

Understanding Barriers of Recent Immigrants to Access Recreational Activities in Guelph

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Niva Shrestha

This research study has been shared with the City of Guelph to help inform the ongoing work of the Culture and Recreation Department and the Parks Department. The findings of the study will be used to help inform the City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Abstract

Recreational activities are an integral part of every culture and tradition since ancient times. For many, recreational activities like soccer, basketball, cricket, and tennis are a universal language. Immigrants, especially recent immigrants, tend not to participate in recreational activities in their new host country. Recreational activities are generally overlooked due to the settlement priorities they have for their families. This research investigates the experiences and use of recreational activities and facilities by recent immigrants living in City of Guelph. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand their perceptions of recreational activities, explore their knowledge of Guelph's recreational activities centres, and inquire about their knowledge of available financial programs to support access to recreational activities. This research concludes that there needs to be more work to publicize available recreational centres, to translate and share information on recreational activities and facilities in different languages, and to provide child-care facilities in the existing amenities.

Acknowledgements

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1 Data Collection, Analysis, and Identification of Study Area

1.1 Research Design

The main objective of conducting this research is to identify the problems recent immigrants in Guelph have in participating in recreation activities. This can only be done through understanding the underlying issues.

1.2 Participant Selection

An electronic flyer was made and shared on social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn by the researcher (See Appendix A). The flyer was shared with the clients, volunteers, and interpreters of Immigrant Services Guelph and Wellington. The research flyer also received attention from other organisations whose representatives are in the Leadership Council of GWLIP. The flyer was also shared by the Ontario Works Guelph staff among their clients.

Participants contacted the researcher through both via the email address and phone number provided in the flyer. Immigrant participants who were at least 18 years of age, had not been living in Guelph for more than five years, and who knew English were eligible for this research. There were thirty individuals who responded to the flyer, but only twenty eligible participants were interviewed. The interviews took place between 5th June 2021 and 20th June 2021. There were eight questions asked to each participant in the interview [see Appendix B for a list of the questions]. These questions were related to participant's work shifts, primary mode of transportation, perceptions of recreational activities, financial issues, and their experiences of discrimination while accessing recreational activities. There was one extra question for female participants to see if their religious faith prohibited them from participating in any recreational activities.

1.3 Interview Process

This research answers three main questions. The first question was to understand the importance that immigrant families place on recreational activities. The second question was to understand their knowledge of recreational activities programs available in the city of Guelph. The third was to understand the barriers they face in accessing recreational activities. The most appropriate method to answer these questions was to perform interviews. Considering the COVID-19 protocols at the time (the rules of social distancing and closure of office spaces normally required for personal interviews), face to face interviews were not possible. As a result, telephone interviews were performed instead. A total of ten telephone interviews were conducted, with each interview approximately an hour in length.

Having done similar research with immigrant parents to understand the barriers they face in enrolling their children in recreational activities previously [see [*Understanding Challenges of Nepali Immigrants to Enroll their Children in Recreational Activities in Guelph, Ontario*](#)], the researcher has an understanding of the experiences of local immigrants.

1.4 Limitations

The biggest limitation to the research was the pandemic restrictions. This prohibited meeting participants in their homes or in an office setting Face to face interviews would likely have allowed for greater rapport, more interactions, and better data collection. Another limitation was the criteria for participants was the requirement that they have a good grasp of English, which limited the number of eligible participants. Interpretation was provided in the Arabic and Nepali languages.

2 Findings

Like most people, recreation activities are something immigrants are attracted to participate in. With the benefits they provide to mental and physical health, recreation activities play a key role in reducing various kinds of shock that living in a different environment can sometimes bring to immigrants.

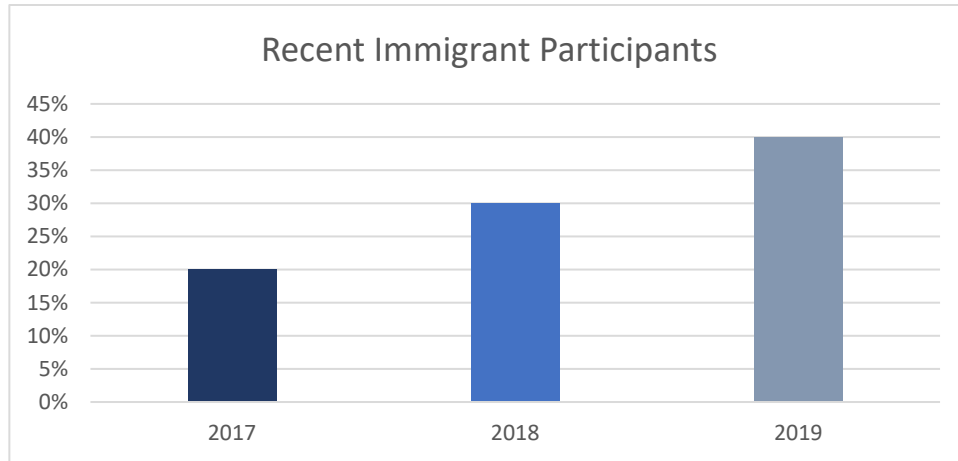


Fig2: Year Participants moved to Canada.

This section presents the analysis of findings from the telephone interviews of twenty participants who are recent immigrants to Guelph. All participants were recent immigrants to Canada, with forty percent of them having immigrated in 2019, thirty percent in 2018 and the rest (20%) in 2017.

40% of the participants were unemployed at the time of the interview, they were either not working, attending English as Second Language (ESL) classes or volunteering. Of the 60% who were working, 25% were working from home and the rest worked in shifts. 45% of participants immigrated because they had friends and family living in Guelph. The remaining 55% immigrated for work, education, or a better life. 65% of the participants were a family with children while the remaining 35% were not married or were couples with no children. Participants answered questions very differently according to whether or not they had children. Those participants with children tended to focus on their children’s experiences with recreation. The rest of the findings are discussed below under the four themes.

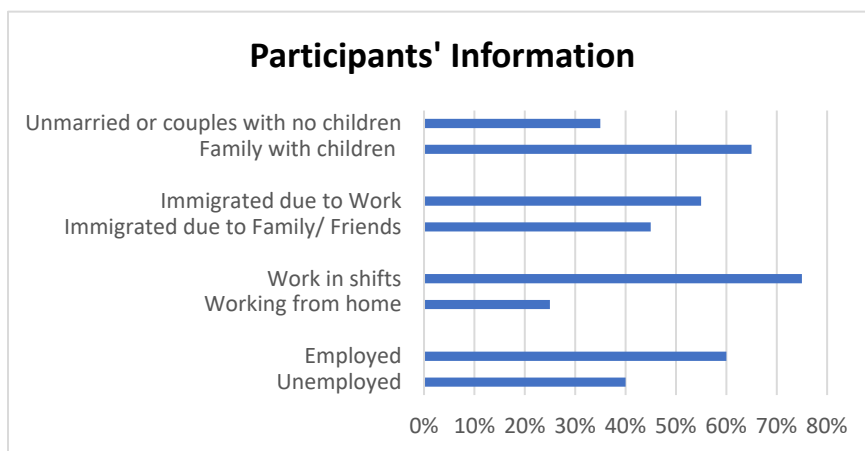


Fig 3: Information about participants

The interview findings are presented in four themes – motivations, knowledge, access, and spatial logistics of accessing recreation opportunities. The motivation theme outlines the perception of immigrants to engage themselves in recreational activities and the importance of recreation in their lives. The knowledge theme examines their understanding of recreational activities and facilities available in Guelph. The access theme examines their current mode of transportation to access recreational activities and facilities in Guelph. The fourth and final theme explores what services (financial or otherwise) are available to immigrants to access using parks, playgrounds, and recreation activities. These four themes also provide insights into the interest of immigrants in recreational activities, their familiarity with recreation activities and facilities available in Guelph, financial discount programs available for recent refugees and low-income individuals, and experiences of discrimination in accessing recreational activities.

2.1 Motivation Theme

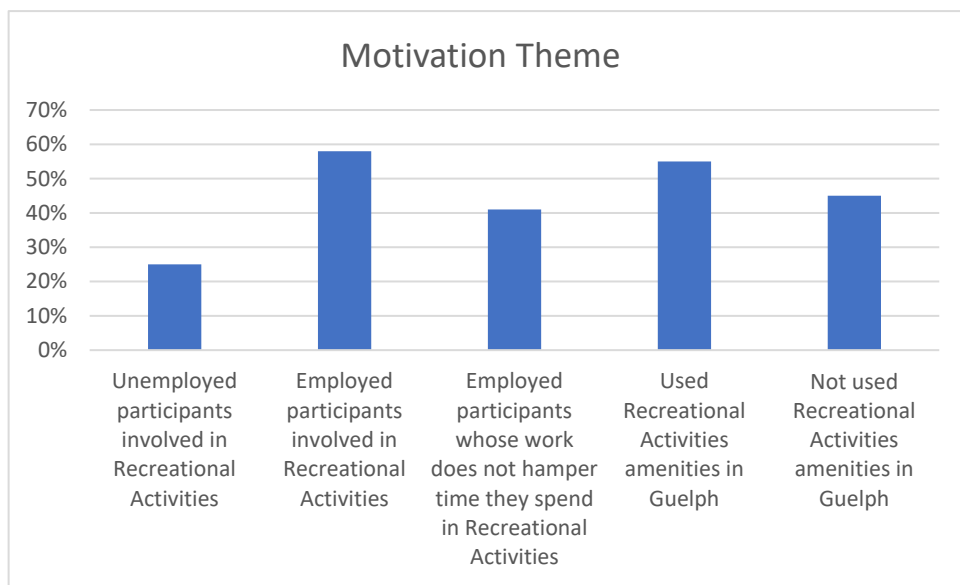


Fig 4: Motivation Theme

This theme investigated critical issues such as the challenges study participants faced that prevented their participation in recreational activities. We also explore participant’s favourite recreational activities in the past and whether there are groups in their community that actively perform these activities. It is generally understood that the settlement needs of recent immigrants will often take precedence over less immediate concerns. As a result, recent immigrants are often under greater financial pressures than the general population. Those participants who did not work had no source of income outside of social assistance. Unemployed participants generally have more free time than those who are working, but only 25% of them were involved in recreational activities, as opposed to 58% of those who are working. For 59% of the participants who were working, their work or their type of work directly hampers the time they spend in recreational activities. Many participants are tired at the end of the day, along with having other family responsibilities to attend to. It seems reasonable to assume that these increased demands on time can make it difficult for recent immigrants to get involved in recreational activities. It was mentioned that:

“... to run the house, we both need to work. We work in different shifts to take care of our children. In this engagement we find no energy for recreational activities.”

25% of the unemployed participants were involved in recreational activities. One of the participants is a martial arts teacher and has been actively involved in organizing international tournaments in the community. 55% of the participants have used recreational activities amenities in Guelph. Most participants knew about the YMCA and the Victoria Recreation Centre. The City of Guelph’s Welcome to Guelph Program helps new refugees to transition to their new life by providing a free bus pass for a year, free passes to Guelph Museums and free passes to participate in public swimming or skating at City of Guelph facilities. 44% out of remaining 45% who have not used amenities in Guelph have neither heard of amenities nor have they heard of programs that are for adults. One of the participants expressed-

“I did not know there was programs for adults. I cannot read English but every poster I see has children in it. So naturally I thought it was only for children...”

Another participant stated-

“The trainer/ coach speaks English. I do not understand what they say, and they do not understand what I say. How will we learn with this barrier?”

Experiences of discrimination affect motivation to participate in recreational activities. It makes participants feel excluded and unwelcomed. None of the participants indicated that they have ever felt discriminated against anywhere in Guelph. In fact, participants unanimously felt that Guelph is very welcoming and the people here are very friendly.

2.2 Knowledge Theme

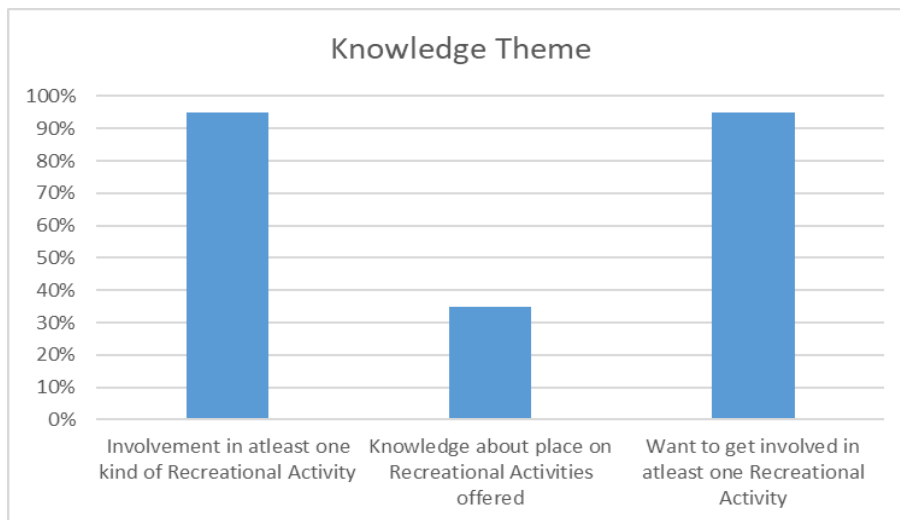


Fig 5: Knowledge Theme

This theme examines where recreational services are available and what discounts and financial assistance are available to help immigrant families access recreation services. The research intentionally selected participants who are currently living in Guelph to ensure each participant had had the opportunity to learn about recreational services available in the city. Immigrants tend to live in

places where there are people of their community (Esses, Hamilton, Bennett-AbuAyyash, & Burstein, 2010). Recent immigrants' knowledge on various things including recreation services can depend upon guidance they receive from other members in the community. Therefore, understanding the reason they chose Guelph to settle is crucial. 75% of participants chose Guelph because they have family and friends living here, 20% of these were sponsored refugees. 15% of the participants moved to Guelph for better life while the remaining 10% moved to pursue higher education. One participant mentioned-

“We are settling here for life away from family. To be closer to our roots, our culture we need to live near people of our community. It is also a way to communicate in our language otherwise we will not be talking (laughs). We share what we know and help in ways we can help.”

It is also important to understand whether the participants know the places where recreation activities that they might be interested in are performed. To understand this, participants were asked their current favourite recreational activities, activities they have done in the past, and whether they knew where these activities are performed. 95% of participants were involved in at least one kind of recreational activity. There was equal representation of male and female candidates in the research. It was interesting to see how sex of the participants changed the way they were involved in recreational activities. It was noted that female participants were more involved in recreational activities like dancing, cooking, yoga and Zumba while male participants were more involved in activities like soccer, tennis, swimming, volleyball and basketball. Only 35% of the participants knew where these recreational activities are performed in Guelph, and swimming is the only activity that was played in a recreation centre managed by the City. Some other activities were either performed in the park during the summer or participants had no idea where they were performed. It was also noted that participants were more active in recreational activities in the summer than in the winter, and that male participants were more likely to be involved in recreational activities than female participants. One of the female participants mentioned that-

“The husbands fix a date and time to play. They play, kids play, and we women just talk and chit chat. We want to learn new activities; we want to be active too.”

One of the male participants said –

“In summer, we have lots of options. We can go play in the playground and parks. The problem is in winter. To rent an indoor place for recreational activities is very expensive. So, in winter we hibernate and due to this pandemic, we are stuck to our houses more.”

It was interesting to see that 95% of the participants want to get involved in at least one recreational activities.

2.3 Access Theme

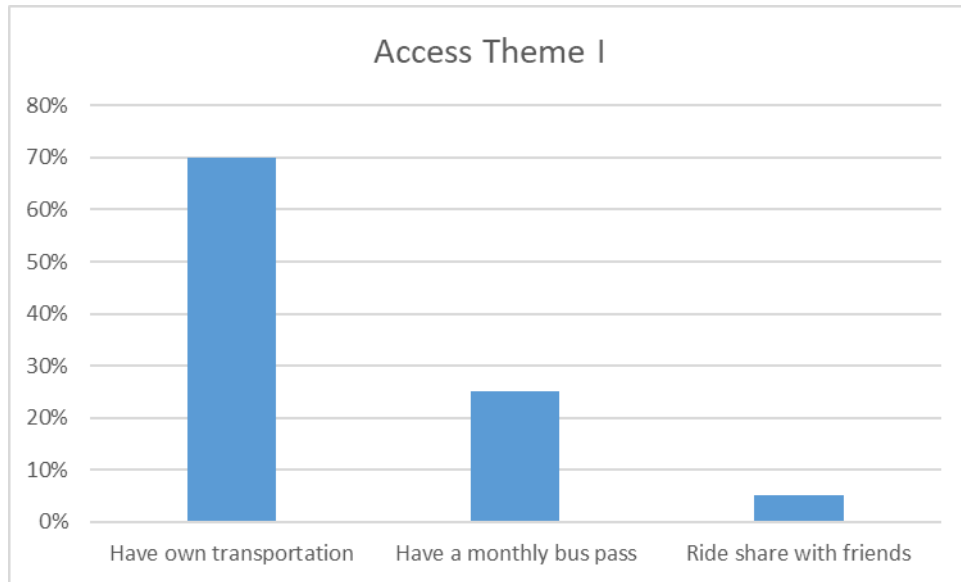


Fig 6: Barrier to Transportation

Transportation can be a big issue for recent immigrants in accessing recreational activities. It was therefore necessary to ask the primary mode of transportation of the participants and how far they were willing to travel for their favourite recreational activity. 70% participants have their own private transportation, but only 14% of them are willing to travel anywhere for recreational activities, while the rest were only interested in activities that were available in Guelph. The 25% of participants travelling by bus all had a monthly bus pass for Low Income Cut Off (LICO) families, which we can assume would provide some flexibility in a given month.

“I have small children. I have nowhere to leave them. I can not join recreation activities with them.”

“There is no cultural dance lessons for my kids here in Guelph. So, I take bus to Mississauga every week. It is hard but they should not forget their culture.”

“After work we come home prepare dinner, eat and sleep. If there are activities for kids, we go but only for us we do not have that energy left to go for our recreational activities. We would rather take rest.”

Another important issue is cost. The cost of pursuing recreational activities is not always affordable for everyone. 75% participants stated that they have income that is enough for their basic needs, but 93% of them have a tight budget to fit recreational activities for themselves.

“We both have jobs. Our income is enough for paying rent, mortgages, grocery, and insurance. Sometimes we have saving but most of the times no savings. It is hard to think about recreational activities for us.”

Out of the 25% of participants who did not have enough income for their basic needs, only 33% knew about financial discounts available for joining recreational activities.

“Our friend had mentioned about discounts before, but we have no idea where and how to contact. We don’t even know where these discounts are given.”

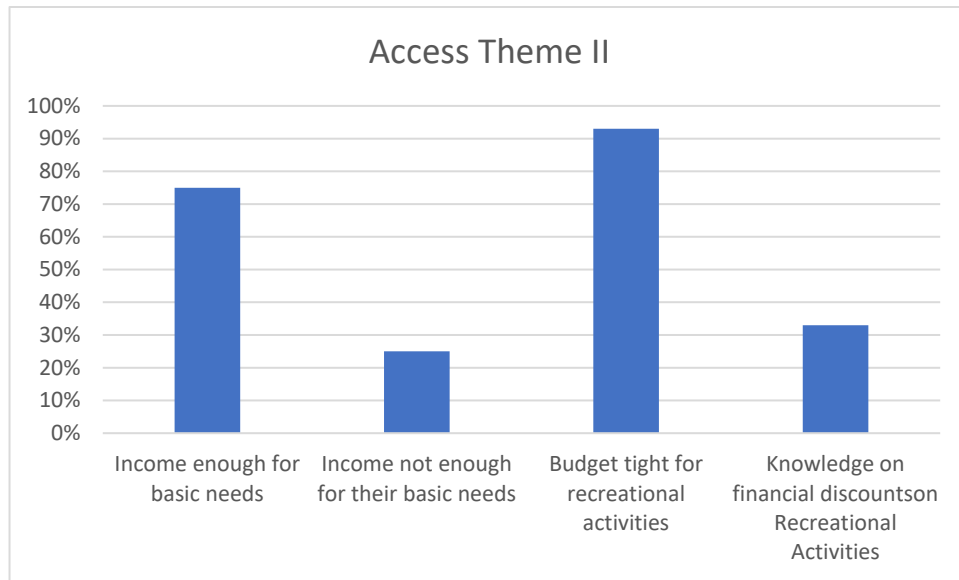


Fig 7: Barrier due to Income

Females in some religions and faiths are sometimes prohibited to participate in recreational activities, which is also an access issue. All the female participants were asked if they were prohibited from participating in any recreational activities due to this. None of them were prohibited from participating in any recreational activities. 50% of them want to learn swimming and the rest were interested in outdoor Zumba and yoga. It is also important to note that the participants were not asked what religion or faith groups they follow. Not knowing what religions the participants represented, this sample may not be a true representation of females from all religions and faith groups.

3 Discussion of Findings and Future Implications

Including immigrants in the planning of parks and recreation department would not be fruitful if the immigrants had no interest in recreational activities at all. On the contrary, 100% of participants want to be involved in some kind of recreation activities in the Guelph community. They understand the benefits of recreational activity on their mental and physical health. Through participation, they want to not only understand Canadian culture but also learn the language and make friends.

“We do not know English, so it is hard to make friends. If we can join activities like swimming, cooking, crocheting, painting, and sketching we can learn skills, make friends and most importantly learn language.”

The findings of this research parallels literature from Carter-Thuillier et al. (2017) and Hatzigeorgiadis et al. (2013), which also highlighted the importance of recreational activities as a socializing agent, noting the benefits to combatting trauma and mental health issues, and language learning. As discussed earlier in the findings, many participants didn’t know where to access recreational activities in Guelph, what discounts and financial assistance were available, nor how to access those discounts. It was also noted that participants wanted an opportunity to meet Canadian people, and learn their culture, life, and way of living. They want to be active citizens, which is good news for Guelph. It appears that different communities are arranging their own informal recreational activities during the summer, but this is more restricted to men. During the summer, many participants

indicated that they use public parks, partly due to the lack of a fee. But in the winter, many of the popular activities cannot be played outside (e.g. soccer, volleyball). Indoor facilities without user fees could be a solution to this issue. Despite 75% participants having a private vehicle, many female participants did not drive, often depending on another family member to get around the city. Getting around by bus involves several difficulties: first understanding the bus system and routes; second being the language barrier and; the third is being unfamiliar with technology. For example, the brochures that show bus routes are only available in English. Bus routes and timings can also be accessed on mobile phone devices through Google or Guelph Transit Bus App. The use of search engines and the app can be a new experience for some immigrants. This is another access issue for women along with a safe and secure place for their children to play while they are performing recreational activities. Most of the participants wanted to participate in activities they have known and done since their childhood. Providing child-care facilities will bring more immigrants to activities and facilities, especially women with small children. Another way is also to use these amenities for stay-at-home immigrant mothers for various lessons for recreation activities during the day while the children are still at school. Understanding the most popular recreational activities amongst immigrants and organizing intra community games and tournaments in all seasons will help to attract more recent immigrants. This would have the added benefit of immigrants being able to better associate themselves with Guelph and to build social capital. Finding community members who are professionals in a given recreational activity and promoting them to municipal, provincial, and national level can motivate those immigrant communities to increased involvement in recreational activities. While conducting interview, there were two participants who have played professionally in their country. One of them was the champion in gymnastics and the other in Dojo Karate. The latter participant is conducting karate classes for community children and organizing community-wide international tournaments for basketball and volleyball. Consulting with immigrants like them would be key to helping other immigrants get engaged in recreational activities. The Welcome to Guelph program is a useful program to introduce what recreation services are available in Guelph, but they only involve access to public swimming and skating, rather than lessons in the potentially unfamiliar sports. This offer is not useful to those who do not already know how to swim or skate. Free lessons could be a useful addition to these programs. Another pressing issue highlighted is that recent immigrants are not aware of adult programming. All the posters they see are with children, so some participants thought that there are only programs for children. There is a language barrier as all banners, brochures, pamphlets, and posters are in English. Brochures and pamphlets can be translated into the top languages spoken in Guelph, and shared with community groups. Similarly, information on financial discounts and other related services should be shared in different languages commonly spoken by immigrants in Guelph. It was seen that families who were not considered LICO families also had problems to make ends meet. A more holistic way to determine LICO should be considered for immigrants.

Appendices**1. Appendix A – Recruitment Flyer**

Understanding barriers of Immigrants to participate in recreational activities in Guelph

Study for Immigrants in Guelph

I am looking for twenty adult immigrants 18 years and older who are immigrants to Guelph in the last 5 years.

Many immigrants find it difficult to participate in recreational activities. This research seeks to find the barriers immigrants face to participate in recreational activities in Guelph.

Participants will be asked to participate in:

- 1 telephonic interview of 45 – 60 minutes

Participants will receive:

- Grocery card of \$ 25 by mail after interview

Interview Details:

- Interviews will be taken via telephone
- Interviews will be taken in English language
- Interviews will be between 45- 60 minutes

Are you eligible?

- 18 years or older
- Must be speaking English
- Immigrant to Guelph in the last 5 years
- Must be residing in the City of Guelph currently
- Recent Immigrants to Canada (Not more than 5 years)

For participation

Contact researcher

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niva_shresthaz@hotmail.com

** To be considered for participation, please contact by 5:00 pm, June 10*



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2. Appendix B - Interview Questions

Introductory questions:

- What year did you move to Guelph?
 - Why did you move to Guelph?
 - How many people you have in your household and what are their ages?
 - Are you male/ female/ do not want to disclose
1. Do you Work?
 - What shift do you work?
 - How much time do you get to spend for recreational activities or ?
 - Does the type of work you do hamper the quality time you spend on recreational activities ?
 - Does your shift work forbid you to participate in recreational activities?
 2. Have you used the recreational activities amenities in Guelph?
 - If yes,
 - Did you like it? What did you like?
 - Is there anything to make it better, any suggestions to make it immigrants friendly?
 - If no,
 - What is preventing you to use recreational activities?
 - What will motivate you to use recreational activities?
 3. Does your community have a sports group for recreational activities?
 - If yes,
 - What is that recreational activities?
 - Where do they play it?
 - Does Guelph have a place to play that recreational activities?
 - How can City of Guelph help you in this?
 - If no,
 - How many members are in your community?
 - Your community members are not interested in recreational activities?
 - How can they be motivated to participate in recreational activities?
 4. Are you interested to participate in recreational activities ?
 - What is your favourite recreational activities?
 - How far is this recreational activity centre from your house?
 - Do you know about the various places these activities are played in Guelph?
 - Are you a member of any recreational activity clubs?
 - Would you like to join any recreational activities?
 5. How important is recreational activities to you?
 - Why do you think recreational activities are important to you?
 - What kind of recreational activities were your involved before?
 - What can you learn from being involved in recreational activities?
 - Is it something everybody needs to be involved in?
 - Do you want to be get involved in atleast 1 recreational activity?
 6. Have you have ever been discriminated while accessing recreational activities?
 - At what point of participation in the recreational activities program did you feel discriminated? Admission/ during fees payment/ during playing etc?
 - What made you feel discriminated?

- Why do you think you were discriminated?
 - Is it because of this discrimination, you do not want to participate in recreation activities?
 - What kind of problems have you faced because of language issues while accessing recreational activities?
7. How do you travel in and around Guelph?
- If Car
 - How far would you travel to participate in recreational activities ?
 - If Bus
 - Is transportation or transportation fee an issue for participating in recreational activities ?
 - How many busses do you need to take for two-way transportation for participating in recreational activities ? How long does it take?
 - Is public transportation an issue in Guelph to access recreational activities ?
 - If public transportation were to be made better, would you consider participating in recreational activities ?
8. Is your household income enough to pay for the basic need?
- If Yes
 - Are you considered a low- income family?
 - Do you have any knowledge on the financial subsidy and other membership discounts?
 - Have you ever used any of these services? No, why?
 - If No
 - Do you have any knowledge on the financial subsidy and other membership discounts?
 - Have you ever used any of these services? No, why?
9. Do you participate in recreational activities? (**For Females only**)
- If Yes
 - What kind of?
 - How much time do you spend on this recreational activity?
 - If you have a family with children, how do you manage time to participate in recreational activity?
 - If No
 - Does your faith/ religion prevent you to participate in certain recreational activities?
 - What are the recreational activities, you feel comfortable to participate?
 - What will motivate you to get involved in recreational activities?

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