

research snapshot

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Groundbreaking Program Helps Make York Region More Inclusive

What is this research about?

York Region in Ontario has grown tremendously in the past few years. As the population has increased, so too has diversity. While visible minorities make up 22.8% of Ontario's population, in York Region the percentage rises to 37.2%. Many of these minorities are recent immigrants. And many of them face profound challenges. Newcomers to Canada often lack access to schools, employment, and health care. They suffer from poverty, poor health, and other problems. They exist in a state of 'social exclusion,' isolated from 'mainstream' Canadian life.

In an effort to address the growing diversity in York Region, the Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC) launched the Inclusivity Action Plan (IAP) in 2005. The goal of the IAP was to make York Region more 'inclusive' – in other words, more welcoming to different ethnic groups. But after two and a half years of activity, has the IAP been successful in making York Region a better place for immigrants and other minorities?

What did the researcher do?

Researchers at York University in Toronto undertook an evaluation of the IAP. Their goal was to see if the IAP has helped to improve the lives of immigrants and other minorities in York Region. They used surveys, interviews, and focus groups to assess the impact of the IAP.

What you need to know:

The IAP has begun the work of making York Region a more welcoming place for newcomers and visible minorities. It needs to continue to collaborate with the community and to raise awareness of its goals.

What did the researcher find?

The researchers found that the creation of the IAP alone is one of the most important outcomes of the initiative. The IAP involved the collective vision and efforts of an entire community. It spawned partnerships among a wide variety of politicians, stakeholders, and community members. The support and leadership of the HSPC was crucial to the success of this relationship building.

The IAP was also successful in achieving a number of its specific goals. It launched a Welcome Centre, designed to help newcomers to York Region. It documented the English language programs in the area – an important first step toward building bridges between newcomers and the community. A Charter of Inclusivity and a Circle of Champions program were created to promote greater diversity in organizations. The Charter of Inclusivity sets out guiding principles that will help organizations and workplaces become more inclusive, reflecting York Region's diversity. The Circle of Champions, on the other hand, is a group of eight to ten individuals who will be selected every

year to promote the Charter of Inclusivity. They will also assess those organizations that apply to become Charter Members.

Over the last few years, a number of external organizations and agencies expressed interest in the IAP. This suggests that the IAP was successful in raising awareness about itself and ethnocultural issues. However, there is still a need to improve awareness of the IAP among the general public.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers who are developing programs like the IAP need to:

- Take a long-term approach.
- Address the needs of excluded groups.
- Mobilize all relevant members in a unified way.
- Base decisions on good evidence.

The IAP can continue to build on its success by helping to integrate newcomers into the economy. Also, inclusion is not just an outcome, but a collaborative process. As a result, the IAP needs to continue to work with newcomers and visible minorities as well as politicians, service providers, stakeholders, funding bodies, and other members of the community. The IAP should expand its goals to include other potentially vulnerable groups, including youth, seniors, the disabled, and Indigenous peoples. Finally, inclusivity programs like the IAP should develop an evaluation framework to help measure their ongoing impact.

About the Researcher

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Knowledge Mobilization at York

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