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‘They Can Live a Life Here’

Current and Past Tenants’
Experiences with IRCOM’s
Model of Housing and
Wrap-Around Supports

By Jill Bucklaschuk

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CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
MANITOBA OFFICE

Unit 205 – 765 Main St., Winnipeg, MB R2W 3N5
TEL 204-927-3200 FAX 204-927-3201
EMAIL ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca



Immigrant and Refugee
Community Organization of Manitoba



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About the Author

Jill Bucklaschuk recently completed a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Guelph and has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Manitoba. Currently, she is a community-based researcher, specializing in collaborative community-engaged research on immigration and settlement in Manitoba.

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Introduction

Finding affordable, secure, good quality housing is an essential and immediate part of the early settlement process for immigrants and refugees. Yet, obtaining appropriate housing can be daunting and often impossible in housing markets with a dearth of affordable housing and low vacancy rates. Newcomers are often unfamiliar with the particularities of local practices, lack social networks, and have limited financial resources, which contribute to their struggles when searching for housing that meets their needs. As a number of studies have found, housing is the foundation of the settlement process, from which all other elements of the process develop (Carter, Polevychok, & Osborne, 2009; Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary, 2015; Shier, et al., 2014). Without access to good housing, the entire settlement process is in jeopardy; without good housing, newcomers can struggle to develop a sense of stability, security, and inclusion in their new community.

Despite the importance of housing, it is not a significant consideration in Canada's settlement and integration policies, programs, and services. While there is a plethora of supports and services designed and funded to assist newcomers in

their early settlement process, housing remains on the periphery and not an integral element of immigrant and refugee services. Housing is not commonly part of the mandates of settlement service provider organizations and when housing services are available they are often in

“A lack of stable housing is correlated with more marginalized social networks, higher rates of unemployment, inability to build assets and meet other needs, increased stress, and a longer and more difficult integration process overall. In other words, without adequate housing as the cornerstone, the entire structure of settlement is put at risk” (Francis and Hiebert, 2014, p. 64).

the form of referrals to other organizations or resources (Wayland, 2007). Settlement services and housing are not effectively conjoined and, as Francis and Hiebert (2014) argue, better linkages between settlement and housing policy are required in Canada. As such, there are few best practice models of newcomer housing policies and programs in Canada since housing is not often a core settlement focus despite the fact that it remains one of the base necessities for establishing a new life in a new place.

Existing at this important and neglected intersection between settlement and housing policy, services, and programming is *Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba Inc.* (IRCOM). Operating since 1991 in Winnipeg's inner city, IRCOM works to alleviate the stresses that newcomers experience in their early settlement process by providing wrap-around supports within two affordable housing complexes (IRCOM House), located on Ellen Street and Isabel Street. The organization's mission is to provide affordable transitional housing, programs, and services in an environment that empowers newcomer families as they integrate into the wider community. It serves low-income newcomer families by providing housing and offering accessible programs and services during the first few years after arrival. By offering an array of accessible supports and services within the building in which newcomers live, IRCOM aids the settlement process by implementing structures and relationships that allow people to pursue employment, training, and skill-building opportunities that could otherwise be constrained by isolation or other barriers. Families can live in IRCOM House for a maximum of three years, gaining knowledge and skills that will lead to their independence and empowerment as they eventually find another place to live and settle in Winnipeg.

This research report presents findings from a three-year project that explored the experiences of a sample of IRCOM's current and past tenants, each of whom was interviewed three times over

the course of the study. It is the final report for the project and builds on, but does not replicate, a report released in August 2016 that presented an in-depth history of IRCOM, details about its programs, and preliminary findings from the first round of interviewing (Bucklaschuk, 2016).

This final report proceeds by briefly contextualizing the study and discussing the issue of affordable housing and settlement supports for newcomers. Then it provides details of the study's methodology, followed by an introduction to the interview participants who generously lent their time and shared their experiences once a year for three years. Next, the report delves into a discussion of tenants' experiences while living at IRCOM House, focusing on the benefits that both the housing and programming provided as well as some of their challenges.

The report then presents details about participants' lives once they move out of their IRCOM apartments. Exploring the experiences of past tenants allows for a rich discussion of the benefits provided by IRCOM, since hindsight and reflection enable participants to compare and contrast their current situations with the past and with other newcomers living in the community. Following that is a discussion of the observed changes in participants' lives over the course of the study. Finally, the report concludes with a summary and an argument in support of closer linkages between housing and settlement policies, which will benefit newcomer families as they undergo what is a long and complex process of settlement and integration.

Affordable Housing and Settlement Supports for Newcomers

Urban centres in Canada lack good-quality and affordable housing, which negatively affects and contributes to the ongoing struggles of low-income families (Silver, 2011). With inadequate supplies of social housing and increasingly expensive private market rents, low-income Canadians have few options for stable, safe, and affordable housing. The recent *National Housing Strategy* (NHS), which is a ten-year, \$40 billion plan to address some of these challenges, has placed emphasis on generating best practices and research that can work toward informing and achieving strategies that enhance housing access and affordability for Canadian families while contributing to new social housing development targets.

One of the NHS's priority theme areas is to address housing needs for newcomer and refugee families. Recent events such as the Syrian refugee crisis and Canada's ongoing need to attract immigrants as a response to perceived labour market shortages have brought attention to the fact that few Canadian cities can adequately house large arrivals of newcomers, which compromises successful settlement and fails to meet Canada's obligations to these populations (Silvius et al, 2017). Given the erosion of subsidized and social housing, in addition to a lack

of growth in the affordable housing market, immigrant and refugee families are at increasing risk of being in 'core housing need' (see Table 1 for Winnipeg data).

Newcomers face many barriers to obtaining affordable, secure, and good quality housing. According to a number of studies, these barriers are quite predictable regardless of the place in which people settle. Affordability, language barriers, a lack of knowledge, and discrimination have been consistently found to compromise newcomers' ability to find housing (Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Murdie, 2008; Shier et al, 2014; Teixeira, 2009). Newcomers typically struggle to find housing that is of appropriate size, in good condition, and in neighbourhoods that are both central and safe. As a result, new immigrants are increasingly becoming the 'hidden homeless', as they share crowded spaces with other families, experience precarious housing, and struggle to find stability and security in Canada (Hiebert, 2011; Keung, 2012). Being unable to secure housing contributes to stresses, negatively affects mental and physical health, compromises successful settlement and integration, and contributes to a poor sense of belonging and inclusion (Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary, 2015).

TABLE 1 Immigrants in Core Housing Need in Winnipeg, 2011*

	All Households	Renters	Owners
Non-immigrant	9.8%	22.5%	4.2%
Immigrant	11.7%	24.7%	6.1%
Period of Immigration			
Prior to 1986	8.1%	20.0%	4.6%
1986 – 1995	9.2%	16.6%	6.6%
1996 – 2000	9.6%	20.9%	5.2%
2001 – 2005	12.3%	22.4%	7.1%
2006 – 2011	24.9%	35.2%	12.7%

SOURCE Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (National Household Survey-based housing indicators and data). Canadian Housing Observer.

* More recent data detailing immigrants' core housing need has yet to be released.

Refugees face particular challenges upon arrival in Canada. Unlike economic immigrants, refugees typically arrive from circumstances of trauma and profound dislocation with very limited financial resources and few established social networks (Rose, 2016). Their resettlement process and needs differ from immigrants arriving through other categories since a refugee's dislocation is often attached to trauma and linked to mental health challenges, physical illnesses, fractured families, and other struggles. Given these factors, refugees require and receive particular accommodation for housing and other settlement supports. For example, Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) receive federal government support for temporary housing up to three-months after arrival. They can then also access the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), which will provide allowances for housing and basic needs for up to one year after arrival (Silvius, 2016). Privately-Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) must be assisted by their sponsors for up to one year after arrival, and this support is to include the cost of housing and other settlement needs. Despite these supports, accessing affordable housing remains a considerable challenge, even many years after arrival (Carter, Polevychok, & Osborne, 2009; Hiebert, 2016; Rose, 2016; Silvius et al, 2015). With a real lack of good-quality and affordable housing in urban centres, refugees

struggle to find housing that will accommodate their typically larger families while still being affordable. They are also more likely to encounter discrimination, language differences, and systemic barriers in their searches for housing.

Indeed, both immigrants and refugees require an array of services and supports as they settle and integrate. The federal government, through the Department of *Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada* (IRCC), funds local settlement service provider organizations to deliver necessary services, which are designed to contribute to successful settlement outcomes, to eligible newcomers. The emphasis of many of these services and supports is placed on general orientation to Canada, practical settlement supports, and ensuring pathways into the labour market. As such, these organizations often offer services related to employment assistance, language training, skills upgrading, and general information. Accessing services and supports through these federally-funded settlement service organizations can be one of the first steps newcomers take toward establishing themselves in Canada, and they can do so with guidance and current information from professionals. However, some studies have found that only about one-third of all newcomers do access supports through such organizations, leaving the majority of newcomers finding settlement assistance through other

means or not at all (Lo et al, 2010; Wilkinson & Bucklaschuk, 2014). As the first report from this project discusses, there are a number of barriers to accessing services that newcomers experience, which negatively impacts the settlement process and may contribute to them not accessing supports through settlement service provider organizations (Bucklaschuk, 2016).

Addressing a number of issues raised in this discussion, IRCOM acts as both housing and settlement service provider organization. Their holistic model of providing wrap-around supports¹ for low-income newcomer families within an affordable housing complex is one of few such models in Canada.² It alleviates a number of the barriers that immigrant and refugee families face both in the housing market and when accessing settlement services. Focusing on providing affordable housing for low-income immigrant and refugee families, rent at IRCOM House is subsidized. Housing and rent subsidies are available through a sponsor management agreement between *Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation* (MHRC) and IRCOM.³ Rent is based on MHRC's Rent Geared to Income program, which increased from 28 percent to 30 percent of household income on November 1, 2018. If a household receives financial support through

Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), then their rent is based on the shelter allowance. Rent at IRCOM House is inclusive of heat, electricity, water, fridge, and stove. Some of the building's two and three-bedroom suites are wheelchair accessible. There is also on-site management and regular apartment maintenance available.

The organization also provides numerous core programs to newcomers, one-on-one supports, and extensive referrals to families within the building. They conduct in-house visits, assist newcomers with settlement planning and goal setting, deliver a multitude of workshops, and offer interpretation services. As of October 2018, IRCOM's original housing complex, which is located at 95 Ellen Street, houses 242 tenants.

Given the high demand for IRCOM House and its programming, the organization opened a second location at 215 Isabel Street. A project that had been in development since 2010, it became fully operational in 2017 and is now at capacity, housing over 250 newcomers. The Isabel Street location has 60 apartments that can be configured to accommodate family sizes ranging from two to eight; when configured to house larger families there are 48 suites. Like IRCOM on Ellen Street, the Isabel Street location offers robust programming and supports within the building.

¹For a rich discussion highlighting the importance of providing affordable housing in combination with wrap-around supports, see Jess Klassen's report on the experiences of people living at *WestEnd Commons* in Winnipeg (Klassen, 2018).

²*Sojourn House* in Toronto provides a two-year subsidized housing program for refugee families.

³ Beginning as the *South East Asian Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba* (SEARCOM) in the mid 1980s, the organization evolved into IRCOM Inc. in 1991. With charitable status, IRCOM Inc. engages in the management of the building and administration of programming. IRCOM House Inc. is the entity that receives and manages much of the financial responsibilities with MHRC, in addition to attending to the fundamentals of the building such as maintenance and the collection of rents. For a more detailed history, see Bucklaschuk, 2016.

Reflections on Methodology

To assess the housing trajectories of newcomers and the impact of community supports on their lives, this project used qualitative methods, relying on interviews with current and past residents of IRCOM over a three-year period to gather data.

It was not the explicit intention to name it as such, but the project has emerged as an ethnography of IRCOM. It is an in-depth exploration of various facets of the institution, its processes, and the experiences of those living and working within a shared space (Creswell 2006). This ethnography is one that follows the experiences of individuals over a three-year period, interviewing them once a year in their place of residence about their experiences since moving to Canada and residing at IRCOM.

Using interviews and a focus group as the primary sources of data, the project also draws data from various organizational documents (such as annual reports and internal records) and consultations and interviews with key stakeholders (such as current and past staff, board members, and volunteers). These data sources document the history of the organization, its particular processes, and the institutional culture, which are presented in more detail in the project's first report (Bucklaschuk, 2016).

In addition to providing an in-depth exploration of the organization through an ethnographic approach, the project's design and delivery is driven by a commitment to community-based research principles. The project was initiated, planned, and executed with direct and continuous input from IRCOM staff. Updates were regularly communicated to the organization, and their input was sought while designing interview questions. An interim research presentation was given at a board meeting and that input was incorporated into the project. First and foremost, this project's goal is to provide meaningful findings that can benefit IRCOM as they further develop their own knowledge of the impact that their work has on newcomer families. In this way, research has the ability to give back to the community, when too often it is merely taken from the community without providing direct benefits. This report has been written with the intention of being accessible, beneficial, and informative to IRCOM personnel, interview participants, policymakers, and researchers.

Prior to the recruitment of interview participants, the project was approved by the *University of Winnipeg's Human Research Ethics Board*. To ensure ongoing and informed consent of partici-

pants over the years, each interview began with an overview of the consent process and participants signed an informed consent form during the first interview (see Appendix 1), which they kept for their records. Participants were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences without fear of reprisal. As such, care was taken during interviews to exclude names from interview transcripts so as to protect the identity of participants. Identifying characteristics are excluded from reporting as well. Any names used in this report are pseudonyms, assigned by the researcher and derived from internet searches of popular culturally-specific names so as to reflect the diversity among interview participants. Further details on the number of interview participants, how they were recruited, and length of interviews are included in the next section.

To ensure that a diverse group of people could participate in the study, interpreters were employed for those participants who required them. Prior to each interview, participants were given the choice to conduct interviews in the language they preferred. The first round of interviews required interpretation for 11 interviews from five different language groups (Tigrinya, Arabic, Swahili, Somali, and Nepali). By the last round of interviews, interpretation was required for eight interviews from three language groups (Arabic, Nepali, and Somali). Interpreters were hired in consultation with IRCOM and were trusted members of the community.

All interview participants were given an honorarium of \$25.00 at the beginning of each interview to acknowledge both their time and their contribution to the project. Open-ended questions were asked, and interviews followed a semi-structured format. For a sample of questions asked during the interviews, see Appendix Two.

Interviews were audio recorded, upon receiving consent to do so, and then transcribed. During both the interview process and analysis of data, emphasis was placed on discerning change in participants' housing trajectories

and their settlement process over the three-year period. In addition, the interviews focused on understanding the impact that IRCOM had on people's lives in both the short- and long-term. Transcripts were analyzed for recurring themes and findings reflect those themes.

Findings from this project are presented across two major reports. The first report (Bucklaschuk, 2016) highlights the history of IRCOM, which was learned through a series of interviews with current and past staff and board members. These interviews provided rich and in-depth accounts of the organization's struggles and accomplishments over the years. The second report — this report — focuses exclusively on the experiences and stories told by current and past tenants across three interviews. It places an emphasis on how IRCOM has affected their lives and what role the organization has played in their settlement process. Combined, the two reports provide a detailed account of IRCOM's history and present experiences from a multitude of actors who are or have been deeply invested in the organization as either staff, volunteers, or tenants.

Throughout the duration of this project, I learned much about what it takes to maintain momentum for such a large-scale endeavour as it was my first multi-year study. It becomes easy to lose track of timelines, objectives, and participants over the years. Such work requires much flexibility, methodological tweaks and changes, and a keen eye toward organization. In addition, there is immense coordination involved in such work and it would not have been possible without skilled research assistants who were involved in scheduling interviews, arranging interpretation, and conducting interviews. The project also relied on continued assistance from the partner organization, with personnel assisting in finding participants' new telephone numbers and address, appropriate interpreters, and spaces in which to conduct interviews.

Before delving into reporting on the findings of this project, I wish to note here that I am an

outsider to this project in many ways. It was not a project of my design as I became involved following both its design and first year of interviews. This was an initiative that was very much moving forward once I became the lead researcher. I am not a newcomer. I grew up in rural Manitoba, so I can never fully understand what it is like to be a newcomer in a place that may not have been of one's choosing and is so profoundly unfamiliar. Prior to this project, IRCOM was also unfamiliar to me. I had heard about it in previous projects, but I did not have much knowledge about this organization. As such, I approached this project with the perspective of being an outsider and my

intent has been to engage with it in a way that brought no preconceptions to the investigations.

In light of this, what follows is an account of newcomers' experiences while living at IRCOM. Although the stories have been framed and recreated through my interpretative interventions, they do represent individuals' assessments of their own experiences at IRCOM. What is noteworthy throughout is the absence of negativity towards IRCOM, which I was prepared to present if it was discussed in interviews. This general positivity, I have learned, is a reflection and recognition of the incredible work that this organization does to ensure that newcomers 'can live a life here'.

The Participants

Participants for this study were recruited using a number of methods and by drawing on resources within IRCOM. Initially, the researchers met with IRCOM's tenant leaders who were given information about the project and details about participation. They took this information back to IRCOM tenants and found individuals who were interested in participating. In addition, a researcher attended both men's and women's group meetings at IRCOM to present project details and recruit participants. The majority of interview participants signed up through this initiative. IRCOM staff were also asked to distribute project information within the building and identify people who might be interested in participating.

In the first year of the project, twenty current tenants of IRCOM were interviewed in-person and seven past tenants participated in a focus group. Interviews were around one hour in length and occurred in people's place of residence. Interviews were also conducted with 12 key stakeholders, including current and past staff, board members, and volunteers.

For the second year, 16 of the current tenants were interviewed (four either could not be reached or did not want to participate). The past tenants who participated in the focus group in

the first year were approached for one-on-one interviews and six interviews were conducted. Interviews were also around one hour in length. In the third year, 14 of the current tenants were interviewed; two individuals had either moved or were unable to be reached. Of those original focus group members, five were interviewed. The findings in this report only include data from those participants who stayed with the project from year-to-year and, thus, were interviewed three times. It is the details and experiences of 19 participants that are reported here.

There have been some challenges in reporting on the demographic characteristics of the interview participants given research personnel turn-over, incomplete records, and attrition. As such, some details are lacking or incomplete and cannot be reported on with accuracy. Table 2 provides an overview of demographic characteristics of those who remained in the study for the three-years. It is also necessary to note here that an error was made in the first report regarding the gender distribution of participants and the table below reflects the accurate numbers.

Between years one and two, seven participants had moved out of IRCOM and were interviewed in their new place of residence. Between years two

TABLE 2 Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants

Gender distribution	12 females 7 males
Average age	42 years
Range of ages	26 years to 60 years
Average number of children	3.9
Immigration status at time of last interview	15 permanent residents 3 citizens 1 provincial nominee
Average numbers of years in Canada at time of last interview	4.9 years
Average number of months living at IRCOM	29.3 months
Languages of interviews	11 in English 4 in Arabic 2 in Somali 2 in Nepali
Highest level of education completed	6 have not completed high school 4 completed high school 7 completed post-secondary education (university or college) 1 is unclear
Source of income	10 rely on Employment and Income Assistance 8 rely on part-time or full-time work 1 relies on savings

and three, three more participants had moved out. At the conclusion of the interviews, four families had not yet completed their three-years at IRCOM but were planning moves in the coming months. For those participants who were past tenants of IRCOM at the time of the first interview, on average they lived at IRCOM for 27.6. At the time of the first interview, past tenants had lived away from IRCOM for between one and two years.

All except one of the interview participants came to Canada as refugees. Some families came as GARS and some as PSRS. People came to Canada through countries such as Uganda, Syria, Sudan, Namibia, Turkey, and Democratic Republic of Congo. The majority were not born in these countries since they had fled their home countries in search of refuge and were living in refugee camps before coming to Winnipeg. Participants' home countries include Burundi, Iraq, India, Somalia, Bhutan, Eritrea, Chad, and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The family situations of interview participants are diverse and often transnationally complex.

All participants have children, with numbers ranging from one to ten. Some are single parents, having been divorced, while the majority are married. Some have children with disabilities and are accessing necessary supports through IRCOM. Some parents struggle with their own health problems, which affects their family. Some participants have fractured families with children and/or a spouse still living in other countries and are caught in complex webs of bureaucracy that hinder their ability to reunite.

Leaving behind family members is deeply traumatic for parents, and they struggle with these circumstances. For one mother, who had to leave behind two adult children and her husband, living at IRCOM in a supportive and helpful environment helped her to feel less lonely even though her fractured family situation brings her much stress and sadness. Many participants struggle with the circumstances of their dislocation as they try to cope with their traumas while navigating a completely unfamiliar place.

Living at IRCOM

Many aspects of living at IRCOM, including a detailed account of available programming and supports, are presented in the first report (Bucklaschuk, 2016). What follows here is a discussion of the experiences of current and past tenants as they reflect on the opportunities and challenges they encountered at IRCOM. Over the course of each interview, participants were asked to consider the benefits of IRCOM on their lives, as well as on the lives of their family members. They were also asked to discuss any challenges they encountered and reflect on any difficulties they have experienced. The following discussion focuses on the main themes expressed in participants' interviews.

Finding IRCOM

When GARS arrive in Winnipeg, they are received by *Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council* (MIIC) or *Accueil Francophone* (Silvius, 2016), which are organizations that provide initial necessary supports and short-term housing. When Privately-Sponsored Refugees arrive, they are received by their sponsors who arrange for housing and supports. Participants often explain that they initially heard about IRCOM through MIIC

or *Accueil Francophone*, while some were directed to the organization by *Family Dynamics*, which is a community-based organization that focuses on building healthy families and strong communities. Some learned about the organization through their social networks or sponsor. Many of the participants in this study moved from their short-term place of residence at *Welcome Place*, which is part of MIIC, into IRCOM House, while others moved from the private market into the building. The majority of interview participants (13 of 19) had been in Winnipeg for three months or less when they moved into IRCOM, although a few people (4 of 19) had been in the city for between six months and a year.

Since the rents are so affordable and apartment sizes can comfortably accommodate families, IRCOM is a very desirable place to live and there is high demand for apartments. Furthermore, it provides security, is located in a central neighbourhood, and offers families a supportive environment during a highly stressful and uncertain time of settlement. As such, IRCOM has a wait list, which means that many families must find a place to live while they wait on their application. For more details about IRCOM's selection criteria, see Bucklaschuk (2016).

Centrality and Security

Interview participants all reside or resided at IRCOM's first — and original — location, at 95 Ellen Street in Winnipeg's William Whyte neighbourhood. It is an inner-city neighbourhood, centrally located near the downtown core. Public transportation access is nearby, as are schools, grocery stores, and health care. Given its location, before moving to IRCOM, some participants were warned about the neighbourhood as being unsafe with high crime rates. These participants feared the area when they first moved in, but, with time and experience they became increasingly secure and learned that the neighbourhood is quite safe and very convenient.

Since IRCOM Ellen is so central, participants did not report venturing beyond the downtown neighbourhood very often. They might walk to medical appointments at the Health Sciences Centre or go to a park, but much of their life is lived within the downtown core of Winnipeg. Participants appreciate the centrality of IRCOM as it is close to many organizations that they go to for supports and assistance. There are also schools nearby, which means parents can walk their children to school and be involved in school-related activities. Their lives become rooted in the neighbourhood as they become more familiar with the area.

"They give [the information] to you on a platter. You don't struggle for anything." — *Aruna*

Interview participants also appreciate that IRCOM personnel are focused on safety and security. There are information sessions that instruct people on how to be safe within the building and in the neighbourhood. There is a security guard in the building overnight and the main doors are controlled through a buzzing-in system. As such, people feel very safe in the building, with one person describing IRCOM as a 'fortress'.

Many participants compare their current circumstances with those of their past. After having left places where they regularly felt threatened or experienced violence, living in downtown Winnipeg is a welcomed reprieve from the insecurities of their past. All participants appreciate that IRCOM takes safety seriously, and the security of the building eases many burdens for families who are resettling.

Learning and Settling

Aside from the provision of affordable and secure places to live, the cornerstone of IRCOM is their robust array of programs and supports. Within the walls of the building, a wide range of holistic programming and wrap-around supports are offered to tenants and some newcomers from the wider community.

Designed to assist newcomers as they navigate their new home, the resources provided by IRCOM equip families with the skills, information, and confidence necessary to establish a well-rounded life in Winnipeg. In addition to formal workshops and programs, IRCOM staff is always available to answer questions, offer one-on-one assistance, or provide referrals to other services in the city. Newcomer families learn about the myriad steps they must take to settle in Winnipeg, along with more particular things such as how to cope with winter weather, where to buy familiar groceries, and the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

The programs and workshops are frequently used and demand often exceeds capacity. Since the supports are offered within the building, families find it easy to learn about upcoming opportunities, and then to attend. In each interview, participants were asked about their use of programming and every tenant reported accessing multiple programs. These resources act as newcomers' introductions to many new and unfamiliar processes, services, and norms. There are workshops on policing, the law, parenting,

banking, and other general orientation resources. Interview participants appreciate the breadth of information and supports they receive. In fact, when asked about the programs and workshops that were most helpful for individuals and families, no one could name just one and, instead, spent much time explaining how all programs contribute to their settlement process and mitigate the challenges they face.

In general, though, most participants mentioned the importance of the financial management programs at IRCOM and credit these with their ability to achieve their goals. Since the banking system in Canada is completely unfamiliar to newcomers, it takes much time to learn about things like mortgages, savings accounts, investments, credit, and debt. Furthermore, many refugee families are low-income, owe thousands of dollars for their transportation loans, and have little access to financial resources outside of government assistance (Silvius et al, 2015). The Asset and Capacity Building Programs, which, in partnership with *SEED Winnipeg*,⁴ includes the Asset Building Program, Saving Circle, Individual Development Account, and the Transportation Loan Repayment programs, allows families to pay down debts, purchase furniture or computers, and save for education. Without the knowledge and associated financial assistance of these programs, families would struggle with managing household finances, resulting in poorer outcomes during their post-IRCOM life. Even once participants move out of IRCOM, they continue to reflect on how important the savings and financial management programs have been for them.

In addition to the financial management programs, many participants focus on the supports that are provided for their children. One of the most commonly discussed programs is the After School Program, which parents credit for their children's academic improvements and

achievements. In fact, when people speak about the benefits IRCOM has had on their lives, they often discuss how the programs and supports have positively influenced their children. They appreciate that their children receive one-on-one assistance with homework and can observe direct benefits of the programs. There is also an important socialization component to participating in programs and living at IRCOM that enables children to develop strong friendships with one another.

Through other family-focused workshops, people can learn about parenting norms and laws in Canada, which can be unfamiliar and quite different than what they are accustomed to in their previous homes. In addition to learning many new parenting techniques, having such information also protects families from encounters with *Child and Family Services (CFS)* as they readjust their disciplinary tactics and parenting styles. IRCOM's focus on supporting families is very much appreciated and valued by tenants since they can observe direct benefits from such activities.

Interview participants also appreciated the supports that were available to help them find employment and gain work experience. Many participants benefited from the employment-related resources provided by IRCOM, such as job references and links to employment opportunities. There are also volunteer opportunities within IRCOM that give people Canadian work experience and offer a certificate that can be used to bolster job applications. People learn about basic building maintenance and can transfer those skills into other employment. Furthermore, the networks established within IRCOM can be quite helpful to people when they begin to look for work.

Participants' use of programs and supports throughout their time at IRCOM changed depending on individual circumstances. There

⁴ SEED Winnipeg is an organization that provides financial empowerment services and programs to people.

were some interview participants who explained that it took some time after moving in to feel able to access resources while others' need for supports tapers off with time. Their encounters with supports often depend on the stage they are at in their settlement process. Newly arrived families may not always automatically jump into programs since they can feel overwhelmed and unsure. Families in the midst of settling require a period of transition where they must, at their own speed, learn how to navigate their new life. Often, children will settle quickly and then, through their interactions with friends and their friends' families, parents begin to ease into the settlement process.

"I never feel lonely here or by myself" — *Salma, through an interpreter.*

During the first round of interviews, some individuals had been at IRCOM for mere months, and felt bewildered as they struggled to sort through their new life. Those same people became more familiar with the programs and practices at IRCOM by the second and third round of interviews. After some time, they enthusiastically accessed the supports available because they gained familiarity, confidence, and stability in their new home. In their third year at IRCOM, some participants felt they no longer need the programs, since they had learned much of what is necessary to become independent and settle. The extent to which people access supports often depends on individual needs, abilities, and desires. That being said, most participants try to access as many programs and supports as they possibly can during their time at IRCOM.

Social Networks and Community

In addition to the benefits provided by programs and supports, IRCOM tenants gain access to a di-

verse social network within the building. Studies have found that many newcomers to Canada lack social capital, which can hinder their settlement and integration while contributing to social isolation and loneliness (Li, 2004; Reitz, 1998). This is not a common occurrence at IRCOM, since families become connected to one another through the shared space and their commonalities. They participate in programs together, seek assistance from one another, and have children who play with each other. There is a vibrancy and openness that occurs within IRCOM's walls where people's socializing occurs simply by knocking on each other's doors; families support one another, and a collective mentality permeates many aspects of life. If a parent needs to go grocery shopping or take a language class, they can usually count on someone else being home and able to care for their children. Staff at IRCOM also seamlessly integrate into this social fabric, where families always feel they have someone around to support them, provide information, or clarify concerns. Many participants explain that the sense of community within the building feels like they are 'back home'.

"IRCOM life was amazing. [It] was like a small world in one place. There are so many cultures, so many nationalities, so many different people together. It's like you live [on] another planet!"
— *Anthony*

Families can partake in a number of organized events and activities that not only bring them together with other tenants, but also introduce them to the wider community. For example, IRCOM often organizes activities such as field trips to various Winnipeg attractions, which families may not otherwise be aware of or able to attend. Many interview participants consider these types of activities as essential parts of learning about Winnipeg. Also, IRCOM organizes the Family-to-Family program, which

pairs tenant families with families outside of the building for the purposes of intercultural learning and socializing. This program has been important to a number of participants as it has introduced them to new friends and exposed them to different cultures. It also fosters a sense of community beyond IRCOM, contributing to the essential social inclusion role that the organization plays.

Challenges

The most commonly reported challenges that people encounter while living at IRCOM are detailed in the first report and did not change over the three years of interviews. Remarkably, interview participants discuss few challenges at IRCOM. Many of the challenges that people do report are related to aspects of living in an apartment building with shared walls and hallways. There are complaints about noises and, as Anthony notes, it can sometimes feel like a “no man’s land” with children running in the hallways, pulling fire alarms, or causing other disturbances. In addition, throughout the years of interviews, nearly everyone mentions the challenges around pest control. Many acknowledge that it is a necessary part of living there, but it can create a disturbance for families. Some tenants note that there is little control over the scheduling of pest management practices, which has the potential to disrupt studying or other family activities. The never-ending fight against pests such as bed bugs can get overwhelming for tenants and they struggle to find solutions within their household.

Other noted challenges include:

- Perceptions that the three-year time frame is not long enough.
- Finding day care for families with very young children (less than six months of age) is difficult. For parents with young children who are not old enough to attend

school or other programs, child care can be a significant concern and hinders one’s ability to access supports.

- Scheduling of workshops can be inconvenient for tenants working night shifts or with irregular work schedules.
- The popularity of workshops and programs can mean that they become full quickly.
- There is a relative lack of support for men (although this has changed over the years).
- There were a couple of incidents of discrimination and prejudice between children on the playground.
- Parking in the neighbourhood can be limited.

These challenges are ones that are most commonly reported and, in many cases, have been discussed by multiple interview participants. However, there are a number of individual stories of struggle that are worth noting here, to highlight the complexity of the settlement process. For example, one female participant’s husband suffered a debilitating health issue. This, combined with her night shifts at work, makes it particularly difficult for her to access education or language classes. Furthermore, she has a child too young to participate in IRCOM’s programs and cannot find daycare that will suit her schedule. She struggles to find time to access services and supports since her non-work time is spent caring for her children. Another female participant faces similar challenges and cannot access supports because of her family situation. She is the mother of multiple children and struggles to focus on language learning because of her familial responsibilities. She also has no formal education and feels that she has little control over her own life. She has since moved away from IRCOM, and her struggles have become amplified. She is now more isolated, and without continued access to the supports that IRCOM offers, she is unable to pursue what she needs to feel settled.

Individual circumstances have a significant influence on settlement and, to some degree, the extent to which families are able to access the services and supports that are available to them. Their challenges often stem from their particular circumstances, which complicates their settlement process.

Positives

In general, the experiences of people living at IRCOM are overwhelmingly positive and all participants recognize the importance of having access to affordable, safe housing and a robust array of support services while living there. The positivity toward IRCOM continues from year to year, with people developing more of an appreciation for the organization over the years. Many participants express feelings of being lucky to get to live at IRCOM and feel as if they are in ‘good hands’ while navigating their first three years of settlement. In particular, parents observe how important the supports at IRCOM are for their children, as they see their academic abilities increase and their social lives flourish.

“[It is] very easy to live in IRCOM. I see many of our community people, they live direct outside [and] they got a lot of problems. I think we were very lucky to get to live in IRCOM, though, for a very short time. It was very perfect and there we [learned] many, many things, too.” — *Jigme*.

When families have access to holistic, wrap-around supports and affordable housing, they can focus on settlement in a way that others who are not living in such an environment cannot. Many of the burdens that newcomers face

“I’m sad that one day we will have to leave this comfort zone” — *Sadia, through interpreter*.

in the early years of settlement are eased by living at IRCOM. One father noted in his interview that he can focus on other responsibilities such as working more hours because he knows that his family’s needs are being addressed. Others recognize that they have the ability to focus on studying English or pursuing other skills since they do not have to immediately find work so as to pay for unaffordable places to live. They have access to a full range information and supports within the walls of their place of residence. They are linked to a large, diverse network of people living in the same place, with shared experiences. Life at IRCOM is, for the most part, collectively oriented, with families helping out one another with such tasks as child care and grocery shopping. There is a reciprocity among people and they are eager to assist newly arrived families, sharing the knowledge they have obtained. The model works well for families and the benefits of having wrap-around supports coupled with affordable housing are numerous. People are given both the space and tools to grow during what is a highly stressful and important stage of their settlement process.

“The life would be miserable [if I had never lived at IRCOM]. I suffered enough. I came from bad situation [and] it will be more suffering. No language. It’s cold. I don’t know where I will go. No support. I never go out from the house maybe, or I ask them to take me back [to the refugee camp].” — *Fatima, through interpreter*.

Post-IRCOM Housing and Community Experiences

One of the inevitabilities about living at IRCOM is that the parameters of one's stay are largely prescribed. There is a relative predictability in families' trajectory within IRCOM. When they sign their rental agreements, they are agreeing to move out within three years. This inevitability was one of the most cited challenges faced

"When you get out [of IRCOM], it will not be like the way that you live in IRCOM." — Carine.

by interview participants. The three-year time-frame, which many participants say comes too fast, looms over families as they work toward establishing themselves in Winnipeg. With supports from IRCOM, MIIC, *New Journey Housing*, and informal networks, many spend time during their last two years at IRCOM planning for the time they must move, searching for affordable housing in desirable and preferred neighbourhoods. The precise timing of families' moves is not always within their control since much depends on their place on *Manitoba Housing* and *Winnipeg Housing* waitlists. For those that moved out of IRCOM prior to the three-year deadline, it was mostly because a suitable place became

available. Most participants who moved out earlier did not wish to do so, but they feared a lack of supply and affordability in the rental market. One family who left before the three-year deadline was required to move because of familial challenges, which is not something that happens often. The majority of families, though, stay at IRCOM as long as possible. On average, families lived at IRCOM for 29 months, with a range between 12 and 42 months.

Finding Housing

Searching for housing can be a stressful process, requiring much time and effort. For newcomers, this process is made all the more challenging because they may lack knowledge about resources, neighbourhoods, tenant rights, and typical rental prices (Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Murdie, 2008; Teixeira, 2009). Many also lack the social capital that can aid in finding housing. However, those living at IRCOM do not often encounter such difficulties since they are attached to an organization and network that offers assistance during their search and has provided individuals with extensive knowledge about the rental market, easing many of their burdens.

The majority of interview participants do not report difficulties in finding a place to live after their time at IRCOM was over, even though they experience trepidation about leaving their familiar and supportive environment. Many searched through online resources such as *Kijiji*, asked friends and family, and sought the assistance of IRCOM, MIIC, and *New Journey Housing* personnel to find a place to live. Participants did report few difficulties finding housing, but this is not to suggest that the process of relocating and settling in a new residence was without challenges.

When people search for housing, they come to the process with a number of priorities and preferences. Among participants, the priorities focus on affordability, size, and neighbourhood, which are all intricately linked. One of the biggest concerns for participants when they envision having to leave IRCOM is the price of other apartments. The majority of families cannot afford apartments in the private market, especially since they often require three bedrooms or more. In fact, many interview participants refer to prices in the private market as ‘a nightmare’ or ‘too scary’, so they seek affordable and subsidized housing through either *Winnipeg Housing* or *Manitoba Housing*.

Feeling pressure to find a suitable place to live, Carine and her husband agreed to lease a townhouse that was expected to have three bedrooms for their five children. However, when they moved in, after signing a one-year lease, they learned that one of the bedrooms is located in an unfinished and poorly heated basement while another bedroom is uncomfortably small.

Once they are able to find a place that is affordable, it is often not of a suitable size or in a preferred neighbourhood. Many participants feel pressure to leave IRCOM by the deadline, which may prompt them to accept a place just because it is available and affordable. This hurriedness can lead to people signing leases with-

out knowing the details, moving to undesirable neighbourhoods, or feeling constrained or misled by the actual conditions of their new residence (see adjacent text box).

Many families do find social housing, but for those navigating the private rental market, they quickly encounter a universe that is largely unfriendly and not conducive to their family size, income levels, and neighbourhood needs (see Table 3 for statistics on what type of housing IRCOM tenants move to). Interview participants who enter the private market often observe that some potential landlords are cold to them and only concerned about money while also noting lists of restrictions. These encounters cause families to stress about finding a place and make the private market the least desirable source for a new place to live. Indeed, people are better prepared and settled than they were upon arrival in Canada and are now armed with knowledge and a sense of familiarity, but they are still required to navigate a housing market that has limited supply of appropriate places.

People have neighbourhood preferences that are often determined by the location of children’s schools, social networks, or commuting times to work. The vast majority of participants want to remain in the same neighbourhood as IRCOM, so they do not have to uproot their lives too much. Leaving IRCOM is very difficult for families since their lives, for three years, have become rooted in the neighbourhood. Their children are in school and have friends either in the building or area. Grocery stores and doctors are nearby. They know the bus routes but can walk to most necessary places. It is a scary proposition for many to have to move to another, unfamiliar area of the city. If they are unable to find places nearby, some parents may choose to leave their children in the same school, which increases commute times, but makes things a bit easier on children’s lives. When settling, it is important for immigrants and refugees to feel a sense of inclusion within a community. They establish this while at IRCOM

TABLE 3 Where do IRCOM Tenants Move? 2015–2016

Type of Housing	Percentage (of 26 families who moved out)
Subsidized Housing	50%
Private Market Rental	27%
Own House	12%
Moved out of Province	7%
Other	4%

SOURCE IRCOM's internal data.

but having to leave the neighbourhood can feel like yet another dislocation for some families.

Although the majority of interview participants move into rental properties after living at IRCOM, three families did buy a house. When asked about their long-term housing goals, most families do want to eventually own a house, but it is not always feasible after being in Canada for only three years. For those that do buy a house, they credit IRCOM with giving them the resources and knowledge that made the process of buying possible. Without the workshops, programs, and supports, they would not have been able to pursue language learning, which then led to a job, which then led to the ability to save money for a house. IRCOM gives families the essential building blocks needed to pursue home ownership. People gain confidence, they learn about what it would entail, they can pay down their transportation loans and other debts, they can go to school and get credentials that will enable them to find a good job, and then they can obtain a mortgage and buy a house. It is a remarkable achievement for immigrant and refugee families to be in a position to purchase a home three years after their arrival in Canada and IRCOM gives people the tools to make it possible.

Challenges with New Residences

In addition to some of the difficulties families face when searching for affordable and desirable places to live, they also must navigate a number of adjustments and challenges once they move

into their new place. Many of these challenges are discussed in interviews as being contrary to their experiences at IRCOM House, as they compare their new residence with their past apartments. Some involve tangible difficulties with the physical building while other challenges are more intangible and impact people's sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and inclusion. Moving into a new place can be unsettling for families and requires a host of new encounters, knowledge, and, sometimes, struggles.

One of the most commonly reported challenges is the difficulty in balancing rent with all other living expenses. All utilities are included in rents at IRCOM, but this is not often the case in other places. Families struggle to pay and manage bills for rent, electricity, gas, water, phones, internet, and all other monthly expenses. It can become overwhelming for individuals to manage household expenses on limited budgets, even if they are living in subsidized housing.

Another common challenge is related to the condition of the residence and the process involved in addressing problems that arise in the new place. At IRCOM, tenants have access to on-site building maintenance and often note how quickly problems within apartments are addressed. Such prompt maintenance and assistance are not often found in other residences. There were many stories about the challenges people face when trying to get things promptly fixed in their new place. Building managers or landlords sometimes ignore problems they do not think are immediately significant or they require multiple remind-

ers to repair something. Some participants found building managers/landlords to be quite difficult to deal with or speak to, in general. One participant explained that she had found bed bugs in her apartment and, upon reporting the problem to the building manager, was brushed off and then told that it was something she would just have to get used to since it is normal. Since people continue to both struggle with English and to have their concerns properly addressed, they then rely on supports from community organizations such as MIIC and IRCOM to call landlords for assistance.

Given the challenges with finding both affordable and appropriately sized apartments, families may move to less desirable neighbourhoods in the inner-city and into buildings that have poor reputations or challenges with safety. They are used to the security of living in IRCOM. The nature of the neighbourhood that families move into has profound impacts on their day-to-day lives, and some feel less safe and secure in their new location. For example, a single mother who moved into a *Manitoba Housing* apartment in the inner-city continually worries about taking the elevator in her new building or answering the door when someone knocks since there have been a number of scams and break-ins in the building. Another parent does not let her son walk home alone from school since there are often police cars and loud parties on their block. Both families want to move, but their finances and space needs restrict their ability to do so.

The move out of IRCOM brings with it many fears and insecurities for families. In addition to encountering safety issues, participants worry about how they will fit into their new neighbourhood. Everyone wants to be able to fit in and the potential for interpersonal conflicts troubles people. Some parents worry about how their children might disturb neighbours since the culture around noise and residences is different than they are used to. At IRCOM, children's playing, and noise in general is largely accepted as a way of life in the hallways and between apartments.

Once they move into other places, families worry about how that behaviour will be accepted. One parent said that she makes her kids play in an unfinished basement, so as not to disrupt neighbours in their townhouse. Some participants fear that neighbours may perceive them as bad parents if they allow their children to play outside unattended or make too much noise. They worry that neighbours may call *Child and Family Services* (CFS) and the potential for encounters with CFS looms as a threat to many parents. As such, many parents told of how they restrict their children's play time, which is in stark contrast to the centrality of play and socialization during their time at IRCOM.

In light of the challenges they face after moving out of IRCOM, families may require multiple moves until they are satisfied with a combination of affordability, size, and neighbourhood. A number of families in this study have lived in multiple places since leaving IRCOM, which is indicative of the nature of the rental market and demonstrates their difficulties in finding affordable and appropriately sized housing. However, even though many families have moved around a few times, they do so with the knowledge and confidence that they can and should find better housing. Upon their initial move out of IRCOM they may accept poor housing out of necessity and the immediacy of their relocation, but they do not intend to stay long term. Their time at IRCOM has taught them that they do not need to wholly accept substandard housing circumstances and that certain housing conditions are not the norm. Many families continue to seek better housing and engage community-based organizations for assistance until they find a place that makes them feel secure and comfortable.

Social Isolation and Loneliness

Living away from IRCOM can be a lonely experience for families. The sense of community that people develop, rely on, and enjoy at IRCOM is

seldom replicated once they move. Upon moving into a new neighbourhood, many interview participants attempt to meet neighbours and develop relationships, but few succeed. Most former IRCOM tenants explain that they find people in their new neighbourhoods to be unfriendly or simply 'always inside'. As such, people miss the opportunity for casual social encounters that are so very much a part of life at IRCOM. They miss being able to knock on a neighbour's door to have coffee. They notice how life outside of IRCOM is much more socially constrained. Those who have moved out of IRCOM speak of being alone. They talk about IRCOM as a family, a community, where people help one another and there is energy and vibrancy. In their new neighbourhoods, they do not have that sense of community or connection with others.

"[At IRCOM] there is support, there is life. Here, nothing. Just quiet." — *Fatima, through interpreter*

Isolation and loneliness are particularly difficult for children. After living at IRCOM where they could access multiple programs, a secure playground, and friends who lived either next door or a short elevator ride away, moving into a new place extracts them from familiar friend groups and socializing. Many parents told stories of how bored their children are in their new place. Television watching or video game playing increases as outdoor or public spaces are less accessible or secure. It also takes time for children to make new friends and, depending on the demographics of the new neighbourhood, some children may not make new friends in the area.

In addition to longing for social connections and a sense of community in their new neighbourhood, participants also miss the ease of access to programs, workshops, and supports that exist at IRCOM. Moving away from a holistically supportive environment introduces challenges for people as they seek to upgrade skills, enhance

English language levels, and continue with their settlement process. Transportation to service providers or other institutions can be more difficult and simply being unable to find childcare can act as a barrier to accessing services.

"My kids, they didn't have any friends or other kids to play with. They [would] just wait until I come home from work and [I would] take them to somewhere else. And my wife, she was not able to go to EAL program because she [recently] had a baby." — *Hamid*.

Moving away from IRCOM has gendered impacts as well. Since women carry the overwhelming burden of housework and child care, they are often unable to pursue settlement services and supports, and such supports rarely consider the specific needs of newcomer women (Tastsoglou et al., 2014). Being at IRCOM affords them opportunities to pursue services in a supportive and considerate environment. However, for those mothers who are single and/or stay at home to raise children, leaving IRCOM separates them from this deeply supportive and educational environment that both helps with childrearing and extends supports for learning. After leaving IRCOM, female participants feel the weight of their domestic and familiar burdens once again. One mother explains that she has been feeling depressed since leaving IRCOM. She struggles to feel like she belongs in her new neighbourhood, which makes her long for the extended social network she had at IRCOM. Another mother has no friends in Winnipeg and relies entirely on her family for social interactions. She struggles with English and desperately wants more independence, but she is unable to access language supports. Her children are also struggling since they no longer have access to the After School and other programs. Although IRCOM has the capacity to address many of these challenges in-house, once families move out, women may then

face challenges and struggles that far too many immigrant women experience in their settlement process (see Creese & Wiebe, 2012).

There is a complicated process occurring after interview participants leave IRCOM, which should not be ignored. On one hand, IRCOM addresses the lack of social capital and limited networks that many newcomers encounter when they come to Canada. The model places people in close proximity to others who have similar life experiences, providing social supports, knowledge, and guidance. A strong social network forms within the walls of IRCOM and exists among tenants and staff. On the other hand, this exposure and experience does not entirely solve the social network problem in the long-term as it appears, for many, that the networks established at IRCOM do not transfer into other neighbourhoods, and this is the case especially for those individuals who are unable to remain in a closely located neighbourhood. When interview participants leave IRCOM, many experience lonely and isolated feelings that so often impact immigrants and refugees in their new home. They have to re-adapt to a life without an immediate social support system. They feel isolated as they struggle to navigate their post-IRCOM life. Some interview participants do continue accessing supports through places like IRCOM and MIIC, but many do not. These experiences, however, are partly indicative of the long-term, multi-staged, and continual process that is settlement. Being completely settled does not occur within a prescribed timeframe and, for many, it may never feel as if it has occurred as they move to new places, seeking security, comforts, and opportunity. It also demonstrates the effect of the profoundly important supports and unique culture that exists within IRCOM.

Encountering Discrimination

To further investigate their day-to-day experiences and explore their encounters with the

wider community, participants were asked if they had ever experienced discrimination or racism since being in Canada. Assessing experiences of discrimination is a difficult task in research with newcomers, though. People do not want to focus on the negative parts of their experiences or they may not observe certain actions as discriminatory. When asked directly, nearly everyone stated that they have not experienced discrimination and that they believe Winnipeg is welcoming to immigrants and refugees. However, stories of discrimination do come out in other ways. One woman answered the question about experiencing discrimination in the negative, but when asked if she thought people in Winnipeg were friendly, she recalled a time when she was spat upon at the mall while shopping with her son. Another woman recounted stories of a building manager in her new place yelling at her to speak English when she could not communicate a problem. Yet another woman recalled an encounter with police where officers accused her of pretending not to be able to speak English. These stories were found in other conversations and did not get raised when speaking directly about experiencing discrimination.

There was one participant who understood many of his challenges in Winnipeg as being a product of racial discrimination. As a result, he has a conflicted opinion of living in Winnipeg. On one hand, since he has been in the community for quite some time, he and his family feel settled. Things are also more familiar and easier than they were in the past. On the other hand, he reflects on his challenges in pursuing his own education, dealing with his children's school, or other day-to-day interactions and feels as if he has experienced systemic discrimination. To try to explain why he was not receiving job interviews, he conducted an experiment with job applications. Unknowingly, he replicated the methodology of a well-known study in Toronto that assessed discriminatory practices based on

people's names, rather than their qualifications (Oreopoulos, 2011). The interview participant submitted the exact same resume, but with different names and had different results. With his African name, he rarely received calls for an interview, but with another name, he received calls. The only thing he would change on the resume would be the name. This experience, combined with experiences of his children in school, lead him to conclude that systemic discrimination negatively impacts him and his family, which deeply frustrates him.

Independence

Despite the struggles and the feelings of loneliness, ultimately, interview participants explained that they are prepared to leave IRCOM. They have been able to save money, gain skills, learn about their new community, and establish themselves in Winnipeg. IRCOM instills a sense of independence in people, as they offer the supports and services needed to navigate the settlement process and prepare for life beyond the walls of the building. Former tenants recognize how important the knowledge they gained in workshops is to their post-IRCOM life and many view their time living there as a period of 'growing up', acquiring experiences and skills over time and eventually getting to a point where they feel confident and familiar with their new lives. One participant likened herself to a baby upon moving to Canada, with little knowledge and a bewilderment of her surroundings. Now that she has completed her time at IRCOM, she feels prepared and ready to move on. Many see their time at IRCOM as having provided a 'strong base' upon which they can settle and build a full life.

After the initial pains of moving out of IRCOM and transitioning into a new place have subsided and families have found suitable and comfortable places to live, they can then work on establishing long-term security and stability, informed

"[IRCOM] prepare me to stand by my own feet." — *Fatima, through interpreter*

by the knowledge they gained through IRCOM's supports. For example, upon buying a house, one father explained that his family can now plan for the future, as they feel more settled and are able to establish roots without worrying about a move in the near future. Some people discuss how the notion of IRCOM being a 'transitional' residence is ingrained in how they think about their time there. They know that one day they will have to move, whereas in their post-IRCOM place, if they have found a place that is comfortable and affordable, there is a sense of permanency. Families feel more settled since they do not have to keep their mind focused on an eventual, non-negotiable move.

"We were at zero before coming to Canada. [When] we first landed on Canada, we are at zero. Now, we develop many things. We have not reached to the hundred, but we are around, like, we are more than sixty, so it's good." — *Jigme*.

When interview participants leave IRCOM they enter the housing market in a very different position than they would have if they had done so upon arrival. Although a number of participants remain on some form of government assistance or struggle to find full-time work after their three years at IRCOM, they are now armed with knowledge and confidence to navigate what is a highly complex terrain. People know about their rights as a tenant and understand what is and is not acceptable in a rental situation. They know about subsidized housing and many successfully obtain it. They also

"[My new place] is not a transitional place. Nobody is after me saying that okay, after three years you have to move." — *David*

have obtained some financial independence as IRCOM's programs assist them with paying back transportation loans and investing in other purchases. They have learned about savings while also being supported in this area. Moving out

of IRCOM does, indeed, bring many stresses and challenges, but the confidence and independence interview participants obtained during their three years in the building mitigates some of the difficulties.

Settlement and Changes

Research on settlement and integration have found that, in general, outcomes for immigrants and refugees in Canada improve over time, with the first three years after arrival being the most difficult (Hiebert, 2016; Reitz, 1998). For example, incomes steadily rise and eventually converge with those of the Canadian-born, while labour market participation follows similar trends. These outcomes differ among immigration categories and are often lower for refugees. However, with time in Canada, it is a reasonable expectation that circumstances will become less challenging and newcomers will be more settled.

Each interview participant did experience significant changes over the three-year period of this project. Although, the nature of the changes largely depends on what stage they were at in their settlement process. Some people had only been living at IRCOM for a few months at the time of the first interview, so there have been immense changes in their lives from year to year. A considerable amount of learning occurs during their time at IRCOM, as people become more familiar with local customs and norms through information provided in programs, workshops, and interactions with neighbours. The first year after arrival is often spent learning as much as

possible as they are adjusting to a new environment, a new culture, and a new way of life. During the first interviews with people who had recently arrived in Canada, many were still trying to make sense of their new surroundings. They are scared and overwhelmed, leaving them hesitant to attend IRCOM programs or pursue learning opportunities. Many families had fled from traumatic circumstances and required a lengthy period of time to resettle after being exposed to war and violence. Not everyone is ready to launch into the programs and workshops provided by IRCOM upon arrival. However, with time, people do establish themselves, become more comfortable, and gain the ability to engage in a lengthy learning process.

“I think I am good now. The challenges [were] in the first times, but now I’m in IRCOM [and] I’m good. I am successful. I get here at IRCOM House and I go to my school and my rent depends on my income and I am satisfied. For me, I get education and I improve my English. I got [a Health Care Aide] course, I get a job, and my husband, he went to university. He [is] done and is a social worker now. Now we are successful [and] we are happy with IRCOM” — *Mariam*.

Over the three years of interviews, the majority of participants increased their English language levels, which eases some challenges and allows them to better navigate Winnipeg. They also established important social networks, which will provide assistance into the future.

Many families maintain connections with staff and programs at IRCOM after they move out, with some people obtaining work or volunteer positions in the organization. In addition, employment situations change for many people over the course of the interviews. Finding employment is a significant part of the settlement process and, after families secure housing, it becomes a priority. Many people pursue education shortly after their initial settlement needs are addressed and then, after completion, seek employment. Some people move from part time or volunteer jobs into full-time employment during the course of the project, while others struggle to either find time to search for work or find a workplace that would hire them.

“Before going to school it was almost impossible [to imagine achieving my dreams]. I was wondering how I could combine my role as a father and a student. It wasn’t easy and it was a little bit frustrating. I was wondering, how will I be able to leave IRCOM and to get a house somewhere. I didn’t know if [it] could happen one day. I was wondering about my kids, how they [would] cope with the situation in Canada. But, day after day, I noticed that one step at a time, a dream can become true. Now, I can see very, very big change. The most important thing is [the] empowerment I got from IRCOM. The education I got [and] the confidence I’m building day after day.” — Anthony

In many of the interviews, people discuss the goals they set for themselves and how they plan to achieve them. They pursue these goals in

a step-wise and regimented way, achieving the first steps before moving onto something bigger. People break their end goals down into smaller, achievable pieces (e.g. pursuing training or language learning) before focusing on their larger goals (e.g., obtaining a new career or going to university). From year to year, families achieve smaller goals. Some find part time work, others begin English classes or get their driver’s license. Many gain confidence from year to year, as demonstrated by their willingness to try things on their own or speak English to those around them. Many end up balancing education with employment, language learning, and family life. Having stable and affordable housing at IRCOM allows them to pursue and obtain these building blocks and steps of their settlement process. They then approach their move out of IRCOM as yet another step they must take toward pursuing their goals.

A central reason for interview participants being able to achieve their settlement goals at IRCOM is owing to the fact that they have affordable, safe, secure, and good-quality housing early in their settlement process. They do not have to find ‘survival employment’ (Creese & Wiebe, 2014) in order to provide for themselves the base necessities of life. They are encouraged to pursue the steps needed to get work that aligns with their training and experience, rather than merely take whatever low-skilled, poorly compensated job is available, which is an occurrence that affects too many newcomers and puts them into a cycle of deskilling that keeps them in undesirable employment. People who get the opportunity to live at IRCOM are set on a path toward successful settlement and integration, thanks to the combined provision of affordable housing and wrap-around supports.

Conclusions and Implications of IRCOM for Settlement

There are four important conclusions to be drawn from this project that can help to better understand the needs of immigrants and refugees during settlement and integration.

First, the findings from this study reveal and reinforce that settlement is a complex and involved process. Successful settlement requires newcomers to regain confidence and familiarity in a place that is unfamiliar. It involves re-learning a day-to-day routine in a new place, with new expectations and norms. It involves being able to grocery shop without difficulty or sorting through mail and knowing the difference between junk mail and a government document. Settlement requires people to learn a new transportation system or how to walk to the store in the winter without getting frostbite. It involves learning about customs around parenting. It involves socializing with new people, from new places and finding the familiar within a deeply unfamiliar environment. What IRCOM does for those who stop over within their walls on their settlement journey is help them learn the nuances of their new community. Through information and supports provided by IRCOM, immigrants and refugees become familiar with the new and strange. Settlement, ultimately, is

about empowerment and independence, which IRCOM instills in newcomer families. People regain their independence and become empowered while living in a deeply supportive yet unfamiliar environment. It is IRCOM's holistic vision of settlement that positively shapes newcomers' lives.

Settlement takes time and is not linear. At the end of their three years at IRCOM, families are not necessarily settled. When they move out, they undergo another period of adaptation and re-learning. Many struggle with social isolation when they relocate as they navigate a new neighbourhood and no longer have the supports provided by IRCOM. Indeed, they have the tools and knowledge necessary to adapt to their new environment, but it remains a challenge for many. Outreach and supports are required for families once they move away from IRCOM and many participants suggest that they would like to be able to access such supports in their new neighbourhood. In addition, special attention is needed for women, since many discussed feeling depressed and isolated after leaving IRCOM. Further, even though children and youth were not interviewed, they, too, are affected by the move out of IRCOM as they struggle to find new groups of friends, patterns of play, and activities.

In light of such struggles, though, the conclusion to be drawn is not that IRCOM creates a sense of dependence among tenants, but rather that settlement is complex and hard, and society is not always as warm, inviting, and welcoming as the community that exists within IRCOM.

“While it is above all a matter a social justice, providing refugees with affordable and decent housing also may give them the necessary breathing room to take time for retraining, language skills development and other strategies so they can move faster out of the ranks of the working poor” (Rose, 2016, n.p).

Second, the experiences of tenants at IRCOM demonstrate that when trying to understand what leads to successful settlement, we should not be content with having employment as our sole marker. Many interview participants are not employed full-time at the end of their three years at IRCOM, but they achieve much in their time in Canada. People pursue language classes, go to college or university, find volunteer opportunities, and set out a plan for their future. Too often, newly arrived immigrants and refugees may accept ‘survival jobs’ so they can meet the necessities of life (including housing). Sometimes they may pursue such jobs on their own or are encouraged to accept poorly compensated, low-skill work by service provider organizations (Creese & Wiebe, 2012). As Creese and Wiebe (2012) argue, accepting these types of jobs leads to deskilling for immigrants who are encouraged to take jobs just because they are available, rather than pursuing the training and education necessary to pursue employment that fits their skills and experience. IRCOM’s model of holistic and wrap-around supports while providing affordable housing allows newcomers the resources and time to establish themselves instead of accepting survival jobs just to pay the bills. Indeed, IRCOM provides supports for employment, but does so with a longer-term goal in mind, giving

tenants opportunities to gain Canadian work experience, learn about the labour market, and pursue necessary training and education.

Third, the experiences of IRCOM tenants in this study reveals that housing must be considered an essential and foundational element of the settlement process in policy. To do so requires a complex examination of the lack of affordable housing in urban centres in Canada, since newcomers do not often come with the means to afford exorbitant rents in the private market or purchase their own home. There is an undeniable need for more social housing, and this must be made an issue in considerations for successful settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees (Rose, 2016). Keeping housing separate from settlement and integration policy does immigrants and refugees a profound disservice as it compromises the success of their settlement process and neglects what should be seen as a foundational element of successful settlement. More efforts are needed to link housing to settlement services, policy, and programming. It must be given the same attention as language learning and labour market participation, if not more. Without access to affordable, safe, appropriately sized, and good-quality housing, then the rest of settlement simply cannot occur.

Moreover, careful consideration of the housing needs for resettling refugee families is required if Canada is to meet their obligations to this population of newcomers. Housing can either exacerbate or mitigate the challenges refugees are facing, and their needs require particular attention. Since the conditions of their dislocation are often traumatic and, in some cases, violent, refugees come to Canada with needs that are quite unlike those of permanent economic immigrants. They arrive with less financial resources, do not typically have extensive social networks, and may have minimal knowledge of the place they are expected to resettle, which affects their well-being and ability to find appropriate housing. Refugee families often require housing that

is large enough to accommodate their family size, but rents for such places are much higher than smaller places. One participant, who has been quite unhappy with her post-IRCOM housing options, discussed how she needs housing in a quiet and safe neighbourhood since loud noises exacerbate the trauma she experiences after living in a war zone. Such a concern cannot be ignored and has profound implications for her resettlement process. Given their particular traumas and struggles, it is unjust to expect refugee families to merely accept places to live just because they are available. They require housing in which they can feel safe and supported otherwise the process of resettlement will remain one that is deeply stressful and unsettling.

Fourth, the findings from this study demonstrate the importance of considering the family unit in settlement service delivery. At IRCOM, programs and supports are provided for the whole family. When interview participants were asked about the benefits of living at IRCOM, nearly everyone cited the impact of the After School Program on their children as they witnessed advances in their children's academic abilities and confidence in school. Many also state that their children benefit from socializing within such a diverse environment, learning from children of

other cultures and backgrounds. While the study did not interview children or youth, the positive influence of IRCOM's holistic model and their supports and programs on children are voiced through their parents. Settlement and integration is a process experienced by the whole family and, as such, policies and programs must target children and youth as well as parents if they are to be successful.

Indeed, given current and past tenants' positivity toward IRCOM and the observed benefits the model has on families, it seems like an obvious conclusion to proclaim that more models like IRCOM are required to meet the needs of immigrants and refugees and ensure successful settlement. However, replication is not a straightforward process and special attention must be given to local characteristics and capacities. The IRCOM model does warrant more widespread attention, though. By mitigating barriers to both housing and service provision, its holistic vision of settlement and integration addresses many challenges faced by newcomer populations. Further, including programs and supports for the whole family empowers the family unit to settle and integrate. IRCOM's successes cannot be denied and the impacts the model has on immigrant and refugee families are immeasurable.

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Appendix 1: IRCOM Tenant Consent Form



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG



Research Project Title: *A Three-Year Longitudinal Analysis on the Impact of Social Housing with Community Supports on Immigrants and Refugees in Winnipeg*

Researcher: Jill Bucklaschuk

Phone number:

Email address:

Sponsor: The Winnipeg Foundation and the Manitoba Research Alliance - through a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

This consent form will be left with you. The form should give you the basic idea of the research and your involvement. Your housing situation at IRCOM will not be affected in any way if you choose to participate or not. If you would like more information, please ask Jill Bucklaschuk.

What is this project about? This three-year study is conducted in partnership with IRCOM. The research examines the impact that good quality, affordable and stable housing along with supports and services have on your life as you are settling into Manitoba. The research investigates how housing and supports affect your settlement experience, including work and school/training, social life and participation in your community.

You are being asked to be involved in this three-year research project. You are asked to participate in a total of 3 interviews over the three years, with each interview lasting 1.5 hours. You will be asked questions about how living at IRCOM has impacted your family. You will be asked questions about your family and yourself, such as how members of your family are doing in terms of schooling, education, employment, whether you are experiencing any difficulties with the law, etc., as well as questions about your goals for the future.

Privacy/Confidentiality: What you say in your interviews will be kept confidential (private). If you agree, our talk together will be recorded on an audio recorder (otherwise the interviewer will take notes). Only the main researcher (Jill Bucklaschuk), the research assistant (Warda Ahmed/Elizabeth Andrea), and the person who transcribes the interview will hear the audio recording of the interview. We have both signed a confidentiality (privacy) agreement that says that we will keep your words confidential. The staff and volunteers of IRCOM will **NOT** hear what is said during the interview. Please know that if a person in an interview tells me about the abuse of a child, I legally have to tell the police.

Confidentiality (privacy) will also be kept within the written reports of this research project. The audio recordings will be transcribed (written out), and information that might show who you are

(names, number of children, language spoken) will be taken out; each interview will be given a number and will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer. You will not be named in any reports of this study. Although the researcher will try to keep your information private, there is still a chance that someone reading the final report will know you because they know that you live at IRCOM. Your interview will be included in a number of reports that will be made public during the three-year study. The media may be invited to hear the results. Information that has private information (e.g., this consent form and the personal information sheet) will be stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed after the study.

Consent: Your participation in this study is voluntary — it is your choice to participate. You are free to stop being involved or not answer any question asked of you. Your housing situation at IRCOM will not be affected in any way if you choose to participate or not. You can stop being involved in this project up until the report on each interview is written.

How will the interview be used? The results of the study will be shared with you during and after the three-year study. The written reports will be published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives during the project, as well as possibly academic journals. A final report will complete the research project. This report will be shared publicly. Presentations may also be made at academic conferences and to interested community groups. By signing this form, you are saying that you agree to this.

Before we begin, do you have any questions about your interview or the research?

I agree to participate in this research project, including being audio-taped.

OR

I agree to participate in this research project but **do not** want to be audio-taped.

I want to be involved in this research project for 3 years and give permission to the researcher to contact me about future interviews in 2016 and 2017.

The researcher can use direct quotes (your own words) from my interview.

I was given a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Signature

Date

Interviewer's Signature

Date

The University of Winnipeg University Human Research Ethics Board (UHREB) has approved this study. If you have any problems about the way this study is done, please contact Jill Bucklaschuk at 204-XXX-XXXX. If there are still problems, please contact the UHREB Program Officer at 204-786-9058.

Appendix 2: Sample Interview Questions

Year 1

Current Tenants:

1. How is life for you in Canada?
2. What has your experience been like at IRCOM House? Best part? Worst part?
3. Please tell me about your family. How are your kids doing? How are you doing?
4. Does living at IRCOM affect your children? How? (school; safety; friends)
5. Does your family access IRCOM's educational programs? Which ones? How have they affected your family?
6. Do you have employment goals for the future? What are they? What would help you in achieving these goals?
7. What programs do you use at IRCOM? How have they been?
8. What supports outside of IRCOM do you currently access? Has IRCOM connected you with any of these supports?
9. Please tell me about how safe or unsafe you feel here at IRCOM. Why?
10. Where do you want to be living after IRCOM? What steps are you taking to

make that happen? How is IRCOM helping you with these steps?

Past Tenants:

1. How was your experience of living at IRCOM? Favourite/least favourite part?
2. Which programs and services did you use when you lived at IRCOM? Did they help you? How?
3. How was your children's experience at IRCOM?
4. How did the community aspect of IRCOM affect your settlement? Did you make friends at IRCOM? Feel supported?
5. Where did you move after IRCOM House? How did you find this place? Do you like it?
6. What do you think your life in Canada would look like if you hadn't lived at IRCOM?
7. What could IRCOM have done better to help you and your family?
8. Do you have anything else you'd like to share with me?

Year 2

Current Tenants:

1. Please tell me how things have been for you in the past year.
2. Are you living in the same place you were living in last year at this time?
3. Thinking about the neighbourhood around IRCOM, please tell me your thoughts about the area where you live.
4. Have you met people outside of IRCOM?
5. Do you use any of the programs at IRCOM?
6. Do you access any programs or services outside of IRCOM?
7. Is there anything about living at IRCOM that has surprised you?
8. Is there anything about living at IRCOM that has disappointed you?
9. Imagine your life in 2 years. Please tell me what you hope for yourself and your family.
10. What are your thoughts about one day leaving IRCOM?

Past Tenants:

1. Please describe your experience living at IRCOM.
2. What would you say were the most positive parts of living at IRCOM?
3. What would you say were the most negative parts of living at IRCOM?
4. Could you tell me which programs and services you and your family used while living at IRCOM?
5. How have these programs helped you and your family?
6. Did the supports you received at IRCOM help you to find housing?
7. Have you encountered any challenges with your current residence?
8. What effect has IRCOM had on your life?

9. When you moved out of IRCOM, did you feel prepared to live on your own?
10. Using your imagination, what would your life be like now if you had not lived at IRCOM?

Year 3

Current tenants:

1. Are you living in the same place you were living in last year at this time?
2. Have your thoughts toward the area/ neighbourhood changed in the last year?
3. Are you involved in any community and/or neighbourhoods group?
4. Do you like living in Winnipeg?
5. Have you ever felt like you don't belong in Winnipeg?
6. Do you consider IRCOM to be an important part of your life? Why?
7. Do you think IRCOM will have an impact on your future? If so, why and how?
8. How do you think your life will change once you move out of IRCOM?
9. Reflecting on the past three years, can you describe for me how your life has changed?
10. If you were talking to someone who had just moved to Canada from another country, what advice would you give them, based on your experiences?

Past tenants:

1. Can you remember the first months/ year after moving away from IRCOM? Do you remember how you felt when you left IRCOM?
2. When you left IRCOM, did you feel ready to live in a different place?
3. Do you have plans to move in the future?
4. What resources/supports/services/organizations do you use to look for housing?



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CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
MANITOBA OFFICE

Unit 205 – 765 Main St., Winnipeg, MB R2W 3N5
TEL 204-927-3200 FAX 204-927-3201
EMAIL ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca
WEBSITE www.policyalternatives.ca