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## Multicultural Association awaits details on immigration plan

The Thunder Bay Multicultural Association is watching for details of the federal government's immigration plan.

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*Thunder Bay Multicultural Association executive director Cathy Woodbeck. (tbnewswatch.com)*

The federal government will not raise the number of immigrants welcomed to Canada next year, but says it will lay the foundation for a larger boost in years ahead.

A report tabled in Parliament Monday shows the country will accept 300,000 new arrivals next year, the same number that was established this year on a temporary basis to accommodate an influx of Syrian refugees.

The announcement comes amid warnings from the Liberals' council of economic advisers that the country needs to increase immigration levels by the tens of thousands in order to ensure better economic growth.

The council recommended the government gradually increase immigration levels to 450,000 a year over the next five years.

The head of the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association said Thunder Bay's ability to successfully accommodate more immigrants hinges on refugees getting adequate supports and time to adjust to their new home, and on other immigrants coming with skills that fit the needs of the local labour market.

Executive-director Cathy Woodbeck was among the local officials waiting Monday for details of the federal strategy. In an interview with [tbnewswatch.com](http://tbnewswatch.com), she said she believes Thunder Bay can presently handle a modest increase in the number of refugees allocated to the city.

Woodbeck said under the existing one-year program for settling Syrian refugees, the target for Thunder Bay is 100 government-assisted refugees, and so far this year the city has taken in about 39 of those.

She added there can be challenges finding suitable housing and services "and we don't want wait lists for newcomers."

Woodbeck believes the multicultural association could comfortably provide English-language training to about 20 more adult clients than it's dealt with so far. She pointed out that 20 adults with families likely means a total of about 50 immigrants in total.

"You don't want to overdo it and have too many people with nowhere to live, and no rentals and things like that," she said.

If they're going to "settle other refugees, from other countries, and different situations, than that would probably be our limit for Thunder Bay that we could handle easily. That would really be the capacity."

Woodbeck added she'll be looking for details on the number of refugees allocated from specific countries under next year's federal targets, as that's necessary for groups such as the Multicultural Association can ascertain specific needs for language training.

She said it can take about a year to provide language training to a level where refugees are able to work, and at that point it's usually not difficult for them to find a job in Thunder Bay.

Woodbeck pointed out that Thunder Bay also receives hundreds of immigrants in non-refugee categories, such as professionals or skilled workers. "As long as that suits the need of what the (local) labour gaps are ... then that works out perfectly."

Woodbeck said it's important to bring in people needed to fill those positions and who don't end up unemployed.

She estimated that Thunder Bay gets a total of 400 to 500 immigrants each year, some of whom have relocated from other parts of Canada.

Last month, a report from the Northern Policy Institute said the Thunder Bay District will need to attract thousands more immigrants over the next quarter-century in order to replace its aging workforce.

The same report indicated the area currently attracts seven times fewer immigrants per capita than the Ontario average.