

## **CIC Response to the Howard Barton & Associates Report on “LINCages to Inclusion: Survey of the Ontario LINC Program Regarding Learners with High Need and Diverse Abilities”**

The report “LINCages to Inclusion... (hereafter called the High Needs Report) examines the question of what constitutes high need within the LINC program in Ontario, the extent of high need, and provides suggestions for ameliorating the need. It includes a review of the pertinent literature as a resource to assist in providing information about learners with high need and methods on how to address this issue.

Information was gathered through a variety of methods including focus groups, individual interviews with key informants and electronic questionnaires that were sent to specific groups of LINC practitioners. Listed below are the top ten factors associated with “high need” as identified by all respondents to the questionnaires:

1. Depression/Sadness
2. Lack of Concentration
3. Learning Disabilities
4. Memory Deficit
5. Child-minding Needs
6. Low Self-Esteem
7. Dyslexia
8. Lack of Study Skills
9. Transportation
10. Poverty/Hunger

The multiple and complex needs of learners have created high need within the LINC classroom. Given the multiplicity of factors that translate into needs, the High Needs Report acknowledges that there can be no one fixed and uniform definition of learners with high need. However, in general, they can be said to be persons who have persistent and recurring impediments and who require assistance over and above the standard level of support to successfully access and complete English or French language acquisition programs.

The High Needs study demonstrated that the population of high need learners is highest in literacy and beginning LINC levels. The report pointed out that the extent of the population of learners with high need is difficult to determine given that there is no systematic testing or recording of high need within the LINC program and given that the high-need population is not static because the degree of need can be alleviated when socio-economic factors are addressed.

### **CIC Response:**

*In general, CIC feels that report is a good starting point on a very complex issue. However, CIC feels that the study’s definition of high needs and the factors associated with “high need” are too general and too inclusive. The Report’s definition of high needs*

*is so general and inclusive (everything from poverty to dyslexia) that it is difficult to determine which students should get what resource assistance and when.*

*The survey questionnaire should have included definitions for terms such as dyslexia and learning disabilities, etc. The authors of the questionnaire should have provided respondents with more objective, observable features of student behaviour and avoided this type of diagnostic terminology. “Memory deficit” is another problematic term.*

*CIC does not want to make all LINC program personnel experts on high needs but suggests that LINC program personnel address needs associated with the LINC process and refer LINC students with greater needs to appropriate settlement or mainstream services. LINC coordinators could provide LINC teachers with a list of community agencies that deal with high-needs clients.*

*It would have been better had the research determined which types of high needs could be addressed in the LINC Program and determined how to address the needs associated with the language learning process. For instance, the report should have recommended class sizes, student/teacher ratios, and/or whether or not CIC should fund teaching assistants for LINC students with physical or mental disabilities.*

*The report provides a series of recommendations that address the individual and social factors that comprise high need:*

**Issue 1:** Settlement is not a stand-alone event but a multilayered process of finding one’s way in a new country. The tasks of settlement are multiple and complex and they are found to be limited by institutional and structural barriers. Problems with poverty, unemployment, housing and immigration and family reunification are among those that are described by respondents as high need within LINC and as barriers to access and learning. Complicating the process, are additional high need experienced on an individual level including disability, depression, memory deficit and concentration difficulties.

**Recommendation 1:** Learning another language should be viewed as one constituent element in a process of settlement that requires recognition of comprehensive settlement needs. Learning another language does not occur in a bubble and therefore should to be viewed holistically by funders and LINC program delivery teams. LINC service delivery organizations and settlement workers should have the means to work in close collaboration to better meet learners’ high need. Each member of the team should be clear in terms of their own job responsibilities and professional boundaries and these functions need to be upheld by the service providing organization. The role of settlement counselors can be clarified so that LINC instructors and coordinators are not filling in a service-delivery gap by providing settlement counseling.

**Recommendation 2:** All LINC programs should be supported by the Immigrant Settlement Adaptation Program (ISAP) commensurate with the identified number and type of high need learners. In boards of education that deliver the LINC program, the

Settlement Worker in Schools Program (SWIS) should be enhanced. Settlement workers need to be more available to provide information and referral to learners with high need.

CIC Response:

*CIC Ontario Region agrees with these recommendations and is establishing protocols for the placement of settlement workers at LINC sites. CIC is increasing the number of settlement workers and will ensure that settlement workers are able to assess and address student settlement needs or refer clients as necessary. The Settlement Workers in Schools program is expanding and the number of itinerant settlement workers will increase.*

**Issue 2:** Because the LINC learning sites are not necessarily adjoining settlement services, many instructors need access to resources that they can use for referral purposes. It was found that LINC instructors make relatively little use of community-based settlement services in general and also in cases of high need learners. They also do little referring of learners to settlement workers/counselors. Instructor comments suggest that both are most likely due to a combination of lack of knowledge and an insufficiency of resources.

**Recommendation 3:** LINC instructors need to have available up-to-date information on local community and mainstream support services for high need that could be included in the curriculum. Better communication between the different components of the LINC program needs to be established. Some Boards of Education with LINC classes have resource banks of services that may be accessed by instructors. At a minimum, LINC instructors should be provided with the contact information for a local settlement agency that can be provided to the high need learner. LINC coordinators should have responsibility for providing this information, especially to instructors who teach in stand-alone classrooms (e.g. Boards of Education) without settlement counselors near-by.

CIC Response:

*CIC agrees with this recommendation. All clients, not just high-need clients, should know about the settlement services available in Ontario. Besides arranging for settlement workers in LINC sites, CIC will inform LINC instructors, coordinators, and assessors about settlement services available through Host and through the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP). Communication tools such as websites, print publications (e.g. Settlement News across the Province SNAP), conference presentations, and community meetings will be used to inform LINC Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) about settlement agencies and services and to clarify the role of settlement workers.*

*CIC will work to enhance collaboration and information sharing between settlement services and local community and mainstream support services for persons with high needs.*

**Issue 3:** Respondents from different locales across Ontario report inconsistent information and lack of awareness about the services LINC can provide. There is confusion and misinformation about the possibilities that currently exist within LINC to support high need learners in the program. For example, many respondents propose that LINC fund accessibility resources for large print resources and supplies. LINC, however, presently does have the capacity to provide support for this type of material. But not all service providing organizations - and not everyone within the organizations - have this information.

Some of the confusion and lack of awareness comes from communication problems within the service providing agencies. Other times, it is caused by CIC itself (e.g. out of date website listing erroneous criteria for LINC eligibility). Respondents report that Canadian-born children of learners have been barred from child-minding because of their citizenship status while adult learners have been prevented from attending LINC classes because they passed a temporal cut-off date (understood differently in different regions). These examples happened because of erroneous information not based on current LINC requirements.

**Recommendation 4:** Each region in Ontario needs current and correct information about the services LINC can provide for high need learners and about eligibility criteria. To accommodate easy direct access by all LINC participants, a portal, “**Ask LINC**” can be added to the Settlement.org website or the CIC website. This should be widely communicated, especially within large service- providing organizations where channels of information are not always effective or timely.

**Recommendation 5:** CIC develop a communication strategy to ensure that all regions of the LINC program receive current policy and program requirements and are equally aware of services the program can provide for learners with high need.

CIC Response:

*CIC Ontario Region agrees that correct information about LINC and LINC eligibility should be provided to LINC program personnel and to all learners and, not just those with high needs. CIC agrees that a communications strategy is necessary to ensure that up-to-date information is provided on all CIC websites and in CIC print and electronic publications. CIC does not agree with the suggestion to establish an **Ask LINC** portal on the CIC website because it would be too costly and difficult to maintain a question-and-answer format through an **Ask LINC** portal. It is more important that the LINC Service Providing Organization be in close contact with their settlement officer, particularly when they have concerns about the needs of their LINC students.*

**Issue 4:** High need learners in the LINC program require flexible curriculum and program requirements because they learn, at times, at differential rates from the rest of the class and may as a consequence require individual assistance and/or specialized assistance for concentration and memory deficits.

**Recommendation 6:** Respondents cited the use of volunteer tutors as a good practice to be employed in assisting learners with high need. Volunteer tutors could be recruited and trained by the LINC program coordinators especially with learners who have had their education disrupted and need to develop study skills. Volunteer tutors could be enabled to provide small groups for “learning to learn” classes along side established LINC classes. This would also assist learners in LINC literacy classes to acquire study tools and become more prepared (and confident) to engage in classroom activities and learning.

CIC Response:

*Because LINC uses curriculum guidelines rather than a static curriculum, LINC instructors can adapt material to suit the needs of people who learn at different rates and who may require special assistance. LINC contains the flexibility to quickly respond to emergent needs. Whenever possible volunteer tutors can be used or classroom assistants can be hired to provide assistance in classrooms where students have disabilities. Teaching assistants would be particularly useful in literacy and low-level LINC classes because at these levels there will always be need for classroom support. Volunteer tutors would be a better option for higher levels of LINC.*

*CIC encourages the use of lower student-teacher ratios to address these requirements. Our Contribution Agreements allow an expense under “provision for the disabled”. For students with literacy needs, CIC Ontario Region will issue a clear policy to the effect that assessment centres must refer literacy students to discrete literacy classes.*

**Issue 5:** The findings of this study confirmed the fact that increased funding would enhance LINC’s service delivery with considerable impact for learners with high need. While increased funding would enhance the program for all LINC learners, any measure that improves access to the LINC program and removes barriers has an additional supportive effect on those high need learners struggling to achieve.

**Recommendation 7:** Increased funding allotments to LINC programs could immediately go to meet existing demands in the following areas: professional development on high need-related factors, class field trips, child-minding, smaller class sizes, transportation and more plentiful tools for the program to meet high needs.

CIC Response:

*CIC Ontario Region agrees with the recommendation and is using increased funding obtained through federal increases and through the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement (COIA) to ask SPOs to consider learner needs in their community and the capacity of their organizations to meet those needs when submitting budget requests. Funding allows for the enhancement of LINC delivery to include additional activities and services such as more classes, specialized classes including literacy or seniors' classes, and more childminding services with infant childminding where space allows.*

**Issue 6:** LINC instructors cite that they regularly find evidence of high need learning during the process of teaching but do not know where to refer for specific assessment of learning difficulty nor do they have clear direction on how to proceed within LINC. By observation alone, they are describing some learners as being learning disabled (e.g. dyslexia). Interviews and focus groups cited the frustration of instructors with regard to descriptions of particular need and the lack of resources to assist this group of learners. Professional development sessions held under TESL on the issue of learning disabilities are highly attended by instructors who have serious concerns on how to address this issue and assist high need learners who are observed to have learning disabilities.

**Recommendation 8:** LINC should establish a framework for accommodating learning disabilities that may be addressed within the LINC program and provide tools to assist instructors to determine how high-need learners can be accommodated within the LINC classroom. *Links to Learning: A Manual Linking Second Language Acquisition, Literacy and Learning Disabilities* (1995) is available and has been found to be useful but requires updating to apply to a more contemporary context of settlement.

**Recommendation 9:** Develop a screening tool for assessment centres to identify high need of the learners with regard to learning disabilities. This would not be a specific diagnostic test, but would alert instructors who could then better prepare lesson plans and curricula.

**Recommendation 10:** Develop teaching tools and resources that can assist instructors to better teach learners with learning disabilities. These can be made accessible by means of a web-based resource site. Ensure that professional development opportunities, e.g. conferences and in-service sessions, devote time and attention to teaching another language and learning disabilities.

CIC Response:

*CIC agrees that it should establish a framework for accommodating learning disabilities that may be addressed within the LINC program through teaching methods and teaching resources. CIC also agrees that tools should be provided to assist instructors to determine how high-need learners can be accommodated within the LINC classroom. CIC is considering the Ontario LINC Advisory Committee (ORLAC)'s recommendation*

that an RFP be issued to research and develop a new manual similar to *Links to Learning: A Manual Linking Second Language Acquisition, Literacy and Learning Disabilities* (1995).

*CIC helps ensure professional development opportunities by funding conferences such as the TESL Ontario conference. Although CIC agrees that teaching tools should be developed to address students with high needs, it does not agree with the recommendation to develop a screening tool for assessment centres to identify high needs of learners with regard to learning disabilities. The identification of learning disabilities requires expertise - not just a tool - and CIC prefers to fund activities within its domain and to address needs in order to assist newcomers to become competent in English or French as quickly as possible. Furthermore, because “high needs” as defined in this report is so broad and involves different dimensions of needs, no one assessment would be able to identify all high needs learners. Some would require psychological testing which is outside the field of expertise of assessment centres.*

**Issue 7:** Literacy needs are multifaceted and are found in a many LINC levels. High need learners can be impeded from learning when only one generalized level of literacy is identified.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** A more refined assessment tool for literacy be developed and incorporated at the time of assessment to determine differentiated levels of literacy.

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** Create commensurate levels of LINC literacy classes (basic, intermediate, advanced) to match demonstrated assessed level of need to better accommodate high need literacy learners.

CIC Response:

*CIC recently funded an investigation of best practices in the instruction and assessment of LINC literacy learners in Ontario and will consider these recommendations when it responds to the recommendations resulting from the Literacy study. Commensurate levels of literacy classes are not feasible in many LINC training sites because of physical space limitations. Currently literacy classes have split from LINC level 1 so that literacy students can get more focused attention.*

**Issue 8:** There are few existing *Canadian* resources to assist service providers to offer more appropriate service to high need learners. At the time of LINC’s inception, a variety of resources to assist with high need were designed, but they are more than a decade out of date. In addition, formerly existing resources that were available to language programs (e.g. Bickford Park Library in Toronto) are no longer available due to years of funding cutbacks.

**Recommendation 13:** Make available to instructors a list of existing teaching resources for high need learners. If these resources are not available commercially, CIC should contract writers to produce them. In particular, Canadian resources are needed that can better reflect the specific environment and wider social context of learning. CIC, in concert with appropriate representatives of LINC programs, ORLAC and other advisory groups, should review the resource lists supplied in this report to identify and prioritize those that are most pressing.

**Recommendation 14:** CIC establish a web-based resource list that could be accessed by LINC programs throughout Ontario. This could be a new site or become part of the small existing language resource on Settlement.Com. [sic]

CIC Response:

*CIC agrees with the recommendation that it review the resource lists supplied in the High Needs Report, with advisory groups such as ORLAC, and determine which materials and supplies should be purchased for LINC classrooms so that all LINC classrooms (not just classrooms with high-need learners) are provided with appropriate teaching tools in order to assist newcomers to become competent in English or French as quickly as possible.*

*The Report's definition of high needs is so general and inclusive that it is difficult to determine which students should get what resource assistance and when. CIC does not want to make all LINC program personnel experts on high needs but suggests that LINC program personnel address needs associated with the LINC process and refer LINC students with greater needs to appropriate settlement or mainstream services.*

**Issue 9:** Finding employment is a major issue for learners as expressed in both their focus groups and through instructor questionnaires. A gap between LINC levels and the Enhanced Learning Program [sic] that was especially wide for those with high need was identified.

**Recommendation 15:** CIC address the gap between LINC levels and the Enhanced Language Training (ELT) programs, and develop an intermediate level program. Further, CIC consider delivering ELT through LINC to make a more integrative program. CIC can also explore partnership with the Ontario government to provide paid apprentices and co-op placements (e.g. CIC Atlantic Provinces in partnership with New Brunswick.).

CIC Response:

*CIC Ontario Region has already begun to deliver LINC 6 and 7 in order to address the need for language training at higher CLB levels. Enhanced Language Training (ELT) is also delivered in Ontario. CIC is also partnering with the Ontario government in their*

*Bridge-to-Work initiative, using ELT funding under the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement.*

**Issue 10:** LINC’s eligibility requirements would better serve learners if they were based on need to learn English or French and not on immigration category. Some high need learners have been found to require time to access language classes. Survivors of trauma and torture are frequently most able to access settlement services often only after the “security” of citizenship has been established. According to current CIC regulations, learners who have become citizens are ineligible for LINC or ISAP services.

**Recommendation 16:** Consideration be given to making LINC programs available to learners based on their settlement needs to learn English or French even after the attainment of citizenship.

CIC Response:

*CIC takes note of the suggestion that Canadian citizens should be eligible for its settlement programs. CIC agrees that more flexibility should be built into language training access and will work closely with the Province of Ontario to determine whether Ontario’s eligibility criteria could address this recommendation.*

**Issue 11:** Questionnaire responses and focus groups spoke to the need for LINC classrooms to become more connected with neighborhoods where high need learners are said to be more comfortable and programs easier to access. For some students, an academic setting is not conducive to inclusion and integration. Significant components of learners are found to have experienced torture and organized violence. Agencies specializing in support for this high need group in Canada, the United States and Europe estimate that between 25-35% of refugees arriving in countries of asylum have experienced traumatic events leading to their flight. Focus groups revealed that, at times, depending on particular refugee movements (e.g. a large number at one time arriving from a refugee camp), LINC classes may have a majority of learners who have particular high need related to experience of war, torture and/or persecution.

**Recommendation 17:** More community-based language training programs should be funded. Learners with high need should to be given the opportunity to experience learning the language in a less structured environment. In addition, community based LINC programs will be better suited to pair LINC programs with settlement services and counselling. This will enhance and support the holistic provision of language and high-need support.

**Recommendation 18:** More professional development and web-based resources are needed to assist instructors, administrators and assessment centre staff to pre-emptively recognize the particular high need that may be present among survivors and to provide methods to accommodate them. Frequently focus group members reported that only after much experience were they able to recognize this particular high need in LINC classes.

CIC Response:

*CIC already offers language classes through a variety of Service Providing Organizations (during 2005-2006 CIC funded 132 LINC SPOs).*

*Psychological trauma cannot be addressed in the classroom. LINC sites should, however, be a welcoming and safe environment for all students regardless of pre-immigration experience. CIC is placing settlement workers at LINC sites so that they will be able to assess and address student settlement needs or refer students to mainstream organizations as necessary. CIC also funds alternative methods of language training such as LINC Home Study and LINC tutoring which could help address the training needs of LINC learners who have had traumatic experiences.*

**Issue 12:** Assessment Centres currently provide assessment for knowledge of English and French only. There is a need to assess for high need in order to better prepare the learners, and for the LINC program to better meet these needs.

**Recommendation 19:** Require that LINC Assessment centres assess prospective learners for high need, and that assessment instrument(s) be developed based on the definition of high need as presented in this report. Also to this end, CIC should consult with Assessment Centres to determine their resources and training needs and then provide the Assessment Centres with the appropriate measures and tools to meet those needs.

CIC Response:

*As was mentioned in the response to recommendation #9, CIC prefers to fund activities within its domain and to address needs in order to assist newcomers to become competent in English or French as quickly as possible. CIC funds the assessment centres and assessors to assess language ability. The Report's definition of high needs is so general and inclusive that it is difficult to determine which students would get what resource assistance and when. CIC suggests that LINC program personnel address needs associated with the LINC process and refer LINC students with greater needs to appropriate settlement or mainstream services.*

**Issue 13:** Respondents cited lack of child care to be a major impediment for women who are primary caregivers. As a result, many female learners often must miss class during school holidays and especially during summer breaks.

**Recommendation 20:** Establish additional funding for child-minding, especially during summer breaks for school-age children.

CIC Response:

*CIC Ontario Region agrees with this recommendation and is increasing the number of childminding spaces that it funds. CIC is working with Childminding Monitoring, Advisory, and Support (CMAS), in order to determine how best to implement LINC childminding during summer breaks for school-age children. CIC is interested in funding increased settlement activities for youth.*

**Issue 14:** Of particular concern is the finding that learners with disabilities are not accessing, in any great numbers, if at all, LINC classes or ISAP programs. While the LINC program can provide support to accommodate many special needs within the classroom, this information needs to be communicated to service providers.

**Recommendation 21:** Increase awareness of the potential for LINC to make available supports to individual learners with disabilities through an improved communication strategy.

**Recommendation 22:** Enhance collaboration between mainstream disability organizations, community based agencies and settlement programs. In particular, consult with Ethno-Racial People with Disabilities Coalition of Ontario (ERDCO), to determine what needs to be done to provide genuine access to the LINC program.

**Recommendation 23:** Make available on a web-based resource centre, existing studies and proposals from community based organizations on methods to provide genuine access and accommodation for learners with disabilities. For example, BALANCE has proposed a detailed plan for visually challenged learners.

CIC Response:

*CIC Ontario Region agrees with this recommendation that it communicate the potential of its settlement programs (LINC, ISAP, and Host) to address high needs. All clients, not just high-need clients, should know about the settlement services available in Ontario. CIC will inform LINC instructors, coordinators, and assessors about settlement services available through the Host Program and through the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP). CIC will work to enhance collaboration between mainstream disability organizations and community-based organizations and settlement programs. There needs to be more attention given to making mainstream entities more sensitive and accessible to the LINC population with high needs. Communication tools such as websites, print publications (e.g. Settlement News across the Province SNAP),*

*and conference presentations will be used to inform LINC Service Providing Organizations (SPO) about settlement agencies and services.*