have to do to go through this. And then you go to this office and you don't have to do this, you have to go to [somewhere else]. (Ayo)

Despite their issues of trusting unfamiliar individuals and experiences of confusion the participants generally spoke of their experiences with the employment service providers as positive. They were content with the support they received from the various employment services they accessed and would recommend specific services to other newcomers.

> We have employment services right here in Winnipeg. We go there, go through the internet. You ask people, you have counselors, have advisors you can meet and talk to them about employment. It's a very good service. They can actually show you what to do. It's all up to you to really put an effort to get an employment. (Ayo)

Health and Housing. Participants expressed relief and happiness with the health care services in Canada. They shared stories of their health needs not being adequately met in Sierra Leone and of living with health problems in Sierra Leone that were later resolved in Canada. Despite their satisfaction with finding adequate health care in Canada, participants with no family members in Canada struggled with finding a health care provider (doctor, dentist, optometrist, etc.).

> I had problems getting a family physician. There is no organized thing that will tell you where to go for a family physician. When I was downtown I was just going to walk in clinics. When I ask someone for a family physician no one will tell us where there is one. It was a problem but we had one Canadian doctor with an African background but he stopped practicing. I stayed over two to three years

without a family physician. I have one now because it just opened not too far away from me. There was a poster saying they were accepting new clients and I went there. (Dube)

Using the telephone directory to locate a physician was foreign, difficult and confusing, at first. Participants explained that they expected a direct referral to a health service provider, as they were used to doing so in Sierra Leone. The participants with family members in Canada received direct referrals to health care service providers and reported no issues with accessing those services.

Each participant spoke about the need for safe and affordable housing. They were unaware of the problems in specific neighbourhoods and were reliant on their sponsors, family and informal networks to educate them about suitable neighbourhoods and assist them to find safe and affordable housing.

I got help to find my first place. The government had someone at the [agency] who was going around and looking for a place for my family. At the same time a Sierra Leonean guy talked to them and he was helping too. Eventually he found a place outside of downtown and that was where I stayed until I moved here [to my own home]. The government guy found a place at [an unsafe core area location] for me and the Sierra Leonean guy said no, it's downtown and you are not going there with these children. I opened my eyes and looked at him. He said no, we will find another place. (Gaya)

Each female participant expressed concern for their family's safety when considering where to live. All but one female participant chose to live in a neighbourhood removed from the downtown area.

It's okay for my budget but the area is not great, especially with me having a kid. I don't really want him to grow up in that kind of environment. I don't want to be in the downtown area. I want to live [in a community away from downtown]. (Chi Chi)

The participant who remained in the downtown area did so only because it was where she could find the most affordable housing that was convenient for her to travel to her school, work and the daycare for her children. Each male participant found affordable accommodations in the downtown area and remained there for at least two years. However, they all eventually relocated to neighbourhoods outside of the downtown area.

Summary: Reaching Out To the Unfamiliar

Reaching out for help was somewhat difficult for the participants. They wanted to accomplish tasks on their own but recognized their need for additional support. They reached out to those who were familiar to them: their family and/or community members. When they had no other choice the participants reached out to unfamiliar individuals. These were people on the street and counselors or advisors within specific organizations. They were grateful for whatever help they received. However, all participants associated feeling inadequate and their fear of rejection with their reluctance to trust unfamiliar individuals for help. For some participants the language barrier also perpetuated those fears and feelings.

The participants related their confusion and misunderstanding of the processes in Canada to being ill-prepared prior to their migration. They explained that their independence would have been easier to attain had they been aware of what they needed to secure employment and attain accreditation for their foreign credentials. As well, the competition among employment service providers hindered the participants' access to appropriate services. Participants spoke about "getting the run around" and wasting their

precious time sorting out the differences between services rather than getting direct

assistance for their needs.

Difficult Situations

Throughout the interviews participants continued to describe their negative

experiences with seeking help and other issues that affected their perceptions and

feelings. The most prevalent and recurring issues are:

- Problems within the Sierra Leonean community

- Sacrificing Dreams

- Feeling Isolated

Problems within the Sierra Leonean Community

Challenges often surface within community organizations as there are

disagreements that occur among various members. Many ethno-cultural and Canadian

community organizations face similar challenges as in the Sierra Leonean community.

The findings presented in this section discuss general issues the participants raise

regarding seeking help within their community organizations. These issues are shared

among many Sierra Leonean community members and are openly discussed, outside of

this research as well, in hopes of finding solutions and improving the community

organizations' functioning.

In this study, participants spoke of the potentially negative images that were

portrayed about Sierra Leonean newcomers from the negative events broadcasted on

local news stations. They were concerned about how those events would affect their own

reputation in the general population. One participant explained that a bad community

image could affect him directly because Canadians would associate him with the bad

image of other Sierra Leoneans. Participants worried because they preferred to have

others recognize them for their talents and their successes.

> Hearing people from in the community causing crime, you hear about a person's first crime, second crime, third crime, not stopping for the cops. They take him and he's on the TV and they say "this one is Sierra Leonean". They met drugs in the car. When people are seeing you and you say I am a Sierra Leonean they will think something different from what you are. … The only thing sometimes [it] can bring good to the community or bad. When they appear their identity shows that they are Sierra Leoneans. If they perform very well, wherever, maybe it goes to the community. If they perform bad they say those are the Sierra Leoneans. (Emeka)

While participants spoke about these negative events in the community they also

expressed a need for the Sierra Leone community organizations to intervene with

solutions to assist the affected families. They understood that the community

organizations were created for a purpose and that those involved in the organizations

wanted to assist newcomers. However, they were all disappointed with the level of

preparedness and the type of support they received, from within the community

organizations, with regard to their settlement issues. Participants explained that they did

not have faith in some community organizations. One participant explained some of the

community issues. He stated that since some community organizations did not have the

expertise to assist newcomers they were unable to provide support to some newcomers.

> People are going [to the community organizations] and they are turning them out, a lot of people who are really desperately in need for things like helping them to settle down. In terms of if they don't have money, like if the kids have problems in the houses, if they can talk to them because that's why the community is there for. They don't give any information to help them, their kids, give them advice on

how they can treat their kids here. Because it is quite different from back home and they know, I believe they know because that's why they formed the organization. They should have known all these things because if they heard it from people here in Canada that this is how you operate and this is how you do to help your community. All this information and they are not helping those people. I think they are not helping. …But it's not working because a lot of people don't get the information they supposed to get. …No meetings, people don't pay their dues because of the problems they have within the leadership, in the organization. …We don't go to the meetings because most of the time the meetings cause trouble. (Ayo)

Participants explained that they wanted the established Sierra Leoneans to provide guidance and take initiative in community planning. As well, they wanted a Sierra Leonean representative within the settlement service agencies that could link the community to external resources and provide accurate information.

They could be that structure to help link us with other agencies. It is their community, they should do that. If I had that things would have gone differently I think. Even the support, they could say ok, we know things are like this and we are here in case you need anything. But it is not there actually, it is everybody for himself. Social support isn't there [within the community organization]. (Dube)

Each participant stated that the community organizations lacked effective leadership and knowledge about how to resolve the issues to effectively create change to move the community forward.

People like to be leaders without doing nothing. Some of us felt that it is not just to sit down there and say I am doing this and without doing nothing. Some groups left and think they could do better. And that's why I am in one and not in the other. I just feel that one group is not doing what they are supposed to do. (Dube)

There are several Sierra Leonean community based organizations that exist in Winnipeg. Most of the organizations operate separately from each other. Participants were aware of most of the community based organizations and were very specific about

which ones they supported. As well, they were not critical of only one specific

organization. Participants described having issues of trust, confidentiality and reliability

with these organizations. They did not trust that their financial contributions would be

used effectively to support the community. "[The organization] collect money. People

will take this money and put it into their private business. It is the same corruption

coming within the group" (Fume). They also explained that there was too much fighting

within some community organizations.

> My community, I used to attend their meetings with my [family member] and
> after a while I stopped. It doesn't make sense to me because they fight there all
> the time. Gossip goes around, people don't get along. So I stopped going because
> I don't want to be a part of that. (Chi Chi)

Participants described feeling unsafe to discuss their personal problems within some

organizations as they were concerned that their personal issues would be shared with

others in the community.

> I wouldn't go to some people for help. Sometimes some Africans, especially in
> my community, you can come and inspire everybody to reveal everything and
> after say "I'm so sorry" [I can't help]. You should have said that at the start.
> When you finish you can go and call another person and say, this fellow came
> here and blah, blah, blah. By the time you reach back home they disseminate all
> the information. (Emeka)

Participants did not like the discourse between members in some of the

community organizations. They suggested that this discourse prevented any successful

attempts at helping community members resolve ongoing issues. Participants explained

that the power struggle from some community leaders limited the contributions

knowledgeable community members could offer. In these community meetings, the

members with the skill and expertise to make significant contributions to the community would often be silenced by others who disagreed with their ideas or suggestions. Participants worried about how these issues would affect them and their families.

> I believe that if only [the community organization] can listen to some of the things people say I think we would be on very good terms with them. But, if only [the community organization] don't listen, I believe that they are only there to pull down the community. (Ayo)

Participants relied on individual community members for help and support instead of relying on a community organization. They turned to those individual community members with ideas and suggestions that offered substantial assistance to the participants and who had proven success in helping others. These individuals were previously identified, in this chapter, under the section titled "Community Members are Informal Helpers". It is important to note that participants did not associate the gossip and lack of confidentiality with the informal helpers.

Sacrificing Dreams

Participants spoke about the sacrifices they made in various aspects of their lives. The most prevalent and recurring topics were about giving up their career choice and their standard of living.

In Sierra Leone, two participants worked in their own small businesses and they missed the independence and control they found in operating their businesses. These participants were interested in restarting similar businesses in Canada but explained that there was too much to learn about operating a business in Canada. As well, they

explained that returning to school to "have the skills … and learn a little bit" (Bintou) was better for their future.

Participants explained that moving to Canada was such a great sacrifice to them. While they were thankful for the opportunity to change their future, the participants who were trying to get their foreign credentials accredited were saddened and disappointed at the prospects of returning to school for a new career when they already had useful skills in careers that were a priority in Canada.

> The reply I got was that I had to go back and do five years of university course before I would be allowed to work. I was really disappointed and I said no, this is not right. After I have done four years at school in my country and I did a year of post-graduate work, no way, it can't be. (Gaya)

Participants described that there were too many barriers to break down in order to achieve their goal and they needed to decide on a career because they could not spend years and money chasing their old career. They did not want to continue to pursue the accreditation process because the expense of the process affected their standard of living.

> I have never failed in my life so it was a shock to me that I can fail… It was the first time that happened to me…. After all the energy I put into and then I had to come back and start all over again. And I have to find the money to pay again…. At the end of the day I accepted what I am doing because I know I have to do it to live" (Dube).

Female participants also spoke about giving up time with their children. They were also single parents and the additional burden of being the sole breadwinner meant working long hours to be able to provide for the family. One participant stated that it was the only way she could stay off of welfare and provide for the things she and her family

needed. She worked several shifts and relied on daycare and private babysitters to care for her child while she worked.

> I don't get to spend time with my child very much because I work most time. I work every day and my child is in daycare. There is [also] a babysitter that lives in my building. In my spare time I spend time with my child. (Chi Chi)

Feeling Isolated

> **"**It is not easy to be alone in my country. …Here, you have to belong to [Canadian] society before you live. And I never belonged and I tried to belong and I couldn't" (Fume).

In Sierra Leone, feeling isolated would not be common as friends and family would maintain social visits often. Participants relied on their support networks to help them complete tasks and achieve goals. Without these support networks in Canada each participant realized that they had to rely on their own efforts to succeed. Participants shared their initial feelings of being alone and of not having the family connections and the social support networks they were accustomed to in Sierra Leone. "I miss having close and intimate relations with neighbours. That was very, very important. You'll never be alone, never be lonesome. You always have people around you" (Gaya).

They tried to reach out to Canadians for friendship and, while each participant had successfully created friendships with other Canadians, they all spoke clearly and consistently about their continued struggle to create and maintain meaningful friendships with Canadians. They expressed how lonely they were and how they felt when they approached Canadian friends about spending time together.

> When I first came I realized I was very alone with my children. … Some of the friends I tried to make among the Canadians, some of them were not ready for [friendship]. I don't know what the reason was. Some would smile at you and

give you the welcome but when you call them and say, can I come visit, it is like no. I'm busy. I'm busy. Then you draw the line. (Gaya)

One participant described himself as very outgoing and active. He tried to reach out to his Canadian friends to participate in sporting and entertainment activities only to be discouraged.

Once in a while they will call you to go hiking or fishing. I have tried to do a lot of things here, these winter sports, camping, skiing, etc. Sometimes you get the friends but you might get one and the next time you go with them you can't go. Some will want to go with their girlfriends. They don't want to really get involved with a stranger for a long time. Because people will be asking, where do you know that person? And nobody knows me and they will never try to know me. (Fume)

Fume spoke about feeling like a stranger as he had no one to 'vouch' for him and support his credibility among his Canadian friends. Participants explained that in Sierra Leone family and friends could verify their credibility and reputation and this provided the basis for forming new friendships. Without anyone to vouch for them in Canada participants explained that it was difficult to feel included in Canadian social life. Their Canadian friends were more like acquaintances and the camaraderie they expected appeared artificial or imposed. Participants felt very discouraged about creating friendships with Canadians, yet, they continued to try. They each identified that they maintain successful friendships with Canadians and they still depend on their connections with other Sierra Leoneans to fulfill their social needs.

Summary: Difficult Situations

Participants shared common, negative experiences: they experienced some conflict within the community, feelings of isolation, difficulties with creating and

maintaining friendships and disappointment in having to sacrifice their chosen careers and lifestyles. Though these negative experiences had some impact on their livelihood, each participant took great pride in making progress in their new lives through self-learning and independence.

Summary of Findings

The Sierra Leonean newcomers interviewed shared many personal experiences about finding help in Winnipeg. Common themes, shared by each participant, emerged after analyzing the data: understanding their new life; the family and community as the first contact for support; reaching out to unfamiliar people and places for help; and the difficult situations and emotions. As well, further analysis of the participant's experiences and the common themes identified two underlying themes: fundamental values (having faith and hope; being independent and giving back to the community; and, significant differences between male and female participants. A discussion about the meaning of the participants' experiences and the relationship to the current literature will follow in Chapter Five, the discussion.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

The literature review in Chapter Two centers on the settlement needs of

newcomers, the changes in the delivery of settlement and support services and the

meanings of finding help and dealing with challenges. This discussion expands on the

literature and makes connections to the findings presented in this research. The

theoretical framework presented earlier will be revisited at the end of this Chapter. The

focus of this discussion will be as follows:

- Mental Health Taboo

- Healing: Hope, Faith and Giving Back to the Community

- Dependence and Independence

- Strengthening Social Support to Newcomers

    o Strengthening Bonds Within Ethno-cultural Communities

    o Building Bridges between Newcomers and Local Communities

    o Enhancing Links Between Service Providers and Newcomers

    o Support Based on Gender

Mental Health Taboo

The interviews consist of questions about health services. While participants

discuss health services in general there is a reluctance to discuss experiences about

mental health issues. Some participants experienced traumatic events in Sierra Leone

during the war and they acknowledged this in the interview. Participants refer to 'not

feeling good' and 'having a hard time' when they refer to issues of trauma and associated

feelings. Only one participant identifies the term 'trauma' when she speaks about her child. But this participant also stated that she did not want to discuss the trauma and I did not continue questioning her about it. The remainder of the participants avoided sharing traumatic experiences during the interviews.

I wonder about the cultural implications of their reluctance to discuss traumatic experiences. I question whether their silence is influenced by my presence or is a constant throughout their lives, not shared even with their close family and friends. As well, I am interested in understanding whether their silence is related to perceptions of possible negative consequences to their immigration status. Francis (2009) explains that refugees are often afraid to 'complain' or discuss their emotional troubles because they are unsure if doing so might affect their sponsorship or initiate deportation. Wasik (2006) further explains that these fears, in addition to the feelings of isolation, economic insecurity and any trauma experienced prior to migration, become traumatizing to African newcomers. Wasik clarifies that African refugee women, who migrate to Canada, "experience trauma as a continuum of lived experience characterized by power inequalities and loss of security, control and social connection" (p. 3).

Wasik (2006) and Francis (2009) identify that current mental health practice models are narrow and inappropriate when working with African newcomers. Since the participants in this research do not discuss traumatic events during the interviews I query if they have found assistance to cope with their traumatic experiences and any other mental health concerns that are associated with these experiences. Also, I question if they are able to receive assistance within their ethno-cultural community, from informal

helpers or their family members. Further research is needed to shed more light on the newcomers' trauma, retraumatization and coping.

In this discussion, issues of mental health are limited to expressed feelings or perceptions about self-worth, competence and isolation. Without completely understanding the mental health concerns of participants it is beneficial to understand how their reliance on their faith and hope affect their perceptions of themselves.

Healing: Hope, Faith and Giving Back to the Community

Hope, faith and giving back to the community are values inherent to the help-seeking and help providing experiences of Sierra Leonean newcomers. These values are connected to their perceptions of success and achievement. As the newcomers in this study understand that they are not alone and that support is available, they are able to move on and look to the future. Their hopefulness is expressed when there is the availability of resources such as access to a specific program or connecting with friends for support.

Hollis, Massey, and Jevne (2007) identify strategies to build hope: setting attainable goals, access to resources needed to accomplish goals, performing actions that can help to achieve goals, having control over self and the surroundings, and having time to complete goals. The findings in this research are associated with these strategies. Newcomers in this study identify with being able to achieve their goals by accessing support networks and programs that promote their learning and enhance their ability to function in the community. They also want to achieve their goals independently and they want to be able to help others as a result of their new learning.

Newcomers express hope by setting up a solid foundation in their own homes and within the community. This foundation is built on core values of hard work, respect and resilience, all of which they believe will enable their future success. Female newcomers articulate the same views in regards to their own and their children's future success. Newcomers in this study look to the community to support them and their children and to reinforce their cultural values. In turn, they support community members by giving back to the community in any way they can. Hollis et al. (2007) explain that when individuals are unable to help themselves, actions directed at serving others or making things better for family and friends provide opportunities to satisfy personal goals and community based goals of helping others; this reinforces their own feelings of hope and contributes to a better perception of self.

"Pride" and "confidence" are the words newcomers in this study use to discuss their role in helping others. When they speak about being in need, all the time, they also speak about losing confidence in their ability to assist themselves. Having the capacity to lend support to another in need strengthens newcomers' levels of confidence, feelings of pride and their sense of hope.

There is healing power in hope: it contributes to achievement, health, happiness and perseverance; it is experienced in relation to others as hope is enhanced by the perceived help and encouragement provided by friends and families; and, hope is supported by faith and other important interpersonal resources such as optimism, values and beliefs (Hollis et al., 2007). The research study reinforces that the Sierra Leonean newcomers' faith supports them during times of stress and their optimism and hope motivates them to persevere despite the various challenges they encounter.

Dependence and Independence

The adage, "give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime" is represented in the findings. One newcomer in this study summarizes the shared feelings of all participants:

Well, at least I have a small job and I get money to buy what I want. I don't really need somebody to give me money and I am not used to it. I do things for myself. I don't want somebody to give me money but to give me the way to get the money. (Fume)

Newcomers are dependent on support to help them learn new ways of functioning that increases their independence and strengthens their self-reliance. They strive for independence and this speaks to their concept of self and their ability to function. They identify feeling incompetent when they can not meet their needs or achieve their goals. Newcomers describe being shocked at failing; failure is new to them. The findings indicate that their independence is linked to their financial success; their financial success is linked to the availability of quality employment sufficient to meet their needs; quality employment is linked to access to education and training and their ability to find employment where their skills and experience are recognized and utilized. Carter & Osborne (2009) and Francis (2009) concur that limited access to income diminishes newcomers' ability to provide for themselves and is directly linked to the limited access of safe and affordable housing, as well as the ability to afford higher education.

The newcomers interviewed identify their most pressing need as economic self-sufficiency through jobs that offer a competitive wage. However, according to Francis (2009) newcomers generally are employed in minimum wage, manual labour jobs. Although these offer some financial relief, they do not offer vertical mobility in the workplace and leave newcomers feeling stagnant in their employment. The findings in this study show that newcomer options are limited in searching for higher wage jobs or finding additional jobs that will help increase their financial resources. The literature makes clear that newcomers who maintain several jobs experience stress in maintaining their work-life balance which can lead to burnout and further diminish their capacity to provide for themselves and their family (Francis, 2009; Wasik, 2006). It also limits their attendance at English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes and specialized training since there is a lack of time to pursue additional training (Simbandumwe, 2007).

The findings show that newcomers often work in jobs that they neither enjoy doing nor want to consider as a career. The manual labour jobs they obtain are the only ones available at the time and they have no choice but to accept the job as it is their only means of financial support. Many newcomers are advised by ethnic community members that working in the health care system provides better wages. Francis (2009) identifies that, while gaining employment is deemed a success, lack of good employment alternatives reduces the chances of newcomers finding work outside of the usual manual labour jobs. Receiving this type of employment through 'word-of-mouth' and other non-transparent forms of recruitment maintains a cycle of poverty among newcomers.

Simich et al. (2005) have found that newcomers depend on support services to assist them towards self reliance and financial independence. Access to income greatly

affects newcomers' ability to provide for themselves and their families; it is also a necessity and a determinant of health. The newcomers in this study indicate that they can achieve independence if they have access to quality employment that recognizes their existing skills and experience. As well, they want alternative options for training and employment that matches their skills and desires. Newcomers value their financial independence and work towards being self-reliant. They depend on support services to provide them with connections to meaningful, quality employment.

Strengthening Social Support to Newcomers

Newcomers in this study identify basic settlement needs as: safe and affordable housing; quality employment; education and training; accessible health care services; and the recognition of foreign credentials, skills and experience. The literature on the settlement needs of newcomers largely follows the premise that barriers to settlement needs are a result of limitations in accessing services. These findings indicate that newcomers consistently identify barriers to accessing services and meeting their needs as:

- Limited information about all available services;
- Conflicting referrals from different service agencies;
- Difficulties finding service locations in the city;
- The process of accrediting foreign credentials is expensive, difficult and takes too long to complete;
- Limited information on options for training and choosing a career;
- Education and training is desired but too costly to afford;

- Difficulties accessing quality employment that offers income beyond minimum wage;

- Difficulties finding employment that recognizes and uses newcomers' skills, experience and foreign training ;

- Minimum wage income is insufficient to provide basic necessities while saving for the future and repaying transportation loans;

- Perceived discrimination and prejudice among employers and local community members;

- Perceived prejudice among the general public related to negative incidents about community members in the media;

- Difficulties trusting local community members for support;

- Difficulties understanding English speaking members of the general public;

- Perceptions of incompetence and confusion and feeling inadequate when meeting with members of the general public;

- Understanding the school system and working with schools and trying to get educational support for their children is difficult;

- Supporting their children while managing work, education and life responsibilities and dealing with the stress related to integration is overwhelming;

- Conflict within the ethnic community divides community members and limits access to support networks;

- Support within local communities is limited and creates perceptions of isolation among newcomers.

While the findings are congruent with the literature in identifying barriers to accessing services, what is most apparent is newcomers' reliance on support networks to bridge the gap between themselves and access to resources. When newcomers identify needs they do so in terms of wanting support that enhances their well being and capacity to function effectively. The findings specify the need for social support to assist newcomers in learning the new culture, maintaining their own ethnic culture, navigating through the available services in their new community and building support networks.

Social support is a determinant of health and is just as significant as the need for food, shelter and income (Simich et al., 2005). Access to social support reduces newcomers' risk of developing depression (Ager & Strang, 2008) and strengthens newcomers' perceptions of competence, confidence in themselves and overall sense of worth (Hernández-Plaza, Alonso-Morillejo and Pozo-Muñoz, 2006; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola and Reuter, 2006). The findings support that newcomers rely on friends, families and informal support networks to assist them through the challenges associated with adapting to their new lives. They spend considerable time and resources building support networks as they consider these networks to be vital to their success. This is not to say that settlement services are any less vital to the successful integration of newcomers. Newcomers need settlement services and support networks as they both complement the other. When settlement services are unavailable or inaccessible the only other option for newcomers is to rely on their informal support networks.

The findings show that informal social networks are beneficial to newcomers. They are more direct, flexible and easily accessible as support is available outside of the normal work hours (of settlement service agencies) and usually within the newcomer's

environment. As well, informal social networks are based on strong social/ethno-cultural ties among newcomers. The literature supports that there is a greater congruence regarding shared needs as a result of the shared knowledge among group members; and, there is an increased variety of different kinds of emotional, information-based and material support based on the skills and abilities of individuals within the network (Hernandez et al., 2006; Simich et al., 2003).

The findings show a need for promoting ethno-cultural and local communities in their efforts to support newcomers. It is not just about fixing what is wrong with accessing settlement services; it is also about building on the strengths of newcomers. Their strengths emanate from within their personal resources (self worth, a sense of competence, and values) and their personal resources are strengthened by their social ties, their sense of belonging and ethno-cultural identity and their ability to help themselves.

Ager & Strang (2008) discuss building social bonds, social bridges and social links as facilitators to the removal of barriers affecting the integration of newcomers. This is the basis of my discussion about the strengthening of social support for newcomers. It includes strengthening bonds within the Sierra Leone community, strengthening bridges between the ethno-cultural and local communities, and strengthening links between newcomers and service providers.

Strengthening Bonds within Ethno-cultural Communities

Ager & Strang (2008) discuss the need for social bonds within community groups. These are connections that link members of a group akin to the connections found among members of a family.

> They provide a 'voice for refugees', contact points for isolated individuals, expertise in dealing with refugee issues and flexible and sensitive responses to the needs of their target populations. They also provide cultural and social activities which offer refugees the chance to maintain their own customs and religion, talk in their own language, celebrate their traditions and exchange news from their home country. (Duke et al., 1999, p. 119, as cited in Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 178).

The importance of the community to provide settlement services to its members is significant as the findings show that the support received from informal networks positively impacts the lives of Sierra Leonean newcomers. Simbandumwe (2007) concurs that informal networks are usually provided through contact with members of ethno-cultural communities as they can provide support to newcomers in their native languages. Ethno-cultural communities also have innate knowledge about cultural beliefs and values; sometimes they are in a better position to assist newcomers who need culturally sensitive support (Simbandumwe, 2007; Wasik, 2006).

Simich et al. (2003) indicate from their research that newcomers prefer direct, personal and confidential support as they associate friends with family and, in the absence of their familial bonds, they rely on trusted community members (informal helpers). I have observed that informal helpers in the Sierra Leone community show a desire and stamina to maintain a level of availability to newcomers and have become informal settlement service workers. Some of them volunteer their time as part of their role in a smaller community organization; other community helpers act independently. The findings show that they are providing support and direct one-on-one interventions with newcomers, during and after their normal work hours, relying on their own and sometimes the community group's limited finances.

The findings identify that building connections between newcomers and their ethno-cultural community groups provides valuable support to newcomers. Newcomers in this study choose ethno-cultural community groups that have proven successful in assisting their members, are politically tied to their own political views and are based on strong friendship ties. They also judge these groups based on the best fit for their own needs. When conflict occurs within and between the various internal community groups it affects the community members.

Stressful relationships between various internal community groups and their members diminish the ability of all the groups to provide support to their members (Simbandumwe, 2007). Conflict within different community groups is not isolated to the Sierra Leonean community as Simbandumwe (2007) highlights that many ethno-cultural communities experience similar issues of intra and inter group conflict management and effective communication. The findings in this research show that issues of trust, financial accountability, confidentiality and confidence in the leadership of some Sierra Leonean groups polarize the community members and enable the formation of several smaller groups striving towards the same goal, i.e. supporting members, and competing for the same resources. These smaller community groups compete for political and financial support from within the ethno-cultural community. Newcomers in this study are not encouraged by the conflict that is evident in the Sierra Leonean community. Divisions within ethno-cultural communities serve to alienate members and make it difficult to access funding sources and assistance from external organizations as these outside organizations do not want to become involved in community conflict (Simbandumwe, 2007; Simich et al., 2003).

The newcomers in this study indicate that they want their ethno-cultural community to function cohesively and they also want the community organizations to provide more support and access to services. Simbandumwe (2007) suggests that community groups could increase their capacity to collaborate with one another and external organizations through better communication strategies, better management of conflict between groups and between individuals, development to strengthen leadership skills and competencies, and mentorship from already well established ethno-cultural groups.

The findings show that newcomers have built social bonds within their ethno-cultural community. However, without the presence of conflict and division within the various internal community organizations, these social bonds could be strengthened. It is important to strengthen social bonds between newcomers and their respective ethno-cultural organizations because these communities are often a vital source of information and support (Simich et al., 2004).

Building Bridges between Newcomers and Local Communities

The findings show that newcomers want to understand Canadian culture and to fit into Canadian life. They feel isolated and estranged within their local communities as they experience difficulties in making and maintaining friendships with Canadians. Newcomers in this study experience feelings of incompetence and ambiguity when they seek help from unfamiliar people. Often they do not feel they can be understood and are concerned with appearing inept because of the perception that they lack specific social knowledge and skills.

The newcomers in this study explain that the customs associated with meeting people in Canada are very different than what is practiced in Sierra Leone. As well, the pace of life in Canada and the weather create barriers to maintaining social connections. The literature explains that since newcomers are removed from their family and social supports they need to form social connections with local communities in their host city (Simich et al., 2003). Local communities (sponsors, neighbours, and local businesses) provide newcomers with access to resources such as food banks, places of worship and recreational activities. They also provide newcomers with opportunities to learn about Canadian life through the use of resources and participation in community-based activities.

The findings show that even though there are social bonds within ethno-cultural communities, social exclusion can still exist in other settings such as the work place, school and within the local community. The literature supports the findings that prejudice and discrimination contribute to social exclusion which separates communities and newcomers into distinct groups that may not function cohesively (Ager & Strang, 2008; Wasik, 2006). Building bridges between newcomers and their local communities can connect the two and facilitate newcomers' participation in their new community. Some authors recommend incorporating settlement services within local communities and educating local communities and newcomers about each other through awareness programs and opportunities to socialize (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009; Simich et al., 2005). Integrating settlement services within existing local communities is not always financially feasible but it has been accomplished in some communities. For example, the Neigbourhood Settlement Services Program (Manitoba Labour and Immigration)

employs settlement workers working out of different community centers, schools and community clinics in 10 local communities in Manitoba.

The newcomers in this study explain that they are reluctant to reach out to people within their local community because they often do not trust unfamiliar people and are afraid of being rejected or ridiculed. The literature supports that awareness programs and social activities within local communities build bridges that can intensify involvement and understanding between newcomers and local communities and reduce social exclusion, feelings of incompetence and isolation (Ager & Strang, 2008; Staub et al., 2005; Stepakoff et al., 2006). Local community members can learn about new cultures and the challenges newcomers encounter prior to and after migrating to Canada; newcomers can also learn about their new community's culture, history and available resources. Social involvement that reflects safety, security, a sense of acceptance and a lack of conflict is desired (Stepakoff, 2006). Fostering greater involvement between newcomers and local communities increases the local communities' ability to provide support. Local businesses can offer employment opportunities to newcomers which can promote long term social and economic improvement for local communities and newcomers (Ager & Strang, 2008). The findings indicate that access to appropriate support and resources improves newcomers' well-being and self-reliance. The literature supports that newcomers can participate equally and without prejudice in communities that understand them, their experiences and the resources they require to become self-sufficient (Staub et al., 2005; Stepakoff, 2006). Building bridges between newcomers and local communities is important to the well-being of newcomers and the improvement of local communities.

Enhancing Links between Service Providers and Newcomers

Ager & Strang (2008) define social links as the connections between newcomers and service providers such as schools, hospitals and government and settlement service agencies. These links exist in the provision of services to newcomers and are vital resources needed to support and enhance their lives. The findings establish that the links between newcomers and service providers exist and newcomers are grateful for the support they receive from service providers. However, a significant contribution of the findings in this thesis is that newcomers continue to encounter challenges with accessing appropriate support despite the availability of services.

Newcomers in this study explain that there is a disconnect between embassies overseas and service providers in the host country. They clarify that inaccurate pre-migration information about Canadian life and the realities of starting over impedes their understanding of what to expect when they migrate. The findings indicate other challenges: sacrificing their dreams because they could not find employment that would enable them to be self-sufficient; limited knowledge of all the available services and resources and where to access these services and resources; conflicting referrals and advice from service providers which lead to confusion about which settlement service to access; and, devaluing their existing skills, experience and foreign training.

The literature identifies that some of the challenges newcomers encounter occur because service agencies have been unable to realize the needs of some newcomer populations and, as a result, services are not appropriate or are unavailable (George, 2002; Simbandumwe, 2007; Simich et al., 2005). Immigration in Manitoba has increased and Manitoba now accepts over 10,000 newcomers into the province each year. These

newcomers originate from over 40 countries and from varying circumstances (Manitoba Labour & Immigration, n.d.). While settlement needs of newcomers are consistently the same among all newcomers, specific newcomer communities also have needs that will likely differ from other newcomer communities. MacKinnon et al. (2007) identify that service agencies need to be flexible in their methods of practice to accommodate the changing needs of newcomer communities.

The findings show that there are consistencies among the challenges identified by newcomers. The literature agrees that many of these challenges concern the availability of accurate information provided by service providers to newcomers and their supporters (Beirens et al., 2007; George, 2002; MacKinnon et al., 2007; Simbandumwe, 2007; Simich et al., 2005; Simich et al., 2004). Simbandumwe (2007) suggests a better collaboration between service agencies and local and ethno-cultural communities could increase accuracy of information, timely referrals and appropriate services to newcomers. As well, financial and practical support from governing agencies could promote local and ethno-cultural communities working together to support newcomers (Simbandumwe, 2007; Simich et al., 2004). Improving access to accurate information and services in a timely manner can enhance the links between newcomers and service providers (Ager & Strang, 2008; Simich et al., 2005).

Support Based on Gender

The findings indicate that there are differences that female newcomers face with finding appropriate support. Female newcomers require support not only for themselves but for their children. While their male counterparts are affected by the challenges of

integration, MacKinnon et al., (2007) suggest that female newcomer parents also have the additional burden of family responsibilities. The impact of little or no support on the female newcomers' settlement can not be understated. Deacon and Sullivan, (2009) and Francis (2009) explain that the challenges female newcomer parents experience with accessing support diminishes their capacity to help their children and the burden of stress overwhelms their abilities to function in the community. For example, a female newcomer in this study explains that she commutes several hours each work day to transport her child to and from daycare and take herself to and from work and school. The daycare is in another neighbourhood as it is the only facility with an available daycare spot for her child; the bus ride is an hour long. The school she attends is a thirty minute bus ride from the daycare and her place of employment is another 1 hour bus ride from her school. At the end of the day she is exhausted and she still needs to prepare a meal, spend time with her child, perform light housekeeping duties and complete her homework!

The above example illustrates the frustration that female newcomers experience with meeting their basic needs, caring for their family, pursuing an education and maintaining employment. The literature supports the findings that these challenges negatively affect female newcomers' perceptions of their competence as women and mothers caring for their family (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009; Francis, 2009).

The effects of these and other challenges are felt in every aspect of female newcomers' lives. The literature concurs with the findings that female newcomers are often working several jobs to provide basic necessities and this reduces the time they have to be available for their children (Francis 2009; Wasik, 2006). Female newcomers in

this study acknowledge feeling tired, all the time, and not having the energy or motivation to do much more at the end of the day. Dealing with family and work responsibilities, coping with the stress related to integration and satisfying personal goals are enormous burdens that female newcomers must carry, often times on their own.

The literature supports the recommendation that government policies and support services should consider the disparity between male and female newcomers and recognize the needs of female newcomers as different, specific and requiring intense, long term and continuous support (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2007; McLaren & Dyck, 2002). The findings in this study provide support for differential consideration for male and female newcomers.

Theoretical Framework Revisited

A review of the literature on ecosystems indicates that the interaction between the various systems and individuals is continuous, reciprocal and always changing (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001; Miley et al., 2007). This applies to newcomers and the interactions with their ethno-cultural communities, local communities and service agencies. The methods of providing settlement services in Manitoba have undergone changes over the years that affect the type of services offered and the different areas of support available. While these changes have occurred and are a good move towards providing better service, newcomers are still experiencing barriers to accessing services which affect their ability to provide for themselves.

The ecosystem perspective explains that a good fit occurs when the newcomer is able to access resources (Gitterman & Germain, 2008). Newcomers have the personal

resources for coping as they speak about being hopeful and optimistic that their situation will improve. However, as Gitterman and Germain (2008) state, personal resources also include "the ability to seek environmental resources and to use them effectively" (p. 62). Newcomers need to access resources to meet their needs and when they are unable to do so, their perception of their own competence and self-esteem is damaged and feelings of powerlessness are created.

Miley et al. (2007) explains perceptions of powerlessness as a sense of distrust and feelings of alienation from resources. Newcomers in this study indentify this sense of distrust with unfamiliar people and feelings of isolation when they are unable to access support and other resources. The findings show that female newcomers experience the same distrust and feelings of isolation but their experiences are amplified by their responsibilities to their children. The literature recognizes the connection between having access to resources and newcomers becoming independent (George, 2002; Simich et al., 2004; Wasik, 2006).

The goal of empowerment is for newcomers to become independent and to attain a greater control of their lives (Moss & Thompson, 2008). "Personal empowerment embodies our own sense of competence, mastery, strength, and ability to effect change" (Miley et al., 2007, p. 87). Newcomers want to learn new skills and be freed from "assumptions, understandings or perceptions that are holding them back in some way (in effect, disempowering [newcomers])" (Moss & Thompson, 2008, p. 68). They want independence and the ability to help themselves; they are willing and want the opportunity to learn. Their perceptions of distrust, incompetence and powerlessness must be removed to positively affect their ability to meet their needs.

The literature supports the findings that connections within communities, between communities and with service agencies could be strengthened to increase support to newcomers. Breton (2002) explains that these community-building efforts are connected to empowerment and that working with and within communities is the foundation of empowerment work.

> This work requires flexibility and determination on the part of professionals and the organizations in which they practice, for it means meeting community leaders, residents and organizations on their own turf, learning together the skills needed to be effective in reaching community goals. (Breton, 2002, p. 30).

The findings show that, together with service providers, ethno-cultural and local communities have a significant role to play in supporting newcomers and providing access to resources. The literature shows that creating a supportive environment increases the potential for 'goodness of fit' between newcomers, their ethno-cultural communities, the general public and service providers.

Summary

Integration is a complex, long-term process that requires constant, unwavering access to support (Hernandez-Plaza et al., 2006). The findings show that newcomers' meaning of help has its foundation in the strengthening of support and this is accomplished through enhancing connections between newcomers, their ethno-cultural communities, local communities and service providers. Sierra Leonean newcomers strive towards empowerment through access to resources within their environment. They want financial independence; they want to understand and fit into Canadian life and they want to be understood by those who provide them with support. They build informal networks

with other Sierra Leoneans but would also like connections with their local communities for support and assistance. They are thankful for the assistance received from service agencies and would like more access to accurate information and available services. As well, female Sierra Leonean newcomers experience greater challenges that are linked to their access to resources for themselves and their families. Despite the adversities these newcomers encounter, they show great resilience in accomplishing their goals and making a better life for their future. They have found healing power in their faith, hope and desire to give back to their community.

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The experiences of Sierra Leonean newcomers in Winnipeg are positively affected by the support they receive from within their ethno-cultural community, the local community (neighbourhood and general public), settlement service agencies, government departments and other support service agencies. It is important to understand the experiences of newcomers in order to identify the strengths and limitations in their ability to help themselves. By doing so, research can identify completely new areas of service and those that need enhancing or restructuring. Providing accurate, appropriate and timely services and support to newcomers will strengthen their ability to help themselves and promote their successful integration into their new lives in Canada.

The questions asked which guided this research are: "How are Sierra Leonean newcomers getting help with meeting their needs" and "What are their experiences in receiving help". The following summarizes the major findings from the analysis of the data, identifies the strengths and limitations of this study, outlines practice and program recommendations from the research and suggests areas for future research.

Summary of the Findings

There are four main themes that emerged from the data.

1. Sierra Leonean newcomers value being able to provide for themselves. Employment that would provide them sufficient income to achieve financial independence is their most predominant goal. Learning about Canadian culture, fitting into Canadian life and making and maintaining friendships with Canadians

are also imperative to the newcomers. They experience feelings of isolation when they perceive a disconnection with Canadians.

2. Family is their most valuable asset and Sierra Leonean newcomers value friends like family. Informal helpers and informal social networks, comprised of Sierra Leonean friends and those trusted by the Sierra Leonean community, are vital to their well being as they rely on these helpers and networks to share information, access resources and maintain their ethno-cultural identity.

3. Sierra Leonean newcomers are grateful for the assistance they receive in accessing services and meeting their needs. However, perceptions of distrust, lack of competence, isolation and low confidence in themselves impede their attempts to reach out to unfamiliar people, government agencies and service providers for help. They are unaware of some of the available services and often are confused about which service to choose. Getting foreign credentials approved is very difficult and prohibits Sierra Leonean newcomers from finding employment that recognizes their foreign training and uses their skills and experience.

4. Positive ethno-cultural community relations are important to Sierra Leonean newcomers. The Sierra Leonean ethno-cultural community organizations provide valuable support to the newcomers. Newcomers are concerned when there is conflict and ineffective leadership within their ethno-cultural community organizations and the consequent diminished ability of the organizations to provide support to their members. Newcomers are also concerned about the negative images portrayed in the media about Sierra Leonean newcomers

involved in criminal activity. They perceive that negative images could create prejudiced perceptions among Canadians and affect the community well being.

Other Observations

5. Mental health concerns are generally not discussed openly. References to mental health concerns are minimized in the language the newcomers used to express those issues.

6. Hope, faith and giving back to the community are fundamental values shared by all Sierra Leonean newcomers interviewed. These values enhance their perceptions about themselves and support their integration into their new community. The participants express hope in being able to help others and being able to access resources to achieve their goals.

7. While these newcomers seek independence they depend on others to support them. They value being self reliant and rely on others to assist them in accessing higher learning and quality jobs in becoming independent.

8. Female newcomer parents are experiencing additional burdens with adjusting to their new lives as they struggle to find a balance between work and life responsibilities, being available for their children and maintaining social contact within their community.

9. Sierra Leonean newcomers identify a need for enhanced support from service providing and government agencies, in their ethno-cultural and local communities, in all aspects of their lives as they rely on others for help in accessing resources and meeting their needs.

Strengths and Limitations

A major strength of this study is that participants represented both genders, were from a variety of economic and social backgrounds and from different religions and regions in Sierra Leone. As well, this research uses qualitative methods to collect and analyze the data. This approach allows the experiences of newcomers to be captured from their perspective. The use of the computer program, NVIVO, to assist in the sorting and coding of the data allowed me to organize and analyze the data in ways that were facilitative. It minimized my need for physical space and reduced the amount of time I spent sorting the data.

This research is limited to Sierra Leoneans fluent in the English language and did not include elderly Sierra Leoneans who do not speak much English. Therefore, I was not able to explore the effects of the language barrier and age on help-seeking behaviours and the related outcomes. Their unique experiences would have further enriched the data and increased our understanding of their experiences with seeking help. Notwithstanding some of these limitations and strengths, there are many recommendations that can be made for practice and policy consideration and future research.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested to support newcomers and minimize their challenges. As one participant explains: "We come disadvantaged and they hit us with everything right away and we continue to be disadvantaged and if we get a break then we could get to a level like everyone else" (Dube).

Recommendations for Government and Policy Makers

1. Collaboration between the different levels of government is important to provide newcomers with accurate pre-migration and settlement contact information about their intended host community. This could include more detailed information on what to expect after arriving, contact information for ethno-cultural community organizations and specific contact information identifying professional bodies and agencies regarding accreditation of foreign credentials.

2. Transportation loans are a financial burden on newcomers. The federal government could omit loan repayment or develop alternative options for repaying the loan. Some suggestions are: to offer interest free loans and longer loan repayment options to reduce the total cost of the loan and minimize the financial stress newcomers encounter; to reduce the total cost of the loan if newcomers complete an educational program; to reduce the loan for single parent newcomers with multiple children.

3. Provide foreign trained professionals with the information to contact the respective professional body within the host community. This information should be given soon after newcomers arrive. If possible it could be provided earlier to give newcomers the opportunity to organize their credential information prior to leaving the country.

4. Policy makers should encourage professional organizations to consider the work experience and foreign training of skilled newcomers and offer them the opportunity to practice their skills and gain Canadian work experience. Positions for newcomers to gain work experience would allow professional organizations

the opportunity to evaluate newcomers' skills based on practice and not solely on

their ability to pass a written exam. In addition, providing opportunities for

foreign trained professionals to practice their skills would also identify areas that

require further training and support.

5. Housing policies should consider that the increase in immigration has

implications for the availability of safe and affordable housing.

Recommendations for Practice

The implications of the findings should be considered by social workers and others in

a position of support to newcomers. The findings point to a need for workers to recognize

the experiences and skills of newcomers as strengths and to incorporate these strengths

when assisting newcomers. Major recommendations include:

1. It is critical to understand newcomers' feelings of pride, competence and

confidence in their desire to seek help and the impact of these feelings on their

well being. Fair, compassionate and understanding workers are necessary to build

trusting relationships with newcomers.

2. Understanding the importance of strong ties between newcomers and their ethno-

cultural community seems to be essential for effective settlement. Presenting

opportunities for newcomers to connect with others from within their ethno-

cultural community are key.

3. Collaboration is necessary with local and ethno-cultural communities, settlement

service providers and governing organizations to provide information to the

general public that would enhance their awareness and understanding of

newcomers, their experiences and their potential for contribution within the host community.

4. There is a need for safe and affordable housing alternatives outside of the inner city and in neighbourhoods with established access to support and services.

5. Connections between local businesses and newcomers should be enhanced so newcomers can receive employment more easily and have the opportunity to gain valuable Canadian work experience. Practitioners should lobby for wage subsidy programs to assist local businesses in accomplishing this.

6. Female and single parent newcomers need prioritized access to daycare and alternative forms of childcare to enable them to attend language training, skills training and/or employment. They should also have access to: subsidized funding for education and professional skills training; and short-term support and/or respite services that are currently provided to individuals and families within the general public. Providing schools and health care agencies with information on newcomer experiences and culture so they can offer appropriate and culturally sensitive services is also essential.

7. Settlement service agencies should provide training and employment opportunities for individuals identified as competent informal helpers within their respective communities. These informal helpers already perform many settlement worker duties and could be supported and appropriately compensated in their role. As well, training and support could assist these informal helpers in managing the responsibilities of their role while minimizing personal stress and burnout. It would also free up settlement workers time for other clients.

8. Mental health concerns are not always discussed openly, especially when there is a distrust of unfamiliar people and places. Mental health practitioners could minimize the 'unfamiliarity' between newcomers and practitioners through frequent, informal contact with newcomers. As well, since newcomers rely on support networks for assistance, the development of appropriate therapeutic interventions for newcomers could include maintaining connections with those in a position to offer support to newcomers (i.e. a spouse, informal helper, etc.).

9. Mentorship programs that connect newer ethno-cultural communities with established ethno-cultural communities can provide support to newer ethno-cultural communities in their efforts to create a supportive environment for members. The newer communities can learn from the experiences of the established ethno-cultural communities. This might reduce the challenges ethno-cultural communities face and might also accelerate the progress they make in building a supportive base for their members.

10. Major organizations employ human resource strategies to support their managers, supervisors and others in leadership roles. If ethno-cultural community organizations had access to the same strategies and training opportunities they could better assist their leaders with improving communication between members, managing conflict within and between the various communities and enhancing their leadership roles to promote progress within their communities.

I recognize that some of these recommendations overlap as they apply to service organizations, policy makers and government departments.

Future Research

The recommendations I suggest for future research emerge from the experiences of this research study and the gaps in the literature on newcomers.

1. Research on the help-seeking experiences of elderly newcomers and newcomers in need of language training could be beneficial to understanding how these specific newcomers cope with adjusting to their new lives. This can also highlight areas of support that are working and those that need to be restructured or created.

2. Further research on Sierra Leonean and other newcomers and their employment-seeking experiences should be explored.

3. Literature on single parent newcomers is limited. Future research on their settlement experiences, balancing work and life responsibilities and networking with schools, health services and other service agencies should be conducted.

4. From this research a large amount of data was collected on perceptions of conflict within the Sierra Leonean ethno-cultural community organizations, but was not reported since the focus of the research was different. Further research in the Sierra Leonean and other communities could explore the strengths and challenges within these organizations and the steps community members and leaders have taken to improve the functioning of their community organizations.

5. There is limited published literature that exists about specific African ethno-cultural communities in Winnipeg and their efforts to support newcomers. Policy makers and governing bodies should encourage research that explores other

African ethno-cultural communities in Winnipeg in terms of their strengths and limitations providing support to newcomers in their communities.

6. Increasingly, newcomers are settling in rural areas of Manitoba. Their experiences with finding help in a smaller community should be examined.

7. Aboriginal people who leave the reserve for bigger cities may experience similar issues related to integration. Further exploration of these experiences and their relevance to the experiences of newcomers should be considered. As well, the resources available to Aboriginal people within their cultural communities and their local communities should be examined in relation to the resources available to newcomers. There may be learning and strengthening for all communities in so doing.

8. Zehr (1998) conducted a study on immigrant service providers working within their ethno-cultural communities. Further exploration on the role informal helpers play in their ethno-cultural communities and their experiences with supporting their community members would be useful, especially since informal community helping was so important to the participants of this study.

9. The interviews in this research were conducted immediately prior to the creation of the Manitoba Settlement Strategy (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2007). Further research on the help-seeking experiences of newcomers, after the implementation of the strategies outlined in the Manitoba Settlement Strategy, should be considered.

Conclusion

As a social work student I was eager for the opportunity to study a new, although personally familiar, phenomenon. I was encouraged by the many Sierra Leonean newcomers I knew as they were interested in the findings and the prospects of change as a result of their contribution to this research. It was a humbling experience listening to the Sierra Leonean participants and their struggles. It reminded me of the many challenges I encountered the first few years after I arrived in Canada. I was also astonished at their resilience and their ability to bounce back in the face of adversity.

The literature identified similar strengths and resilience among many other newcomer populations. It is encouraging to see the efforts of these different newcomers in supporting themselves and their community members. As well, the positive response from settlement service providers and policy makers to the various research outcomes identified in the literature indicates that change will continue to occur in the provision of settlement services. I hope that the issues and problems encountered by the participants will help us understand what needs to be done to prevent the same challenges from occurring with present day newcomers.

Finally, the process of completing this research has strengthened my knowledge as a practitioner. I am forever changed by the learning I have achieved during the research process and have incorporated this learning into my life.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION NOTICE ABOUT THE STUDY TO SIERRA LEONEANS IN WINNIPEG

Are you from Sierra Leone?

Have you been in Canada less than 6 years?

Did you ever have to ask someone for help when you first arrived in Winnipeg?

If you answered yes to all of the above questions, this study may be of interest to you.

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER   KAMARA-JAY TAYO-JONES, MSW STUDENT
                              Phone: ***-****

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR   PROFESSOR ESTHER BLUM
                              Phone: ***-****

I wish to explore the experiences of Sierra Leone immigrants who have sought help for themselves and other Sierra Leoneans in Winnipeg. This study will be conducted by Kamara-Jay Tayo-Jones, a student from University of Manitoba completing a thesis as part of the requirements for a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree.

Sierra Leone newcomers in Winnipeg, Manitoba are invited to participate in this study. Your participation is this study is voluntary and you must be at least 18 years of age. The first ten volunteers will be chosen for the study. The purpose of this study is to get information about how you found help for problems you had with settling in Winnipeg. Private, individual meetings will be scheduled for those participating in this study and the meetings are expected to last for one and a half to two hours. The meetings will be held at the Salvation Army Centre at 51 Morrow avenue. The meetings will consist of questions about your experiences with looking for help in Winnipeg and how you have helped your family members and other Sierra Leoneans in your community when they needed help.

If you would like to participate in this study or would like more information about this study please contact me at the number listed above. If you prefer, you can also call Professor Esther Blum, my advisor at the University of Manitoba, at her contact number listed above.

Sincerely,

_____
Kamara-Jay Tayo-Jones
Researcher

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS

Researcher

Kamara-Jay Tayo-Jones, MSW Student

This is a study to explore the experiences of Sierra Leone immigrants with finding help for themselves and others in Winnipeg. This study will be conducted by Kamara-Jay Tayo-Jones, a student from University of Manitoba completing her Masters in Social Work (MSW).

You are invited to participate in an interview that will take approximately one hour. The interviewer will ask you questions on your experiences with seeking help in Winnipeg and how you have helped your family and others in your community when they needed help. There are no right or wrong answers. Everything you say is **private** and **confidential**. The interview will be recorded on audio-tape and the interviewer will also be writing down your answers during the interview. Your name will not be used and will not be on any of the papers or the tape. The answers from the interview will only be used for this study and will only be published (without your name) in the final report. All the consent forms, papers, and audio-tape with your answers will be kept in a locked cabinet at the interviewer's home office and will be destroyed after the report is completed.

If you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you do not have to answer it. There will be some questions about your past experiences when you were in Sierra Leone or a refugee camp. If these or any other questions make you feel upset, the interviewer will give you the name of someone you can talk to. You can also stop the interview at any time or decide not to continue. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you will not receive any money for doing the interview.

If you are interested in knowing the final results of the interviews, or if you have any questions, please contact me at the number listed above. If you prefer, you can also call Professor Esther Blum, my advisor at the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work at *****-******.

I, _____, have read and understood the above information and agree to participate in the study.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Witness   Date

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC LINE OF QUESTIONING FOR INTERVIEWS

1. What name would you like us to call you?

2. Age:

3. Marital Status: Single   Dating   Common-law

                                      Married   Divorced   Widowed

4. Place of birth?

5. Where did you spend most of your life?

6. How long were you there?

7. How many years of schooling have you completed?

8. Where did you complete your schooling?

9. What was your occupation in your country of origin?

10. What is your current occupation in Winnipeg?

11. When did you come to Canada?

12. When did you arrive in Winnipeg?

13. Did you travel to Canada from Sierra Leone?

        If no, then which country did you travel from?

        How long were you in that country?

        What was your reason for being in that country?

14. Why did you choose to come to Canada?

15. Did you travel alone? If not, who did you travel with to come to Canada?

16. Who else that is important to you is still living in your country or origin or country of asylum?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Note. In many of the questions there is reference to Winnipeg/Canada. Some of the participants may not have come directly to Winnipeg as the first port of entry. They may have entered Canada from another Canadian city. Once the participant indicates the first port of entry into Canada, 'Winnipeg' or 'Canada' will be used accordingly.

Life in Sierra Leone

1. Describe your life when you were in Sierra Leone?

   Probes: What was a typical day for you?

                      What did you do in your spare time?

                      Who did you spend your spare time with?

2. What were some of the problems that you needed help for then?

3. When you were in need:

              Who did you ask for help? Family, friends, neighbours?

              Where are those people now?

              When would you ask for help? Immediately, when in crisis only?

4. What do you miss about Sierra Leone?

Life in Winnipeg/ Canada

5. What were your expectations about life in Winnipeg/Canada?

6. Describe what your life was like when you first arrived in Winnipeg/Canada.

   Probes: What were your first impressions?

                      What were some of the similarities between Canada and Sierra

   Leone?

                      What were some of the differences between Canada and Sierra

   Leone?

                      What were the most difficult things for you to do when you first arrived?

                      Did you know anyone in Canada when you first arrived?

7. Describe your life now?

   Probes: What is a typical day for you?

                    What do you like about living in Winnipeg?

                    What do you dislike about living in Winnipeg?

8. What do you do in your spare time?

   Probes: Who do you spend your spare time with?

                    Are these people other Sierra Leoneans/African or of other ethnic

                    background?

9. Tell me about your family and/or friends here in Winnipeg? In Canada?

10. In what ways are family and friends important to you?

Settlement Needs

11. How do you feel about your employment situation?

    Probes: Why are you happy or unhappy in your current job?

12. What kind of help did you get to find employment?

    Probes: Who helped you and how?

13. What kind of job would you like to be doing?

14. How do you feel about your current living arrangements?

    Probes: In which area of the city do you live?

                   Who else lives with you?

15. What kind of help did you get to find your current home?

                   Who helped you and how?

                   Are you happy with your current home?

                   Why or why not?

16. How did you learn about the English as a Second Language classes?

17. What kind of help did you get in finding information about ESL classes?

    Probe: Who helped you and how?

18. Which type of educational program are you taking?

    Probe: High School, college, university, certificate program, none

19. What kind of help did you get in finding information about your schools or

    program?

Probe:　　　　　Who helped you and how?

20. What are your reasons for going or not going back to school?

21. What were some of the problems you had in adjusting to life in Winnipeg/Canada?

     Probes: Language, un/under/employment, housing, getting lost

     In need of job skill training, climate,　adjusting to urban living

     No family or friends to talk to, not knowing where to go for help

22. What are some of the problems you still have in adjusting to life in Winnipeg/Canada?

23. Since you have been in Winnipeg/Canada, who do you go to for help you when you are in need? (such as a crisis or problems)

Settlement Services

24. About the settlement and social services in Winnipeg:

     What are some of the services you know about?

     Describe your experiences with getting help from any of these services?

     What is your opinion about these services?

     Do you feel that you have enough information about these services?

Community Affiliation

25. In general, has anyone ever asked you for help?

     What kind of help did they need?

26. Have you ever told others (friends, family, community members) about specific services?

27. Do you know about any clubs or organizations within your community?

     What are they called?

     How did you find out about the club or organization?

     Are you a member of these clubs? Why or why not?

     From what you know, what kind of things do they do for the community?

     Have you attended various club events? Why or why not?

28. Would you approach any club member for help if you needed it?

Why or why not?

29. Would you refer someone else to your community club for help?

Why or why not?

30. Who are the people within the community that you and others usually go to for help?

31. What kind of help do you ask of them?

32. From your experience, what does your community do to help you or others from within your community?

33. What kind of community events do you attend?

34. Is there anything you would like to say about your experiences with finding help for yourself or others?