

Summary Evaluation Report for Somali Immigrant Aid Organization Settlement Program

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Executive Summary

This evaluation report reviews the progress achieved by the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization (SIAO) in assessing how their settlement program activities have contributed to the outcomes anticipated in the 2015 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) contribution agreement.

The assessment focused on an analysis of demographic and other data collected from SIAO in the IRCC iCARE database. In addition, the consultant examined a selection of participant satisfaction surveys administered by agency settlement workers for workshops and group sessions conducted in fulfillment of the agreement; and interviewed the three longest-serving settlement workers on their experience in program design and delivery and case management.

Findings indicate that the SIAO Settlement Program meets important needs for the low-income newcomer community of York South Weston by providing one-stop access to a comprehensive range of settlement supports, delivered in a culturally sensitive way primarily to refugees of Somali and African origin. Over the years, the agency has worked closely with the IRCC to design and deliver enhanced services to a population which has frequently experienced dislocation, trauma and violence—in the form of crisis and trauma counseling at whatever stage in their settlement process the participants present themselves. Indeed, as one of the senior settlement workers noted, the collaborations to offer enhanced programming to those of limited means has been critical to their success in Canada.

Recommendations arising from this evaluation are of two kinds:

1. Pilot and implement semi-annual focus groups with clients who have used at least 2 of the funded services, to begin to build a better sense of how further program improvements can maximize program outcomes;
2. Consider the recruitment of additional settlement workers to support the counseling needs of the increasing case load of refugee clients who often come with trauma and other mental health issues which can slow or delay their fullest participation in the agency's programming.

Background

The 2015 Contribution Agreement with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) included a plan by the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization (SIAO) Settlement program to embed program evaluation in its ongoing program work and management with:

- A process of monthly staff reviews of clients seen in each program area and which serve as the main source of data for the semi-annual reports to the funder;
- End of program client satisfaction surveys;
- Semi-annual client focus groups on the proposed outcomes; and
- The annual report.

This marks increased attention to an evidence-based approach to facilitating the improvement of program outcomes that comes in tandem with improvements in the Immigration Contribution Agreement Reporting Environment (iCARE) during the life of the current contribution agreement.

This report assembles available data from all the above sources, noting program improvements that have occurred during the life of the 2015 agreement as well as summarizing recommendations for continued improvement.

Methodology

Data summarized in this report include:

Profile of Clients served

This information is derived from IRCC data summaries, developed as a result of data provided on a quarterly basis by the SIAO Settlement Program to act as a consolidated source of comprehensive data on program participants.

Summary of Client Satisfaction Surveys

Information provided here comes from an analysis of Client Satisfaction Surveys collected in 2017-18 at the end of several series of the specialized settlement programs offered by SIAO, including:

- Youth programming
- Mental health
- Pre-employment, and
- General settlement (preparation for citizenship).

Staff Review of program progress

This information is summarized from key informant interviews with 2 of the more senior SIAO settlement workers, who were asked to comment on:

- program design and review,
- recruitment of program participants,
- success factors in program delivery, and
- recommendations for future program development.

Data Presentation

Profile of the clients served

The iCARE summary for the SIAO highlights the characteristics of clients served by the agency as set out below.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Clients receiving at least one settlement service at SIAO, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019¹

Demographic Characteristics	2017-2018 N=740		2018-2019 N=977	
	No.	%	No.	%
Age:				
0-24	204	27.6	237	24.3
25-64	517	69.9	715	73.2
65+ and not stated	19	2.6	25	2.5
Gender:				
Male	408	55.1	604	61.8
Female and not stated	332	44.9	373	38.2
Immigration Class				
Family class	96	13.0	96	9.8
Economic immigrants	27	3.6	47	4.9
Refugees	529	71.5	725	74.2
Other & not stated	88	11.9	109	11.2
Mother tongue:				
Somali & other African	550	74.3	807	82.6
English or French	32	4.3	32	3.3
Other European	20	2.7	31	3.2
Other not enumerated above	138	18.6	107	11.0
Intended occupation:				
Open, professional, and entrepreneurs	186	25.1	110	11.3
New workers	348	47.0	638	65.3

¹ Source, ICARE detailed data extract, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, RDM, July 2018; April 2019.

Students	120	16.2	164	16.8
Non-workers, homemakers, retired & other	89	12.0	65	6.7

As can be seen in Table 1, the SIAO Settlement Program serves the full age spectrum, predominantly in the 25-64 age group. In the 2018 cohort, just over half are male; just under half are female; in the 2019 cohort those of working age account for just over 75% of the total. Approximately half of the 2018 client load are or will be new workers; about one-fourth expect to be professionals or entrepreneurs; the remaining one-fourth are students or others not necessarily headed for employment. In the 2019 cohort, refugees account for the largest single group, but the pattern is otherwise consistent with the 2018 cohort.

Consistent with its historic mandate to serve Somali and North African newcomers. The great majority of the client group are refugee claimants, from Somalia and the rest of Africa. In recent years, according to staff, service has expanded slightly to support other than African, we assume primarily as a result of location in Weston, a west-end Toronto community particularly hospitable to low income newcomers.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Clients receiving SIAO Needs Assessment and Referral Services, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019²

Demographic Characteristics	2017-2018 N=567		2018-2019 N=798	
	No.	%	No.	%
Age:				
0-24	163	28.7	214	26.8
25-64	390	68.8	563	70.6
65+ and not stated	14	2.5	21	2.6
Gender:				
Male	324	57.1	500	62.7
Female and not stated	243	42.9	298	37.3
Immigration Class				
Family class	71	12.5	73	9.1
Economic immigrants	21	3.7	44	5.5
Refugees	399	70.4	581	72.8
Other & not stated	76	13.4	100	12.5
Mother tongue:				
Somali & other African	429	75.7	666	83.5
English or French	26	4.6	28	3.5
Other not enumerated above	112	19.8	100	12.5

² Source, ICARE detailed data extract, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, RDM, July 2018; April 2019.

Intended occupation:				
Open, professional, and entrepreneurs	146	25.7	99	24.9
New workers	260	45.9	500	62.7
Students	99	17.5	145	18.2
Non-workers, homemakers, retired & other	62	10.9	54	6.8

Table 2 summarizes demographic data for clients who have commenced the needs assessment and referral process at SIAO. By comparison with Table 1, the range of responses to each of the demographic items is similar. Compared to the 2018 cohort, we note an increase in the proportion of male participants; as well, there is a slight increase in participants who are refugees and who speak Somali or another African language. Although this is not directly explained by client characteristics, staff suggest that access to the one-stop services, including access to informal child care, promised by a local program such as SIAO make it an obvious choice both for Africans and for the larger group of non-African newcomers who live in or near Weston.

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of Clients receiving SIAO Information and Orientation Services, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019³

Demographic Characteristics	2017-2018 N=208		2018-2019 N=646	
	No.	%	No.	%
Age:				
0-24	63	30.3	132	20.4
28-64	139	66.8	497	76.9
65+ and not stated	6	2.9	17	2.6
Gender:				
Male	117	56.3	410	63.5
Female and not stated	91	43.7	236	36.5
Immigration Class				
Family class	19	9.1	58	9.0
Economic immigrants	10	4.8	30	4.6
Refugees	173	83.2	490	75.9
Other & not stated	6	2.9	68	10.5
Mother tongue:				
Somali & other African	167	80.3	543	84.1
English or French	7	3.4	23	3.5
Other not enumerated above	34	6.0	80	12.4

³ Source, ICARE detailed data extract, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, RDM, July 2018; April 2019.

Intended occupation:				
Open, professional, and entrepreneurs	7	3.4	74	11.5
New workers	141	67.8	445	68.9
Students	41	19.7	94	14.6
Non-workers, homemakers, retired & other	19	9.1	33	5.1

Table 3 summarizes the usage of the SIAO information and orientation programs, including in particular the mental health and youth programs, and access to other specialized programming including for vulnerable seniors and pre-employment training for those with limited English. By comparison with 2018, the 2019 cohort is more likely to be of working age, male, a refugee, speaking Somali or another African language as a mother tongue, and to be preparing to be a new worker.

Although not directly explained by clients and the client data, staff have suggested that the configuration of services and resources available—a fully-equipped computer lab, access to quality informal child care, support services in the form of transit subsidies, interpretation and translation in north African and Arabic languages, as well as culturally sensitive crisis and trauma counseling—and the case management approach make the SIAO location an important consideration for local newcomers with complex needs.

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Clients receiving SIAO Language Training Services, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019⁴

Demographic Characteristics	2017-2018 N=89		2018-2019	
Age:	No.	%		
0-24	7	7.9		
28-64	78	87.6		
65+ and not stated	4	4.5		
Gender:				
Male	32	36.0		
Female and not stated	57	64.0		
Immigration Class				
Family class	23	25.8		
Economic immigrants	4	4.5		
Refugees	56	62.9		
Other & not stated	6	6.7		

⁴ Source, ICARE detailed data extract, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, RDM, July 2018; 2019 cohort data not available at the time of this report.

Mother tongue:				
Somali & other African	56	62.9		
English or French	4	4.5		
Other European (Port, Span & Hung)	9	10.1		
Other not enumerated above	20	22.5		
Intended occupation:				
Open, professional, and entrepreneurs	14	15.7		
New workers	63	70.8		
Students, homemakers, retired & other	12	13.6		

Table 4 summarizes the characteristics of those enrolled in Language Training. Again, although the numbers are smaller, reflecting a program capacity of 70 (including literacy as well as LINC for CLB levels 1 to 6). According to staff, retention in the LINC programs is due to the supports SIAO can provide for clients, including high quality informal child care, transportation subsidies, access to the computer lab, and to culturally sensitive counseling and problem solving.

In 2017, 2018, and 2019, the typical LINC client was able to complete 3 CLB levels in approximately a year.

Client Satisfaction Surveys

Beginning in 2017, SIAO settlement staff were able to implement client satisfaction surveys to those who completed at least one of the generic information and orientation program sessions which serve as a supports for the completion of their individualized settlement plans or of the specialized settlement programs workshops, circles or other group sessions offered.⁵

Table 5. Summary of Selected Client Satisfaction Surveys administered by 5 SIAO settlement staff for group sessions in Needs Assessment, Information and Orientation, Mental Health, Youth and Pre-Employment, April to December 2018

Program Name	Q3. % Answered Excellent to Adequacy of Information	Q4. % Answered Excellent to Quality of class	Total Number of participants in group sessions April -Dec. 2018
General Information & Orientation	100	95	134

⁵ See the generic Settlement Client Feedback Sheet, Appendix 1. Each settlement worker is responsible for amending the feedback form to reflect information from her area of work.

Mental Health Program	100	100	240
Youth Program	100	90	67
Employment Worker	95	100	520

As noted in Table 5, client satisfaction is very high. Few clients entered information in the comment section, a result, staff suggest, of the limited English skills of many of the clients. Since this was often a reason for their recruitment to SIAO in the first place, this is not a surprising result. According to staff, the focus on experiential learning in the workshops and access to resources, including referrals for additional counseling, the computer lab and other support services likely contributed to high client satisfaction.

Staff Review of program progress

Particularly where settlement staff have long service, as at SIAO, their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the client group and strengths and weaknesses of the programming can provide important information on the capacity of the agency to meet program outcomes, and so the evaluation design sought feedback from the senior settlement workers, according to the key informant questionnaire.⁶

Format of workshops

The format varies, according to the aims and objectives of the workshop and the characteristics of the target group. Where other resources or facilities were to be used, for example the computer lab, group size was most likely to be around 10 to a maximum of 15, with similar workshops being offered repeatedly (typically every 2 weeks or month for information and orientation workshops or monthly or quarterly for most specialized workshops). The workshops have generally been designed for interaction between the workshop leader and participants, and among participants.

For example, citizenship application workshops, among the most popular, are offered to a group of 10 at a time, 20 times a year. Conversation circles, computer lab orientations, and career development for employment typically start every week throughout the year, for 6 to 10 participants at a time, and last as long as clients find them useful—typically 3-4 weeks before they get a referral to pre-employment or another similar program. Other workshops are offered in series of 4, 5 or 10 weeks in a row.

Recruitment and selection for workshops

Clients who have access to the SIAO needs assessment and referral process can self-select, but most frequently the settlement worker will make suggestions as the client is completing the process of the individualized settlement plan.

⁶ See Appendix 2. Three of the five settlement workers were interviewed, and a summary of their responses appears in the text.

Client Achievement or who does well? Who does poorly or drops out?

The clients who do well in workshops are generally those who have a better understanding of English and some familiarity with life in Canada; if they have social or psychological issues, it is generally preferable to deal with these through one-on-one sessions. A few clients will start a workshop series and have to drop out because of child care or other issues, but will often be back once these issues are dealt with.

New programming initiatives

SIAO has been diligent in monitoring program outcomes of our clients over several years and made recommendations for program improvements to accommodate many of the issues of our client base, including:

- low literacy for some clients, resulted in addition of a formal Literacy section to the LINC programming in 2013
- social supports, including not only informal child care, but also transit subsidies, interpretation and translation of documents
- enhanced program supports, for example mental health group and individual sessions, pre-employment for those eager to work, but with limited English, 'You are not Alone' sessions on elder abuse, violence, trauma, financial literacy and the like for vulnerable seniors.

Without exception, these programs have helped the agency offer a more comprehensive service which helps to improve outcomes for our client groups.

Summary and Discussion

Consistent with the 2017 IRCC evaluation of the Settlement program,⁷ clients with higher human capital (that is, already competent in English or French, possessing an advanced professional credential on admission to Canada) derive greater benefits faster from IRCC-funded settlement services than those with less human capital. SIAO, with a history of 30 years of activity in the York South Weston area has done an admirable job of designing and delivering programming which improves the outcomes for the lower-income, mainly visible minority refugee demographic of the community.

Particularly in the life of the current contribution agreement, this has resulted in:

- creative use of social supports to provide transportation subsidies, interpretation and translation of documents and the like to eliminate barriers to access for newcomers; and
- program enhancements stemming from the comprehensive needs assessment and referral process and case management approach adopted which

⁷ IRCC Evaluation Division (November 2017). Evaluation of the Settlement Program. Reference No. E2-2016.

- have built on crisis counseling to offer more fulsome mental health programming to include supports to those suffering the effects of trauma and addictions,
- address the issues of a small but critical population of seniors in the form of a series branded 'You are not Alone', which offers financial literacy, community and other self-help supports to seniors experiencing or at risk of experiencing elder abuse, and
- rejig agency pre-employment and similar programming to accommodate the limited English used by clients at CLB level 4 or 5, who are eager to begin their job search.

While some program participants may take a little longer to reach full English competence, the SIAO programming contributes greatly to their settlement and integration into Canadian life. It is also important to point out that improvements in curriculum supports and access to high quality professional development for staff such as those who are recruited by SIAO, have facilitated staff innovation, for example, in the area of improved programming in simple English.

Recommendations

SIAO has made its reputation in the York South Weston area through its efforts to provide full wrap-around and comprehensive culturally-sensitive services for its target clients at a single stop, near to local schools and other community agencies in a way that works well for them, and will continue to do so.

We have two recommendations for the next contribution agreement/cycle:

1. Pilot and implement semi-annual focus groups with clients who have used at least 2 of the funded services to begin to build a better sense of how further program improvements can maximize outcomes;
2. Consider the recruitment of additional settlement workers to support the counselling needs of refugee clients who often come with trauma and other mental health issues which slow or delay their fullest participation in the agency's programming.

Appendix 1

Client Feedback form

Somali Immigrant Aid Organization
Client Feedback Sheet

Youth Settlement Worker Workshop

The following questions will provide the clients feedback in regards to services you have received. This will help us improve how we offer the services to you at our organization.

Services Provided	1= Poor – 3=Excellent
1. Did you receive the services that you were seeking? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Were you pleased with the Youth Settlement Worker workshop? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure <input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Do you think you were provided with adequate information with regards to: ➤ Our role and services ➤ Steps needed to achieve your goal ➤ The overall outcome Comments:	1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3
4. How would you rate the quality of the class? ➤ Knowledge ➤ Sensitivity to your needs/feelings ➤ Trustworthiness ➤ Reliability Comments:	1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3
5. How would you rate your satisfaction with the overall service provided by the Teacher? 1 2 3 Comments:	

Thank you for your feedback

Appendix 2.

Staff Questionnaire for Program and Case Management Evaluation

Questions for program staff

For each program component:

Can you describe briefly the format (eg workshops of 10 sessions, evening, up to 10 participants, topics include...) of the intervention?

Who attends? How are they selected for the program?

What does completion look like? Eg. Complete a work plan, get drivers' licence, etc.

Who does well? Who does poorly, or drops out?

Can you share results of satisfaction survey for this component? (short table for whole group for year, or sections)

During the life of the last agreement, new programming was introduced in mental health, senior and youth programming. Did they meet the needs for which they were intended? Are there other unmet needs we should mention?

Any other comments?