



Kamloops Immigrant Services

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Coming Together to Support Diversity in Kamloops: A Recommendations Paper

Introduction

The purpose of the Kamloops Welcoming Communities Program (WCP) Recommendations Paper is to distribute information regarding the next steps for improving the capacity of Kamloops to be more welcoming and inclusive of new immigrants. It is our hope that Kamloops Immigrant Services (KIS), and other interested community partners/individuals, will use the information collected in this paper to develop local programming that supports the integration of newcomers. Ideas can be drawn from our research to develop funding proposals that see the work continue based on the community input that we collected through the Welcoming Communities Program and events.

Background

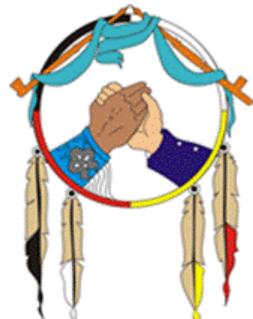
At the start of 2013, Kamloops Immigrant Services, in partnership with the Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society (KAFS), was successful in a bid for funding to develop a local Welcoming Communities Program. KAFS provided technical equipment to the project, in addition to an office space located at 115 Palm Street. KIS hired Allysa Gredling (Welcoming Communities Coordinator) and Geoffrey Otto (Welcoming Communities Assistant Coordinator) to coordinate the project. Seven community support partners assisted in the development of an action plan for moving forward. The goal of the program was to increase the capacity of Kamloops to be welcoming and inclusive of new immigrants by increasing the knowledge and understanding of employers, businesses and other service-providing organizations to encourage them to hire from within this group. The project has been funded by the Province of BC and the Government of Canada.

On March 15, 2013, the Action Plan that was developed by KIS and our planning group was submitted. With minor changes, it was approved. We have been moving forward with the activities identified in our plan since. There was an Open House held and attended by approximately 70 people on May 16th, and on June 5th we held our first large Action Plan activity, the Opening Community Dialogue, which was attended by approximately 55 people. The information collected through the Dialogue was then used to map out the remainder of the WCP so that we engaged the community in a way that they identified as beneficial. To ensure the direction of the planned program would be culturally appropriate, we hosted an Elders Gathering on July 24, 2013. This event brought together Elders and Knowledge Keepers of the various cultures living in Kamloops so they could provide us with further input on the project. It was attended by twelve people, representing six different cultural communities.

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From these community engagement activities, workshops were developed for the community to address the gaps/needs identified through the Opening Dialogue, Elders Gathering, and community survey. They were made available to the community in the fall/winter of 2013. There were three sets of the Employer Workshops Series held and one Community Engagement Workshop. The Employer Series was made up of three workshops and a networking event. One series was geared towards the public sector, and one towards the private sector. They both explored Diversity in the Workplace, HR & Diversity, and Language Barriers; while the Community Engagement Workshop looked at raising self-awareness and how we can interact with others in more positive ways. Thirty-four participants, representing various local businesses, non-profits, government, cultural groups, and sectors, participated in the workshops.

Once the all the Workshops were completed, our plan brought the community back together at a second dialogue to report, evaluate the success of the program, and identify further recommendations and input for next steps. The Next Steps Dialogue took place on Thursday, January, 30th, 2014 and was attended by approximately sixty-two people. In addition to the dialogue, a second community survey was also distributed to collect information from individuals who were unable to attend the event.

Methodology

This project was designed using qualitative data and community engagement in the forms of community dialogue events, online surveys, interviews with the community support partners engaged in the project, and online research.

For each community dialogue event that was hosted, a follow-up survey was developed and distributed within the community. The goal was to collect greater input from the community, and engage individuals who were unable to attend the community events. The surveys were populated using the same questions that were used during the dialogues to ensure consistency in feedback.

In an effort to provide more general information to the public, it was determined that developing and distributing fact sheets would bridge some of the knowledge gaps that the main portion of the program was not designed to do. Four themes were identified by the WCP Action Planning Group, and online research as well as interviews with these community support partners was done to develop the fact sheets. The four theme areas were: general myths and realities about immigration in Canada, the experiences of immigrant women, the experiences of immigrants with disabilities, and bridging Aboriginal and immigrant communities.

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Recommendations

To develop the recommendations section of this paper, we referred to the feedback and information collected through the Next Steps Community Dialogue participants (62), its correlating community survey responses (38), interviews with our local partners (10), and online research. Detailed below are the most common recommendations for moving forward, as well as some of the unique ideas we heard from the community, and the WCP Team's suggestions for who may be best suited to manage these activities. These suggestions are by no means meant to limit who may be interested in and/or willing to take on the activities explored here. It is our hope the interested community groups and individuals will step forward to help support these items. The recommendations that we received are grouped into three themes: community education, community collaboration, and other.

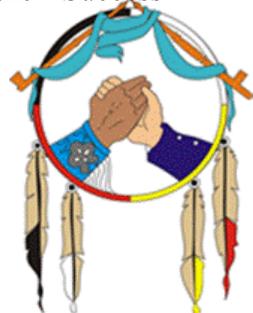
Community Education

There was a very consistent call for continued education on the subject of immigration and diversity. In particular, some felt that the employer focus that our program provided was of distinct value. Much of the content discussed through the employer-focused workshop series was consistent with what the community wanted to see; however, there were suggestions for improving the logistical and engagement components that created challenges. These included developing more specific targeting efforts to engage the private sector that was largely absent within the project. Two ideas came forward in this regard. The first was to hold workshops more often, and in shorter blocks of time. The second was to develop a traveling version of the workshops that could be taken to employers. It was also felt that periodically hosting the community engagement workshops would be beneficial, re-focusing them to look at informing community members about immigration, how they can support the settlement experience, and working to build stronger relationships between various ethnic communities. It was felt by participants that having this kind of programming managed by KIS made the most sense. Two programs in particular seem to fit best for overseeing these kinds of workshops: Community Connections, and Diversity Education. Support from TRU World to help develop and provide expertise on workshop content would be a natural partnership for this component. It may even work for these groups to share human resources in terms of delivering workshop content. In addition, community support partners involved in the labour market could support this process by helping to identify successful marketing activities for the workshops, and actively connecting their clients and members.

Another important identified component to raising community awareness was within the media. Many individuals felt that it was important for media to participate in diversity related events, and reflect the diversity of Kamloops within their stories positively. At the Opening Community Dialogue, Dale Bass, a reporter for Kamloops This Week (KTW), provided an open invitation to the community encouraging them to send her their constructive stories about immigration and diversity for the paper. As the theme of media came up again in the Next Steps Dialogue, we believe that the "Success

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Stories” that KIS writes on this topic could be sent to Ms. Bass for publication. Additionally, the Community Connections program, which develops this piece for the KIS website, could work with KTW to develop a weekly or monthly column sharing these success stories through the paper.

Kamloops has a very rich history of diversity, but it is not always well known within the community. A unique idea that was put forward by participants at the Next Steps Dialogue was to develop an awareness raising campaign through social media. They suggested developing a *hashtag*¹ that people could use to identify and celebrate local diversity. We believe this could be a great way of engaging technological groups that may be less familiar with the diversity of our local history, such as youth or post-secondary students who are new to Kamloops. Initiatives like this can build a positive collection of information and evidence within the community that is widely accessible and requires minimal administration. *#DiverseKam* is the tag we have identified as appropriate for this campaign. Local support partners, along with those responsible for online marketing through KIS, would be responsible for getting this campaign moving, but once the hashtag develops its own standing, these groups would be able to step back and participate in the campaign as any member of the community would.

Community Collaboration

Discussions regarding the importance of community collaboration were also common. Some of the local organizations present at the Next Steps Dialogue expressed an interest in being involved in this work, as did members of the community. Further work done in this area could develop from a public call for engagement from the community. Another unique idea that came forward at this event was the development of a multicultural welcome wagon type program. The suggestion was that this could be a volunteer-powered program that would be managed through the KIS Community Connections program. They would learn about newcomers to the community through the Settlement Workers, and deliver a basket of goods, resources, and information to them based on the individual needs of the person or family (for example, this may be more general cultural needs such as faith-based information, or more specific needs unique to each individual’s/family’s situation, such as health-related resources).

Another piece that was touched on through our project, and echoed as significant at the Next Steps Dialogue, was the importance of bridging newcomers with the local Aboriginal communities. It is important for new immigrants to understand the history and experiences of the Aboriginal peoples living in and around Kamloops so that they are less likely to adopt discriminatory beliefs. As Aboriginal and immigrant communities face some similar experiences of oppression within Canadian society, developing connections between them could provide needed support and understanding, while also diminishing the effects of perceived competition that is the cause of much conflict. KIS and

¹ Hashtag: (on social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) a word or phrase preceded by a hash or pound sign (#) and used to identify messages on a specific topic. It is a form of metadata tag.

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KAFS could build on their initial partnership to develop more concrete bridging opportunities for these communities, such as shared cultural experiences and learning events.

By engaging in various community events, tables, networks, and other groups, KIS is able to bring the experiences of immigrants to the community so that local work being done takes their voices into consideration. Additionally, educating the community about the experiences, struggles, and successes of newcomers allows for greater understanding, trust and respect to build between individuals and groups. This is an important role for KIS to continue to fill.

Other

Some of the important reoccurring items included do not fall under the previous themes and are listed here.

It was noted on a number of occasions throughout our various data collection methods that making community information accessible to immigrants who do not speak English as a first language was an important step in increasing our community's ability to be welcoming and inclusive. A particular focus was placed on municipal information and materials such as the Kamloops Activity Guide, as well as other information related to local employment, emergency services, and major community events. It was suggested that this work could start with one or two of the most common second languages which are present in Kamloops. A partnership among KIS, TRU World, and the City of Kamloops could work to start developing these materials, with support from other interested parties.

After an encouraging discussion at the Next Steps Dialogue about the diverse history of Kamloops, many participants felt that having visual displays and artifacts accessible throughout the community, explaining and depicting this history, was important. These displays could include information related to local First Nations history, as well as other multicultural work and contribution to Kamloops, such as that of the Chinese railway workers, diversity in municipal representatives (Kamloops boasts the first Chinese mayor, and black alderman in all of Canada), and other similar local facts. It could also include representations of cultural artifacts from the different cultures represented in the community. KIS has already engaged the Kamloops Art Council to begin work on creating a mural along the side of its building which will display multicultural and Aboriginal life in Kamloops. This is a great start and we hope that more projects around town will follow in the future.

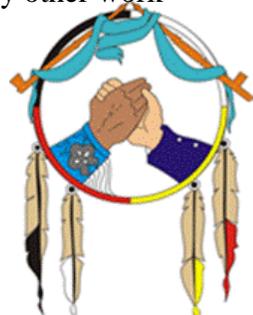
Conclusion

In conclusion, there is still work to be done in Kamloops to make it more welcoming and inclusive. Luckily, we live in a community which is full of compassionate and driven individuals who are interested in continuing to engage in this work. Please make use of this document, and any other work

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produced through the Kamloops Welcoming Communities Program, to reinforce the development of funding proposals and programming that supports new immigrants in our community.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the supporters and participants involved in this project. Its success has been thanks to you, and your involvement. All of the materials associated with this project can be found at www.immigrantservices.ca/wcp. Any further questions that you have can be directed to Paul Lagace, Executive Director at Kamloops Immigrant Services, 778-470-6101.

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