



Kamloops Immigrant Services

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Follow-up Summary from the Welcoming Communities Program's Evaluative & Next Steps Dialogue

The Welcoming Communities Program (WCP) would like to thank all the participants, individuals, and volunteers who helped to make our Evaluative & Next Steps Dialogue event a success! Hosted on Thursday, January 30th, 2014, the WCP Evaluative & Next Steps Dialogue was attended by over 62 people from various community groups, organizations, and businesses. It was held in the Interior Savings Centre's Parkside Lounge and facilitated by Arjun Singh.

There were 2 main components to the day's events:

1. an evaluative component reviewing the work of the WCP to date, including discussion on what was done well and what could have been improved; and
2. various discussions and activities looking at ideas for moving forward, building a more welcoming and inclusive Kamloops.

The information collected from participants at this event is being used to develop reporting for the project, as well as recommendations for the community on next steps. The following notes summarize the information that was shared during discussions which took place on January 30th.



To open the event, we were joined by the Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society's Drum Group, and Elder, Buzz Morrisette. The KAFS Drum Group has been involved in the WCP since its Open House in May, 2013, and we were honoured to have them help us close the circle on this project's community engagement by drumming for us at this final event. Additionally, Buzz provided the event with an Opening Prayer to put us all into the right spiritual place for the important work that we were undertaking. He has also been a strong supporter of the project and honoured us by opening many of the events put on throughout the WCP. To conclude the opening activities, Paul Lagace, Executive Director of Kamloops Immigrant Services, shared words of welcome with the group.

Evaluative Exercises

To start the WCP Evaluative component of the day, the Welcoming Communities Coordinator, Allysa Gredling, gave a presentation summarizing the work of the project. This was meant to give participants who were unfamiliar with previous activities a basic understanding that they could then discuss in the evaluative activities. The presentation can be found at:

<http://immigrantservices.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Evaluative-Dialogue-WCP-Presentation.pdf>

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Of the individuals who attended the Evaluative & Next Steps Dialogue, the group was split evenly between those with previous involvement in the project and those who were attending their first WCP event (53% vs 47%). After the presentation, the Facilitator, Arjun Singh, began the day's dialogue topics. Those who had previously engaged in the program participated mainly in either the Opening Dialogue in June of 2013, or in workshops (including both the employer- and community-focused ones). From this group, we learned that the



vast majority of people had heard about various WCP activities through emails or the in-person campaigning that was done in the fall of 2013. From the group who was attending their first WCP event, many had not heard about the event prior to marketing efforts for the Next Steps Dialogue (approx. 58%) despite extensive email invitations, TV and newspaper advertising, in-person campaigning, contact with various cultural groups, and online marketing. However, we received considerably higher response rates for this event than any of the previous activities, showing growth in the community's interest. Evaluative feedback we received from the community members present at the Next Steps Dialogue was collected based on whether individuals had been involved in previous activities of the WCP.

Those who had been involved in previous events found two components of the project to be of most value:

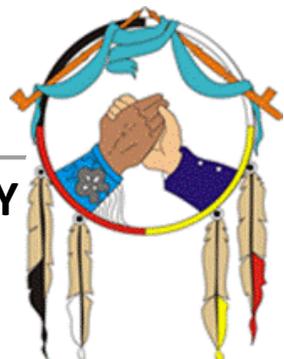
- the opportunity to network/meet new people, and
- the sharing of ideas/learning new information.

The majority of this group felt satisfied that the WCP had been successful and there were not any stark areas for improvement (75% of groups felt this). Of the groups who felt that there were some changes that could have been made, suggestions included: shorter events, longer events, as well as higher numbers of participants involved. This made it clear that many of the final challenges which existed for this project were based on individuals' personal circumstances.

For individuals who were attending an event for the first time, their feedback was provided based on the information available in the WCP Presentation. Ninety percent of the participants in groups who were attending for the first time expressed an interest in being involved in earlier WCP events, with a particular interest in both the community- and employer-focused workshops. As these groups were not previously involved in the project, the possible gaps identified were considerably more varied, without particular themes. Some of the ideas that were discussed included: tying events to the settlement and integration of new immigrants, having more visible immigrant voices utilized, expanding the number of community agencies who were involved, broader community advertising, etc.

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Next Steps Exercises

During lunch we were joined by two international student volunteers from India who shared some contemporary Indian dance with us. The pair performed two dances for the group, and many participants got up and involved in the second performance! It was a great way to break up the day and get the creative juices flowing for the second component of the Dialogue, discussing next steps. The afternoon looked at four main areas:

1. reasons for getting involved in this work,
2. areas to focus on,
3. ideas for sustainability, and
4. moving forward.

To learn about the reasons that participants get involved in discussions and work regarding cultural diversity, we asked them two questions:

1. Why do you appreciate/support cultural diversity?
2. What do you find inspiring and challenging about this work?

In response to the first question, many of the groups felt enriched by global perspectives, ideas, foods, etc. They felt that personal experiences and pioneers from around the world help to build and strengthen our community. Other common discussion topics included the importance of every person feeling safe and comfortable in our community, the natural growth and evolution that a community needs to experience to be richer and more sustainable, and many of the participants were immigrants themselves (or their families had been within the last couple of generations). What most people found to be inspiring about this work was reaching out to others and building new bridges and relationships, as well as learning about new cultures, music, foods, etc. They saw the increase in diverse community events inspiring as well as the history of Kamloops' multi-cultural success. The most common challenges that participants spoke to were:

- how to garner meaningful engagement from the larger community,
- challenges with short-term, temporary funding, and
- the unwillingness to learn about other cultures that still exists in our community.

All of these discussions helped us to better determine what encourages people to get involved, and the areas that we can work within to better support that involvement.

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There were a number of areas that participants identified as important elements to focus on in continued work. Some saw the importance of keeping this program employment-focused. Building on this piece, many also discussed the need to have a more concerted effort for engaging previously uninterested groups. There was a lot of support for the workshops, both the community-engagement one and the employer-focused ones, and many wished to see this kind of work continued as a method of engagement and education. There was also a theme regarding on-going commitment. Those in attendance wanted to see the momentum continue and identify possible ways of ensuring that this happens.

When discussing sustainability, participants felt that the program had real practical value. Some suggestions for maintaining the work included:

- getting people's real stories out,
- continuing to build relationships/network with more groups in the community and getting them involved, and
- bringing those with strong interests on this topic together to identify funding opportunities for on-going work.

One of the biggest challenges with the topic of sustainability seemed to be regarding funding, and more specifically that once funding runs out, the work that still needs to be done relies on volunteers and informal systems. Some felt that a larger list of partners could be developed to share future work, with KIS leading this network of diversity-minded groups.

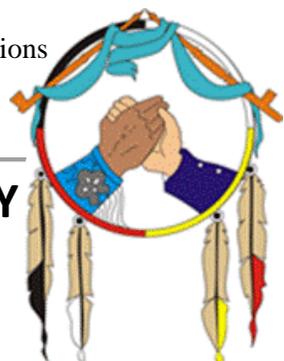


In terms of moving forward, participants had a number of great ideas for what we could do in order to continue making Kamloops more welcoming and inclusive of newcomers. Some groups discussed the importance of visual artifacts being made available throughout the city to identify its cultural diversity. Others discussed the creation of a weekly column in the local paper that could raise awareness/educate the community on topics related to cultural differences, immigrant successes and struggles, supporting settlement and integration, and sharing personal experiences in support of cultural diversity. Similarly, the discussion about information and resources being available in more languages came up. It was felt that material related to the community and life in Canada needed to be more accessible for people who may be experiencing language barriers. One group brought forward a unique suggestion to create a volunteer-powered multicultural welcome wagon that would be managed through KIS. This would be a group who learn about new immigrants to the community through staff at KIS and visit these individuals/families with a basket of goods and information that could be tailored to meet the needs of different cultures.

To close the day, we joined in a circle to share a prayer with Paul Lagace. Overall, we were able to collect a lot of great ideas, suggestions, and feedback for the development of a Recommendations Paper. Many of the thoughts summarized in the Next Steps section of this document will be explored in further detail within that paper. We will be using this information, along with feedback collected through the WCP Next Steps Survey, and interviews conducted with community supports to develop the Recommendations Paper. As a component of the WCP Legacy Toolkit, this document will be made available to the community in late March, 2014.

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Thank-you!

In closing, we would like to thank everyone who participated for sharing their thoughts and experiences with us. The event has given us a sense of what has worked, and new ideas for the future that we can recommend to the community. We are in the process of creating a Legacy Toolkit, including all of the information that has been developed and used throughout the WCP, which will be available online at the end of March, 2014. You will be able to find it at www.immigrantservices.ca/wcp. If you have any questions about the WCP after March, please contact Kamloops Immigrants Services' ED, Paul Lagace.

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