



# Kamloops Immigrant Services

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## Follow-up Summary from the Welcoming Communities Program Opening Dialogue

The Welcoming Communities Program (WCP) would like to thank all the participants, individuals and volunteers who helped to make our Opening Dialogue event a success! Hosted on Wednesday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the WCP Opening Dialogue was attended by over 55 people from various community groups, organizations and businesses. It was held in the Interior Savings Centre's Parkside Lounge and was facilitated by Arjun Singh.

There were 3 main components to the day's events: a storytelling exercise to form relationships within the larger group; a panel discussion to hear about the issues from the perspective of different sectors; and small group discussions to look at specific topics related to the WCP. From these activities, a number of common themes have been identified, along with a few unique ideas that may work for the purposes of the program. The following notes summarize information shared in the discussions that took place on June 5<sup>th</sup>.



### Panel Discussion Summary

The Panel was populated by 5 individuals from 5 different groups/sectors within the community: *Dale Bass*, Kamloops This Week (media); *Donovan Cavers*, City Councilor/Conscientious Catering Owner (city); *Geri Collins*, Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society Board Member (Aboriginal community); *Brendan Martin*, North Shore Safeway Store Manager (business sector); and *Paul Lagace*, Kamloops Immigrant Services Executive Director (immigrant community).

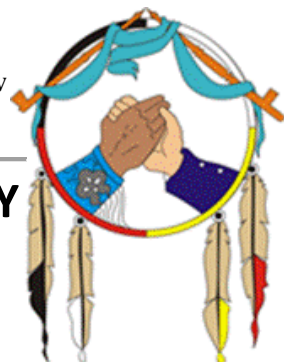
**Question 1:** What are some ways you have seen of successful integration of new immigrants and multi-cultural work environments into the labour market?

- Building partnerships
- Asking questions about different people
- Kamloops Immigrant Services (KIS) making suggestions about "fit" of an employee within a specific business/organization
- Businesses/potential employers giving seminars to KIS clients who may be future applicants (or other newcomer groups)
- Need to recognize that BC is made up of many different cultures
- Everybody has potential and we need to acknowledge that we're all in this together
- By making space for curiosity and questions, if they're respectful (*as not all people and employers are friendly*)
- When we stop looking at the differences and start recognizing our common human value
- By dispelling myths

**Question 2:** What supports already exist within your sector of the community to help new immigrants feel accepted and comfortable?

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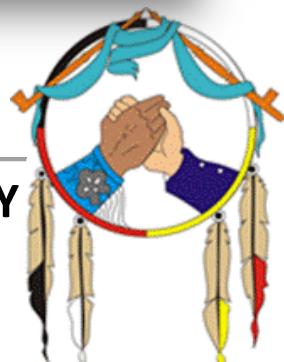
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- A lack of understanding exists because we're not taught about different cultures
  - The media needs to tell the stories, but also take time to gain a better relationship/understanding of the people whose story they're telling
  - Employers need to show an interest in employees and their cultures; by doing this in a less formal setting it can become more natural (lunches, events, projects, sports, etc)
  - It is important not to water down the negative: we need to stop making assumptions about other cultures; it is important to make room for understanding and getting to know different people; and it is not our place to question another person's cultural practices and make judgements about them
  - "Old cultures" share a lot in common – family first, including the extended family; and a respect for generations (Elders & youth)
  - We need to remember that what we see isn't necessarily what is going on
  - We cannot tolerate bigotry
- How do we deal with immigrant nay-sayers?
  - o Do we ignore them or acknowledge their hate and risk validating it? Ignoring it probably isn't our best course of action
  - o By sharing ourselves, we can create a better understanding for everyone
  - o We also need to understand ourselves and where our values/opinions actually come from
  - o Keeping people focused on a person's job (not their ethnicity) tends to diffuse complaints within an employment setting
  - o Highlighting Canadian statistics: the death rate in Canada and BC are higher than the birth rate
  - o We need to get to the root of the hate: not about jobs, but about fear of differences
  - o Ask someone: do you have a job? Did an immigrant take it from you? The answer is often no and if they did, that person probably wasn't working to keep it – employers are unlikely to let good employees go
  - o First Nations people didn't require immigration applications in the 1600s when Europeans first started coming to this country

**Questions 3 & 4:** What other supports may help new immigrants and people of diverse backgrounds feel accepted and comfortable within your sector? What are some practices for changing negative attitudes within your sector/the community?

- KIS policies and services are culturally and linguistically supportive
- Having examples of successful immigrants within businesses that are allowing of cultural dress and involving these individuals in community events and projects



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- Work done at Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society (KAFS) is done for people who are displaced from their homes because of the urban setting – there are a lot of services available through KAFS and mentoring/understanding
- A number of community celebrations in Kamloops take place such as: National Aboriginal Day, St Jean Baptiste, Canada Day, TRU's International Days, and other heritage related events – these events are very important for bring people together and gaining exposure to different cultures in a positive atmosphere
- Mentoring systems are also very important; both within a job setting and within cultures
- Seeing positive stories about individuals within the media helps to improve people's attitudes

## Questions from the Audience:

What can immigrants do for local community to help change attitudes?

- Participate in the community
- Be more forthcoming with your experiences, education, culture, etc (both in a job setting and within the larger community)
- Form relationships with people outside of your culture and let them get to know you
- Being more open helps bridge the gap between people

When do people stop being from “other cultures”?

- The beauty of Canada is that we can be both rooted in our past culture and a part of Canadian culture in the present; a person never stops being a part of their culture

How do we make the invisible visible?

- By having policies that direct positive behaviour in our organizations/businesses – not just what we don't do, but what we do do and why it is important
- Using images as well as signs/words

## Small Group Discussions Commonalities

This section will look at a number of commonalities that have been identified from the small group discussions based on notes taken by the Volunteer Facilitators:

**Question 1:** What content should be covered in a workshop designed to support employers, organizations and businesses to be welcoming and inclusive of new immigrants and establish multicultural workplaces?



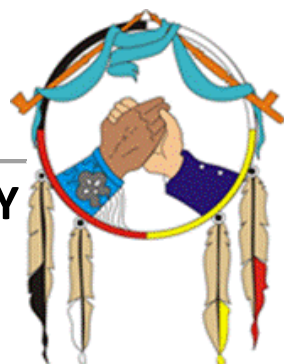
It was made very clear across the groups that WCP will need to “sell” the benefits of supporting cultural differences and hiring new immigrants. Suggestions for doing this included:

- Using statistics
- Being able to market to cultural niches
- Sharing success stories from other employers
- Filling vacancies

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It was also noted that having a variety of sectors/businesses/organizations participate was important, but that the workshops may need to be tailored to meet the different needs of these different groups and their industries to attract them.

Some of the other suggestions identified as potential workshop content included:

- Reviewing the legal aspects of hiring immigrants
- Dispelling myths and addressing the fears
- Providing basic cultural education/diversity training
- Discussing potential language barriers
- Highlighting/identifying any existing incentive programs
- Putting forward ideas such as mentorship programs within a business, providing language supports to employees, having immigrants and other organizations participate in a presentation component

**Question 2:** What might be some barriers to acceptance of workshops designed to assist employers, organizations and businesses be inclusive of new immigrants? What could we do to work around these barriers?

The major barriers identified by almost every group included:

- Time and lack thereof
- Fear and racism
- The sense that this topic “doesn’t have anything to do with me”
- That there are a lot of different cultures in our community and it is likely impossible and overwhelming to think about them all; additionally, there is a fear of offending people which can be equally problematic

The common ways to work around the barriers suggested were:

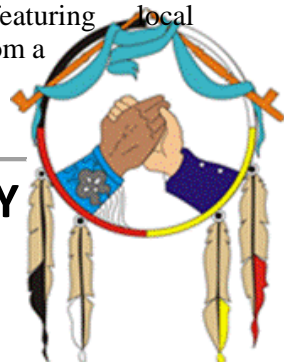
- Having multiple workshops that take place at different times, in different locations and for different lengths of time
- Having respected employers in the community discuss what has worked for them
- Reiterating Canada’s “dying population” and how it will affect the labour market in coming years
- Identifying the more prominent cultures in Kamloops and having a discussion about difference to encourage open mindedness and respectful curiosity – by encouraging people to get to know one another there is less fear of the unknown



Another common theme was the media (TV, radio, newspaper, etc) and using it to give the community exposure to this topic in a positive light. This could be done by printing success stories about diverse individuals in the community, running a myth debunking campaign, and/or featuring local businesses/organizations who work from a welcoming and inclusive approach.

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## Small Group Discussions Unique Ideas

This section will highlight some of the unique ideas put forward within the small groups:

Conduct informal interviews with potential participants to explain the program and how it can benefit organizations/businesses. This way, when the workshops are running these individuals will know what they are and be more likely to take an interest.

Discussing foreign education and work experience with employers to give them a sense of the Canadian equivalencies. It was brought forward that employers often underestimate immigrants' transferable skills and that we could highlight this in a workshop and discuss the importance of transferable skills.

Creating a mentorship program that would support employers looking to hire newcomers, but may be unfamiliar with the process.

Develop a workbook for employers to help them be prepared for hiring and how to make hiring decisions that are inclusive and well informed. Similarly to this, it was put forward that WCP could review the hiring process with employers and look at what decisions are culturally informed and how to be aware of that. From there, these groups of employers could market themselves to the immigrant community and benefit from a diverse labour force. There was also mention of an endorsement program for organizations promoting diversity.

Another table brought forward the possibility of having workshops available on-line to facilitate scheduling conflicts.

## Thank-you!

In closing, we'd like to thank everyone who participated for sharing your thoughts and experiences with us. The event has given us a wide range of excellent information to work with in moving forward. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us! You can email [welcoming.communities@kcris.ca](mailto:welcoming.communities@kcris.ca) or call Allysa or Geoffrey at 250-376-1296.



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