



## English Proficiency for New Canadians

Language proficiency is an important part of newcomers' economic, social and political adjustment to their new country.<sup>1</sup>

The 2007 Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, reported immigrants saw language barriers as their biggest difficulty next to finding adequate jobs. Over a quarter (26%) of all new immigrants still reported language difficulties in English or French four years after arriving in Canada. About one-third of job seekers who experienced difficulties (32%) cited language barriers as a problem.<sup>2</sup>

\* The facts presented in this article pertain to only those FFE participants born outside of Canada.

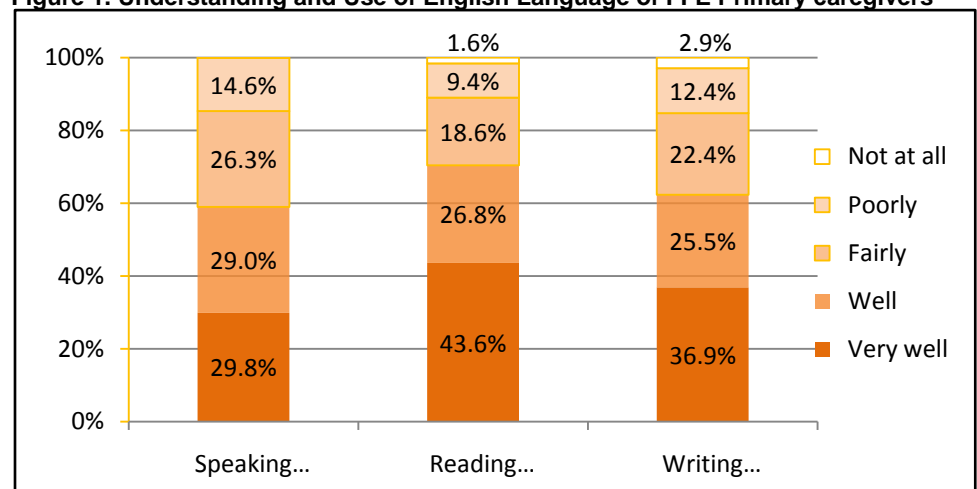
## FFE Fast Facts: Self-reported English Proficiency of FFE Foreign-Born\*

Most FFE foreign-born primary caregivers reported a fairly high level of English proficiency, but a minority needed interpretation assistance to participate in the program.

Thirty-nine percent of the Families First Edmonton (FFE) primary caregivers were born outside of Canada, with 81% of those being immigrants and 19% of those being refugees. Knowing the proficiency of FFE primary caregivers in the use and understanding of the English language can provide information that may help determine the need and usage of interpreters, translation services and job/school readiness.

When asked 'how well do you speak/ read/ write in English?' FFE foreign-born primary caregivers generally reported a comfortable level of English proficiency. As shown in Figure 1, on average they rated their English proficiency in speaking: 3.7, reading: 4.0, and writing: 3.8 (on a scale where 1 = not at all, 2 = poorly, 3 = fairly, 4 = well, and 5 = very well).

Figure 1. Understanding and Use of English Language of FFE Primary caregivers



Source: FFE Baseline Data, 2011

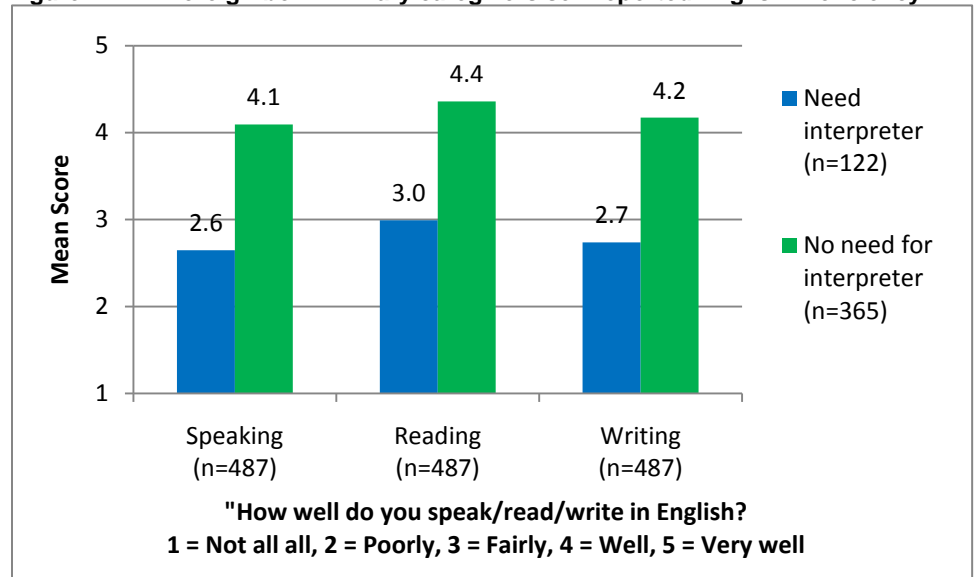


## Families First Edmonton

Families First Edmonton is a research project to determine whether delivering health, family support and recreation services in a coordinated way can lead to better outcomes for low-income families.

**Interpretation assistance** was provided if the primary caregivers felt they needed it. This resulted in 22% of the interviews with FFE immigrants (n=413), and 40% of FFE refugees (n=78) using interpretation. In general, FFE primary caregivers who needed the assistance during the first interview also reported a lower level of English proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing (Figure 2). Sometimes even when interpreters were requested, the interviewees would try communicating in English, and assistance was provided when needed.

Figure 2. FFE Foreign-born Primary caregivers self-reported English Proficiency



Source: FFE Baseline Data, 2011

With community partners' coordination, interpretation assistance was made available in 14 languages/ dialects for the foreign-born baseline interviews.

Table 1. Number of Language Interpreted at Foreign-Born FFE baseline interviews

Language / Dialect	Number of interviews		Total
	Immigrant	Refugee	
<b>Mandarin</b>	40	0	40
<b>Spanish</b>	6	10	16
<b>Cantonese</b>	13	0	13
<b>Persian / Farsi</b>	6	5	11
<b>French</b>	5	5	10
<b>Arabic</b>	4	4	8
<b>Other*</b>	7	5	12

Note. \*Other languages were Vietnamese, Amharic, Kurdish, Bari/Sudanese, Serbo-Croatian, Turkish, Somali, and Romanian.



Things to consider:

- Have you audited your program materials and advertising for its language level?
- Have you considered how program names are understood (or not) by the community (i.e. Will someone with limited English understand what you mean when you offer a program called “Bouncing Baby Bumblebees”?)
- Is there a need to translate some program resources and brochures into other languages? Do you have staff that would be willing to help with translation or mentoring families attending your programs?
- Are you open to engaging with leaders or community connectors within an immigrant or refugee community to help you plan, advertise, recruit families and manage programs where you are targeting English language learners? Can you commit organizational resources to this? (see the [Inclusive Collaboration](#) report on our website for more information)
- Is your environment welcoming to English language learners? (see the Family Resource Programs Canada [“Welcome Here”](#) project for ideas and resources)

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## Sources

- <sup>1</sup> Mesch, G.S., (2003). *Language Proficiency Among New Immigrants: The role of human capital and societal conditions*. Sociological Perspectives, Volume 46, Number 1, pages 41-58.
- <sup>2</sup> Schellenberg G.& Maheux, H. *Immigrants' perspectives on their first four years in Canada: highlights from three waves of the longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada*. Canadian Social Trends, Special Edition 2007. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada; 2007 [Accessed 2007 October 4]. Available from: [http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection\\_2007/statcan/11-008-X/11-008-XIE20070009627.pdf](http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2007/statcan/11-008-X/11-008-XIE20070009627.pdf).