



Kamloops Immigrant Services

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Follow-up Summary from the Welcoming Communities Program Elders Gathering

The Welcoming Communities Program (WCP) would like to thank all the participants, individuals and volunteers who helped to make our Elders Gathering event a success! Hosted on Wednesday, July 24th, 2013, the WCP Elders Gathering was attended by 12 people representing 6 different cultural communities. It was held in the Community Room at Kamloops Immigrant Services and was facilitated by KIS ED, Paul Lagacè. *We are interested in meeting with other individuals of local cultural communities to gain further input. If you, or someone you know, would be available to speak with us, please have them email Allysa at welcoming.communities@kcris.ca or call her at 778-470-6101.*

The main purpose of the day's event was to bring together Elders and Knowledge Keepers of Kamloops' various cultural communities to provide further input on our project. We presented the findings from the WCP Opening Dialogue and our plans for moving forward to determine cultural relevance to the participating members. From these activities we prioritized the themes identified at the WCP Opening Dialogue for inclusion in our next steps. The following notes summarize information received during the discussions that took place on July 24th.



A Welcoming & Inclusive Community from the Perspective of the Elders

We started the day off with a discussion about what makes a community welcoming and inclusive. Greetings were identified as the first, and fastest, way to create a sense of welcoming and inclusion. This includes smiling, making eye contact, providing information easily and identifying with people as people, not focusing on their nationality. Additionally, holding gatherings for different cultures to come together was recognized as important. These gatherings give people the opportunity to create an "us", a sense of community that we can all belong to. They also provide natural settings to share ones cultural traditions and beliefs with others which can dispel some of the fear caused by unknowns. Being able to connect with other people in a community helps newcomers to settle and integrate, and supports them to get help and access local services as needed.

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Another key component to a welcoming and inclusive community is educated employers and workplaces. There are still a lot of negative stereotypes and discrimination within our labour market that prevent people of diverse cultures from meaningfully participating in life here. Because employment is vital to the settlement process, employers need to have understanding and patience for the learning curve most immigrants face regarding a new culture and language. It is important to remember that just because an individual speaks English as a second language and/or with an accent, does not mean they don't understand the language; however, if they do have language barriers, that does not necessarily mean they cannot communicate effectively. Language and communication are two different things. Some ways of being more welcoming and inclusive when speaking with newcomers includes: use hand gestures, minimize your use of slang (eg: "raining cats and dogs"), speak slowly (this does not mean loudly), use simple words, and be open to questions. There are services in Kamloops (eg: KIS) that can support both immigrants and employers when navigating these challenges.



Being Respectful Cultural Learners

We finished up the morning by looking at how people from other cultures can learn about different cultures in a respectful way. It was recognized that newcomers need to adapt to living in Canada and to Canadian culture, but it is also important for individuals to have the space to remain connected to their own cultures. It was noted that some of the most important behaviours are purely to be patient and have a willingness to learn. If we are genuine and sincere in our curiosity, asking questions is the best way to learn. Different cultures have different nuances. For example, in many First Nations cultures, you cannot tell an Elder they are wrong

because you have not lived their life, or had their experiences. Asking questions helps us understand these nuances. We can also attend multicultural events and provide/participate in opportunities for multicultural learning.

Additionally, we discussed the importance of understanding how different laws, policies, and practices affect (or have affected) different groups of people. It is important for Canadians to know their own history (eg: learning about local First Nations who are in the area, contributions made by immigrants to our society such as Chinese railway workers, etc). It is also important for us to be honest and fair about that history, the good and the bad. By accepting these realities and experiences, it is easier to build relationships with and between people of different cultures.

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Many of the participants feel that there is disconnect in Canada between generations, particularly with regards of Elders. They felt that by enhancing these relationships, we can build stronger ties within our communities and enhance respect for all people.

Priority Workshop Content

In the afternoon, we presented to the Elders about the potential workshop content that was identified at the WCP Opening Dialogue. We wanted participants to help us identify the priority components and point out any content we may have missed. We asked each person to prioritize the list we provided them with and then tallied up their top 4 choices. The top priority was given 4 points, second was given 3 points, third was given 2 points, and fourth was given 1 point. This system provided us with the following information:



1. **25 points each** – a) *Providing basic cross cultural education/diversity training*; and d) *Discussing potential language barriers*
2. **17 points** – h) *Creating a mentorship program for employers who are interested in hiring people of diverse backgrounds*
3. **15 points** – b) *Dispelling myths about different cultures*
4. **11 points** – g) *Reviewing the hiring process to discuss cultural biases*
5. **4 points each** – f) *Marketing the benefits of supporting cultural differences in a workplace*; and c) *Going over eligibility when hiring new immigrants*
6. **1 point** – e) *Pointing out possible incentive programs*

After we realized that the top two priorities actually tied in points, a discussion took place about their relevance to one another. It was decided that when looking at these items with a new immigrant lens, they naturally run together. In moving forward, it makes the most sense for these two components to be developed in a combined manner.

Positive Media Reflections

At the WCP Opening Dialogue, there was substantial discussion about the role the media plays in our perceptions of immigrants and people of diverse backgrounds. We posed this discussion at the Elders Gathering and asked participants to let us know what types of stories they would like to see in the media to represent their cultures positively.

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The first and foremost point that was made during this discussion was the identification of race in reporting. Participants didn't understand why reporters always mention race in stories that are negative and how unnecessary it is. In response to this discussion, the WCP team did some preliminary searches into this topic and made an interesting discovery. In positive stories, race is rarely identified; a reader would have to know the individual to know whether or not they are an immigrant (or they may assume based on name). However, in negative stories, race is almost always noted if the individual is a member of a visible minority. This may account for why both events' participants felt that people of diverse backgrounds are not positively reflected in the media – when a story is positive, we may not know the person is of a diverse background.

From there, the discussion led into a look at what types of positive stories participants would like to see. This included stories that help us get to know diverse members of our community, highlights on successful business owners, individuals who excel as volunteers, diverse role models within the community, etc.



These stories create a sense of pride within their communities and help the greater community see the good of our cultural diversity. We also discussed the importance of identifying how these groups have contributed to Kamloops over the years (eg: First Nations and Metis supporting European settlers when they first came to the area, Chinese railway worker building the railway, etc). Sometimes these historical contributions are not widely known, or are forgotten, but they have been vital to our success.

Other

To finish up the day we discussed some of the logistics of the workshop process. Participants requested that we engage cultural Elders within the workshop process as well as that we reach out to other community Elders who were not represented at the gathering. As noted earlier, we are interested in meeting with other individuals of these communities to gain further input.

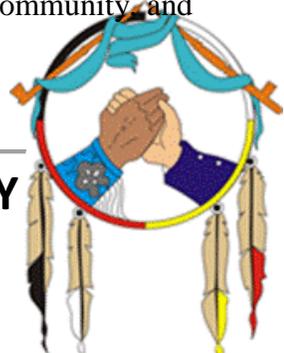
If you, or someone you know, would be available to speak with us, please have them email Allysa at welcoming.communities@kcris.ca or call her at 778-470-6101.

Final Thoughts

In closing, we reviewed some of the main concepts of the day and identified final thoughts for moving forward. These included opening up new connections, continuing to reach out to the community and building on the momentum of this event to engage a larger representation of cultures.

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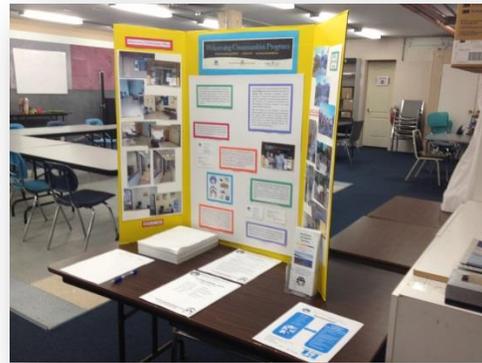
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It was also noted that KIS is key in bringing people together on this and we received encouragement to continue with the work we're currently involved in.

Thank-you!

WCP would like to thank everyone who took time to participate in this event. Your knowledge and recommendations are extremely valuable to us in moving forward and we're so glad you were able to join our discussion. We received very constructive feedback on the direction of this project and we look forward to providing the community with workshops that reflect the identified priorities. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us! You can email welcoming.communities@kcris.ca or call Allysa or Geoffrey at 778-470-6101.



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