

**Dakota County  
Human Services Advisory Committee**

***Change and Stability:*  
Update on Status of Immigrants  
in Dakota County**

**October 9, 2007**



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“Around the turn of the last century hundreds of thousands of Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, Pole, Finns, and other Europeans poured into the Great Plains to bust the prairie sod, cut virgin timber, toil in the mines, and build cities of brick and steel... In 1910, the peak year for immigration to Minnesota, 29 percent of the state’s population was born outside the country.”

(1)

Today in Dakota County, nearly 28,000 residents, or 7.3 percent, are foreign-born; the Minnesota figure is 12.4 percent. (2)

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## 1. Introduction

### b. 2003 HSAC report

In February 2003, the Human Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) completed a report on the status of immigrants in the County. The report noted that immigration is a feature of American life and that most Americans trace their heritage to other parts of the globe. The Committee considered how immigrants were faring at the time and whether there was a role for Dakota County to help communities meet challenges and take advantage of opportunities posed by immigrants. On February 11, 2003 the Board Community Services Committee heard an HSAC presentation of findings and recommendations. The Board accepted the report and did not direct staff to undertake any new program or activities.

### c. 2007 Board request

At its meeting on January 23, 2007, County Board members discussed immigration as a driving force of population growth in Dakota County. In response to a request for additional information, the Human Services Advisory Committee agreed to conduct an update of the 2003 Status of Immigrants report.

## 2. Study Process

### b. Human Services Advisory Committee.

The Human Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) is a 21-person group of County residents appointed by the Dakota County Board of Commissioners to advise the Board on human services issues. With assistance from Community Services Division staff, HSAC typically seeks out expert information and opinions through literature studies and presentations by academic and community informants.

### b. Sessions

HSAC met monthly from February 2007 through October 2007 (except July, due to staff illness) to gather information, to discuss issues and concerns, and to develop recommendations. During these sessions HSAC members learned about immigrants in Dakota County through three avenues:

- Population, demographic, and economic trends compiled from a variety of sources.

- Views and comments by representatives of the Hispanic, African, and Asian immigrant communities at three HSAC meetings.
- Highlights from 10 focus groups conducted with staff persons who work with immigrants. Organizations included Community Services Division departments, school districts, private agencies, cities, and churches.

Following the data-gathering phase, HSAC members used three meetings to summarize what they had learned, to determine major issues and concerns, and to develop recommendations for the County Board.

### 3. What did HSAC learn?

#### b. HSAC 2003 Report

First, we would like to summarize key findings from the 2003 HSAC report, as the purpose of the present study is to update these results:

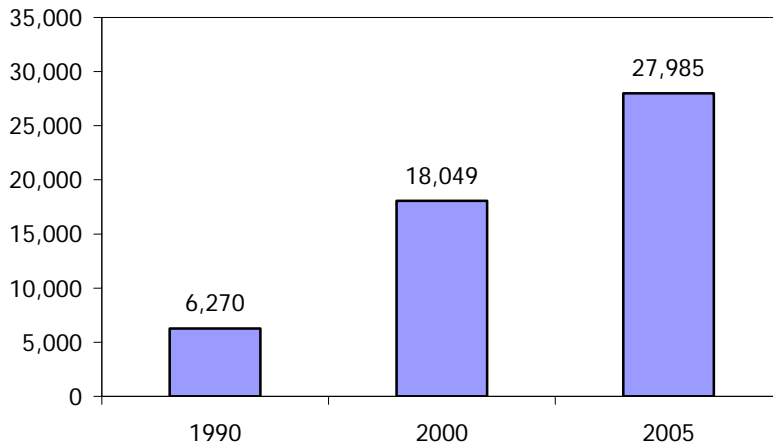
- Overview.
  - There were approximately 18,000 immigrants in Dakota County according to the 2000 Census, about five percent of the total population.
  - Most immigrants come to this country to be with family members, in search of better schools, housing, and neighborhoods.
  - HSAC members met with representatives of the largest and most visible immigrant communities- Somalis, Lao/Cambodians, Latinos, and former Soviet Union.
  
- Concerns.
  - Limited ability to speak and read English.
  - Getting started in Dakota County (“putting one foot in front of another”).
  - Fear and mistrust of authority.
  - Reconciling old world parenting with new adolescent realities.
  - Dealing with mental health problems.
  - Dealing with racism and xenophobia.
  
- Strengths.
  - Communities are highly networked.
  - Traditions of mutual aid exist.
  - Many are risk-takers, highly educated.

#### c. Population and Demographic Trends- updated

##### ▪ Growth

The foreign-born population reached nearly 28,000 in 2005, a gain of 55 percent since 2000. During this time, the percent of foreign-born residents grew from 5.1 to 7.3 percent of the population.

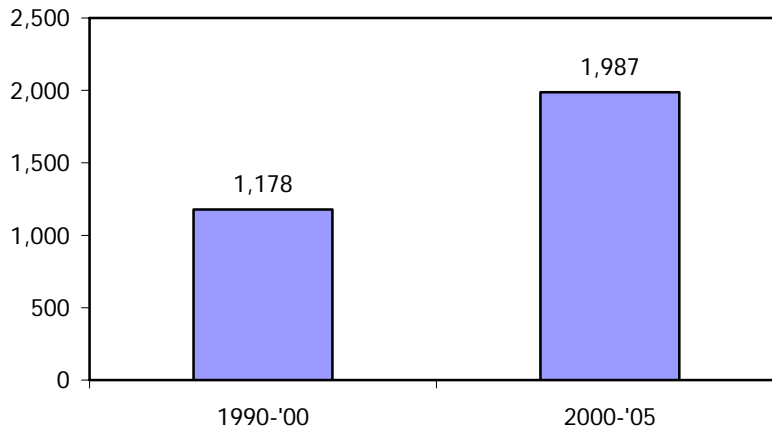
**Immigrant Population in Dakota County  
1990, 2000, & 2005**



Source: U.S. Decennial Census and American Community Survey

A comparison with 1990-2000 shows that annual gains so far since the 2000 Census have increased.

**Annual Growth of Foreign-born Residents  
Dakota County, 1990-2000 and 2000-2005**

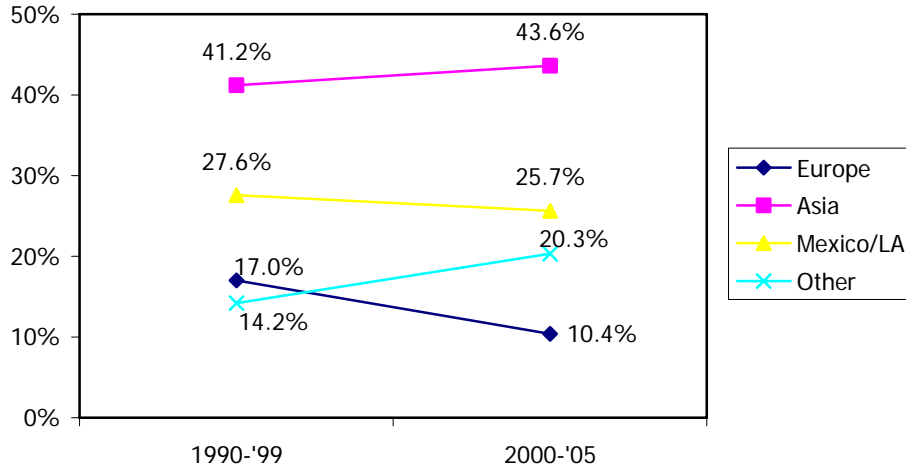


Source: U.S. Decennial Census and American Community Survey

One indicator that further demonstrates the impact of the foreign-born population is that 19 percent (nearly one in five) of births to Dakota County residents was to foreign-born women.

While the number of new arrivals has increased, there has also been a change in country of origin. With the largest decline in immigrants from European countries, the largest increase has been newcomers from African countries.

**Region of Birth by Percent  
Dakota County, 1990 - 2005**



Source: U.S. Decennial Census and American Community Survey

- Diversity

Looking at education, income, and poverty demonstrates that there are sizeable differences within the immigrant population.

- Education.

Though 23 percent of immigrants over the age of 16 do not have a high school diploma (much higher than 3.5% in total population), 14 percent have graduate or professional degrees (higher than 10.2% in native-born population).

- Income.

While a large percentage of individuals have low incomes, nearly 20 percent earn \$50,000 or more annually.

Income, 2005	Foreign-born		Others	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
\$0 - \$14,999	9,366	37%	77,294	28%
\$15,000 - \$24,000	4,687	19%	30,394	11%
\$25,000 - \$49,000	6,484	26%	82,983	31%
\$50,000 - \$64,999	1,751	7%	30,810	11%
\$65,000 +	2,737	11%	50,553	19%
	25,025	100%	272,034	100%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey

- Poverty

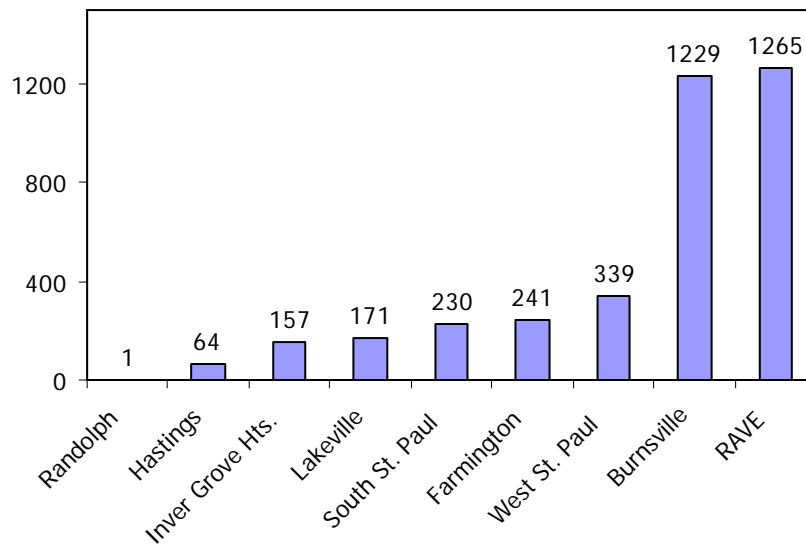
Foreign-born residents have a higher rate of poverty (9.7%) in Dakota County than the total population (5.3%), but the rate is still lower than the U.S. rate of 13.3 percent.

▪ Geography

Because the only available data about immigrants since the 2000 Census provides County level data, it is difficult to assess residential patterns. But school district data offer some guidance.

The school districts with the most students who have “limited English proficiency” are Burnsville and Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan (RAVE). “LEP” students are usually recent arrivals.

**Students with Limited English Proficiency  
Dakota County School Districts, 2006-07**



Source: Minnesota Department of Education

We should note that the Burnsville percentage (12%) of LEP students is much greater than in the RAVE district (5%). West St. Paul (8%) and South St. Paul (7%) have the next highest rates after Burnsville.

▪ Workforce.

Though lacking detailed data about number and percent of foreign-born workers by occupation and industry, we did learn about experiences of many employers in Dakota County. Mark Jacobs, Director of the Workforce Centers of Dakota and Scott Counties provided this information.

Several employers have notably high numbers of immigrants and refugees on their payrolls. Examples include: Ryt-Way Industries (Lakeville) said that 330 (55%) employees are foreign born, Northwest Airlines (Eagan) estimated that 10-15 percent of local employees are foreign-born, and Fairview Ridges (Burnsville) reported that a large number of its workers are foreign-born. Wells Fargo noted that they are seeking to hire tellers who are fluent in English and Spanish.

d. Faces on the Numbers

HSAC learned about real-life experiences of immigrants in Dakota County from immigrants themselves and from staff (including both native-born and foreign-born) in many organizations who daily help immigrants navigate their new world.

We heard rich, compelling, touching, and sometimes humorous stories about new Americans in Dakota County. To weave together an estimated 20 hours of conversation, we have selected six themes:

- English Language
- Family Relations
- Resources
- Cultural Conventions
- Workforce
- Organizational Change.

- English Language

There is widespread acceptance that learning English is necessary for adapting to a new culture. "Learning English," however, has different meanings. Kids learn a new language more readily than adults. Working age adults must have at least "conversational" or "workplace" English. According the 2006 American Community Survey, 8,440 workers who live in Dakota County, 16 years and over, speak English "less than very well."

Older immigrants may learn only limited English and integrate less easily. HSAC members recognized the value of young and old alike retaining the language and culture of their home countries... the importance of balancing two opposite forces- maintaining supportive immigrant communities while joining American society.

- Family Relations

Families undergo severe and sometimes ongoing stress. First, there may be a sense of "loss" after leaving the home country, with stops along the way, sometimes in refugee camps. The rapport with family and friends in familiar neighborhoods is no longer easy in a new setting. Learning a new language and customs takes time... people talked about loneliness in this "foreign land" (of Dakota County).

Secondly, family roles are shifted. Adults may feel a loss of honor or respect as they may take a “lesser” job than they held previously or progress more slowly, compared to their children, in adapting. A Somali immigrant noted that power may shift from parents to kids. Because learning English is generally easier for the children, they may assume additional responsibilities and assert more power within the family unit by translating for their parents and representing the family in contacts with governmental officials.

- Resources

From the perspective of immigrants themselves, resettlement presents a dizzying array of complying with laws/regulations and figuring out how to seek help in areas such as housing, jobs, language, and health. An immigrant working for a non-profit said that the main challenge is how to establish yourself. Though her job at a Burnsville church is to organize religious services and educational programs for Spanish-speaking families, a Mexican woman said that many people approach her for help and advice. Both a family support worker for a non-profit and an ESL teacher noted that immigrants approach them for guidance because they have built sound relationships. In these cases, immigrants felt sufficient trust and comfort level.

A Somali woman noted that having only a few primary County service locations and “normal” business hours challenge families whose adults work during the day or work more than one job.

Staff persons highlighted these issues:

- Transportation and location. Many families have unreliable cars or a single car that serves several working adults. For some adults working more than one job, attending evening and extra-curricular sessions at their children’s school is difficult.

- Language and culturally specific services. Finding programs with staff who speak languages other than English is difficult. While there are many such programs in the core cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, growth in the County has not kept pace with population changes.

- In order to serve immigrants well, staff spend much more case management time (addressing language issues and tracking down appropriate resources) than with native-born individuals and families.

- Cultural Conventions

Both immigrants themselves and organizational staff mentioned cultural ideas unfamiliar to many new arrivals- prevention, mental health, and school/parent relations.

- Prevention. Prevention is a new concept to many immigrants. For example, they are used to waiting until a child is sick before seeking help. So, simply

encouraging families to take part in “prevention” may make little sense to them and result in little follow through.

- School/parent relations. Our culture places great emphasis on parent involvement in their children’s education, both at home (with homework) and at school (conferences, special programs, volunteering). For many immigrants this is an unfamiliar expectation.

- Mental Health. Immigrant communities face an even higher level of stigma and reluctance to seek help than the overall population.

- Workforce

In considering English language skills, employers use two approaches in hiring:

- Some employers will hire only those with good English skills
- Other employers will hire and provide training and/or mentors.

Larger businesses have greater flexibility than small businesses to offer its workers:

- Training in English and career advancement.
- Assistance with paperwork for visa and citizenship applications and transferability of education.

Mark Jacobs summarized six challenges that employers face with their foreign-born employees:

- Basic English skills (...for safe operation of machinery)
- English skills for career advancement (...improve vocabulary)
- Cultural differences (...working near pork, request for leave time)
- Work authorization (...paperwork, expiration, visa shortages)
- Benefits (...paper trails for marriage and divorce)
- Emergencies abroad (...extended leave time)

- Organizational Improvement

Staff persons from the County, non-profits, and schools generally agreed that while their respective sectors are working hard and sincerely to accommodate new Americans, some positive gains can be accelerated.

- Training and education. Staff uniformly valued sessions that taught them about other people’s history, culture, and language. They cited specific ways in which these sessions helped them work with family dynamics or simply how to address and greet clients.
- Partnering. Staff said partnering is especially effective for serving immigrants: sharing information, making special efforts for referrals, and together finding solutions for client needs results in better outcomes than when working alone.
- County services. From outside the county, several comments about improving how the county serves new American included:

- o Locations. For some services there are only one or two locations and hours are 8 AM to 4:30 PM. Travel to the Northern Service Center for financial assistance was highlighted.
- o Languages in phone system. English is the only language on the County phone system. They suggested adding at least some opportunities to get information through the major non-English languages spoken in the county (e.g., "for Spanish, press 2" ...)

County staff applauded training that has been available and the ease for accessing interpreter services and the Language Line. In contrast, schools generally have ready interpreter access only for formally arranged meetings, not informal contact or whenever the need arises.

#### 4. Issues and Concerns

HSAC members sifted through the quantitative and qualitative data to uncover themes and possible emphasis areas for developing recommendations. They identified three major areas for deliberation: Language and Workplace, Resource Improvement, and Cultural Connections.

##### a. Language and Workplace

Research from the current HSAC study strongly echoed a major concern from the 2003 report, "Immigrants' inability to speak and read English affects every aspect of their lives, from dealing with government/law enforcement to finding a place to live, to interacting with their children's schools. Everyone HSAC spoke to... hammered home this point." (3)

Current HSAC members further examined this point and concluded that any recommendation should focus on working-age adults succeeding in the workplace. Children and youth tend to learn a new language more readily and are exposed to English in school and with their peers. Older adults face isolation and slow adaptation. Given the importance of self-sufficiency and participation in civic life, working-age adults seemed the sensible focus. The 2006 American Community Survey estimates that in Dakota County there are 18,000 foreign-born residents ages 25-54.

##### b. Resource Improvement.

HSAC members were impressed by the multiple layers of issues related to accessing resources discussed by immigrants and staff alike. They identified three interconnected issues.

- Knowledge

In response to accumulated growth of foreign-born residents, public sector institutions (such as County, school districts, cities) and private, non-profits

(service agencies and churches) have expanded their capacities to serve those from different cultures and with different languages. As mentioned earlier, staff noted that they spend considerable time trying to locate services that match needs and capacities of clients.

Because there has been no mechanism or forum to exchange/share information, more than one effort (within the county, a school district, and a collaborative) emerged to develop a comprehensive directory of services. Though the county's document is most complete, it challenges the single staff person's time and ability to make it accurate and current.

The United Way of the Twin Cities has developed the "211" Information and Referral system and database of resources in the region. Staff comments suggest that the phone system is not very helpful while the computer disk containing the database is a useful tool. The United Way is currently reviewing the content and effectiveness of the 211 system and how to best disseminate information.

- Access

From experience of the immigrant communities, they, of course, also have difficulty finding services on their own (see what we said about savvy staff persons!).

Further, the location of services and transportation presents another set of challenges. We do not have a "multi-service" site addressing myriad issues facing immigrants. As we are a large-sized county and lack good within-county transit, people can't conveniently "bundle" multiple trips and reliance on public transportation is especially challenging.

HSAC members also discussed several potential locations for "resource knowledgeable" persons that are effortlessly accessible and welcoming for immigrants. These may include libraries or volunteer sites at agencies and faith organizations.

- Development

Another aspect is development of services that serve new Americans living within Dakota County. There is a rich network of agencies serving immigrant communities in the principal cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. However, reflecting a national trend, many recent arrivals are settling in suburban areas. Overall, established agencies have scarce resources and cannot readily expand their reach into Dakota County. So, the question is how to nurture "locally-grown" Dakota County agencies and also to attract metro-wide agencies.

HSAC members noted that increased presence of immigrant-serving agencies at Dakota County locations would make an enormous contribution.

We should note several particularly welcome expansions in Dakota County: Community Action Council created a New American Services department to assist individuals and families in resettlement; EFTIN, begun and staffed by immigrants, serves Somali children and families and provides training for other agencies; and Storefront Group employs staff in two school districts to assist foreign-born students and their families.

Perhaps most ambitious is a new “collaborative” of organizations (non-profit agencies, school districts, cities, and county departments) that serve immigrants. Meeting monthly since April, the group shares information, improves referrals, and is planning a countywide resource fair for January 2008.

c. Cultural Connections.

Throughout the study process we saw evidence of miscues between immigrant communities and receiving communities. A Nigerian immigrant said, “It is important for immigrants to understand the system and for the system to understand immigrants and refugees.”

Exchanges between newcomers and community-at-large build trust and positive relations with social institutions. Specific benefits may include: promote simple encounters (exchange greetings in different languages), reduce moderate stress (not ordering pepperoni pizza for employees, some of whom are Muslim), induce healthier behaviors (participate in physical fitness activities), and support long-term benefits (improve school success for children by immigrant parent-school partnerships).

5. Recommendations

HSAC developed five recommendations to address the three issues and concerns noted and also recognized that while Dakota County government has an important role, it need not be the leading actor.

Following a brief discussion for each recommendation area is a Summary Table.

a. To increase economic advancement and self-sufficiency.

HSAC identified that achieving adequate English language skills is a high priority. A 2007 report by the Migration Policy Institute noted, “English is truly the language of opportunity for today’s immigrants: it opens the door to jobs that pay family-sustaining wages and allows immigrants to communicate with their neighbors, their children’s teachers, health care providers, landlords, and others...” (4)

HSAC suggests that for working-age adults the Workforce Centers is the best organization to link existing resources, immigrant communities, and businesses.

b. To help new arrivals link to formal and informal systems.

HSAC heard about the difficulty of settling in a new land, but also the value of trusted relationships. An Indianapolis non-profit launched an intriguing approach earlier this year, "The burgeoning number of immigrants arriving in Indianapolis have a new source available to help them navigate unfamiliar surroundings and the kaleidoscope of social support systems... The Welcome Center uses volunteers dubbed 'natural helpers' to link foreign newcomers to such basic needs as health care, government, and transportation services." (5)

HSAC suggests that the non-profit sector is best situated to develop such a program, such Community Action Council and the Immigrant Collaborative.

c. To strengthen immigrant community assets and leadership.

Other recommendations focus on improving "systems" and not immigrant communities themselves. However, immigrants bring, not just need for services, but strengths and a rich wealth of experience. Cities (as close as Brooklyn Park, MN and counties (as far away as Santa Clara County, CA) have developed leadership programs, "Civic participation can include attending a school meeting... voting or participating in government. Civic participation is an indicator of successful integration and the cornerstone of a healthy democracy" (6)

HSAC notes that several local foundations are interesting in supporting immigrant communities.

d. To expand resources and to improve access to resources.

HSAC members concluded that "resources" had inter-connected themes- struggle to find up-to-date and accurate information about resources for immigrants, plus expand resources for growing immigrant population.

In response HSAC agreed that there should be a single, cooperative effort to track and disseminate information. In addition, support for county-based services and increased presence of Minneapolis and St. Paul-based services would aid the County's foreign-born residents.

HSAC suggests that partnerships are especially critical here.

e. To improve Dakota County's ability to serve immigrants and refugees.

Dakota County has a responsibility to examine its own policies and procedures. Many County and non-County staff, and immigrants themselves, complimented the County for its efforts... and also made suggestions. Two suggestions that HSAC thought worthwhile to consider are providing non-English functions within the County phone system and expanding service locations.

HSAC recognizes that staff from all County Divisions could be involved.

### SUMMARY TABLE

Goal	Target Group	Actions	County Role	Potential Partners	Cost
a. To increase economic advancement and self-sufficiency of immigrants.  Issue/Concern: Language & Workplace	Working-age immigrants and refugees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Present HSAC Change &amp; Stability Immigrant report to Workforce Investment Board.</li> <li>- Strengthen connections between network of English as Second Language (ESL) providers, employers, and immigrants.</li> <li>- Encourage larger businesses to assist smaller businesses with English training, career advancement, recruitment, and legal help.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate partnership development.</li> </ul> <p>Lead: Workforce Centers of Dakota and Scott Counties</p>	Adult Basic Education programs, International Institute of MN, and businesses	Minimal
b. To help new arrivals link to formal and informal systems of support.  Issue/Concern: Resource Improvement	All immigrants and refugees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop a relational resource center using cultural support volunteers at multiple locations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote concept and seed funding</li> </ul> <p>Lead: Community Service Admin.</p>	Community Action Council (CAC), Immigrant Collaborative, and Dakota County Collaborative	Modest
c. To strengthen immigrant community assets and leadership.  Issue/Concern: Cultural Connections	Teenage and older immigrants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase leadership development, volunteer, and civic participation opportunities.</li> <li>- Track funding and partnership opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assist with research and grant writing.</li> </ul> <p>Lead: Community Services Admin. and Planning</p>	CAC, Immigrant Collaborative, and foundations	Modest
d. To expand resources and to improve access to resources.  Issue/Concern: Resource Improvement	Immigrant communities and public and non-profit providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adapt United Way 211 Information and Referral for use throughout Dakota County.</li> <li>- Nurture development of current programs in Dakota County and attract new programs to serve County residents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initiate discussions with United Way and local partners.</li> </ul> <p>Lead: Community Services Admin.</p>	Dakota County Collaborative, Immigrant Collaborative, Dakota County Community Services and Library, and United Way	Minimal
e. To improve County ability to serve immigrants and refugees.  Issues/Concerns: Resource Improvement & Cultural Connections	All County Divisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Study options and costs of adding non-English language options to phone system.</li> <li>- Study space, cost, and liability issues for "co-location" of services for immigrants.</li> <li>- Investigate providing EEA Department services at additional sites.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate study processes and recommendations.</li> </ul> <p>Leads: Community Services, Employee Relations, and Information Tech.</p>	County Divisions	Unknown

## 6. Conclusion

The Human Services Advisory Committee devoted eight sessions since February 2007 to studying immigrants in Dakota County. The findings and recommendations represent many hours of participation by HSAC members themselves, Dakota County staff, staff from other organizations, and most importantly, the immigrants and refugees who graciously accepted our invitation to spend an evening with us. They spoke eloquently about themselves and others.

To advance the value of the study process, the document concludes, not with the recommendations, but with two additional tasks for the coming year.

First, HSAC will request a follow up report on progress achieved during the next 12 months in implementing recommendations.

Secondly, HSAC will distribute the report to other organizations and offer to present the findings and recommendations.

## APPENDIX A: Endnotes

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1. Phil Davis, "Faces of Change," Fedgazette September 2004: 1.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2005.
3. Human Services Advisory Committee, The Status of Immigrants in Dakota County (West St. Paul: Dakota County Community Services Administration, 2003) 19.
4. Margie McHugh, Julia Gelatt, and Michael Fix, Adult English Language Instruction in the United States, Migration Policy Institute, July 2007: 3.
5. Scott Olson, "City Steps Up Efforts to Help Immigrants," Indianapolis Business Journal July 2, 2007: 1
6. "The House We All Live In: A Report on Civic Integration," Carnegie Foundation, 2003: 17

## APPENDIX B: Definitions

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**Foreign-born population**, as defined by the Census Bureau, refers to all residents of the United States who were not U.S. citizens at birth, regardless of their current legal or citizenship status.

**Natives** are those who were born in one of the following areas--the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or the Northern Mariana Islands--or were born abroad to at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen.

**Immigrants** are defined as persons legally admitted to the United States as permanent residents.

**Refugees** are people admitted to the United States because they are unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution

**Asylees** apply for admission when already in the United States or at a point of entry because they are unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution.

**Legal temporary residents** are foreign citizens authorized to enter and reside temporarily in the United States for a specific purpose such as students, tourists, and temporary workers...

**Unauthorized immigrants** are foreign citizens illegally residing in the United States. Also referred to as *illegal* or *undocumented immigrants or aliens*.

## APPENDIX C: Participants in HSAC Community Forums

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Carmen Dean, Hispanic Ministry Coordinator  
Risen Savior Church  
Burnsville

Anab Gulaid, Executive Director  
Eftin, Inc.  
Burnsville

Alix Ibarra, Director, New Americans Program  
Community Action Council  
Lakeville

Binta Kawu, New American Services  
Community Action Council  
Lakeville

Tina Kush, ESL Teacher and Community Outreach Liaison  
Adult Basic Education/School District #196  
Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan

Amin Mohamed, Mosaic Program  
The Storefront Group

Rogelio Munoz, Executive Director  
Chicano Latino Affairs Council  
St. Paul

Carmen Pineda, Parent Educator and Pre-school Teacher  
Building Bridges and School Readiness, School District #197  
West St. Paul

Phia Xiong, Social Worker  
Dakota County Social Services  
West St. Paul