

Building a holistic bridge training program for newcomers through unique partnerships

Presented at
Community-University Exposition

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Today

- Welcome and introductions
- The need...
- The idea...
- The program...
- The outcomes...
- Implications for other partnerships



Immigrant context in Canada

Statistics:

- Immigration accounts for 70 percent of net growth in the labour force
- It will account for 100% net growth by 2011 (Stats Canada)

Barriers:

- Complex credential assessment and recognition requirements
- High cost of education in Canada

Canada has much to gain from allowing its immigrants to realize their full potential and much to lose from failing to do so.

(“Immigration: The Changing Face of Canada”, Policy Brief February 2009)

Immigrant Context In Southern Ontario

Waterloo Region is a magnet for immigrants.

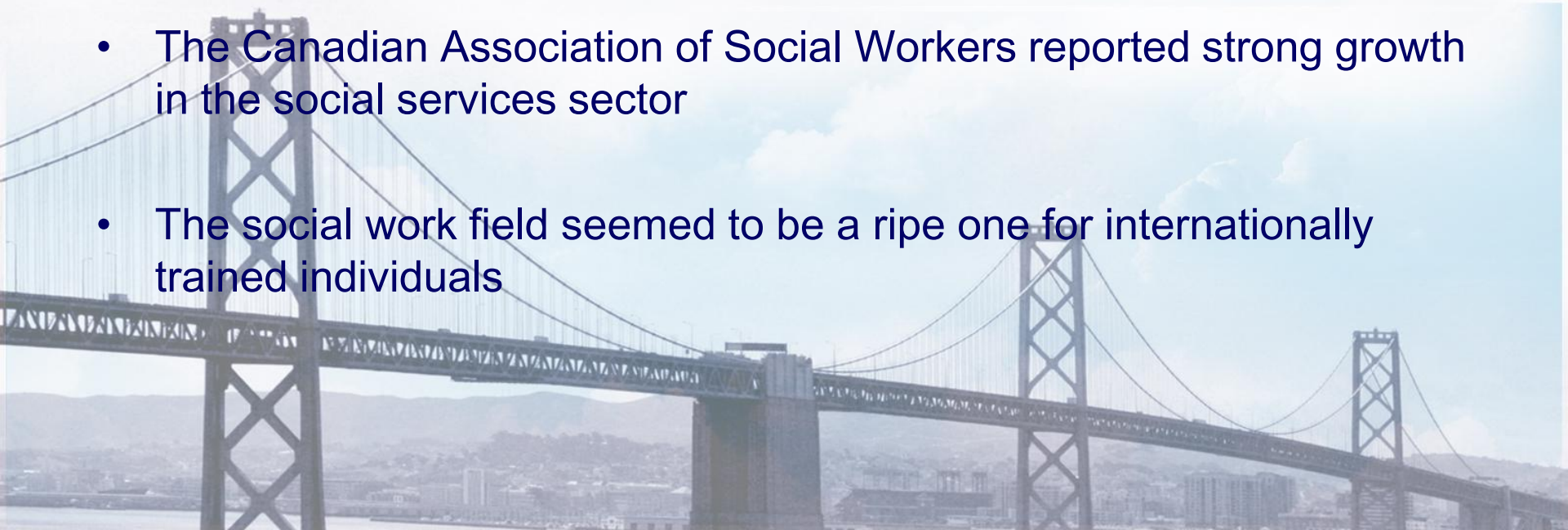
“Currently, one in five residents in Waterloo Region is an immigrant and the Waterloo Region area has the fifth largest per capita immigrant population of all urban areas in Canada behind Toronto, Vancouver, Hamilton and Windsor.”

(Immigrants and Growth: A Look at Health and Employment in Waterloo Region, Region of Waterloo Public Health September 2006)

Immigrant Context In Southern Ontario

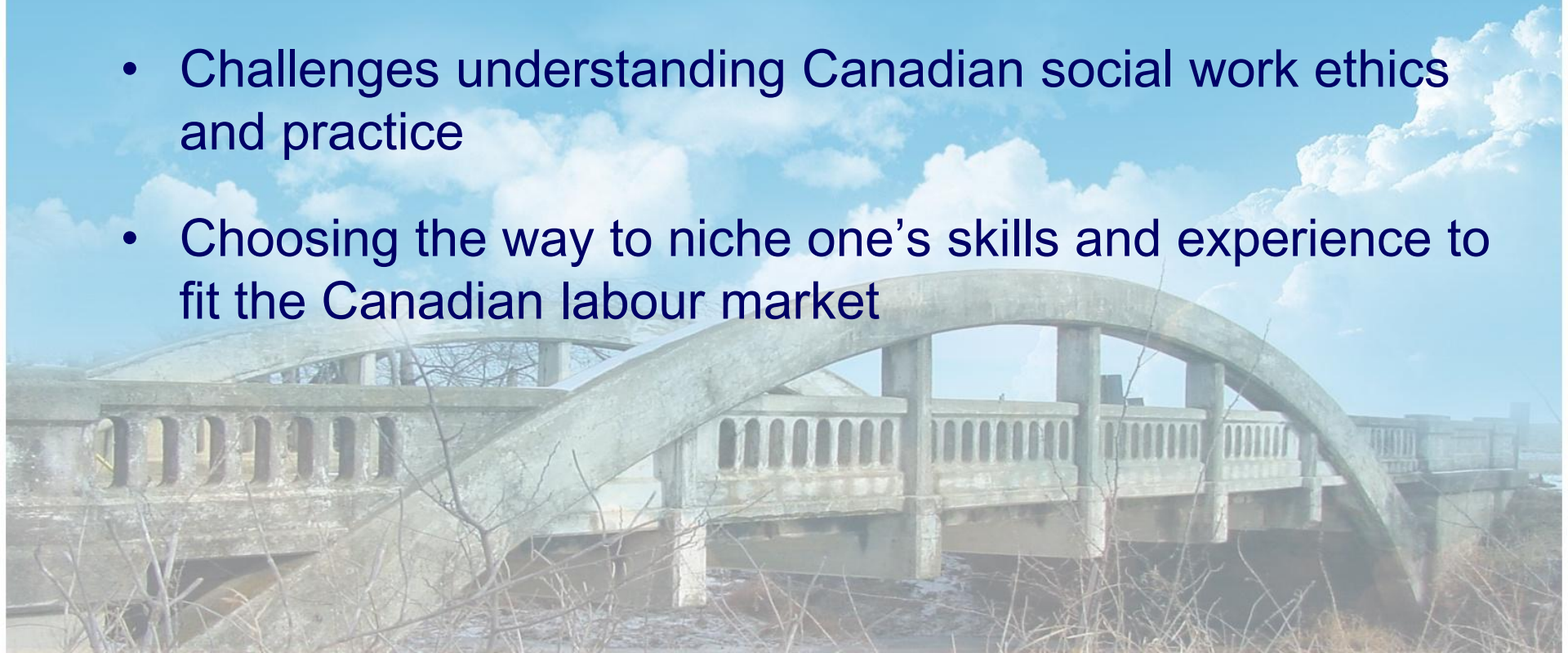
The local labour market in 2007/2008:

- Kitchener-Waterloo agencies assisting large numbers of internationally trained professionals from social work and related fields
- The Canadian Association of Social Workers reported strong growth in the social services sector
- The social work field seemed to be a ripe one for internationally trained individuals



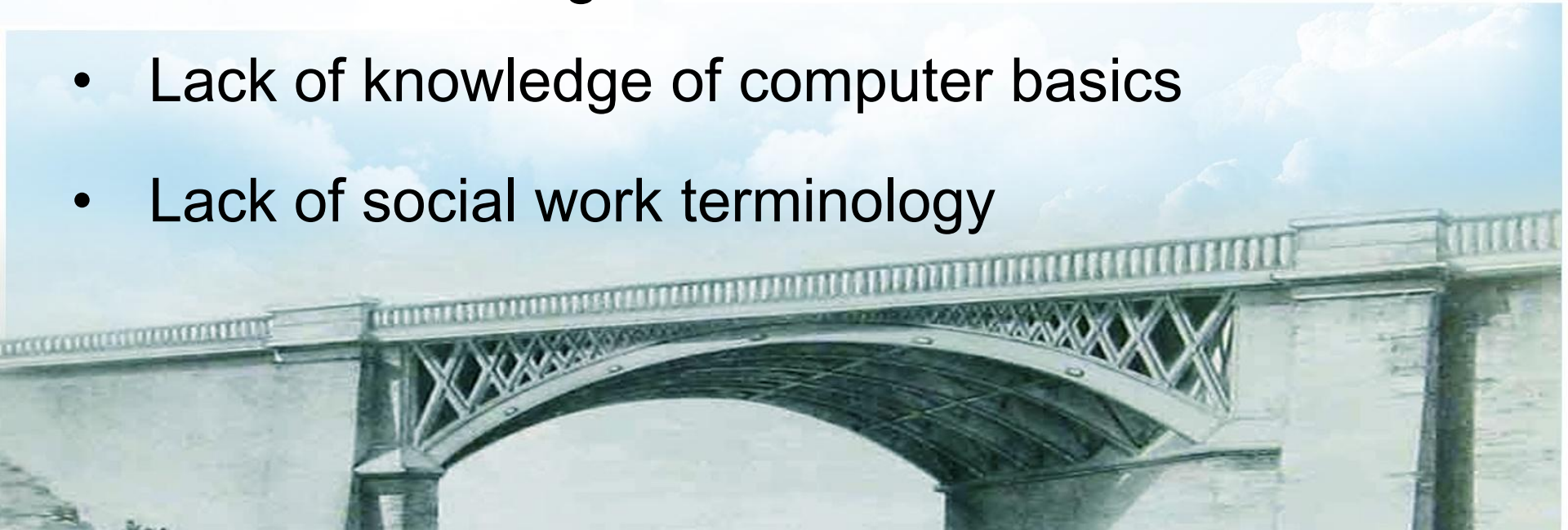
Barriers for Internationally Trained Professionals to enter the field of social work in Waterloo Region:

- Challenges understanding Canadian social service systems
- Challenges understanding Canadian social work ethics and practice
- Choosing the way to niche one's skills and experience to fit the Canadian labour market



Barriers continued...

- Difficulty understanding how to be a pro-active learner in Canadian education system and how to be an active part of workplace learning.
- Lack of Canadian work experience
- Lack of licensing & certification in social work field
- Lack of knowledge of computer basics
- Lack of social work terminology



Bridge Training Programs



- Bridging programs in Canada help skilled immigrants “bridge” the Canadian context and skill gap they experience when seeking to enter regulated professions
- (The Labour Market Experience of Immigrants, World Education Services)
- In Waterloo Region, immigrant professionals had a need for local opportunities for a sector-specific preparatory program.
- A stepping stone to further education or employment

A Unique Partnership

- The Working Centre
- Centre for Community Based Research
- Wilfrid Laurier Faculty of Social Work
- Extend-A-Family
- Renison University College
- Conestoga College



CENTRE FOR
COMMUNITY
BASED RESEARCH



Collaborative Effort

- Process learning of partners
- Willing to overcome differences of approaches, and workplace culture



Overview: Social Work in Waterloo Region bridge training program

- Five month full-time intensive program
- Groups of 15 individuals trained in social work or related fields
- Collaborative effort
- Sought to achieve increased access to education and employment for internationally trained professionals



Major components...

- Work placements
- Social work class room based 'fundamentals'
- Career path and workplace preparation
- One-on-one employment counselling
- System-level changes
- Evaluation



Career Paths Overview

Selected Workshop Topics

- Exploring Learning Strategies
- Reflective Journal Writing
- Occupational Research
- Communication Styles in the Workplace
- Essential Skills for Social Work
- Educational Planning
- New Economy Skills
- Interview Skills
- Self Marketing
- Portfolio Development

Computer Training Overview

Support in developing proficiency in Microsoft applications

Based on the National Occupation Classification System 'Essential Skills' for the social work field (Ontario Skills Passport: <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca>)

Critical to social work training in new economy context



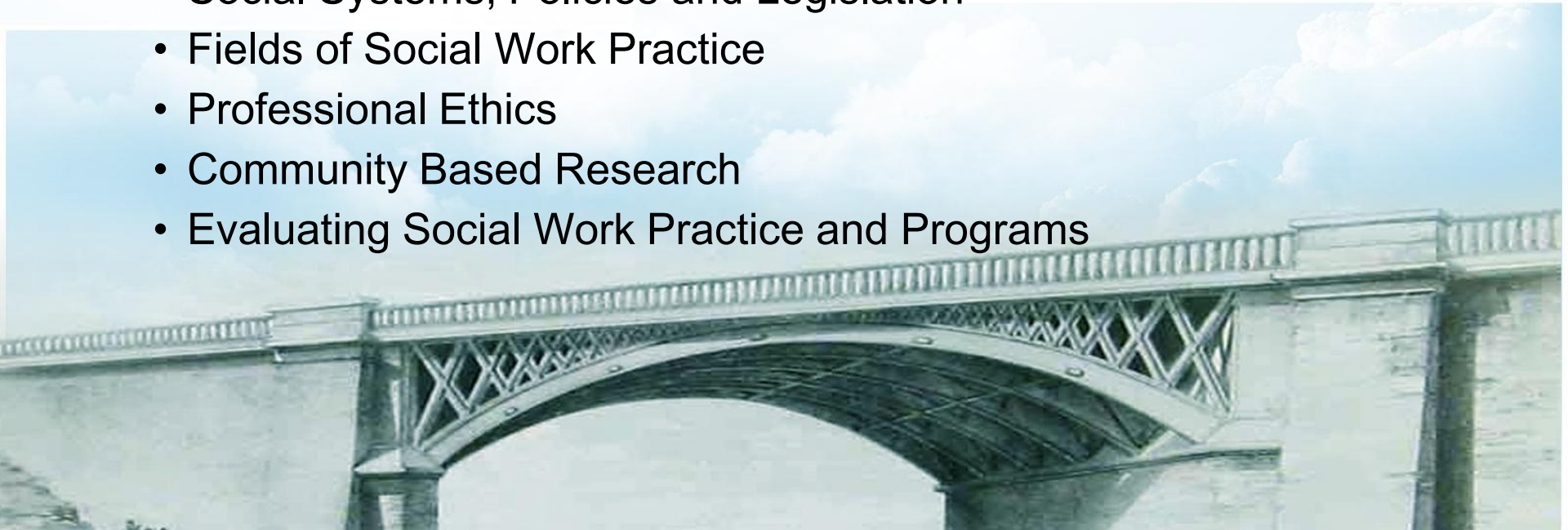
Advanced English for Social Work Overview

Team taught: The Working Centre, Renison University College and Wilfrid Laurier University

- **Basic principles of writing**
- **Advanced writing skills**
- **Training in sector specific terminology**
- **Workplace documentation for the social work sector**
- **The importance of listening and reading**
- **A series of documentation exercises based on an example case study**
- **Advanced grammar**
- **Writing for an audience**
- **Introductory sessions on TOEFL and IELTS preparation**
- **English for the workplace**

The 'Fundamentals'...

- **Broad range of core introductory concepts**
- **Held at the WLU Faculty of Social Work**
 - Social Work in Canada
 - English for Social Work Practice
 - The Helping Process and Basic Helping Skills
 - Social Systems, Policies and Legislation
 - Fields of Social Work Practice
 - Professional Ethics
 - Community Based Research
 - Evaluating Social Work Practice and Programs



The Placements...

- 30 community organizations on board
- Placements shaped to meet individuals' specific goals and life contexts
- Strong community based Advisory Committee facilitated entry to agencies and provided ongoing support
- Credibility of program among agencies was strengthened because of affiliation with local post-secondary social work programs
- Training provided to Workplace Instructors
- Volunteering vs. Practicum experience

Ongoing Evaluation

Purpose: To examine the program's activities, outcomes, unexpected learnings, and recommendations to determine the extent to which it has succeeded in moving internationally educated social workers toward further education and/or employment in their field.

- Collected data from multiple perspectives
- Shared feedback on an ongoing basis
- Provided wider context to help Advisory Committee with decision-making
 - Program changes
 - Differences of opinions mediated

Evaluation Research Design: Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach

Main assumptions underlying PAR:

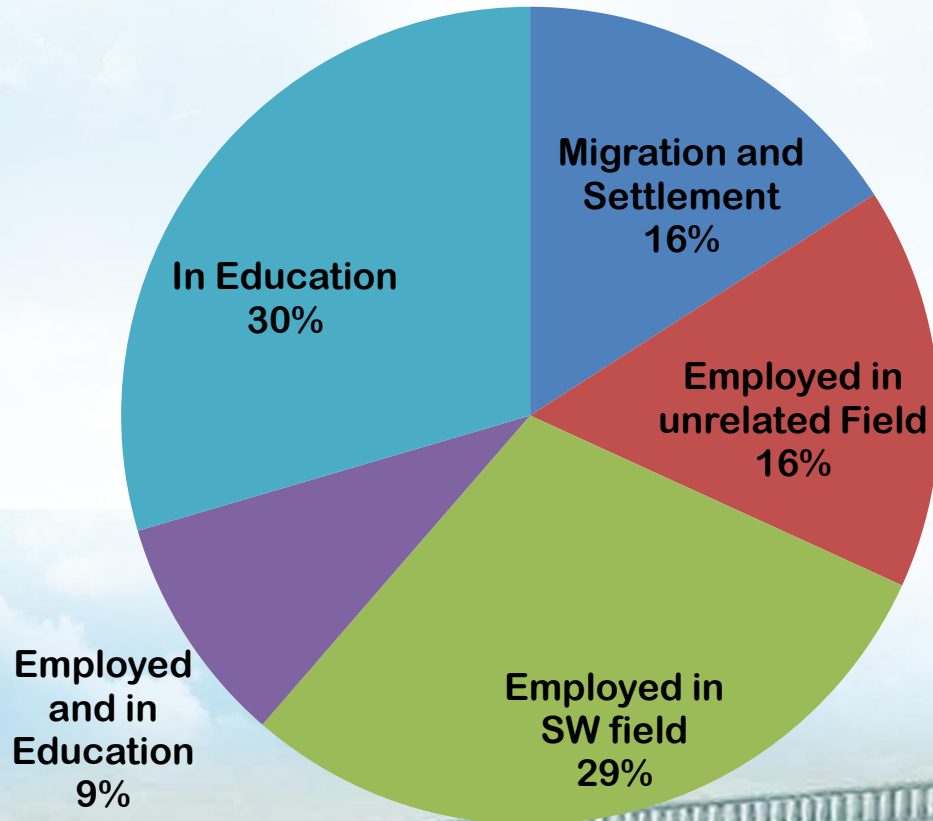
- 1) Empowerment
 - 2) Building supportive relationships
 - 3) Social change/social action
 - 4) Ongoing, reciprocal education
 - 5) Respect for diversity
- (Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998)

Multiple methods: qualitative and quantitative

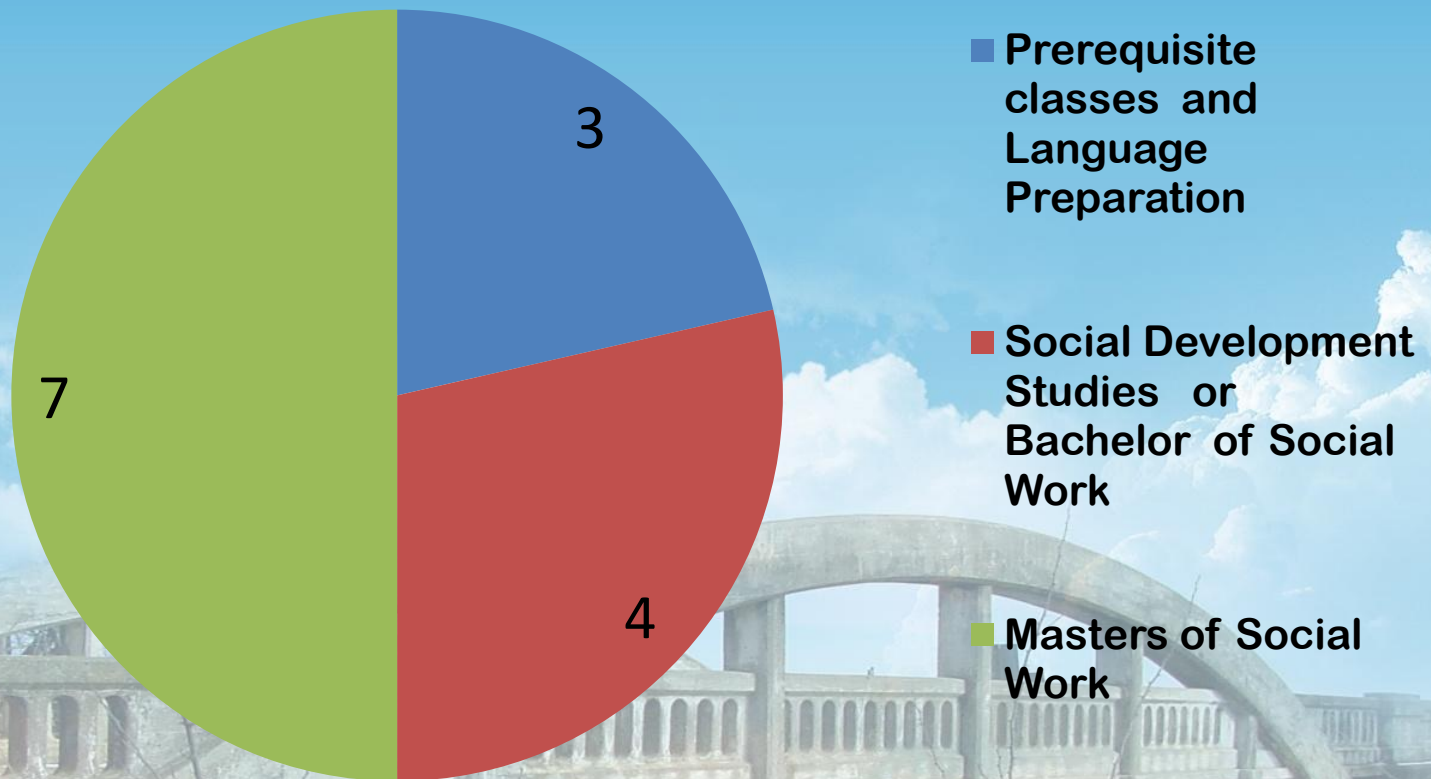
- Document Review
- Participant
- Observation
- Individual Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Web Survey

Participant Outcomes

44 Graduates of the program



Social Work in Waterloo Region: Educational Outcomes 2011



Employment Outcomes occupational roles

Community Assistant

Employment Counselor

Facilitator

Co-Facilitator

Interpreter

Translator

Settlement Assistant

Outreach Worker

Settlement Counselor

Peer Health Worker

Personal Support Worker

Respite Worker

Group Facilitator

Group Support Worker

ECE Worker

Community Outreach Worker

Support Worker

Researcher

Health Records Assistant

Mental Health Navigator

Employer Outcomes in their words...

“When one of our employees completed the Waterloo Region Bridge Training Program, we had the confidence to increase her responsibilities. As a result of her graduation from the program, we have changed her Administrative Assistant duties to include a half-time Settlement Counselor role.” (English at First)



Education Outcomes: programs

**Career Development Practitioner Program
with Conestoga College**

**Bachelor of Social Work
with Renison University College**

**Master of Social Work
with Wilfrid Laurier University**

**Social Service Worker
with Conestoga College**

Further English preparation to meet requirements

Academic Systems Outcomes

Program resulted in:

- Increased diversity of student population
- Enriched program with students contributing international experience
- Forces the social work programs to address admissions barriers / systemic barriers
- Increased communication and growing awareness within Registrar's office and Admissions staff
- Generally more comfortable rapport between and among institutions



Learning & Insight

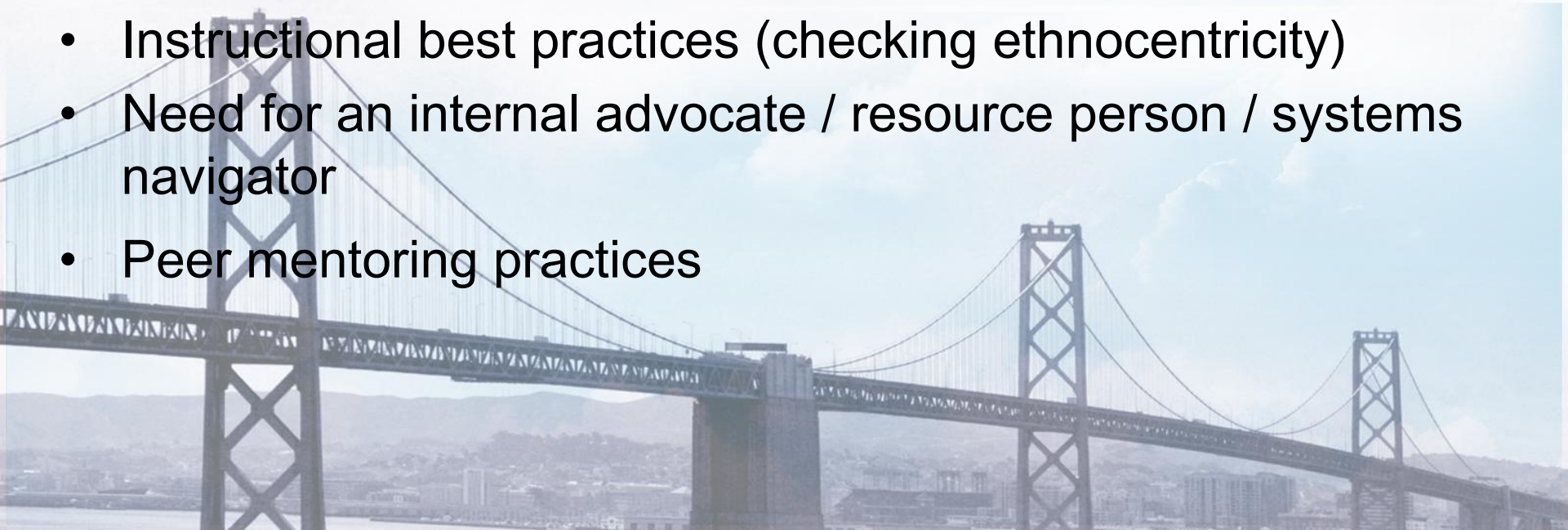
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- Champions in each sector
- Communication
- Constructive Conflict
- Creativity



Education-related Directions Ahead

- Advanced ESL course development for academic preparation (beyond TOEFL)
- Streamline credential assessment processes
- Work across silos to increase access to supports for academic success
- Instructional best practices (checking ethnocentricity)
- Need for an internal advocate / resource person / systems navigator
- Peer mentoring practices



Employment-related Directions Ahead

- Support employers to take hiring risks
- Initiate community dialogue; explore possibility of project-based work
- Provide incentives to employers for role development (e.g. paid placements)
- Open up para-professional & professional roles to Internationally Trained Individuals



Discussion

- What's on your mind about what you heard today?
- Were there surprises or puzzles?
- What are some of your successes/challenges in similar partnerships?
- What are remaining questions that concern you?



Presenters...

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Ongoing Evaluation

Supported the innovative and evolving nature of this program

Purpose: To examine the program's activities and outcomes to determine the extent to which it has succeeded in moving internationally educated social workers toward further education and/or employment in their field.

Main research questions:

- What are the strengths and areas needing improvement in program delivery? (process)
- To what extent has the program succeeded in meeting its anticipated outcomes? (outcomes)
- What discoveries and unexpected outcomes have emerged through the implementation of the pilot project? (learnings)
- What are the suggestions for future groups to improve on the Social Work Bridge Training program? (recommendations)

Multiple methods: qualitative and quantitative

Method	Description
<i>Document Review</i>	Documents were reviewed, including proposal, course outlines, emails, participant writing, advisory committee minutes and participant feedback forms.
<i>Participant Observation</i>	Evaluation team participated in Advisory Committee meetings and additional meetings. They wrote observational field notes relevant to evaluation questions.
<i>Individual Interviews</i>	At the end of each cohort's program, interviews were held with program participants, staff, Advisory committee members, and workplace instructors.
<i>Focus Groups</i>	At the end of each cohort's program, three focus groups were held with members of each of the main stakeholder groups. All partners and participants were invited to participate.
<i>Web Survey</i>	A web survey was made available to all participants to be used as a tool for reflection and feedback at the conclusion of all activities.

Evaluation Research Design

Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach

Main assumptions underlying PAR:

- 1) Empowerment
- 2) Building supportive relationships
- 3) Social change/social action
- 4) Ongoing, reciprocal education
- 5) Respect for diversity

(Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998)

Main mechanisms used to implement PAR approach:

Evaluation team: Content expertise, experiential knowledge, commitment to advancing immigrant employment.

Multi-stakeholder committee. The Project Advisory Committee guided each step of the evaluation process. Sixteen committee members gave input into evaluation.

Ongoing feedback. Over the two years of this project, feedback was shared regularly.

Comments from Graduates

“The Social Work Bridge Training program is such a wonderful experience. Each and every component is an astonishing chapter. The lectures about the Social Work Fundamentals, the Career Paths, the computer training and the Placement are all joys to be celebrated. But the most important part about the program goes beyond the components; it is the people – the anonymous soldiers who have courageously sacrificed their time and effort to make this program a success....The program has offered us the common ground of practicing social work. It has become a landmark in our lives.”

“Now I am standing on the middle of the bridge of change, the bridge of life and the bridge of work transition. As I look ahead with confidence, I also look back with gratitude.”

“Thus, as I am standing in the middle of the bridge, ready to resume my journey. I know which road to take, which decision to make. I see myself as more confident, more positive and more grateful.”

