WelcomeBC

WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES AND WORKPLACES PROGRAM

Winter 2010/11

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BURNABY INTERCULTURAL PLANNING TABLE WINS AWARD AT FIRST ANNUAL WELCOMEBC DAY

The Government of British Columbia has officially proclaimed October 6th as WelcomeBC Day in recognition of the many contributions that immigrants make to British Columbia.

The first annual WelcomeBC Day was celebrated on October 6, 2010 with a ceremony and reception at SFU Harbour Centre, Vancouver. The event brought together immigrant service providers, elected officials, all orders of government and ministry partners, members of the Consular Corps, educational institutions and other key partners to celebrate immigration in BC and demonstrate the benefits of immigration to Canadians. At the celebration, a WelcomeBC Award was given to the Burnaby Intercultural Planning Table (BIPT), for their exemplary efforts in connecting newcomers to the labour market and their communities. This is just one example of the many innovative partnerships at work under WelcomeBC.

Since 2007, BIPT has demonstrated an outstanding capacity to build and sustain effective partnerships with a wide range of organizations, including the Burnaby Board of Trade, Burnaby Family Life, the Immigrant Services Society, South Burnaby Neighbourhood House and the Burnaby School District. BIPT has engaged these partners and others to develop and implement innovative solutions to help newcomers settle and feel welcomed in Burnaby.

The Burnaby Intercultural Planning Table is showcasing the very best of WelcomeBC.

EMBRACEBC’S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE INITIATIVE

In October 2010, the Multiculturalism and Inclusive Communities Office (MICO) joined the Immigrant Integration and Multiculturalism Branch and continues to lead the Community Engagement and Dialogue (CED) program under EmbraceBC. The best way to explain the purpose of the CED program is to use a title from an upcoming dialogue event: “Conversations that Matter.” The CED program engages communities in conversations that unite diverse voices, ideas, and understandings about what it means to live in harmony in a culturally diverse society. Through these conversations, communities can create their own paths towards a more inclusive community.

Nineteen community organizations have been funded to take part in the CED program this year. EmbraceBC funding gives each community the opportunity to develop and implement dialogue events that directly correspond to the needs of their distinct community. Kitsilano, Williams Lake, Smithers, and Gold River have already completed successful dialogue events. By March 2011, 15 more dialogues will have taken place across British Columbia.

The CED program is complementary to the other elements of WICWP and does not preclude organizations and communities from applying to both funding opportunities.

You can read all about various multiculturalism and anti-racism programming and about the community dialogues taking place on our diverse communities’ blog under the EmbraceBC website at http://blog.gov.bc.ca/embracebc/. For information about our funding you can check out www.embracebc.ca. For any questions please contact Mindy Nannar at Mindy.Nannar@gov.bc.ca.

UPDATE: WICWP PROJECTS ACROSS THE PROVINCE

To date, the Immigrant Integration and Multiculturalism Branch (formerly Immigration and WelcomeBC Branch) has funded 85 projects in over 30 communities in the province under the WICWP program elements of Demonstration Projects, Knowledge Development & Exchange and Public Education.
MINISTRY REORGANIZATION AND NAME CHANGE

On October 25, 2010, the Immigration and WelcomeBC Branch became part of a new ministry, the Ministry of Regional Economic and Skills Development. Since then, the branch’s name has changed to the Immigrant Integration and Multiculturalism Branch (IIMB).

The IIMB is brings together responsibility for settlement policy and programs under WelcomeBC and the Multiculturalism and Inclusive Communities Office (formerly part of the Ministry of Citizens’ Services).

WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES REGIONAL LEARNING FORUMS

In June 2010, the Immigration and WelcomeBC Branch, the SFU Dialogue Programs and local advisory groups organized three forums that brought together active WICWP project leaders and partners. Forums were held in Vancouver (Metro Vancouver Region), Nanaimo (Vancouver Island Region) and Prince George (Northern BC Region).

The goals of the forums were to share project innovations, current research and demographic information; to participate in capacity-building activities and to engage in dialogues on promising practices. Each forum was unique in highlighting their own community experience and showcasing their local WICWP projects.

Participant evaluations reflected the success of the events.

SUCCESS STORY: ABCDIVERSITY - BRINGING THE COWICHAN VALLEY TOGETHER

What exactly creates welcoming and inclusive communities and workplaces? Cowichan Intercultural Society (CIS) set out to examine the answer with their ABCDiversity project. Through the use of visual arts and dialogue, participants in CIS’ initiative explored the issues that both unite and disconnect communities.

During one activity, two large collages were created: one with positive community attributes such as “acceptance,” “respect,” “communication” and “equality”; the other with issues that can harm a community such as “silence,” “bullying” and “fear.” By identifying both the characteristics of a welcoming community and obstacles that must still be overcome, the activity allowed everyone to visualize what qualities may allow a community to flourish.

The ABCDiversity project also co-ordinated several workshops aimed at fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity. During the International Day for the Elimination of Racism, members of the Cowichan community came together for an “Anti-Discrimination First Aid” training session. Class participants learned how to better stand up for others and to appreciate and to fully value people’s different perspectives and strengths. Community members also experienced Bafa Bafa, a cultural simulation that exposes a person’s natural inclination to fear the unknown, causing them to make assumptions which lead to stereotypes and prejudice. Bafa Bafa helps people become conscious of this inclination, allowing them to adjust their thinking or make different choices.

By bringing together newcomers and long-time community members to facilitate discussion and interaction, the ABCDiversity project has been a wonderfully positive experience for the Cowichan Intercultural Society and the community it serves.
THE WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES AND WORKPLACES PROGRAM

WICWP is a three-year initiative that supports WelcomeBC through fostering inclusive, welcoming and vibrant communities in British Columbia where immigrants can realize their full potential, racism is eliminated, and cultural diversity is valued and celebrated. WICWP has four community-level program elements that focus on immigration, multiculturalism, workplace diversity and issues related to building and sustaining welcoming and inclusive communities. WICWP program elements include Demonstration Projects, Knowledge Development & Exchange, Community Partnership Development, and Public Education.

SUCCESS STORY: PRINCE GEORGE’S WELCOMEPG PROJECT

The City of Prince George is rapidly becoming a vibrant and multicultural city, and the Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society (IMSS) of Prince George is leading a comprehensive campaign to attract, recruit and retain skilled new Canadians. To do this, IMSS has created the WelcomePG Project, which is bringing together the Prince George community to push for a more welcoming and inclusive community.

IMSS, in partnership with Initiatives Prince George and the Prince George Chamber of Commerce, recently launched a new website, www.welcomepg.com. The WelcomePG website provides resources and information for employers, service providers and other stakeholder groups from the City of Prince George, allowing users to share knowledge and innovations. To enable Prince George’s industries to more fully tap into the talent pool of new Canadians, WelcomePG promotes cultural competence and diversity in the workplace. In addition, information sessions are being held to drive home the message of the importance of diversity in the workplace. One session, organized by the Chamber of Commerce, was titled “Profiting from Diversity: A Business Case for Inclusive Workplaces.” It was attended by over 25 local business leaders. Another workshop brought together the major Human Resources agencies in Prince George to promote a similar message.

The WelcomePG project has also created a new award: the “Welcoming and Inclusive Workplace Award.” The award is given to a business or organization that “successfully reduces employment barriers for new Canadians” and “supports inclusiveness to all employees while recognizing that a welcoming and inclusive environment leads to a stronger community.” This year’s winner was AiMHi, a Prince George Community Living organization.

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. LEADS DIALOGUES ON INTEGRATION; INTERCULTURAL WORKPLACES

As part of a larger Tri-Cities Intercultural Workplace Project, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. is working with multiple community organizations and Douglas College to host Dialogue sessions on intercultural workplaces. At these sessions, representatives of various local organizations come together to share information and reflect on and articulate promising practices with regard to recruiting and retaining foreign trained workers in social service positions.

As one participant remarked, the Project and associated Dialogues are already having a noticeable effect on her workplace: “Now, there is an expectation that [co-workers] will apply themselves to increase their cultural competency.”
WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

We are interested in hearing about the work that is taking place in your communities through WICWP. If you are interested in sharing your stories, please contact Anneke Van Vliet at Anneke.VanVliet@gov.bc.ca

WELCOMEBC’S CLIENT ENGAGEMENT UNIT REACHES OUT VIA SOCIAL MARKETING

Since its launch in April 2007, WelcomeBC.ca has helped more than 300,000 clients access comprehensive information on immigration, labour market and settlement services. Now, WelcomeBC’s Client Engagement Unit is breaking new ground by reaching targeted groups online and through social media.

‘Micro-sites’ under the WelcomeBC.ca banner are providing immigration and settlement information to prospective newcomers in their home country by utilizing a format that is culturally appropriate for the target audience. First to launch was the South Korean micro-site, which was released in October 2010. A French micro-site was subsequently released in November 2010, and more are in development for Mexico, India and China.

- View the French site at: http://immigration.welcomebc.ca/canada_fr/
- View the South Korean site at: http://immigration.welcomebc.ca/canada_kr/

To help newcomers locate settlement agencies, English Language services, ELSA Assessment Centres and other BC services, a service directory map is expected to launch by the end of March 2011. The online directory will feature interactive maps with street view photos of the service agency; agencies may be contacted shortly for photos to post on the map.

The WelcomeBC Portal is developing an interactive online space which is expected to go live in February 2011. The project will enable WICWP-funded organizations to share ideas and resources with each other more easily.

The WelcomeBC Client Engagement Unit is working on the country’s first Mobile Channel for newcomers with the development of a mobile website and smart phone software. Mobile access for BC newcomers and prospective arrivals is targeted for Phase 1 release in March 2011.

SUCCESS STORY: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY GARDENS PROJECT

Everyone in the Intercultural Community Gardens Project shares a common language – although it’s not necessarily English. Each sit-down meeting with gardeners begins with a discussion on intercultural communication skills, and in the garden the most direct route to understanding is often using non-verbal communication involving vegetables or garden hoses! Gardeners will show each other hands-on techniques for planting beans and picking greens, and there’s no mistaking the message of sharing when it comes in the offering of an extra bounty of radishes or a bunch of spinach.

Since the project began in January 2010 through a partnership with YMCA Connections, Gordon Neighbourhood House and the West End Residents Association, about 100 people in downtown Vancouver have been trained – through workshops on anti-racism, anti-homophobia and intercultural communication – to help build a more welcoming and inclusive community. Approximately 50, half being immigrants from all over the world, have gone on to become gardeners, working to grow both community and organic food.

“Gardening and food have no language or cultural barriers,” explains Canadian-born Sue Smolen. “Participating in the Intercultural Community Gardens Project has been a unique way to learn, share and grow not only our harvest, but ourselves. I have gained a deeper understanding of and commitment to my community.”

A first-time gardener and an immigrant, Kai Chang says, “I feel blessed to be learning not only about organic gardening but about other people’s cultures. For me, the Intercultural Community Garden makes the downtown peninsula feel like a warmer, welcoming home.”

Client Engagement Unit staff Tim, Joanna, Asha, and Shelley.