Good Ideas Archive

https://citiesofmigration.ca
Table of Contents

Come from Away: A Rural Mill Town Welcomes the World
Becoming an Inclusive Community: the Moncton Immigration Strategy
New Conversations: Regional Realities
Urban to Rural: The Rural Employment Initiative (REI)
City of 100 Hellos
Community Driven
Glen Haven Manor
Move To Thunder Bay: it's the employers
How to build a movement of change
Peace By Chocolate
Hamilton For All
investing in Success
RNIP Canada: About Thunder Bay's New Immigration Pilot
A Mill Town Recruits
Career Loans: a Community Investment
Digital Love: WE Values
Navigating Newcomer Health
Industry Leaders Connect to Recruit Newcomers
From Survival Jobs to Rich Harvest
Eliminating Barriers for Displaced Individuals
Encouraging Cities to Bring Locals and Immigrants Together
Emma's Torch: Creating Culinary Space for Refugees Dreams
Welcomed in Halifax
Cooking Up Opportunity
MySkills to Job Skills: Competence Cards for Occupational Assessment
ALIGN: Matching Refugee Job Seekers to Jobs
Teacher Training, With and For Refugee Teachers
Business Out of the Box
Ankommen in Deutschland: Cities of Arrival
Entry Hub – because integration is local
Refugee Day: Jobs and Opportunity
A Rising Phoenix in St. James Town
Taking the Plunge
People's Planning Panel
BollywoodMonster MashUp
Jobs, SMEs and Refugees at Volkswagen
Dwaili in the West Midlands
Status: Good Neighbours
Bed, Bath and Bread
Every Person's Health
First Voice
What the Volk?! The NiCeR Project
Firing Up the Refugees Talent Pipeline
Socially Responsible City
Superkilen: Extreme civic involvement
Culturally-Competent Workforce for the Elderly
Mother Tongue Language Training On the Job
Arctic Welcome for the Multicultural City
COSTI Syrian Refugee Professional Internship Program
Refugee Dialogues
Muslim Girls Fence
Frenshirinrefugees
One Samson, One World
Croeso Abergwaun, Welcome Fishguard
BDC Internships: Breaking Down the Barriers to Refugee Employment
Muffins: Museums Welcome Refugees
Starbucks and the First One Thousand
World Mayor, Minister of Society
Refugee 'Sprachraum': Meet, Greet, Learn
MiniActive: Local Women, Local Action
We Speak Translate
The World in Ten Blocks
Procurement Power
PhillyHub: Welcoming Economy Innovations
integration begins at work
Seeing is Believing
Housing Starts Here
Wired for Language Learning
MyCity Academy
Mes Amis: The Clothing Drive
Mobile Solutions for Refugees on the Move
MigrantHire
Healthcare in a Box
When My Home Becomes Our Home
Welcome to City Plaza, Athens
In Italy, a struggling town looks to refugees for revival
On Your Mark, Get Set, Weibo!
Project Ahlan: From Chef to Champion of Refugee Talent
Dream Neighbourhoods: City Innovation in Refugee Housing
integrating Refugees 'Stitch By Stitch'
PINs: Professional Immigrant Networks
SINGA: Connecting Community, New and Old
Better Housing for Refugees Means Better Housing For All
Cities for Citizenship
Concorate Citizen, Employer, Refugee Champion
Triple Win: Tapping Refugee Talent
Bridggin Refugees Talent and Opportunity
Coaching Ordinary Citizens To Be Extraordinary
Learning By Doing
Get Refugees Cycling!
Helping Immigrants Become Kiwi Entrepreneurs
Small Towns, Big Returns
Giving Young Refugees a Shot at Success
A Million Dollar Question: Youth Lead the Change
Revitalizing Neighbourhood Economies
Private Prayer in Public School
Tower Neighbourhood, Tower City
Volunteering for Health, Heart and Work
Sikh Formaggio
Future-Proofing the Library: The Idea Store
New Families, New City
Hayat means Life
Future-Proofing the City
Closing the Opportunity Gap for Immigrant Youth
Rooting Out Intolerance: the Kungaliv Model
Swedish With Your Baby
Language and Learning at Play
Nurturing immigrant entrepreneurs in Sweden
Second Chance School
Quick! I am Sick! Mobile Technology for Newcomers
Empowering Youth to Empower Parents
Gateway to New Audiences
Milan Bus Stories
Projet Proximité: Professional Mentoring for Youth
Courting Justice: Families and The Law in Australia
Gardens of Intercultural Delight
Naan in the Park: Re-imagining Public Space
Mission Export Education
Charting a Path to Citizenship
Brains for Trains: Harnessing diversity for global success
Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Make Me a Match
All Parisians, All Citizens
Anonymous Job Applications Help Overcome Hiring Biases
Youth Employment Drives Diversity Goals
The Dilemma Workshop
Mosaic’s Ambassadors of Prosperity
Operation Black Vote
Hearing and Vision Screening at School
Fit for Finance
The Youth Ambassador Project
Career Bridge Internships a Win-Win for St. Michael’s Hospital
More than Bricks and Mortar: Employability and Housing in Refugee Communities
Sunday in the Park
Diversity Day: Today and Every Day in Mannheim
Building New Working Lives
Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project
Transport Links, Racism Divides
Investing in Character
Social Justice Charter and Citizen’s Bill of Rights
Heritage and Modernity in Singapore’s Urban Renewal
Beyond the Border, Behind the Men
Cook and Share a Pot of Curry Day
From the Multicultural Classroom to the Multicultural Staff Room
The Cuff Road Project: Meals and a Friendly Ear for Jobless Migrants
Strangers Become Friends
Neighbourhood Mothers Leading the Way in Neukölln
Making Friends and Sharing Dreams: International Summer Youth Program
Getting Credit for Credentials
The Vancouver Dialogues Project: Where the Gold Mountain Meets Turtle Island
Making Connections
The Great Equalizer: Toronto Public Library
Reflecting the City: Employment Equity at Work
Internships, ‘Canadian’ Experience and Employment
Access Without Fear: Building a City of Sanctuary
Racism Free Edmonton
Taking Time for Community Safety
Thinking Big: A Film Festival Highlights Small Town Diversity
Found in Translation: Bilbao’s Online Multilingual Resource Guide
Participation, Politics and Impact
Munich Lives Diversity
The Open Library Welcomes the World at Home
Bank On San Francisco
Competition THRIVE: Making the City Stronger
Making Maternity Services Migrant-Friendly
Wolverhampton India Project
The Polish Forum and the Fire Station
Meet Your Neighbours
Bookshelves and Bollywood: Delivering on Diversity
Community First: Christchurch’s Emergency Response
New Haven Promise
Welcoming Diverse Leadership
Taking a National Language and Integration Class Local
From Asylum to Employment: The Wuppertal Participation Network
Unlocking Auckland’s Diversity
Semana intercultural: Valladolid’s Week of Sharing Ideas and Cultures
Reaching out to Migrant Entrepreneurs in Munich
From Hope to Fraternity: Marseille Esperance
Living Together in Madrid
CIMA Mayor’s School Cricket Tournament
Putting Women’s Health in Women’s Hands
Mentoring Skilled Immigrants at City Hall
Lost in Translation: Auckland’s Primary Health Interpreting Services
Everyday Policing for Equality
Bringing Maori Culture to Newcomers: The Wellington Regional Settlement Strategy
The World in a City: The Olympic Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
Do not Judge a Book by its Cover
The Philadelphia Story: Economic Integration through Integrated Services
We are New York Project
From the Cradle to the Classroom
Community Ambassadors for Seniors
Looking Ahead: the TPS Recruiting and Hiring Strategy
You Are the Key: Your Future, Your City
Giving Equality a Sporting Chance in Greenwich
Mayor’s Office of New Bostonians
Relining on Immigrant Networks: Business Network Aachen
A Charter of Rights for Urban Citizens
Business Law for Immigrant Entrepreneurs
Mapping Community Cohesion in Weltham Forest
Creating Language Empathy in Corporate Canada
Mindino Minority Interests at City Hall
From Neighbours to Citizens: the Barcelona Interculturality Plan
The 5 Estates Project: Bringing Diverse Communities Together
Taking Teachers on Community and Faith Walks
Together in the same direction
Engaging in Copenhagen
Diversity Moves Frankfurt
Team London and the Mayor’s Mentoring Scheme
From Public Space to Common Ground
Calgary’s Employment Forums Go Face-to-Face
Language-wise in the Global Classroom
Sheffield’s Ambassadors of Welcome
Immigrant Businesses get a Helping Hand
Talking Business in your Mother Tongue
Toronto Inspirers Settlement Website for New Aucklanders
Fighting Fiction with Facts: the BCN Anti-Rumour Campaign
Reaching out for the Stars: VIPs go to School
Chicago Opens Office of New Americans
Count Us In!
Making Space for a Sikh Parade
We Are Hamburg! Won’t you join us?
Berlin: Testing Diversity in City Councils
Hamilton: Going for Gold – Beyond Pan Am 2015
Kangaroo: Football and the Local Community
Music and the Urban Soul of New Zealand
Parc Central de Nou Barris
It Starts with Soccer
A Scholarship for the Entire Family
Fundació Tot Raval
Bridging More than the Digital Divide
New Zealand Police finds Engagement with Migrant Communities
CONRAD: Syndication model delivers the village square
Amsterdam To Toronto: Top Points for Police
Lisbon: Dialogue Cafe
Police Take Community Outreach to City Hall
Pravas: Indian theatre in English for all New Zealanders
Chicago: Redrawing voting districts to favour minorities
Turn: Bibliomigra brings the library to the people
Take One Hour Before Eating: Pharmacies in Translation
No more Doctors as Stone Masons! Recognition of the Qualifications of Immigrant Doctors and Nurses
Ordinary Acts of Courage
Putting Justice to Work for Domestic Caregivers
DiverseCity School for Civics
Karaka: Cooking Up Inclusion
Swimming to Safety
Listen Up! Making a Business Case for Diversity
Timmini: Tempo and Beat: Youth and Community
On the Front Lines of Integration
The Key To France: Not All Roads Lead to Paris
Welcome Back to a Healthier Community
London: Making Museums A Hub For Integration
Taking the Swedish National Diversity Plan to School
Gateway to Little Burma
Oslo Extra Large
The Bristol Bike Project
East London: Digging in for Community
Barcelona: ODAME, School of Entrepreneurship for Women
Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Immigrants
Banking on Affordable Credit
Toronto: DiverseCity Counts, Measuring Leadership Success
Helsinki: Business Counseling for Entrepreneurial Success
Antwerp: Welving Newcomers into the Local Marketplace
Toronto: StartRight with Scotiabank
In Menden, All Kids are VIPs
Tuition Programs for International Students
One Stop Shop: Mainstreaming Integration
Toronto: Cultural Interpreters for Mental Health
Jumping Ahead with Math!
Putting Quality into Multi-Ethnic Schools (QUIMS)
Orchestrating New Audiences
Delicious Celebrating Culture through Food
Montreal: Sports hijab helps girls make the team
VALOA: Moving international talent from university to employment
Toronto schools help remove the taboo of sex education
Engaging Newcomers in City Parks
Partnership for Success: Investing in City Governments
Peacemaker: All People, All Communities
Narratives of Belonging
Diaspora Dialogues: Writing the New City
Porta Palazzo and the Balon Flea Market
Connecting Nurses to Healthy Employment
Making Their Mark: Unlocking Educational Opportunity for Young Refugees
Women at Work: the KVINFO Mentor Network
City Mondial: Looking Forward from the Past
Integration in Action
Interviewing the Up and Coming at Upwardly Global
Integration Workshops for Inclusive Cities
Play It Fair!
Asylum Dialogues
Accommodate Sheffield – Better Together
Time Together: Mentoring for Daily Life
Staying in Touch: The Library Responds To A Changing Community
A Community Roadmap: the Weqwezi Kommune
Cities of Sanctuary. Communities of Welcome
Walking School Bus
Urban Citizenship and Identity
Urban Citizens: Municipal Identification Cards (ID) For Inclusive And Safe Communities
Twin Streams Project: Common Ground for Environmental Sustainability
Traffic Advocating for Environmental Health
To Bean or Not To Bean?
The World On Our Doorstep: Short Term Mentoring Opens Doors To Employment
The Stuttgart Pact For Integration: the Power of Planning
The Miracle of Marxloh: Brining A Community Together Around A New Mosque
The London Living Wage Campaign
The Generation Project: Community Partnerships for Youth
Sultans of Science
Better Business: Integrating the Chinese Business Community Into the Mainstream
Youth on Stage: Real People, Real Stories, Real Community
Promoting Healthy Living In Multicultural Communities
Interpreting Diversity in Healthcare
Open Mosques against Prejudice
Older but not Overlooked
Muslims and Mortgages: American Home Ownership Through Flexible Financing
Mobilize the Immigrant Vote!
MIRA: Media Advocacy With A Human Face
MIMI-Within Migrants: For Migrants: Intercultural Health in Germany
Meeting, Mediating and Mentoring: The Power of Peer Mentoring
Marketing Multiculturalism: Advertising Campaign for Integration
Last Words: Cultural Approaches to Death and Dying
Language from the Law: The Cardiff E.S.O.L. Police Project
Integration Through Education: Toronto’s Second Generation Makes the Grade
Improving Housing. Empowering Communities: Incorporating Multiculturalism Into Urban Planning
Hockey Night In Canada – In Punjabi!
From Boston’s Back Streets to Mainstream Success
From Alpha to Omega: Innovating in the Workplace
Financing Immigrant Futures: The Latino Community Credit Union
Family Mentoring For Migrants: MEMI
Dolls and Diversity: Fighting Prejudice with Empathy
Did You Know You Can Vote? Cities and Democracy at Work
Dealing With Diabetes: The Maslaha Project
Common Ground: One Space, Many Cultures
Citizens For Citizenship
Changing the Face of Leadership: DiverseCity onBoard
Buntkicktgut! Integration Through Sports
Building Professional and Occupational Networks: The Mentoring Partnership
Bringing People to Jobs: Runways to Work Programme
Banking on Success: Diversity at Lloyds TSB
A Soap Opera For Success: The Grand Cafe Telenovela
'School For Mama and Me!'
Come from Away: A Rural Mill Town Welcomes the World

By Sinthu Vimaladasan  
March 31, 2020

Employment Inclusion New Gateways

The challenges of immigration in small communities are different than in cities. Solving them may be key rural Atlantic Canada’s future prosperity.

A small influx of foreign workers has sparked sharp reactions in Chipman, New Brunswick. Many see the newcomers as potential saviours of a town headed toward extinction. Others see them as competitors for local jobs. In between, a handful of newcomer families are trying to figure out how to feel at home.

Big companies, small companies, high-tech start-ups and century-old family firms all have trouble finding workers. Towns all over the region are wooing immigrants as the population ages and shrinks.

Aging, Shrinking, Declining

Chipman’s civic leaders are in their 70s. Its average resident is over 50 years old. The town’s population declined for a decade until its major employer, J.D. Irving, began recruiting workers in Ukraine, Latvia, Scotland and Finland.

"Small rural communities are being hollowed out completely," says Chipman Mayor Carson Atkinson, who helped develop a strategic plan for his town that relies in part on bringing overseas workers to the local mill. The hope is that they can convince more newcomers not just to stay for a while, but to bring their families and put down roots.

J.D. Irving knows the labour shortage in Atlantic Canada is poised to go from tough to devastating. The company will hire more than 8,000 people over the next three years. Local isn’t always an option. Even with high unemployment, employers have trouble finding the workers they need. Some businesses will not survive without international recruitment. Up to one-third of those workers may come from outside Canada.

Diversity in Leadership

Employers have to change their approach. Susan Wilson made history in 2019 when J.D. Irving made her its first director of immigration. She is tasked with developing new best practices that will help J.D. Irving find and retain the people it needs. The company’s newly created centre of excellence has three main tasks:

- Figure out where to recruit for specific jobs and divisions
- Streamline the immigration process that candidates go through with the government
- Develop ways to ensure new workers are well integrated into their communities.

L i n k  C o p y  h t t p s : / / w w w . c b c . c a / p l a y e
There is no single narrative that fits all small towns, but the experience in Chipman illustrates several key challenges. There is more isolation in small towns than in cities. Newcomers have less access to the kind of cultural and recreational activities where neighbours can bond. There is less access to medical care, language classes, non-Christian places of worship, child care, and food and consumer goods from other cultures. And there is an ongoing housing crisis.

Like company towns of two generations ago, employers are investing in housing. J.D. Irving partnered with Chipman to build a subdivision of transitional homes for newcomer families until they find a permanent home.

Helping newcomers thrive outside of work is essential. Newcomer recruits will only stay if they are happy. The focus cannot only be on workers. Many small towns are focusing on how to help the spouses of new workers feel at home in their new communities.

Dispelling myths

Chipman Mayor Carson Atkinson knows that some people in his town believe the newcomers are taking their jobs. He doesn’t think that’s true. He doesn’t think they appreciate that the town won’t survive without newcomers.

Atlantic Canada’s demographic reality is one of population decline. The Atlantic Provinces Economic Council reported that the regional labour force has shrunk by more than 30,000 people since 2012. The New Brunswick Multicultural Council estimates the workforce will shrink by 40,000 in the next 15 years—unless the province can attract many new immigrants.

Chipman’s experiment with immigration started in 2018. It is new compared to some other Atlantic cities. Whether newcomers stay in Chipman will be decided by those who grew up there, says Doug Tyler (a former provincial minister of natural resources who is now a consultant to J.D. Irving).

A chance to turn the tide

“We have a chance to turn the tide from decline to growth,” he says. “But we only have this opportunity once. If we are successful, we will have more vibrant schools, a larger population and better services for everybody. (The people of Chipman) have to understand this initiative is going to help them. We are making progress, but there is lots more work to do.”

This article has been compiled and edited from two Public Policy Forum articles about immigration to Atlantic Canada:

- Mill town’s struggle reveals rural areas’ unique immigration challenges
- How Atlantic Canada businesses keep their foreign workers
Becoming an Inclusive Community: the Moncton Immigration Strategy

By Sinhthu Vimaladasan
March 30, 2020

Civic Inclusion, Economic Inclusion, Municipal, New Gateways, Social Inclusion

Many urban mid-sized cities in Canada find themselves acknowledging a scary demographic reality. They don’t have the population or workforce to maintain their current standard of living. As well, discussions about immigration around the world have become polarized. Moncton, New Brunswick, offers a roadmap to turn it around.

The numbers were clear. Moncton wasn’t growing. Inter-provincial migration had stagnated. But in immigration, Moncton saw a solution. In 2013, the city set out to create an immigration strategy. Looking nationally and internationally for best practices, the city also looked inward. They hosted an immigration summit and consulted with other 200 people in the community. They reframed a common demographic argument about aging populations being a challenge to cities. The real challenge? A lack of young people and workers to ensure stable economic growth and tax generation to support public services.

The 2014-2018 Greater Moncton Immigration Strategy was a landmark document. It was the first formal strategy meant to guide immigrant attraction and retention efforts in the region’s history. It was also one of the few municipal immigration strategies in Canada.

It worked. By 2018, Moncton had more than doubled the number of immigrants moving to the region each year. According to Moncton’s Immigration Strategy Officer, Angelique Reddy-Kalala, immigration has become an important part of New Brunswick’s economic development planning. Immigration is prominent in the New Brunswick Population Growth Strategy, the New Brunswick Economic Growth Plan, and the Greater Moncton Region Strategic Economic Development Plan.

Moncton knew that having a strategy wasn’t enough. It was essential to have tangible, measurable actions. A Local Immigration Partnership was created and tasked to implement the strategy. A Moncton immigration website was created, including a Greater Moncton Newcomer Guide. Reddy-Kalala’s position, an immigration strategy officer, unique to many cities, was also created. Having a dedicated position within government indicated the importance of immigration to Moncton.

The 2014-2018 Immigration Strategy final report outlines Moncton’s success: “from a community that attracted very few immigrants just a decade ago to one of the leading urban centres in eastern Canada for the attraction of immigrants.”

Intentional investment and the creation of measurable instruments had resulted in success. The strategy and its implementation meant the city was ready for unanticipated migration. In 2015 Canada experienced a Syrian refugee influx. Moncton was able to pivot resources and supports to welcome new refugees to the city. Over 1000 Syrians settled in Moncton. Reddy-Kalala says the foundations were always in the city. As immigrant groups have grown, their presence has grown and formalized.

There is much support in the community for those types of organizations. She says that people see value in celebrating a welcoming and inclusive community together. It meant the conversation about immigration wasn’t polarizing. Moncton is experiencing much higher levels of immigrant retention. Newcomers feel that Moncton is their home. Syrian families are settling. Their children are doing well in school and are active in the community. They are welcomed in a way they might not experience in a bigger city.

Reddy-Kalala tells the story of one Syrian family who moved to Vancouver. They decided that the bigger city wasn’t for them. Moncton had become their home. But they lacked the resources to move again. A local business person, an immigrant entrepreneur, flew the family back to Moncton. Moncton’s efforts have paid off locally.

The country has also noticed. Moncton won a Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators’ award for their strategy.

The city hasn’t rested on the success of their first strategy. Moncton recently launched their second immigration strategy. It builds on the successes of their first strategy, but is ambitious in many ways. This time, the city consulted over 600 people. It is accepted fact that immigration is the city’s source of population and economic growth. The strategy continues to focus on attracting newcomers, but also ensuring they stay. Mobilizing the broader community to be welcoming is also a key goal. The city has made it a priority to expand and improve pathways to inclusion for newcomers.

Moncton has quickly moved from a demographic precipice to celebrating a growing diversity and economic success. Moncton also wants to ensure that cities are consulted on all discussions about immigration and inclusion in Canada. All cities can learn from their success, strength and strategic approach.
New Conversations: Regional Realities

By Sinthu Vimaladasan
March 31, 2020

New Brunswick doesn't lack economic and job opportunities. Quite the opposite. With a healthy employer base, the province has lacked a workforce to fill opportunities. The province was able to rely on the local population and inter-provincial movement of workers to fill job opportunities. But, in recent years both of those sources of labour started to decline. Immigration was a clear solution. But the province also had a newcomer attraction and retention challenge.

Recognizing and valuing immigration as their key source of labour market growth meant taking a look inward. There are opportunities, yes. But, are the communities welcoming? What about pathways to work in fields newcomers are skilled and experienced in? Immigration itself is a cumbersome and complex process. How could New Brunswick make it easier for newcomers to not only come, but thrive in the province?

By 2017, immigration was already transforming the province. The city of Moncton was about to launch one of Canada’s first municipal immigration strategies – so successfully, in fact, it has since launched its 2nd 2020-2024 strategy. In 2015 New Brunswick welcomed the largest number of Syrian refugees per capita in Canada. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program launched. New Brunswick saw a significant increase in economic immigration to the province. The New Brunswick Multicultural Council (NBMC) in Fredericton identified immigration as a potential solution and population growth strategy.

The question was: Were other New Brunswick communities aware of this new reality? And would they respond to the new ‘immigration imperative’? To test these ideas and get the pulse of New Brunswickers across the province, NBMC and David Campbell, former economist for the Province of New Brunswick, put together a compelling story on the fragility of the region’s future prosperity and hit the road.

The New Conversations tour was born. New Conversations roadshow brought the conversation about immigration to over 1,300 people in 15 cities and towns across New Brunswick. It took place when misinformation, myths, xenophobia and racism were a global and Canadian reality. Local mayors and councillors understood the need for the conversation. As former Chief Economist of New Brunswick, David Campbell put it, "the labour market is actually starting to decline in the province. If we don’t find a new source of workers in a hurry, and a lot of them, it’s going to negatively impact our economy and, ultimately, negatively impact our communities."

The economic argument tends to be the most persuasive when it comes to immigration. But, municipal leaders also realized that jobs are not enough. "I want to be Canada’s most diverse, most welcoming city.” Saint John, NB, Mayor John Darling. This type of local leadership would be crucial to the success of New Conversations.
Status quo means change

“If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change. If we want our institutions to stay as they are; if we want our schools to stay in our communities; if we want our way of life and our quality of life to stay as it is; things will have to change.” NBMC’s Alex LeBlanc.

On the surface, it seems a bit confusing to suggest that for things to stay the same things will have to change. When it comes to economic growth, quality of life, and healthy communities in small, medium and regional cities and towns across Canada, what needs to change is not a recognition that immigration brings economic growth, but that it brings social capital as well.

Creating the conditions for success requires an entire community to come together. This requires the active participation of city and community leaders, institutions and employers. It also means involving others in the community not always considered inclusion actors.

Case Study: Edmundston, regional hub

The City of Edmundston was one of the 11 cities toured by New Conversations. This northwestern New Brunswick city plays an important role in the New Brunswick economy. The City of Edmundston is a small, centrally located urban centre (pop. 16,800) with a much larger regional population of approximately 80,000. Its importance as a regional hub for northwestern NB is illustrated by the Edmundston Census Agglomeration (CA) with a labour force featuring above-average employment in health care, retail trade, accommodation and food services, and public administration, and highlighting the community’s role as a regional services and tourism hub. Without Edmundston, New Brunswick would lose a large regional services hub. In the City of Edmundston alone there are over 650 businesses, including more than 120 in retail trade, 39 in professional services, and 45 in accommodation and food services. Read the New Conversations: Edmundston report

Success

A key Conversation objective was “to engage communities in discussions and stimulate their future actions to provide welcoming communities for immigrants.”

New Conversations focused the conversation on both communities and newcomers in 11 cities across the province. Settlement and inclusion is a two-way street that involves everyone. NBMC worked with community leaders to ensure that the right mix of residents attended. NBMC also created local labour market and demographic profiles specific to each community. Discussion focused on local realities. This included the voices of local employers and newcomers.

Focusing on the local helped to frame the challenge facing the people in each room. Participants would identify solutions to make their lives and communities better. NBMC didn’t present an immigration and inclusion playbook. This approach, crafting local solutions with local community members proved very successful.

Local solutions from local communities

New Conversations’ recommendations came from New Brunswickers, for New Brunswickers. Some recommendations identified concrete initiatives to address immigrant attraction, integration, and retention. Others focused on the need to conduct further research and develop population growth strategies. There are recommendations calling for action from everyone in the community.

New Brunswick has moved quickly from a precarious demographic challenge to becoming a model for municipal immigration attraction and retention. Creating the conditions for newcomers to thrive requires collaboration and shared leadership. There is much to learn from the province and how it has come together.

In 2019, the Province of New Brunswick’s launched New Beginnings, its Population Growth Strategy for 2019-2024. The strategy focuses on three targets: Growing the New Brunswick population by increasing the immigration target over time, welcoming up to 7,500 newcomers annually by 2024. The strategy was created to address current and future labour market needs and is built on past successes and recent initiatives, such as the Atlantic Growth Strategy and the New Brunswick Multicultural Council’s New Conversations Post-Tour Report.

This would bring New Brunswick’s annual immigration intake to about one per cent of the population.
Urban to Rural: The Rural Employment Initiative (REI)

By Sinthu Vimaladasan
March 28, 2020

Economic Inclusion, Employment Inclusion, Municipal Welcome-ability, New Gateways, Social Inclusion

Rural Ontario communities need newcomers. New immigration programs are emerging to support these cities. But what about newcomers already in Canada? Many talented internationally trained professionals already live in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). They and their families are assets for smaller and rural Ontario communities.

Recognizing this reality, in 2016, The Newcomer Centre of Peel (NCP) partnered with the Ontario Association for Community Futures Development Corporation (OACFDC) to create the Rural Employment Initiative (REI).

REI works with newcomers to find local jobs and housing in rural communities. Importantly the project works with those communities to create welcoming conditions.

Finding and preparing newcomers interested in making the move to rural Ontario is a core part of REI’s work. For newcomers, it’s an opportunity to actually use their skills and experience. REI works with them, assesses them, and takes them on tours of Ontario communities.

These group tours are essential. REI introduces newcomers to cities they may never have been to or even heard of. According to REI Training & Development Facilitator, Tania Maksymenko, the decision to move isn’t something people can do from their computers. They want and need to interact with a real person. It’s an opportunity for newcomers and community representatives to connect. Newcomers meet local job recruiters, employers, community leaders and those eager for their talent.

It’s about collaboration

REI has learned about the right approach to working with rural communities. Maksymenko says REI was initially more focused on job seekers and how to help them find jobs. They realized that they needed to work with communities as well. Municipal leadership (politicians, economic development departments) and employers are key to success.

Maksymenko says that high touch collaboration is essential. Making a human connection with rural communities is a key ingredient in REI’s success. REI’s approach is long-term. Often, relationship-building takes time, requires patience, persistence, and personalization.

Each community is unique. Each approach is different. REI uses many different strategies based on what they learn and who they work with. Taking that approach is having an impact. REI might help with attraction and retention strategies, cultural awareness and diversity training.

Cultural competency is one of primary skills for developing effective attraction and retention strategies. REI assists rural communities in designing and delivering diversity training specific to the regional needs. For example, REI actively collaborated with the Sarnia, Lambton Economic Development Officer to design an event for employers focusing on diversity. It was important to create an open conversation about the benefits of creating a welcoming community.

REI brought newcomers to the region where they visited employers, made connections. Employers told newcomers firsthand what a small town employer is looking for.

In Grey County, REI participated in a one-day employer-focused Regional Forum on Rural Newcomer Integration in Collingwood. Local leaders realized that a community-wide approach was needed. They brought key stakeholders together to discuss how to “improve workplace integration, public perception and affordable and attainable housing.”

Some communities need a longer courting period. REI has been working in Owen Sound for 3 years. This year they are seeing the fruits of their patient, persistent approach.

Success comes through strong partnerships with community agencies and economic development partners. As a result of REI’s efforts, a small community of newcomers from Peel are growing roots in Thunder Bay.

Maksymenko says a lot of work goes into creating just one success story. REI has travelled to rural communities. Those communities are now coming to them.

REI client Manikantan can attest to the effort and support he received. The Mayor from Sault Ste Marie came to Mississauga and spoke to REI clients. People from the economic development and Local Immigration Partnership visited REI.
This week Manikantan moved to the Sault Ste Marie to start as a Plant Manager at Heliene Inc. His journey started soon after arriving in Mississauga in August 2019. He connected with NCP and other service providers along the way. But it was REI who gave him the best advice about how to present himself to employers. They also connected him with Sault Ste Marie city staff who shared his resume with his now new employer. And they continue to support him. As he looks for housing, they’ve helped him get to know the city, checked in with him and made his move to the city welcoming. Manikantan looks forward to bringing his family to Sault Ste Marie once the school year is over.

For newcomers, moving again can be intimidating. According to one group tour participant: “This isn’t a move for everyone. It would take someone with a pioneer spirit, courage, and strength to make a move into unknown territory.”

REI harnesses newcomer spirit and strength such as Manikantan’s and brings it to communities that need it.
Known as “The City of 100 Hellos”, the demographics of Brooks, Alberta (population 15,000) have changed dramatically over the past 2 decades. The city is one of the most ethnically diverse small cities in Canada. In 1996, racialized people made up 3% of Brooks’ population. By 2016 35% of Brooks’ residents identify as racialized.

In the mid 1990s, the city’s main local employer, Lakeside Packers, a feed mill, feedlot, slaughterhouse and meat-packing plant that processes up to 40% of Canada’s beef, started hiring increasingly large numbers of newcomers. The meatpacking industry, like many others in Canada, had turned to immigration to fill demand for workers.

Newcomer hires came mainly through secondary migration. An influx of immigrants from Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia looking for work were referred from organizations in larger Alberta cities. Since then, Brooks itself has become a landing site for refugees to the province. By the early 2000s Brooks had become a multicultural mosaic.

It took time however, for the changing face of rural Alberta’s rural communities to reconcile newcomer interests to their own. In 2005 Brooks and Lakeside became the location of one of western Canada’s largest and most significant first-contract strikes in the province’s history. Ultimately, innovative and responsive organizing strategies and tactics utilized by union organizers and the racially divided workforce paid off: “They learned how to build trust among the various ethnic communities.”

Creating an open, welcoming community became a priority for the city as a whole. Like many changing communities, for Brooks that means a commitment to a long-term process.

**Working with other cities**

In 2012 the City of Brooks committed to its first Welcoming and Inclusive Communities Partnership Plan, built on the vision of the Canadian Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities (CCIM) and its ten Common Commitments. CCIM’s network brings together municipalities that want to improve their policies against racism, discrimination, exclusion and intolerance. Coalition members must commit both an elected official and a senior member of the city executive as signatories to the convention. To date, more than 80 cities in Canada have signed on.

Formerly the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD) led by the Canadian Commission for Unesco (CCUNESCO), CCIM’s foundational work to address racism brought ethnic and cultural groups together for mutual support. Immigrants’ experience of being ‘othered’ newcomers in a small town helped create a living sense of shared interest and standing together across all groups.

In 2015, with a growing newcomer population in need of coordinated services, the City of Brooks Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) was formed to focus on the newcomer aspects of this work. In 2018, the LIP identified three key areas to focus on in Brooks until 2021:

- English-language Learning and Education;
- Social Isolation and Integration; and
- Immigrant Youth
Underlying each strategic area is the goal of creating a cohesive and empowered community. Newcomer needs are met through the delivery of effective, well-coordinated services. An over-arching goal is to engage newcomers in the life of the community.

The most recent Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) Partnership Plan for 2017-2020, continues to build on this work to create an inclusive community.

A work in progress

In a 2007 documentary about the unionization of Lakeside Packers, the city’s mayor acknowledged that over the course of a decade Brooks transformed from a socially conservative, primarily white town to one of the most diverse places in Canada.

Change takes time. Recently, the city’s Mayor Barry Morishito noted that while diversity has enriched the community, "there have been challenges [and] a desperate need for more social support."

Looking to the future, the 2017-2020 WIC Plan acknowledges this: "There are no quick fixes to a more inclusive community. It is not something that is done once and then forgotten. It is a journey, which requires a willingness to plan and work over the long term through shifting or competing priorities and changes in leadership or staff."

Success

Much effort has gone into creating better conditions for social inclusion. The city has created or is part of a number of initiatives, including:

City of Brooks Inclusion Champion and Organizational Awards. Two Welcoming and Inclusive Committee initiatives, to recognize and honour those people and organizations that help make Brooks and surrounding area a community that people are proud to call home.

Taste of Nations. A day of unique foods, interesting cultures, and a celebration of diversity as the City of Brooks and the Region of Newell celebrates its diverse cultural heritage.

City of Brooks – Community Feedback – Inclusion Survey. A survey for the city to get insights about how they’re welcoming and inclusive from a municipal government perspective, a personal perspective, and a community perspective.

Inclusion Advisor. The City created this position to represent it at various community meetings, work with businesses, non-profit organizations, schools, and any residents that wish to promote and/or implement awareness campaigns against racism and discrimination and advise City staff about diversity and inclusion.

Safe Harbour Program. The City of Brooks participates in the Safe Harbour Program. All City of Brooks facilities are recognized as places where all community members can come for help and support.

Newell Regional Expo. The Newell Regional Expo grew out of an idea to develop strategies to encourage welcoming and inclusive communities within healthy economic and social systems by promoting, honouring and increasing community involvement and awareness in all sectors in our communities.

Demographic change can happen quickly in a small community. As a newcomer population shifts from temporary to permanent to essential, city leadership must adapt quickly. Working with existing models of inclusion and welcoming is an important way to implement what works in other similar communities.
Is Canada’s Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot simply a replication of Morden’s Community Driven Immigration Initiative (MCDII)? The federal Pilot requires that applicants meet “community-specific requirements” and a “community recommendation application process.”

That’s been Morden’s approach since 2012.

That’s when the City of Morden and Morden Community Development Corporation started working with the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program to match the skill set of prospective immigrants to local employer needs. It was the first city in Canada to implement its own immigration program.

Wanted: Ability to Adapt

Potential immigrant applicants receive an invitation to make an exploratory visit to Morden. If there’s a good fit, they are invited to apply to the Provincial Nominee Program and complete the federal immigration application process. Morden also recruits immigrant entrepreneurs interested in starting or buying a business in the city.

Morden’s message to newcomers is clear. The language on their website is not ambiguous: “Applications will not be considered if they do not meet minimum qualifications… Due to the very small size of our program, we are only able to choose and support a small percentage of received applications. We choose applicants based on minimum qualifications, occupational experience, and ability to adapt to climate, culture, and genuine intention on living and working in Morden.”

To ensure that employers get what they need, the program screens and selects newcomers that match Morden’s workforce needs. The city works closely with the province and federal counterparts to ensure that their chosen applicants move quickly through the application, assessment and acceptance process of the Provincial Nominee Program. Successful applicants will put their talents and skills to work the minute they arrive. Settlement isn’t a long-term goal, it’s a tangible reality.

It’s the community

Thanks to the success of its newcomer recruitment, Morden is experiencing the demographic growth every small city in Canada is looking for. In 2016, almost 20% of the population was made up of immigrants (compared to 8.5% just 10 years earlier). Mother tongues range from German, Russian, and Ukrainian, to Arabic, Spanish, Korean, and Tagalog. It is a diverse, growing and welcoming community.

It’s not just about jobs

Looking beyond the city’s economic needs to the future, the city of Morden is committed to building a welcoming and inclusive community. Morden wants to help newcomers become part of the community: “As an applicant who has been supported through the immigration process by the City of Morden, you have declared your intention to live and work in Morden when you arrive. We will do everything we can to assist you in your successful settlement here.”
A growing consensus

Morden’s high retention results prove the Manitoba model works: 95% of those that have participated in an exploratory visit have been living in Morden for at least a year and, overall, 84% are still living in Morden.

Outcomes like these are a call to action for similar regional towns and cities. Today Morden is part of a 13-city collaborative community initiative dedicated to improving immigrant integration in the Pembina Valley region of southern Manitoba. Their 2020-2025 action plan focuses on:

- Creating welcoming and inclusive communities
- Making sure newcomers have the information they need about resources, supports, and activities in their communities
- Giving newcomers have equal access to care and organizational support to ensure they feel connected to their community

As other Canadian cities replicate Morden’s model they thank the city for its pioneering approach.
A groundbreaking and innovative partnership with the potential to help Canadian employers facing significant labour shortages and create labour mobility opportunities for qualified refugees has taken root in Nova Scotia, Canada. The partnership is positioned to have a significant positive impact on staffing shortages in the local health care sector and inform the creation of similar efforts across Canada and in other countries.

RefugePoint, an international non-profit that serves at-risk refugees, Glen Haven Manor, a long-term care facility in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, and the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network, are pleased to announce that multiple skilled refugees in Kenya have received job offers to work as continuing care assistants at Glen Haven Manor. Glen Haven Manor is the third-largest long-term care facility in Nova Scotia, serving 202 residents.

The opportunity to connect qualified refugees to employers facing specific skilled labor gaps has come to fruition through the Economic Mobility Pathways Project (EMPP). The EMPP is a research project administered by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), in collaboration with RefugePoint, Talent Beyond Boundaries (TBB), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and four Canadian provinces and territories.

The EMPP tests whether skilled refugees can access immigration to Canada through existing economic migration programs. Implementing partners support the identification of qualified and experienced refugees and connect them with employers in Canada facing labor market shortages. To relocate to Canada, all refugee applicants need to meet pre-existing immigration requirements at both the Federal and Provincial levels. Through this pathway, refugees will gain the opportunity to rebuild their lives, while communities throughout Canada will benefit and grow by filling critical gaps in employment. The project is designed to complement Canada’s traditional refugee resettlement programs, which focus on assisting the most vulnerable refugees.

Pictou County, Nova Scotia, is one of many non-urban communities in Canada that struggles with a shortage of skilled labor, particularly within health care. Sarah Macintosh-Wiseman, CEO of Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN), responsible for economic development within the region, says her organization recognized the need for innovative solutions to address this challenge. After learning about the EMPP, Macintosh-Wiseman invited RefugePoint, TBB, and other partners to Pictou County in May 2019 to present a new strategic idea to local employers: in addition to local hiring efforts, also consider hiring skilled refugees.

International recruitment to meet needs of local residents

Glen Haven Manor, a community-governed nursing home, which serves citizens of Pictou County and other parts of Nova Scotia, was one of the first employers to sign on to this pioneering partnership. They expressed an interest in connecting with qualified candidates to fill vacancies for Continuing Care Assistant (CCA) positions. While the Nova Scotian nursing home continues to actively invest in local recruitment and retention, they have also started investing in international recruitment to address immediate needs to prevent the very real potential of a staffing crisis.

RefugePoint identified refugee candidates in Kenya and TBB identified refugee candidates in Jordan and Lebanon that met the qualifications for the CCA positions and set up interviews with Glen Haven Manor via Skype in July 2019.

Glen Haven was impressed by the competence and experience of the candidates and issued several job offers as a result. After seeing a sample of the high calibre of applicants, Glen Haven Manor CEO, Lisa M. Smith, and Employee Relations Specialist, Janice Jorden, along with Sarah Macintosh-Wiseman of PCREN, traveled to Kenya with RefugePoint to interview additional candidates. The candidates, who were interviewed in person in November 2019, included urban refugees from Nairobi and rural refugees from Dadaab Refugee Camp who were interviewed with the assistance of UNHCR Kenya.

"Glen Haven is proud to be part of this extraordinary global collaboration that has the capacity to positively change the lives of refugees and their families by offering a pathway to permanent residence in Canada. However, the primary goal for being an active partner in this international project is to address our recruitment needs for the benefit of our residents," explains Glen Haven Manor CEO Smith.

Refugees’ skills and experience

"Typically, when refugees are being interviewed, the conversation is focused on their vulnerabilities, the things they desperately need, and the horrifying experiences they have had. Here, the tone of the conversation was completely different. Refugees were being asked about their skills and professional experience," shared Simar Singh, Senior Program Manager at RefugePoint. "Immediately after the interviews, candidates told us that they deeply appreciated the conversations, and the chance to interview with an employer." One candidate said, "Thank you for giving me my dignity back by being able to present a more accurate reflection of who I am as a person."

Based on the interviews and the outstanding skills and experience of the candidates, Glen Haven issued multiple job offers to the candidates, who are now in the process of compiling the necessary documents to apply to immigrate to Canada.

It is about finding the right staff. It is a win for all of us.

"Despite hiring many local employees and actively continuing to do so, there have not been enough qualified candidates to fill all of our needs," Smith explained. "Our search led us to Kenya because of the qualified candidates that we had the opportunity to interview previously and the knowledge that there were many more. Meeting the candidates in person enabled us to gain a greater understanding of their qualifications and skills, which were of a very high standard. Many people thanked us for coming to Kenya, and it
was a privilege to meet them, but ultimately it is about finding the right staff for Glen Haven, and it is a win for all of us. If this is an effective way to hire amazingly qualified candidates in these times where brave new solutions are needed, then yes, we are delighted and ready to be involved.”

Addressing Canadian immigration pathways
An important aspect of the EMPP is demonstrating that qualified refugees can make it through regular economic immigration pathways while meeting the same requirements and criteria that are in place for all other economic immigrants. All refugee candidates that receive job offers will be required to undergo the same vetting and verification procedures as part of the immigration process as other prospective economic immigrants. Candidates will need to pass English language tests, a Canadian immigration requirement, and ensure that their immigration paperwork is filed, accepted, and ultimately approved by both the Province and the Federal government.

Having an international employer visit Kenya to recruit from the refugee community has been a milestone in the global community’s exploration of complementary pathways and a massive boost to everyone involved in the process. However, several steps must be completed before any of the candidates will be ready to fly to Canada.

According to MacIntosh Wiseman, “We have the right partners at every level working together to make this happen. I’m optimistic that by testing this project in Pictou County, we will address chronic job vacancies locally, particularly in the health sector, and will build a model that would work for other areas across Nova Scotia and Canada facing labour shortages.”

“Following on the heels of the Global Refugee Forum held in December, there is high interest at the international level to see the results of this approach and the potential to take it to scale to benefit many more refugee families and communities facing labour shortages,” Singh added.

Reprinted with permission from RefugePoint blog (January 23, 2020).

Success – story update!
In March 2020, Glen Haven Manor received a national Employer Award for Newcomer Employment from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. The award was given in recognition of outstanding achievement in finding novel and meaningful approaches to hiring and retaining newcomers and meeting important community needs.

Glen Haven Manor is one of the largest long-term care facilities in Nova Scotia, with 202 residents and 300 employees. The organization, an Atlantic Immigration Pilot Designated Employer, lives a culture that celebrates and supports diversity and inclusion, and prides itself in recognizing newcomers’ contributions through career and professional development opportunities as well as stories in local, provincial and national media, social media and on their website.
Move To Thunder Bay: it's the employers

By ktturner
March 1, 2020
Economic Inclusion, Employment Inclusion, New Gateways

What makes a community "outside the Big City" attractive to newcomers? Is there a regional recipe for building open, inclusive communities where everyone thrives today and for the long-term?

Employers. Economic opportunity.

Without them, a community cannot fully welcome or ensure newcomers prosper. Employers play a crucial role in creating the conditions for successful settlement and integration of newcomers into the community. For small and rural communities across Canada the alignment of immigration and economic development strategies is essential to future growth and prosperity.

In Northwestern Ontario the city of Thunder Bay and surrounding region is leading the way.

According to Thunder Bay Multicultural Association (TBMA) Executive Director Cathy Woodbeck, the community had been mobilizing for years and was ready to bring employers on board: "A large percentage of internationally trained workers arrive in Canada every year with extensive skills and experience that can help employers to overcome knowledge gaps and labour shortages. Canadian immigration policy prioritizes candidates who will contribute to the economic success of our communities. When you choose to build an internationally trained workforce, you benefit from the critical skills, experiences and ambitions of diverse people who are ready to make a new life in Canada."

In Thunder Bay today, Woodbeck's pitch is no longer controversial. However, employers were slow to come around. Ten years ago, the resource economy had jobs and plenty of people to fill them. That has changed. Woodbeck notes that at one point there were at least 1,200 unfulfilled job openings in Northwestern Ontario, and employers were struggling to find qualified labour and/or people willing to do the work.

The time was right

In February 2019, a new Employer Portal was launched at movetoNWOntario.ca, an initiative between the City of Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay Multicultural Association and 32 regional municipalities to provide essential information and tools to help employers strengthen and "diversify the regional workforce for future growth."

Cathy Woodbeck, Executive Director of Thunder Bay Multicultural Association explains: "Northwestern Ontario faces significant labour shortages in key sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, sales, mining and service industries. Newcomers present an untapped and exciting source of skilled labour and professional talent for our region. The Employer Portal is designed to guide employers through the process of bringing internationally trained workers into their organizations."

What did employers want?

Woodbeck believes the portal is a necessary step forward for the region, one that's been a long time coming. For some time it had been clear to community leaders and settlement workers that local recruitment strategies weren't having the demographic impact the community needed. Many community actors were actively engaged in promoting the city and to attract and retain newcomers. But without employers, the level of growth needed to match their demographic challenges wasn't enough.

The goal of the Employment Portal is to connect businesses with immigrants looking to fill the employee gap in Ontario's Northwest, while educating employers on how to hire newcomers and calm any concerns they might have.

To ensure its goals were met, the Employer Portal was developed in close collaboration with regional employers, economic development and employment agencies to tackle the real barriers to recruiting newcomers that employers faced. A regional survey found that most employers didn't know where to start when it comes to hiring newcomers. Others expressed concerns related to validating international qualifications, navigating visas and work permits, and matching applicants to opportunities.

"The resources there are for all of those needs," Woodbeck said. "How to recruit, what the process is like, what do you do step-by-step, who are the resources in the area to help you do that, what you can do at your work place and how you help a newcomer through the steps of things they may not know about – like the tax process, housing or (other) issues."

Knowledge, experience and innovation

The Thunder Bay Multicultural Association (TBMA) has been a key hub of information and support for their community partners. They also work with partners and programs outside the region to make newcomers anywhere aware of the employment and settlement opportunities that Thunder Bay has to offer. Innovative examples include the Rural Employment Initiative, a program run from suburban Toronto by the Newcomer Centre of Peel to connect newcomers to jobs outside the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) – basically, to encourage secondary migration for those seeking a better fit for their talents, skills and resources. Another example is the Select for Success project, run by the New Canadian Centre of Excellence in the southern Ontario city of Windsor.

Welcoming communities

From the newcomer perspective, attraction correlates highly to the availability of jobs, affordability and the general economic vitality of the community. However, economic prospects may not be enough to retain them for the longterm. Research shows that experiences of exclusion or discrimination are leading causes of newcomer displacement post-arrival. So, while economic integration is an important first step in creating an inclusive welcoming community, most immigrants will settle where they can put down roots and provide a safe home and promising future for their children and families. Helping employers embrace diversity in the workplace and manage it appropriately is a central part of TBMA's mission, and includes working with longterm employees and locals to smooth that transition:

"A truly dynamic and inclusive workforce is the product of an organizational culture in which everyone from top management to front line employees embraces and practices the understanding of differences." P. 32 https://www.movetonwontario.ca/en/for-employers/resources/NWON-Employer-Guide.pdf

TBMA and partners at the City and other key community stakeholders have spent years cultivating a welcoming community for newcomers. Community partners have long known that immigration is a core piece in their local economic development strategy. They can quickly and easily pitch a close-to-nature, lower cost of living, housing or (other) issues.

Timing also matters. The Canadian government implemented the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, focused on meeting local labour market needs and creating welcoming communities. Thunder Bay is part of the pilot, which is expected to give the region an immigration boost and hopefully additional profile.

None of this is possible without employers at the table as ready partners. Employers are key. If they don't get it, it won't get done. But groundwork has been laid by partners and they're ready to help employers respond. The next five years will make it clear if Thunder Bay and region are finally cooking with the right recipe.
How to build a movement of change

By kturner

Living Together, Municipal Welcome-ability, New Gateways, Refugee Portal, Social Inclusion

By Talia Stump

“Rural towns are full of rednecks and racists.”

Owen Sound is shattering this stereotype one community sponsor at a time.

For a town of 20,000 people, it has experienced a lot of change over the past few years. The catalyst was the Canadian Government’s policy to allow community groups to sponsor refugees. So far 25 refugee families have arrived, with others now also choosing to relocate to Owen Sound from different parts of Canada.

It started with a couple of key leaders, including a church minister who organised a community meeting at the local church in September 2015. 75 curious and compassionate locals showed up, many of whom had been touched by the image of 3 year old Alan Kurdi’s body washed up on a beach in Europe.

Out of this meeting, a small number of church members put their hand up to form the first sponsorship group. They brought out an Eritrean refugee family of seven. Other locals watched keenly from the sidelines. The Eritrean family were well-liked by the community and settling well. You can do it too – was the message filtering out through the town.

Monthly meetings were organized at the church to encourage others to get involved. This turned into the Grey Bruce Newcomer Network which harnessed the groundswell of support as other sponsorship groups quickly began to form. The volunteer network became a way for the community to self-organise, support one another and share insights and challenges. With the nearest funded settlement service more than 150km away there were no existing services close by and this made it even more important for the community to educate themselves to ensure that refugees were provided with the highest possible level of care and welcome.

Open night at Arden Language Centre

Now it’s Thursday night in Owen Sound and I’m participating in a lively open night event at the Arden Language Centre. Diversity seems the norm here. Adult English students from all different backgrounds are proudly showcasing their culture and the building is alive with colour and vibrancy.

Responding to a lack of English language services in the region, the school was started by husband and wife-team Andy and Dave after the first refugee families started to arrive. “Here we do more than just teach English” Dave tells me, “we build human connections”. The school relies on over 50 volunteers to teach just over 40 students. On top of the incredible language and literacy outcomes the school has enabled for students, the personal relationships formed between volunteers and students have been powerful in influencing broader community acceptance for refugees and newcomers. And importantly, this has helped newcomers feel welcome and like they belong.

Leadership and a seed of compassion

Owen Sound didn’t need everything to be perfectly in place to become an inclusive new home for refugees – the community responded as the need emerged. But it started with leadership and a seed of compassion.
With the church minister, who brought ordinary community members into a conversation around diversity and social justice, and the first pioneering sponsorship group, whose endorsement and encouragement paved the way for other locals to become sponsors. And Dave and Andy, who not only responded to a gap in services but recognised the importance of getting locals involved.

Arden students write their goals for Fall 2019. This has been a great way for school volunteers to learn what else they can help refugees with outside of class.

What Owen Sound teaches us is how big social change can often start with the leadership of one or two trusted and respected community champions. It also shows us the power of personal connections in sustaining positive change.

“Of course racism still exists here”, a local tells me, “But the difference now is that when one guy makes a racist remark in the pub, there’s 2 or 3 other guys around him to tell him to shut the *** up. And he shuts up pretty quickly!”

Before you know it, you have created a movement.

Reprinted with permission from: How to Build a Movement of Change / by Talia Stump. In the City to Country Project blog, April 21, 2019.

Talia Stump is Principal Policy Officer, Settlement, for the New South Wales (NSW) Government in Sydney, Australia, where she is overseeing the design and implementation of a new approach aimed at supporting regional communities to attract and retain newcomers. In 2019, Talia was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship to conduct research on small and regional towns in Canada, USA, Germany, Norway and Sweden.

Read her report: The Right Fit: Attracting and retaining newcomers in regional towns: A framework for secondary migration based on lessons from around the world (Sydney: City to Country Project, 2019).
Wearing red and white socks emblazoned with the Maple Leaf, Tareq Hadhad wore Canada’s national symbol for the latest step in his extraordinary journey from Syrian refugee to chocolate maker—and now, Canadian citizen. The Peace by Chocolate founder was all smiles as he joined 48 fellow new flag-waving Canadians in taking the oath of citizenship in Halifax. The ceremony was held at Pier 21, a national historic site deeply symbolic of Canada’s storied history of welcoming newcomers to its shores. Pier 21 was a port of entry to Canada for one million immigrants between 1928 and 1971. It now hosts the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.

“It's really magical… it's phenomenal,” said Tareq, 27, recalling the whirlwind of emotions surrounding the ceremony and his newly minted citizenship status.

“I was thinking about Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I was certainly thinking about all of those who sacrificed their lives so that we have such freedoms in this country.”

Tareq’s business, Peace by Chocolate, was born in his home kitchen in Antigonish, a town of around 5,000 people on the north shore of Nova Scotia, where he resettled after arriving in Canada in December 2015.

**Flight and freedom**

Tareq said he was on one of the first flights out of the Middle East after the Canadian government announced a plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada by the end of February 2016; this was in the wake of the ongoing conflict and escalating humanitarian crisis in Syria. Tareq’s father, Isameddin, mother, Shahnaz, sisters, Alaa, Batoul and Taghrid, and brother, Ahmad, joined him three weeks later.

Peace by Chocolate launched in 2016. And in the years since, the company’s inspiring origins and its range of confections offering messages of peace, hospitality and forgiveness have resonated with chocolate lovers the world over.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau praised the family business during an address to the Leaders Summit on Refugees at the United Nations in New York in 2016, helping further propel the then-fledgling business into the global spotlight.

**Re-establishing a family tradition**

Certainly, it is a family heritage and it's a tradition,” said Tareq. “It's the type of skills and talent that we brought with us here.” The Hadhad family had previously run a chocolate business for more than 30 years in the Middle East.

“My father started making chocolate in the home kitchen and then he opened shops and one of the largest chocolate factories in the region,” Tareq recalled of the business, which was established in 1986. Soon they were exporting all over the world from their base in Damascus, Syria; they also sought to share their good fortune with others in need. “The company was also aiming towards being a social enterprise, and supporting those who are less fortunate in the community.”

After civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, their hopeful aspirations for the future were cut abruptly short. The factory was bombed in 2012. “Life became so hard,” Tareq recalled. “I’ve lost many family members that were shot, they were killed.”

“All aspects of our life were destroyed in the war. Whether it’s from my dad’s business, my mother’s initiative that she launched in the Middle East … and my siblings, they did not feel safe to go to school anymore because a mortar rocket can hit that school at any point.”

In March 2013, the family fled to Lebanon and registered as refugees with UNHCR. They lived there several years before Tareq and his family decided to apply for resettlement in Canada. They were able to make their dreams of a fresh start in Canada a reality through the Blended-Visa Office Referred Program (BVOR) after the people of Antigonish decided to fundraise to bring a refugee family to their community.
Supported by the Canadian government, the BVOR program matches refugees identified for resettlement by UNHCR because of their specific vulnerability with private sponsors in Canada. Costs are shared between sponsors and the federal government, with each party providing six months of financial support.

“I arrived here with nothing,” Tareq said. “Just with lots of hope for the future, and gratitude towards everyone who have done their best to make us feel that we are at home.”

Tareq recalled the first time they made and shared a few pieces of chocolate at a community gathering where “everyone loved them.” The positive feedback encouraged them to bring their chocolate-making skills to a new enterprise whose Peace by Chocolate name holds significant meaning.

“It was a message of bringing the world together and expressing that peace is very important and we need it every single moment of our lives, because without peace I would not have been able to restart my life here in Canada, or have my family to come here, start a business.”

Sharing their good fortune to help others in need was another tradition the family carried with them from Syria to Canada. In 2016, Peace by Chocolate donated a month’s profits to the relief efforts in support of those fleeing wildfires in Fort McMurray, Alberta. They have also pledged to donate between three and five per cent of all profits to the Peace on Earth Society, a Nova Scotia-based organization that provides funds to peace-building projects around the world.

“Without peace I would not have been able to restart my life here in Canada, or have my family to come here, start a business.”

Success

Tareq said Peace by Chocolate plans to hire 50 refugees by 2022. They would also like to offer marketing and distribution mentorship to support 10 businesses run by refugees. The company is in discussions to partner with settlement organizations in Canada to refer candidates and businesses. They hope to start implementing the initiative by the fall of 2020.

“As a small business stepping into the medium size (category), we felt the responsibility, and now is the time really to give back to those who had the same experiences as us,” said Tareq, who now employs 55 full-time and seasonal employees. “But they want the first step, right? They want to get hired, to get the Canadian experience, and to get a profile in this country so they can start moving forward.”

“We also noticed that refugees, they tend to be entrepreneurs. They are risk-takers and they are changemakers,” he added. “So, they want to create something different and unique in the community because they know that they came here not to take but to contribute.”

Tareq shows no sign of slowing down away from the business, either. A book on Peace by Chocolate by Halifax-based journalist Jon Tattrie is due out this fall. And Tareq says his family members also plan to follow his lead in becoming Canadian citizens. There are now 17 of them in Canada, including his nephew Omar Al Kadri, niece Sana Al Kadri, his uncle, cousin and their families. “They have shared some laughs and smiles and tears with everyone who were getting their citizenship. The whole room was full of excitement and emotions for sure.”

“For my family, I guess it also comes back to the point where they were thinking how their life has changed in the past four years significantly. They know now that they should never give up.”

Hamilton For All

By ktturner
March 28, 2020

Building Inclusive Cities Living Together Municipal Municipal Welcome-ability New Gateways Role of Media

Hamilton Ontario is ranked high and continues to be ranked high in terms of proportion incidences of hate crime. The community decided to do something to give a more positive message to newcomers to the city.

They didn’t have to look far for inspiration. When Hamilton’s Mayor Fred Eisenberger learned about the #AjaxForAll campaign, he saw the potential for a similar campaign in Hamilton. The Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC) connected with the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) in Toronto. OCASI had run #TorontoForAll campaigns to combat Islamophobia and anti-Black racism in Toronto.

#HamiltonForAll launched in November 2017. Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI) and HIPC partnered with OCASI to create the campaign. It focused on celebrating Hamilton’s diversity. It also promoted Hamilton’s vision of becoming an inclusive and welcoming city.

The campaign focused on addressing misconceptions and stereotypes against immigrants and refugees. It ran as a social media, poster, and transit ad campaign, like Toronto and Ajax before it. #HamiltonForAll encouraged public dialogue on prejudice, exclusion and discrimination. Community members could submit events they were hosting in support of the campaign, which would be promoted on the website and campaign communications.

The #HamiltonForAll campaign has ended. HIPC and its partners continue their inclusion efforts. They have run a human library project and a campaign promoting newcomer stories. Most recently their Communi-Tea project creates safe public conversation spaces to discuss immigration, diversity, and inclusion.
“You are Hamilton”

A key component of the campaign was seven Hamiltonians who became #HamiltonForAll Ambassadors. They were newcomers with lived experience of immigration. They were available to tell their story at different public events. Their role was to help personalize and humanize newcomers to Hamilton by connecting with other Hamiltonians. They also had a deep impact on newcomer communities themselves.

Sarah Wayland, HIPC Senior Project Manager, describes the visible impact Ambassadors had on newcomer children at a particular school event. Students saw themselves in the Ambassadors. They could connect with their stories. They were impressed that people like them — from their own home countries who shared the same native languages — were welcomed as keynote speakers.

Leadership and Sustained Campaigning

Mayor Eisenberger was one of #HamiltonForAll’s biggest supporters. After the official campaign has ended, he and others continue to use the hashtag to promote inclusion in the city.

According to Rashad Al-Aani, HIPC Communications Associate, the campaign lives on in new and emerging forms, “one of which was a human library. These were not designated Ambassadors, but people with lived experience who volunteered at public events (such as Canada150 celebrations) to start friendly conversations with people and exchange stories.”

Another is Communi-Tea. Wayland describes it as travelling “community conversation circles, going to different places (such as farmers’ markets) and events (such as World Mental Health Day) to talk about topics that people wouldn’t be exposed to. The intent is to create a friendly space for discussion.” It has.

Success

Hamiltonians have been open and receptive to the conversations at Communi-Tea events. They have been open to talking to others, exploring their curiosity in a safe space. The events provide an opportunity for people to connect with others they might not otherwise engage with in their daily lives.

Al-Aani says, of her experience, “after a while people felt safe to ask me personal questions about my beliefs or my hijab. On some occasions people would stick around for an hour.”

#HamiltonForAll was a large campaign. It shared key messages using different media, hoping to persuade Hamiltonians at scale. But Wayland and Al-Aani talk about the deep impact the community conversations are having. Hamiltonians can ask frank questions in a space modeling inclusive and respectful conversation which can contribute to a better sense of community.
Investing in Success
By Sinthu Vimaladasan
February 29, 2020

The scenario for many small towns and regions is cross Canada is not unique. A declining population. A need to keep as many newcomers in the province as possible to ensure local economic prosperity. An ageing community with a potentially bleak outlook for business succession. In New Brunswick, Fredericton stands out nationally as a living laboratory for creating prosperity in the face of such challenges.

In 2009 the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce had a simple problem: newcomer investors were not staying. So they created a simple solution to support them: a set of intersecting services and programs to ensure that business immigrants, international students with great start-up ideas received the tools and support required to prosper.

Start with the need
According to Janet Moser, Managing Director, Immigration Services, Ignite Fredericton, in 2009 the Chamber recognized that immigrant investors needed help. Newcomers entering New Brunswick through the entrepreneurial stream face tight timelines to get a business up and running, which can lead to bad investments, poorly thought out business plans and many other issues that exacerbate the challenge of settling into a new country. Many were leaving the province.

The Fredericton Chamber came up with the idea of supporting business immigrants with mentors and reached out to other chambers across Canada for advice and good practice. However, immigration was not the burning topic it is today and they found little to go on. It seems the Fredericton Chamber was to become a pioneer in the field.

In 2009, with seed funding from the provincial government, the Chamber launched the Business Immigrant Mentorship Program (BIMP) pilot to support immigrant entrepreneurs through a mentorship program. Mentors were recruited from the Chamber membership and local network of business professionals. BIMP was soon operating in five regions across the province.

Clearly, the mentorship program is having an impact
Since 2009, over 140 mentees have registered and completed the program, and gone on to start over 35 businesses locally and across New Brunswick. While local businesses tend to have a 5% success rate after 2 years of start-up, immigrant investors have a significantly higher success rate at 40%.

Moser attributes some of this success to the diverse make-up and resourcefulness of the immigrant investors themselves. Experienced and ambitious, often arriving with significant savings, they are less focused on realizing success in the short-term, willing to wait out the ups and downs of the business cycle.

Evolution
Originally targeting the Provincial Nominee Program’s (PNP) Business Entrepreneur investor class (including immigration entrepreneurs and Provincial nominee investors), BIMP has evolved beyond its initial business mentoring focus, accommodating a diverse range of business needs with new and additional resources. BIMP has also worked with refugees, skilled workers, and family class immigrants. Any newcomer seeking to start a business is welcome.

In 2014, the Chamber rolled out Phase 2, with The Hive, a business incubator offering immigrant entrepreneurs a tailored, personalized program of support in developing business plans. The co-location facility provides space, training, and networking opportunities. Individual mentees are introduced to the Canadian standard of business, local business etiquette and culture, both key aspects of working your market. The Hive program, says Moser, is the bridge that takes the newcomer from the entrepreneurial ideation process to actual start-up in Fredericton. Today the Hive is recognized as one of the most successful programs nationally for newcomers interested in entrepreneurial business ventures.

“Who can you trust?” quips one happy client. ‘the Hive, BIMP and Janet [Moser]. I call her ‘saviour.’”

From Success to Succession Connect
It is estimated that 75% of small business owners will retire over the next decade, with $1 trillion in business assets changing hands. According to Moser, succession planning programming will become important as the local population continues to age. “Closing the doors of business is not an option,” says Moser. “We know that having the ability to directly attract foreign investors interested in immigrating will hold the key to keeping the lights of business on not only in NB but across Canada as well”

But many local business owners struggle to sell their businesses when it is time to retire or otherwise move on. Owners are concerned that announcing their business is for sale may hurt its value, or put the operation at risk should employees start looking elsewhere, or customers move on. Less than half of business owners have a succession plan, and only 9% formal, written plans. This often means that businesses, the jobs they create and the taxes they produce – disappear when the owner retires.

Looking to the region’s future, in 2014 the Chamber created an innovative new program called Succession Connect to help entrepreneurial newcomers identify potential business opportunities through a secure database-managed matching system.

Funded by three levels of government: the federal Atlantic Canadian Opportunities Agency, the Province of New Brunswick, and City of Fredericton, Succession Connect became the first program model nationally to specifically address matching immigrant investors with local businesses for sale in the greater Fredericton region. Getting these two groups together in a confidential and discreet manner could be the difference between a business closing or staying open. Matching a newcomer seeking to purchase a
business with an owner looking to sell can save that business, the jobs it creates and the tax dollars it produces. It also helps ensure that a business-minded newcomer and their family will stay, and not move away to another province. It's a win-win at all levels.

"Fredericton is on course to grow in the coming years, and a lot of that growth will come from immigration. This innovative pilot program will help create the best conditions for immigrant investors to find business opportunities, giving them the best chance to succeed. We think it's a winning formula." – Mike O'Brien, Mayor of Fredericton

Creating a new service model

In 2019 the City of Fredericton launched a five-year immigration and population growth strategy, collaborating closely with local stakeholders to streamline population growth efforts and settlement processes for newcomers. The Chamber said goodbye to the BIMP, Hive and Succession Connect programs in order to support a strong, integrated roll-out of the strategy through its new Immigration Advocacy Committee. With the local settlement agency leading on newcomer support services, Ignite Fredericton, with Planet Hatch, took the lead on immigration economic development, population growth, international student attraction and newcomer business support programming.

Fredericton became the first city in New Brunswick to launch the federally funded Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) which is housed within Ignite Fredericton under the supervision of the Chamber’s Managing Director of Immigration Services, Janet Moser.

Looking back on the Chamber’s success Moser now sees a local vision for newcomer attraction and retention she never would have imagined possible in 2009. She says: "Although I have been pioneering and breaking new ground in immigrant business services for over ten years, my enthusiasm today for what the future holds is very high, and I can’t wait to see the direction the next five years takes us in. With an incredibly supportive municipality and support stakeholder group our possibilities to attract, support and retain our newest community members is endless."

Positive messaging

Back in 2009, Moser reflects, the Fredericton community wasn’t necessarily interested in increased immigration. Ensuring that locals understood the immigration imperative and would support their efforts to attract and retain newcomers was essential. The Chamber’s kept their messaging positive and worked continually to maintain direct and relevant communication open through social media, and stakeholder and press relations. That includes high level political and business leadership involvement and support.

Public education and promotion aimed at highlighting successful newcomer businesses has had a multiplier effect, attracting more newcomer investors.

Success

Over the years, the BIMP model has been adapted across Canada and recognized internationally. In 2012 it was recognized as a Canadian Mentor Rock Star by StartUp Canada. Both the Hive and BIMP were co-located at Planet Hatch, the dynamic business incubator driven by Fredericton’s economic development agency Ignite Fredericton.

With programs like this, the Chamber and Ignite Fredericton have not only enhanced local economic prosperity, but created a sense of integration and community.

Says Moser: "Our mentors have often said that they feel that are getting a great deal from this experience, both professionally and personally. Many have reached a point in their careers that giving back to the community in which they work and run business is very important to them. Our mentors and volunteers learn about diversity, cultural acceptance and integration. They become more aware of themselves as people and what the meaning of being Canadian truly is."

In 2016 the city was named Canada’s Startup Capital by Startup Canada.
People from all over the world move to Canada to fulfill their dreams. From 2018 to 2019, the country welcomed more than 300,000 immigrants. In 2020, there might be even more opportunities available, thanks to the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP).

One popular location for newcomers to settle in is the province of Ontario. Many people are familiar with the Greater Toronto Area, especially the city of Toronto. This urban, densely populated region offers ample career and social opportunities.

However, Canada’s more rural areas also have a lot to offer. In addition to its bustling metropolises, the country has many small cities that would be just as advantageous for newcomers. They are simply less well known.

But there is a good reason to learn more about them if you are interested in relocating to Canada. Skilled immigrants might be able to secure pathways to permanent residency in these smaller cities. You might also find more professional opportunities in a rural area, depending on your area of expertise.

Hoping to attract more skilled immigrants to these areas, Canada recently launched the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP).

What Is the RNIP?

The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot provides pathways to permanent residency for skilled immigrants who want to live and work in smaller communities in Canada.

This is not only an opportunity for immigrants, it is also beneficial for the participating regions, their provinces, and the country as a whole. To prosper, smaller cities rely on newcomers bringing their education and skills to boost local industries. For example, when rural areas gain new talent, it benefits their infrastructure, transportation, housing, and cultural diversity. The local economy then relies on retaining its local talent. This helps a region make the most of its resources.

There are 11 rural areas participating in the RNIP as of 2019. Five have begun accepting applications from aspiring immigrants (updated February 13, 2020).

Thunder Bay will begin accepting applications from newcomers soon.

About Thunder Bay

Thunder Bay is one of the most populated cities in Northwestern Ontario. It is one of five areas in the province participating in the RNIP.

The city is home to many thriving industries, including forestry, transportation, manufacturing, mining, health care, and agriculture.

Here is more information about Thunder Bay:

Education: As of 2020, Thunder Bay is home to over 60 elementary and high schools, many of which offer academic tracks in both English and French. Extracurricular activities often take place at the city’s sports, arts, and recreational facilities. Lakehead University, Confederation College, and Northern Ontario School of Medicine are popular options for postsecondary education.

Health Care: Thunder Bay has a reputation as a medical services hub. You can choose from one of several health care centers that provide services covered by Ontario Health Insurance (OHIP). You can also make use of walk-in clinics in between scheduled doctor’s visits.

Affordability: According to recent real estate reports, property in Thunder Bay is more affordable than that of other cities in Ontario. Additionally, the cost of groceries, shopping, and dining out are also more reasonable.

Services: There are several settlement agencies in Thunder Bay. These government-funded agencies offer essential services to newcomers. You might use them for professional development, to learn more about the local area, or to work on your language skills.

Lifestyle: Canada is renowned for its hospitality to immigrants. In particular, Thunder Bay’s diverse population might be appealing to newcomers from around the world. The city has a modern and cosmopolitan feel. It offers plenty of shopping and creative arts events. If Canada’s great outdoors appeal to you, you might be drawn to the sailing, fishing, hiking, and snowmobiling available in Thunder Bay.

How to apply for the RNIP

- Thunder Bay will begin accepting RNIP applications in January 2020.
- To apply, you must already have a full-time job offer from an approved employer in Thunder Bay.

For more information on the application process, visit the RNIP page at GoTo Thunder Bay or the Government of Canada website.

Source: Adapted and translated from the original article, “RNIP Canada: About Thunder Bay’s New Immigration Pilot” by Zara Khan in the WES Advisor Blog, January 8, 2020.
A Mill Town Recruits

By kturner
February 10, 2020
Building Inclusive Cities, Municipal Welcome-ability, New Gateways

Chipman welcomes the world: a rural village of 1000 is recruiting immigrants for work

For the first time in years, the population of Chipman hasn't declined. Councillors say it held steady last year because of an influx of skilled workers recruited by J.D. Irving Ltd. from around the globe for its local forestry operations in the Chipman area.

"For the first time in many, many years the population has stayed the same," said Deputy Mayor Keith West.

Eighteen new residents have already moved to the rural community, and a new subdivision is being built to accommodate newcomers. In coming years, West expects dozens more to be added to the village’s current population of about 1,000. He says they’re coming from Ukraine, Latvia, Finland, and Brazil.

Many foreign workers will move to southern New Brunswick in the next year or two, to fill forestry jobs with JD Irving Ltd.

"Right now we have about 10 new families from abroad," said Paul Klassen, co-ordinator of Chipman’s newcomer settlement program.

According to Klassen and West, workers will be operating in three different capacities for JDI: driving logging trucks, working with logging operations, or working in the Grand Lake Timber in Chipman. "These are not minimum wage jobs," West said. "These are good-paying jobs. These people are making 60, 70, 80 thousand dollars a year."

"So in a small town like Chipman that's big money."

Watch: New Chipman residents are coming from Ukraine, Latvia, and Brazil

Share this

• Link
https://www.cbc.ca/playe

• Facebook

West said it’s his understanding that JDI is bringing in as many as 3,000 workers from outside of New Brunswick over the next three years to fill positions in southern New Brunswick because the company cannot find employees locally. "Most of these jobs are skilled labour," he said. "And the people who say they would work, they don't have the skills and the company needs skilled labour. Working in a sawmill isn’t like it was 50 years ago. You know, it’s all skilled labour."

CBC News requested an interview with someone from JDI to speak on the specifics of the positions being filled and recruitment, but no interview was provided. According to an email from JDI spokesperson Mary Keith, 17 workers and families are expected to move to the community next year as part of the company’s plan to fill 7,500 jobs by 2021. Keith also said the company established a director of immigration as of last year and is forecasting 400 immigrants for Canadian operations over the next three years. The workers are coming through the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program, a federal program for employers looking to recruit internationally for jobs they have been unable to fill locally.

Construction underway

In Chipman, so many workers and their families are expected that a new subdivision is being built. Chipman Housing Authority Inc. was created in August 2018 and lists Mayor Carson Atkinson and JDI woodlands division vice-president Jason Limongelli as two of its directors.

According to West, incoming workers can't afford to buy a home and there are few spaces for rent. "So, we've created a non-profit housing authority and putting in mini-homes and renting them to the immigrants on a temporary basis until they can get their permanent residency and get their own place."


29/541
Construction on Chipman's new subdivision is expected to be completed this summer with two expansions planned for the near future. Built on eight acres of village land, the subdivision will host 25 mini-homes, with two expansions already planned. The mini-homes are being built by Kent Homes, which is a division of JDI. Atkinson said Limongelli was not a part of the tendering process that resulted in Chipman Housing Authority Inc.'s purchase of mini-homes from the Irving-owned company.

Mary Keith said Limongelli recused himself. "He did not see any of the bids," she said in an email. "We had four tenders, open tenders, and all that stuff and we took the lowest tender," Atkinson said. "And it turned out to be Irving."

"This was a public tender so we had to take the lowest tender anyway. But then they threw in some bonuses." Atkinson said the bonuses include air-conditioning, with ductless heating and cooling systems, and the models are more esthetically pleasing.

Atkinson said he was not yet able to provide documents of the tender process or its results. Nor was he able to disclose the amount the housing authority has received from the province. "I don't think I'm at liberty to talk about the amount," he said. "But it's not enough to complete what we want and that is why we are approaching different banks."

But he said anyone questioning the relationship between the village and the company shouldn't worry. "We are supportive of any group that comes in and offers us any kind of partnership that doesn't cost the village money and is a long-term benefit to the community," said Atkinson. "Why wouldn't we? That's what's done in every other community across the world."

So far, the subdivision has five mini-homes, two of which already have immigrant workers and their families living in them.

**Language barriers**

For those helping newcomers settle into life in rural New Brunswick, the biggest challenge has been language.

"New Brunswick is quite well set up for providing French as a second language in small communities, but not really English," said Klassen. "So, we were kind of a test case."

Klassen said JDI has required that workers they bring in speak rudimentary English for work. But their families often do not speak any English and finding teachers to help them learn has been a struggle.

Many of those moving from Latvia and Ukraine speak Russian. For months, the community has been attempting to set up classes for families to learn or improve their English, but three weeks ago, Klassen said, the instructor quit, leaving them in a bind.

"We are currently working with the provincial government to provide training for these families that are coming in," said Klassen. "We're going to see how that expands and who exactly will be funding all of the training, but at least we have a commitment now to get something up and running:"

**Respite for a 'dying' community**

To hear it from those involved in the project, the incoming workforce is a godsend for a community in dire need of new blood. "It's going to make all the difference," said Klassen. "Because it was another village that was just dying. And now this influx of people and work is going to turn it around."

Keith said it is an "amazing story about a small rural community coming together to welcome newcomers." In her email to CBC News, she wrote: "Our priority is to keep New Brunswicker's home and bring them home. However, understanding NB demographic challenges, immigration – make N.B. home – is also part of the strategy."

The workers are seen as saviours by West, giving hope to an area that in recent years had begun to lose services, including its only bank. Many were starting to fear the village's elementary school and high school were next.

"When I went to school here, there were 500 kids in each school," said West. "There's barely under 100 kids in each school today. So, every kid that goes into that school is going to help save our schools. And it's imperative that we keep that."

Career Loans: a Community Investment

By kturner
December 19, 2019

Considered the gateway to northern Ontario, North Bay (pop. 51,500) sits on the shore of Lake Nipissing, 350 km due north of Toronto. Like many smaller cities with a declining population, the city region is looking to immigrants and refugees as a talent source to fill a growing need for skilled workers.

To help attract, retain, and prosper from that talent, in 2015 the Skilled Newcomer Career Loan (SNCL) Program was launched. A true community initiative, seed money for the loans was contributed by North Bay District Multicultural Centre (NBDMC), YES Employment, The Labour Market Group, and the City of North Bay. Each contributed $5000, giving the SNCL $20,000 of immediate lending power. Additional support from the Ontario provincial government’s Municipal Immigration Information Online” (MIIO) grant as well as from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation helped set up and administer the program.

The partnership generated more than the seed money required to build a loan program. The collaborative funding model invested each of the partners in the success of the undertaking and in that of the newcomer client as well. The knock-on effect was to foster more participation and community engagement around welcoming newcomers to North Bay.

Each organization has a seat on the Loan Review Committee (LRC), where loans are approved. The LRC includes a representative of a local bank to help with financial aspects of setting and administering a loan program. Newcomers can apply for loans up to $5,000 to help with training or certification costs required to work in their field of employment in Ontario. The loan is repaid over three years at a 7% interest rate. The application is entirely online. Interested newcomers must first complete an Eligibility Quiz to determine that they meet loan criteria.

Significantly, no Canadian credit history is required. Like Windmill Microlending (formerly Immigrant Access Fund), loans are “character-based.” As former IAF Canada Executive Director Dianne Fehr has said, the loan is for whatever will lead to employment success. To paraphrase Fehr, SNCL “invests in people who the banks would turn away – people who have skills and abilities our society needs…. [SNCL] loans are made to people who are trustworthy and are of good character. We lend to people not based on where they are today, but where we believe they will be in the future.”

Like Windmill, SNCL loans can be used for more than tuition, credential assessments, and exam fees; whatever the newcomer identifies they need to succeed (i.e. snow tires, childcare, groceries, etc.). The SNCL loan program has some unique local qualities to ensure success.

SNCL partners wanted to offer more flexibility for newcomers to explore jobs in their sector, not necessarily the same work they did previously. They also wanted to offer a bit more flexibility in terms of how the loan could be used, allowing newcomers to explain how something they wanted to do would contribute to their eventual employment success. And, while the English language level required is fairly high, they wanted to allow newcomers to be able to pay for English upgrading. According to NBDMC’s Meg Ramore free ESL classes (run by the local school board, during the day, during the school year) are more difficult to access for working newcomers. As a result, they wanted to allow newcomers to be able to access supplementary ESL classes at the local college.

Everyone prosers

In order to demystify ‘the newcomer’ in the eyes of the local population, the SNCL Program highlights the skills newcomers bring and talent the community needs, as well as drawing attention to systemic barriers newcomers face, and how they can be overcome.

SNCL is run out of the NBDMC, the local immigrant and refugee-serving organization. That allows newcomers to connect with Settlement staff who can help them with employment and other aspects of settling in North Bay.

In part to support interest in SNCL as well as to offer a general resource for any newcomer to the area, NBDMC created a Financial Literacy Guide for Newcomers to Canada. It is intended to assist and educate newcomers about financial literacy and best financial practices while living in Canada and more specifically, in the North Bay region.

The program also involves newcomers helping newcomers. As Ramore says: “As newcomers pay back their loans the interest they pay back grows the fund and helps other newcomers. So we’re just hoping to slowly grow the fund and be able to help more folks as needed.”

Three newcomers have received loans through the SNCL, working in the healthcare, legal, and trucking sectors. Two have found work in their field, and one has fully paid back their loan. They are in demand in the North. Investing in them will help them as well as the entire North Bay community prosper.
Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies provide important services, they also coordinate with and refer to other human service providers. Coordinating complex services can be challenging. In Windsor, Ontario, community agencies are tackling complex system navigation with the goal of creating more effective and client-centred services.

The WE Value Partnership appears to be a technology and data project. And it is. The YMCA of Southwestern Ontario, along with Workforce Windsor-Essex and its community partners, is creating a customized Client Management System that will allow settlement workers and, eventually, other service providers to streamline newcomer client intake, assessment and referral. WE Value wants more accurate, timely referrals for newcomer clients into the community, leading to better client outcomes.

Better systems can have an impact on a newcomer’s integration. But the goal is broader, to have an impact on the entire community. As a digital transformation AND community engagement project WE Value is leading a community cultural shift in how the city looks at settlement of newcomers. By increasing service accessibility, they hope the entire community will be improved.

Clients are seen as asset-based, rather than needs-based. Project partners recognize the skills, experience and energy newcomers bring, and their potential to be long-term contributors to local community health, wealth and well-being. It’s an important shift in how immigrants, whatever their initial status, are seen: as assets to and within the community rather than people with needs or vulnerabilities to be fixed.

Creating seamless community service access

WE Value seeks to break down service silos, coordinating service provision to help newcomers at the right time. The simple act of bringing community stakeholders together in the project’s first year has already led to more responsive and effective service coordination.

They’re bringing together organizations that act as key system navigators for other human services in the city and region. A newcomer-specific health clinic has connected more deeply with a mainstream health-care coordinating organization that maintains a database of doctors who only work with them to manage wait-lists and referrals. Moving from a gatekeeper to a system partner and navigator, newcomers can be referred to the mainstream health-care provider to better navigate the system and find a permanent doctor or family health team.

Relationship and trust building are key to creating these system navigators. Connecting the right people to each other in the community requires taking the time to build trust, collaboration and partnership. Partners want Windsor to move to a two-way approach to newcomer integration focused not only on newcomers adapting, but making sure that the community adapts and is welcoming as well. The goal is not only to better outcomes for newcomers, but for the community to fully understand that it’s success and growth is tied to newcomers genuinely being able to meet their full potential.

Local organizations understand the benefits of streamlining services and the two-way approach, but there are concerns. There are real fears about how policy or regime change might affect their services, programming, organizations and funding. Acknowledging these concerns has sparked conversations that are building trust and new
relationships that are moving the community to a truly reciprocal relationship with newcomers—and will serve them well in the future.

Using data to drive innovation and relationships

As the digital transformation in case management moves forward more reliable local data based on the actual information and needs of newcomers entering the region will emerge: “The only thing more exciting than all the data and the research that could be created from this project, is the creation of personalized, community-wide, referral plans for newcomers so that they can be referred to the right service, at the right time and at the right location. This silo-busting approach to service will best serve newcomers and their families, leaving these new Canadians in the strongest position to contribute to their country and community. With better service referrals and better outcomes, I think our newcomer-serving organizations will not only experience increased service volume, but also stronger community recognition of their work.”

The new case management system will give WE Value partners the data they need to measure service impacts and outcomes with newcomers. This will allow them to pivot where needed, change, modify or create needed services, as well as help community partners know the impact of their system navigation.

By creating more robust intake and assessment processes with newcomers, they can be more accurately referred to the systems and services needed to speed up their integration process. Settlement professionals can also focus on the work they do best and trust that their community partners are meeting other newcomer needs.

Success

In building a better and more client-centred system, WE Value partners have already started to build a more connected community. For immigrant and refugee-serving organizations, referring clients into the community is an essential part of how they help. As WE Value brings organizations that provide important services to the table, the community is already seeing more streamlined referral processes and more awareness of each other.

Valuing newcomers in the community means being open to system change. WE Value is building on the premise that newcomers are valuable for the community. Investing in a better welcoming and settlement experience will ensure that their value is felt across the city. To do that, all city actors need to work together to remove complex barriers, work better together and seek to make what is complex simple for all newcomers and, inevitably, for employers and more.
Navigating Newcomer Health

By ktturner

Building Inclusive Cities, Health Inclusion, New Gateways, Refugee Portal

Health is a settlement issue.

The Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre reflects that reality. A partnership between a local multi-service immigrant and refugee-serving agency (CCI Ottawa) and Somerset West Community Health Centre, the Centre provides culturally competent integration and healthcare services. Co-located in the same building, the Centre has created seamless service transitions between very different service systems.

Seamless transitions is key. Newcomers experience confusion in the complex navigation of new systems, eligibility and opportunities to access community services. Formal collaboration and co-location of services, along with active help to navigate new systems makes a huge difference in a newcomer’s integration. Clients needs are met quickly, saving time, making both settlement and health services more efficient and accessible.

Growing and building based on community need

Initial health services are crucial for newly arrived refugees. Initially, CCI worked with healthcare providers to offer occasional on-site health services to Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) in their reception and initial housing centre. However, CCI and their health partners found the service too fragmented, not timely enough, and that it lacked overall oversight.

With some funding from the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), CCI and Somerset West Community Health Centre were able to establish a clinic in CCI’s building. LHINs are local health authorities responsible for regional administration of public healthcare services in Ontario. They are focused on ensuring that local communities have the unique health services they need. This funding resulted in an immediate increase in timely care for around 300 GARs per year who arrived in Ottawa.

Since then, the Ottawa Newcomer Health Centre has grown, offering important short-term medical care for all newcomers. At the same time the Centre is an important community partner for immigrant and refugee-serving agencies and mainstream healthcare service providers across Ottawa.

As the medical clinic for GARs rolled out, the partners identified, and are meeting, additional health service gaps. Today the Centre provides three main services:

A full service medical clinic provides short-term medical services to newcomers until they find a permanent doctor or health-care team.

A Health Navigator program made up of specially trained, multilingual staff/guides provide short-term advice and guidance to newcomers to navigate the local health system. The Centre replicated and built on a Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op from Edmonton, Alberta. The Ottawa model is open to any clients who need any kind of health navigation support. This open eligibility has been important. The Centre has found that even citizens who return after a long period of time sometimes need help to re-navigate the healthcare system.

A key goal of the Centre’s Navigators is to educate newcomers about the health care system and employer them to navigate it on their own. Their goal is not to create long-term clients for their medical clinic, but to move clients to more permanent healthcare providers. Clients are allowed to access services for two years. It’s working; on average, clients access services for 14 months. They gain enough understanding of the system to act on their own and access services.

The Centre’s Interpretation Services provide free interpreters for local agencies serving newcomers and healthcare programs that receive LHIN funding. A social enterprise (an idea they borrowed from Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre in Toronto), the Centre has become an employment project as well. They worked closely with Access Alliance to establish health interpretation standards, developed interpreter training in partnership, and continue to work together to share resources and build a professional interpreter service.

In 2015 the Centre started providing mental health services to meet well identified needs in the community. Operational since October 2018, the Centre quickly surpassed targets they set for the initial year. Mental health continues to be a pressing and growing area of need in the community.

Impact

The Centre has grown from two staff in 2012 to sixteen today. As they outgrow their current space, they are not looking to move. Service co-location has had a huge impact, making it much easier to coordinate care with clients. Service providers can connect and case manage much more easily, and it is easier for clients to meet with settlement and healthcare providers and access the wide range of services and programs at both agencies.

Beyond direct services to newcomers, the Centre has also played a key role educating the local healthcare sector about newcomers. In particular they have helped service providers understand the unique healthcare needs of refugees, but also of economic immigrants and how to support them to integrate into the community. They have developed a leadership collective to help reach, educate and collaborate with more agencies and programs serving newcomers. There is an ongoing opportunity to share what they have learned, including how they do what they do.

As they’ve learned from and replicated other practices, their approach is now seen as a model for replication in other communities.
Industry Leaders Connect to Recruit Newcomers

By Evelyn

November 6, 2019

Employment Inclusion, Municipal Welcome-ability, New Gateways

The meatpacking industry once provided thousands of Canadian workers with a decent living wage. Today, the industry, like many others in Canada, has turned to immigration to fill demand for workers.

In Brandon, Manitoba (pop. 49,000), Maple Leaf Consumer Foods’ hog processing plant is the largest such plant in Canada, and the leading employer and primary economic driver for the booming “Wheat City.”

Maple Leaf's opened its Brandon facility in 1999 as a world-class processing plant. Despite its impressive size and modernity, facility struggled to retain workers for jobs that were hard, repetitive and undesirable for many. Maple Leaf turned to overseas recruitment to satisfy its workforce needs and to reduce turnover. Today Maple Leaf’s Brandon facility employs around 2,000 hourly, unionized workers, the majority of whom are either temporary foreign workers or new residents who have passed through the foreign worker program.

Collective Action

“The turnover was really high... in the early stages of the plant,” explains Blake Caruthers, Communications Officer with UFCW Local 832, representing the workers at Maple Leaf. “Once they started using the temporary foreign worker program, people were staying and making Brandon their home.”

To qualify for fast-tracked landed immigrant status, temporary foreign workers must agree to extend their six month contracts for another two years at Maple Leaf. To accommodate the new workers, UFCW Local 832 pushed to have the collective bargaining agreement and workplace information available to workers in four languages: English, Spanish, Mandarin, and Ukrainian.

“It was the first of its kind in Canada,” Caruthers says of the collective agreement. “You’ve got to give Maple Leaf credit for that…. They understand the value of keeping their employees, our members, informed of their rights, and they realized that the better everybody understands the collective agreement, the better the workforce.”

From Temporary to Transitional

Like any employer, Maple Leaf Foods is looking for a stable workforce. While they depend on recruiting foreign workers, many temporary jobs are really a permanent human resource need.

According to Susan Yaeger, Senior Manager, Human Resources International Recruitment Office at Maple Leaf Foods: “We don’t want temporary workers, we want permanent. When we select Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs), we select people who will qualify for Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) as well. This is a pathway to permanency, in Manitoba, which has been very successful. We provide them with the supports they need.”

Maple Leaf Foods has built recruitment and onboarding supports to ensure that workers are oriented and welcomed into the company and community. As workers transition from temporary to permanent status, those supports continue to be crucial.

English Training on Site

For Yaeger, it’s important for employers to give workers the tools and supports they need to do their job. If one of those tools is to speak English at a certain proficiency level employers should help them.

Employers should create a plan focused on people who would be likely to succeed in their local economy and community. At Maple Leaf Foods, English is crucial to that plan. Yaeger says that because their workforce is quite diverse, the common language of communication is English.

The company provides extensive pre and post-arrival supports to their workers. Before they arrive in Canada, they have received up to 160 hours of English language training. They also received an orientation package about Canadian culture, community and settlement information.

After the workers arrive, support continues, including additional ESL support. In Maple Leaf Foods’ Brandon, Manitoba plant, English classes are run after hours and on weekends in an on-site training facility. Funded by the union and by Maple Leaf Foods, classes are free for workers.

Classes aim to get workers to Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) 4, to ensure they can communicate adequately on the job. During workplace orientation, translation and interpretation is also provided. All important written communication, such as health and safety information, is translated into workers’ native language. As some workers develop adequate language skills, they also act as interpreters in the workplace. Anyone who needs ESL training can attend classes.

Looking Locally for Global Talent

Canada’s recent immigrant arrivals are an essential part of Maple Leaf Foods strategy to grow their workforce. Yaeger recognizes that there are challenges to attracting and settling newcomers in small communities and rural areas. Newcomers tend to land in more urban centres, such as Winnipeg. Maple Leaf has provided relocation packages, up to $5000 to relocate to Brandon. They’re making progress: “we’re getting enough workers through working with local newcomer associations that we’ve been connecting with. We’ve brought in a lot of workers who are newcomers to Canada.”

Yaeger has made direct connections with community groups. She works with them to ensure they know about job opportunities, and what Maple Leaf Foods is looking for. When newcomers are looking for work, she wants them to understand what’s available at Maple Leaf Foods.

The company still relies on some highly skilled transitional foreign workers for specific skilled labour they can’t find in Canada. As they raise their profile among immigrant groups, they’re hoping to help reach and support more newcomers with jobs.

Success

The City of Brandon’s population in the 2016 Census was 48,859, just over a 6% increase from the 2011 Census. Brandon’s growth has kept pace with the fastest growing cities in Canada and demonstrates the opportunities available for individuals, families, and businesses to grow and succeed.
For the first time in years, Brandon’s schools are filling up, houses are being built and new businesses are opening their doors. New comer attraction and retention strategies at the Maple Leaf Commercial Foods’ Brandon plant have positively increased local population growth, spurring the economy forward at a rate unseen for decades. In 2012, the vacancy rate in Brandon was less than 0.5 per cent and the unemployment rate sitting at a comfortable 2.8 per cent.

Source: Hire Immigrants
From Survival Jobs to Rich Harvest

By Evelyn

Economic Inclusion, Employment Inclusion, New Gateways, Work

With the right supports and inclusive workplace, a survival job can become permanent for newcomers. Some will leave and move on to other opportunities. But, many stay. A company can create the conditions crucial to creating that loyal workforce. Nowhere is that more evident than in agriculture.

The agricultural sector is Canada’s third largest industry. But, it’s chronically understaffed, relying on temporary foreign workers to round out their workforce. In Southwestern Ontario, Highline Mushrooms isn’t different. Canadian-born workers are not flocking to work in agriculture. But, Highline has found willing workers in newcomers.

Attraction

The regional municipality of Leamington ON (pop. 27,595) is best known for the farms and greenhouses that provide local produce for the province’s predominantly urban populations. Affordable, friendly and well-serviced – and far from the city’s bright lights.

That works for agriculture industry leaders like Highline Mushrooms. Susan McBride Friesen, Highline Mushroom’s Director of Human Resources, finds newcomers, including refugees, coming into the community are not only attracted to its size and affordability but my be more connected with the land and farming. They’re more willing to go into agricultural jobs.

She says “We’ve always hired immigrants and mushrooms. It’s always been our practice to recruit and hire a very diverse group of people.” A lot of people land at Highline for their first job. Friesen says a newcomer might be with Highline Mushrooms for 10 years before they move on. It takes time to develop English skills, save money, perhaps bring their family over. Using the job as stepping stone? “We’re OK with that. We’re OK with people bettering themselves and growing and being part of our team for however long they work. They’ve made us better for the time they’ve spent with us.”

At the same time, she says many newcomers have established themselves as part of Highline family. “We have managers who started here as Harvesters when they landed. They have stayed with us for their entire careers and are in leadership positions. In some cases their children also work at Highline. A current Supervisor’s father started as a Harvester when he first arrived in Canada. It’s multigenerational.”

Intentional inclusion means making the effort

Friesen comes across numerous people who have had their start at Highline and have gone on to other success. At a recent career path session hosted by community partner, Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County, former refugees told their story of inclusion. Working as full time Highline Mushroom Harvesters, they learned English, and eventually asked for part time work to go back to school. Highline accommodated them. Now they’re nurses, social workers, settlement workers.

Friesen describes the various ways Highline Mushrooms works to ensure their newcomer workforce is included. Decent health benefits, a pension and retirement plan all help people to establish themselves in Canada. Highline Mushrooms also offers part-time and summer work to children of their workers. They have a family scholarship program for children of their workers. A quick look at the list of 2015 recipients speaks to the diversity of their workforce.

When it comes to language, Friesen says, “You need to learn the language, you need to become part of Canadian culture. Our workforce demographics are very mixed and diverse. English is essential as the common language of communication.”

So, Highline offers English classes. In Leamington, classes are offered on the farm, tailored around production schedules. Many workers access the classes. Community partners translate safety policies, newsletters, any information and policies that workers need to know. These all become part of the English curriculum. While workers learn English, they also learn about safety, HR policies and more related to their day-to-day work. With Highline’s diverse workforce, workers help interpret or translate for others on the job.

All of these supports influence a newcomer’s decision to stay and become part of the company for the long term.

Success

Highline’s relationships with community partners have become more and more important. They work with community agencies to provide employment opportunities to any newcomers who are interested. Leamington will welcome 125 Syrian refugees in 2016. Highline let community partners know that they are an employer that will embrace the Syrians and support their transition to Canadian society. They’re having discussions about how Highline can help get workers to the job (a challenge for a rural company).

When asked why Highline Mushrooms makes such an effort, Friesen says it’s really quite simple: “It’s a benefit to you and your organization to hire newcomers. They bring strong worth ethic, diversity that only makes you better as an employer. The gratitude and work ethic are unbelievable. You know that your company is about more than just making money. As a business and a business leader, it’s very important to invest in your community. Helping new Canadians integrate into Canada is an awesome way of contributing to our communities.”

For Friesen, the benefits extend well beyond the workplace. She says that embracing diversity breaks down barriers, builds empathy and reduces prejudice.

Source: Hire Immigrants

Eliminating Barriers for Displaced Individuals

By kturner
May 15, 2019

Employment Inclusion Refugees Portal

In recent years, millions of individuals, many of them highly educated and skilled, have been forced to flee their home countries due to circumstances beyond their control. Many arrive in Canada with some official record of their educational accomplishments, but without complete and verified documentation. In many cases, the institutions they attended have been damaged or destroyed, and such records may no longer be accessible.

Talar Chitjian gained admission to York University’s Osgoode Hall Law School using a credential evaluation issued through WES’ refugee pilot project.

A credential evaluation is an important tool for internationally educated professionals to prove their qualifications in familiar terms. Recognition of academic credentials is a springboard for pursuing education, employment, and professional licensure. It is a critical piece to the successful integration of newcomers to Canada.

The Gateway Program, a new initiative from World Education Services (WES), aims to help those seeking to enter higher education, employment, or a regulated profession in Canada by providing credential evaluations, even when verification of official documents is not possible. A similar program for the United States is currently being tested.

The WES Gateway Program provides qualified participants educated in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, or Venezuela with a high-quality credential evaluation report that can be accepted and recognized by employers, higher education institutions, and regulatory bodies throughout Canada. The program is for individuals who are unable to obtain documents from their institutions but may have documentation in their possession.

“This is very exciting,” says Shamira Madhany, managing director for WES Canada and deputy executive director for WES. “Through the WES Gateway Program, people whose careers were put on hold now have a reliable way forward. It’s very gratifying to know that we can help them meaningfully reclaim their professional lives.”

Talar Chitjian, a former Syrian refugee now studying at Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto, knows first-hand the value of getting a credential evaluation from WES. She received an assessment during the pilot phase of the program: “WES’ assessment was really beneficial to me. It provided me with the validation of my documents that I needed to go to law school and ultimately pursue my passion of practicing law. The evaluation changed the course of my path in Canada—for the better.”

Promising practice
To conduct these evaluations, WES draws on more than 40 years of expertise working with academic credentials and extensive knowledge of international education systems. The organization can confidently use credible documents in an individual’s possession to validate credentials and provide a reliable assessment of their equivalency in Canada.

Carmen Jacques, student recruitment manager at CPA Ontario, echoes Chitjian’s belief about the strong value of the program: “It’s critical that we break down barriers to ensure the path to professional licensure is fair and accessible to all those who wish to pursue it,” she says. “The Gateway Program helps Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario (CPA Ontario) move closer to that goal.”

WES works with partner organizations across Canada to refer clients to the WES Gateway Program. These referring organizations confirm applicants’ eligibility, submit documents for evaluation, and provide additional information and resources to support program participants in achieving their professional and academic goals in Canada.

In a pilot study concluded in 2017, WES worked with documents Syrian refugees had in their possession and that signified they had attended or completed a program of study. In some cases evaluators were able to reconstruct the course of study using partial documentation, information in the organization’s archives, and knowledge of the Syrian education system. Using a stringent methodology, WES was able to confidently provide a credential evaluation to Syrian refugees to pursue their professional and academic goals in Canada.

To expand the program, WES conducted in-house research to examine a group of countries experiencing turmoil and producing large numbers of refugees, asylum seekers, or individuals in refugee-like situations. The report provided evidence and rationale for the seven countries of education currently eligible as part of the WES Gateway Program. WES considered a number of factors including:

- Turmoil in country (such as conflict with significant violence, persecution, significant natural disasters)
- Number of refugees, asylum seekers, and other individuals in need
- Number of highly educated individuals with the ability to work in Canada
- Need for assessment (individuals experiencing challenges accessing verified documents)
- WES’ ability to assess qualifications from the country

WES will continue to assess the climate in several countries where global and local change could create greater need in the coming years.

Success

WES provided credential assessments to 337 Syrian refugees – 100 percent of applicants – during the pilot phase of the program. Most have used or plan to use their report, either to apply for education, for licensure/certification, or for employment — some for more than one purpose. Of those using the report for education, three-quarters said they had been offered admission, in programs ranging from accounting to early childhood education to master’s in common law; none reported having their application rejected. Of those using the report for professional licensure or certification, 84 percent reported passing the initial review. Among those using the evaluation for employment, more than 60 percent reported receiving at least one job offer.

As part of the ongoing evaluation of the program, WES monitors international conflicts, natural disasters, and shifting global trends in order to identify emerging need. The program is scalable and may expand to serve those being forcibly displaced in other countries.
Encouraging Cities to Bring Locals and Immigrants Together

By ktturner
May 14, 2019

Kuopio is a city in Finland with 120,000 inhabitants. The number of people, houses and businesses in Kuopio have all experienced stable growth for the last 15 years. In the future, though, Kuopio – like many other cities in Finland – will need to rely on people moving in from abroad to keep this growth going.

In 2016, around 2,700 immigrants resided in Kuopio. That’s 2.5 per cent of the population, a modest number in comparison with other cities in Finland. The biggest group of immigrants are Russians, numbering 650 people. Second largest group are Estonians, followed by people from Myanmar, Thailand, China, Syria and Iraq. Around 4,300 people, or 3.6 per cent of population, in Kuopio speak another language than Finnish or Swedish as their native language. These include around 70 different languages.

An immigrant future

To attract people to move to Kuopio, the city offers high-quality public services: from kindergartens to senior homes, libraries to sports facilities. To integrate people from different cultural backgrounds, Kuopio is providing a variety of services targeted at migrants. Kuopio Info is an easily accessible resident service desk, which directs immigrants to find the right services. The multicultural centre Kompassi offers immigrants in Kuopio various services, including, for example, Finnish language courses, hobby groups and personal job guidance. The unemployment rate among immigrants is lower in Kuopio compared with other cities.

Internationality is part of everyday life in Kuopio and cross-cuts public services. For example, libraries offer books in more than 20 languages. Symbolic gestures can be quite meaningful too, when it comes to creating a feeling of community. Finland celebrated 100 years of independence on 6th December 2017. In a bold move, Kuopio decided to celebrate Finland’s 100 years of independence with multiculturalism as the main theme of the event. As part of the events to celebrate the occasion, Kuopio decided to give a voice to the new Finns who have immigrated to the city from abroad and showcased the cultures of their home countries in the gala.

Spirit of Kuopio

An important aspect is that the communications department of Kuopio invested in telling potential migrants, the story of city. So, when people are considering where to settle, they would not only know the facts about Kuopio, but would also feel the city, experience its atmosphere and breathe in the spirit of Kuopio.

Social media campaigns are a simple but sometimes effective method to address a global audience. Every year Kuopio organizes a photo competition for around a thousand exchange students enrolled in the educational institutes located in the city. Also, in an effort to brand the Kuopio region as the Capital of Lakeland, in February, the city launched a photo competition concentrating on wintertime sports activities.

But it is not enough to just tell the story of Kuopio to potential migrants. An also equally important element for successful immigration and integration is to tell the stories of migrants to the inhabitants of Kuopio. This is where an organization with decades of expertise like the International Organization for Migration would come in. The IOM website is filled with stories of migrants – some of them sad, some of them hopeful. The trick is how to tell these stories, and more so, to the people living in cities where immigrants are arriving.

A good example is IOM’s Global Migration Film Festival (GMFF). The 2017 edition of the festival showcased, in over 100 countries, more than 30 films concerning the promise and challenges of migration. To get maximum benefit from the GMFF, the films would ideally be screened in as many locations as possible. Reaching larger audiences is imperative to maximize the impact of the films – especially important in communities experiencing migration.

Since there’s a limit to how many film screenings and events an organization can handle, IOM would need a little help from others, and this includes cities like Kuopio. IOM offices in more than a hundred countries form a network to reach out to communities around the world. This way it’s possible to coordinate events with local administrations and NGOs willing to participate in arranging film screenings.

How can this be done? For example, in Kuopio, there’s a municipal art-house movie theatre Kuvakukko which is very ideal for such events. If you then add to this, active immigrant communities and the Kompassi multicultural centre in Kuopio, you have an excellent opportunity. IOM can provide these communities with the films and the city can provide them with the theatre, and could also easily organize events around screenings as happens with the GMFF in other locations.

The UN Together campaign, in which IOM is a key participant, is another method of changing negative narratives on migration and to strengthen the social cohesion between host communities and refugees and migrants. “Yhdessä”, Finnish word for “Together”, was also the theme of Finland’s centenary independence celebration year 2017.

Research shows that exchange students coming to Kuopio are happy with the education, services, nature and other aspects. However, they consistently say that they find it difficult to meet and make friends with local people. Movie screening would therefore be a low-cost, low-threshold event bringing together immigrants and Finns living in Kuopio.

How to bring people from different backgrounds together?

There are hundreds of local communities globally facing the same questions: How to bring people from different backgrounds together? How to ease tensions and prejudices between different groups of people? Watching movies together is a good start. IOM could nudge local communities in the right direction and encourage them to arrange events by providing interesting content and a simple guide on how to use it. The GMFF, among other initiatives, is already doing this.

Kuopio provides immigrant children with preparatory instruction, which acquaints children with Finnish school, culture and teaching methods. The aim of the instruction is to develop pupils’ Finnish language skills and general readiness for Finnish school to a level sufficient for them to participate in regular schooling. As pupils’ proficiency in Finnish improves, they can begin to participate in lessons with their actual class (integration lessons).

Reprinted with permission from the author from the IOM website (03/13/2018).

Jukka Torikka is a communications expert on a short-term secondment to the IOM Online Communications Unit (OCU) from the City of Kuopio, Finland.
Emma’s Torch: Creating Culinary Space for Refugees Dreams

By Niko
May 13, 2019

Freedom through employment

In June 2016, Brodie combined her love of cooking with her advocacy for refugee and human rights to launch the non-profit, social enterprise Emma’s Torch. Emma’s Torch is named after Emma Lazarus, a refugee right’s pioneer whose inspiring words are found on the base of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

In an eight-week, paid apprenticeship program, students receive over 400 hours of culinary training and licensing. They gain work experience at Emma’s Torch Restaurant in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn and participate in accelerated English classes focused on restaurant industry vocabulary. The training is focused and personalized, with one instructor for every two students. The curriculum is designed in consultation with the program’s Culinary Council, made up of a wide range of New York restaurant experts.

The road to Emma’s Torch was well researched, collaborative and ambitious. Brodie sought to answer the question: with 8 weeks of training could a refugee become just as qualified as a Culinary Institute graduate? She did her research and networking over many months, meeting with human resource teams, chefs and culinary leaders to ensure that Emma’s Torch curriculum met the needs of the culinary industry. The answer turned out to be yes.

Launching the project was not without its own challenges: lack of experience in the field, and being young, confronted Brodie as she began the project. She knew the idea was sound, but started with a small pilot project to test the approach, before building an entire non-profit and investing in a cafe. The small pilot not only confirmed that her idea could work, it was an important step in demonstrating the value and return on investment for the foundations and donors that support Emma’s Torch.

Brodie provides post-employment supports for her students, working with the employing restaurants as needed. Emma’s Torch also partners with resettlement and advocacy organizations. They help refer potential students and are available to support the students if needed during their training.

This lean start-up approach – “try, learn, adjust, try” – is not entirely common to non-profit culture. Brodie shows how it can work effectively to support refugees. Her research, industry connections and commitment to provide meaningful training-to-work opportunities results in an environment where students are set up for success. The employment success of each student is a testament to the quality of his or her training and thoughtfulness of Brodie’s approach.

With a great launch and solid industry connections, in May 2018 Brodie and the team moved from their brunch pop-up in Red Hook to a fully operational restaurant in Carroll Gardens and ramped up operations to graduate at least 40 students a year.

Success means changing lives

As Emma’s Torch builds to have an impact on meeting New York’s restaurant industry labour demands, the impact on refugees is immediate.

The only constant for refugees is change. When they start to settle, there are many firsts. Their lives are precarious, sometimes living in homeless shelters. Employment brings stability. After training at Emma’s Torch, students are moving out of homeless shelters into more stable housing. Some graduates have gotten promotions already in their restaurants.

Employment means decreased isolation, as they make connections with co-workers and build their social networks. One graduate is now able to save money to take night courses, building new hopes and dreams that seemed beyond her when she first started the program. Brodie says it’s exciting to hear them talk about their future like anyone else does, with joy and ambition.

The future for Emma’s Torch is growth and replication. Brodie sees the program being easily replicated in other cities in the near future. Like Gijs Cortens of Hack Your Future, Brodie says it is important to help refugees build skills to lead to long term employment. She’s not interested in tokenizing refugees, asking, “we love to have a meal cooked for us by a refugee, but how do we ensure that they have a sustainable salary?” She says it’s important to think through how can you be sure of the long-term impact you can have.

Emma’s Torch is building new careers, transforming the lives of refugees and meeting local labour market demand. There’s no doubt the next moves for Emma’s Torch will be well thought out and planned with the most impact possible on refugees and their communities. Emma Lazarus would be proud.

Welcomed in Halifax

By Niko
September 2, 2019

When Canada announced it would resettle over 25,000 Syrian refugees, cities across the country began planning. In Halifax, Nova Scotia, the recently formed municipal Office of Diversity and Inclusion took a practical and comprehensive approach. They reached out to colleagues in other departments to ask what the city could do to welcome the Syrians, and other newcomers, better.

Like many cities in Canada’s Atlantic provinces, Nova Scotia has struggled with a declining population. Recently, immigration has been turning the tide, creating population growth for the first time in decades.

Welcoming means creating inclusion

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion, which also houses the Local Immigration Partnership, came up with a number of recommendations to provide support for the refugees in Halifax. Halifax Regional Council recognized that “the attraction and retention of refugees is also likely to contribute to the strength of Halifax’s economy and community and align with previous Council direction.”

These recommendations, while refugee-specific, built on an existing Welcoming Newcomers Action Plan. Key to its success was not only municipal government leadership, departmental action and broad municipal support, but working and coordinating with local immigrant and refugee-serving organizations, private refugee sponsorship groups and other interested community members.

Perhaps the most tangible public initiative was the creation of the Welcomed in Halifax (WIH) pass. The pass gives arriving refugees one year of free access to public transportation and municipal recreation facilities and programs (such as swimming lessons, summer camps and many more programs for all family members). Local museums and the Canada Games Centre also provided free admission and access to programs for WIH pass holders.

Up and running in time for the Syrian refugee arrivals in December of 2015, by early 2016 the program was running smoothly. According to Roberto Montiel, Coordinator of HRM Local Immigration Partnership (LIP), the intention was to make the WIH card available to all refugees, not only the newly arriving Syrians. In 2017 WIH pass eligibility was expanded to refugee-claimants. The city works with Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) and the Halifax Refugee Clinic to distribute WIH cards to new refugee arrivals.

As the Syrian refugee crisis dominated the national news, Montiel says it presented an opportunity to raise the Halifax community’s awareness of immigration and refugee issues. It was also an opportunity to increase newcomer-serving competency within city services. Among other recommendations, the city committed to providing sensitivity training for public-facing municipal staff to address stigma and stereotypes, along with promoting a more diverse workforce.

What has it meant for the newcomers?

In 2011, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities noted that “new immigrants are twice as likely to use public transit when compared to Canadian-born workers.” A 2016 FCM publication, Welcoming Communities: A Toolkit for Municipalities, reiterated the importance of access to transit and public spaces and recommended that, in order to “reduce isolation and support a sense of belonging, municipalities provide newcomers with access to public transit and public spaces such as libraries and recreation facilities. Enabling access to these services helps newcomers integrate into the community.”

Halifax’s Montiel agrees. The transportation aspect has been very helpful from day one for newly arrived refugees. Access to scheduled recreation programs has not been as popular, but Montiel says the municipality has learned that it is not as urgent a concern for refugees in their initial settlement process as easily getting around town. Recreation is accessed more after initial arrival and settlement and is important for integration. However, Montiel says that access to transportation has been key “for folks being able to get to their EAL classes, and to their programs and job interviews.”

While more formal recreation programs requiring registration have not been accessed as much, drop-in access to places like local museums and the Canada Games Centre have been popular among new arrivals. While these facilities have lost potential entrance fee revenue, they view the WIH pass as a long-term investment into attracting a new audience, many of whom live around the area. One Halifax council report indicated that the Canada Games Centre lost approximately $35,000 in potential annual revenue. However, the Centre not only expressed interest in continuing the program, but expanding it to asylum-seekers and claimants with rejected claims. The timing of the WIH pass aligned well and timed well with the Centre’s strategy to diversify not only their visitor base, but also their workforce. Museums have also seen an uptake in terms of visitors and remain committed. Montiel says that they see the increase in visitors and as positive.

Making a long-term investment for inclusion

The WIH pass and other efforts are a continuation of earlier commitments Halifax made in their Welcoming Newcomers Action Plan. They’re also an important illustration of how important immigration is for the demographic, economic and community resilience of the city and region.

Currently Halifax is developing an updated immigration action plan. They’re looking at how municipal services can be better delivered, develop better relationships with newcomer communities, and how to make their hiring and employment practices more inclusive.
Montiel says it’s important that the municipality plays a role in any local newcomer initiative. He says creating a welcoming community will not only be important for new immigrants and refugees, but for everyone.

As part of creating a welcoming city, they’re working with the local indigenous population to create relationships between newcomers and First Nations, as well as ensuring that African-Nova Scotian and Acadian populations are represented. The city also works with faith groups to create dialogue in the community.

Illustrating how local diversity is an asset is also part of the strategy. In 2018, Halifax held their first Multilingual Language Fair, showcasing the diversity of languages spoken in the city (including indigenous and other languages existing in the province for generations). It was a huge success, pointing to the need and interest in the city in creating spaces to build bridges between existing and newer communities. Celebrating diversity can lead to further inclusion: “One couple who recently emigrated from Columbia, after failing to see their own culture represented at the event, have decided to invest in that capital. ‘Our Latin population is growing here in Nova Scotia, so I think it’s good to join our effort and start to build an association,’ says Diana Ortiz. ‘In Canada, people work as a community.’”

The demographic tide will shift in cities like Halifax because of the work of municipalities actively building welcoming communities with local organizations and residents. Committing to supporting newcomers is not simply the right thing to do. It is essential to ensure that the city and region thrives for generations to come.
Cooking Up Opportunity

By Niko
May 2, 2019

Cultural Inclusion, Economic Inclusion, Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Living Together, New Gateways, Refugee Portal

Increasingly, smaller and rural municipalities are seeing the economic, demographic and social potential immigration brings to them. Providing a welcoming and supportive environment is key to attracting those newcomers. Newcomers realize that large urban centres are not the only places for them to find success.

Peterborough gets that. Around 800 immigrants arrive in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada each year (pop. 83,000). The city frames itself as an alternative for newcomers to settle with their families, a place where they can find opportunity while not being too far from large urban centres like Toronto.

According to Peterborough's New Canadians Centre (NCC) Director of Community Development, Yvonne Lai, it's up to the cities to understand "that attraction and long-term retention are tied in to economic development and social inclusion. Newcomers will stay and enjoy the benefits of being in small cities if they can be securely employed and their families are supported in their growth. Small city/rural communities provide an ideal pace and environment for a newcomer to settle and integrate. And, increasingly, the cities and communities that see newcomers are assets, both economic and social, will thrive."

The backdrop

Between 2015 and 2018 over 400 Syrian refugees settled in Peterborough. Like other Canadian cities, the community actively welcomed them. In early 2016 volunteers at Peterborough's New Canadians Centre (NCC) wanted to help. They were inspired by Toronto's Newcomer Kitchen and wanted to replicate it.

Food and settlement go together no matter where you are. Food is a way to bring people together to build connections around sharing culture. It also provides inroads to entrepreneurism and economic inclusion for newcomers.

The seed of Newcomer Kitchen Peterborough was planted, focused on empowering newcomer women through cooking, learning workplace English and entrepreneurial skills.

The volunteers brought enthusiasm and experience, including experience working in the food industry. But they began to become overwhelmed with the complexities of the project. NCC staff took on a more formal supportive role. NCC Community Development Worker Reem Ali had been supporting the project and became the project coordinator, working closely with the women and community partners.

While they looked at Toronto's Newcomer Kitchen as a source of inspiration, NCC's project would go another route. Instead of the women being salaried workers, with access to a kitchen once a week, the Peterborough Newcomer Kitchen would create a business led by the women. It was a more intensive undertaking, but one that has borne fruit.

Creating an ethnic women's catering group isn't new. For more than 2 decades in communities across Canada you can find groups like the Afghan Women's Catering Group, started in 1997, or more recently, Karam Kitchen in Hamilton, Toronto Newcomer Kitchen, or New Canadians' Kitchen. Like these other initiatives, the Peterborough Newcomer Kitchen is not simply about food, but about capacity, integration and inclusion.

To make it work required a community effort.

Partnerships are key

Starting as a volunteer-led initiative without funding, collaborating with local organizations was essential. And the community stepped up. From getting access to certified kitchen space to cook in to ensuring that the Syrian women took and passed food handler certification to coming up with menu ideas, it was intensive work.

After bringing together 16 motivated Syrian women, NCC applied for foundation grant through Peterborough’s Luke Four Foundation. This gave them enough initial seed money to pilot the project for a year. Ali also connected with with the Nourish Project, which allowed them to leverage the initial seed money to do even more. Nourish works to create healthy, inclusive communities through food programming and food literacy with vulnerable groups in the community.
There was a natural connection between the two projects. Since November 2017 Ali and Nourish’s food facilitator, certified chef Amanda Harrison, have worked together with the Syrian women to coordinate the Newcomer Kitchen.

Where would they cook?

As we’ve noted in the Scadding Court Business out of the Box story, accessing a certified kitchen is costly. For groups just starting up with an idea, that upfront cost can end a good idea before it can even begin. Peterborough’s Jewish Community Centre (JCC) came on board as a key partner with their certified kitchen. As a partner, NCC was able to use their funding to buy some kitchen equipment, for JCC’s kitchen. Since graduating from training in September 2018, they women continue to use this kitchen for free.

Building a foundation

Ali says that the women were all excellent cooks. But taking cooking skills into a commercial enterprise is completely different. The women not only needed to learn how to cook in a commercial kitchen, understand food handling and public health expectations, but also how to run a business from marketing, to pricing their food, to customer service.

Nourish provided their standardized training modules, including basic kitchen skills. Ali says that the training flowed organically. As they identified needed skill development, they worked with Nourish to build next module. Because the women simply cooked from experience, they didn’t typically measure their ingredients. For a commercial enterprise, they needed to standardize their recipes. A numeracy module was created that allowed the women to familiarize themselves with measuring utensils to create their recipes.

The women needed to get certified as Food Handlers. Peterborough Public Health was able to get copies of Toronto Public Health’s Arabic translation of the Food Handler Training Manual. They have been an important partner, supporting and certifying the women in the kitchen.

Beyond kitchen skills, NCC also worked with the women to develop their business skills. Ali says that it was important to have the women make their own decisions together, including whether or not to launch a business. She says it is a core part of the project that the women own their own path, and decide on the path they wanted to take. As Nourish provided the core kitchen skills, NCC brought in other local female food entrepreneurs to support the women. They provided mentoring and helped managed expectations of what it meant to start a food business in Peterborough. Ali says that these practical lessons were key. The women still recall what those entrepreneurs told them, it has impacted how they run their business today.

Success

Running a food business is demanding. Of the 16 women who started, four have continued together to establish and run the Newcomer Kitchen. In 2018 the women were ready. Their graduation project, a booth at the local Veg Fest, would be their public business launch.

They were immediately put to the test.

After running a full day of cooking in the kitchen, the women discovered the fridge had not been at the right temperature. They had to make a decision. They were starting to build some reputation in the community and couldn’t afford anyone getting sick or the food not tasting good. They made a difficult business decision. The food went into garbage. Ali says this became a defining moment for the women and their business. They would survive, together.

Since September 2018 they women have had a few catering gigs, but their biggest success came by way of the Peterborough Regional Farmers’ Market. They were offered free space to sell at the Market. The four women continue to work together and are regulars at the market. “It has been an enriching experience for these women,” Ali explains. “They have had a chance to put all of their new learning into practice in a supportive, welcoming, low-pressure environment with a steady flow of customers.” At the market since December 1st, the women continue to experience the support and sense of belonging from the community.

It’s a long way from where they were just a short year earlier. According to Ali, the impact of the Farmers’ Market support and being regular vendors has been transformative for the women. After the first three weeks at the market, the women told her they felt different. They have changed, they’re no longer the same people they were a year ago. They are confident in themselves and what they are doing. Ali knows how hard it was for them to get there.

Throughout it all, Ali says that the work the women have done together became a support system. For a project like this to be replicated requires working closely with the women as a facilitator and having a community partner like Nourish. As well, having the women conceive of and drive the business is key. Ali says this is the advantage of a small community and an approach focused on ownership by the women. They make the decisions. They own it.

It was important not just support the group, she says, but the women as individuals. Ali says that individual evaluations were a key turning point for many of the women. They felt valued as individuals, and that their voices were heard. After some of their initial one-on-one supports, the women acted differently. Their confidence grew and they felt like they, as individuals, mattered to the group’s success.

Ultimately, according Yvonne Lai, everyone benefits from their success: “The community benefits by embracing the mentality that what is good for newcomers is good for the community as a whole. Newcomers fill labour gaps and should be considered for business succession. Small city/rural communities provide an ideal pace and environment for a newcomer to settle and integrate.” Peterborough’s Newcomer Kitchen is a shining example of that.
MySkills to Job Skills: Competence Cards for Occupational Assessment

By kturner
April 8, 2019
Employment Inclusion

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is working with labour market stakeholders to create a new system where job seekers, employment support services and employers can take a competency-based approach to hiring.

For employers, evaluating job seeker skills has typically meant reviewing education and certification credentials. Critical labour shortages create conditions for employers to think more creatively about how they recruit and hire talent. Germany anticipates skilled labour shortages to increase by 30% between 2015 and 2020. Given this outlook, employers are opening up to new ideas about how to assess worker skills and credentials, in particular among migrant groups.

According to Bertelsmann Foundation Board member Jörg Dräger, learning by doing is becoming the most important source of competence for working people. However, the increasing importance of informal learning presents a dilemma: illustrating skills developed from this learning is the most difficult to prove.

How could immigrants and refugees better document their expertise and skills to help German employers assess their competencies?

Focus on competencies

In 2013, the Foundation began their project, Further Education for All, to provide employment and migration counsellors tools to assess immigrant and refugee clients’ workplace competencies.

The Foundation found no standardized instruments for determining the potential of immigrants. Counsellors working with them found the existing assessment landscape confusing and overwhelming. The Foundation started working on new tools that were practical and easier to use for the counsellors.

Working with government, employment and migration partners, Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Careers via Competences Project created Competence Cards to speed up the recognition and utilization of immigrant qualifications and experience. The cards identified a core set of transversal or “21st century skills” (related terms include applied skills, cross-curricular skills, cross-disciplinary skills, interdisciplinary skills, transferable skills, transversal skills, noncognitive skills, and soft skills), and provided employment counsellors with an easy-to-use visual tool they could use with the client to identify labour market skills. From social (e.g., teamwork) to technical (e.g., pipe-fitting) to process/methodological skills (e.g., planning), the Competence Cards gave both the client and the employment counsellor a starting point for a conversation about occupation-specific skills. Using visual cues, clients could easily identify and self-assess whether or not they had such skills, regardless of their formal education and training.

The Competence Cards were immediately popular. Counsellors found the tool effective, quick and easy to use with clients. The project originally anticipated disseminating 800 card sets to migration counsellors across Germany. Today, they are available for free in ten languages. It should come as no surprise that, to date, over 12,000 Competence Card sets have been disseminated to a wide variety of employment, migration, education, social service and other organizations that support migrants.

Scaling up success

The Foundation recognized they had an opportunity to do more. Their experts consulted with employment counselling partner organizations and began creating profession- and occupation-specific cards. Instead of animated drawings, like those on the Competence Cards, the Career Cards use real pictures, illustrating specific job tasks to show a newcomer what the profession looks like in Germany. They created 48 cards outlining professional fields, and 30 occupation-specific cards, outlining jobs with high demand in Germany, where refugees could find employment opportunities. Dr. Martin Noack, a Senior Expert at the Foundation in the Learning for Life Program, says that each career card was created in consultation with assessors, educators and certification providers, employers and trade masters. Six to ten people per profession worked together to identify competencies that are required on the job.

For example, a career card for a Specialist in the hotel and restaurant industry would have an image of a front desk clerk, depicting the skills important to be successful in the role. Competency cards associated with the Specialist role would be on-hand to demonstrate the attributes of an ideal candidate. If a refugee could identify skills they already have, it would be easier to connect them to a suitable job right away.

The idea, says Noack, is that a worker can identify all of their skills, whether gained through formal education, on the job, through volunteer work, or through life experience. From a quick initial assessment, they could be directed to the required upgrading and education to access a specific employment opportunity.

MySkills

The Foundation realized that to make the process work, they needed more images for each occupation. In December 2017, they scaled up their analog of Competence and Career Cards, creating an online self-assessment of vocational skills. Eight occupations (with 22 more in development) are available in six languages, with 20 to 40 images per occupation, each representing a specific job task or competency. The My Professional Experience Counts tool is available from the Bertelsmann Stiftung program page where it provides access to a competency self-assessment anywhere at any time. From there, the client can visit the MY SKILLS website, an attractive, dynamic platform available in 6 languages that offers clients information, FAQs and a video orientation to the full in-depth assessment overseen by registered employment counsellors.

Those who work with employment counsellors can use the assessment as a stepping stone to the more formal My Skills test, which Noack says has greater credibility with employers. The computer-aided test is run by the Federal Employment Agency (BA) and was developed in cooperation with the Foundation. Clients are referred by employment counsellors and undergo a four-hour test, which more rigorously assesses their competencies in the specific job tasks in their identified occupation. Participants answer complex questions that relate to everyday situations in one of 30 training occupations. The questions are supplemented by explanatory pictures and videos. Noack anticipates in the next year German Public Employment Service counsellors will refer over 120,000 clients to My Skills.
Employer buy-in

Noack says that big companies in Germany, such as Ernst and Young and Google, have shifted to competence tests in their initial recruitment and hiring practices. However, eighty percent of Germans work in SMEs, which don’t have the HR and personnel department capacities of these big employers. They hire on the basis of formal educational achievement, with the hope that workers have the required skills. Hiring risks are perceived to be higher in absence of formal education.

The Foundation’s competency-based approach offers a way for employers to reduce this risk. For those labour market sectors with critical shortages, employers cannot wait until they have fully qualified workers, but they can assess and hire people who are partially qualified. Once they know a worker’s competencies, they can provide the on-the-job training needed, or work with education providers to quickly get their workforce up to speed and fully qualified. Employers are starting to see the potential. Chambers of Crafts, which oversee the professional education and certification of German occupations, are slower to come on board.

Shifting the landscape of how competencies are recognized and workers are hired is a large project. As more potential workers assess their competencies, more German employers will see the value of competency-based employment assessments. These numbers can gradually provide 1 million refugees more pathways to greater economic integration, benefiting the entire country.

Originally published by Hire Immigrants.
ALiGN: Matching Refugee Job Seekers to Jobs

By ktturner
Employment Inclusion Refugee Portal

Current hiring practices often exclude refugees, as they are not seen as a ‘good fit’ based on lack of Canadian education, training, or experience. However, a critical labour shortage can offer an opportunity for employers to re-evaluate hiring practices to realize the potential in a previously untapped labour pool.

Ontario’s tourism and hospitality employers have struggled for some time with a critical labour shortage. Recently, the industry began replicating an employment project with refugees that has had some success working with vulnerable youth. The ALiGN Network Model introduces an alternative approach to traditional recruitment, screening and hiring practices.

OTECS, a sector-specific training, consulting, and workforce development organization, teamed up with Magnet to launch ALiGN, to connect unemployed youth to job vacancies. Based at Ryerson University, Magnet is a non-profit social innovation that brings together cross-sector partners to address unemployment and under-employment of Canadians through a technology-driven platform. With a strong commitment to diversity and supporting groups facing significant barriers to employment, Magnet was a natural fit to partner with OTEC.

Many potential workers from vulnerable groups were not recognized as a suitable fit by employers simply because employers lacked the tools to fully evaluate their potential. Adam Morrison, OTEC Vice President, Projects and Partnerships says that “businesses have been telling us for years that, if candidates are the right fit, they will hire them and train them for advancement.” As employers struggled to fill entry-level positions, it became clear that OTEC needed to create a system that matched vulnerable groups to opportunities based on their unique attributes, attitudes and goals.

OTECS and Magnet looked at models that were working for larger, well-resourced employers in the sector, but were out of reach for smaller companies. In one approach, “peak performers” were interviewed to assess not only skills, but also the behavioural and personality attributes that made candidates successful. OTEC worked with the sector to scale this approach and created employee benchmarks that they combined with Lumina Learning’s psychometric assessment tool to establish job fit characteristics such as introversion vs. extroversion and people- vs. outcome-focused.

With Magnet and sector partners, OTEC built the ALiGN Network Model, a “psychometric-based talent-to-role fit assessment and job-matching model.” Once the psychometric and job readiness model was tested and had employer buy-in, OTEC worked with Magnet to bring the model online.

Clients are assessed by community and education partners trained in the psychometric tool. Once they are determined to be a fit for a particular job, clients are moved directly into work or supported through training, certification and other steps necessary to obtain employment.

The ALiGN approach has broad applicability. According to Magnet’s Executive Director, Mark Patterson, and echoed by Morrison, the model was always envisioned to work with other client groups and labour market segments. Refugees are a logical next group. Like unemployed youth, ALiGN creates pathways to employment for refugees who do not have traditional “good fit” credentials for success, or even participation, in the labour market, such as academic accreditation, language proficiency, and “Canadian experience.” ACCES Employment, already a Magnet community partner, will pilot the Lumina psychometric assessment tool with refugee clients, and provide the additional support system necessary for employment success.

Morrison says that the Lumina tool is particularly appropriate for refugees. It is available in 17 languages, and has been tested and used in other countries. Additional modifications have been made to ALiGN to be accessible for this new population of job-seekers, including a multilingual online interface, taking into account multilingual refugee clients.
Measuring impact

OTECA recently completed an evaluation of ALiGN for improving employment outcomes for vulnerable youth. They found that more youth are being assessed as a fit when they work with their employment counsellor to complete the assessment on ALiGN. Thirty percent more youth are on a realistic path to employment. That means more potential workers for employers facing labour shortages.

More employers also have access to greater hiring opportunities now. Most employers, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), lack the Human Resource resources large corporate entities have. Through ALiGN, employers now have access to a recruiting system and new talent pools if they are willing to commit to hiring from underemployed and vulnerable groups.

With a solution-focused tool, Morrison says that employers, large and small, have indicated that they are willing to adapt their recruitment practices to work with ALiGN, and access the new talent pool. With hundreds of thousands of unfilled jobs projected in the sector, employers simply need new ways of finding and hiring potential workers.

Reducing employment friction for everyone

Refugees only have to complete the psychometric assessment tool once. It becomes part of their profile on ALiGN and part of their personal employment portfolio on the broader Magnet site. With the ALiGN profile integrated on Magnet, refugees will be able to also access opportunities across the whole Magnet platform, exposing them to more employment opportunities as they gain new skills and experiences.

Morrison says ALiGN offers employers a streamlined process to access talent they may not have previously been able to tap into. Their access to the platform, including posting jobs, is all free.

ALiGN’s refugee project is just getting started. With its initial success working with youth, it can continue to model the way tourism and hospitality employers can tap into previously ignored labour talent.

Originally published by Hire Immigrants.
Teacher Training, With and For Refugee Teachers

By ktuser
March 14, 2019

Education Inclusion Refugee Portal

Refugees bring skills and experience with them when they arrive in their new homes. However, getting back into the labour market can be a challenge. In 2015, Germany saw a record influx of migrants. Many agreed that there was an opportunity the refugees “could help alleviate a labour shortage caused partly by the ageing of the population,” but “many newcomers lack the training and language skills that Europe’s largest economy needs.” The University of Potsdam, near Berlin, decided they could do something to ease the transition for new refugees with a teaching background.

The University launched a pilot program in 2016 to help refugees with teacher training or experience enter the Brandenburg school system and resume their careers as teachers. Miriam Vock, the Professor of Empirical Teaching and Intervention Research at the University of Potsdam who developed the program said: “These are people who have had a good university education. We want to give them the chance to be able to work again here.”

Similarly to Skövde, Sweden, the program could meet employment needs but also help in local schools. According to Andreas Musil, vice president for teaching at the University of Potsdam, “a lot of the refugees had a background in teaching and refugee children have to go to German schools, so we saw this as a chance to use their cultural similarities and offer refugee children someone they can speak to.”

Shortening the integration timeline

Internationally trained teachers can become re-certified in Germany. However, Germany teachers typically take seven years to become certified and are competent to teach in two subjects. A combination of German language competency, and the fact that most of the refugee teachers were Syrian (where teachers are expected to have competency in one subject) meant most newcomers would spend years upgrading and studying before ever setting foot inside a classroom.

The Refugee Teachers Program set out to shorten that timeline. Selected refugee teachers participate in a fast-tracked 1.5 year program. Initially, students spend up to six hours a day learning German. Intensive German courses continue throughout the program, complemented by specialized instructional, pedagogical and school education seminars. The program is rounded off by an in-class internship and regular exchanges with local teachers to get to know the school system and culture.

The program was immediately popular with the skilled refugees who were looking to get back into their teaching careers. More than 700 applied for 25 initial spots. Given this demand, as well as the reality of over 4000 refugee students in the state of Brandenburg who could benefit from teachers with a similar background, the number increased to 75 refugee teachers for the first cohort.

While they will still have to complete more training to become fully qualified, the impact on refugee teachers has already been significant. “Teaching English gives me most pleasure in life,” says English teacher Alaa Kassab, 25, who works as an assistant English Teacher in a local primary school. “I’m proud when I see my students are speaking or understanding English because of me. I know the language one day will affect their lives like it affected mine.”

Jumpstarting integration

The students are eager to work and agree that the program has jump-started their integration. Fellow student Motaz Jarkas, 34, another English teacher from Aleppo: “I’ve already studied, now I want to work. Working means security for us at this stage. We’ve done our best, we’ve learned a lot, but it hasn’t been easy. We need stability and a future. That’s why this programme is so important for us.”

Success means meeting everyone’s needs

The new graduates are filling a labour shortage of qualified teachers in the region, while also contributing to the ongoing integration of refugee children. Kassab’s Principal Monika Nebel believes hiring Kassab contributes to the long-term integration of Syrian refugee children in the school and community. The school also benefits: “Alaa has invested a lot personally to make this happen. And we too invest a lot to make it work. But it’s worth it for our region and it’s worth it for her. We gain a teacher and she gains a job. It’s win-win.”

The program has worked with four groups of refugee teachers so far. Forty participants from the first 2 groups are currently working as assistant teachers or helping personnel in local schools. The last two groups are continuing their qualification training until the end of this year. Almost 100 refugee teachers have have been part of the program so far. With their success, the program has been refunded and will continue to offer opportunity to refugee teachers. Always evaluating and innovating, Potsdam University’s Maya Nyagolova says that they are currently working on re-conceptualizing the program for the next three years.

Vock hopes other universities will follow suit: “It is important to give a chance to the many highly qualified teachers among the refugees.” The demand is enormous and not just locally. Already, Bielefeld University in North Rhine-Westphalia has launched a similar Lehrkräfte Plus initiative with the support of the Bertelsmann Foundation. At Potsdam, over 100 refugee teachers from across Germany are on the current waitlist and the application process has not yet re-opened.

According to UNHCR’s Céline Schmitt, the program addresses a number of refugee needs and UNHCR recommendations for effective refugee integration: “Invest more in integration of refugees. Invest more in teaching language because it’s very important from the start for asylum seekers and refugees. It’s their key to integration. It also addresses another challenge and recommendation, to create links between the host communities and refugees. Together they can improve things, even improve local programs.”

The program has shown what is possible when there is strong local will combined with the intense desire of refugees to settle. Without a strong local advocate and cooperation of champions within different departments at the University, and the enthusiastic participation of schools and the education sector, an initiative like Refugee Teachers Program could not happen. Potsdam has shown what cooperation, built on the enthusiasm of refugees to integrate and utilize their skills, can mean for them, and for the local community.
Contacts:

Maya Nyagolova & Dr.in Anna Aleksandra Wojciechowicz
Scientific project coordination
Tel: 0331/977 203140
refteachwel@uni-potsdam.de

Campus Golm
Karl-Liebknecht-Straße 24
14476 Potsdam
House 35, room 0.09
Business Out of the Box

By kturner
March 13, 2019

In 2009, during one of Scadding Court’s international programs in Ghana, SCCC staff witnessed innovative uses of shipping containers transformed into vending stalls and we thought – why can’t we do that?

Shipping containers have been re-purposed as low-cost living spaces, office and retail storefronts, even quickly deployed medical centres for refugees. Why not as a community economic revitalization project?

In 2011 Scadding Court Community Centre (SCCC) launched Market 707 as a means to offer economic opportunity to community members while revitalizing a fairly bleak concrete wasteland. The resulting shipping container market outside the centre has brought economic opportunity to low-income communities, including newcomers, youth and women entrepreneurs.

Inspired by a serendipitous trip to Africa, SCCC replicated what they saw to create Toronto’s first successful permanent street market.

Business out of the Box (BoB)
https://youtube.com/watch?v=YJZX8ajWJv4

A neighbourhood of promise and potential

It isn’t entirely surprising that a street market is successful in Toronto, a city full of local neighbourhood entrepreneurs, farmers’ markets and long-term successful street festivals. What makes SCCC’s approach unique is how it has broken down the barriers to participation for low-income community members to become part of that success.

Entrepreneurship has always been a route for low-income immigrants and women to sustain themselves. However, initial start up challenges such as access to capital and space necessary to start a business have commonly been insurmountable for many. With the success of Market 707, SCCC an opportunity to bring entrepreneurship within reach and created Business out of the Box (BoB).

BoB offers low cost retail space (rare in urban Toronto) for new and emerging businesses, along with a suite of supports and community mentorship. Market 707 currently has 11 containers and 23 vendor spaces made up of a diversity of businesses, such as specialty foods, a bike shop, a cell phone repair shop, clothing designers and more.

SCCC calls it a “low-risk, low-rent, and supportive environment. The community of entrepreneurs created facilitates learning and resource sharing between business owners. This low-risk model allows individuals to enter entrepreneurship, test an idea, supplement their incomes, explore a pathway out of social assistance, and grow an established business.” According to one entrepreneur, “What it really allows us to do is start a business very quickly and at very low cost and be able to provide a lot of different options within a very small area.”

SCCC provides an accessible, friendly, and supportive environment to learn how to run a business, removing the red tape normally associated with starting a new business. With a simple application process SCCC works with budding entrepreneurs to understand what is required. When a challenge comes up (such as needing a food handling certificate) SCCC works with them to overcome it.

And if entrepreneurship proves not to be for them, SCCC has a variety of programs and other forms of settlement and employment support.

Operationalizing innovation

SCCC is constantly evaluating and learning how to make BoB successful. When early research conducted with Ryerson University’s Diversity Institute showed SCCC that the key demographics using BoB were low income women and newcomers (75% of entrepreneurs at Market 707 were born outside of Canada, 55% are women), SCCC created supportive entrepreneurship hubs for newcomers and women. They include training courses, mentorship, and funding opportunities.
The impact on the community has not only made SCCC’s Market 707 a destination, but “enhances community engagement, improves safety, encourages healthy active living by drawing people outside and creating a pedestrian friendly atmosphere and creates awareness of local talent and innovation. BoB retail spaces will add to street life and inject vibrancy into pedestrian thoroughfares, benefiting members of the community.”

Once they are operating, entrepreneurs become more independence, generate more income and have become more socially engaged and economically more productive. Everyone in the community benefits.

A replication is being replicated

Given that SCCC’s Market 707 and Building out of the Box are both replications inspired by an African approach, it makes sense that replication is part of SCCC’s approach. Sharing how they do what they do is a core part of SCCC’s approach. The list of local community groups and spaces that have worked with SCCC to replicate some aspect of BoB is long and growing.

SCCC worked with the community and local city councillor in north Parkdale to launch McCormick Park Cafe in 2014, which is now operated by Aangen Community Centre. In Thorncliffe Park a local women’s collective launched the Park Cafe, which acts as an entry point for future female entrepreneurs. It also provides job opportunities for local youth who work there in the summer. The St Jamestown Community Co-op is interested in operating a container in their neighbourhood as part of their future Community Food Hub, to create a place where local food can be prepared, bought, sold.

SCCC has also worked with real estate developers to create local markets on vacant sites before construction takes place. Outside of Toronto, SCCC worked with community groups and a [Hamilton property management company](https://www.hamilton.ca/) to reinvigorate a huge empty Target retail space.

Success

The BoB model also inspired other projects at SCCC itself, such as their Newcomer Entrepreneur Hub, [Women’s Entrepreneurship Hub](https://www.sccc.ca/services/entrepreneurship/women/), [Commercial Kitchen Rental](https://www.sccc.ca/services/entrepreneurship/kitchen/), and an onsite greenhouse.

SCCC believes it’s a model that can work anywhere. According to Tamara Sabarini, SCCC Senior Manager, Development and Community Engagement: “Given increasing diversity and service gaps in rural communities, the BoB model is well positioned to provide local economic development opportunities at a grassroots level.”

To make it easier to replicate BoB in any community SCCC has created a [social franchise model toolkit](https://www.sccc.ca/services/entrepreneurship/franchise/). By creating a social franchise model, SCCC can also pass along what it has learned along the way.

Building Market 707 and BoB were not without challenges, from zoning to security to sanitation and water supply, all the way to dealing with the realities of winter for a pedestrian-focused market (vendors work with local food delivery services and simply expect and plan to not be as busy in winter months). SCCC BoB’s model ensures that a collaborative and community development approach with their vendors, city representatives, and the local community can overcome any challenges.

SCCC staff say that challenges will arise for anyone implementing BoB. However, having to deal with them is far outweighed by the transformative impact BoB can have on a community. And that success is not limited to the community. Because it is a social enterprise, Market 707 and BoB generate revenue for SCCC. Market 707 and BoB have been able to help support SCCC’s core programming, at times offsetting a dependence on grants.

Of course, seeing individual businesses, and their owners, succeed is the ultimate reward. SCCC have worked with entrepreneurs who were on social assistance before they started their business who are now financially independent. Newcomers and women who didn’t see a way out of their situation are now mentoring others to become successful entrepreneurs.

Responding to local interest and opportunities, SCC is currently experimenting with offering container shared office space for other entrepreneurs that don’t fit the retail model. They continue to work with other communities, but remain focused on evolving, adapting to and meeting local community needs.
Having the right people at the table is essential to build an integration and labour market strategy to effectively address an influx of refugees.

In 2015, German cities were overwhelmed with the sudden influx of refugees. The Bertelsmann Stiftung foundation wondered how they could help. A future-focused operational foundation, its programs range across a number of activities from education to employment to social cohesion. Focused on strengthening society’s ability to help individuals reach their full potential, Bertelsmann Stiftung develops the resources needed to achieve those goals.

With the challenges posed to receiving cities and a lack of preexisting coordination and organization to address these challenges, Bertelsmann Stiftung recognized it had a role to play and previous experience to leverage to support cities.

**Coordinating cities and city networks, a role to play**

Labour market integration of refugees was the common key focus, but cities also faced challenges in education integration, language acquisition, social participation and housing the refugees. Bertelsmann Stiftung started a pilot project with thirteen cities, later expanding into ten more (see video story from Wuppertal, below).

According to Claudia Walther, Bertelsmann Stiftung Senior Project Manager, a multi-stakeholder approach was crucial to develop goals and objectives, and a common understanding of the situation facing both refugees and the cities themselves. Bertelsmann Stiftung saw their role as a convenor and moderator of a strategic process undertaken within each city.

Identifying and engaging the right mix of local stakeholders was important. The refugees arriving had a range of needs. A wide net was cast to involve labour market organizations, chambers of commerce, migrant-serving groups, civil society groups, municipal staff and politicians, economists and others interested in refugee integration efforts. For labour market efforts, it was essential to have employers at the table.

Each group brought their own expertise, but also challenges. Walther says that Bertelsmann Stiftung initially sought to have direct refugee representation on local steering groups, but it proved more difficult than they had envisioned. Similarly, involving migrant-serving groups proved more effective when they were brought in and consulted at specific points in time. A core steering group was created and participation was expanded, bringing in additional organizations and refugees themselves to provide input when necessary.

The projects brought to the forefront the myriad challenges that stakeholders faced at the city level. The sheer number of refugees, along with a lack of adequate data and data sharing about refugees meant that cities sometimes didn’t know how many refugees were arriving.

Asylum policies (such as restricted work permits for asylum seekers) and decision backlogs created additional challenges for cities trying to identify who was eligible for which services. For example, Walther says that many German companies were initially motivated to employee refugees, but came up against an impenetrable bureaucratic landscape and found it too hard to hire them.

In many cities, the sheer number of service providers created a fragmented service landscape, which in turn, impacted a coordinated approach to serving the refugees. These complexities added even more weight to a collaborative approach to find solutions.

**The model**

Bertelsmann Stiftung worked with a local Steering Committee in each city to create a vision, analyzing their local situation (taking the time to ensure they had the data for an effective and accurate analysis), identifying key stakeholders and refugee numbers, establishing a clear structure, defining responsibilities, goals, objectives and measures, and building in an evaluation and learning cycle.

Developing a common vision and mission was crucial to focus the group. With data challenges, it was important that cities conducted a proper analysis to fully understand the refugees and what their needs were. The strategy developed needed to have clear objectives, measures and a road map that all stakeholders understood and accepted.

Bertelsmann Stiftung created a structured model and process to support each city. Initially they envisioned a four-month process to get the city organized and initiatives up and running. In reality, it took at least nine months in most cities to coordinate, build a strategy and start collaborating effectively with the diverse mix of stakeholders.

**Growing success**

With growing success in their pilot cities, the foundation built on what they had learned, building partnerships to inform and strengthen the core model. A partnership with the JP Morgan Chase Foundation created an opportunity to work with ten additional cities in the states of Hessen and North Westphalia on a focused strategy to address refugee integration in the labour market.

Walther says a key goal for Bertelsmann was for the cities to continue the work when the foundation left; to have sustainable and self-sufficient strategies and initiatives. Each city they worked with was better organized, had support networks in place and was bringing employers on board when the Bertelsmann pilots ended.
Work is a key to integrating refugees into our society. The good practice example from Wuppertal shows how this can succeed successfully. Close cooperation between the various partner organizations and the individual support of refugees enabled almost half of the project participants to be placed in work.

Sharing and knowledge exchange

Learning from other cities was a key part of the model Bertelsmann Stiftung developed. Cities were at different stages of newcomer integration. Some were further ahead, and already had city integration plans and some policies. Others were starting from scratch, pushed along by the arrival of refugees. By connecting cities working on refugee integration, the foundation sought to create a process for knowledge sharing and exchange among city leaders and peers.

Bertelsmann created an online bank of good practices to share what cities are doing, and a guidebook to share their experiences and best practices with the broader public. German cities still struggling with how best to integrate refugees benefit from this knowledge sharing.

Walther says that city actors are very eager to share and learn from each other. She has seen deep exchanges, sharing and learning in city network meetings. As cities connect and share best practices in the knowledge exchange model Bertelsmann Stiftung helped establish through projects like Wegweiser Kommune, the landscape for ideas and innovation starts to catalyze community change. Access to promising practices means cities don’t have to reinvent, but can learn from each other.

Changemakers like Bertelsmann Stiftung will continue to contribute to and drive the dialogue.
Entry Hub – because integration is local

By ktuner
January 31, 2019
Employment Inclusion

In a time of apps, websites and automation, connecting in-person can seem like a thing of the past. But for job-seeking refugees, it can be the key to their success. For refugees, the challenge of finding employment seems daunting. How does job-seeking work in this new country? Where does a newcomer even begin? What are employers looking for? For employers, the challenge is equally challenging: not knowing how to assess refugee education, work experience or skills can mean missing out on talent and opportunity.

Bridging these gaps is critical, but their success only comes because of the power of local partnerships. Starting small, but already spreading across the country, We Link Sweden’s Entry Hub project is playing an important role as a broker between refugee job seekers and the companies that want to hire them.

The We Link Sweden model champions close relationships with local city governments, non-government organizations, employers, researchers, and the refugees themselves to craft local, customized solutions that meet all their needs.

A network driven cooperative model

In part inspired by the Canadian approach to refugee integration, where civil society actors help newcomers find work, We Link Sweden applied for a VINNOVA (Swedish Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation) innovation grant in 2015. Their approach emphasized the direct involvement of refugees in identifying needs and creating solutions. We Link Sweden’s Hugo Ortiz Dubón says they saw each refugee as a person with potential. We Link Sweden sees each person as active and capable, with human and social capital to offer. The organization wanted to encourage and push refugees to actively take part in their own integration.

Working closely with a reference group made up of refugees, as well as all other labour market actors, they worked on solutions.

Together, they saw three distinct challenges:

- a lack of coordination between different stakeholders – private, public, civil society (NGO)
- a lack of physical spaces where refugees could go and meet labour market actor
- a lack of administration to connect newcomers immediately to support networks upon arrival, ultimately delaying integration

Out of this work, Entry Hub was born. Focused not only on immediate employment needs, Entry Hub supports individual refugee job-seekers to prepare for long term employment success in the Swedish labour market.

Collaboration means success

With additional financial support from VINNOVA, they began to implement their model through pilot initiatives with specific employer partners. Swedavia, the Swedish airport authority, was eager to participate. They had a genuine interest in supporting newcomer integration, and positions to fill. With Swedavia providing the airport as a physical location, We Link Sweden hosted its first networking day, connecting newcomers with Swedavia staff who could provide information about job vacancies, and the Swedish labour market generally. Newcomers reported feeling more included in the employment process: they were able to showcase their competencies in-person, and determine where their skills intersected with the existing jobs. Dubón says that the experience also broke down barriers between newcomers and Swedes. Swedish workers discovered links they had with newcomers and felt more connected and open to them.

While the initial pilot did not result in jobs for refugees, it secured Swedavia as a key corporate partner in the Entry Hub initiative. As it expands, Swedavia is interested in exploring ways to hire from Entry Hub’s newcomer pool at the Umeå Airport.

Entry Hub’s next foray into corporate partnership proved more fruitful after learning from its pilot. We Link Sweden was excited to create a similar event with PostNord, Scandinavia’s biggest postal company. PostNord expressed interest in hiring part-time workers in early 2017 and partnered with We Link Sweden to hold a recruitment event. Given the specific needs of the employer, We Link Sweden decided to pre-filter job candidates using tools such as online psychometric self-assessments. This narrowed the pool of candidates to twenty-five newcomers who attended the event. Dubón says this approach was important: the self-assessment allowed newcomers to determine what they want to know about the job market, from workplace rights to workplace culture, and how to match their skills with existing opportunities.

We Link Sweden doesn’t stop at connecting job-seeker to employer. As part of their model, continued monitoring and evaluation is built in, to ensure new hires’ workplace experience is positive. Of the twenty new hires, eighteen remained with PostNord in the same position, while the other two quickly moved into other positions within the company. Beyond workplace experience, We Link Sweden wants to ensure that the refugees continue improving their Swedish language competency. Given that the refugees were hired on a part-time basis, they were able to continue their language studies; the combination of work and language training significantly increased their Swedish language ability. In a country where language acquisition has been a significant barrier, Dubón says that the combination of work and study is crucial and effective to provide newcomers with more opportunities to practice and become proficient in Swedish.

These early successes made the Entry Hub model a viable solution for employers and refugees alike in Sweden. It wasn’t long before company requests started coming in.

Setting up shop

We Link Sweden opened their first physical Entry Hub location in Umeå in October 2017. Another will open in the Stockholm suburb of Botkyrka in early 2018.

Opening a physical location for Entry Hub provides a space for newcomers and employers to meet. It’s also a place where newcomers can quickly learn what they need to know about the job market, from workplace rights to workplace culture, and how to match their skills with existing opportunities.

In Umeå, collaboration with local partners happened rapidly. After only a few weeks from opening, ten people were hired by local small businesses in different sectors through the Entry Hub. Nine were newcomers/refugees, including 3 asylum seekers, the most difficult group to employ. Asylum seekers whose cases have not yet been determined in Sweden have permission to apply for jobs. However, it can be a risk for an employer. If the claim is rejected, asylum seekers will have to leave Sweden and the company loses their employee. However, if an asylum seeker can get a job, it can also positively impact their case.

We Link Sweden was excited to create a similar event with PostNord, Scandinavia’s biggest postal company. PostNord expressed interest in hiring part-time workers in early 2017 and partnered with We Link Sweden to hold a recruitment event. Given the specific needs of the employer, We Link Sweden decided to pre-filter job candidates using tools such as online psychometric self-assessments. This narrowed the pool of candidates to twenty-five newcomers who attended the event. Dubón says this approach was important: the self-assessment allowed newcomers to determine what they want to know about the job market, from workplace rights to workplace culture, and how to match their skills with existing opportunities.

In the Botkyrka suburb of Stockholm, the Entry Hub will hit the ground running with two companies that want to hire close to fifty newcomers.

Dubón says an Entry Hub model can be set up and active within three months in any city, in any country. His recipe for success is simple: map everyone’s needs, develop custom solutions to meet those needs, and coordinate everyone. Once you know your stakeholders and create solutions that meets their needs, Dubón says it becomes easy to put everything into practice quickly.

The Entry Hub model has illustrated the importance local hands-on collaboration and building a physical space where newcomers and employers can interact directly. It has also shown how building on a human capital, not deficiency, model is essential when working with refugees.

Other cities and Scandinavian countries agree. There is much interest to expand the Entry Hub model across Sweden. Norway and Denmark are following the model closely.
Refugee Day: Jobs and Opportunity

By ktturner
Municipal Refugee Portal

When Europe experienced an influx of refugees, the district of Kassel, like other German cities and regions, was tasked to receive some of them. In all almost 2700 refugees moved into the area. Immediate settlement was essential, but so too was long term integration and inclusion.

With the influx of refugees to the region, the District of Kassel created a local coordinating network of public, private and community groups. Their goal is to ensure that both the refugees receive needed support as well as to provide community members with a space to ask questions and address any local concerns about refugee integration. Project partners include the local community college, youth employment services and youth serving organizations, and health groups.

When employment emerged as a top priority for both refugee job-seekers and local businesses, the District partners recognized an opportunity to bring both sides of the equation together.

District authorities had long understood that North Hessian employers were looking for motivated workers but struggling to fill jobs and apprenticeships. Inspired by Germany’s Girls and Boys Day, Kassel’s Department of Social Affairs created Refugees’ Day on the same model to give refugee jobseekers a special opportunity to spend ‘one day’ working in a regional company. The path from refugee jobseeker to intern to fully-employed community member was swift.

A community effort

Refugees’ Day’s goal is to make connections between refugees and companies with hiring needs, moving from a one-day internship, to apprenticeship, to hiring the new community members. It takes place in the cities of Lohfelden, Kaufungen, and Hofgeismar. In its sixth year, 20 refugees recently tried out a variety of positions in different industries and sectors, from office to sales in areas ranging from handicrafts, hairstyling, and catering to automobiles, electrical and gardening.

To make the Day a success takes much planning, support and work. Working with their network of community, industry and government partners, the District of Kassel creates occupational profiles of interested refugees and then works with its network to identify and match them with employers.

By accessing funding from the European Union the District has been able to offer important supports to employers who already employ or intend to hire refugees. Support services are tailored to the needs of the employer. This can include addressing legal hurdles for employment, helping with of language problems, or special requirements due to different cultural experiences. Committed and interested employers make the difference in the training and integration of refugee workers.

Committed and interested employers make the difference

At Energy Glas GmbH (which produces energy efficient triple window panes) six Afghans, an Eritrean and a Somali work at the specialist for insulating glass, almost all as semi-skilled production workers, one as an intern. Almost half have been hired as permanent employees. “The refugees are motivated,” says Managing Director Hans Franke. “They receive the same pay as others.”

Franke is familiar with concerns of other employers when it comes to hiring refugees, but after hiring the refugees he doesn’t share them. His experience supports the importance of projects like Refugees’ Day, which brings newcomers and locals together to meet and get to know each other. As is typically the case, once employers meet refugees they become more than convinced of their potential as workers.

Building on success

Refugees’ Day has resulted in numerous internships and over 200 refugees finding work. Always evaluating how best to support both newcomers and employers, the District has piloted a more intensive support program. In June 2016, the pilot Project 15+5 was started. Project 15+5 provides young refugees with 15 months intensive learning and orientation and 5 months of on-the-job training or work experience.

The District found one of the biggest challenges facing the integration of refugees into local employment is a lack of German language proficiency. This is especially important for young refugees transitioning from school to employment. They often lack work experience and need confidence in their communication abilities.

Project 15+5 focuses on intensive language skills training as well as job orientation, and workplace preparation. Funded by the Hessian Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration (Hessischen Ministerium für Soziales und Integration) and the District of Kassel, the pilot is considered an important building block towards labour market integration for the refugee participants. Project 15+5 has four phases:

1. in-class language acquisition up to level A2 (of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment), provided by the local Community College + professional orientation;
2. in-class language acquisition up to level B1 + vocational preparation I (practice days in non-profit work areas supported by a local non-profit);
3. in-class language and educational upgrading (optional language & mathematics training) + vocational preparation II (including internships, work placement and work on Refugees’ Days);
4. On-the-job support in the start-up phase of training with an employer.
The project started in June 2016. With the support of the District’s local refugee support network, more than 20 apprentices recently started their training both in large companies and in small and medium sized businesses. They also participated in the recent Refugees’ Day in April 2018.

The District has also introduced a longer-term internship, to allow employers to observe a refugee’s abilities and skills over a period of six to twelve months in daily work. With this type of internship a company can better assess its performance and reduce potential concerns.

The District is also currently running a crowdfunding campaign to expand on their successes working with refugees and employers. With the additional money, the District plans to expand language courses for the refugees and provide support for job-related materials, such as workwear, transit tickets, and grants for specific skill qualifications, such as driver and forklift licences.

Collaboration

Helping the refugees living in the District of Kassel find employment and training is not achievable without local community and government actors becoming involved and offering their support.

The District found willing partners among the Chamber of Skilled Trades Kassel (Handwerkskammer Kassel) which was looking for suitable jobs for refugees and supporting employers. The Education Consultant of the Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Industrie- und Handelskammer Kassel-Marburg) helps with education planning and supports for refugees. The Education Coordinator for Newcomers examines educational requirements, sees what is missing and works to develop qualification modules for refugees. The Volkshochschule Kassel (VHS – Community College) supports the project with experience and creative educational ideas and plays a coordinating role with local partners. Funding comes from the Federal Ministry of Labour.

Refugees’ Day partners are aware that not all problems of the labour market in the region can be solved through hiring refugee. However, they have targeted particular sectors that appear to be a fit, especially in the field of logistics, crafts, food/restaurants and the construction industry. In these sectors the employment and training of refugees plays an increasingly important role.

So far the partners have helped find employment for more than 200 refugees. This initial success is an example of what can come out of companies, government and community partners working to support both refugees and the local economy.
**A Rising Phoenix in St. James Town**

By Evelyn

May 31, 2018

*Living Together, Spatial Inclusion*

Soaring above a busy intersection, this community-led art initiative transformed a 32 story modernist social housing high-rise into a vertical canvas for the world's tallest mural. An enormous bird flies up the side of the building towards the sky. Emblematic of a phoenix rising from the ashes, the design includes a subtle reference to the six-alarm fire in 2010 that forced out over a thousand residents. The award-winning mural by [artist Sean Martindale](https://www.seanmartindale.com) represents the new, more vibrant outlook the project hopes to bring to the building and surrounding area in one of Toronto's most densely populated neighbourhoods: "We wanted to bring something more positive to the neighbourhood. The youth were saying that the neighbourhood needed more colour, and they wanted to show that there are positive things happening here."

The mural and phoenix design weaves themes of diversity, accessibility, safety, happiness and other aspects of local culture into its story of community transformation. It is the result of over a year of engagement with St. James Town youth and hundreds of local community members working with the City of Toronto’s StreetART Program in partnership with the St. James Town Community Corner and Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

Over forty St. James Town youth worked with eight artists to explore their community and decide how and where public art could make a difference. After numerous consultations with St. James Town residents, the group finally settled on the mural and phoenix design – the scale and success of what would become the highest mural in the city, and possibly in the world, has surprised everyone.

"Beautification of our public spaces is an essential component of building and maintaining healthy communities," said Councillor Pam McConnell (Ward 28, Toronto Centre – Rosedale). "This spectacular mural is a shining example of the resiliency and creativity of the young people of St. James Town, and stands as a beacon of pride in their community on display for all of Toronto to enjoy."

**Community well-being**

Another mural project in Toronto’s St. Lawrence Neighbourhood illustrates how a public art project can help a community heal. The area features a large population of newcomers and racialized people who reside in social housing buildings. It has experienced tension between police and Black youths: for example, in 2014 a cherished basketball court was accidentally destroyed by a police cruiser during a chase. It was later repaired through a private donation, but importantly, a mural wall was also created in a partnership between police and youth. The mural celebrates local history and the values of love, peace, diversity, nature and teamwork.

Building community resilience requires mutual support from various stakeholders, and public arts planning can be an effective way to form partnership, create common ground and build social bonds among stakeholders.

For more on Planning for Diversity, Inclusion and Urban Resilience in Toronto, read the Building Inclusive Cities case study.
Taking the Plunge

By Evelyn

Cultural Inclusion, Health Inclusion, Municipal Plan, Spatial Inclusion

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre is a modernist gem on the eastern edge of the Regent Park revitalization project. Completed in 2012, the multi-purpose swimming pool is the first facility in Canada to adopt the use of universal changerooms, no longer separating males and females in favour of common changerooms with private change cubicles. This progressive design feature addresses cultural and gender identity issues, creating an inclusive environment that enhances openness, safety, and accessibility for all. The Centre offers a new level of accommodation with the addition of a complete system of aquatics hall screening for those cultural groups interested in privacy swims. The Centre typifies the legacy commitments of the Regent Park revitalization program and provides an important civic amenity to a once marginalized neighbourhood.

Regent Park is Canada’s oldest and largest social housing project. Built as planned community in the late 1940’s, its affordability and central location made it an immigrant settlement community. During the 1990s, declining physical and social conditions contributed to the concentration of a socially marginalized population, over 70% of which live below Canada’s poverty line. 41% are under 18. What was a model community became one the city’s roughest neighbourhood.

Today a $1bn 12 year revitalization project has transformed Regent Park into a mix of subsidized housing, condos, retail shops and community amenities that attracts global attention as a socio-economic experiment in public-private gentrification.

For more on Planning for Diversity, Inclusion and Urban Resilience in Toronto, read the Building Inclusive Cities case study.
The People’s Planning Panel, as described in the text, aims to improve public engagement by capturing input from a broader segment of the population that can help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. Created to complement, not replace, other methods of public consultation, the city was nevertheless aware that traditional methods don’t always ensure Toronto’s many diverse communities are equally represented.

The Panel began in 2015 with 28 members selected via Civic Lottery to serve a 2-year voluntary term. The selection process seeks a balance of gender, age, visible minority, home renters vs. homeowners, geographic location, and always ensures at least one member of Aboriginal descent. Designed to introduce new voices into the planning process, members gain access to city planners, independent experts, and stakeholders over the course of sixteen day-long meetings during which they learn about the planning process and improve public engagement by offering their perspectives to the Planning Department. Planning issues discussed at the panel include a wide range of city-building topics including transportation, housing, density, heritage, public art, and community amenities.

In the spirit of validating their contributions, the panel is referenced in official staff reports to city council, and the panel’s reports are publicly accessible online. This equity-based civic engagement approach brings people into the centre of city-building, which is an important component of shaping a more inclusive city.
When Vikas Kohli noticed emerging cultural communities were becoming disconnected from their city he created a new festival celebrating them. Along the way he built new opportunities for diverse artists in the creative economy.

Located in the western arc of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the Region of Peel includes two of Canada’s fastest growing municipalities: Mississauga and Brampton. People from over 200 different ethnic origins, speaking more than 70 different languages call Peel Region their home. And within this highly diverse and multicultural region, just over half the population report belonging to the South Asian visible minority group (50.8%).

It comes as no surprise then that the Region of Peel is host to Canada’s largest South Asian festival. Launched in 2011, #BollywoodMonster Mashup brings arts, culture and diversity together in a new and exciting way.

But that success had a rocky start. Fueled by immigration, Peel Region experienced rapid growth and demographic change over over the last two decades. No longer a sleepy suburban town, the City of Brampton’s ‘visible minorities’ are now the majority, with South Asians representing the predominant cultural community across the region. Local government was initially slow to recognize and incorporate its growing diversity into the political process and municipal decision-making.

Enter Vikas Kohli, an award-winning film composer and music producer, with a finance background and deep connections to the Bollywood creative community. In 2010, Kohli was invited to sit on the City of Mississauga’s Grants Committee. Kohli quickly noticed a resource allocation problem. Older cultural groups whose populations were in decline were still receiving large community grants from the city. Newer, growing cultural groups were not getting their fair share of the funding pie. As a result, the City was rapidly becoming disconnected from its constituents. When Kohli pointed it out, the City asked him if he had any ideas.

#BollywoodMonster Mashup

Starting with an evening event attached to another festival in 2011, Kohli launched an annual celebration that has grown to have a huge local impact.

Kohli says that even though the festival initially focused on the large South Asian population in Mississauga, he never wanted to create an event with cultural silos. “We were going to make sure that all the acts were cross-cultural. The dancers would not all be South Asian, but include dancers from other backgrounds. And we would mix genres. Same thing musically.”

He wanted to avoid isolating emerging cultural communities “where South Asians performed only to South Asians. To me that wasn’t going to help the problem of getting everyone to integrate. Music and art and dance are great ways to get people to get along without preaching to them about multiculturalism.”

Within Peel Region’s diverse communities “it was all about taking what were considered minority and fringe groups and placing them in the centre with everyone else.”

Creating access to the creative economy

#BollywoodMonster Mashup has grown to a multi-day, multi-media program, including music, visual arts art, comedy, spoken word, film and more. Along with way, Kohli worked hard to identify opportunities for the changing and diverse community to adapt, integrate and grow within the region’s creative economy.

In 2018, a Ontario Government Policy Dialogue held in Toronto asked the question, “How can we address barriers to better economic outcomes and harness the opportunity for broader economic growth presented by immigrants in the creative industries, arts and culture sectors?”

Kohli has been answering that question since 2011, when he created MonstrARTity Creative Community, and the Monster Creative Collective. The nonprofit’s projects have grown to create a pipeline for talent to incubate and grow locally. MonstrARTity brings the celebration into the classroom, supports new artists and voices through access and mentorship, creating a cycle of access and opportunity for diverse and newcomer talent.

The #MonsterArts for Youth program brings professional artists into local schools to teach kids South Asian arts in free workshops. Why not introduce kids to how awesome other cultures can be as early in their lives as possible? Workshops have been provided for over 150,000 students in Peel Region and have recently been offered to schools in the municipality of Markham, north of Toronto.

Tools for success in the creative economy
The #MonsterArtist Development program gives local artists the tools they need to succeed in a career in the creative economy. To develop emerging artists’ business skills, seasoned artists and music industry experts are on hand to support and mentor program participants. Kohli says #MonsterArtist has created a cycle that supports #BollywoodMonster: #MonsterArtists perform in the festival and then go into the school system to cultivate new talent and inspire youth through #MonsterArts.

#MonsterWorld Mashup

started as the Monster Rock Orchestra, a smaller event in neighbouring Brampton. Kohli says that they identified interest in Brampton in making space for a cultural event that didn’t exist in the community. People wanted something unique for the city. Now a yearly event, #MonsterWorld brings multi-disciplinary programming to the heart of downtown Brampton.

#MonsterSuccess

Kohli says that while cultural silos within the South Asian community still exist, #BollywoodMonster Mashup is bringing a greater diversity of cultural communities together, including underrepresented groups in the area. For Kohli, this is where the mashup idea really comes to life.

In one case, the Bollywood Monster Choir, a traditional European choir, took on the challenge to sing in 4 different Indian dialects. In another, classically trained traditional Chinese musicians performed popular Bollywood songs with Indian singers.

#BollywoodMonster brings a shared love of Bollywood to the entire community, with a mashup of performers on stage celebrating that love.

Reflecting audiences on stage

With a diverse community Kohli says it was important for people on stage reflect the audiences they’re performing to. “It changes the whole feel of the show, because when we put on the show the people on stage look exactly like the people in the audience and that’s key for us. We create projects to actively integrate different segments of the community into the festival. It’s very important for us to not be preachy. We don’t talk about multiculturalism, cultural silos, or integration. We think, what would be really cool to see? It would be cool to see a sixty-voice European-style choir singing Bollywood songs.

We like to think about what are people not expecting to see. Just by doing that, it opens up the possibilities in people’s minds. The audience sees very interesting, cool performances done by professional artists. We want to show people it’s OK to like Indian music and Chinese music and Latin music, just like they like those cultures’ food. We’re taking them to our restaurant and saying, here’s our fusion dish of Chinese and Indian musicians, enjoy.”
Jobs, SMEs and Refugees at Volkswagen

By Evelyn

Employment Inclusion-Entrepreneurship Inclusion New Gateways

In German, Volkswagen stands for “car of the people”. In the city of Wolfsburg, where the company has its headquarters, this couldn’t be more true: Volkswagen has become the center of the city’s economic life. Many companies and businesses, from family-owned automotive component suppliers to the farms producing meat for the “Volkswagen currywurst,” are in some way connected to Volkswagen.

So, when these small and medium size companies (SMEs) were faced with daunting skills gaps and the city’s refugee population was struggling to find employment, Volkswagen was motivated to step in.

Multi-sector partnerships

In 2016, the company started a collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce and the local office of the Federal Employment Agency, which provides job training and placements in communities across Germany, to connect unemployed refugees with businesses in Wolfsburg who were searching for new employees and offering apprenticeship positions.

The core of Volkswagen’s refugee assistance programs focus on helping train refugees in language proficiency and skills so they can compete in the German job market. The goal for all of Volkswagen’s refugee programs is to prepare refugees to enter the workforce through traditional pathways, rather than through specialized programs. While there was initial excitement among local companies to hire refugees immediately, most had to take a step back and strategize how to adapt their current national training programs to be inclusive of refugees.

From the beginning, it was clear that Federal language classes were not enough – speaking in class for 2 to 3 hours, then returning home to a non-German speaking environment meant that most of what refugees were learning in class was quickly forgotten. In addition, the sudden influx of refugees in 2015 overwhelmed the system, and the government struggled to respond quickly. So Volkswagen took a leading role. The started by supporting the government programs where they needed help most: “We financed language classes because there were not enough state teachers and language proficiency is one of the main pre-requisite requirements for those applying to work or study in a German university. Waiting around for over six months with nothing to do, especially after coming from traumatic backgrounds, is especially difficult for the refugees, so we thought we could intervene there first,” explained Ms. Krautz, a member of the Corporate Social Responsibility team at Volkswagen. Importantly, Volkswagen recognized the value of integrating language with work training, so the company supported the development of language classes and pre-qualification workshops to help prospective refugee employees “catch-up” with locals. Focused especially on current students and young adults, the targeted programs helped refugees prepare for the traineeship programs that are mandatory to complete to enter certain professions in Germany. To date, over 2,600 refugees have direct classes from Volkswagen.

Ms. Krautz explained that small and medium enterprises (SMEs), both in Volkswagen’s value chain and externally, have particular difficulty finding employees and would benefit from a refugee hiring pool, as opposed to larger companies which are able to attract internationally trained workers to Germany. “Finding good people is good for our business, so we looked for where those gaps were, where people were most needed, and started to train them to access jobs, even outside of the ‘Wolfswagen’ Group,” stated Ms. Krautz. Soon they were connecting refugees to employment in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in their supply chains by empowering them with the skill sets needed, as well as providing the financial assistance to complete the qualifications necessary for the job, which typically, smaller companies cannot afford to finance alone.

Considering the impact of Volkswagen on the city of Wolfsburg, and how closely its supply chain is connected to the economic well-being of the city, addressing SME skill gaps locally may help Volkswagen close the labour gaps in its supply chain in the long-term. While the core of the company’s efforts lay in filling local employment gaps in Wolfsburg, the success of these initiatives is travelling throughout its entire supply chain.

Important City Stakeholder

Beyond assisting refugees with direct employment services, Volkswagen recognized the important role it could play at the city level, assisting with other aspects of refugee settlement. This initial engagement took shape in a program called Refugee Aid, which offered Volkswagen employees opportunities to volunteer to address specific refugee needs in the community, with the added benefit of creating an employee engagement program that strengthened the companies’ ties to the community. The most pressing concern was managing the administration of the large influx of refugees to local housing and assistance centers. Through its employee participation programs, Volkswagen was able to provide software engineers to help develop and implement IT systems to support more effective registration and tracking of refugees. With this information, Volkswagen volunteers were able to develop programs to address the populations concerns, such as the translation of CVs into the German labor market context and mentoring refugee youth interested in attending German universities.

In addition to leveraging its own employee base, Volkswagen found other ways to utilize its resources to support refugees. In the summer of 2016, the refugee housing facility located close to company headquarters had received over 1,000 refugees but did not yet have a functional kitchen. So, Volkswagen responded by providing cooked meals for over 1,000 people during the 4 days the kitchen was under construction. Volkswagen reached into its own automobile inventory, lending out company cars out to help refugees traveling to doctor’s appointments, government appointments or transporting materials and supplies. Through partnering directly with NGOs, and understanding the most immediate needs, Volkswagen could respond quickly and use resources the company had readily available.

Youth, an investment in the future

Through its commitment to supporting refugees in the community, Volkswagen recognized the need to invest specifically in refugee youth. Germany’s rigid education system, divided into 3 ‘levels’ based on student performance, can negatively affects migrant and refugee children who have experienced interruptions in their schooling, or different curriculum. The level at which the student can progress determines whether they can apply for university degrees, so it is especially important for newcomers to be coached
throughout the process. The union at Volkswagen has a foundation that initiated a 2.5-million euro program in 2015 in Wolfsburg for school-age refugee children that provides additional teachers to public schools sometimes overwhelmed by the sudden influx of school-age children in their classrooms. The fund also provided social workers to monitor refugee children’s experiences of trauma and dislocation and assist them throughout the healing process.

Advice to other companies

By directly providing the training and connections to SMEs in their supply chains, large companies can support the Volkswagen model of refugee assistance without direct involvement. This model is particularly replicable in companies operating in multiple countries where they control their supply chains, and in this way demonstrate a socially responsible footprint.

Source: Reprinted from Hire Immigrants website
As a majority-minority city, Leicester is a city in which no single ethnic community comprises a majority of the city’s 300,000 residents. The share of residents who self-identify as “White British” is 45%. Whereas migration from former British colonies accounts in large part for Leicester’s diverse population, more recent arrivals have come from war-torn and crisis-ridden countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia.

Indians from Uganda head for Leicester

Leicester’s largest group of residents with a migration background have Asian roots, primarily from India. However, Leicester’s residents with Indian roots did not arrive directly from India, but rather by way of Uganda in East Africa. As subjects of British colonial rule, they came to Uganda and helped drive economic development in the country until Ugandan dictator Idi Amin forced them out in the early 1970s.

There is irony in the story behind Leicester becoming Ugandan Asians’ destination of choice within the UK. After the first wave of Ugandan Asian emigrants had arrived in Leicester, the city responded by placing an ad in the Ugandan newspaper Uganda Argus which was meant to send the message that Leicester was crowded and living conditions were poor. The goal was to discourage further immigration. However, the announcement had the exact opposite effect, drawing instead considerable attention to a city that would have otherwise been overlooked by the Ugandan Asians. "The ad was gloriously counterproductive," jokes Leicester Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby today.

Diwali festivities in Leicester

What at first seemed to be an undesired outcome has since proven to be a blessing for the city. As experienced entrepreneurs eager to invest, Leicester’s Ugandan Indian immigrants helped boost the city’s beleaguered post-industrial economy. Today, Indian cuisine and other Indian cultural institutions are woven into the fabric of the city’s identity. This is vividly apparent in October each year during the “Diwali” celebration of Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights, which is celebrated not only by Hindus but the city as a whole. Wishes of “Happy Diwali” at this time of year are as common as “Merry Christmas” in December, and shops throughout the city feature both special Diwali offers and seasonal Christmas sales.

Embracing cultural differences

However, Leicester’s Indian immigrants from Uganda are no longer the only source of cultural diversity in the city. This is most plain to see along England’s most diverse street — Narborough Road in southwest Leicester, where the city’s immigrants have opened their shops, cafes and restaurants offering specialties from around the world. The city’s diversity can also be seen in the fact that Christian churches, Hindu temples and Muslim mosques stand side-by-side. But Leicester also features several buildings and monuments that testify to the city’s history as one of the oldest in England, such as the Guildhall and the tomb of King Richard III in Leicester Cathedral.

Statue of King Richard III

As the location of King Richard III’s final resting place, Leicester honors the spirit of English medieval history. The remains of the monarch, who was killed in 1485 during the Battle of Bosworth Field, were found by archaeologists during an excavation under a parking lot and reburied in Leicester Cathedral.

How has the city managed to interweave the multiple legacies of English history, the impact of the colonial era and current developments resulting from globalization? A cornerstone of the city’s approach to diversity has been to accept the fact that culture “is an indispensable tool of human life” (Reinhard Mohn) and that people need to be able to express their cultural and religious identities openly. In Leicester, clear ties to a specific cultural or religious community are not perceived as a threat to the cohesion of the broader community as a whole. On the contrary: The city has implemented policies that create opportunities for everyone to practice their cultural or religious identity, which promotes loyalty to the city of Leicester as a community and fosters mutual acceptance among equals.

Intercultural dialogue in a context of globalization

As the differences inherent to a context of diversity are always at risk of generating misunderstanding, stereotypes and conflicts, Leicester has taken several measures to actively cultivate respect across communities treated as equals that live in peace together. This includes, for example, the City Mayor’s Faith & Community Forum, where the mayor meets on a regular basis with representatives from Leicester’s religious and non-religious communities. The city also sponsors a variety of other forums promoting dialogue between the city’s diverse communities and city government, the police, local schools and the media. One such forum involves the local daily, the Leicester Mercury, as an adviser to the Leicester Multicultural Advisory Group, which emphasizes informed and balanced reporting as a means of advancing informed understanding and knowledge of Leicester’s culturally diverse residents.

Councillor Manjula Sood is one of the city’s Ugandan Indian immigrants and acts today as a leader in fostering dialogue between the city and its civil society. In the photo above, she meets with Michael Lewis, member of the board of trustees of the Waterfront Sports & Education Academy.

Thanks to its Community Cohesion Strategy, Leicester has successfully transformed the city into a place where living in cultural diversity is a success. According to Professor Ted Cantle, a leading expert for intercultural relations and social cohesion in the UK, the city’s next step involves adapting the community-oriented strategy to the current challenges posed by globalization. Indeed, now – more than ever before – cultural identities elude one-dimensional definitions. Constantly exposed to a variety of influences and subject to ongoing change, modern cultural identities have become increasingly complex and multi-dimensional.

Source: Reprinted with permission from the Bertelsmann Stiftung website:

“As part of the 2018 Reinhard Mohn Prize and in the tradition of Reinhard Mohn’s vision of learning from the world, the Bertelsmann Foundation is searching the globe for urban settings where living together in cultural diversity is a proven success. The United Kingdom has considerable experience with multiculturalism and a long tradition of embracing diversity. In the City of Leicester, in the English Midlands, we found one of the UK’s most diverse cities. With its Community Cohesion Strategy targeting a “community of communities,” the city has taken a proactive approach to fostering good relations between the various cultural and religious communities that call Leicester home.” – from The Bertelsmann Foundation website.
“It does not make sense that persons are left in the streets of Barcelona by the State without any document, jeopardizing their future and the cohesion of the city. Every body should at least have a temporary resident permit.” Former Mayor of Barcelona, Xavier Trias

In 2015, the city of Barcelona officially implemented the policy behind this sentiment. The city encouraged all undocumented residents to sign up for the municipal register, and provided free access to the public health system.

Registering gives irregular migrants the status of Neighbour. They gain access to all local services, including sports, public facilities, libraries, schools, free language, emergency social services and health. Among the measures Barcelona already had in place were funding for free legal support to migrants for regularizing their status, provided through NGOs that also ensure distribution of information: on how to obtain a health card, for instance, and access to the health system. Advice is also provided on recognition of qualifications and accessing the job market.

The municipal register, known as padrón, enables all residents, whatever their status, to have access to all local services and to the public health system provided by the Catalán Region. Even residents who have difficulty demonstrating where they live, or have no fixed address, are eligible to register. In order to create trust with irregular migrants, the register is protected. Police access is restricted. The register gives the city more accurate data about residents to help plan services accordingly.

The city has gone further. In 2017 Barcelona published a comprehensive Action Plan to address the social condition of irregular migrants in the city. Its first goal is to ensure universal access to municipal public services. The Plan reinforced the importance of registration in the local padrón. Barcelona created a service hub for migrants, open to all, including refugees and asylum-seekers. Services include free legal advice, city orientation, and help with emergencies. A network of 120 community service organizations and non-profits collaborate with the city to deliver information and services to the migrants.

Awareness among migrants and local service providers is important. The Action Plan includes a leaflet in seven languages on the importance of the register; and establishes information sessions for service professionals whose job brings them into contact with irregular migrants.

Accountability is also important. Barcelona has posted posters in hospital emergency rooms informing the public that everyone has the right to free emergency room services, and that no one should be billed for care. A local committee examines specific cases where individuals are inappropriately billed.

Jaume Asens, Barcelona Deputy Mayor on Citizenship, Participation and Transparency, recently outlined the case behind regularization in the city: “Barcelona is very committed to grant access to public health services to all citizens, especially those residents with an irregular status. Barcelona will protect all our neighbours including those that happen to be in an irregular situation, because above all, they are our citizens and neighbours, and deserve protection as human beings. Our aim is to facilitate regularization as the right path to integration.”

Because irregular migrants were typically unable to access city services and employment, both their financial and housing situations were precarious. Barcelona saw the growth of “settlements”: occupation of spaces in factories or abandoned buildings. They were typically poor housing structures, such as shacks, caravans, or lorries maintained over time and used as a place of continuous residence by groups of people, including families. City officials regarded this occupation or overcrowding a health hazard.

The city created the Office of the Irregular Settlement Plan (OPAI) to manage the phenomenon of settlements in the city, offering alternatives to the vulnerable people living in them. The goal was to give them decent living conditions and fight against social exclusion, irrespective of their origins and legal status. OPAI coordinated the work of city and community partners to address the precarious housing situation among migrants.

As a result of their efforts, migrants in the city’s largest settlement, Calle Puigcerdá, were moved to permanent accommodation. They were also provided with legal advice, skills training, literacy and language courses, and job placement help. Overall, the number of people living in settlements in Barcelona decreased by almost 40%.

Barcelona created a committee to monitor irregular migrants’ access to services, to assess the effectiveness of their Action Plan. A goal is to influence the adoption of inclusive policies at the national and EU level.

Barcelona’s Action Plan makes it clear that the city is taking the lead. But it is not alone. In 2014, Barcelona hosted the first Mayoral Forum on Migration, Mobility and Development. Mayors adopted the Barcelona Declaration, calling on authorities to provide the same rights, duties and opportunities to everyone residing in their territory, including irregular migrants: “The clear message that this Forum conveyed was the need to persuade central Governments and international organizations that they must listen to what cities have to say. Cities must be included in decision-making processes. They are the engines of migration and the ones who manage a great deal of its impact; so they know the complexity of the situation better than anyone. In a multilevel governance situation, cities must take the lead on governing migration and mobility.”
The provision of shelter to destitute irregular migrants in the Dutch city of Utrecht led to a heated national debate on the city’s right to provide ‘Bed, Bath and Bread’. However, the impact of street homelessness including the vulnerability of families and young people on the street had to be addressed.

Working through local NGOs, the City of Utrecht provides shelter and access to medical care, including funds to support dental and pharmacare. Safe spaces and trusted community partners make it easier to address underlying issues of irregular status, such as how to secure a legal residence permit, or assistance with returning home. Services also support mediation with national immigration authorities. In their first ten years, Utrecht found solutions in 94% of cases in the form of a residence permit, voluntary return or restoration of the right to care within the federal asylum system.

Utrecht became one of Europe’s first ‘Human Rights City’ in 2013 when it adopted the universal standard in honour of the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Utrecht. That ethos informs the city’s position on providing shelter in face of government opposition. However, the pragmatic need to tackle street homelessness and the social problems to which it gives rise is the driving force. Today Utrecht and other Dutch municipalities are in constructive talks with the national government to find a joint solution to homelessness, whatever the resident status.

*Full Good Idea Coming soon!*
Every Person’s Health

By kturner

Health Inclusion

Being ‘undocumented’ often means being excluded from access to medical care and healthcare systems. For irregular migrants, fear of being identified, arrested or deported can be life threatening in an emergency situation, when disease or infirmity goes untreated, or is treated too late. In recognition of the increasing reality of this humanitarian catastrophe in the making, a growing number of cities are developing strategies to ensure the medical officer’s ‘duty of care’ can be legally and responsibly extended to all residents.

Since 2001, the city of Frankfurt’s Health Dept. and Women’s Dept. have collaborated with a local NGO to provide medical consultation and treatment through a clinic offering ‘Humanitarian Consultation Hours’ (Humanitäre Sprechstunde). Care is provided anonymously (to men and women) and without charge except where patients are able to pay. Language support is available for non-German speakers, and special hours are set aside for children’s healthcare needs.

The ‘Frankfurt Model’ has been influential in other German cities such as Bremen, Düsseldorf and Munich. New initiatives like the “anonymous health card” are being piloted nationally, and the German Medical Association has published guidance for medical practitioners on treating “Patients without Legal Residence Status in Hospitals and Practices” that addresses sensitive issues of medical confidentiality vis-à-vis the social welfare offices and immigration authorities, and reimbursement.

*Full Good Idea Coming soon!*
How do you build confident and motivated students and an inclusive school environment? The answer is to acknowledge and celebrate the cultures, languages and life stories students bring with them, says Barb Drake, who for the seventeenth year running, has organized Palmerston North Intermediate Normal School’s, First Voice initiative.

In a packed school hall in Palmerston North in New Zealand under the glare of the stage lights, Saim Ahmed, age 12, expertly bowls a tennis ball towards the batsman.

New Zealand and Pakistan remember the 1992 Cricket World Cup for very different reasons. New Zealand, the favourite, remembers being eliminated in a semi-final. Pakistan, which lost four of its first five matches, remembers winning the Cup.

Saim, playing the part of Pakistan’s captain Imran Khan, is reenacting the moment of Pakistan’s victory in the final against England.

Imran Khan is the famous person Saim Ahmed and his fellow Pakistani-background students have chosen to talk about at this year’s Multicultural Assembly.

For 17 years, the annual Multicultural Assembly has been a highlight of the school’s calendar. It marks the publication of the First Voice booklet, which features stories written by the students in the languages they speak at home with their families.

Palmerston North is a provincial city of around 80,000 people in the lower half of New Zealand’s North Island. Historically a farming service town, it is now the country’s seventh largest city, home to one of New Zealand’s eight universities, a number of research institutions, a major hospital and a military camp.

It is a city in the midst of demographic change. According to medium growth projections, by 2043 the city will have added 17,200 people to the population it had in 2013. There will be more jobs, income levels will be higher, and the population will, on average, be slightly older. But the most dramatic change will be in the ethnic mix.

By 2038, according to the projections, the Pacific community will have increased from 3,870 people in 2013 to 8,410, with Pasifika people making up 8.7 per cent of the city’s population. The Asian population will have climbed by 7,950 people, making up 17 per cent of the city’s population. The Maori population will have risen by 10,500, accounting for 25.6 per cent of the city’s population. Meanwhile, the ‘European and other’ category will have fallen from 79.9 per cent to 69.7 per cent of the population.

But you do not have to wait for time to go by to see the new Palmerston North emerging. Teachers like Barb see the evidence everyday.

In 2016, around half of the students on the Palmerston North school roll were European Pakeha (non-Maori), with the other half made up of 27 per cent Maori, 5 per cent Pacific Island and 9 per cent Asian.

Global voices, global heroes

Each year the stories in the First Voice publication have a different theme. In 2017 it is ‘Famous People’. The 57 stories in 22 languages cover people most New Zealanders know – Gandhi, Alexander the Great, Jackie Chan – and many they would not.

Rumaan from Pakistan writes in Urdu in Perso-Arabic script. Chamasha from Sri Lanka writes in Sinhalese, which has its own intricately curved alphabet. Emma from China writes in Mandarin using Chinese characters.

For as many as half of the children, the experience of writing in their first language will be new: these are languages they speak, not write. However, they have had help.

When writing their stories, each child works with a migrant mentor.

Together, the student and the mentor write a first draft, which the student then carefully copies and illustrates for publication. It is a time of intense heads-down concentration as they make sure everything is perfect, says Barb Drake, who heads the programme. “You can hear a pin drop.”

Barb, who is a trained primary school teacher, began teaching English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) when approached by a friend who was teaching at her daughter’s school.

“My friend said ‘I have five children that don’t speak English, can you come and help me?’,” says Barb.

For three years Barb taught ESOL part time, “and I just loved it”, before moving to another part-time job with Palmerston North Intermediate Normal School and taking part in the first-ever First Voice in 2000.
Multicultural and multilingual

Palmerston North Intermediate Normal School is highly multicultural and multilingual and very proud to be so.

Collectively, the school’s current roll of approximately 700 students speaks around 36 different languages, and Barbara estimates that there are around 138 children who don’t speak English at home. Which of the non-English languages are most spoken varies year to year. This year the larger part of the 138 students speak Mandarin or Cantonese, she says, but Urdu and Arabic are also well represented.

A few steps away from the school’s reception area there is a language board with the names and photographs of students under the headings of their first languages.

From the moment of their arrival, PNINS wants new students to feel safe, supported and valued, says Barb. The language board is part of this: a place where new students can identify other people who share their language and cultural background.

Most of Barb’s ESOL students are educated and have at least a little preparation in English. But she also sees students with limited schooling who have little or no knowledge of English at all.

New students also see the school’s inclusive culture at work at the weekly Monday-morning school assembly.

“We have two children who stand up and announce the name of the week’s country. This week it is Fiji; next week it’s the Netherlands. And when we ask a question about the country all of the children’s hands go up.”

Success


Barb has seen how well her students do in later life, achieving academic and professional success. She has seen the how First Voice connects the school with the children’s families and the wider migrant community.

“Every grandparent’s and parent’s dream is for their child to be able to speak and write in their language,” says Barb.

The mentors for First Voice also treasure the experience. “I get the warm fuzzies when I see my children interacting with these adults, there is so much laughter and fun.” says Barb.

Sometimes mentoring leads to other things. A Thai international student who mentored a student and missed Thai food found himself invited to a series of Sunday dinners by the student’s family. Another mentor became a teacher’s aide.

Palmerston North City Library supports First Voice, hosting the workshop where the mentors and students work together, presenting each student with a copy of the finished publication at the school’s multicultural assembly, and holding a public exhibition of the children’s work, which in 2017 featured video interviews.

“I really appreciate the generous long-term support of the Palmerston North City Library and the Manawatu Multicultural Centre,” says Barb. “First Voice is an expression of the values of the Palmerston North community.”

Palmerston North is a pilot community in New Zealand’s Welcoming Community initiative.
What the Volk?! The NiCeR Project

By Evelyn
March 27, 2018
Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Social Inclusion

In 2015, more than a million refugees arrived in Europe, fleeing war, terrorism, poverty, hunger, searching for safety and a better life. Among them were many refugee youth. Organizations in seven European cities, working with professional artists and coaches, responded with a flexible performing arts training project designed to bring young refugees and local youth together. Called the NiCeR Project (Nouvelle approche pour renforcer l’Intégration Culturelle des jeunes Réfugiés) the idea, says Tamara Hadas Garcia, Fundación Juventud y Cultura in Seville, Spain, was to use the tool of the performing arts to foster interaction and build relationship between refugee and local youth, develop their creative skills as well as strengthen youth participation in cultural and social life at the local level.

The European partners decided on a common, cross-cutting project theme: identity. Each local organization would interpret the theme in its own way, working with groups of fifteen refugee and fifteen local youth.

Collaborative and inclusive theatre

Citizens for Europe, a Berlin based NGO and social enterprise that seeks a more participatory and inclusive society, partnered with Jugendtheater Büro / Theater X, a collaborative “CommUNITY-Theater” in the district of Moabit. Theater X is the only theater company in Germany that is collectively co-managed by adults and young people. In recent years it has become an important centre for new approaches at the boundaries of self-organized and collective art production, as well as cultural and political education.

To get the project started, recalls Séverine Lenglet, Citizens for Europe’s Media and Communications Officer, organizers connected with local settlement agencies and schools to identify and bring together neighbourhood youth aged 15 to 25 for informal breakfast sessions over a couple of Saturday mornings to introduce the project concept: “Potential participants had the chance to try out a theatre workshop session, get to know each other through games and icebreakers, and become familiar with the setting and the staff.” Later, a core group of thirty young people continued on to theatre and drama training workshops followed by a session that focused on the dramaturgy.

Gaining the youth group’s trust was a critical part of the participatory approach and co-creation journey. As Lenglet observes, issues of trust also shaped the decision not ask participating youth for proof of their refugee status: “We could not act like the administration or police asking them for their identity, and putting them through one-to-one interviews that can create a feeling of discomfort at any age – and not at this stage of the project, notably within the refugee group, where it might recall previous traumatic experiences.”

Furthermore, says Lenglet, given that the focus of the production was on identity, it was important not to label the young people as “refugees” but to acknowledge the fullness of their individual identities. The solution? “Newcomer” was used when helpful to distinguish refugee youth from their locally-born peers – but mostly the idea was to avoid labels altogether.

Culture, language and intercultural competence

All partner cities in the NiCeR Project recruited youth participants in the Fall of 2016 with the goal of delivering a youth-led project. Co-funded by the European Union, performing arts projects with (not ‘for’) youth were organized in seven cities:

- Molenbeek, Belgium
- Liverpool, England
- Nicosia, Cyprus
- Rome, Italy
- Timisoara, Romania
- Seville, Spain
- Berlin, Germany

The project was developed in three phases: exploration; performing arts skills development; and finally, performance. During the first few weeks, project leaders used a variety of participatory processes to explore the interests of the youth group while focusing on team building. As Lenglet says “the group dimension was essential.”

Theatre workshops as well as sessions on cross-cultural and language training were organized in early 2017. Cultural diversity was a key element of the production and at the heart of the project itself. The language learning process was integrated into informal city-wide activities for all 30 youth, such as visits to exhibitions, shows, tours around the city and so on. The young people who already spoke German supported, translated, and helped the newcomers, accompanying them towards their common goal. In some cities, newcomer participants were encouraged to bring their own traditional music and translate it for the locals.

Soon participants were exploring acting, singing, dancing and the theatre space itself to help them determine what they were most interested in. They were also encouraged to identify the backstage roles needed to create the production. Building relationships among the youth and theatre educators was essential to the co-creation and production process.

Multiple identities

copyright Davide Bergamini
Through a process of dialogue and facilitated discussion, participants explored the identity theme and its different meanings. The Berlin group decided to divide the identity theme into three sub-topics: nation, culture, and language. The youth were interested in looking beyond issues of personal identity to what identity might mean in the broader context of national narrative.

Over the two first workshops, the layered and expressive possibilities of a single German word captured the group’s imagination: how the concept of ‘Volk’ [people] and ‘Nation’ overlap in German, and have come to embody both positive and negative messages. ‘Volk’ as an expression of the collectivity, or nationhood (“we, the people”) on the one hand, but also as a concept often linked to nationalism, right-wing ideologies, discrimination and exclusion.

Having established the connection between the identity of the people (personal identity) and that of the collectivity that constitutes the nation, the group were ready to tackle the dramatic challenge of how to represent these ideas on stage—and the play's central character was born. The young people invented an imaginary character named 'Völker' and split up into three groups to try and answer together the following questions: Who belongs to the ‘Volk/Nation? Who does not belong to it? Who are the others?”

What the Volk?!

"What the Volk?!” the play evolved out of these discussions. A ‘little more’ than thirty kids from Berlin, Kosovo, Syria and Afghanistan in 4 months of workshops and production process. In addition to Volker and Frauke, the ‘typical’ Germans, a cast of secondary characters emerged, richly imagined like ‘Heba and the shark-nation’.

Lenglet says a participatory approach where the youth were co-designing all aspects of the theatre production was important. As participants began exploring their interests, members of Theater X/Jugentheather Büro worked with them to develop the skills and talents necessary for their parts in the production.

By Spring 2017, the young people were rehearsing and getting ready for their first public performance. In June they performed twice for 350 people at the Jugendkulturzentrum Pumpe theatre in the Mitte district of Berlin. Later that summer, Theater X presented the play again during the FESTIVAL arts festival which attracts up to 5,000 visitors a year, providing a great performance opportunity for young people from Berlin, Germany and around the world.

Impact

Lenglet says that the project was transformational, not only for newcomers, but for local youth as well. While all the young participants became more informed and fluent on issues of migration, diversity, and notions of nation, local youth who were initially overwhelmed by the experiences of the young refugees quickly became allies and champions of their newcomer peers. Their sensitization had a multiplier effect in their networks, as they shared their insights and newfound knowledge with friends, families, communities, schools and beyond.

Lenglet commented on the importance of creating a safe space where kids could feel understood, empowered, protected and helped: “Some participants told me at the end that they felt at home. For the first time they were in a place where they were not ‘I am the refugee,’ they were just individuals, making friendships and learning.”

The progress in skill development and confidence among the newcomers was impressive. One example is the young boy from Syria who initially needed translation during the workshops and ended up performing a very complicated German piece in the final performance.

Success

The NiCeR project, was realised by a European partnership, coordinated by the CIOFS-FP (Italy) as leader, with Alfea Cinematografica (Italy), Molenbeek St-Jean – MCCS, and Pluralis asbl (Belgium), Fundación Juventud y Cultura (Spain), KISA (Cyprus), Intercultural Institute from Timisoara and AIDRom (Romania), Citizens For Europe (Germany), and Rare Studio (UK). The multi-city partnership sought to explore inclusive approaches aimed at refugees at the local level, under a European perspective.

According to Oana Bajka of the Intercultural Institute Timisoara, Romania, NiCeR partners also experienced deep impacts: “The organizations from the different countries worked together, not separately, finding meaning and transmitting a joint message to everyone in Europe. You can build partnerships just like we did. You can be part of something special using art and young people. You can do this in your country, just as we did it in ours.”

United in their convictions, NiCeR Project partners clearly expressed their rejection of any approach to integration which “is in reality assimilation” as well as their commitment to a human rights-based approach and the importance of developing exchanges and cooperation based on mutual respect between refugees and local citizens. To this end, NiCeR has documented an impressive collection of projects (“Good Practices”) from the seven host cities and countries, produced a report on their Methodology and Evaluation, as well as a practical NiCeR pedagogical guide that offers “practitioners from specialized and non-specialized settings, alternative ways to teach, using intercultural education as their philosophy and artistic expression as their tool.”
Firing Up the Refugee Talent Pipeline

By Evelyn
March 28, 2018
Refugee Portal

Entrepreneur Jana Al Zaibak credit her employees with her business success. They’re driven, contribute their expertise and ideas, and are passionate about their work. Another thing they have in common? They’re all refugees.

Al Zaibak is the founder and CEO of Toronto-based Nomz, a healthy snack company that manufactures and wholesales gluten free, paleo, and delicious snacks to retailers and consumers across Canada.

Nomz shares a recruitment strategy playing out in communities around the world. Hiring refugees has become synonymous with hiring staff who are loyal, motivated, and – just like other newcomers – talented. Whether it’s in Germany or parts of Canada, employers are recognizing firsthand the benefits of their local refugee talent pool.

Al Zaibak’s business is just a few years old but is set to rapidly expand. Nomz’ mission includes a commitment to give back to the community. For Al Zaibak, that includes hiring newcomers.

Paying it forward with help from a community partner

The Nomz employee base is made up of newcomers from Afghanistan. Al Zaibak considers them the heart of her company.

"Many other food manufacturing businesses have trouble retaining their employees," Al Zaibak said. But it’s not a problem for Nomz, which has a 100% retention rate over two years in business. "We feel very grateful and blessed that they have all stayed with us, and we hope they will continue to stay with us throughout our journey. At this point, our team feels more like a family."

More than hope goes into the strong retention record at Nomz. Al Zaibak has purposely created a positive space for employees, with policies that support the work-life balance needs of her employees. Those include flexible working hours, and next, Al Zaibak plans to financially support her employees’ continuing English language education.

The decision to hire newcomers makes good business sense, but it also “speaks to our Canadian values to open our doors and our hearts. Compassion is what makes us human.”

Al Zaibak’s family experienced that compassion when they emigrated from Syria in the 1980s. "We were all welcomed to Canada when we arrived, so it is only natural to pass that kindness forward and welcome today’s newcomers."

A business that supports newcomer employment was an early vision for Al Zaibak. To realize it, she connected with a local community agency that serves newcomers to some of Toronto’s most diverse arrival neighbourhoods, Thorncliffe Park, Victoria Village and Flemingdon Park. Reh’ma Community Services helps immigrant women develop kitchen skills and find jobs primarily in the hospitality sector. Working with the agency allows Al Zaibak to connect with a pipeline of candidates who have developed the skills her business needs. Nomz.

As her business grows this year, Al Zaibak sees an opportunity to expand her workforce, and extend job opportunities to the latest large group of newcomers to Canada. Over 26,000 Syrian newcomers arrived in Canada in a period of six months beginning in November 2015. To source talent within this group, Al Zaibak has found another community partner, the Refugee Career Jumpstart Project, a Toronto-based organization facilitating the entry of Syrian newcomers into the job market.

Employers an important part of newcomer integration

Jim Estill, the CEO of Danby, located in the Canadian city of Guelph, is another champion of newcomer talent not only for moral reasons, but economic ones. In an interview with Hire Immigrants, he said employers are looking for loyal, motivated and long-term workers. In his own community, he advocates among peers in the private sector to source refugee talent for these winning qualities.

Al Zaibak recognizes the necessary role of employers in providing opportunities to qualified newcomers who might otherwise experience slower entry into the job market because of low language proficiency, unfamiliarity with Canadian workplace culture, or other reasons. "Employment is the best way to set up newcomers for success. A job isn’t just about making money, it’s also about feeling a sense of purpose, making new social connections at work, learning a new skill set, and just integrating better in society and day-to-day life."

Al Zaibak’s approach to hiring has helped anchor and grow her business.

“Everyone on the team brings love and passion to the production facility every day. Our team members are down-to-earth women who I enjoy talking to every day and they have become some of my closest friends. I truly believe our work culture has contributed to our success,” Al Zaibak explained. “Our team brought with them rich experiences, unique knowledge, interesting stories and different perspectives. Our business is more diverse now and it has only made a positive impact. We’re excited to grow, and have them grow with us.”

Al Zaibak’s message for peers is clear: “All businesses should be open to hiring newcomers.”

Source: reprinted with permission from HireImmigrants.

Read the HireImmigrants interview with Jana Al Zaibak.
Socially Responsible City

By Evelyn

Economic Inclusion, Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Municipal

In 2009, the city of Avilés, located in the Asturias region in Spain, approved the introduction of “social clauses in public procurement” in municipal contracts, known by its Spanish acronym ICSA. Simply put, the city made its primary goal the full participation and complete integration of all members of its diverse community in the ongoing work of building, maintaining and serving an inclusive city.

In Spain, the use of social clauses in public tenders is relatively widespread. Many municipalities include ‘green’ (eco-friendly) and social criteria in the public procurement of works, supplies and services. Referred to as socially responsible public procurement (SRPP), the notion is embedded in the European Union’s governing principles. The Lisbon Treaty states that “in defining policies and activities the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of high level of employment, the adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health.”

SRPP policies are based on a number of principles, including promoting employment opportunities for those detached from the labour market (for example, youth, women, long-term unemployed, migrants, people with disabilities) and promoting decent work (employment quality and stability).

In 2013, former Avilés Mayor Pilar Varela said: “Avilés is committed to making the city a place where everyone can live and thrive. We’re looking to create a place that grows in a sustained way, and where social cohesion grows as well. Everyone in the city, regardless of origin or challenges, has opportunity.”

Avilés public policies are people centred, aimed at reducing social exclusion.

Elements of socially responsible public procurement (SRPP)

Avilés’ ICSA rules require the inclusion of social criteria in municipal tenders for contract over EUR 100,000 and and longer than 4 months. The rules apply to all types of contracts, including public works, supplies and services.

Core to the program is the support for unemployed people currently accessing social benefits from the city. The city works with “Insertion Companies” and Special Employment Centres that “insert” people who would find it more difficult to access the labour market without supports. It allows for more active monitoring and support for both workers and employers. The unemployed find work, advocates encourage equal employment opportunities and employers contribute to the social fabric of their city.

Companies that include social clauses in their hiring gain access to public sector contracts under more favourable conditions. Employers that engage in practices that promote equal opportunities are rewarded. As part of their procurement bids, companies are evaluated on their ability to create employment opportunity, support gender balance, create high quality jobs, and will work with insertion companies and employment centres.

In practice, for example, a company presents in its bid a commitment of a certain number of hours of work carried out by people with difficulties accessing the labour market. The ideal target audience for the city would be unemployed people who are accessing city benefit programs and connected to local employment centres.

Being socially responsible means being successful
Since its approval in 2009, 420 people with various difficulties in accessing employment have found employment, including 39 immigrants. Most of these people were previously on social benefits. According to Avilés Councillor Manuel Campa, “it is essential to give the opportunity to work to all the people have the capacity for it because work is an element of fundamental social and economic integration.” ICSA created the conditions to hire people with difficulties accessing the labor market who otherwise might be beneficiaries of passive income and benefits as their wage.

Because it was simply a shift in how they did business, there were no new costs for the City administration. Rather, it aims at changing the behaviour of the economic agents involved in recruitment toward a higher social provision of goods and service. In fact, it has increased efficiencies in how the City manages resources and procurement. The level of uptake of ICSA in the municipality increased overall because it became easier and faster for city administrators to apply ICSA to all tenders than to have multiple internal tendering processes.

At the same time it raises awareness of more inclusive and sustainable development models and contributes to the stability and sustainability of local social enterprises, such as the special employment centres (SECs) and Social Insertion Companies (SICs).

Success
Avilés move to SICSA also had a positive side-effect on the procurement below the EUR 100,000 threshold. Companies submitting tenders adapted the same processes, documents and templates. They now incorporate social criteria in a vast majority of tenders, even if they are not obliged to do so.

By turning passive policies into active policies for inclusion, contributing to social policies and economic sustainability, particularly around employability and socio-occupational issues, it has had a direct economic impact on the city.

Recently, the procurement policies of the Spanish city Avilés were recognized by URBACT as a good practice with the potential to be replicated by other European cities. Avilés has shown how the incorporation of social clauses gives rise to a snowball effect in terms of impact across the city, its partners, and, most importantly, its residents.
Superkilen: Extreme civic involvement

By Evelyn

Cultural Inclusion Municipal Spatial Inclusion

When the city of Copenhagen went looking for ideas to revitalize the old working class district of Nørrebro, it decided to create a new kind of public space. Superkilen is a half a mile long urban space running through one of the most ethnically diverse and socially challenged neighborhoods in Denmark. Today Nørrebro’s award-winning urban park is a central feature of what’s described as Copenhagen’s coolest neighbourhood. In 2005, that certainly wasn’t the case. Located beyond the northern gates of the old city, the neighbourhood was disconnected from the rest of Copenhagen and better known for its violence, gang activity, social problems and lack of cultural integration.

Superkilen was envisioned as an urban regeneration project by the city of Copenhagen in a partnership with Realdania and an international team that included the Danish architectural firm Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), German landscape architecture firm Topotek 1, and Danish artist group Superflex. It would reconnect Nørrebro with Copenhagen, as well as create conditions for participation and inclusion within the diverse local population. Part of those conditions meant creating a vibrant public space where residents could enjoy themselves. The design of the park also ensured that their diversity was visible to everyone.

“Superkilen has a profound impact on Nørrebro and plugged the area back into the city. Seven hundred and fifty metres long, the park is divided into three main areas: The Red Square, The Black Market and The Green Park. The Red Square is modern, urban, with cafés, outdoor music and sports. The Black Market is the city square with a fountain and benches. The Green Park is a typical park for picnics, sports and walking the dog. Each area is unique, with referral points and recognizable meeting places (“Meet me at the Octopus.”), bringing people together from different backgrounds to play and share in a public space.

It’s a popular park, fun and whimsical, practical and playful. But it has also had an incredible impact on a precarious community, transforming Nørrebro from a raw, edgy district into a positive space where neighbours come out to have fun and connect with each other and the city. The process of creating that had the deepest impact.

Not just a new park, an extension of the neighbourhood

The project vision was to create a space that reflected the people living in the area, with their input. That meant creating greater integration and inclusion in a racialized neighbourhood representing more than 50 different nationalities, half of which were Muslim-majority countries. Engaging community members was a key priority for Superkilen, and an essential part of the park’s impact and success.

Residents were seen by the project team as vital resources for the project. It would be public participation, not simply consultation. It helped that two of the core project teams were based in Nørrebro. They knew the area and how to connect with the community. They made sure that community members were not only consulted, but actively contributed to the park’s creation.

Jakob Fenger and Bjørnstjerne Christiansen of Superflex call the project’s approach extreme civic involvement. They asked residents to suggest objects from public spaces around the world to incorporate into their new park: “We found it interesting to look at this very diverse group of people in regard to culture, social standing, nationality, etc., and then see it as a rich and significant foundation for impacting the area these people live in. We talked to various groups that we had talked to before and asked: What if you could pick whatever you want for Superkilen — and we go out to find it next week? It’s only natural to ask people directly to come up with proposals.”

Instead of using the kind of objects normally used for parks and public spaces in Copenhagen, people from the area were asked to nominate specific city objects such as benches, bins, trees, playgrounds, manhole covers, and signage from their countries of origin or favourite places. The objects were then either produced in a 1:1 copy or purchased and transported to the site. Every tree, every lamp, every object is from or inspired by somewhere else. There are swings from Iraq, benches from Brazil, a fountain from Morocco and garbage bins from England. There are neon signs advertise American donuts, a Russian hotel, a Chinese beauty parlor. Even the sewer covers are from somewhere else (Zanzibar, Gdansk and Paris).

The objects, playful and interesting and people-connected, are an important reasons why Superkilen is used by locals and visited by people from outside Nørrebro. Artifacts and plants from other cities and countries have been lovingly catalogued in a publication, “Superkilen’s 108 objects and their history.” You can even download an app to learn more about every object in Superkilen.

The park as a reflection of migration

Not all objects were imported. Some were copies. For Martin Rein-Cano, Director of landscape architecture firm Topotek 1, the process of copying an object, or integrating the original with local design and materials, was like a metaphor for migration itself. This also contributed to the sense of inclusion: “Immigration is rich when it’s capable of creating this kind of hybrid between worlds. You don’t have to make a choice. You don’t have to say ‘I’m that, or I am that.’ You can be all of it if you want. And all of it is what you are. And this is the idea for these objects.”

Rein-Cano’s design work was influenced by the English garden, seen through a migrant lens. In the English garden all the items are also from somewhere else. Something that is completely foreign becomes a new normal. These objects are as much foreign as they are part of their new country. They become a hybrid, something new: “Landscape, because it is rooted, seems to be a good allegory for identity. We like to have the sense that we belong somewhere and are somehow rooted in something… Different areas of the world can be mixed together to create your own bio-geography. A new identity.”

The park’s objects bring a piece of the old country to the new. Some objects in Superkilen are extremely symbolic, like soil brought from Palestine. Superflex’s Fenger: “You have this reddish soil that slowly seeps into the Danish soil. As with the two Palestinian girls who collected the soil, you have their heritage, slowly weaving into a Danish system.”

For cities, trust, take risks, embrace the challenge

Rein-Cano says cities have two choices when it comes to immigration and inclusion. We can be generous, or we can have turmoil. Cities are the front line in migration. He says they need to create a more permissive and generous environment for newcomers. Many host countries expect people to leave their objects behind. In fact, those objects, in a new community, can take on new meaning and identity. Much like migrants do.

Rein-Cano counsels city leaders to not be afraid of conflict, they create opportunities. Good cities are places in constant change. His advice echoes Mechelen Mayor Bart Somers’ approach, when Rein-Cano says: “You might live for a while from your past, but there is always a future. That future doesn’t come only from your past. You have to create it. You have to think of it. And you have to be positive about what could come. If we live out of fear, it can create repression. That’s something that cities shouldn’t have.”

By creating a highly functional, usable and popular space through extreme civic involvement, Superkilen illustrates how cities can transform a ‘no-go’ space like Nørrebro into an inclusive ‘must-see’ space for all.
Culturally-Competent Workforce for the Elderly

By Evelyn
January 31, 2018

Employment Inclusion Health Inclusion Living Together

As more refugees and migrants enter the German workforce, the challenges of integrating and managing a diversity of cultures, voices and attitudes in the workplace also increase in scope and scale. In Munich, an HR consultancy has developed a new approach to workplace training and integration for a diverse workforce in response to the challenge:

How to create a culturally sensitive training program to manage a culturally diverse workforce and high staff turnover?

Background

The shortage of skilled labor is a growing problem in Germany affecting small and medium enterprises as well as larger companies; public institutions and social enterprises are also struggling with a shortage of employees. In an aging population the health and nursing sector is particularly hard hit. Much of eldercare in Germany today is supported by workers with multicultural backgrounds, with increasing numbers of foreign skilled workers in the health and care professions coming to Germany seeking recognition of their education under Germany’s new laws. As a result almost without exception, workplaces in the health and care sector consist of highly diverse teams. This brings welcome resources reflective of the country’s growing multiculturalism. However, it also creates challenges in the workplace that require new culturally inclusive approaches.

EiKu – Culture sensitive training

GAB München is a consultancy firm in Munich, Germany that works on the challenges of the changing world of work and labour. Their client, MÜNCHENSTIFT GmbH is one of the largest service providers for the elderly in Munich, with around 1,800 employees and 3,000 residents in 13 long-term care facilities. MÜNCHENSTIFT GmbH has many staff members hired from outside of Germany, mainly from Eastern Europe. Linguistic and cultural differences amongst staff members, compounded by different educational and training traditions in their countries of origin, resulted in numerous and conflicting approaches to health care, generally, and to the culture of care for the elderly, specifically. MÜNCHENSTIFT struggled with how best to manage this diversity, both to ensure quality and consistency of care, and to maintain an effective and functioning workplace. These differences impacted issues of internal communication, workplace culture and employee coordination.

In 2015 Migrant-IQ asked GAB München to design and test a new training model that could provide more coherent and effective training for new staff working in MÜNCHENSTIFT’s facilities for elderly care. In recognition of the challenges of meeting the needs of such a diverse workforce, a participatory development approach was recommended. The result was EiKu – Culture Sensitive Training.

GAB München developed a cultural competency model that takes into account both organizational, and individual diversity and culture, as well as effective communication techniques. Two tangible products were developed: a tool kit “Passgenaue Einarbeitung” (Precision Fit) and a visual guide in the form of comic book to help workers with low literacy skills in the German language get through the introductory training successfully.

Elisa Hartmann, Researcher and Consultant at GAB München, says it was very important for all workers, especially for non-native speakers who were new to the “way things are done,” to be effectively oriented to the organization’s standard of care. Employers must be clear about what is expected of workers. And workers also need to have space to reflect, clarify and confirm their duties and responsibilities on the job. Hartmann found the comic an essential component of the new training program. It gave workers something in their hands they could read and refer to, visualizations that explained things, regardless of language or literacy barriers.

Workplace training materials that clearly introduced and laid out the steps and procedures of what appeared to be mundane daily tasks were able to reinforce the underlying precision and complexity required of the task to new workers. But GAB München went one step further, asking the worker “How did you do this in your old work place? What is new here? What surprised you about this approach?” Hartmann says that this type of reflection is critical. Instead of correcting new hires with the negative implication of “you’re doing it wrong,” this participatory approach creates space for a dialogue between new workers and their colleagues about individual and workplace cultural differences. In the process, staff and management learn a little more about each other, their respective skills and backgrounds, and how it all fits into the work requirements of the company.

Building a confident and optimistic workforce

Effective training is greatly facilitated by the confidence and initiative of the new employee. A positive outlook makes for a better learner. So it is important to reduce the barriers of linguistic and cultural differences that can adversely impact the onboarding experience of new employees in a diverse workplace. For GAB München, training is successful when new employees are quickly able to act independently and assume responsibility for their tasks. The domino effect of feeling confident about how they do their jobs helps their social integration in the workplace. When you feel more comfortable with your colleagues and can see yourself as part of the team, its also possible to imagine being with the organization for the long term – thus, reducing the high staff turnover and low retention rates that were costing MÜNCHENSTIFT money and time, and reducing the quality of care to their residential clients.

GAB München’s tool box and comic take into account both the worker’s core training needs and management’s need for a staff training and development tool that works in a culturally diverse workplace. At GAB München, the concept of cultural sensitization and cross cultural competency is based on the assumption that every new employee has their own individual culture and cultural orientation. The more diverse the workforce, the more important it is to take this into account in the on-boarding and training process. Good training in a standardized service setting like elderly care means designing training with existing and new employees for a specific situation. The approach must be practical, based on the daily work realities of staff, not a theoretical model of diversity integration.

GAB München approached this as a social innovation issue. True innovation would only be possible if the project was participatory and included a diversity of voices. They developed an approach that included staff at all levels of the organization, from all teams. They had additional principles, key to the project’s overall success:

Employees are experts in their work – employees working in the residential areas where the eldercare work is provided are the best situated to know whether the training is working, and what is not. Actively involving the employees and giving them the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and skills is essential.

Broad information and transparency – as many employees as possible, as well as workplace supervisors and management staff should have the opportunity to share their experiences, ideas, fears and wishes during the development of the training program.

Results need to be anchored into the organization, at all levels – relevant decision-makers need to be included as early as possible and actively engaged during development process so that they can link the model with the existing structures and processes within the organization.

Cultural Competency is a Two-Way Street
Building cross cultural competency into the organizational culture as a whole, and not only among some workers, is important, among local workers was important. GAB München is quick to point out that an interest in cultural competency among foreign workers should not be assumed simply because of their backgrounds. People with diverse backgrounds often have no interest in discussing culture. According to Hartmann, many have no interest in being singled out as ‘migrants’ and simply wanted to be more effective at work. By ensuring cross-cultural competency training is offered to all staff, organization can avoid the stigmatization of the ‘other’ and help reduce conscious and unconscious bias from subverting innovation and good decision-making in the workplace.

Success

GAB München’s participatory cross cultural competency approach to workplace learning and collaboration has produced an effective training model for the culturally diverse workplace. The tool box provides concrete recommendations for action, guidelines and simple visual overviews of complex systems and explanations of daily tasks for new trainees.

To date, this small pilot project was developed and tested successfully in only one part of the large eldercare organization. Hartmann is hopeful that they will be able to continue the work across the organization.

Word of their success is out! The training model as already being used by other similar organizations. Their model, toolkit and comic are a “made-in-Germany” solution for a globalizing world – to be replicated within and outside of the elder care sector, across Germany and internationally.

Source: Reprinted with permission from the HireImmigrants website.
Mother Tongue Language Training On the Job

By Evelyn
Employment Inclusion Refugee Portal

LIUNA Local 506 serves a diverse group of over 8,000 workers in the construction and industrial sectors. It considers itself one of the most multicultural unions in North America. Started during waves of Irish and Scottish immigrants, LIUNA’s membership has evolved alongside immigration patterns.

The construction industry in Canada is a significant economic driver, accounting for 9% of Canada’s GDP. As with many skilled worker sectors, future labour demands are high and immigrants are considered an important current, and future, source for that talent.

Inclusion doesn’t mean treating everyone the same

For construction firms and other sector employers thinking about the benefits of diversity, LIUNA! offers a useful lesson. LIUNA! staff and leadership come from their diverse membership itself. LIUNA! Local 506 recognizes that inclusion doesn’t mean treating everyone the same. It means providing the different supports they need to have equal access to training and employment.

Merissa Preston, LIUNA! Local 506 Training Liaison, says that supporting their members is key. “If we get a call for a specific training need, even something we don’t offer all the time, we’ll organize it just for them. If our members need it, we just do it.”

Mother tongue language training

With Italian, Polish and Portuguese-speaking trainers, Spanish and Arabic-speaking business representatives on staff, when language support is needed, staff provide it. When large groups of new immigrants work together, they tend to communicate in their common language. Over time, like many immigrants, LIUNA!’s immigrant members have learned English. They communicate effectively on the job site, and access training and support in English.

However, according to Preston, the Portuguese membership has requested safety training in their native language. This ensures that members are prepared for safety training, re-certification or more rigorous hand-on exams, mandated by the Ministry of Labour like the new Working at Heights Training.

The solution for LIUNA! Local 506 was obvious: give them the support they need. Portuguese speaking trainers provide interpretation during training and testing. Information and tests are run in English, interpretation is provided as needed. The result is LIUNA! Local 506 members are able to continue providing their skilled work on the job site. If other languages are needed in the future, Preston says they will provide that support.

English, integration and working with Syrian refugees

While they give support when called upon, Preston emphasizes the importance of speaking and understanding English on the job site. LIUNA! Local 506 instills the need to improve English skills in their members. From a health and safety perspective, English is essential. However, Preston says that understanding English is also important if members move into jobs in other sectors, or with other employers.

As immigration patterns change, LIUNA! Local 506 membership is also evolving, just as it always has. Preston says they want to support newer Syrian refugees who are interested in working in construction trades. They are looking into how best to recruit Syrian refugees for apprenticeship training and help get them working in the field.

Since different groups need different supports, Preston wants to ensure the Syrian refugees they work with are set up to succeed. She notes how some people might have preconceived notions about particular immigrant groups, such as newer refugees: “We don’t want to put them on a job site and make them a target for employers or other workers. We want them to be able to integrate into the job site like anyone else.”

Preston says they want to support them not only with apprenticeship and workplace skills, but also so they can communicate effectively on the job site. For her, integrating into the job site means ensuring they have adequate English language skills.

Recognizing that they are not English trainers, LIUNA! Local 506 has partnered with ACCES Employment and the Ontario Masonry Training Centre. This partnership will leverage each of their strengths. LIUNA! Local 506 will provide technical expertise, outlining what the Syrians need to know on the job and work site. OMTC will work closely with LIUNA! Local 506 to provide hands-on training to participants and ACCES Employment will create pre-apprentice language training, programming and employment supports to get participants ready for work.

For LIUNA! Local 506, it’s important to support members on the job. It is equally important to prepare them for success through training. Challenges such as language or recently arrived newcomers are seen simply as opportunities to serve and support their members. Their approach illustrates how unions, employers and community groups working together ensures that immigrant talent, new and old, will thrive.

Source: Reprinted with permission from HireImmigrants.
Arctic Welcome for the Multicultural City

By Evelyn Living Together Municipal Municipal Welcome-ability New Gateways

When the city of Anchorage, Alaska, comes to mind, urban diversity might not be the first thing you think of. It turns out, Anchorage is one of the most diverse cities in America. While the number of foreign born residents increases steadily across the United States (13.4% overall in 2017), in Anchorage the numbers jumped from 8.4% in 2008 to 11.13% in 2015.

According to Anchorage sociology professor Chad Farrell, the city’s diversity is unique because its neighbourhoods “include members of all seven demographic categories recognized by the government — white, black, Hispanic/Latino, Alaska Native/American Indian, mixed race, Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander — in large numbers.”

Emphasizing Anchorage’s exceptionalism, Farrell says “there are few areas in the United States that have the mix of groups and the presence of groups in significant sizes like we do.”

With a growing immigrant population, increasing diversity and open, inclusive city leadership, responding to the ‘welcoming cities and communities’ call to action at Welcoming America was a natural step forward. In 2014 the city of Anchorage joined other American municipalities in a growing national movement to recognize the economic, cultural and social contributions that immigrants and refugees make in their communities. This broad coalition of city actors is working with business, community, academic and other stakeholders on a more inclusive, ‘Welcoming’ urban agenda to build prosperous futures and stronger communities.

A vision of a community ‘without prejudice’

The story behind the creation of Welcoming Anchorage begins with a 1996 meeting in the home of former mayor Rick Mystrom where representatives from several of the local African American and Caucasian churches came together to open a dialogue on how to improve racial harmony and communication in their community. A discussion on black and white race relations soon expanded to a conversation about the diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds more broadly represented in Anchorage’s population. That night, the Bridge Builders of Anchorage was born with the ambitious vision of making Anchorage the first city in the United States ‘without prejudice’.

The seeds sown with Bridge Builders laid the foundation for the formal strategy and Welcoming Anchorage campaign that was launched by the city in 2014. In the words of First Lady Mara Kimmel: “Being ‘welcoming’ is a character and value that defines our city and all who call Anchorage home. We are welcoming because we understand that being far away, tucked up here in the northern corner of the U.S., we need each other. Especially when times are tough and we face an uncertain future. As Alaskans, what matters is our willingness to extend a hand, not what color or political persuasion or sexual orientation may be on the other end of that hand. What counts is our promise to our state and to each other.”

Putting it into practice

The Welcoming Anchorage Roadmap outlines how the stakeholders will work to achieve an equitable, diverse and inclusive city. It is a living document, encouraging all Alaskans to participate and contribute to building a welcoming city. The Roadmap process began in Fall 2016, culminating in a commitment to specific solutions and projects. Each solution finds a home in the five welcoming pillars:

- Employment and entrepreneurship
- Civic Engagement
- Connected, safe and healthy communities
- Equitable access
- Education

In Spring 2017, community members came together to vote on the solutions, creating a set of city priorities for the coming years.

When she presented the Roadmap to the Anchorage Assembly, First Lady Mara Kimmel said: “The roadmap identified the core values of our community – inclusivity, equity, and justice – and offers a variety of actions our city’s residents and government can take as we seek to become a globally competitive and culturally vibrant city.”

A roadmap built on good practices – for future prosperity
While a new initiative, Anchorage’s Roadmap comes rooted in historical efforts to create an inclusive and welcoming city for all. Like other cities, Anchorage sees its economic prosperity increasingly connected to a growing diverse migrant population (PDF): “foreign-born Anchorage residents contributed $1.9 billion to Anchorage’s GDP in 2014, and represented $573 million in spending power. Foreign-born residents also bring education and experience to our economy, representing 10.3 percent of the labor force in our city—and 9.6 percent of STEM jobs. We also know that diversity is one of the most important ways we can attract and retain young talent to our city, a vital piece of building a bright economic future.”

Anchorage understands that economic inclusion alone won’t build the city they want. It is both a social and economic prerogative. As a result, economics make up only one of the Welcoming Anchorage initiative’s five pillars:

- Employment and entrepreneurship
- Civic Engagement
- Connected, safe and healthy communities
- Equitable access
- Education

Like Mechelen Mayor Bart Somers, Anchorage’s leaders understand that building equity, inclusivity and justice into the core of the city, its services, and its people is vital. Whether it is through the living Roadmap, ongoing efforts of the Bridge Builders of Anchorage, the annual Walk Together Anchorage initiative, or providing bridging services for refugees, the city is working with and for all residents to create a safer, stronger, more resilient and welcoming city for a shared future.
COSTI Syrian Refugee Professional Internship Program

By Evelyn
December 21, 2017
Employment Inclusion Refugee Portal

Over 25,000 refugees began their journey from Syria to Canada in 2015. According to Maril Celia, Executive Director of COSTI Immigrant Services in Toronto, “escaping from suffering and persecution is just the first step in a long journey for refugees. When they arrive here in their new country, they encounter a new series of challenges.” Our goal, he says, is to “help refugee families get the best start for their new life in Canada.”

COSTI, along with a network of partners, is on the front line of refugee reception and settlement. They are the lead agency helping Government Sponsored Refugees (GSRs) in the Toronto region. Like many service providers, COSTI finds working with refugees both a rewarding and challenging experience. What works best, according to Julie Darboh, COSTI’s Director of Employment Services, is a targeted and focused approach: “Clients such as the Syrian newcomers require more hand-holding to assist them in gaining their confidence and self-worth. Such a specialized service is better able to prepare program participants, identify niche markets and opportunities for the unique skills and abilities of a focused and marginalized client groups.”

And like all newcomers, the faster refugees find employment, the quicker they will engage and become self-sufficient members of the community.

Vision, partnership and generosity

Many Syrians arrive with extensive training and skills only to face numerous challenges accessing the employment, starting with a lack of Canadian workplace experience. In 2016, La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso approached COSTI with a niche opportunity. The Foundation wanted to provide funding to support paid internships for at least 15 professional Syrian Refugees. The idea was to give the Syrian newcomers a leg up in their search for employment through orientation and employment services from COSTI matched with paid workplace internships that would provide the “Canadian experience” that many employers require. In short order, the COSTI Syrian Refugee Professional Internship Program was born.

The support received from La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso serves as an example of how philanthropic individuals and corporations make a difference in the lives of newcomers, by helping shape their future and accelerating their engagement in Canada, and in the process, contributing to the economy and their community. — 2016/2017 COSTI Annual Report

Although COSTI already had a large client pool of almost 2200 Syrians to work with, they reached out to Toronto’s Armenian community to offer support to its privately sponsored refugees. Partnership and collaboration have characterized COSTI’s approach since its earliest days with Italian immigrants to Canada in the 1950s.

It’s still a winning formula.

How it works

COSTI screened refugee candidates for their English skills and professional backgrounds, eventually accepting twenty-seven into the refugee professional internship program. The candidates represented a wide range of professional backgrounds, including architects, engineers, accountants, social workers, IT and business specialists, software developers, and more. COSTI’s employment programs for internationally trained individuals formed the backbone of the initial orientation and program development.

A two week compressed workshop provided information about adapting to workplace culture and preparing a professional portfolio. COSTI specialists worked with each client to guide them through the job application and interview process. That included tailoring each curriculum vitae (CV) to the Canadian context, using an anonymous CV format designed to reduce the risk of overt, or ‘unconscious’ discrimination that a growing body of research has highlighted as a barrier to immigrant employment.

COSTI also provided real-world insight and network. The refugee candidates had access to local guest speakers to learn exactly what employers were looking for. Their credentials were assessed by World Education Services (WES), under a pilot Alternative Credential Assessment for Syrian Refugees project.

According to Mahmoud Bakkar, a participant program who was an IT professional in Damascus, “COSTI training was really unique. If focused on soft skills. It hit on workplace communications, culture and work ethics specific to a Canadian context. The internship itself exposed me to the Canadian workplace culture, and allowed me to sharpen my soft skills, work with professionals. It increased my self-confidence and awareness. And that’s what I truly gained. That was the key for me to land the next job.”

As the Syrian professionals were taking their crash course in Canadian employment, COSTI was reaching out to its extensive employer network. Like the many Canadians who stepped forward during the Syrian refugee crisis, the response from Toronto area employers has been catalytic. COSTI found employers who were willing to host workers for the full 10 week internships. Many were willing to top up their interns’ wages in recognition of the applicant’s skills and experience.

Bakkar notes the benefits of a paid internship: “Having internships paid is a win-win situation. It encourages the employer to hire newcomers and immigrants, and helps the employee to practice in the new work culture and gain the required soft skills while earning an income. The first job that a newcomer or an immigrant gets is like the foundation stone for their immigration journey to Canada — getting this right would make the whole journey smooth.”

Employer efforts were transformative

Pinpoint GPS Solutions, a fleet management business that has partnered with COSTI for over 20 years, was quick to respond to COSTI’s new internship program. COSTI had no trouble providing three applicants for a general accounting position they needed to support a challenging systems implementation involving an integrated financial and accounting module. Among them, Samer Arafeh stood out for his extensive international experience but was also over-qualified for the job, with poor English skills. That was a potential problem, as the company’s hiring manager and small business owner, Vince Arone, knows well: “It’s important to get the best fit possible for each job.” They took a
chance anyways, offering Arafeh a 3 month internship. “Even though this was not our original hiring plan,” Arone comments, “Samer’s professionalism and willingness to learn helped convince us.”

It turned out to be a win-win proposition for both parties. Arone: “I learned that our team member from Syria just needed a “first chance,” an opportunity to be in a Canadian office to see how we do business, understand the processes, the protocol, speaking to fellow employees, answering emails and phone calls from customers and suppliers. Not to mention the slang and local business terms”

On his side, the highly qualified Arafeh learned that he’d launched his career in Canada with a welcoming, multicultural team. He realized “how similar we are regardless of where we are born.”

The risk paid off. Today, Arafeh is fully employed and a valued team member at Pinpoint GPS Systems.

Success

Out of the twenty-seven initial candidates that were selected, 20 completed internships and 18 went on to full time employment, the majority hired by the companies where they had interned (two started their own businesses). Another seven decided to go back to school, one encouraged by his employer to seek upgrading. A job waits for him when he returns.

Darboh says that while employment is very important, refugees also have other issues to deal with. Culturally sensitive “wrap around services” encompassing case management, along with settlement, housing, health and employment services are equally important. COSTI’s holistic service model has worked well for the former refugees – and earned the agency international recognition.

COSTI is sharing the success of the paid internship project and its partnership with La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso in the hopes the success of the model will lead to more engagement from employers and better outcomes for the next cohort of refugees. As Canadians in cities across the country continue to receive and settle refugees, COSTI’s lesson is that a paid internship model should be part of the welcome.
Refugee Dialogues

By Evelyn Civic Inclusion Living Together Municipal Refugee Portal

As the number of asylum seeking arrivals increased in Germany, so too did information guides, apps and integration projects aimed at helping refugees settle. However, until recently there was little opportunity for real dialogue with refugees about their expectations of life in Germany and the daily challenges they face.

The city of Stuttgart has a rich history of services to support the integration and inclusion of migrants. To welcome this newest cohort of arrivals and help the refugees settle, the city heeded the insight of German sociologist Heinz Bude: “To understand the social setting one needs to make people talk about their experiences.” So began the Stuttgart Refugee Dialogues.

According to Ayse Özbabacan, the idea of hosting an open dialogue platform was to “create spaces where people can come together, talk and get to know each other and learn about their respective life experiences – refugees, volunteers and especially inhabitants and neighbours of refugee homes.”

The Dialogues bring refugees together with Germans to talk about daily life expectations and the experience of integration. These conversations are an opportunity for refugees to reflect openly and honestly on their experiences with Germans who are genuinely interested and eager to help.

Stuttgart citizens have also founded neighbourhood-based friendship circles to support these new Stuttgarters in their neighborhood. Dialogues and friendship circles help “the host community to better appreciate the ‘human face’ of refugees, through their own stories.” At the same time, it helps the refugees to better understand the culture of the host community.

“We are all Stuttgarters”

The Stuttgart Refugee Dialogues are primarily a way for different groups in the city to get together, talk and listen to each other, crossing cultural, national and social lines. They come together to build community through conversation and connection. Native Stuttgarters learn about their new neighbours and how to best welcome them. New Stuttgarters gain a better understanding of their new community and society. Everyone develops their intercultural and communication skills.

The Dialogues offer a natural and informal way for anyone in Stuttgart to be part of the refugee welcome, settlement and integration process. Dialogue volunteers are trained through the city’s Dept. of Integration Policy. Training includes background and orientation to the refugee experience of seeking asylum in Germany, as well as training about trauma and how to deal with mental health issues that might come up when working with refugees. This training enriches the knowledge of the volunteers, and also builds empathy for refugees in their neighbourhood.

Refugees gain first-hand information on living in Germany from Germans interested in their integration. For them, the Dialogues provide a bridge as they move from asylum seeking to integration, helping to ensure that they become independent, active participants in their new city, and make the community connections so essential for inclusion in Stuttgart. Formal services are important, but for a refugee to truly thrive, they must make the connections that will help them integrate socially.

Success

The Dialogues approach came easy to the city. In 2001 the Stuttgart Pact for Integration was created to lead efforts to promote the participation and integration of the city’s migrant population. The Stuttgart Way means that everyone who lives in the city can call Stuttgart home.

For Stuttgart’s leaders, helping new Stuttgarters feel welcome is not only about working for the common good. The talents and potential of their migrant population are crucial for the development of the community and local economy. Migrants are seen as assets, future citizens and partners who will actively shape the future of Stuttgart.

Successful integration of new Stuttgarters requires an entire community of formal and informal actors to welcome and integrate newcomers into public life and society. The Stuttgart Dialogues provide an example of the importance of building integration strength within a city, where everyone has a role to play.
Muslim Girls Fence

By Evelyn

Cultural Inclusion, Health Inclusion, Living Together, Social Inclusion

“I feel like I can do anything anything I want. It's me, myself. The [fencing] mask makes me confident.”

The girl in the mask could be any girl. You see a fencing mask. It’s removed to reveal a young girl in a hijab. She is an image of quiet confidence.

The Maslaha project aims to disrupt conventional ideas and misperceptions about young Muslim women. Has it scored a hit? Is this the image that comes to mind when you think of Muslim women?

Breaking stereotypes about girls – and Muslims

A strong confident fencer probably isn’t your first thought when it comes to young Muslim women, says Latifa Akay, project manager for Muslim Girls Fence: “The images we see every day of Muslim women in the press, in the media, are so one-dimensional. How do you shift public imagination about what a Muslim is, what a Muslim woman can be, and change the narratives around Muslim communities? You need to do something quite radical or unusual to do that. And listen to Muslim communities speaking on their own terms. We’re using fencing, that’s something unusual.”

Muslim Girls Fence is a collaboration between Maslaha, British Fencing and Sport England. The initiative breaks down stereotypes of fencing as a male and white-dominated elite sport not accessible to young people of racialized backgrounds. The project challenges misconceptions, builds confidence and empowers young Muslim women to lift their aspirations as they enter an adult world.

Maslaha is a London-based organization that works to change the conditions that create inequalities for Muslim communities. With success tackling wicked problems in such areas as health, education and the criminal justice system, taking on a white, male-dominated sport like fencing and a maligned cultural community was the kind of challenge – and opportunity – they embrace.

Muslim Girls Fence as launched as an 8-week pilot project at Frederick Bremer school in East London between December 2015 and March 2016, and has been expanding ever since. Akay credits the project’s success to the girls and their role as ambassadors: “They’re taking back power, speaking on their own terms, reclaiming their narrative.

It’s about sports, but it’s not about sports

On the face of it, the project is about getting girls into sport. But it is about so much more than that. Fencing workshops are interspersed with sessions on identity and feminism. The girls are encouraged to become their own story tellers, to speak for themselves instead of being spoken about. In 2016, the novice fencers eagerly participated in London’s Women of the World Festival, where they spoke to national and international media about the project in their own words.

For Maslaha, the project makes perfect sense. Founded in East London in 2007, Maslaha works on changing and challenging the conditions that create inequalities for Muslim communities in the UK, where Muslim women experience complex discrimination based on both faith and gender. Almost two thirds of UK Islamophobic incidences happen to women. So building resilience and creating more confidence among Muslim girls is an important goal for Muslim Girls Fence.

Working with strategic partners

Like many sports organizations in highly diverse cities, British Fencing wants to make its sport more inclusive and accessible to young people of all backgrounds, starting in London. The pitch got a bit easier with the profile and success of American fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad, a hijab-wearing Muslim woman who represented the United States Olympic fencing team in 2016. Muhammad has described fencing as ‘uniquely accommodating’ for Muslim women. The fact that she could wear the same fencing kit as everyone else meant that for the first time she ‘truly felt like part of the team.’

The Olympian’s success brought pride to 13-year old fencer Serhildan Gocmen: “I watched the Olympic fencing team and felt really proud of myself for being able to tell my sister their moves. Most people don’t know about fencing.” Serhildan is also keenly aware of the challenges she faces as a Muslim girl: ‘Girls don’t get this sort of opportunity and people are biased, saying Muslim girls can’t do this – it’s been mostly white British men [fencing] – but now it’s getting heard around the world. Lots of people can pick up fencing.”

A counter-narrative

Project leaders also understand the need to counter the force of pervasively negative images of Muslim women projected in mainstream media. For this reason the project has also involved the production of an exhibition and short film in an effort to breach a public imagination that is being ever constricted by the media and government preoccupation with a certain type of Muslim woman. The exhibition and film were showcased at the Women Of the World (WOW) festival 2016 at the Southbank Centre, attracting international attention and coverage: “Just because I’m Muslim and a girl and I’m not white, doesn’t mean I can’t fence. I can, and here I am showing you I can.”

Building inclusion, one saber at a time

While Maslaha entertains global aspirations, for now, the project is focused on its impact in local communities. For the girls learning to fence, that impact is real and tangible. “I thought it was a high-class, white man’s game – it wasn’t really for girls,” 12 year-old Assiya told The Telegraph. “But I’ve started to realise what fencing actually is. It isn’t just about fighting – there’s something more behind it… confidence.”

Her 12-year old friend Rodha agrees: “When I’m fencing I feel proud because you know what you’re doing it for – you’re raising awareness about stereotypes and Muslim women. I just feel like… it’s a new beginning.”

In an Al Jazeera interview, project manager Akay elaborates on in this emerging theme among the young participants: “A lot of the girls spoke about how fencing made them feel more confident, how it had been uplifting to be part of a journey and immersed in a new activity. While some of the girls got a lot from the fencing and are keen to continue in the sport, others really enjoyed the opportunity to discuss their identities as Muslim girls, to think about tackling stereotypes and articulate this on their own terms to national and international audiences.”

Success

Maslaha translates from Arabic as “for the common good.” Strategic partners, British Fencing and Sport England are both actively working to build Maslaha’s value proposition into their own institutions while sharing their professional skills and expertise with Muslim Girls Fence. Their open and enthusiastic participation is important to the projects young athletes and is helping build a more inclusive culture around fencing and sports across the UK. Ensuring diversity and inclusion are embedded in their institutions and in sports like fencing means all Londoners can feel welcome to participate and included.

The project has been picked up widely by the national and international media including; Buzzfeed, AP, The Telegraph, BBC Asian Network, TRT, London Live, Al Jazeera and NBC.

Recent partners currently include Youtube and the National Theatre of Scotland.

Building on the success of the project, Maslaha is scaling up and developing a national engagement strategy and programmes across the UK. Muslim Girls Fence will expand to six locations in London and Birmingham over the next two years. Sooner, rather than later, it’s likely that more Muslim Girls Fence programs will sprout in cities around the globe.
The #rethinkingrefugee campaign started as a response to the negative portrayals of refugees in the mainstream media. But the campaign has had an even larger impact.

In 2008 Fuad Mahamed established Ashley Community Housing (ACH) to provide refugees and vulnerable homeless people affordable housing. Mahamed says when he “arrived in the UK as a refugee 20 years ago I found a lot of goodwill, but a system which was fragmented and lacking focus on long-term integration.”

A stable home is the first step for refugees. But it is not enough. Integration is not a moment in time, but a long-term process that takes investment. Moving towards integration requires additional supports, especially around employment and enterprise, or entrepreneur, skills.

According to Matthew Rogers, ACH Marketing & Communications Officer, ACH has changed to bring cohesion to the system: “When we set up our business, we were solely a housing provider. Over time, we’ve grown into a company offering housing, training and support. The past two years have seen us evolve into leading industry experts, establishing a best practice ethical business model that is being shared globally.”

ACH works across an integration continuum to help refugees become self-sufficient contributors to the local economy and community. Employment supports and economic opportunity are at the core of their approach. In their experience, refugees quickly become independent and self-reliant with a limited amount of targeted support.

Social media was key to building, sharing and spreading the campaign. They focused on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, all popular social media channels in the UK. The initial campaign encouraged people to post a photograph on social media showing that they were #rethinkingrefugee. This encouraged people to get personally involved in the campaign and to also raise awareness among their own social networks and connections.

Build, learn, evolve, build again

As they found success, ACH evolved the campaign. They were having difficulties securing enough properties to house refugees due to the overall high demand for housing in Bristol and shockingly high housing prices. In July 2016, they targeted landlords in Bristol.
The #rethinkingrefugee campaign moved offline, with an in-person event in Bristol; a conference for 100 local businesses, the local City Council, five cabinet members and landlords. Their goal was to shift landlords from seeing refugees as liabilities to community assets.

It was a success.

Seven new landlords pledged affordable accommodation to house refugee tenants. An agreement with Bristol City Council gave ACH empty and dilapidated buildings to renovate. In return, the properties would be rented to ACH’s refugee tenants at reduced cost over 10 years. Some of the renovations are being done by future tenants. They’re building skills that could lead to employment opportunities in the construction sector.

Through these and other efforts, ACH exceeded their initial housing goals.

As the #rethinkingrefugee campaign found success, ACH shifted the campaign once again. This time, following their Innovation Model, they focused on employment, aligning #rethinkingrefugee with the UK skills agenda.

In 2017 ACH wants local authorities, employers and education providers to see how refugees are community assets. While this third campaign evolution has only recently begun, the results are promising. ACH has built partnerships with employers looking to diversify their organisations and hire refugees. They have encouraged employers to offer refugees opportunities, from work experience positions to full-time paid roles.

Impact

Already active in three UK cities, with 50 staff, ACH has resettled over 2,000 refugees. ACH has set an ambitious goal is to get 25,000 refugees into median salary jobs by 2028. They’re already working with Starbucks, which has pledged to support refugee employment globally and plans to hire 2,500 refugees to work at its coffee shops in Europe. ACH is providing pre-employment training and one-to-one support to selected candidates followed by guaranteed job interviews for Barista roles at Starbucks stores across Bristol and Birmingham.

Ashley Community Housing is determined to create transformative change, not only on the lives of individual refugees, but on the entire community. That change has also impacted ACH. Says Rogers, "#rethinkingrefugee isn't simply a marketing campaign, it highlights our values and ethos and speaks to our focus on promoting the positive impact of refugees on local communities, and as assets to employers that can be successfully integrated into our society. #rethinkingrefugee is embodied in the day-to-day activities of staff members across the business.”

Challenges still exist, especially with Brexit post-referendum uncertainty, and lingering negative opinion of refugees. However, the campaign has had an impact. Landlords are changing their opinions on refugees and now offer housing to them. Employers are on board. Community perception has been impacted.

ACH has great expectations for the future of #rethinkingrefugee. Their work has brought recognition and awards. Most recently, they were named 24Housing Care & Support Provider of the Year.

Most importantly to ACH, however, are the refugees expressing that they feel welcome. “They are like my family. I don’t feel like I’m alone here,” says Mariam Sayed, Ashley Community Housing tenant and learner.
One Samson, One World

By kturner
October 30, 2017

Employment Inclusion, Refugee Portal

Those who have found their way to us after a dangerous journey with fear and deprivation first need our confidence. We do not want to wait with our help until all bureaucratic hurdles are taken and all doubts are eliminated. We trust these people to create a new start with us and take them into our Samson AG family.” Dr. Ingo Koch, Samson AG Executive Board member.

When other business leaders expressed doubt that Samson AG could be successful with refugee hires, the 100-year old company set out to prove them wrong.

Samson AG, a Frankfurt-based multinational engineering firm, is a diverse company with a workforce of people from more than 40 different countries. They knew they were up to the challenge.

“We have customers all across the world, we could not shut ourselves off from the refugee situation,” commented Andrea Schmidt, Head of Education and Training.

Diversity and leadership

Leadership came from the top. Samson AG Chairman, Dr. Andreas Widl, was moved by the images of asylum seekers entering Europe, and decided the company could play an important role by giving young refugees a chance to qualify professionally and build a safe life in Germany.

The company’s headquarters, Samson Frankfurt, decided to add an additional 30 training spots for refugee youth to their annual vocational training allotment. The company was confident its inter-cultural environment would help make integration easier for the refugee trainees. Indeed, the plan was not just to provide training for the young refugees but to offer qualified candidates employment after their training.

Having internal buy in was essential. Schmidt says “it was important for us to inform our workforce about our commitment from the outset, and to involve them through sponsorship programs, interns, etc.” Internal support was overwhelming. Many employee volunteers came forward as instructors and mentors to support the refugee trainees.

Already in 2015 the Samson AG Refugee Work Program was up and running a recruitment campaign. By March of 2016 the first refugees entered the paid internship program as vocational trainees. Initial funding contracts run for six months, then the apprenticeship begins. Over the course of the program, trainees rotate through different departments and see every side of the engineering company: logistics, production, administration.

A renewable pipeline

Importantly, the 30 new training spots Samson AG created are not a one-time commitment but a renewable pipeline for refugee talent. As trainees complete the training cycle, their spot becomes available for other young refugee candidates. Already in 2018, three trainees will complete their training and new trainees will be hired. Samson AG has also already exceeded their initial hiring goal. According to Schmidt, “we have 37 refugees at the moment at Samson AG. We had 30 spots especially for refugee youth and the other 7 are on jobs where we were looking for employees in general.”

The trainees come from many countries: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Congo, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Algeria. Their training spans the company hierarchy, including Industrial Mechanic, Mechanic, Electronics Technician for Engineering Operations, Technical Warehouse Worker, Industrial Purchaser, and Quality Assessor.

As of September 2017, nine former refugees will be permanently employed. These individuals were hired directly into different jobs at the company. They are workers who studied, qualified and worked in their field for years before they had to flee. Samson AG is recognizing their foreign credentials and experience. That is significant in the world of refugee employment, and is a promising model for other German companies.

Pioneering

Notwithstanding wide-ranging efforts to accelerate refugee integration across Europe and around the world, Samson AG found itself in a pioneering role among its German corporate peers. As one of the first companies to act in Germany, Schmidt says they “didn’t know what obstacles there would be. But as time passed, we saw what needed to
We worked together with the vocational schools and organized help if needed. We saw huge improvements as these young men started work and training. They acquired good German language skills astonishingly quickly. Working and being part of a group speaking German, being accepted and having something to do gave them so much and helped them finding an everyday living routine. Of course, it took some weeks for them to settle and understand the structures in Germany but they have done a fantastic job.”

Refugees to Germany receive language lessons and support in the community. Samson AG added to this support. Schmidt says the trainees “know that if they need anything we will help. All our refugees have a mentor outside of Samson AG that help them as well.” Challenges continue, especially finding affordable housing for the trainees.

What does the future hold?

Samson AG is an inspiring example of how a company can integrate refugees into their workforce. Their success, Schmidt says, comes from the company's culture, embodied in the slogan, One Samson AG, One World. For Schmidt, “the diversity we have makes Samson AG so beautiful and interesting. Bringing together people from different backgrounds helps to fight prejudices. We accept each other and the feeling of being accepted improves the working environment for everyone.”

While the company is thrilled with how well the program is going, Schmidt says they are still learning. At the same time, Samson AG’s approach and efforts have inspired their peers. Other German companies see opportunities to have an impact as employers, as well as the labour market potential that refugees bring. They have approached Samson AG to find out how and what they can do.

Schmidt's advice to them is simply to act: “Just get started and do not think about problems that might arise, but solve problems when they actually show up.”
Croeso Abergwaun, Welcome Fishguard

By Evelyn
Living Together Municipal Welcome-ability, New Gateways, Refugee Portal

"I can't solve the whole Syrian crisis, but I can do something, for a few people." The words of Olwen Thomas, from the port of Fishguard in Pembrokeshire, southwest Wales, sum up the feelings of many people around the world.

Traditional refugee resettlement in the UK has left many refugee families isolated and struggling to adapt to their new surroundings, according to Chris Clements, a director of Social Finance UK. This lack of integration means higher rates of unemployment, depression, stress, and other problems. So, the UK, along with five other countries, is adopting a new approach.

Building a new approach

Last year, Open Society Foundations began working with the Canadian government, the UNHCR, the University of Ottawa, and the Radcliffe Foundation on a Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI). The project is spreading the word about the Canadian private and community refugee sponsorship model. It supports countries and civil society organizations interested in adopting community sponsorship models in new jurisdictions around the world.

In Wales, Thomas, and other members of her community created the Welcome Fishguard Community Sponsorship Group. Theirs was one of the first to respond to a UK scheme first announced in July 2016 by the British Home Affairs Minister Amber Rudd and the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby.

Under this new UK Community Sponsorship program, local groups agree to sponsor refugee families and help them integrate into life in the UK. They help their new families find housing, access medical and social services, arrange English language tuition, and support them with employment, leading to self-sufficiency.

Community sponsorship, Clements says, "enables local people to take responsibility for resettling a refugee family, supporting and empowering them to rebuild their lives." Canada’s record shows how it has "improved outcomes for refugees and made communities more welcoming."

Replicating what works around the world

The Community Sponsorship model is partly inspired by Canada’s success. In 1979, the mayor of Ottawa, Marion Dewar, mobilized an effort by community groups to settle 4,000 mostly Southeast Asian refugees. Since then, Canadians have resettled almost 300,000 refugees through private sponsorship programs.

As the UK effort gathered momentum in Summer 2017, GRSI and UK partners went on a weeklong “road show” – a tour of six cities in England and Wales. Roadshow participants included Canadian and UK ministers, government officials, city mayors, civil society leaders, and refugee sponsors, each of whom shared their experiences at a series of open houses that drew hundreds of representatives from interested churches and local groups.

According to the Global Refugees Sponsorship Initiative, in addition to the five countries committed to adopting the private sponsorship model, almost 15 others have expressed an interest.

Local impact and organizing

In Wales there are 13 community groups already sponsoring or looking to sponsor families across Wales. Under the umbrella of Hiraeth Hope, Fishguard residents have worked with others in Haverfordwest and Narbeth to sponsor Syrian refugee families in west Wales. Groups also formed in Cardigan, Aberystwyth and Cardiff. Hiraeth Hope was established in 2015 to connect a network of groups in different towns in Wales who were seeking to sponsor refugee families under the community settlement program. They say that being inclusive and generous is part of Welsh culture; "the Welsh language word for 'Welsh' is 'Cymro', which translates as 'one of us'. Aberystwyth was the first town to take Syrian refugees, as a result of the efforts of a community group, so living up to the heritage of inclusiveness."

Under the Home Office program, communities are expected to raise £9,000 to support refugee integration. Fishguard’s initial goal was to sponsor three Syrian families (PDF). Initial success came quickly. “Once we felt confident we were likely to get the go ahead, we began serious fund raising to cover the expenses of resettling families: to date £8000+ has been donated by our community, plus many offers of goods and free services – plenty, we estimate, to cover the first family and maybe more.”

Fishguard organizers said they were “taken aback” by the response of locals who continue to come forward with ‘countless offers’ of furniture. ‘People have been extremely generous and we have a solid groundswell of support from within the local community,” said spokesperson Olwen Thomas.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=MT3aaKElkUU


https://citiesofmigration.ca
The response in Fishguard is similar to the experience in many Canadian communities. If resistance exists in the community, it is mild. For the most part, the community comes together, before and after sponsored families arrive.

Their efforts paid off. A year after Croeso Abergwaun, the Welcome Fishguard Community Sponsorship Group, starting making plans the first Syrian family arrived. The community has welcomed them and has spent Summer of 2017 helping with language and orienting them to the community. “Unfazed by our mixed bag of weather, the family have explored the area and are happy using buses to go further afield. Thanks to the kindness of folks within our community, the children have been learning to swim, the family have been out on a boat trip, attended a wedding, watched fireworks above the bay, and been invited to many local events.” Croeso Abergwaun has begun looking into work opportunities for Nasr, the family breadwinner.

According to Chris Samra of Croeso Abergwaun, “the people of Fishguard and Goodwick have shown overwhelming generosity… Hopefully we will provide this first family with all the tools they need to integrate into the local community.” They are hoping to sponsor two additional Syrian families near future. “After all, Samra says, “there are 30 different nationalities in Fishguard – we had no idea the town was so cosmopolitan.” As new Syrian families arrive, Fishguard is being enriched even more.

BDC Internships: Breaking Down the Barriers to Refugee Employment

By Evelyn
July 31, 2017
Employment Inclusion | Entrepreneurship Inclusion | Refugee Portal

What can an employer do to create opportunities for former refugees?

The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) knows how important diversity and inclusion are to expand and reach entrepreneurs in new markets and communities. BDC is finding out a diversity strategic imperative includes the talent of former refugees in Canada.

Ellen Austin, HR Business Partner says BDC understands the benefits of hiring newcomers: "If you’re attracting the same types of candidates, you’re not moving forward. Newcomers help us to better serve newcomer entrepreneurs. They bring value to our business, with different perspectives and connections with new clients and markets. Having a diversity of perspective helps us to grow."

Being inclusive: a strategic imperative

Being inclusive has helped BDC learn more about entrepreneurs’ target markets, including connecting with entrepreneurs they may not be reaching. Ellen gives the example of an interview with a newcomer originally from Turkey. He told his interviewer there was a huge, untapped Turkish entrepreneur community in North York (Toronto). He was connected, understood the community and could bridge BDC products, and mandate, into that community.

When he was hired, BDC was able to reach and serve this new client market. It was good for BDC. It was good for the entrepreneurs. Without him, BDC would not have been able to tap into this new market, and may not have even known about the opportunity. It was also important for BDC to recognize his talent and potential beyond one target market. He has since grown into a very successful Account Manager at BDC.

Ellen says it takes time and commitment for employers to see newcomer talent as a strategic opportunity. They must commit to it. Once they do, they’ll only benefit. The opportunity and obligation for employers is critical, now more than ever. As refugee talent arrives, employers have an important role to play in recognizing them as talent first, and refugee second.

Both recruiters and hiring managers have a responsibility to expand their knowledge and understand international talent. When an employer sees a resume with international experience, it is easy to say, ‘I don’t know, it’s too much risk.’ Ellen says because of this blind spot, the Bank wondered if they were missing out on potential talent. Now, staff are educated to understand international resumes, international experience and unconscious bias. Having a diverse employee base with international experience already at BDC has also helped to evaluate specific credentials, institutions and companies.

BDC’s openness to learning means that it has become more open to international education, experience, and to a greater talent pool. It means that the perception of risk has shifted from avoiding international experience, to ensuring BDC does not miss out on internationally trained talent.

Syrian Refugees Jobs Agenda Roundtable

Even in this context however, it was hard to know what an employer could do to support arriving Syrian refugees. When presented with the opportunity, BDC joined the Syrian Refugees Jobs Agenda Roundtable, convened by Hire Immigrants. The Roundtable provides employers with an opportunity to come together with like minded companies, leveraging and learning from each others’ experiences. Ellen finds the Roundtable refreshingly collaborative. Everyone comes together to learn and help each other, all guided by the goal of creating employment opportunities for refugee talent. It is about doing the right thing.

As BDC and other Roundtable employers are finding, doing the right thing also means gaining a strategic employment advantage. Take recent Analyst hire, Mustafa Fadel. An IT Engineer with 10 years’ experience, Fadel came to Canada as a Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) in January 2016. Originally from Syria, Fadel spent three years in Jordan. With his IT background, he was able to continue to work remotely with companies in Dubai, keeping his skill set fresh.

In Canada, his initial job seeking experience was challenging. Like many newcomers, he faced a typical barrier: “once you start looking for work, you hear the Canadian experience excuse. But, no one is giving you the experience, so how do you get it? I have high level of experience. IT is the same anywhere.”

To address “Canadian experience” and other challenges for refugees, BDC created a small interview and presentation skills workshop for new refugees. It gives them the experience of being in a business environment. BDC includes video interviews, which are increasingly common in hiring practices. After an intensive, practical day of information and support, participants can apply for paid internships at BDC.

Making it a company imperative, the session is useful not only for the refugees, but for BDC. It is part of BDC’s leadership development program, building the company’s internal leaders.

The internship program started strategically. Ellen created the pilot with the support of a BDC Vice President. By creating a program with a small cohort, Ellen has been able to make the business case for not only hiring interns, but looking at refugee talent as a long-term, full time talent pool. Starting small, incrementally, gave BDC an opportunity to build the internal competence and confidence they needed to work with refugees. Success was immediate. The result was interest from departments across BDC to host refugee talent.

In Fadel, and three other interns, BDC found not only skills and competence, but also new experience that enhances company diversity. The value Fadel brings BDC is over and above his technical skills. His view of the power of diversity echoes what BDC and other employers have found: “I had different experience in the field, in terms of how I’ve worked with clients. By adding my experience to my team and their sharing with me we have improved our processes. Diversity makes our team stronger.”
Fadel originally gave himself a year to find work in his field. Like many highly-skilled refugees, he took responsibility for his success. He connected with local organizations that help refugees, such as ACCES Employment and Refugee Career Jumpstart Project (RCJP), both members of the Roundtable. With their support, he attended employment workshops, information sessions and, eventually, the connection that would lead him to BDC.

Given the opportunity to prove himself in a welcoming environment has also made his settlement in Canada a reality. He can think about his future and provide more support to the family who came with him to Canada: his parents and two sisters.

Ellen says that employers can provide opportunities, but also need to be thoughtful and offer more support and accommodation when it comes to hiring former refugees. Benefits are offered to BDC interns, such as access to the corporate Employee Assistance Program (EAP), to complement community settlement services. BDC also works with ACCES Employment’s entrepreneurship program. ACCES found many entrepreneurs in the Syrian population and created a program for them, offered in Arabic. BDC’s four new interns were front and centre, interested and volunteering to help deliver the program. Fadel says volunteering is his way to give back to new refugees.

Success

Ellen says that being introduced to more community organizations and other employers at the Roundtable has been important. She’s particularly excited about the fact that most employers at the table have national reach. While the Roundtable started in Toronto, it’s a model that can be replicated across Canada, and beyond.

It is already happening at BDC. BDC has done a second session in Ottawa with 15 former refugees. Three are currently being interviewed for internships. Another skills workshop and potential intern cohort will start soon in Toronto.

BDC has gained knowledge and community connections, and also access to a previously untapped talent pool. The Bank provides an example of how employers can create opportunities for refugees. In so doing, they create opportunities for their companies as well.

Originally published by HireImmigrants.

Read more Success Stories from the Syrian Refugees Jobs Agenda Roundtable.
Multaka: Museums Welcome Refugees

By ktuner

June 23, 2017

Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Refugee Portal

Visitors gaze awe-struck at an ornate azure blue arch. As tall as an office block, the Ishtar Gate is more than 2,500 years old, and was once one of the entrances to the ancient city of Babylon, in modern-day Iraq. Today the ancient Ishtar Gate is housed in Berlin’s Pergamon Museum.

Syrian museum guide, Bashar, has been in Germany for six months. He spent 20 years working in museums in Syria, specialising in antiquities. Today he is working in Berlin’s state museums, after receiving training as a guide through an innovative museum program called Multaka that helps refugees integrate into German society by easing them back into work and restoring a sense of self-worth. It’s been a life-saver for Bashar:

“I would like to pass the idea on to refugees that we should respect the country which has opened the door for us to come, and that we should also be proud of our cultures,” says Bashar. “When German people give me the chance to be active and practice what I did over the last 20 years, it’s not only a chance for me, but it also shows other refugees that you will find very good people who will support you and will give you the opportunity to integrate and start a better life. For me this job in the Pergamon Museum is like a gift.”

Meeting place

Multaka means “meeting place” in Arabic. In Berlin it’s the name of an innovative museum project that welcomes refugees into the city’s cultural institutions and then invites them to play host to their rich Middle Eastern and Islamic collections.

The project “Multaka: Museums as Meeting Point” (Treffpunkt Museum) is a collaboration between some of Berlin’s finest museums, the Museum für Islamische Kunst, the Vorderasiatisches Museum, the Skulpturensammlung and Museum für Byzantinische Kunst and the Deutsches Historisches Museum that provides guided museum tours to refugees in their mother tongue.

How does it work? In collaboration with the department of “Education, Outreach and Visitor Services” of the Staatliche Museen and the “Education and Outreach” department of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, a training program for the guides-to-be was developed with a focus on culturally relevant collections, didactics and methodology. Syrian and Iraqi refugees, many of them specialists like Bashar, are trained as museum guides so they can share their knowledge with fellow refugees and all Berliners. The point is to facilitate an exchange of cultural and historic experiences that can enrich both newcomer and museum regular. The program is aimed primarily at teenagers and young adults, but also addresses older people in mixed groups.

Cultural goods from the homelands

The Syrian and Iraqi artefacts exhibited in the Museum für Islamische Kunst (Museum of Islamic Art) and in the Vorderasiatisches Museum (Near Eastern Museum) are outstanding testaments to the history of humanity. By inviting refugees to participate as guides, the public institution sends a clear message of appreciation and respect, boosting the confidence of these newcomers as they deal with the challenges of settling into a new culture. At the same time the museum promotes the two-way dynamic of integration, providing Berliners with a fresh look at the collections and some of their newest neighbours.

The topics covered on Multaka tours are built on the strengths of Berlin’s various collections. At the Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, for example, that means looking at the common origins of the three world religions of Islam, Judaism and Christendom. The historic cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean region are characterised by a religiously and ethnically plural societies, which today are under threat by right wing nationalist and populist movements. In this context, museums are both memorial sites of a common past and agents of integration and inclusion.

Reflections on German history

The Deutsches Historisches Museum provides an opportunity for a different type of reflection. Visitors learn about movements less distant from the present, including German culture and history, with all of its crises and renewals. However, rather than the dark era of the Third Reich, it is the years of re-building after the Second World War that offer refugee visitors optimism and a glimmer of hope for the re-building of Iraq and Syria one day. Indeed, the majority of the 19 apprentice guides from Iraq and Syria have chosen this museum as their preferred place of work.

On one level, the guided tours make questions around historical objects relevant to contemporary debates, in order to establish a connection between the past and the present. In the process, the guides incorporate the visitors into the process of observing and interpreting the objects. In this way, through the mutual dialogue and the consideration of their own history, the visitors become active participants.

Space for intercultural dialogue

On another level, the guided museum tours also call attention to historical and cultural connections between Germany, Syria and Iraq. The recognition and incorporation of such cultural commonalities helps create an “epoch-transcending narrative” and bridge between experiences of the refugees’ countries of origin and their new host country.
Clear language, peer-to-peer communication, and something for all age groups: the “Multaqa” project formula not only facilitates refugee access to museums and social and cultural points of connection with Berliners, it increases their participation in the public sphere. Invitations to museum events such as workshops, talks or special guided tours provide additional context for integration and intercultural dialogue, while promoting a pedagogical agenda to make museums vibrant spaces for day-to-day recreation and social activity.

Starbucks and the First One Thousand

By kturner
Employment Inclusion Refugee Portal

Starbucks recently pledged to hire 10,000 refugees in its stores worldwide. In March 2017, Starbucks Canada committed to hiring 1,000 refugees over the next five years.

When asked why Starbucks is making this commitment, Luisa Girotto, Starbucks Canada Vice President of Public Affairs, says “Starbucks is particularly well placed to successfully hire refugees as we have existing hiring programs in place that address hiring people, specifically disconnected youth, who face challenges in finding opportunity. We are committed to being a leading employer of refugees in Canada. This resilient and highly-talented group of people are a valued addition to our teams as we have always been a place of inclusion, respectful dialogue and opportunity.”

In April 2015 Starbucks Canada launched a program, in partnership with various levels of government and local social agencies, to take real action to tackle the country’s critical youth unemployment rates. The company took leadership position by committing 10 per cent of new store hires to Opportunity Youth, which are young people who are facing various systemic barriers to employment and require even more support in finding pathways to opportunity. The program which started in Toronto has expanded to Montreal, Vancouver and Calgary, with more cities to come. Girotto believes Starbucks will have the same success and impact among refugees to Canada.

Collective impact

Starbucks reached out to Hire Immigrants as their national partner in this ambitious effort. As part of the Syrian Refugees Jobs Agenda Roundtable, Starbucks is working with other employers and community partners to share, learn and scale employment solutions for former refugees.

Starbucks isn't trying to do this by themselves. When government, community groups and employers come together, Girotto says that all partners can leverage their expertise and efforts for refugee employment success.

Working through Hire Immigrants, Starbucks will identify and connect with local refugee-serving agencies in each key city/market where it has stores. City by city, Starbucks will work with local agencies to identify candidates and create opportunities.

Meet and Greet

In its work with youth, Starbucks has found the high touch approach to have high impact. They created a Meet & Greet model that helps job candidates better understand Starbucks. It gives the company and candidates the time and space to explore what Starbucks is looking for in new hires, the work culture, and what success looks like at the company. It's a safe environment where no one is being evaluated. Girotto says it helps Starbucks employees get to know candidates in a personal and friendly way.

She says this approach removes barriers that could potentially get in the way of someone applying through Starbucks' software-based application system. It streamlines the flow of potential candidates to the company. Together with community partners who identify clients most likely to be interested and ready, the company can connect with people and help them understand the opportunities, and what they need to make the leap to employment.

Many employees show interest to volunteer at these events, showcasing how this commitment has engaged Starbucks employees. Girotto says that what employees take away is huge. The first refugee Meet & Greet with Syrian refugees, hosted by ACCES Employment on May 31st, was overwhelming from an emotional point of view. Every Starbucks partner who attended came away feeling proud and rewarded.

When it comes to former refugees, Girotto says they are looking for skills, personality, learning agility, and Emotional Intelligence (EQ), not job experience. The Meet & Greet allows company staff to meet people and experience who they are in a friendly environment. For the former refugees, it is a way to connect with a potential employer in an unfamiliar labour market.

Bigger than Corporate Social Responsibility

Always in person, always one-on-one, these sessions have resulted in an astronomical return on investment in the Opportunity Youth program. Girotto says corporate job fairs typically measure success when 10% of attendees are eventually offered a job. In the Starbucks’ Meet & Greet model 50-90% of participants are offered a job. She thinks the company can replicate this success in its refugee Meet & Greet sessions.

Ultimately, the sessions are a small investment for the company. Barriers for potential hires are removed. Community partners like ACCES know the candidates, and will know who to refer to the Meet & Greet with an eye for success. The turn around from Meet & Greet to interviews takes days, not weeks. Candidates can be offered a job and begin training within a short period of time.

Those hired gain secure employment, but also benefits that exceed what most workers find in the industry. Starbucks provides part-time employees, working a minimum of 20 hours per week, with “full-time” benefits including: health, dental, tuition reimbursements, company stocks, future savings, career and personal support services. The company also offers an Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) to all employees which provides mental health support, including short-term services. Most recently, they increased their mental health benefits to $5,000 per year for all eligible employees, who work a minimum of 20 hours per week, and their dependents.

Starbucks has found that their approach has also translated into greater staff retention. Workers who participate feel they work for a company that cares about its communities. Building a secure, passionate and loyal workforce is also a win for Starbucks.

It's a model that can work for other employers as well.

Reprinted with permission from Hire Immigrants.
Migration and diversity is the new normal in the 21st century. One city is making sure inclusion is also the new normal. How best to integrate new immigrants and refugees is one of Western Europe’s biggest challenges. In the small Belgian city of Mechelen, the mayor’s passionate commitment to inclusive city-building has created a winning formula.

Mayor Bart Somers, City of Mechelen, was one of three city leaders awarded the 2016 World Mayor Prize which honoured mayors and their communities for their efforts to welcome refugees and offer them safety, shelter and support. In contrast to fellow awardees in Greece and Athens where refugee populations surged in cities across the country, Mechelen was the only Belgian town at the height of the refugee crisis to ask the federal government to send refugees its way. Why? Because, for Somers, there was no other way to go. “Human rights and justice are part of the DNA of this city.”

Over a nine-month period, 200 refugees were housed in an emergency aid shelter where they received Dutch classes, lessons focused on basic social skills as well as volunteer opportunities that brought them into regular contact with Mechelen residents. Housing the refugees, who have since been transferred to communities across Flanders, made the city stronger and better, says Somers, whose own grandfather spent time in a refugee camp in the Netherlands during the First World War. “They gave us the opportunity to realize a central Western value: that you have to give shelter to people in need, people fleeing war and violence. This is one of the basic principles of our society, and if we abandon this, we aren’t protecting our Western society, but destroying it.”

But the real story here is not about refugee reception. It’s about the rapid transformation over a 16 year period of an economically depressed and socially challenged town into the thriving, open and inclusive city of 86,000 Mechelen is today. A place where Mechelaars feel like Mechelaars, no matter where they, their parents or their grandparents are from. “There’s only one community in Mechelen, and that’s Mechelaars,” says Somers. “There are 86,000 of them, and they’re all different.”

The World Mayor Prize invites us to explore Somers’ efforts to create an inclusive city, and the secret to its success.

“Diversity is reality, inclusion is a choice.”— The Honourable Ratna Omidvar, Senate of Canada

Years ago Somers made the choice for inclusion. In a city of 138 nationalities, where one in two children born have an immigrant background, diversity was a reality the mayor of Mechelen could not ignore. The question was: “How do you organize this? How do you adequately support people? How do you organize this diversity in a good way?” Success in Mechelen did not come overnight. Over 16 years, Somers developed a simple formula for building an inclusive city: public safety, improving neighbourhoods and public spaces, and connection. Starting with tough policing and community outreach, the mayor’s priority was preventive action aimed at strengthening social ties; subsidizing community programmes; and mobilizing schools and police officers.

Inclusion: a place called home

Central to Somers’ strategy is the idea that safe, clean neighbourhoods and responsive city services are critical to building a culture of mutual respect in which diversity and inclusion can thrive: “People will never have open minds for diversity if they live in neighbourhoods where they are scared.”

Safe streets. In the last 15 years, Somers dramatically increased police spending and installed more cameras than any other city in Flanders. Why? According to Somers, “Safety is a basic need…. I knew that if I could get the middle class to return to the city, it would create the financial and social leverage to lift the city from this negative spiral of impoverishment.”

Public space. Under Somers’ administration, streets were also re-laid and new parks and car parks constructed. Entire neighbourhoods got a fresh makeover. Residents with (and without) migrants roots are hugely appreciative. In the past, many new arrivals had no choice but to buy homes in the city’s poorest neighbourhoods because rampant racism and discrimination made it impossible to rent on the private market. Today, those residents have seen their investment double in value.

A strict anti-ghetto policy. Somers is adamant about “ghettos”, whether spatial, cultural or economic, immigrant or ‘white’: “If people are separated physically they are also separated mentally,” he says. Living in the ordinary spaces of school, playground and marketplace are essential to creating the conditions for shared identity, connection and social mobility. By making all residents Mechelaars first, Somers aimed to instill a shared sense of belonging, but also a deeper sense of rights and responsibilities among all in the community.

A new narrative

Somers needed a new narrative of belonging. It was no longer enough to welcome the newcomer and then ask her to adapt as a condition of belonging. And how can you ask a third generation youth to ‘adapt’ whose parents were born in Mechelen and who speaks Dutch at home? That young person may be Muslim, but he or she has an equal claim to the city. “It is not only up to the newcomer to adapt,” says Somers. “Everyone has to adapt to the New Normal. It is the reality of the 21st century.”

To help all Mechelen residents adapt to the new reality of diversity and learn to “see each other as citizens of the same city,” the city took the bold, symbolic decision to add two new figures to its iconic group of city mascots, four giants that are brought out for all important civic events. The two new additions—Amir and Noa—represent North African and black African giants and send a clear message to newcomers that they are part of the city’s social fabric, while making clear the narrative shift for longtime residents.
Building connection is the new normal

For the native Mechelaar, urban citizenship means recognizing that to be a successful, prosperous and safe, their diverse city must also be inclusive. For a new arrival, it means feeling immediately welcome in the new city they chose. For a refugee, who may have experienced years of statelessness, it means stability, safety, security; a powerful feeling of settlement along the path to a new beginning.

A narrative about urban citizenship that has something for everyone increases the sense of welcome, inclusion and belonging across the city. It creates a livable city, in all neighbourhoods, for all Mechelaars. It is an outstanding example of what local leadership can achieve with readily available policy instruments, community action and the necessary investments to make it work.

Success

Not long ago, Mechelen was a struggling city. A lack of civic pride, criminality, political polarization and pollution were the norm. Today the city is a model for other cities in Belgium and neighbouring countries: a clean, pleasant, safe and open city.

Somers has also successfully dealt with another Belgian reality, radicalization and its appeal to marginalized youth seeking identity and relevance they sometimes cannot find that in their immediate community. Not in Mechelen while Somers as Mayor: “Not a single resident has left the town to fight in Syria, a surprising fact considering that Belgium has the highest ratio of foreign fighters per capita, and Mechelen is surrounded by cities such as Vilvoorde, Brussels and Antwerp, which have seen dozens and dozens of young men leave.” Rather, Mechelen has created a culture where Immigrants are recognized and see themselves as full citizens, and young people feel that they belong, that they are Europeans and more specifically, Flemish Belgians.

Be your city’s Minister of Society

In his essay for the World Mayor 2016 award, Somers calls for a ‘Minister of Society’ to help bring people together under a common sense of citizenship and values. To combat isolation and prejudice, it is important to not simply live beside each other, but to live together.

In a recent video Somers further comments on how he built a broad public consensus for inclusion among Mechelaars: “There are challenges. People may not feel secure, they feel alienated, or long for a past that is gone. We have to take those issues seriously. They have to feel that a mayor understands that they will sometimes have difficulties with a changing world. But, at the same time, you have to create a new WE, a new common identity and that has to be based on the future of living together in the city, creating a new co-citizenship. In the end, diversity creates more freedom, more economic and social opportunities and it creates a city that’s adapted to the 21st century.”

Migration, diversity and inclusion are the new normal in Melechen and as civic leaders wake up to Somers’ vision of inclusive city-building, a welcome future for more and more cities in Belgium and across Europe.
Cologne Library opens its doors to refugees: ‘You fill this room with life’

While a flurry of snow threatens to fall outside at any moment, Sanaw, a 30-year-old Kurdish Christian from western Iran, is proudly describing his involvement in a nativity play over Christmas.

He holds court at a table of eight fellow refugees, explaining in coherent German how the local theatre group, of which he has only been a member for a matter of months, has helped to improve his sense of belonging in Cologne, his home city for just over a year.

“Even though I’m living in a refugee camp, I was able to interact with a few locals,” he says, as the group listen intently. “And I was also able to learn German without doing a course.”

Sanaw, a graphic designer who ran his own agency back home, is one of the growing number of users of Cologne Public Library’s sprachraum (language space).

The sprachraum, a large ground-floor room that sits opposite the main library building, serves as both a meeting point and learning hub for the city’s migrant community – which, as of December 2016, is 13,253-strong.

From a UK vantage point, Cologne Public Library – which recorded more than two million visitors in 2015 – stands in direct contrast to prevailing trends. According to a BBC investigation last year, 350 libraries have closed across the UK since 2010, contributing to 8,000 job losses. Addressing the House of Lords in October, Big Issue founder John Bird urged for urgent action to be taken to ringfence library funding.

“If you are going to cut libraries you must be prepared to build more prisons, to build more homeless hostels,” said Bird. "Libraries are essential, yet what is happening is that they are being cut.”

His argument was supported by Baroness Gail Rebuck, Labour peer and chair of the Penguin Random House publishing group, who said: “Libraries should be seen as key community centres, open to all, where, alongside books, people can rely on other essential life services.”

In Germany, however, libraries appear to have retained their cultural status. According to broadcaster Deutsche Welle, footfall in German public bibliothecae actually grew by 5 million people between 2013 and 2015.

That’s not to say they have been without their own budget fears. But unlike many of their UK counterparts, German libraries have better adapted into dynamic spaces with a bent towards digital and community engagement as well as printed matter.

Many public libraries in Germany, including Cologne, now include “maker spaces”, in which users can experiment with new technologies, including 3D printers and virtual reality glasses. For every study room, there is likely to be a cafe or children’s play area.

On this cold Saturday afternoon, the group is here for “Offene Deutschhilfe” (literally “Open German Help”), a weekly workshop aimed at helping refugees in a range of matters, from German vocabulary to filling in job applications and finding accommodation.

As Susanne – one of the two volunteers hosting the session – recommends to Sanaw an free recital held by the Chamber Philharmonia Cologne, one-to-one language lessons are taking place on tables dotted around the space. Others are at workstations reading emails; a man in an oversized bomber jacket pours himself a coffee.

The sprachraum was conceived by Dr Hanne Vogt, the Cologne Public Library’s director, in 2015 – the same year in which Germany welcomed more than 1 million asylum seekers as part of Angela Merkel’s open-door border policy.

“The idea actually came about before the first huge wave of refugees came to Germany,” explains Vogt. “I was seeing a lot of people who were coming to the central library for language lessons, who were asking if there was any additional space where they could go for extra classes. At that time, we didn’t have anything.”

It was around this point that Vogt discovered an abandoned room across the square abutting onto the library’s main entrance. The librarian pitched the idea of a space exclusively for refugees to City Hall, which was paying rent on the property.

“They agreed instantly,” says Vogt. “It then took us three or four months to finalise the room and get all the furniture. It’s now been open for around 18 months, and it’s in good condition. If you have a nice space, people will always take good care of it.”

Today, the sprachraum counts the Red Cross as one of its key partners, as well as several “private initiatives”, says Vogt. It has also seen its number of volunteers – on whose custodianship the space is entirely dependent – increase from 20 to over 50 in the last year.

The volunteers come from a broad cross-section of Colognian society, explains Sarah Dudek, sprachraum coordinator. “They consist of everyone from students, university lecturers and retired teachers, to advertising professionals,” she says. “We’ve also started to have volunteers who are migrants themselves, and who have similar stories to the
new refugees."

“We are giving more training to them, too,” adds Vogt. “Only last week, we had a meeting to discuss what they need and what could be done better, such as having more of a presence on social media.”

But even with a more than twofold increase in volunteers, “we need more back-up”, says Dudek. Sundays aside – when public libraries, like retail stores and supermarkets, are required to shut by German law – sprachraum has a busy calendar, holding daily events.

These include games afternoons, arts and crafts sessions, and well as mentoring sessions for families and children. Recently, the library – one of Germany’s biggest – also kickstarted a joint digital storytelling project with counterparts in Malmö, Roskilde and Athens, through which refugees are encouraged to share their personal experiences.

While its social media presence may need tightening up, new people are finding their way to the sprachraum all the time through a mix of lessons put on in the library and subsequent word of mouth.

For Vogt – who has held the directorship in Cologne since 2008 – the sprachraum embodies the shift in the role of the 21st-century library; a byword for community engagement. “It’s a space that belongs to the public,” she says.

Could UK libraries learn from its example? Absolutely, she argues, citing other German institutions running their own refugee programmes. They include the Association of Public Libraries in Berlin, which is the first German library association to provide library cards to refugees without demanding an official certificate of registration – normally a strict prerequisite in Germany.

“There are other cities doing this, although I’m not sure they have such a nice extra space as the sprachraum,” she says wryly. “Many of them are offering guided tours and materials, offering space. They are engaged in this.”

She believes Germany’s libraries, particularly in the bigger cities, have an obligation to meet the needs of asylum and refugees. Libraries in the UK, which has taken far fewer refugees – perhaps feel less of an onus to do the same, suggests Vogt.

Back at the “Offene Deutschhilfe” session, introductions are being made. Following Sanaw’s lead, Nizar, also from Syria, is discussing his hopes of returning to his true vocation as a tailor. He currently works as a caretaker in a local hospital. Vogt, who drops in on the session, reveals there is a sewing station on the fourth floor of the library, and suggests he bring some materials the next time he is over. “Maybe you could sew something for the [Cologne] carnival this month,” says a member of the group, and is met by a chorus of encouragement. Nizar smiles.

All eight refugees share the same objective: to be able to integrate into their new culture, even if it is not always easy. A spate of sexual assaults on women in Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2015 was linked to migrants, providing fodder for far-right populist groups such as Alternative for Germany and Pegida.

Some are finding the challenge harder than others.

Ibrahim, a 32-year old Libyan and IT professional, describes his fruitless hunt for a flat. “I don’t stand a chance,” he says. Mohammed, a 30-year-old hospital worker, speaks of his hopes of doing a master’s degree but fears he will be precluded of the chance due to limited placements.

Michael, an Eritrean who has lived in a hostel for the past five months following a “catastrophic journey” from his homeland via Libya and Italy, simply wants to meet more of his fellow townsfolk.

“I don’t know any,” he says, “apart from the ones I meet here at the library.” At this, the whole group nods in agreement. “And you fill this room with life,” replies Dr Vogt with a warm smile.

*Some of the names have been changed.

Can a functioning street lamp be the key to peace? Sometimes, it’s almost that simple.

In 2011 a group of Palestinian women in East Jerusalem decided they’d had enough of broken street lamps, unrepaired roads and other nuisances that caused daily tensions and disrupted the peace of the neighbourhood. Local volunteers started using the municipal hotline to demand the repair and replacement of faulty street lamps and were soon meeting with relevant municipal authorities. No, the women explained, contrary to what municipal workers too often said, the street lamps would not be broken by local youth.

Five years later, the street lamps are still working, bus stops have been repaired and thousands of other small and large improvements have been made.

Empowered by a unique program called MiniActive that focuses on community-led action and helping local residents become change agents in their own neighbourhoods, MiniActive volunteers are leading the way for civic action in East Jerusalem, and across the city.

From Activism to Action

Conditions for the more than 300,000 Palestinians living in poverty in East Jerusalem often put the health and welfare of local residents at risk. The quarter’s winding streets are poorly maintained, filled with potholes and often littered due to inefficient garbage removal by local authorities. Public stairs and walkways are uneven and unsafe, and few public buildings – schools, welfare offices, community organizations – are handicapped accessible.

Compounding these challenges, residents often lack the tools to self-organize and build the organizational capacity needed to effect changes on their own, leaving them feeling disempowered and disengaged from civic processes. Such frustrations can be exacerbated by cultural and language barriers, or unfamiliarity with municipal services.

For these reasons, the success of the intervention by Palestinian women in East Jerusalem around municipal repairs to their neighbourhood caught the eye of the Jerusalem Intercultural Center (JICC).

Since 2004, the JICC had been engaged in a series of internal discussions about activism as a tool for community change. Since their mission was to help residents of all identities create positive impact within their communities and in the city as a whole, activism seemed an important approach. However, over the years they had noticed that much of the activist energy was non-effective, more cause and complaint than positive impact.

By contrast, the activism of East Jerusalem’s neighbourhood women was practical, positive and place-based. Its example galvanized the JICC to pilot a new model for community engagement called “MiniActive.” The central idea? To let people train themselves to change the world, by choosing a very small part of the world to change.

Agents of community change

MiniActive was launched in 2012, with the support and partnership of the JICC and the Jerusalem Foundation and the dual objective of effecting real change and empowering community action. Its goals are to advance human rights in East Jerusalem by creating sustainable grassroots advocacy and empowerment mechanisms; to empower women as agents of change; and to help all residents, but mainly women, take practical steps to improve the everyday lives of East Jerusalem residents.

MiniActive workshops consist of small group meetings in which each of the participants is invited to choose an issue to work on that is both ‘do-able’ and requires working with or convincing others to do something, whether it be neighbours, local agencies or the municipality, because learning to work with others is critical to developing organizational capacity. Examples can be repairing a street light, improving garbage collection in a specific location, fixing a pothole, replacing a safety fence, initiating an event in school, or simply connecting neighbours to meet together over an issue. The criteria for choosing projects are:

- **Results can be achieved in 1-2 months.** The relatively quick results seen on the ground in this model boosts participants’ self-confidence and empowers them to ‘graduate’ on to larger and more complex issues.
- **The solution cannot be achieved alone** – some other body or organization must be activated to achieve success. This often includes the Municipality or other service provider.
- **A passion for community.** The participant has passion to achieve this target issue.

Whether it’s a problem on the street, an issue to be tackled at the local school, or a service improvement at the health clinic, the program empowers participants to identify problems in their immediate community, and helps them to develop effective methods of solving those problems, which can be applied to larger-scale problems in the future as well.

Language classes, recycling, horticulture: a community hub

In 2014 MiniActive upgraded its monthly professional development seminars for their volunteer coordinators from East Jerusalem’s various neighbourhoods. Previously, monthly meetings largely consisted of peer learning and assistance on a case-by-case basis. The new format included workshops on how to map local needs and set priorities; how to navigate the Municipality and its different departments; how to navigate other service providers (phone, electric, water, etc.); how to write letters to these agencies; how to deal with the Municipality’s contractors in the field; who might (or might not) be willing to work with them should a woman be supervising— and more.

In addition to in-service seminars about accessing local services more effectively, Hebrew classes have been organized for more than 200 women to facilitate communication with municipal service providers. An important project outcome was the addition of Arabic-speakers to the municipal hotline, both to encourage participation and to handle the volume of calls MiniActive outreach was generating.

Since its overall goal is to improve residents’ immediate environment, in 2014 MiniActive began to offer courses and workshops that focused on a broader definition of improving one’s environment, such as composting, recycling, etc. A photography workshop increased the women’s ability and propensity to look around them and see new ways to improve their neighbourhood. In 2016, the first ever Arabic-language horticultural therapy course was added.

MiniActive has become a community hub, offering a wide range of activities – from exercise to crocheting to baking to trips – where local women can gather to enjoy their leisure, each other’s company, and the rewards of hard work.

Today MiniActive’s network of volunteers spills across 15 districts, with 50 – 100 women in each district, and covers nearly every neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. Working in small groups of 4 to 6, the women of MiniActive are working on 500 issues each month, solving approximately half and continuing to work on the remainder, and improving the everyday lives of residents through continual communication and interaction with service providers (telephone, electricity, water, municipality, etc.) and community members.

What’s more, municipal service providers recognize the effectiveness of MiniActive’s work and are less inclined to see the complaints as antagonizing ‘nuisances.’ Rather, MiniActive participants are viewed as partners in the change process.

Success

MiniActive has galvanized civic action in East Jerusalem neighbourhoods. In 2016 alone more than 6,000 formal complaints were filed, and over 2,300 problems resolved. Among the improvements, all bus stops in three neighbourhoods were repaired or replaced. On a larger scale, MiniActive’s response to an acute problem around garbage removal resulted in the launch of the “We Won’t Live in Filth” Facebook campaign. The result? Millions of shekels were added to the East Jerusalem sanitation budget, and garbage collection became a central issue in local activism throughout Jerusalem.

From its modest beginnings, MiniActive quickly grew to a network of 1,000 Palestinian women in every corner of East Jerusalem, arguably the largest network of volunteers in East Jerusalem. In 2015, MiniActive’s success was internationally recognized when the project’s director was invited to present at the Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) Partners Forum in Washington, DC. In November 2016 a group from the Czech Republic visited Jerusalem to learn about MiniActive. Interest in the project remains lively. Today, the MiniActive Facebook page has over 20,300 ‘likes.’

Over the past 5 years a growing MiniActive volunteer network has solved thousands of neighbourhood problems and is training hundreds of women on how to engage local service providers and municipal services to bring about community change by working with the system, and despite the system.

For the first time, MiniActive empowers participants to be stakeholders in their own future.
When language is a barrier to effective communication, translation and interpretation are essential. They bridge the space and time a newcomer needs as they move from low language skills to proficient language ability. They're also expensive. In Canada, the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) is partnering with Google to use the Google Translate app to build a simple, every day way to bridge the language gap. Through the use of translation technology, they also want to create a sense of welcome and belonging for newcomers.

According to ICA's Community Integration Coordinator, Kate Longpre, using Google Translate was an obvious idea. She and her colleagues already use it to communicate with clients. It's a familiar tool among newcomers. A translation app can clearly be useful in resettlement. Many do use Google Translate for just that reason. But, perhaps surprisingly, no one had reached out to Google to partner with them to re-frame Google Translate as a resettlement and integration tool. Until now.

ICA is working directly with Google Translate staff to provide training to community members, businesses and agencies, as well as newcomers themselves. The "We Speak Translate" project provides an accessible, no cost platform to enhance communication with newcomers as they improve their English skills.

Organizations that take the training receive a program decal to put up in their entrance way, indicating they are part of the program to promote diversity and communication across language barriers. The decal is a public symbol that tells newcomers they are welcome.

Bridging the communication gap

Google Translate won't replace the standardized language training or interpretation services ICA offers. But, it's a useful complement for newcomers to continue to learn and become confident with language outside the classroom. Language acquisition can take more time with some groups of newcomers. This tool will help bridge basic communication in the community.

Longpre recognizes that machine translation apps like Google Translate are not perfect tools. They don't allow for completely accurate in-depth complex or highly technical translations. But, an app like Google Translate bridges the initial language barrier and can create a point of connection.

And more…

Longpre sees Google Translate as much more than a technology tool. "It becomes the moment in time when you connect with someone. The technology allows for that moment, rather than no connection. It's where community building takes place."

Newcomers will know that if they go to a participating business or organization, the people there are familiar with the app and want to welcome them.

Recent Syrian refugee to Victoria, Ibrahim Haj-Ibrahim, outlines how important this is: "It's very important for people to know that somebody wants to speak to them. It will give me more confidence that people care to speak with strangers. When I see somebody has this logo, I will know that people want to speak with me."

Improved communications is the first point of the We Speak Translate project. ICA will provide 45 minutes of training on Google Translate. They'll create power users in the community, who have a commitment and interest to helping newcomers navigate their new city. Community engagement is equally important, says Longpre. The training will also build awareness about resettlement, integration and inclusiveness among community members and local businesses.

Longpre says that people in the community are looking for ways to support and help newcomer integrate: "This is a very tangible initiative for any community member. They can wear a button on their coat that shows a newcomer that they're are approachable, welcoming. It's a tangible, no cost initiative for the community." Anyone and everyone can become an integration actor.

Human service organizations as leading innovators

Building digital capacity in human service nonprofits can be challenging. Clients tend to be more tech savvy and demand technology-mediate services. Forward looking agencies are looking more closely at how they use technology as a tool in resettlement and integration.

Many organizations connect with local volunteers or civic tech groups in their communities to accomplish amazing things with technology, on a small scale. Longpre decided to go big. She reached out with her idea to use Google Translate both as an integration tool and a symbol for inclusive and diverse communities. Google liked the idea and the partnership was born.
Longpre says the “What's In It For Me” is obvious for a resettlement organization. She says it's also obvious for Google. Google's ability to align a product with a broader mission, focused on integration and welcoming communities, is a tangible form of corporate social responsibility. We Speak Translate illustrates how their technology can have deeper impact.

Google is global. They have the capacity to scale We Speak Translate in a way that matches the scale of the global migration crisis. Google Translate as an integration tool can be replicated in any city, anywhere in the world. It has potential for all integration actors to create more welcoming communities.
The World in Ten Blocks

By Evelyn

Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Living Together, Spatial Inclusion

When childhood friends Marc Serpa Francoeur and Robinder Uppal moved to Toronto to study Documentary Media at Ryerson University, they found inspiration in their new neighbourhood. Unlike other parts of Toronto known informally by their predominant (or former/historical) ethnic group, like Little Italy, Greektown, or Chinatown, Bloorcourt is a unique island of diversity within the diverse city. The immigrant entrepreneurs who line Bloorcourt’s main commercial artery became their documentary subjects.

After five years of embedded film making, the result is “The World in Ten Blocks,” a documentary film in two formats: a standard documentary film, and a groundbreaking interactive online documentary. The standard film follows the story of immigrant entrepreneurs along a seven-theme narrative that mirrors the immigration experience. Viewers discover the richness of the immigration experience through the film’s conversations. These are immigration and entrepreneurship success stories, although not without struggle. The businesses inevitably become important community hubs, places of mentorship and support for other immigrants. Businesses may seem like unusual hubs for immigrant inclusion and sources of settlement. Not in the typical immigration narrative:

From national to neighbourhood

The interactive documentary brings you onto the street itself. You follow the film makers, from business to business, with historical snippets about immigration in the neighbourhood along the way. You’re on the street with them, getting to know the community. It’s a bit of a choose your own adventure; you decide how much or how little of each subject you want to view and learn about.

Online attention can be notoriously short. But, when your attention is captured, it can also be long. Serpa Francoeur says that “one of the strengths of the project is that it’s not predicated upon a linear viewing or experience of the community. Our intention was to allow for different levels of engagement.” Viewers can “snack” the community, and come back later for more. Or, they can go through every nook and cranny of the interactive film in an experience that mirrors a Netflix binge.

You can’t help but dive in.

Viewers come away with a deep sense of the resilience of immigrants, and independent community entrepreneurs. It’s an overarching theme in both films. Serpa Francoeur says the idea of resilience was not easy to broach with their interview subjects: “To get at that more meta expression of resilience, you come to it in a round about way. That was part of our role, to stitch things together. That might even be the single most substantive and overarching theme and commonality between peoples’ stories. Whatever your trials and tribulations are, the challenges, but also the victories and successes, resilience is common to them all.”

The approach

You can’t help but want to know more about Serpa Francoeur and Uppal’s subjects. The film makers not only lived in the community, but spent much time with their subjects, over five years. As the connections deepened, people became more comfortable and more open. “There’s an inherent value to speak to people who aren’t normally spoken to,
or asked for interviews,” says Serpa Francoeur. “Those people who are so confident in the immateriality of what they have to say. A lot of people would say ‘Why do you want to talk to me? My English isn’t good.’ Or ‘Go talk to the community leader.’” The results illustrate how every immigrant’s experience is inherently interesting.

Spending five years to film, produce and learn a new technology (Uppal learned how to code to create the interactive version!) requires resources, connections and support. They credit their professor, Richard Lachman, at Ryerson University’s Documentary Media MFA Program as a major influence and support. Ryerson’s Transmedia Zone gave them access to gear and other support to set up mobile screenings at Hot Docs and Nuit Blanche, and this year, Making Peace. Along the way, they won a small financial award at Ryerson, Partnership for Change: The RBC Immigrant, Diversity and Inclusion Project at Ryerson University, to continue the work. It’s also no small task to get it in front of an audience. They partnered with the Globe and Mail, giving them a national reach.

The result?

The result is not only a great film. Francoeur and Uppal have created an innovative storytelling approach that enlarges our understanding of immigrant entrepreneurs, their experiences and how their businesses shape our neighbourhoods. The viewer travels through and truly experiences the world in these ten blocks.

There are lessons for documentarians, but, also for the immigrant and refugee settlement sector. It’s a model that can be easily transplanted and replicated in any city. City actors already see possibilities in how the interactive approach communicates the local to viewers.

There is interest in bringing “The World in Ten Blocks” to cities across the world. A city actor in Rome sees a market, not a street, as the focus. In Delhi, internal rural-urban migrants would be the focus. The possibilities are endless to showcase local place-based diversity and community.

The immigration conversation everywhere has its ebbs and flows. Currently, it’s a Canadian obsession. Serpa Francoeur and Uppal’s contribution is to showcase how neighbourhood prosperity can be built on a foundation of diversity and inclusion. It’s a lesson any city can look to for inspiration.
Procurement Power

By Evelyn

Economic Inclusion, Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Municipal

By: Flavie Halais, Citiescope

Every year, the city of Toronto spends about CAD 1.8 billion (USD 1.35 billion) on goods and services, from large construction projects to one-off catering projects. Now, the city wants to harness that procurement power to help raise minors, aboriginal people, recent immigrants and people with disabilities out of poverty.

Starting January 1, 2017, Toronto is implementing a new Social Procurement Policy. The policy establishes clear guidelines and tools to ensure that businesses owned by members of disadvantaged groups participate in the bidding process for public contracts. It also aims to ensure that businesses contracting with the city hire and train a diverse workforce. Vendors working on large city contracts are encouraged to participate in workforce development programmes with vulnerable groups, such as youth.

Supplier diversity programmes for minorities and women are already well established in the United States. And procurement schemes focusing on social goals are multiplying in other countries, notably in the United Kingdom and Australia. Requirements that large infrastructure or development projects benefit the local community — usually through local hires — also are taking root in these places.

But Canada has been late to adopt similar initiatives, both in the public and private sectors. With its Social Procurement Policy, Toronto not only wants to catch up with other global cities. It's also playing a leadership role for Canadian public institutions that are interested in channeling their procurement needs to help build more equitable communities, deploying a unique strategy that blends elements of the American and European approaches.

"City Hall is playing a leadership role by championing social procurement as a corporate and operational goal," says Colette Murphy, executive director of the Atkinson Foundation, which has provided the city with financial and technical support for the development of the policy. "The city is a pioneer."

Navigating red tape

Denise Campbell is a director at the city of Social Development, Finance & Administration division, and has been a champion of social procurement for a decade. Her interest was first piqued while working on city-led development projects in low-income neighbourhoods. As she recalls, community members were asking whether local youth could be employed on public works projects.

Starting January 1, 2017, Toronto is implementing a new Social Procurement Policy. The policy establishes clear guidelines and tools to ensure that businesses owned by members of disadvantaged groups participate in the bidding process for public contracts. It also aims to ensure that businesses contracting with the city hire and train a diverse workforce. Vendors working on large city contracts are encouraged to participate in workforce development programmes with vulnerable groups, such as youth.

Over the next ten years, Campbell kept trying informal approaches to hire and train young people on public construction projects, but she could never turn one-off projects into policy. In 2012, however, she found a new ally in Michael Pacholok, who, as the city’s new Chief Procurement Officer, took over the department in charge of awarding the larger city contracts for goods and services.

Pacholok was aware the procurement process was too bureaucratic for small- and medium-sized enterprises, and was already reflecting on how to incorporate diverse companies into the city’s supply chain. When Denise Campbell’s team approached him to discuss how to leverage city contracts as a way to strengthen economic inclusion, Pacholok saw an opportunity for both divisions to work on common goals. "They had done a pilot project before that was successful," Pacholok recalls, "so I was intrigued by how this would work."

At the same time, Toronto was getting ready for the 2015 Pan American Games, the largest sport event ever hosted by the city. The City Council required the Organizing Committee to include a social procurement clause in municipal contracts linked to the Games; this would serve as tangible proof that social procurement could be implemented in spite of administrative constraints and legal concerns.

The culture at City Hall was changing. A growing number of reports were sounding the alarm on a rise in poverty, food insecurity and lack of affordable housing, especially in Toronto’s inner suburban areas. Nineteen percent of residents are now considered low-income, and 27 percent of children live in poverty. In 2014, John Tory was elected mayor and made poverty reduction one of his priorities. In 2015, the city adopted the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, a 20-year, multi-sectoral policy that served as a major rationale to support social procurement.

"It is one of our signature initiatives from the Poverty Reduction Strategy," explains Campbell, who also headed up development of the anti-poverty policy. "It was important for me to include social procurement in that strategy, just one more that reinforces to Council, the vendor community and ourselves that [the strategy] is an important systemic tool if we use it right."

Creating opportunities

Diverse suppliers cite a number of barriers that prevent them from accessing contracts, both in the private and public sectors. Finding out about requests for proposals in the first place can be difficult. Even harder for these firms, which tend to be small in size, is going through the bidding process and competing with larger, more established firms.

On both sides of the procurement process, there’s a mutual lack of knowledge that prevents diverse suppliers from getting into the game.

"There is a perception that there aren’t enough diverse suppliers out there," says Cassandra Dorrington, president of the Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council, or CAMSC. "It isn’t true."

CAMSC is one of the organizations that partnered with City Hall on the new procurement policy. So did Women’s Business Enterprises (WBE Canada), the Canadian Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC) and the Social Purchasing Project (SPP). The groups help city purchasers identify diverse suppliers, help vendors find diverse subcontractors, and generally help members build capacity to bid for contracts (a new partnership is being set up with an organization working with people with disabilities).

Cassandra Dorrington of the Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council says the perception that there aren’t diverse suppliers isn’t true (CAMSC).

These partnerships are one of the ways Toronto’s policy may differ from that of other cities in North America. The city of Chicago, for instance, identifies diverse suppliers through an in-house certification process.

"In the United States, there is a very robust legal framework to target minority-owned suppliers in a way that we can’t do in Canada and in Ontario," explains Wayne Chu, a policy development officer working with Denise Campbell at City Hall. Chu cites the Province of Ontario’s Human Rights Code, which prevents public and private purchasers from collecting information on a vendor such as race, sexual orientation or disability.

"So the requirements that we have in the programme," Chu says, "are tailored very specifically to be compliant with our legal obligations."
Pilot tests
Legal requirements aside, the policy had to be built mostly from the ground up because the team couldn’t find enough detailed examples of existing best practices to be replicated in Toronto.

As Campbell says, “We wanted examples of language for ‘call’ documents. We wanted to understand scoring in competitive processes. We wanted to understand how people are making the business case when facing questions such as, ‘Will this make procurement more expensive for us as a procuring organization? ’ Even when we talked to people, those details were very hard to pull out.”

Instead of writing a policy based on international best practices, Campbell’s team ended up adopting a more exploratory approach, running pilots to test their assumptions before eventually drafting the policy.

One of these pilots sought to explore how regular suppliers could embed elements of social procurement or workforce development into their own operations. For example, Black & Veatch, an engineering company working on water infrastructure projects, ended up sub-contracting with a minority-owned printing company, and later hired two engineers who were part of a mentorship programme for recent immigrants.

“The city was looking for ways to identify organizations and companies that could essentially provide the same service at the same price,” recalls David London, project manager at Black & Veatch. “It was just a matter of figuring out how to identify these companies. But once we were able to do that, it was very easy.”

London explains the process was not about giving preferential treatment; to be considered for a contract, diverse suppliers must abide by the same rules as others, including bidding at the lowest price. And the two engineers hired through the mentorship program were selected because their qualifications were the same or better than those of other candidates.

The policy doesn’t use quotas, but rather encourages city divisions in charge of their own procurement and regular vendors to seek out diverse businesses. When bidding for a contract, vendors may earn points for making plans to sub-contract a diverse supplier, for instance. The city’s Procurement, Social Development, Housing, and Employment and Social Services divisions, as well as its Economic Development Commission, are all participating in Social Procurement by helping regular vendors identify opportunities for workforce development through one of their existing programmes, with a particular focus on youth employment.

All of this is expected to come at no extra cost for the city, which has only committed to hiring one additional staffer to work on the policy’s implementation. Each division is expected to streamline the new procurement guidelines into their regular activities.

Anchor institutions
By 2021, the city hopes that a third of contracts worth more than CAD 5 million (USD 3.7 million) will include a workforce development component that includes hiring and training workers belonging to vulnerable groups, like immigrants, youth or people with disabilities. Other goals are that 75 percent of proposals sent by suppliers will include a workforce development programme, and that 50 percent of direct suppliers will have or will be developing a diversity policy for their supply chains.

Staff from the various city divisions engaged in the policy are still working on establishing the tools and metrics that will help measure its actual impact.

But the city of Toronto is already looking beyond its own procurement power to other players in the region. The city is part of AnchorTO, a group of 18 local institutions that include hospitals, public authorities and universities looking to use their combined CAD 17 billion (USD 12.7 billion) annual spending to drive inclusive economic growth.

One such effort is being led by the metropolitan transit authority Metrolinx. For a CAD 5.3 billion (USD 3.96 billion) light-rail project, Metrolinx has committed to hire among historically disadvantaged and marginalized groups for part of its construction workforce.

”[Metrolinx is] making the most significant investment in building public transit in Toronto in the last hundred years,” says Colette Murphy of the Atkinson Foundation, which is providing financial and technical support to AnchorTO. “And they are doing it in a way that is intentionally looking at how they can integrate good job opportunities, apprenticeships, social enterprises, spending opportunities for residents who have not had access or have benefited from economic development in the past.”

“Our public institutions need to think of themselves as public wealth builders.”

Reprinted with permission from: Citiscope April 7, 2017. Citiscope is a nonprofit news outlet that covers innovations in cities around the world. More at Citiscope.org.
Denise Williams found her courage negotiating with CEOs at the age of fourteen while working for her family’s staffing business. As the eldest child raised by her Cambodian mother, she learned how to run a business and to be a part of a community from her parents, whose lives focused on strengthening their local community of Cambodian and other Asian immigrants. They were very involved in the lives and future of their neighbors.

In 2009 she took that courage and ventured out on her own. She integrated the Cambodian family style into Madison Birch Staffing Agency, whose strength is her commitment to building healthy communities.

A new space for immigrant entrepreneurs

In 2016, Denise was welcomed into a new space for immigrant entrepreneurs to gather and grow together in the Mt. Airy neighborhood of northwest Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Immigrant Innovation Hub (PhillyHub) provides aspiring immigrant entrepreneurs and established small business owners, like Denise, with the tools and expertise they need to grow. Denise entered the PhillyHub to grow her business, but as she learned she also uncovered a gap in her community: many elders in need of health care services are unable to access those benefits because of language and literacy barriers. With her Vietnamese and Cambodian language skills, and the support of the PhillyHub and connections made through it, Denise launched her second business, WelSpring Home Care, to support Philly’s aging Asian community. She sets it apart by treating every client like family.

How the PhillyHub works

Mt. Airy is a diverse neighborhood but it has not experienced much growth of its immigrant communities relative to other Philly neighborhoods like Northeast and South Philadelphia. These neighborhoods benefit from the economic and social contributions of immigrants – which can be seen in things like small business and population growth – and strengthen Philadelphia’s position as a city that recognizes welcoming and inclusion as vital, and valuable, to the city’s future. In the Philadelphia metro, immigrant entrepreneurs are a huge asset: there are more than 40,000 of them and they are responsible for an astounding 96 percent of small business growth since 2000.

Knowing these numbers, Mt. Airy USA, a non-profit organization committed to preserving, empowering and advancing the vibrancy and diversity of the Mt. Airy neighborhood, saw the opportunity to show its welcoming side while marketing the neighborhood and drawing in entrepreneurs and new businesses. Through a unique three-way partnership with Welcoming Economies Global Network member The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians and local micro-lending institution Finanta, a plan for an immigrant entrepreneur incubation space was born. The partnership’s goal was to create a holistic environment for businesses and entrepreneurs to grow with wrap around services including space, training and resources, and access to capital.

The team secured a grant from the Knight Cities Challenge, which allowed for the renovation of an abandoned post office to house the Hub and to sustain the program for the first year and half. The incubation space has graduated three cohorts including entrepreneurs with a wide range of businesses, from import and export companies to fashion and magazines, home health care to catering. The cohorts begin their training as a group, then move into more specialized guidance based on industry.

The team secured a grant from the Knight Cities Challenge, which allowed for the renovation of an abandoned post office to house the Hub and to sustain the program for the first year and half. The incubation space has graduated three cohorts including entrepreneurs with a wide range of businesses, from import and export companies to fashion and magazines, home health care to catering. The cohorts begin their training as a group, then move into more specialized guidance based on industry.

Just as essential as the business services provided, the space fosters a sense of community for the entrepreneurs, not only within its walls, but with the Mt. Airy community. Most of the graduated cohort members continue to take advantage of the PhillyHub’s events and support after their training has finished, and have built strong networks they can lean on.

“Our goal is to have people connected to the neighborhood, and to each other,” notes Nikia Hill of Mt. Airy USA. “The PhillyHub provides entrepreneurs and community members the opportunity to cross paths and make connections. Community involvement is an integral part of the space.”

Denise is still in contact with many from her cohort. “I wanted to network with other immigrant business owners and entrepreneurs that could relate to my story, and I to theirs.” Part of what is unique about the PhillyHub is its focus, not on a specific industry, like tech, but on immigrant entrepreneurs – and it is the only one in Philadelphia. It is a space for individuals living in Philly but coming from all over to gather and connect, to share experiences and resources.

“The value the PhillyHub has brought to the neighborhood is exciting,” notes Ms. Hill. “Our neighborhood values diversity, and the space brings people with very different experiences together to collaborate. We’re eager to support the innovative ways entrepreneurs are helping grow our local economy.”

Denise found value in collaborating with entrepreneurs in different sectors that she might not otherwise connect with. “Our cohort had so many different industries, and we would come together each with a different way of solving a problem, and those unique perspectives fostered an environment that welcomed every idea. I believe our businesses are stronger because of it.”
Success

The success of the PhillyHub allowed Mt. Airy USA to develop a co-working space, Work Mt. Airy, that is open to all, and Ms. Hill says it adds more opportunities for the neighborhood. "It brings another set of local creatives, professionals, and entrepreneurs into the mix. The strength of diversity in the PhillyHub mirrors the strength of diversity in our neighborhoods and cities."

"In our current political climate," Ms. Hill adds, "it feels like there is a very real need for a place where immigrants can come together and where the community can support them. The PhillyHub is that space."

This article was reprinted with permission of the author, Beth Szurpicki from WE Global Network
Integration begins at work

By ktturner
March 2, 2017

Employment Inclusion

You can’t tap into migrant skills if you don’t recognize them.

MigraNet works to create a positive image of migrants in Germany’s Bavarian region, to ensure their economic integration. A key goal is improving recognition of their skills and qualifications in the labour market.

MigraNet is part of a nationwide program called Integration through Qualification (IQ). It is a network building cultural competency, credential literacy and economic integration projects to ensure that skilled migrants can effectively contribute to Germany society.

In many European countries refugees and migrants experience higher levels of unemployment and significant underemployment. Skills and qualifications gained abroad are not recognized. This isn’t a phenomenon unique to Germany, it affects migrants across Europe. After recently accepting nearly one million refugees and migrants who made their way through Europe to reach Germany borders, recognizing their skills is a priority for all.

The long game

Since 2005, MigraNet has brought together organizations, businesses and migrant organizations to improve labor market integration in Bavaria. MigraNet is also part of a pan-European network, Migrants Employment Empowerment Training (MEET). They work together to create consistent and common credential assessment instruments and campaigns for labour market integration of migrants.

The OECD estimates that migrants to the EU have an unemployment rate twice that of those born in the EU. When migrant talent and credentials are not recognized, their integration process slows down, and local communities miss out on talent they may sorely need in their economies.

Turning this trend around is a long-term process. It involves not only creating prescriptive solutions, but also persuasive interventions.

A pan-European image campaign

In the summer of 2006, MigraNet launched a media campaign to illustrate the economic waste caused by not recognizing professional migrant qualifications in Germany. Their work contributed to a 2007 MEET set of campaign recommendations including:

- Give migration a face
- Make qualifications visible
- Create recognizing effects
- Find important partners
- Irritate people

According to Anne Güller-Frey, MigraNet’s Transnational Coordinator, all of these approaches were important, but especially to “give migration a face” and to “make qualifications visible.” “The focus of the campaign and working on these topics was to change the public view on migrants from deficit to resource orientated,” she says. “To show, that migrants bring with them potential which can be used in the labour market. Qualifications gained abroad have to be recognized and transferred. We focus on three main target groups: economic stakeholders, stakeholders in policy and other relevant groups, and public society.”

MigraNet created a banner exhibition “Many Worlds – Many Abilities”, aired “Recognition Now!” video spots in movie theatres across Germany, distributed information postcards and a booklet of interviews with migrants sharing their experiences getting qualifications recognized. They recognize that the approach must continue, and with new and different integration actors. Together with the Bavarian Football Association, MigraNet produced a publicity campaign to show how sporting qualifications (via UEFA licenses) can be easily recognized across borders.

Beer coasters were created and distributed in restaurants, bars, at conferences, seminars across Bavaria.

Reaching out to society is essential, as is informing and connecting with migrants. MigraNet has created a toolbox of resources for migrants to prepare them for their move to Germany. Helping them get ready is an important part of MigraNet’s mission.

Recognition, progress, and next steps

MigraNet works with and learns from international partners. They have replicated a Canadian immigrant-focused mentoring program. Modelled on TRIEC’s successful Mentoring Partnership, the program has been active in Ausburg for three years. Güller-Frey says, while the aim is not employment, connecting migrants with mentors in their fields means finding employment sooner. This experience is consistent with a 2013 Canadian report on mentoring outcomes (PDF).

Their work is making a difference. In 2012, Germany passed the Law on Recognition of Foreign Qualifications. Based on the network’s efforts, the federal employment agency changed the credential assessment tool they use. A simple change, such as including a category for foreign qualifications, means that data about skilled migrants is now accurate.

In 2013, the MigraNet Image Campaign was awarded the Bavarian State Government’s Integration Prize. Their work became better known across Bavaria, says Güller-Frey. This new awareness of their work functioned like a “door opener” for work with new partners, such as employers.

Employers are an important piece of the puzzle for MigraNet. Supporting companies is essential. Güller-Frey says that it’s necessary to address the perception that refugees and migrants are a drain on resources and to demonstrate that they are a resource with great potential. Having credentials recognized doesn’t necessarily mean that they’ll find adequate jobs. It’s a challenge, as employers are still reluctant to take what they perceive as a hiring risk.

Recently, MEET partners surveyed employers about their perceptions of migrants. The study indicated that when employers had direct experience of employing refugees and migrants they had more positive attitudes then those who had no such experience.
Inspired by this knowledge and work done with employers in Canada, MigraNet is building an online employer portal. The goal is to match skilled migrants with employers. The portal will also include additional support for employers to further the integration of migrants into the labour market.

MigraNet will interview employers about their experience, challenges they faced, and what other employers can learn from them. They plan to publish these interviews, similar to their booklet of migrant interviews.

Ultimately, says Güller-Frey, networking, bringing relevant partners together to work on common solutions is the most important lesson in their work.
When Toronto medical student Tarek Bin Yameen volunteered with Mes Amis/The Clothing Drive he noticed many of the Syrian refugee arrivals were in poor health. As a former refugee from Yemen, he understood that refugees are focused foremost on survival. Going to a doctor is secondary. When he encountered a child with eye problems, he wondered how widespread the problem might be. Even though government-assisted refugees (GAR) in Canada could access eye exams through their health coverage, they were not.

Could a large, institutional sector be responsive to immediate and emerging refugee needs? It would take an inspiring idea, a group with deep links in the refugee community, a motivated volunteer and a disruptive healthcare innovator.

We wrote recently about Mes Amis (formerly The Clothing Drive) and how they leveraged technology and community to build a rapid and effective response to Syrian refugee needs. They’re at the core of this story about providing eye care to recent refugees. This time, their impact would not have been possible without the interest and action of some key healthcare providers in Toronto, Canada.

The catalyst

Bin Yameen approached one of his professors, Dr. Myrna Lichter, a teaching and practicing ophthalmologist at University of Toronto, working out of St. Michael’s Hospital.

An innovator committed to providing eye health services to vulnerable populations, Lichter was a receptive audience. She had done vision screening projects for homeless and women suffering domestic violence, going into shelters to set up “pop-up” eye clinics. Mes Amis was offering pop-up clothing services to refugees in local hotels. The connection and potential to work together was clear.

The community

Mes Amis was well versed in nimble, pop-up style services, going to where lots of refugees were, and help them. Their strength was organizing and moving community volunteers to action. In late 2015, Bin Yameen saw an opportunity to connect his soon-to-be profession and network to his volunteer work at Mes Amis.

The original idea was to continue the successful pop-up approach, this time for eye clinics. COSTI, the local settlement agency responsible for GAR settlement, was already working with other agencies provide health services to refugees at the hotels where they stayed until moving to permanent housing. Access Alliance Multicultural Health Centre provided primary healthcare. Toronto Public Health provided onsite flu vaccination clinics, as well as urgent dental assessments.

Bin Yameen and Mahfouz thought an eye clinic was a logical addition. COSTI was interested, but the priority was to get refugees into private housing as quickly as possible. As well, bringing the eye screening equipment into a hotel space proved to be an issue.

The idea went on the back burner.

The collaboration

Canada’s health sector is a valued partner and advocate for refugees. For years, Canadian doctors have been strong advocates of health service interventions for refugees. Their advocacy work has had a deep impact. But, they have also created and built services to ensure that refugees can get the help they need. Through specialty clinics, or offering services not generally covered by Canada’s healthcare system (such as eye and dental care services), Canada’s health practitioners have traditionally worked with vulnerable populations.

As Syrian refugees arrived in Canada, the sector was actively reaching out to and providing service to them. Bin Yameen approached Dr. Lichter to see if they could offer something manageable, but impactful. A small pilot idea grew into a bigger idea after Lichter met with Mes Amis’ Mahfouz. In the summer of 2016, together they would pilot an eye clinic at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, a Scarborough (East Toronto) mosque.

Mes Amis arranged participants and translators. Bin Yameen encouraged many optometry students to volunteer. Lichter worked her network to bring equipment and 20 doctors to the mosque to create a pop-up clinic.

Their goal was not to simply screen, but also provide follow up care; good exams and follow up for all of the patients. Supervised by his professor and mentor, Bin Yameen organized logistics. Lichter reviewed every file to ensure that quality care was given to all refugees.

Success

The pilot was successful. So, they expanded. In Fall 2016, they moved their screening to an eye clinic in Brampton, just outside of Toronto. Dr. Ike Ahmed (head of eye surgery at Trillium Health Centre in Peel) donated his Prism Eye Institute clinic space for free. Lichter worked her network to bring in over 40 eye health specialist and optometrist volunteers, among them some of Canada’s top eye health talent. Over 60 medical students, including optometry students and nurses volunteered, along with over 60 Arabic translators, and 20 general volunteers organized by Mes Amis.

Almost 350 Syrian refugees received eye care screening. The intervention was successful, not only in numbers, but also in impact. It also confirmed Bin Yameen’s suspicion, revealing the needs of this vulnerable population. Fifty percent of those screened needed follow-up treatment, and doctors detected more severe vision-loss conditions in some.

Learning, expanding, replicating
The partners achieved their goals of identifying those with urgent eye conditions and referring them onto appropriate services while also educating newcomers on the importance of accessing thorough and complete eye examinations.

Mes Amis and their health sector partners are not planning to stop there. Mahfouz says other Canadian cities are interested in replicating their success. Eye clinics will continue. Mes Amis is also looking at how they can replicate the pop-up experience with dental and mental health services for all refugees. Ultimately, they want to work with their collaborators to create a newcomer medical services program that can meet needs across the city and beyond.

Mes Amis and St. Michael's Hospital, along with a wide network of health sector volunteers, have shown the impact of collaboration and innovation. They've created a pop-up service model that can be rolled out with any vulnerable population, anywhere in the world.
Housing Starts Here

By Evelyn

Living Together, Refugee Portal, Spatial Inclusion

AMSTERDAM, The Netherlands — The white prefab housing blocks dropped in a field next to a highway bypass here don’t look like much. But the project known as Startblok Riekerhaven is an innovative housing experiment — and social experiment — worth watching.

Since July, more than 550 young adults under the age of 28 have been living here. Half of them are Dutch, including students and others without the means to afford Amsterdam’s high rents. The other half are refugees, recently arrived from the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere, and eager to settle into a new life in a new land.

The two groups are not only encouraged to mix socially but to think of themselves as building a new community together. They organize joint activities, like movie nights and football matches. Through a buddy system, they learn about each other’s cultures. They also share responsibility for maintaining the buildings and grounds, a “self-management” structure intended to unite all the residents in the common cause of caring for their living space.

The project is unique in its approach and required a lot of creative thinking by municipal officials, the leaders of a pair of social-housing agencies, and the residents themselves. In just nine months, they turned what first seemed like a crazy idea into a potential European model for housing refugees and integrating them into society.

It all started a little more than a year ago. Leon Bobbe, CEO of the social housing corporation De Key, had to find a new location to put hundreds of empty container apartments. These low-cost mobile dwellings have become a popular solution for student housing in Amsterdam; the units Bobbe needed space for had just been moved to make way for permanent construction.

Social housing corporations in the Netherlands are responsible for providing people with a low to medium income with affordable housing. De Key specializes in serving young people, from students to people who are just starting to work.

The question of where to put the temporary apartments went to Laurens Ivens, Amsterdam’s alderman for housing. Ivens was already wrestling with the challenge of finding housing for 2,400 refugees, an annual target set by the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs. He contacted his colleague Ahmed Baâdoud, president of the local council in Amsterdam-West, a neighborhood with large Moroccan and Turkish communities.

Baâdoud suggested the apartments could locate on a sports ground in his area, at least for a while. Ivens wondered if the apartments could house “status holders” — refugees who have permission from the government to stay, study and work in the Netherlands. Baâdoud agreed, but with a twist.

“I didn’t want just status-holders — I have a responsibility to my constituents to also provide housing for young people from this district,” Baâdoud recalls. “Besides, ten years ago we already made the mistake of housing newcomers separately. Now, they still don’t speak the language and are not participating fully. Our aim is to turn newcomers into citizens of Amsterdam, and that works a lot better if they mix with local residents. So, I said: Let’s combine these two groups.”

The municipality of Amsterdam leased the plot of land to De Key at a below-market price and for a limited period of 9 years. After that, a new residential neighborhood is planned for the area. That was good enough for Bobbe. “The tenants receive a lease for a maximum period of five years,” he explains. “That is what we call a ‘campus contract’, which we use for all our student housing.”

All the practicalities were taken care of, yet Bobbe wanted more. He didn’t just want to make a functional housing project, he wanted to build community where the residents would create lasting social bonds. He was envisioning something like Christiania, the famously free-spirited squatter village in Copenhagen. “But it’s not going to happen by itself,” Bobbe says, “so how do you organize that?”

De Key got another organization on board: Socius, a housing organization that specializes in redeveloping office buildings into housing for young people. Socius had a history of using unusual tactics to get residents bought into building community.

“All our projects contain some sort of self-management,” says Pim Koot, commercial manager at Socius. “So we have some experience in organizing this, although this project was quite unique due to the mix of tenants.”

At Startblok Riekerhaven, Socius was responsible for the selection of the 280 Dutch tenants. “A lot of young people are looking for affordable housing, but for this project we really wanted to make sure they knew what they were getting into,” says Koot. “We expect people to actively contribute.”

Leon Bobbe, CEO of the social housing corporation De Key: ‘The question for us was how to give these young people a future, without being paternalistic.’

Anybody under the age of 28 could apply; in addition to the usual paperwork, applicants also had to fill out a questionnaire and explain their motivation for wanting to join this particular project. Three times more applications came in than the number of available units. “On the basis of the personal motivation we made a selection,” explains Koot.

The selection of the refugees was the responsibility of the municipality. In addition to being cleared to stay in the Netherlands, they also had to be under the age of 28 and to be alone — the project is not for couples or families.

“The status-holders are mostly from Syria and Eritrea, but also from other countries — for them, this project is a stepping stone into life,” says Baâdoud. “But that is also true for the Dutch youngsters. We didn’t mind if youngsters from outside of Amsterdam could join, especially from the richer communities. Because here they get to know the diversity of the city.”

That describes 22-year-old Anouk Duba, who is Dutch but not originally from Amsterdam. She says the diversity at Startblok Riekerhaven was a draw for her. "I want to connect with people from all over the world and want to make foreigners feel welcome here," Duba says. Although she admits the project is viewed with some skepticism from the outside. "When I tell my friends about this project, they don’t understand what I’m doing here. They are sometimes scared to come over, because they think it’s not safe."

Anouk Zwaan, another 22-year-old from outside Amsterdam says she’s heard the same things — and hopes her positive experience at the complex can help change public attitudes toward refugees. "I come from a very white neighborhood," Zwaan says. "My friends and parents never meet foreigners. My dad is worried about me, but I really don’t feel scared at all here."

**Communicating without words**

After residents moved in a few months ago, Socius organized an introduction day for both the Dutch tenants and refugees to get to know each other. "It was kind of awkward," Duba remembers. "We played a lot of games to get to know each other."

The people from Socius also had another agenda. They wanted to spot who the natural leaders were, both among the Dutch residents and the refugees. "With these exercises in group dynamics, we wanted to see who were the organizers in the group and the ones that align people," says Koot. "In order to organize self-management, we were looking for people who could be trusted with specific tasks in the community."

One ice-breaker required a group of people to lift a large wooden stick together without talking. Abdullah Zakrat, from Aleppo, Syria, participated in that one. "It was an exercise to learn how to work as a community, not as a person," he recalls. Later, Zakrat was selected to be one of five project managers responsible for the Startblok Riekerhaven complex. This is an official job for which he and the others earn a salary from Socius.

"I work about 30 to 70 hours a month," he says. "As project managers, we are responsible for safety and hygiene and generally keeping the place in order."

Apart from the project managers, Socius selected other tenants to work paid part-time jobs in key management roles. There is a technical team of two who do the maintenance of the buildings and the grounds, one person who is responsible for finances, and a two-person communications team. Socius keeps one of its project coordinators on location at Startblok Riekerhaven to back up these staff, but the day-to-day work is handled by the tenants. De Key is learning from Socius how to organize this tenant self-management structure and will eventually take over the oversight role.

Both Koot and Bobbe are very pleased with how the tenant self-management system is working out. They believe that having a community of activists, rather than just passive tenants, will help with the goal of integration. They also want to combat any notion that the refugees are not capable by letting all residents see their contributions for themselves.

Bobbe is especially enthusiastic about the communications team that handles all the questions from the press. "If a journalist approaches us, we just refer them to one of the press coordinators and let them handle everything," he says. "Which is kind of a new way of working for us as well."

**Agitators for inclusion**

In terms of housing units, Startblok Riekerhaven consists of one-person studios that share common rooms and large kitchens. There also are some larger apartments with a bathroom and small kitchen for two to share. Studios and apartments were carefully allocated to ensure diversity in background, gender and language skills throughout the complex. The studios rent for €510 a month, which includes water, electricity, heating and internet; the shared rooms cost a bit less. The Dutch tenants and refugee tenants pay the same amount for rent.

To build a community with more than 500 people is difficult. So the idea is to work bottom-up and start by building social connections within each hallway. Following the introduction days, two organizers — one Dutch and one refugee — were selected for each hallway of about 20 people. They are called “gangmakers”, which is a Dutch word with double-meaning. “Gang” means hallway, and a “gangmaker” is someone who gets the party started.

The gangmakers are responsible for getting people involved in social activities such as group dinners or watching movies. They also make sure everything runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis — that people put out their garbage or don’t make too much noise. Nahom Berhane, a 24-year old Eritrean, is a gangmaker for his hallway. "Of course you cannot force anybody to join," he says. "But sometimes people are shy, so you figure out a way to overcome their anxiety."

With so many cultures there are inevitably some difficulties in communication. More English is spoken in the hallways than Dutch, although many of the refugees are taking language classes. Socius also offered a training in intercultural communication. Berhane found that very useful.

"How can you find common ground in something that is normal for one, but not for another?" he says. Berhane cites an episode from a couple of months ago, when a group of Eritreans lit a fire outside, part of a traditional ritual called ‘Hoay’. ‘Some people were a little panicky because of the fire’, he says, "but everybody was interested and came to have a look."

Anouk Duba was one of the people who came over to check it out. "We all ended up dancing together," she says.

Tenants can also participate in a buddy system. Through a kind of speed-dating, matches are made between refugees and Dutch residents who share a common interest like art or sports. Duba and her roommate both have Syrian buddies. "The other day we went to their house and they cooked an enormous meal for us," she says. "It is very interesting to hear their stories. One of them wants to become a journalist, and my friend’s a journalist too, so she can talk about how to write a good article."

Participation does not come easy for everyone. Anouk Zwaan moved in later than the others; above everything else, she was most glad just to have housing she could afford. "Between studies and a job in the supermarket, I don’t have much time left to socialize," Zwaan says. "But I might get a buddy at some point."

Everyone involved in putting together Startblok Riekerhaven has learned something in the past year. A big lesson is the need for organizations to be flexible in their thinking. Achner Baaloud is proud that the municipality was able to work beyond the existing boundaries of its departments. "We have to be able to look differently at the problems we face and also let an organization like Socius take the lead," he says.

For De Key’s Leon Bobbe, the project involved a whole new way of working. "The question for us was how to give these young people a future, without being paternalistic," he says. Abdullah Zakrat, the tenant from Aleppo, agrees. "We can do things ourselves," he says. "It is important that people realize that."

The project is still evolving and time will tell if it will succeed. Baaloud calls it a “European laboratory.” Local leaders are important, he says. "We feel and hear what people really need," he says. "People who leave their homes don’t come here for the ice-skating; they want to be seen, heard and appreciated. I want to show the people in my community that this new diversity is a quality we should use, instead of feeling threatened."

**Source:** Reprinted and adapted with permission from an original article by Letty Reimerink, *In this Amsterdam housing project, Dutch youth and refugees live together — and run the place.* CitiScope, December 8, 2016)
Learning with Babbel © FotoDiMatti

Wired for Language Learning

By Evelyn
November 30, 2016
Living Together

Language learning online or via an app is a fairly new industry. With few role models ahead of them, the Berlin-based Babbel is defining the space as they go. Their approach is also redefining their company, through a commitment to diversity.

Christian Hillemer, Babbel’s Director PR & Internal Communications, credits a multilingual corporate culture that embraces the diversity of its workforce with their success. Studies show that becoming multilingual has an impact on our personalities and increased acceptance of others. Babbel’s 400 employees in two countries (Germany and the U.S.) speak more than 30 languages. They are passionate about diversity.

Babbel’s unique approach to language is to get people to talk to each other as quickly as possible, through conversational learning. In a recent Babbel user survey, 73% of respondents said they were confident holding a conversation in a new language within five hours of language learning using Babbel. Making the effort to understand each other has also had a huge impact on the company’s productivity, workforce morale and community engagement.

Building diversity into the learning curve

Creating an inclusive corporate culture is not easy. Babbel is a living experiment in making it work.

Babbel is a successful company because they’re still learning. After eight years, Hillemer says they’re successful “only because we went through many different changes, tried many things. We failed, and moved on. We need people to be different, and to try things and do things their way because we don’t know what will work.”

Valuing their diverse human capital is essential. Hillemer says that Babbel looks for interesting people, who are open, not too biased and interested in taking on projects in their own way. “Diversity means multidimensional collaboration. Different opinions brought together create a bigger dimension.” Babbel gives their teams room to explore, rather than dictating how they need to do their work. “We want them to think out of the box. If it goes wrong, then we make it different the next time.”

Clearly, it’s working. Babbel just surpassed one million paid subscribers and was recently named one of the world’s most innovative companies in 2016, by Fast Company.

A different kind of social responsibility

“The more languages you know, the more you are human.” Hillemer takes this quotation from Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk to heart. Making language learning easy and putting a premium on conversational exchange lowers barriers for human connection can bring people together in a shared humanity. With this perspective, it was easy for the company to play a role in something as seemingly disconnected as refugee resettlement.

Germany has welcomed 1 million refugees in the current mass migration into Europe. Opening the country’s borders has not been without resistance, fear and trepidation. Babbel has looked at the situation with the lens, how can we help?

In early 2015, before larger refugee numbers started arriving, Berlin-based refugee support organizations contacted Babbel for free access to their language courses. It was easy to say yes, but Babbel wanted to do more. Being helpful meant taking the time to ensure that their approach was thoughtful and could have a large and sustainable impact. As a result, Babbel is providing German refugee projects with €1 million worth of language courses.

Working collaboratively with refugee centres made sense, to ensure Babbel can have the lasting impact they seek. As Babbel Founder and CEO Markus Witte said, “in providing help to refugees, we find ourselves in completely new territory. That’s why it was important for us to partner with organizations that possess a wealth of relevant experience and expertise. Offering free online courses is all well and good, but you also need to get the courses into the hands of the people that need them.”

Babbel employees are also actively helping. Dozens of Babbel staff have volunteered in refugee centres to help distribute courses, and to help refugees learn German. Babbel linguists, professional language teachers, translators and education specialists train volunteer teachers who deliver face-to-face lessons in the centres. Moving forward, Babbel may share their workshops online, for volunteer teachers globally.

Being helpful in community externally has paid off internally for Babbel. Hillemer says an unexpected result of their refugee initiatives has been a huge increase in employee pride in the company. It’s the kind of employee morale boost that employers dream of. For Babbel’s workers, supporting local refugee initiatives gives them the feeling that they and the company they work for are doing something meaningful.

Babbel’s approach to diversity, valuing their employees and being helpful has put them on the path to even greater success. Says Hillemer, “Really helping people has put us at a different level. I feel pride and happiness that we kicked this off.”
MyCity Academy

By Evelyn
Municipal-Political Inclusion

One day this July, two dozen leaders from various immigrant communities here gathered in Nashville’s Glenciff High School auditorium to learn how public education works in this fast-growing southern city.

They were from Bhutan, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mexico and many other countries. And they had lots of questions. Why do some schools provide transportation but others don’t? What’s a “charter” school? Why are the results of students’ English-language assessments reported only in English? A man named Mamane, from Niger, asked what may be the most elemental but perplexing question in all of U.S. education: Why is it that two nearby schools teaching the same curriculum can show vastly different results?

VIP speakers, including the chairwoman of the Board of Education, were on hand to provide some answers. In five hours of presentations, they offered what added up to a beginner’s course on Nashville’s public schools, adult education and where to find resources. There were no tests to pass, but the pupils in the auditorium had an important job to do: to take this information back to their communities and serve as a go-to resource for other immigrants who may have the same questions.

Pioneering urban leadership

The schools meeting was just one of seven sessions this year of a pioneering Nashville leadership training program known as MyCity Academy. Now in its fifth year, this free and first-of-its kind program in the U.S. is a signature initiative of the Mayor’s Office of New Americans. The idea is to identify leaders from within Nashville’s many immigrant communities and give them a solid overview of how city government works. They’re expected to communicate what they learn with friends, relatives and associates, helping to explain the rights and responsibilities of life in their new country.

In monthly sessions from March through September, they visit the courts for a session on the criminal justice system; they tour the water treatment and recycling plants to see how those work; they learn about social services, parks and libraries, and the history of the civil rights movement. The program has trained more than 130 people — some of whom, Nashville city officials hope, will go on to serve on local boards and commissions, run for public office and build a generation of civic leaders that reflect the new demographics of a changing city.

In November 2016, the MyCity Academy Class of 2016 will hold its graduation ceremony, against the backdrop of anti-immigrant rhetoric from the incoming U.S. president. Like so many U.S. cities, Nashville is going out of its way to send the opposite message. The MyCity Academy is a big part of setting the inclusive tone city leaders are going for.

“Our New American community is a source of pride for the entire city,” Nashville Mayor Megan Barry said a few days after the election. “Regardless of what Mr. Trump does, I will continue to do whatever I can as mayor to ensure that Nashville remains a warm and welcoming community where we all treat each other with dignity and respect.”

Nashville’s experience with MyCity Academy carries lessons for any city in the world that is coping with the question of how to integrate immigrants and refugees. Members of this year’s class called the course a valuable bridge between local authorities and immigrant communities who can otherwise become quite isolated.

“It’s a safe space where I can learn and ask questions,” said new graduate, Patricia Tarquino, who works in family engagement at a local elementary school where 86 percent of the kids speak a language other than English at home. “It helps me to make families aware of all the opportunities there are in the city and demystifying them.”

She explained: “Some families think the public library charges a fee or you have to have citizenship status to participate. Now I’m organizing trips to the library with families so we can show them that the city has this awesome library system.”

Sirak Sebsebie, who’s active with the advisory board for the Ethiopian community in Nashville, heard about MyCity Academy from friends at church. “The government is opening their doors,” said Sebsebie. “I personally never knew that option was there until I joined this program. We can interface with officials directly and bring concerns to them directly. The city council — you can actually talk to them.”

Turning point

With a population of about 680,000, Nashville is better known to much of the rest of the world as the capital of country music than as a hub for immigrants. But for the past few decades, the demographics of what was once a quintessentially southern U.S. city have been changing dramatically.

Waves of people from Central and Southeast Asia, Latin America, East Africa and other parts of the world have settled here. About 12 percent of the residents of Nashville-Davidson County are foreign-born; more than 150 languages are spoken in the schools. Somali coffee shops, Turkish restaurants and halal meat markets can be found along the busy boulevards near the city’s airport.

A turning point came in 2009, when an anti-immigrant backlash kicked up in the form of a ballot initiative that would have declared English the city’s “official language.” Opposition to the proposal became a rallying point, not only for Nashville’s immigrant communities but also for a civic establishment forced to pick sides. Karl Dean, who was mayor at the time, led a coalition of business leaders, labor groups, churches, higher-ed institutions and others against the measure. Nashville voters said no to “official English” by a six-percent margin.
"Since then, Nashville has not looked back," Dean told me in July. "We’ve really taken a position that Nashville is a welcoming city, that we embrace diversity, and that’s a core strength for the city."

After the vote, Dean created a New Americans Advisory Council. Made up of leaders from various immigrant communities, it was an early attempt to open lines of communication between those groups and the mayor’s office. A couple of years later, Dean tasked this council with broadening and deepening the pool of immigrant leaders who could play that role.

As a model, they looked to a program called Leadership Nashville, which since 1978 has been putting leaders from the business, government, education and nonprofit sectors through nine-month crash courses on issues facing the city. They worked with managers of various city departments to develop a curriculum — and pilot tested it in 2012 by putting themselves through the course.

This is what became MyCity Academy. Vanessa Lazón was part of that first iteration of the course. Lazón came to Nashville from Peru as a teenager. Now under Mayor Barry, she runs the program as the head of the Mayor’s Office of New Americans. She’s committed to making it an easier path for the international students arriving in Nashville and their families.

Community connectors

There are several key components to MyCity Academy. First, graduates of the program are asked to recommend at least one or two people to apply for the next class — so there’s a built-in growth model for identifying new leaders. People must apply to be part of the program, and thanks to local media attention, there are always many more applications than slots available. Applicants are assessed in part based on their connections in the community and their ability to disseminate what they learn at the academy within their networks.

“That’s the whole point,” Lazón said. “We identify people who maybe are not the known leaders in the community in the immigrant and refugee world, but they are some people already showing signs of leadership and they’re well connected within their community.”

Many outcomes

The results sometimes come quickly. A visit to Nashville’s waste-recycling plant cleared up a lot of confusion about what trash can be recycled and how to use the city’s curbside pickup service. Alfonso Nieto, who edits a local Spanish-language newspaper called Hola! Tennessee, was inspired to publish a two-page how-to guide to recycling in Nashville.

But the outcomes are not always so direct. The Academy forges friendships that cross over invisible barriers between different immigrant communities. As a result of connections made through the Academy, youth from the Kurdish and Somali communities now play soccer together. The Class of 2016 has an active WhatsApp group, which buzzes with invitations to cultural events such as a dinner last month in honor of Muslims returning from their pilgrimage to Mecca. “The people I’ve met here I would not have met if not for this program,” says Jacky Gomez, who works as a counselor for college-bound high-schoolers. “It’s done a great job of bringing together people who care, from all different walks of life, regardless of language barrier.”

Mohamed-Shukri Hassan is a 29-year-old Somali who came to the United States from a refugee camp in Kenya as a teenager. Like Lazón, he was part of the first MyCity Academy class in 2012.

Since then, he’s founded a nonprofit that runs workshops for refugees who want to start a business but don’t know where to start. Hassan helps them understand what rules and regulations they need to comply with to set up a business, works with them to find sources of capital to get ideas off the ground, and leverages his real-estate connections to find refugees space to set up their businesses. "A lot of migrants find it hard and pack up and leave," Hassan said. “But the opportunities are there. It’s a matter of finding that connector who can break that barrier for them.”

Cultural brokers

Hassan broke another kind of barrier in January, when he was appointed to the Metro Nashville Arts Commission. It’s a community board that advises the city council on arts and culture issues, and has a budget to make grants to artists and community institutions. Hassan said he’s been able to bring an immigrant’s perspective to local debates around cultural equity. “If I didn’t get exposure to city government through MyCity Academy,” Hassan said, “I would not have seen the value of being on the board.”

That’s the outcome Nashville city leaders are rooting for. The notion that a former refugee could ascend into the official local power structure is exactly what leadership training is all about. "I’m confident we will have people elected to political office who will have started in MyCity Academy,” Dean said.

Dean’s successor, Mayor Barry, continued the program when she took office a year ago. It only costs about $5,000, which mostly covers supplies and ordering lunch for the group each time it meets. That cost is paid for through a sponsorship from Fifth Third Bank. “MyCity Academy is not funded with taxpayer dollars,” Mayor Barry.

What the program does cost is time, particularly to coordinate the sessions and line up speakers. It also represents a commitment from the department heads and other city workers who make time in their schedules to put on the sessions.

“You have to have everyone on board, and that has to come from leadership that it’s something they want from the mayor’s office,” Lazón said. “We’re lucky in this city that people recognize and like the diversity, and thrive on it.”

Source: Reprinted and adapted with permission from an original article by CHRISTOPHER SWOPE, "How Nashville is training a new generation of local leaders from its immigrant communities” In Citiscope, November 22, 2016)
Mes Amis: The Clothing Drive

By Evelyn
October 25, 2016
Civic Inclusion Living Together Refugee Portal Role of Media

Twenty-five thousand Syrian refugees were scheduled to arrive in a few short months. Was Toronto ready? For some community members, the reality of refugees arriving during Canada’s harsh winter months meant one thing: warm clothing and footwear.

When friends sponsoring a Syrian family came together to plan what could be done to help the new arrivals, Laura-Jean Bernhardson decided to take on a clothing drive. Simple enough. She put a call out on Facebook and could not have imagined what would happen next.

What started as a call for volunteer contributions of clothing and footwear for Syrian refugees grew into an actual storefront and warehouse, rallying thousands of interested residents and volunteers across the city in the process. Today, founder Bernhardson calls the Mes Amis Clothing Drive “a social movement” to welcome Syrian refugees and help them feel at home in the city.

How to engage the community?

The technology was easy. Slightly more than two-thirds of Canadians regularly use Facebook. A public Facebook group was created where people could get updates, share information and offer help and resources. This included basic information about donations and volunteering as well as updates on weekly donation needs; calls for volunteers; events for “Super Shopper” days; and being available to answer questions from community.

The Mes Amis Facebook group was an instant success, creating an engaging and accessible public platform and connection for people interested in helping. A private Facebook group was also used to organize and connect key volunteers.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=TWdzuzyxeV0

From social media to social space

Once the formal clothing “shop” space was up and running, the Mes Amis Facebook group became the go-to place for volunteers to provide daily status updates, information about what was needed, when volunteers shifts needed filling and to stay connected to each other – a virtual and increasingly engaged community. The social media platform made it easy to keep important documents in the group’s shared file system, while encouraging playful interactions like using the group’s header photo in creative ways for the weekly schedule.

Using Facebook meant that interested residents and active volunteers didn’t need to stray from technology they were already using. Clothing Drive organizers made creative use of Facebook group features (such as the header image) to ensure that information was easy to find, share and act on.
It also meant that the idea and those who wanted to help expanded beyond the City of Toronto, into the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) with ease. Other technology tools such as Google docs, an online fundraising site, and a project website were also used to generate awareness and engage with the community.

Technology wasn’t the point

Technology was used to facilitate the important work of getting Syrian refugees the clothes they needed, give interested community volunteers immediate opportunities to contribute and help raise public awareness of both the refugees’ needs and the incredible community spirit that was being exhibited.

Like many civic tech projects, technology wasn’t the point. The point was to find a solution to a problem. Can technology play a role, be helpful, or even make the difference in solving a specific problem? It did. But, like other civic tech projects, the technology is a side issue. What matters is providing solutions to the challenges faced by refugees integrating into a new home.

In the case of The Clothing Drive, technology was an important piece of how the Mes Amis project was initiated, implemented and, ultimately, met with success. The technology didn’t get in the way. It made things easier. Social media tools familiar to project participants were used to create, share, inform and serve. Mainstream media helped raise awareness of the project. Use of smart technology kept it going and growing.

Success is more than just numbers

Mes Amis’ clothing drive is responsible for providing over 3,000 Syrian refugees with clothes and a warm community welcome.

Success fosters innovation. As with any successful project, the Mes Amis organizers adapted the clothing drive model to meet emerging needs. For example, toys and personal hygiene items also were collected, and during Ramadan food baskets were organized and distributed to Muslim refugee families. The community organizing happened online, was practical, culturally responsive and widely applauded for bringing new and host communities together.

When government assisted refugees languished in local hotels while waiting for permanent housing, Mes Amis put out a call to action. Their high-traffic Facebook page and other social media quickly brought together the volunteers needed to hire buses and bring families to the shop to collect clothing and make community connections.

Mes Amis ran “pop up” clothing shops in hotels in Toronto as well as cities outside of the GTA (Greater Toronto Area), bringing clothes directly to where refugees were living and in need. An incredible amount of creativity and innovation went into figuring out how community members outside the formal settlement and integration system could help their new neighbours feel welcomed, included and supported. The sense of inclusion and welcome these families experienced far exceeds any tangible item of clothing they received. It was a ray of sunshine in an often alien and frustrating settling experience.

Civic tech approach FTW!

The Mes Amis Clothing Drive illustrates how technology helps us learn what is possible and how technology can contribute to solutions. As we’ve seen with other approaches to supporting refugees, a tech development approach can work in human services. Technology helps build our capacity “to deliver quickly, respond to emerging requirements and adapt to evolving issues and changes in family conditions.”

It’s an approach inherent in many civic tech projects: find out what’s needed, learn about the “end user”, come up with some ideas, implement, learn, adapt and modify, implement and continue the cycle until needs are met. It’s an approach that clearly works in the fluid community engagement and outreach context of the refugee experience.

The Clothing Drive exceeded all Mes Amis group expectations, from Facebook group to the bricks and mortar clothing shop that provided additional support for many months. The physical shop is closed now. The need has been met. Some of the original project proponents have moved on to other things. However, the energy, enthusiasm and expertise has not been lost.

What started as a Facebook Clothing Drive is adapting to what organizers learned. It’s morphed into Mes Amis, an online platform that continues to bring Syrian refugees and interested community members together for further connection, shared experiences and to serve as a flashpoint for community action, whenever the need should arise.
Mobile Solutions for Refugees on the Move

By Evelyn
Refugee Portal: Role of Media

In October 2015, an overwhelming numbers of migrants were making their way across Europe from Syria’s civil war in what’s been called the worst humanitarian crisis in fifty years. TechCrunch Editor Mike Butcher recognized a challenge: Could the tech community contribute by creating solutions to help refugees?

The Techfugees start-up took off and spread quickly. With chapters in over 20 countries, and at least ten more in development, Techfugees aims to coordinate an international tech community response to the growing refugee crisis.

Keep it practical

Techfugees organizes conferences, workshops, hackathons and meetups of like-minded techies around the world. Its approach is ambitious but rooted in practical IT solutions to improve a refugee’s day-to-day life. Techfugees’ notion of what technology can do is not utopian. When they talk about solutions, they don’t mean solving the refugee crisis itself. They mean finding ideas, applications and practical approaches that can help refugees in specific circumstances: ICT for connection and safety en route, and for integration and inclusion upon arrival.

The work is done in local chapters, usually cities in receiving or refugee host countries. Local tech innovators work with nonprofits, government and refugees to create solutions in five core areas:

1. Infrastructure – connectivity and access to internet and technology for refugees.
2. Education – leveraging technology to provide online/offline training and courses for refugees
3. Identity – basic identification for refugees (an issue for those who flee with little time to gather documents) as well as recognition of their skills and expertise, key for integration
4. Health – technology innovation for wide ranging and specific health needs of refugees
5. Inclusion – the role technology can play in facilitating social, cultural and economic inclusion of refugees in daily life

Work directly with the people you want to help

Working with refugees directly is key. As Techfugees Belgrade puts it: “Belgrade is on the Balkan route, parks were flooded with refugees (thousands were passing through, daily) and the tech community wanted to offer some help. We kept one thing in front of our eyes at all times: The crisis is understood only by the ones involved in it.”

It’s a refugee-centric approach. In Belgrade, Techfugees focused on “real-tech, and to connect the solutions to all the real aspects: suffering while constantly being on the go.” Their solution? Building on an “almost forgotten technology,” the team is currently developing InfoHelp, a “fully offline, USSD communication project for refugees that works on any kind of a mobile phone- providing info without the need for the internet.”

As Techfugees Belgrade learned, echoed in a recent UNHCR report, infrastructure and collaboration are necessary for success. In Belgrade’s case, the largest national telecom operator came on board, offering free access to the technology needed for their solution.

It’s an approach that not only scales, but can be replicated in other countries. Techfugees Belgrade is spilling their ideas over borders. They’re working with Serbian innovators to replicate InfoHelp. They want to reach out to Greek innovators, and are talking with groups in Pakistan and Italy: “Our aim is to help countries where the influx of refugees is large, and smart ways of sharing information much needed.”

“Hacking the problem” – high stakes, high pressure collaboration

A hackathon brings teams of interested people together, usually over 2-3 days, to “work” a practical IT challenge, in this case to the kind of problems faced by refugees. The goal is to create apps and websites that might help solve small, or large, challenges. Refugees are part of the solution, playing a key role in the drive towards new ideas and strategies to deal with the problems they face.

In April 2016 the Techfugees Belgrade hackathon brought together tech developers with local refugee aid organizations and people from the refugee community itself. Having refugees represented in the innovation process is essential. At a minimum it underlines the sense of urgency for better information and connectivity. It also ensures that developers start from actual experiences and needs when crafting solutions. Six new ideas were developed at the Belgrade hackathon, a number of which were funded and immediately went into development.
Making connections

Techfugees hackathons do more than create new ideas. They bring new stakeholders to the table, including people whose work may not traditionally overlap. Bringing NGOs together with civic tech innovators can have an important impact on host communities.

Techfugees understands the importance of working with receiving communities. However, they also work with and support chapters at the heart of the refugee crisis, such as Techfugees Jordan (in 2014, Jordan had 2.7 million refugees, a third of their population). Being there, being part of those conversations is key (such as a live tech discussion with UNICEF in Lebanese refugee camp).

The Techfugee experience in Jordan provides an important example of how larger infrastructure and political issues can, and can not, be resolved by tech innovation. In August 2016, internet access was cut off in Jordanian refugee camps. Techfugees recognized that “internet access is not a technical issue but a highly sensitive and political issue.” Moving the conversation about connectivity up the ladder to policy-makers has huge potential to transform everything from safety to services in refugee communities.

Success

Realistic, low-tech solutions such as Techfugees Belgrade’s InfoHelp can be vital in helping people in times of crisis, wherever they are. The potential for Techfugee community innovations to be replicated and shared is central to the Techfugees mission.

Techfugees recently created, Basefugees, an online platform that matches tech innovators with NGOs to help meet their real-world challenges. It’s one of many ways that Techfugees works to ensure that refugees and their host communities collaborate for inclusion and prosperity.
MigrantHire

By Evelyn
October 26, 2016

Employment Inclusion Refugee Portal

Germany has been generous to refugees making their way into Europe over the past year. But that doesn't mean the structural barriers to employment for refugees got easier. MigrantHire wants to help the New Germans integrate into society as fast as they can.

Like so many civic tech projects, MigrantHire started with a couple of friends chatting about how they might help. They came up with a simple idea for how to help connect refugees to jobs and started testing the concept of a "matchmaker" for refugees and German companies. As the startup gained traction, it wasn't long before it morphed into a state of the art "refugee business accelerator" with the ambitious goal of helping 10,000 refugees get jobs in its first year.

Connecting refugees with German companies that want to hire them

The MigrantHire team went to work in April 2016. According to Stefan Parlebach, MigrantHire’s Head of Talent, the project started with IT sector, where they thought it would be easiest to identify employment opportunities for refugees in Berlin. Not only are IT workers needed in Germany, but English is commonly spoken in the industry and many newly arrived Syrians in Germany speak English better than German. IT companies were also less hung up on certifications, or formal language and educational assessments. They want to know that someone can do the coding/programming required, and can quickly determine if they can.

It wasn’t long before the project opened its platform to all occupations and sectors.

MigrantHire’s core is a smart matching system, connecting candidates with jobs where they fit. It started as an online job matching platform. It has the potential to deeply impact the labour market in Berlin.

Trust and support are key

MigrantHire’s co-founder and Community Manager Hussein Shaker came to Germany from Syria as a refugee with an IT background. He knows the frustration of trying to find a job. His initial community networking created 1000 sign ups when MigrantHire launched. The demand told them they were onto something. His experience and community connections mean that, so far, 6,000 Syrian refugees in Germany have come to trust MigrantHire to help them.

Some early successes helped. A Syrian IT refugee spent two unsuccessful years looking for work. Within three months of connecting to MigrantHire, he landed three interviews, and, the holy grail, a job that uses his IT skills at a software vendor.

The approach is straightforward. Applicants create a profile. They apply for jobs. But, there is a third step: personal support. This step differentiates MigrantHire from other civic tech approaches.

The vision is to not simply have a site where job seekers can post their resumes/CV, but to evaluate and work with candidates to help get them ready for the job market. MigrantHire found is that socially conscious companies want to help. They want to hire refugees, but can’t find them. German job centres can’t deliver the right people to them. The system is overwhelmed with demands from both companies and refugees.

Refugees face ongoing barriers to workplace integration. At the same time, many refugees are not ready yet for the job market. Of the 6000 candidates currently on MigrantHire’s system, Parlebach says that maybe 500-1000 fulfill job requirements. MigrantHire realized they can still play a role and help them, and the economy.

That’s where personal support really kicks in. And, not just for the refugees.

As the founders learned and listened to their refugee audience and partners, the impact of their platform started extending beyond job matches. The site and it’s technology is crucial. As the idea evolved and grew, offline connections and partnerships have become crucial as well. MigrantHire’s approach to connect deeply with the refugees not only benefits how the site evolves for the refugees. It also benefits their education, government and employer partners to understand the best way to help them.

A bridging role – implement, listen, learn, adapt, implement

The platform they’ve created allows MigrantHire to mine deep data to make those connections and link people not only to jobs, but to pathways to future work. The team can connect refugees with educational and nonprofit partners to additional support.

Parlebach says their platform makes it easy to find out needs of candidates and to reach out on their behalf. If they see a collective interest or need in a particular course or workshop, they can reach out to partners to deliver it. If partners have something to offer refugees, they can contact those candidates whose profiles suggest they could benefit.

Parlebach says that the MigrantHire team already assumed that most people wouldn’t be job ready – especially in terms of speaking German. They thought it might be useful to offer educational opportunities to applicants. A lot of community and government organizations that offer free employment help were having problems finding clients to enrol into their projects. MigrantHire has been able to connect them.

An example was the Refugee Business Accelerator workshop. MigrantHire was able to connect refugee participants interested in creating their own business with experts in legal, business startup, marketing, finance and other key areas.
Parlebach sees this connector role as a new core part of MigrantHire’s future. MigrantHire can show refugees the pathway to good jobs and connect with community partners to help them. Their focus is practical, and long-term: “We want to show them jobs with a future in the German labour market.”

The potential for German NGOs and community organizations is huge. Community projects tend to lack the tech capacity to create and manage a sophisticated platform like MigrantHire. Working together means leveraging all partner strengths to scale a local solution to help as many people as possible. It’s the very definition of what civic tech tries to accomplish.

As they identify candidates’ needs, and good jobs in German labour market, MigrantHire can work to create courses, bring companies, and others together. The impacts are real and measurable. For example, as a result of their efforts, more IT courses have been created in Berlin to help refugees learn how to be programmers. They’re connecting interested refugees to jobs in demand in senior care, working with community partners to offer the training to qualify them.

Parlebach says that social enterprise innovators can be more nimble and shift where they see the needs. Because they’re flexible, they can pivot based on needs and outcomes. The civic tech learning approach means they’ll inevitably focus on things that work for their audiences, meeting demands as they come up, abandoning approaches that aren’t working quickly.

It's an approach that's already working for Berlin’s Syrian refugee population and can work anywhere.
Healthcare in a Box

By Evelyn
Health Inclusion, Refugee Portal

You arrive to find someone in crisis. They don’t speak your language. How can you help? Google Translate could help, but if you’re working with refugees, RefuChat wants to make your life easier.

Populated with common phrases, at the tap of a screen, an emergency responder can communicate quickly and safely with a refugee in crisis.

It’s one of a growing number of language and translation technology innovations trying to help make refugees’ lives easier.

RefuChat creator, Marco Nissen, liked the Refugee Phrasebook, but didn’t like the fact that it had to be printed out. He realized that many refugees have smartphones with them, so he decided to create a small app.

“A tool that provides basic useful vocabulary related to the most common immediate needs, the Refugee Phrasebook is an open collaborative project to provide important vocabulary to refugees. It assembles important phrases from various fields and encourages designers and experts in the field to improve on the material.”

https://youtube.com/watch?v=xloQaX4XAAk

Effective communication in health care is essential

An app like RefuChat can help when no other resources are available. It’s a crisis resource. What if you had access to more resources?

Mirok Bass, a Business Development Manager at Cisco based in Hamburg, Germany felt he had a personal and a professional duty to help: “Imagine if you’re fleeing out of a conflict situation, out of war- and you get sick? And you are in front of a doctor and you don’t speak the same language. How would you feel?”

The problem was real, on the ground. The city of Hamburg was struggling to provide good healthcare for 60,000 refugees in 40 refugee camps. Cisco had piloted a video translation project at a local hospital. He knew the idea of bringing translators into a health interaction was sound, and possible. Bass wondered, how can we bring this all together, to provide a translation solution in the refugee camps in Hamburg? Could the idea scale?

As consistently comes up with civic tech innovation, it started with a conversation among friends. They had to do something. Bass talked to MLOVE’s Harald Neidhardt. What was possible? Neighardt had done creative things with shipping containers in the past. A travelling medical clinic in a shipping container. Could it work?

Simple needs, complex innovation, simple solutions
They brought together a diverse team to workshop the idea and the pilot was born. The collaborative effort and incredible enthusiasm brought the project from idea to pilot in six weeks.

The Refugee First Responder Center has created a physical waiting room with built-in interpretation that can be taken and set up anywhere in the world. A high tech medical office in a shipping container. It’s an incredible example of innovation from inspiration.

The first four weeks were spent simply sourcing the shipping container! In two weeks, they transformed the metal box into a comfortable, functional medical facility. They delivered it to one of Hamburg's 40 refugee camps and started a pilot.

It’s a 20-foot shipping container equipped with systems allowing remote language interpretation during consultations through high-definition video. Medical staff have access to 750 interpreters who speak about 50 different languages. A side benefit is the WiFi in the container for the staff is shared with the refugees in the camp, transformed into a medical clinic.

![https://youtube.com/watch?v=x3TTyiOUi9A](https://youtube.com/watch?v=x3TTyiOUi9A)

The shipping container. An everyday, banal thing in the port city of Hamburg became transformed into an medical clinic. Magic.

The power of connection

Bass outlines how the European refugee crisis cried out for innovative solutions: “That was the high peak of the refugee crisis. You are working in a chaotic environment and usually you only work with proven solutions. And what we had proposed was something completely new.”

Their innovation clearly met a real, critical need. In fact, it imploded the notion of what medical care in a refugee camp could look like. According to Dr. Martin Scherer of University Hospital Hamburg-Eppendorf, “It’s supposed to be like bar food medicine. Very rudimental, very, very difficult. And what they presented helped me to have the hope that we could provide very good medical care here.”

Project leaders call their success the power of connection. There was the literal connections that put the containers and technology together. But, their was also the network, individuals with expertise, who came together with the support of large organizations, like Cisco that funded the first pilot. The impact? “Now I can speak to somebody in my language, who also looks like me, and they can really explain my situation.”

MLove’s Harald Neidhardt, “This is such a perfect example where we say pull in the community, pull in different talents, apply technology to one of the biggest human challenges and if we can do something so cool, simple and beautiful, everybody can do it. You just have to think a little bit harder and say ‘well you know what, in my community this is my talent. This is what I can do.’ Can we bring in our connections, our networks and see if we can do something, even small, but meaningful?”

It’s a great example of what UNHCR is seeking in their strategic vision to better connect refugees to information, help and serve.

Success

This is a worldwide first: the Refugee First Response Center (RFRC) is a medical emergency station with a unique combination of services. In light of the current refugee crisis, this modern medical office was conceived and customized with just 6 weeks and with the cooperation of the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf (UKE) and the health department of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg.

The first pilot unit is operated by the University Medical Center of Hamburg-Eppendorf on location of a refugee reception center supervised by the Red Cross of Germany.

It’s not a cheap idea. But it’s already scaling. With a one million dollar donation, the Dorit and Alexander Otto Foundation have funded the deployment of 10 medical containers in camps across Hamburg.

However, the RFRC team realize they can do more. The containers are mobile. They can be used anywhere. Their vision is to bring 100 containers closer to refugee hot spots – Syria, Turkey, Greece, Lebanon, where the need is greatest.
**When My Home Becomes Our Home**

By Evelyn  
October 23, 2016

Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Refugee Portal, Social Inclusion, Spatial Inclusion

When refugees arrive in host cities, a first priority is a safe place to live. Camps and other forms of mass housing may be important as emergency temporary housing. But they can be isolating for refugees, and they offer little connection to the community.

In Germany, three friends saw another way. With many single refugees coming into Berlin, they came together at the end of 2014 to create an online system where locals with available rooms to share could connect with refugees looking for housing.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=ixObmWO8gRc

**An idea from lived experience**

It all started with a spare room in co-founders Jonas Kakoschke & Mareike Geiling apartment. They shared it with a refugee from Mali for six months. Because it worked so easily, they decided to create an online platform, spread the word that this is possible.

Coming from a strong perspective of refugee self-determination, the project is also not simply about housing. It's also about inclusion and creating connections between New Germans and existing residents. The principle aim of Refugees Welcome is to promote the experience of living together. They believe that this co-living will learn the local language faster and adjust and integrate more easily, network and find employment (a key integration measure) more quickly. This is borne out in Canadian research, which showed that [privately sponsored refugees have better employment outcomes](https://pdf) than those who are sponsored by government or who claim asylum in Canada.

Residents who share their living spaces get to help someone, but they also learn about a different culture and can become ambassadors for refugee inclusion in their communities.

**Being disruptive**

Civic tech projects are, by nature, [disruptive](https://pdf). This is the case with Refugees Welcome, but the founders sought to bring social disruption as well. Geiling says that refugees are often seen as burdens, and not as people seeking safety, coming from situations of great need. She believes the prejudices and fears about refugees tend to disappear when people get to know and start connecting with each other.

Like [The Clothing Drive/Mes Amis](https://pdf), technology isn't the point. But, it's what makes the project scale. It's also made it easier to replicate internationally. Other cities' sites look like the original, but local organizers customize the program itself from there, to meet local needs.

But, they've built a replicable web and technology infrastructure that partners in other cities can use. Building scalable technology has helped them easily expand an idea to create more welcoming cities and neighbours. Technology means they can take their idea and implement it directly and not wait for formal structures and institutions to take
the lead or catch up. It's an approach similar to what is happening with medical care in Hamburg's refugee camps.

**Local goes global and local**

The original project has **rolled out to 13 countries**. They're working with groups in more than 20 more to set up a local Refugees Welcome group.

Each local group takes on the responsibility of coordinating and connecting refugees with hosts. The site and web infrastructure are key to helping people show interest or need. After that, local coordinators connect and match people together. They also help hosts find rent money for refugees who might not be able to afford it. Support continues after the matching is done, for both hosts and refugees.

Kakoschke says it's important to be flexible with their concept, because the needs change over time and are different in different cities and countries. Initially, he says, the German site saw 1000 registrations per month for housing, but it's decreased to 50-70 per month. In Portugal, where there aren't as many refugees, they're also focusing on migrants, more broadly defined. "It's about bringing locals and non-locals together to dialogue, to have a better life for all of them together."

---

**Success**

The streamlined, online referral service has so far connected 818 refugees to housing.

Refugees Welcome founders recognize that they're a small organization. But, they've been able to prove that the idea works. The importance of decentralized housing options for migrants is important for planners, architects, migration policy officials and something that Refugees Welcome has been able to prove. Their online platform and its replication shows how quickly it can also cross borders. It also shows how an idea in one place can quickly grow to impact others. Without a technology component, Refugees Welcome would have been a great idea among some friends in a neighbourhood. Instead, it's global.

The founders aren't just waiting for society to become more accommodating to refugees. They've also created an online campaign, [Search Racism. Find truth.](https://www.searchracism.com) Refugees themselves face far right propaganda, debunking prejudice with hard facts, surprising revelations and humour.
Welcome to City Plaza, Athens

By Evelyn
Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Refugee Portal, Spatial Inclusion

Welcome to City Plaza, Athens

By: Vicki Squire, University of Warwick

There are now around 55,000 people stranded in Greece as a result of Europe’s failed response to the so-called migration crisis – and many refugees are losing hope. Many languish in camps dotted across the Greek islands, and others have decided to stay in Turkey rather than face the bleak conditions in Europe. But there is a new accommodation project in Athens called City Plaza which is providing refugees with much-needed hope. City Plaza is a disused seven-storey hotel near Victoria Square, which has been occupied by the Economic and Political Refugee Solidarity Initiative. The hotel has been closed for business for around seven years, but the building remains fully equipped and is now being used to house nearly 400 people who arrived to Greece from Turkey in the past year.

Unlike the accommodation provided by the United Nations and its partners, people at City Plaza are not chosen on the basis of their vulnerable status or nationality. The people accommodated on site were purposefully chosen not according to whether they qualified for relocation, and questions about why people migrated were not a factor in identifying those to be accommodated. Instead, attention was paid to ensuring a mix of nationalities, a gender balance, and a combination of religious beliefs.

When I visited in May 2016 there were about 400 residents, including around 20 single parents, six single men, ten unaccompanied minors, four people with extreme disabilities, several pregnant women and three newborn babies. All had to agree to abide by a basic set of rules, such as not drinking alcohol on the premises or acting in a violent way toward others. They also had to agree to participate in the daily activities of the collective, such as cooking and cleaning.

City Plaza is not funded by any external agencies and relies on donations and fundraising. Decisions in City Plaza are made on a collective process which occurs through different assemblies that are held on a regular basis. Each resident agrees on entry to participate fully in the community based on respect for each person regardless of gender and religious or ethnic backgrounds.

Building a community

Though clearly the process of deciding who gets to stay at City Plaza is a difficult one, the activists involved in setting up the site deliberately select a combination of people who require additional support and those who could provide it, such as teachers and translators. This reflects a broader ethos within City Plaza: recognising that people are facing precarious situations but trying to avoid defining their existence according to their vulnerability.

By contrast with the charitable and sometimes victim-centric ethos of many organisations working in the area, the aim is to build a culture of mutual respect. The idea is that residents will then feel able to go out from City Plaza and find their own way forward in the city.

“We don’t want to make a ghetto within the city – even if it is a nice ghetto”, Nasim Lomani, a refugee from Afghanistan who is a long-standing resident of the city, tells me. City Plaza aims to be a place where people on the move in precarious situations can begin to rebuild their lives without being constrained by their status or vulnerabilities. Clearly City Plaza is just one site and does not meet the needs of the up to 55,000 stranded people in Greece. Indeed, this is precisely why the activist collective seeks to do more than simply provide support to those within the re-used hotel. Members of the collective also work on refugee projects beyond the building.

“We can’t solve the problem”, Lomani tells me, “but we can be ready [to act in solidarity with refugees] when we are needed”. City Plaza has already inspired projects elsewhere, including a temporary residential facility, HOOST, in the east of Amsterdam.
City Plaza offers an alternative to camps – and it appears to be incredibly effective for those whose lives it touches. Many of the people I spoke to living in City Plaza explained how even though they are frustrated at being stuck in Greece, they are in the best place they can be given the circumstances. Having visited several camps in Athens during my visit in May, I can only agree.

Of course City Plaza would be difficult to scale up. Government agencies can’t replicate this model for some migrants according to the same criteria as the collective, while leaving the rest behind in camps. But when we think about the squalid camps that tend to represent Europe’s current approach, the question has to be asked as to whether there is a different way to deal with this problem. Couldn’t the many disused buildings, not only in Athens but across various European cities, be used to foster collective living in a similar way to City Plaza?

Vicki Squire, Reader in International Security, University of Warwick

This article was originally published on The Conversation. Read the original article.
In Italy, a struggling town looks to refugees for revival

By Evelyn
September 13, 2016

Satriano, Italy — The population of this town located in the toe of Italy’s “boot” is shrinking as its residents get older.

The narrow streets climbing the hills of the old town are lined with empty houses marked vendesi — for sale. The central square is nearly empty at midday — just a couple of shops remain open. The biggest commotion in town happens each day at 8 am, noon and 4 pm. That’s when a loud siren blares to commemorate bombings during World War II, which many of the residents are old enough to remember.

At its peak in the 1950s, the old town of Satriano had about 3,800 residents. Today it’s down to about 1,000. If it shrinks much more, schools, health clinics and the local post office may have to be closed.

So when a flood of refugees began pouring into Europe last year — some of them on boats landing on Mediterranean beaches not far from here — local leaders saw it as a great opportunity. In Italy, the job of settling and integrating asylum seekers belongs to local governments. Mayors across the impoverished southern region of Calabria, and especially here in Satriano, are embracing this responsibility in a big way.

Local officials in Satriano are enthusiastically situating refugees in temporary housing, lining them up with jobs and assisting them with their applications for asylum. The hope is that the refugees, most of them men in their 20s, will choose to stay here rather than making their way north to more prosperous parts of Italy or on to Germany, Sweden or the UK. Perhaps they’ll bring their families, buy some of those empty houses and make a life here.

“The presence of refugees can be an opportunity to repopulate the town,” says Satriano Mayor Michele Drosi. “It can create a virtuous cycle.”

The results of Satriano’s welcoming attitude remain modest — about 20 refugees are currently living here, hardly enough to reverse decades of decline. But Satriano’s inclusive policies are a model for the kind of approach cities and towns across Europe are going to have to consider as they absorb the 8,000 refugees and migrants arriving on the continent each day. And it may just work, at least for some of the people passing through.

“If I find a good job I will be happy to stay here,” says Adnan from Pakistan, who is working as an apprentice for a local hairdresser. Adnan came to Satriano after spending three months in Pescara, a larger city in central Italy. “I prefer the dimension of life of a smaller town. And also the cohabitation with people from different ethnic backgrounds, such as the guys from African countries hosted here, is working well.”

An understanding community

Embracing outsiders comes easy for the residents of Satriano because many migrated themselves in their younger days. In the 1950s and ’60s, hundreds of locals left for Switzerland, Germany and Argentina to find work. Those who returned can sympathize with the young men coming here now, mainly from Pakistan, Mali and Burkina Faso.

As Carmine Battaglia, president of the local association of seniors, puts it: “Who better than us, who left town because of poverty as young workers, to understand the pain of those people fleeing wars and persecutions?”

Satriano is part of a national network of 376 municipalities called SPRAR — the Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The network was created by the Italian Ministry of Home Affairs, is funded by the national government and European Union and is managed by a central office led by the Italian Association of Cities. (Disclosure: I currently work for the association of cities, but not directly for SPRAR.)

The model in Satriano is a good example of what SPRAR calls an accoglienza integrata, or “integrated welcome.” Like other cities and towns in Italy, Satriano receives €35 per day per refugee it hosts — the money comes from the Home Affairs Ministry. A local cooperative known as Mediazione Globale manages the project on behalf of the municipality. The cooperative is staffed almost exclusively by former migrants who have attained Italian citizenship, including its local leader, Khalid Elsheikhe, who came to Italy from Sudan in the early 1990s. Mediazione Globale helps refugees buy food, find housing and learn how to speak and write Italian. They also help refugees write applications for asylum, collect the necessary papers and coach them on what to say during their official interview.

While the asylum process plays out — it can take six months to a year — Mediazione Globale helps the refugees line up jobs. Some find work with the municipality doing street cleaning, gardening or maintenance in municipally owned buildings. Others have received work grants that allow them to work in a private enterprise but get paid by the municipality — the employer must agree to offer job training. This is the basis by which Adnan from Pakistan is working at the hairdresser; another refugee is working in a factory that makes doors and windows while two others have jobs in agriculture.

For most of the newcomers, finding work is the most important determinant of whether they’ll stay in Satriano or move on to parts of Europe where jobs are more plentiful. One refugee named Abdullah, from Mali, told me he was happy to clean streets for the municipality — “it gave me the opportunity to live in close contact with residents and feel better integrated here.”

But Abdullah admits he may move elsewhere if his asylum papers come through as he hopes. “It will be fundamental to find a good job if I want to settle here in Italy,” he says. “Once I get the status of refugee, I will go where I can find a job.”

Mediazione Globale’s Elsheikhe says even those who leave Satriano may return some day. “We are still in contact with some of the refugees who passed by here and settled in UK cities such as Manchester,” Elsheikhe says. “Some of them say that their desire is to gain enough money to open a shop or a restaurant in Satriano and come back to

Mediazione Globale’s Khalid Elsheikhe (left) works in close cooperation with Don Alessandro, priest of the local church, to integrate refugees into the Satriano community. (Simone d’Antonio)

live here.”

Expansion plans

For now, most of the refugees in Satriano live in a renovated historic building called the Palazzo Condò. The municipality used European Union funds to fix up the old building, which is located next to Satriano’s biggest church. There’s 20 beds to host refugees here. The basement is now being restored to host a daytime center for elderly residents. It was a deliberate choice to have the refugees and seniors share the same building, intended to spark conversations and common understanding.

Some of that has been happening organically already. The local association of seniors invited refugees along on social outings for its members, including a mountain excursion. Some younger people in town brought refugees to a football match in a neighboring town. Residents are hosting asylum seekers for dinner in their homes, or offering free car rides between the old town to a newer section of Satriano near the Mediterranean Sea. (The carpooling is part of longstanding system locals use among themselves to help students or others without cars to get around — public transport is lacking in this part of Italy.)

Satriano hopes to grow its program by renovating some of the empty houses in town into new shelters to host even more asylum seekers. The houses would be used either on a temporary basis for people passing through, or perhaps be rented out directly to those who choose to stay.

There’s fair reason to doubt whether Satriano’s plans will work — there simply may not be enough jobs here to convince large numbers of immigrants to stick around. But with Satriano’s hospitality, the immigrants are sure to at least give it careful consideration.

“We aim to get this process of integration even better,” says Mayor Drosi. “We want to make the asylum seekers really feel like citizens of Satriano and part of the local community.”

Source: This article is reprinted with permission from Citiscope, November 5, 2015. Citiscope is a nonprofit news outlet that covers innovations in cities around the world. More at Citiscope.org.

Simone d’Antonio is a Rome-based journalist who covers innovation, sustainability and urban issues. His articles have appeared in The Good Life, the Italian edition of Wired, Il Sole 24 Ore and Il Manifesto. Simone works at Cittalia-Anci Ricerche Foundation. He also is in charge of the communication of many EU co-funded projects and programs, and serves as the National Dissemination Point for Italy for the URBACT blog focused on European cities.
On Your Mark, Get Set, Weibo!

By kturner
September 14, 2016
Living Together Municipal Role of Media

Smart cities look beyond Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat to uncover online networks the community is using. They meet them in those spaces.

Social media use has become an important part of any city government's communication toolkit. From broadcasting to connecting and engaging directly with residents, it's convenient and impactful. It's also expected. What do you do when your community is diverse and using a variety social media tools and channels? Making an effort to understand social media diversity can transform the way a city connects with residents. In the San Gabriel Valley, that effort has improved civic outreach with Chinese-speaking communities.

San Gabriel Valley's Chinese-speaking community

An ethnically diverse region, San Gabriel Valley was once comprise primarily of White and Latino residents. Asian residents, represented mainly by Chinese immigrants, recently became a majority in a number of cities in the San Gabriel Valley. However, they remained disconnected from the broader community and city institutions.

Siye “Walter” Yu recognized this inclusion issue and penned a simple call to action in 2013: “Five ways organizations could engage Chinese immigrants in the San Gabriel Valley.” Perhaps he thought it would catch the eye of a few people. Maybe it would drive some outreach and increase focus on Chinese-speaking residents in some neighbourhoods. He couldn’t have predicted it would go viral when it caught the eye of Alhambra Police Chief Mark Yokoyama. Yokoyama connected with Yu, and editors from the Alhambra Source, to see what the department could do. Near the end of the year, Alhambra Police opened a Weibo account, a first in the U.S.

Alhambra Police partnered with Yu to run their account. Their foray into Weibo was an immediate hit. In the first week their follower count exceeded Facebook followers by five times. The impact went beyond social media vanity stats. Chinese language calls to the department increased by over 60% in the first year. And, it transformed the department’s relationship with the Chinese-speaking population.

According to Yokoyama, the sense of trust the police began building was the most important outcome. “We’re answering questions that have probably been on the minds of people for a long time. They just didn’t know how to ask or who to ask. It tells me people have some sense of trust in at least asking the question of the police. That’s the outcome that I’ve most enjoyed.”

In 2015, they opened an account on WeChat, a popular Chinese social and messaging network. Another success.

San Gabriel City moves onto Weibo

San Gabriel City noticed Alhambra’s success and joined Weibo in 2015, becoming the first city government in the U.S. on the network. They smartly hired Walter Yu to manage the account.
According to San Gabriel City Public Information Officer Lauren Gold, they’ve experienced success similar to the Alhambra police: “We could tell instantly that Weibo had fulfilled a strong need in the community. A day after the official launch, we already had more than 2,000 followers – just about what we had on Facebook at the time, and we’d had our Facebook account for years.” More than great social media metrics, she says “the Weibo account helped us build a stronger connection with the Chinese-speaking community. It opened a line of communication to a group of residents that had never interacted with their city government before.”

Being strategic in their communications approach is essential. Echoing New York City’s Nisha Agarwal, Gold says “It’s not enough to merely translate materials into Chinese and try to distribute them through the same channels we use for our English communications. It is essential to reach out to these different groups through the channels they are already comfortable with, and in the spaces where they are already participating. We’ve started posting more information that new immigrants might want to know, and we have included information on how to get a translator for city services like police or code enforcement. We’re also able to use the account to appeal to overseas travelers, since tourism is a large industry in San Gabriel.”

Those secondary audiences are important. They became significant in Alhambra as well. As one reporter put it: “The Police Department joined Weibo to do police work, but it soon fell into a different role: explaining America.”

For San Gabriel City, that role cannot be underestimated. Investing in strategic communications helps create communities where all residents feel welcome and included.

Success

The online effort has translated into offline success. In late 2015, San Gabriel held their first Dumpling & Beer Fest. Using Weibo as an outreach tool, the Fest was the most well-attended city event in recent memory, with an estimated 5,000 people filling the downtown. Significantly, attendance was very diverse, reflecting community demographics. Gold says it’s tangible evidence that their investment in Weibo has increased community engagement and interactions with Chinese-speaking residents.

San Gabriel is getting it right. Other U.S. cities have approached them to learn more about Weibo and how they could make it work in their community. For Gold the increased collaboration with other cities is rewarding. This year San Gabriel received the “Most Innovative” Award of Excellence in Communication from the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO).

Next for San Gabriel city? WeChat, of course.
Ahlan is Arabic for welcome. That’s what the hospitality industry in New South Wales (NSW), Australia is planning to offer refugees from Syria. It began with a small-scale idea: When refugees start arriving in NSW, Carol and Sharon Salloum wanted to hire some at Almond Bar, their restaurant serving Syrian cuisine.

Like any good idea, it has grown among local hospitality businesses. Called “Project Ahlan,” the long-term vision is to support Syrian refugees find employment across the hospitality sector in New South Wales, which ranges from specialty and gourmet food markets, to ethnic food suppliers, to delis and greengrocers, and more.

The owners of Almond Bar are leading the project, engaging fellow employers as champions of refugee talent.

A business network for refugee employment

After a radio show profiled Almond Bar at a community cooking event with refugees of other backgrounds, peers in the hospitality industry began showing interest. A small group of like-minded chefs and restaurant owners came together, along with a cultural psychologist, an educator, and a local settlement agency, the Settlement Services International (SSI).

One restaurant owner and project partner, Hugh Foster, explained that refugee employment is a natural fit with industry values. He said, “we're in the hospitality industry and we're being hospitable.”

Large numbers of Syrian refugees haven’t arrived yet, so the project partners are getting ready. Initially, they’ve been going chef to chef, Salloum said, bringing small groups of chefs together to talk about the project. The project’s cultural psychologist and educator spend time with the chefs, helping them understand what to expect when the refugees arrive and how new employees can best be supported.

For Carol Salloum, rallying the industry takes a personal touch. She says there is nothing more personal for a Syrian than sharing a meal together. She and her sister Sharon would know. The children of Syrian immigrants to Australia, they have run Almond Bar since 2007.

“A lot of [the employers] don’t know what to say, what to do. ‘They’ve never met anyone from a war and worked with them,” Salloum says. “If we bring small groups of chefs into our restaurant, they’re more likely to ask questions, to talk about their concerns, and what they’re prepared to do.”

Part of the personal touch is foregoing any paper-based application process for the project. Salloum connects directly with potential employers as interested peers. The personal touch is working. Everyone Salloum has approached has been interested, and many are on board. A small group of about 10 employers will pilot the project.

Here’s how it will work: With SSI as a close partner, Project Ahlan will identify those refugees who have experience or are interested in hospitality work. Job candidates will be given training and skills development directly in workplaces. Like the small group of employers, Project Ahlan will begin small on the candidate side, beginning with 15-25 refugees. As they learn and gain profile, Salloum’s vision is for the program to grow and scale.

It’s not just about the job

Employment is important, but it's not just about supporting refugees to get a job. Connecting the newcomers with the community as they restart their lives is an important goal of the project.

“Through food, through interaction, that’s how they’re going to become members of the community,” Salloum said. “They’re more likely to feel at home, feel more comfortable, and settle in better.”

As the project moves forward, Salloum said they’ll host an event bringing refugees and employers together over dinner or a typical Australian BBQ. Eventually they’ll also hold a public event that will aim to have refugees cook for the community and interact with their neighbours. For Salloum, having employers and the broader public meet and spend time with refugees is a way to ensure greater understanding, which extends beyond the workplace.

Sensitivity to refugee experiences is an important component to work involving refugees in Australia. In recent years, refugees and asylum seekers have become highly politicized, with debate centred on how to manage the arrival of boats to Australia’s shores. In the years leading up to 2013, Australia received a rising number of asylum seekers by boat. The number dropped after the government introduced tough border policies including towing boats away from the mainland, but the political debate over refugees has continued.

Engaging the community comes naturally to Salloum. “That’s just the kind of people we are,” she said. “The way we run our restaurant is very much about making people feel good about themselves, and making people feel comfortable.”

She knows employers can play a big role in engaging the wider community. Project Ahlan is “an opportunity for an employer to demonstrate to their workers that it’s important to help other people.”

But it’s not just a good thing to do. It’s a smart thing to do. “Food is an expression of culture, and those who come here to work with our chefs and in our kitchens bring their culture, thus enriching ours. They also bring their resilience and their hopes and dreams,” Salloum said. “These remarkable people will more than repay our hospitality. We can learn from each other.”

Source: Re-printed with permission from the HireImmigrants website.

Learn from other employers:
Siemens, Germany: Siemens and the City of Erlangen Tap Refugee Talent with Internship Program. Training both Newcomers and their Colleagues
Danby, Canada: "The World Needs to See Leadership" says Guelph CEO and Refugee Champion
Cinnzeo Bakeries, Canada: Mock Interviews by Cinnzeo Bakeries a Way to Support Newcomers and Source Talent
Dream Neighbourhoods: City Innovation in Refugee Housing

By kturner
June 7, 2016

This is the year where refugee housing contributes to the economic revitalization of a Cleveland community. Three City Councillors have come together to create a “Dream Neighborhood” that spans their city wards. It’s an area hard hit by the housing crisis and has had a difficult time recovering.

For the past year, the Councillors have worked on a plan to provide affordable housing, social supports and community inclusion and economic opportunities for refugees settling in Cleveland. They’re not looking for simple neighborhood improvement, but transformation. If they succeed, they won’t only improve existing conditions but also help refugees with the kind of fresh start few receive.

According to one of the project originators, Councillor Joe Cimperman (now President of Global Cleveland): “The goal is to make Cleveland the No. 1 welcoming city for newcomers and refugees within the next five years. They will bring new life to neighborhoods. And the neighborhoods will bring new life to them.”

Housing as the foundation

The approach is fairly simple. Rehabilitate housing in a neighbourhood, bring people the community and economy need, work to ensure they have the supports necessary to thrive and contribute. A simple idea, a massive undertaking. But not a new one for Cleveland.

For years, Cleveland has been rehabilitating empty houses for new use by homeowners, tenants or investors.

Derelict, foreclosed, vacant houses are handed over to a local land bank, or community nonprofit. They’re renovated, rehabilitated (“rehabbed”) and sold as new housing. Since 2010, 100 homes have been rehabbed in the proposed Dream Neighborhood. Hundreds more have been rehabbed across Cleveland. There are over 140 more houses ready to be rehabbed in the Dream Neighbourhood area. 140 refugee families welcomed with new homes as they start over.

Initial goals are modest, to rehabilitate 20 homes by the end of 2016.

“Rehabbers” are not necessarily developers. They can be individuals or organizations (including refugee-resettlement agencies) that purchase and rehabilitate vacant, foreclosed and abandoned homes. It’s an important distinction that illustrates the community-based approach core to the creation of the Dream Neighborhood.

In the Dream Neighbourhood, necessary community and social supports are in place. There will a concerted effort to ensure that new refugee families access the rehabbed houses. Much work has been done to prepare and help the local community become agents of welcome.

Location, location, location

Locating the Dream Neighborhood in an increasingly diverse community with existing supports is key.

The Dream Neighborhood is located around a central focal point, the Thomas Jefferson Newcomers Academy, where over 500 students from 19 nationalities speak over 25 languages. Opened in 2011, the school serves all English language learning students entering the Cleveland school system. Immigrant students spend their first year in a supported cultural and English immersion experience catering to their specific needs.

An already diverse community around the school that calls itself International Village, the Dream Neighborhood will intentionally create a thriving refugee-centric community. Refugee families will settle, they will be supported with housing and other programs. Their children will start at Thomas Jefferson Newcomers Academy and continue in schools in the area. The families themselves will grow roots and become active members of the neighborhood.

As refugees always have, they will contribute to the community. Brian Upton of Refugee Services Collaborative of Greater Cleveland says: “They are not takers. They are not a drain on our community. They are very entrepreneurial.”

 Welcoming communities

Housing is the initial starting point, but other services, jobs, and a welcoming community are key (PDF). “Empty homes, once a source of blight, will be filled with families walking their children to school. Families who want to garden with their neighbors in the 11 existing community gardens. Welcome Wagons to help bridge the gap of unfamiliarity for newly arrived individuals to Cleveland. We are focusing on more than just filling empty homes but also the vacant commercial real estate in the neighborhood. Opening doors with development to help families have increased employment opportunities. To fill this once densely and even more diversely populated neighborhood with an abundance of possibilities for growth.”

Many local services and service providers are essential to make this happen. Lead proponent Cleveland City Councillman Brian Cummins provides a comprehensive overview of the planning, supports and vision for the Dream Neighborhood.

Key, he says, is the unprecedented collaboration between government, non-profit, for-profit and faith-based organizations. “They are leveraging existing community resources to make the change. Revitalizing the neighborhood means providing infrastructure refugees will need to be successful. By default, the entire community will gain.”

Looking Ahead

Cimperman “envisions a repopulated neighborhood where longtime residents live next door to refugees who help maintain shared gardens, find jobs in the area and start businesses on Clark and Storer avenues, two depleted commercial corridors.”

The City of Cleveland has pledged $150,000 towards low interest loans for new and existing businesses owned by immigrants and refugees in the Dream Neighborhood. They’re also connecting with local businesses and training organizations to help the refugees get jobs. The Dream Neighborhood fits nicely into the Cleveland 2020 Plan, focused on creating a more livable, thriving and competitive city.

There is much work to do this year, but so much has already happened to make this Dream Neighborhood a reality.
Integrating Refugees ‘Stitch By Stitch’

By kturner
June 2, 2016
Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Living Together Refugee Portal

In a cozy workshop in Frankfurt’s Bornheim district, shelves filled with folded material line the walls, and long rolls of colourful cloth are stacked in each corner. Esraa, a petit seamstress-in-training, leans over a big table in the middle of the room. Guided by a paper pattern, she carefully cuts through a sheet of bright lime-green fabric. Today, she’s making a blouse.

Esraa is one of more than one million refugees who arrived in Germany in 2015 – most of them from war-torn countries like Syria and Afghanistan. After having survived the journey, the next challenge is integrating in her new society, economy, and surroundings. In most cases that means learning the language, finding a job and finishing their education. Esraa had been studying fashion design in Damascus before her family fled the Syrian war. In Germany she wants to pick up her studies again, but she needs to improve her German skills first. In doing so, Esraa is able to gain practical sewing experience alongside her studies with her first job in Germany.

Personal impact

The project “Stitch by Stitch” was brought into being by seamstress Claudia Frick and graphic designer Nici von Alvensleben. They hope the startup will help their seamstresses adapt to life, culture, and work in Germany. “It was also the question: What can we do? Not what is Angela Merkel doing to help, or what are other people doing, but what can we do?” Claudia said. Her dream is that in a few years, many of the seamstresses will open their own sewing workshops.

For Esraa it was a big step to get her first job in Germany. Nici recalls the moment, when she met Esraa’s family and decided to take her on board. “Across from us was her father and he pulled out his phone, took a photo, super proud, and I was realizing that this photo is going to get sent around friends, neighbours, probably people in his home country. And it said ‘Look, my youngest daughter is the first one getting a job in Germany.’ I felt like there we really have an impact,” she said.

Challenges remain

However, Nici and Claudia still face some obstacles. Both women have more than a decade’s experience running their own businesses, but launching Stitch by Stitch has come with its own challenges – for one, dealing with migration officials and bureaucracy. New territory, says Nici.

“I think the biggest challenge for us is working with the Federal Employment Agency and the Foreigners’ Registration Office,” Nici said. “There needs to be only one agency or one person who’s not supportive and the whole thing falls apart. But I have to say that any encounters I’ve had were really fantastic, people were really helpful.”

Also, many refugees have been through traumatic experiences to get to Europe. That’s something Nici and Claudia have had to take into account. When setting up Stitch by Stitch, they consulted a trauma expert. Nici says they hope to turn the workshop into a positive space where the seamstresses can focus on their skills.

“After having this experience, working with these colours and beautiful materials, it’s kind of soothing, something nice to do and uplifts you, and you also created something at the end of the day,” Nici said.

Positive responses

Their project aims to benefit refugees, but in the long run it should also be profitable. They plan to use the workshop to produce designs for small German fashion labels. The response to their small operation so far has been mostly positive. They say local fashion companies are interested in placing orders with them because they’re working with refugees. So far, Esraa is the only seamstress working with Stitch by Stitch. But by the end of the year, Nici and Claudia would like to have five seamstresses. If things go well down the track, the Stitch by Stitch team plans to find a bigger production space for their workshop, and eventually want to take the idea to other German cities.

Blueprints for success

In February 2016, Stitch by Stitch was one of 14 startups recognized by Frankfurt-based ANKOMMER: Perspektive Deutschland, a social innovation award funded by KfW Stiftung, with the Social Impact agency. ANKOMMER supports entrepreneurial individuals who are trying to improve the social and economic participation of refugees through innovative models and concepts, including access to education, vocational training and jobs.

Along with 13 other entrepreneurs from Frankfurt, Hamburg, Berlin and Leipzig, Stitch by Stitch prevailed against nearly 180 competitors to earn the coveted award, a scholarship program which provides socially-minded start-ups with eight months of financial and organizational support. Selected via a highly competitive multi-stage selection
process, all the projects, "without exception", demonstrate a clear capacity to be replicated or scaled to new locations.

"We have received applications from almost all sectors. Whether IT, gastronomy or culture, the sustainable nature of the funded projects depends on its success in the free market," emphasizes Social Impact CEO Norbert Kunz. "Here, it is particularly important that not only high skilled professionals get job prospects in their new homes, but also those immigrants who may not have recognized vocational qualifications, but have special talents."

Asked about her goals for 2016, Stitch by Stitch co-founder von Alavensleben had this to say: “Building, with five seamstresses, a solid customer base, so that we can live by the company in the medium term.”

A modest and determined beginning.

PINs: Professional Immigrant Networks

By ktturner
June 7, 2016

Employment Inclusion, Entrepreneurship Inclusion

What can organizations like the Latin American MBA Alumni Network, the Chinese Professionals Association of Canada or the Association of Filipino Canadian Accountants tell us about Toronto’s labour market? Lots.

Professional immigrant networks are not new, but the dozens of associations of immigrants helping immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) were largely operating under the radar until the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) started investigating.

As part of its larger mandate to work with employers to improve labour market outcomes for new immigrants, in 2009 TRIEC took a closer look at the role immigrant associations play in helping skilled immigrants find work in their field. They discovered that over 70 associations serving collectively over 30,000 members were hard at work in Ontario and a major influence in the local Toronto job market. Generally organized by profession or ethnicity, or both, professional immigrant networks, or PINs, have a unique capacity to connect immigrant talent to an increasingly specialized job market. TRIEC also learned that public and private sector employers were looking for ways to connect with immigrant associations in a coordinated way to raise their profile and recruit from within the immigrant talent pool.

The ‘click’ was audible. A coordinated effort to advance immigrant employment through PINs was soon in the works.

Capitalizing on resourcefulness

In 2010 TRIEC launched the Professional Immigrant Networks program (PINs), a vital new online hub and learning platform for association leaders and key stakeholders to connect, collaborate and help immigrants achieve success. PINs connects employers to professional immigrant networks and allows them to communicate directly and efficiently with target markets. In its first year alone, TRIEC disseminated 100 job postings out to the professional immigrant networks from 25 employers through PINs. The new website made these connections even easier, with a searchable directory of networks and a messaging function for employers to post jobs.

Sponsored by the Government of Canada and Scotiabank, with the shared goal of advancing immigrant employment, today PINs helps raise awareness of these immigrant-led professional associations, fosters collaboration between associations and key partners, and supports the development of association leaders. It’s what newcomers needed — and employers wanted.

“Lack of professional connections and understanding of Canadian corporate culture are the primary obstacles to meaningful employment for skilled immigrants,” says Gabriel Leiva von Bovet, President of HispanoTech and a TRIEC board member. “But thousands of newcomer professionals are using immigrant networks to help themselves and each other get ahead. Our new website capitalizes on this resourcefulness.”
PINs benefits employers as well as immigrants. With the diversifying population and the growth of the knowledge economy, recruiting internationally experienced and multi-lingual personnel is becoming a priority in most workplaces, both from the talent management and business perspectives. As a case in point, PINs is jointly sponsored by the human resources and business development arms of Scotiabank. According to Pankaj Mehra, Director, Multicultural Banking India and South Asia Markets, the bank’s investment in PINs meets the objectives of both aspects of the business:

“We recognize that professionals coming into our country are not just prospective employees and managers, but also customers,” says Mr. Mehra. “Immigrant employees can be important ambassadors for the bank by not only helping us grow our business, but also helping us strengthen our ties to their communities.”

Building connection and profile

Since 2010, PINs has helped accelerate movement from ideas to action. It has enabled organizations to amplify their efforts to do more, to have greater impact by leveraging existing assets and by connecting them with each other, and to have a stronger immigrant voice. By connecting with PINs associations, immigrants are able to build their professional networks, access information about labour market trends, job opportunities and licensing process for regulated professions, and participate in mentoring programs.

For the associations, the PINs program is a platform to build their profile among immigrants, employers and community agencies. The leaders have access to resources to help them run the groups more effectively and support their members, and have the opportunity to have their voice heard in immigrant employment consultations and the media.

“PINs has created greater awareness of the importance of our role and the relevance of the work we do.” – PINs Leader

“Through PINs, we have seen growth in memberships as well as in the number of potential sponsors and friend organizations that are able to support our work.” – PINs Leader

For PINs employer partners, the PINs network represents a new talent pool they can tap into and an opportunity to build communication pipelines to communities relevant to their business. As one PINs employer partner, a recruiting firm, reports: “[Working with PINs] set me on the path of assisting, representing, working with new Canadians, always with the ultimate goal of placing these professionals into roles that were suitable and well-matched to their skills, experience and abilities.”

The strength of the PINs networks comes from the partnerships and collaboration they foster. Here are a few examples of successful collaboration projects:

- A group mentoring train-the-trainer model developed by JVS Toronto for PINs associations has been piloted successfully with 10 associations.
- PINs supported the formation of Latin Networking Beyond Boundaries (LNBB), which brings together Latin American PINs associations and Employee Resource Groups to foster the integration and promotion among the members of the Latin professional associations.
- PINs collaborated with the provincial Office of the Fairness Commissioner (Ontario) to engage immigrant professionals in consultations on the access to regulated professions.

Keeping an eye on work-life balance is important, too. As TRIEC rolled out the PINs pilot they learned that the time PINs leaders could dedicate to the program was limited by career, family and volunteer commitments. Regular consultation with the leaders and community partners helps ensure that the program remains relevant and in line with their capacity to engage. PINs community partners have found a new audience to promote their programs and services, too.

Success

In 2013, MOWAT Centre’s ‘Diaspora Nation’ research study showcased PINs and the role of PINs associations in helping new immigrants. The report also highlighted the role of TRIEC as a coordinating mechanism that enables stakeholders to engage ideas and learn from each other.

This network of networks enables members to develop connections and gain professional development to help achieve success and reach employment goals. As of April 1, 2016, PINs network consist of 63 associations represented by 123 leaders and 75 partners. Groups cover a range of professions such as: engineering, architecture, accounting, IT, law, healthcare and business management.

Moving forward, TRIEC plans to expand its efforts to raise awareness of PINs and create tools for stakeholders to promote PINs to their networks and beyond. What do PINs leaders want? More accessible and topical learning resources for connecting to and building the potential of future leaders.
SINGA: Connecting Community, New and Old

By kturner
September 8, 2016
Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Refugee Portal, Social Inclusion

Connecting refugees to their new city and community. Can such a simple idea spawn an organization that inspires a community and creates a global movement for change? Enter SINGA.

In 2012, the Paris-based founders of SINGA were not content to simply create better integration outcomes for refugees. They wanted to create social inclusion, value the contributions, talents and presence of refugees, and change the discourse around refugees. SINGA seeks to change the role refugees typically play, from receivers of services, to a focus on their human and social capital. This is where SINGA excels. Co-founder Guillaume Capelle: "In a nutshell, we're forging a community where people are able to offer each other something – whether that offer comes from a host or a refugee."

SINGA's work is practical, grounded in the local, focused on identifying and resolving challenges refugees face. Refugees are part of the solution, playing a key role in the creation of new ideas, solutions to problems they and others face. This was illustrated at a 2015 hackathon. SINGA worked with the technology community, service providers, interested citizens and refugees to create digital solutions to barriers to integration and inclusion. Like SINGA, a hackathon treats everyone in the room as an integral part of the solution. Refugees are equal partners.

SINGA also works to ensure that refugee inclusion is mutually beneficial. According to SINGA co-founder and director Nathanaël Molle, "Listening is everything." Refugees don’t know what to do, where to go or how to express their knowledge or skill to locals. It can be difficult for locals to figure out how to benefit from their presence. SINGA creates a bridge to that understanding. It brings people together who have an interest in creating better neighbourhoods and neighbours. The entire community benefits.

Participation of enthusiastic locals is essential for SINGA's success. They know the community, its nuances and niches. They can help accelerate refugee settlement and inclusion, whether through housing, mentoring, playing, shopping or working together. They are the “unusual integration actors” we increasingly see in Cities of Migration good ideas. Not experts in refugee resettlement, but community members interested in finding ways to contribute and solve problems.

The result? A growing number of ideas and projects at work in cities around the world. Local SINGA organizations create local solutions. They also look to others for inspiration. StayCALM ('Comme à la Maison' – ‘Feels like Home’), is a web and mobile app that matches refugees looking for housing and host families in France. Modeled on a project from Australia, SINGA not only leads, but is a willing learning organization, replicating other good ideas.

Building an innovative, supportive community

SINGA is an organization. But one that functions as a community. Members bring ideas, energy and the desire to create an inclusive society. Although started in Paris, France, SINGA is active and growing in other parts of France, and in Berlin, Brussels, Montreal, Rabat and Sydney. The objectives are the same. Each community focuses on projects and approaches that work locally. SINGA is the community hub, the facilitator, connector and enabler. Change happens because a broader community forms around SINGA's ideals and objectives.

Sima Gatea, Founder, SINGA Germany, calls SINGA a package: "A solution that allows you to make social and professional connections which, at the end of the day, is the best way to promote integration on the ground." SINGA is creating broader community change, building welcoming cities and actively changing the discourse around refugees.

Language matters

SINGA is making a deliberate effort to impact the language used to talk about refugees. The word refugee has been divisive, with negative connotations, linked to ideas such as the "other, alien, illegal, queue jumper, without status, a cost to the host society."

Changing the discourse that surrounds migration is important. SINGA wants people to look at refugees in an entirely different way.

The move is not towards integration – come, emulate us, learn how we do things and do them that way. But, towards inclusion. Yes, come and learn our ways, but what have you brought, what do you have, what can we learn from you that benefits us all? How can we work together? Gatea’s aspiration is that, in the same way “new Canadian” regularizes newcomers of all types, thinking of refugees simply as “new French”, “new German” could contribute to needed local cultural and attitude shifts.

She explains:
Sima Gatea, Singa Deutschland, at COM2016 in Toronto

The lens is long term for SINGA. Refugees are an opportunity for societies if we decide to see them that way; if they are included, supported, and able to contribute. According to Capelle, “In 10 or 15 years, we want society to look at refugees in an entirely different way, and that takes time.” The result will create better pathways to inclusion for all newcomers.

SINGA’s founders have clearly tapped into something and have found an idea that is spreading to communities that want to do more to support refugees among them. Gatea says that when she was looking for an inclusive approach to building community, which also connected refugees to economic opportunities, such as entrepreneurship, it became clear that SINGA was what she needed. Is SINGA what you might be looking for in your community?
In Münster, Germany, building humane housing builds resilience.

Waves of migration are no longer isolated events. They're the norm. It makes sense for cities to be ready. The upside? Being ready means better services, infrastructure, access and inclusion for all in the city. In Münster, Germany, this is being put to the test.

Building resilient cities to weather catastrophic shocks and stresses is not new. Including human migration, fueled by massive human movements into Europe, is a newer phenomenon. Urban planning can't solve the refugee crisis. But it can better take into account increasing mobility and the opportunities diversity brings.

According to the 100 Resilient Cities project, “resilience has never been more compelling and urgent in Europe and the Middle East than it is now. Common challenges—including civil wars and a need to expand city capacities to support growing numbers of refugees and immigrants—bridge the two regions while also creating opportunities for collaborative problem solving.”

As cities start a conversation on migration and housing, Münster has some things to teach them.

A new concept of housing for asylum-seekers:

Over 10 years ago, discussion of Germany’s treatment of refugees recognized that it was, at best, controversial: “Despite having taken great strides to improve the chances for asylum-seekers, there is no minimum standard for the living quarters provided by the state for displaced persons.” Already then, Münster was challenging the German status quo.

Adequate housing is a foundation of resiliency. Layer vulnerable asylum-seekers with precarious housing on top and you have the makings of a potential humanitarian crisis. In 2000, Münster leadership set out a refugee housing policy based on “principles of good living,” made up of a balanced mix of people across the city. In many cities, asylum-seekers end up in segregated camps for too long. In Münster, they’re in group housing for no more than 3 weeks before moving on to family housing and apartments.

No more than 50 asylum-seekers would be housed in any housing facility (ideally no more than 8 people per apartment). No communal kitchens or washrooms. Rather, the policy outlined the importance of private spaces for families to settle, that existed within the community. No refugee/migrant segregation and ghettoization. Certainly no precarious refugee camps.

City leaders recognized that inclusion meant access to green spaces, childcare, and input from local residents, neighbours and community groups. Support in the community is not unanimous, but is strong. Over 800 Münster volunteers have pitched in. It's a community effort.

According to Jochen Köhnke, previously Münster Councillor responsible for Migration and Intercultural Affairs: “In contrast to the large-scale, institutionalized housing, we notice that the new apartments allow for a sense of civil society to develop. We have volunteers from within the immigrant community supporting the social work of our office, and quite a number of immigrants have been adopted by the local community. We are seeing promising developments in the schools, too. Children are not just going more regularly to school, they are also able to enter the class appropriate for their age and thrive there.”

The city recognized that stable housing provides an important foundation for refugees. Additional supports and programs are needed in order to ensure their successful inclusion into the community.

Political pressure and resilience:

Not all asylum seekers will not be accepted as refugees. Providing housing support to asylum-seekers became a contentious political issue in Münster. Whether or not people would be accepted as refugees, treating people humanely is simply the right thing. According to Köhnke: “Knowledge of German and German culture can never be taken away from the asylum-seekers. Even if their bid for amnesty is not accepted and the families must return to their homeland, the immigrants will have profited from their time in Germany.”

Building a broad, inclusive housing strategy was strategically important for Münster. Planning and systems in place meant that the potential refugee-resettlement crisis could be lessened.

Urban resilience focuses on how to build systems to manage crises. Münster provides an example of how sudden demographic shifts via rapid migration as a stress factor/point needs to be integrated into the resilience framework. Early, innovative, inclusive, humanitarian investments over time have resulted in good work with asylum-seekers and refugees who settle. In turn, it benefits the community.

Münster’s 2008 immigration and integration mission statement builds these connections into the city’s goals (PDF): “It is our aim to provide residents on low incomes with reasonable accommodation also in non-segregated areas. In this context, we also plan to strengthen the willingness of the housing sector to continue investing in low-cost housing.”

Success
More and more refugees arriving each day over the past year increased the pressure for housing in Münster. The city will make use of temporary housing, in the form of shipping container-sized portable homes. For now, Münster “has to say goodbye for now of the ideal of a maximum of 50 residents per location. The pressure is too high. Köhnke says, “Maybe we will end up at 100. Clearly at least not at 1,000 people as in other cities.”

Integrating waves of migrants into a city is a challenge. It is not new, and will not stop being a challenge. But, it is one that resilient cities like Münster are up for.
Cities for Citizenship

By ktuner
June 7, 2016
Municipal, Political Inclusion

Immigration is national, but settlement and inclusion are local. But, what does inclusion look like? Nisha Agarwal, Commissioner at New York City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs recently asked: How do you take action to make an increasingly diverse immigrant population feel welcome, included and that their presence is valued?

For the Cities for Citizenship campaign, the answer is to encourage higher rates of naturalization.

Citizenship matters

Recognizing that citizenship is an increasingly a powerful path to social and economic inclusion, Cities for Citizenship was launched in September 2014 by the mayors of New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. The multi-city network of city mayors is a major initiative aimed at increasing citizenship among eligible U.S. permanent residents and encouraging cities across the country to invest in citizenship programs amid growing realization that increased naturalization benefits immigrants and cities alike. Cities for Citizenship is working to ensure that municipal government leaders take practical steps to bring these benefits to their cities.

A natural win-win for cities and immigrants

Newcomers tend to become citizens for non-economic benefits, such as a sense of permanency, the right to vote or run for office, a passport that asserts legitimacy, a welcome identity or greater sense of belonging. Agarwal, along with Global Director, Citi Community Development and Inclusive Finance, Bob Annibale, recently wrote: “It is widely recognized that gaining citizenship is a transformative social experience for immigrants and our nation.... Less widely appreciated is the fact that citizenship is a powerful source of economic empowerment and strength both for the individuals who gain citizenship, as well as the cities in which they live.”

That economic enrichment was recently quantified in the study The Economic Impact of Naturalization on Immigrants and Cities (PDF). Researchers studied 21 American cities, discovering that naturalization brings significant economic benefits, both to those who naturalize, and the economy. For immigrants, Citizenship leads to better paying jobs, higher employment rates, and home ownership. If everyone eligible in the 21 cities studied became Citizens, their earnings would increase by $5.7 billion. There would be 45,000 new homeowners.

This increased financial inclusion is crucial for the successful settlement of newcomers. It also results in long-term economic benefits for cities. The report found that naturalization would increase tax revenues by $2.03 billion in the 21 cities combined. It also found a decreased reliance on public benefits.

It’s the ultimate win-win for new Americans and their communities.

Citizenship is closer than many think

Designing effective outreach programs requires a deep knowledge of local communities. New York City estimates that “700,000 immigrant New Yorkers are one step away from citizenship.” Agarwal says that New York has learned that “if you want to create services for immigrant families, put them in the communities where they live.” Doing that ensured the success of New York City’s inaugural Citizenship Week of Action in late 2015.

NYCitizenship provides free help with citizenship applications at public library branches. What better community resource than the library system? More than half of those eligible for naturalization in the U.S. are low-income. Meeting their needs, and help them navigate the complex maze of applying for Citizenship means providing them with an appropriate intervention. NYCitizenship Services include: “appointments with a trusted attorney for help with citizenship applications, information sessions about the citizenship process and its benefits, and free and confidential financial counseling.”

Recognizing that local community engagement is essential has transformed that way New York City agencies reach out to local communities. According to Agarwal, “If we want to reach the 50% of New Yorkers who speak a language other than English at home, reaching them in their language is essential. It matters to have people on the ground, in the neighbourhoods, building relationships with community organizations, faith leaders. These are people who speak the language of the neighbourhood. Many come from those neighbourhoods. That’s been helpful to build a bridge between City Hall and immigrant communities.”

The message to immigrant communities is clear: city government wants to serve all residents, and will speak their language. It’s also an important lesson for other cities that want to reach all communities.

Collaborating for Citizenship

In New York City, immigrant initiatives come directly from the Mayor’s Office. However, Agarwal points out that the Mayor’s office shouldn’t be the only, or even the main place where city government is thinking about immigrant families. One of her office’s key roles is to help city agencies better serve newcomers and build innovative programs to reach them. The City has expanded its outreach teams in other City agencies and targets communities through multilingual marketing.

On the national stage, collaboration is equally important. Cities compete for talent, investment and profile. But, on immigration and inclusion, city leaders are making their voices heard, together. There are many initiatives in the United States aimed at creating welcoming and inclusive cities for. Connecting, talking, building relationships and sharing best practices means individual cities can have a bigger impact when they work collectively.

Cities for Citizenship is the focal point on Citizenship for these connections. The campaign provides a road-map for what a city can do to build awareness and encourage naturalization. The range of possibilities might seem daunting for a smaller municipal government. Agarwal suggests that all cities have assets and relationships in the community. Cities can start small, perhaps host a Citizenship ceremony at City Hall. Even a small effort will show immigrant communities they are valued and welcome; that local leaders want them to see their place in the city.

Ultimately, naturalization represents an opportunity. The potential return on investment is great, for both new Americans and city governments.
You may have already heard about Jim Estill. He’s the CEO of an appliance company who is footing the bill to sponsor 50 Syrian refugee families to his home community of Guelph, a growing city in Ontario, Canada.

What you may not know is that his efforts extend well beyond corporate philanthropy. He’s not interested in stopping at the personal donation of over $1 million. It’s more of an investment, and Estill is coordinating a whole-of-community effort to nurture it.

A business leader and entrepreneur, he brings a unique set of skills to preparing for the resettlement of 50 families. Estill approached the enormous task as he would any business problem.

“I am a business person who happens to think business is always more efficient than government. Private sector tends to know how to organize and execute. This requires superior execution.”

He took his private sector expertise and created a volunteer organizational structure to ensure that the families arriving in Guelph settle successfully. Community service agencies are welcome partners, especially in their areas of specialization. Just one of the organization’s goals is to ensure every refugee family is paired with an Arabic speaking mentor, which is possible with Guelph’s increasing diversity including on its university campus.

Tapping his entrepreneurial background, Estill is organizing volunteers with an agile “scrum” approach, where small teams are given freedom to collaborate outside of tightly scripted and usually linear direction. When it comes to resettling refugees, it means maximize the organization’s ability to deliver quickly, respond to emerging requirements and adapt to evolving issues and changes in family conditions.

Each family has a settlement checklist and a scorecard. The progress of families will be reviewed, triaged and acted on every two weeks. Priority items will be brought to the attention of the director of that issue to solve. Estill explained, “every week you set your goals, and you ask what’s getting in the way of accomplishing those goals. We may have a family which is not adjusting. You don’t know what you’re going to run into. You just have to make sure it’s on your scorecard and it’s not lost.”

Measuring, he thinks, will mean higher performance by the community. “The goal is to resettle people well, not just to bring them in, put them in an apartment, and pay their rent for a year.”

Part of settling well is finding employment. Good employment.

Employment can be a tricky part of resettlement, but not because refugees are unqualified or unfit for work. They are often educated, of all skill types, and eager to get back to work after leaving careers in their home country out of fear for safety. Just like other immigrant groups, however, refugees too often end up in jobs well below their skill level.

Supporting refugees in finding meaningful employment is an important piece of long-term newcomer success, requiring not just finding any jobs, but jobs that suit the individual. This is where Estill thinks Guelph will excel.

Finding jobs of all skill levels won’t be a problem. Guelph’s diverse economy needs workers.

The city straddles more than one link between old and new. With deep roots in farming, today Guelph is known for excellence in agriculture, bolstered by flagship programs at the University of Guelph and an innovative business community leading the region to its current rank as the province’s top agricultural biotechnology cluster. Guelph is home to several high growth sectors including advanced manufacturing and environmental management and technology. Quality of life is high, with a picturesque stone-plated downtown core, and commuter and industrial rail links to the nearby Greater Toronto Area.

Local business is ready for refugee talent.

The demand for workers began organically. When Estill and his volunteers called Best Western and Days Inn to ask for rooms for temporary housing, the hotel chains responded with a request for staff. Other opportunities abound in the service industry, but do not stop there.

Workers are needed in light assembly and in more advanced manufacturing firms, as machinists and machine operators, as well as in programming. Construction is another industry with high demand for skilled trades like mechanics, electricians, drywallers, and other contractors.

Because speaking the language is key to a lot of the work and especially to success over time, Estill is working with local educational institutions to be ready to offer language and other training opportunities.

In addition to employment-focused learning, education for the entire family is a priority. Every school age child will be assigned a tutor. Estill’s organization will run summer classes to provide further support. Adults will have access to beginner, intermediate, advanced ESL courses. They also plan to provide ESL training to seniors, to ensure they are not socially isolated, now and in the future.

Why hire?

Like employers in Calgary and Halifax, Estill sees the value of hiring refugees. His company, Danby, will be among those looking to hire the newcomers for warehouse and assembly work. Although, because of his role in bringing the refugees to Guelph, Estill said he wants to give other employers the first chance to hire.

He’s been busy approaching other businesses about the opportunity to hire, as well as encouraging other ways to support new employees.

Recognizing that displaced people often start out underemployed and work their way up, he wants local employers to give refugees opportunities and to be flexible. Many newcomers may not be able to take a full time job in the short term. Initially, employers may need to offer part time jobs, even temporary jobs.

Estill is making effective use of his business network. He knows that, above all, they’re looking for good, loyal, hardworking and long-term workers. And that is what he is offering them.
"I'm a business guy, and I just ask my business friends. To some extent, I'm asking for charity, but I'm looking them in the eye and saying this is good for them as well. It will be symbiotic. It will be good."

Estill has a simple message for other employers across Canada about creating a win-win community with Syrian refugees: "This is a way they can get contribute to the cause and help. A business could donate $2,000. I'd rather they hire someone and pay them $2,000 and get them comfortable working. That's win-win. Hard working people trying to make a better life make good employees."

Source: HireImmigrants
German engineering firm Siemens introduced an eight-week internship program in early 2015. The interns are highly-skilled, multilingual, experienced, and refugees. They’re not always considered highly skilled, but that’s what many refugees are: Former engineers, nurses, or teachers forced to leave their homes.

When refugees enter a safe country, many are eager to get jobs. Finding work can be difficult, in part due to immigration status, but government restrictions on work are not always the cause. Even when refugees are legally able to work, they can face barriers in the form of misperceptions that they are low-skilled, traumatized, or not ready.

Whatever the reason, refugees typically face long waits before reentering the job market. This strains refugees, companies in need of skills, and economies.

Siemens AG, a multinational technology engineering firm with headquarters in Berlin and Munich, is bridging the gap between arrival and employment. Its pilot internship program for refugees began in Erlangen, a Bavarian city with 1.2 million metropolitan residents, 15 per cent of whom are non-Germans.

Siemens targeted its internships at asylum seekers, meaning those whose legal status is still being determined in what can be a lengthy judicial process.

The idea to bring refugees into the Siemens workforce originated through partnership with the local government and its city-wide campaign to improve integration of newcomers. The campaign is part of a wider European initiative called C4i (communication for integration) aimed at countering rumours about immigrants.

As a major employer, Siemens has a big role to play. Although a larger city in metropolitan terms, Erlangen proper is home to just 100,000 residents. Siemens employs 23,000 people in the area, or roughly a quarter of Erlangen.

**Internships for a new kind of candidate**

The pilot involved two main parts: Creation of the internship placements and development of a company-wide support network.

The internship placements were straightforward enough. Siemens created real training positions in units that needed support, said Irma Paringer, the Diversity Manager at Siemens responsible for helping to implement the pilot, select candidates, and scale the program. A unique element was creating spots with a candidate in mind. The interns therefore had a role suited to their skills, while filling a real need and contributing directly to a team.

The company worked with the city government in an ongoing effort to source its interns, relying on city staff to identify highly skilled candidates specialized in engineering, healthcare, medicine, biology, and chemistry – the company’s main focus areas. Paringer said this step is a priority and can be a challenge. There is no shortage of qualified candidates, but there is a need for a better data collection on refugee skills and a system to match them to employers.

Next on the administrative side, German law required Siemens apply for work permits on behalf of the candidates. But there is a need for a better data collection on refugee skills and a system to match them to employers.

**Company-sized support network**

The big departure from standard internships was a complementary support infrastructure for each intern, his or her team, and the company’s staff as a whole. It was ambitious and multi-layered, involving a buddy program, employee awareness trainings, public relations, and monitoring and evaluation meetings. The focus on internal training is an innovative approach, and high-impact, considering the size and reach of the Siemens workforce in Erlangen.

The buddy program is a key feature of the support network, structured a bit like an intensive mentorship program. Buddies are Siemens employees who volunteer for the role, to support their new colleagues and get them familiarized with day-to-day work and company culture. They are part tour guide, part mentor, and part friend. Buddies have facts on hand to take questions from colleagues and present the business case for why Siemens (and Germany) needs new talent.

Another key feature is training for Siemens staff, led by the company’s human resources team. A typical workshop convened a small team or unit at Siemens, along with the new intern and buddy. Training topics included workforce diversity broadly, and refugee and settlement issues in particular. Asked about the number of refugees worldwide, employees might hazard a guess around one million, and then learn the real number is around 60 million.

The workshops were heavy on facts (“The engineers love that,” Paringer added), and also aimed to make a point.

**Value and results**

Paringer gave this simple exercise as an example: She asked everyone to form a line, beginning with the person who spoke the fewest languages, and ending with whomever spoke the most. After the line of polyglots formed, staff members almost always turned around to find the refugee at the back – fluent in more languages than the Germans.

Such a simple exercise has the power to demonstrate potential. The message Siemens sends down the pipeline is that this is a win-win relationship. The company gives refugees an opportunity, and in return, it gets highly qualified workers with a lot to contribute.

**Company-sized support network**

The big departure from standard internships was a complementary support infrastructure for each intern, his or her team, and the company’s staff as a whole. It was ambitious and multi-layered, involving a buddy program, employee awareness trainings, public relations, and monitoring and evaluation meetings. The focus on internal training is an innovative approach, and high-impact, considering the size and reach of the Siemens workforce in Erlangen.

The buddy program is a key feature of the support network, structured a bit like an intensive mentorship program. Buddies are Siemens employees who volunteer for the role, to support their new colleagues and get them familiarized with day-to-day work and company culture. They are part tour guide, part mentor, and part friend. Buddies have facts on hand to take questions from colleagues and present the business case for why Siemens (and Germany) needs new talent.

Another key feature is training for Siemens staff, led by the company’s human resources team. A typical workshop convened a small team or unit at Siemens, along with the new intern and buddy. Training topics included workforce diversity broadly, and refugee and settlement issues in particular. Asked about the number of refugees worldwide, employees might hazard a guess around one million, and then learn the real number is around 60 million.

The workshops were heavy on facts (“The engineers love that,” Paringer added), and also aimed to make a point.

Paringer gave this simple exercise as an example: She asked everyone to form a line, beginning with the person who spoke the fewest languages, and ending with whomever spoke the most. After the line of polyglots formed, staff members almost always turned around to find the refugee at the back – fluent in more languages than the Germans.

Such a simple exercise has the power to demonstrate potential. The message Siemens sends down the pipeline is that this is a win-win relationship. The company gives refugees an opportunity, and in return, it gets highly qualified workers with a lot to contribute.

**Value and results**

Paringer said the value for the company is clear. Diversity means more solutions and more creativity.
Tapping diversity can require some engineering. In a politically charged environment in Germany, it requires taking a clear position on values. “We want to have a new culture, that’s based on inclusion, tolerance, and valuing different people,” said Paringer.

Building a culturally diverse, inclusive employee base and increasing awareness of other cultures can help the company succeed in terms of understanding its own market, local and global.

“You find solutions for problems. We know this,” Paringer said. “We need people from different countries. We are in all these countries, and we have to build up the business in these countries.”

Bringing refugees into Siemens fits the company’s diversity strategy, which embeds diversity in another company value of collaboration. “Working together is not always easy, but it brings the best output and innovation for the business,” Paringer said. Asked why Siemens chose refugees as a special target group, Paringer said “we need the skills of everyone, also of refugees [in the company] because they’re part of our society.”

The value for the interns is clear too. They reported having gained the opportunity to develop and test their skills in a German company, as well as improve their language and cultural competency. Interns left with a larger network and enduring mentors, and a better sense of career goals and what new education or training they need to achieve them. Although Siemens is not currently hiring the refugees upon completion of the program, Paringer noted that this may change. In the meantime, the interns can add German experience and references to their resume.

Scaling

As the number of refugees entering Europe grows by the day, Germany receives a growing number of refugee applications compared to previous years. When Siemens launched its training program in 2015, Erlangen had two refugee shelters serving about 200 refugees. At the end of 2015, the number swelled to over 30 shelters coping with 2,000 and the arrival of 70 newcomers each week, according to the City of Erlangen.

The company is now in the midst of rolling out the program to ten Siemens locations nationally – Berlin, Hamburg and Munich among them, and is planning for up to 100 new internship placements in 2016. This represents an investment of 2 million Euros.

Other initiatives complement the company’s engagement with refugees, like housing. In 2014, the company vacated two Munich office buildings to loan the city government for accommodation, a feat Siemens is repeating, and expanding, in 2015-2016.

Siemens also introduced an incentive for its employees to get involved. Employees who volunteer with refugee aid organizations are eligible for an additional five paid leave days.

The Siemens model is drawing attention from other German cities and large companies in Germany and across Europe.

Source: HireImmigrants.ca
Bridging Refugee Talent and Opportunity

By ktturner
March 7, 2016

Employment Inclusion Refugee Portal

The lobby of the Toronto Plaza Hotel is congested with strollers, crowds of children, and adults whose duties are parental, professional and volunteer – and sometimes all of the above. It's a mix of activity and boredom, smiles and sighs. It appears to be a waiting room for over 400 refugees new to Canada from countries bordering Syria.

Down a quiet hall behind the lobby, past one or two kids yet to be chided away, is a meeting room where three to four volunteers are in conversation, speaking Arabic, with a Syrian refugee. Each volunteer has a laptop and a simple form used to build a skills profile with past work experiences as told by the refugees. But these are no simple conversations. The refugees have a new world's worth of questions. Some have been in Canada for less than one week.

The Refugee Career Jumpstart Project (RCJP) team works patiently through each one-on-one interview. Their aim is to build an individual skills profile for each working-age Syrian refugee and match them to education or employment opportunities; whether it's a job, a scholarship, a language course, or a host of other employment and career development services in Toronto's settlement sector. Those who are job-ready get connected with jobs, or with training or education bridging programs. Everyone else gets a basic but personal career map to begin the planning process.

Volunteers of this start-up non-profit are mobile, traveling to Toronto's four main hotels that are the temporary first homes of many Syrians arriving under Canada's plan to resettle 25,000 refugees in four months. The volunteers target working-age men and women who are willing and able to enter the labour market, or nearly ready to enter it.

The RCJP strategy is to have a career conversation with refugees very soon after arrival with two key objectives: inform people about what's possible, and dispel rumours about what's impossible.

Honest and open conversations are the norm because the RCJP founders and ground team are Syrian-Canadians who understand the two worlds that the newcomers are straddling. Some of the questions co-founder Mustafa Alio hears are ones he once had too. Questions like “Is it possible to restart my Syrian career?” or “Will my wife be harassed at work?” or “How much will a construction company pay me?”

A business development graduate, Alio immigrated to Canada on a student visa in 2007 at age 22. His last job in Syria was regional sales manager with the telecommunications giant Syriatel. His first job in Canada was a gig serving shawarma in Toronto's gritty Entertainment District. Today, he’s back in business development and uses experiences from his early, mostly sleepless, months in Canada to make a point in conversation with Syrian newcomers.

In Syria, meritocracy competes with family and political connections, and some refugees arrive thinking that no network means no upward mobility. RCJP counters that myth quickly. “In Canada, that’s the beautiful thing. As much as you put in, you get back,” Alio said.

In Chaos is Opportunity

Before large numbers of Syrian refugees began arriving in Canada, Alio and co-founder Omar Salaymeh met a Syrian engineer, a recent immigrant who spoke decent English. The man commented that he knew it was impossible to requalify as an engineer in Canada, and he wasn’t planning to do it. Alio and Salaymeh knew otherwise. Salaymeh’s father, for one, was a civil engineer from Syria who went through the steps himself in Canada. They connected the two engineers – and the skeptic is now on his way to requalify.

“You just need someone to navigate it with you. It's not impossible,” Alio said.

Similar encounters increased as more Syrians arrived in Toronto. With that engineer in mind who had English, resources and connections, and who still almost gave up on his career, Alio, Salaymeh and third co-founder Bassel Ramli, anticipated an even bigger need among refugees for sound career advice. They began networking with settlement agencies and Syrian-Canadian organizations in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and soon discovered that no one was doing what they had in mind. Their hunch was confirmed when they first visited refugees in the hotels. “They had a lot of questions and no one was talking to them,” Alio said.

Early collaboration with the right actors around the city enabled RCJP to step into a connector role between refugees and the local services and opportunities that do not always reach their target. By traveling directly to arrival zones like hotels, RCJP found out they could bridge a gap between arrival and employment. That gap can be big. There is a tendency to see refugees differently than other immigrants, as people who have needs instead of potential. “Refugee talent” is a scarce phrase, but Syrian Canadians know that’s a mistake. Alio’s own family, now refugees, left careers and degrees behind and are now trying to resettle in Canada.

For resettled family and strangers alike, “we wanted to give them hope and support them to find the right opportunity,” Alio said. “We wanted to avoid losing all that good talent. It’s not only a loss for them, it’s a loss for Canada too.”
Early Impact and Growth

Although still in start-up mode, RCJP has evidence that its approach works. In four months, the team met with 250 clients. On busier days, they can see around 20. So far, four clients are working. That number is likely to rise as RCJP works with more than a dozen companies looking to hire.

Part of the RCJP approach is to do something with the data it collects. Put together, individual refugee forms become an invaluable, localized skills profile of a talent pool that is often elusive and improperly tracked. With a good sample, RCJP can talk to companies and service providers about the skill level, education background, language proficiency, and job readiness of their clients. Data plus access to job candidates is a significant value proposition for local employers in need of talent.

RCJP may have more accuracy than the federal government when similar data points are collected, since the team can translate refugees’ competencies into Canadian terms, and catch what sometimes goes unreported. For example, a business owner might report her experience as “restaurant,” when it is more accurate to say “business management in the restaurant industry.”

As a start-up that’s found a niche, scaling plans are in progress. The team is powered by volunteers and recently secured a small pilot grant from the federal government. Sustainability is a mid-term goal, and social enterprise models in other cities are on the table. For now, RCJP is expanding from a focus on government-assisted refugees to privately-sponsored refugees. There is a vision to scale even further, beyond Syrians to refugees of all backgrounds.

Refugee talent from around the world goes underutilized in Canada even through, like Syrians, many are professionals, skilled tradespeople, and job creators. As Alio summed up, “they’re amazingly talented people.” They just need a jumpstart.
Coaching Ordinary Citizens To Be Extraordinary

By ktturner
February 23, 2016
Civic Inclusion, Political Inclusion

There are some 12,000 Public Appointments in the UK, covering a huge range of interests, from the arts and sport to health services and education. Ensuring diversity in public appointments is a government priority and all government departments have targets to reach to make sure Public Appointments sufficiently reflect the full spectrum of British life. So whatever your gender, ethnic background, socio-economic status, disability or age, there is a public body which is responsible for nearly every issue that affects you, your family and your neighbourhood. For Shaama Saggar-Malik, founder DiPA, that means there’s an opportunity for everyone to “make your shout count.”

Saggar-Malik is a tireless advocate for the importance of public service as a tool for civic engagement: “A Public Appointment can enable you to influence policy on issues that you are passionate about. It can also allow you to participate more fully in your community and help you develop skills to advance your career. Whatever your background the chances are you will have something to offer in a public role. But most people don’t know where to start, or even where to find Public Appointment vacancies.”

DiPA provides advice and coaching to prospective appointees and offers consultancy for businesses implementing work/life balance initiatives or implementing ‘investors in people’ HR policies. DiPA also helps organizations source a wider pool of diverse talents for non-executive and board appointments. With its emphasis on diversity, DiPA’s expertise is helping public agencies, boards and commissions –and the organizations they do business with– become more representative and accountable to the communities they serve.
Good Ideas Archive

Learning By Doing

By Kturner
April 13, 2016
Civic Inclusion, Education Inclusion, Living Together, Refugee Portal

By June 2015, the number of persons who had been forced from their homes as a result of the Syrian war was staggering. Government responses around the globe were falling far short of what was needed in what the United Nations has called the greatest refugee crisis of our time.

Canadians were calling for a greater response to the crisis and looking for opportunities to make an impact directly.

Enter private refugee sponsorship, a policy mechanism unique to Canada that allows everyday Canadians to roll up their sleeves and take a direct role in refugee resettlement. Pre-screened and approved private citizens volunteer to take on all financial and settlement-based responsibilities for a newcomer refugee family’s first year in Canada. The private sponsorship model was developed in the 1970’s in response to the Indochinese refugee crisis, when more than 60,000 persons fleeing conflict forged relationships with the Canadians who stepped up to help them navigate their new communities.

In 2015, an organization called Lifeline Syria was established to champion private sponsorship to a new generation of Canadians in Toronto who wanted to take action on the Syrian crisis. Several leaders from Ryerson University, a publicly-funded Toronto university specializing in social innovation were on Lifeline Syria’s founding board of directors. Ryerson leaders saw that Canada’s private sponsorship model could be improved by harnessing the power and creativity of Toronto’s most dedicated changemakers: students. Ryerson leaders knew that campus consciousness of the Syrian crisis was spreading like wildfire, and so Ryerson students were searching for meaningful opportunities to channel their energy and make a real impact using their passions, not their wallets.

Organizers were careful to give student volunteers a major role in shaping the vision for the project. For Samantha Jackson, Ryerson graduate and volunteer coordinator, the project offered a unique opening for those who want to do something about the Syrian crisis: “This platform cuts through the noise and lets students turn their outrage into action.”

The student-driven solution

The Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge (RULSC) was launched in July 2015 with the goal of helping students become driving forces in private refugee resettlement. The RULSC was Canada’s first ever university-led sponsorship organization, and had to work quickly to build an infrastructure that incorporates the needs of students, private sponsors, and newcomer Syrian refugees within the existing private sponsorship framework.

The idea was this: draw on students’ expertise, skills, and energy to create a team-based refugee sponsorship model that could scale to other universities and institutions across Canada. Ryerson alumni and community members joined to make teams of 5 or more persons who would collectively undertake the established financial and settlement-based responsibilities of private refugee sponsorship. Students would support sponsor teams and newcomer families without taking on formal sponsorship liability.

Students’ response was remarkable – in the midst of summer break, more than 100 students joined in two weeks. Radwan Al-Nachawati, marketing student and president of the Muslim Students’ Association, said he jumped at the chance to be a part of the Ryerson Lifeline Syria Challenge: “Living in Canada, we are blessed with opportunity, and with opportunity comes responsibility. It is our duty to give back.”

Student volunteers are split into five groups: finance, health and wellness, translation interpretation, political engagement and a general focus on introducing refugees to Toronto. Students were quickly divided into direct and indirect volunteers. Direct volunteers were paired with sponsor teams to help prepare for the team’s sponsored family’s arrival. Once the family arrived, student team members act as key social supports, friends, and tour guides to the family’s new home.

Indirect volunteers created committees reflecting their area of study, and focused their energy on generating resources for sponsor teams in preparation for the newcomers’ arrival. For example, nursing students on the Health & Wellness committee researched how newcomers could get a health card; political studies students on the Active Citizenship committee created ‘Canada 101’ seminars for all ages for topics ranging from Canada’s electoral system to the citizenship application process. Arabic-speaking students translate materials and interpret for newcomers (“how to get a bank account”), and all committees updated a Settlement Handbook for Sponsors to study pre-newcomers’ arrival.

From One to Many

“When we started, we really didn’t anticipate the tremendous outpouring of support in the Ryerson community and then the extended university communities,” says Wendy Cukier, executive lead of Ryerson’s Lifeline Syria Challenge and the vice-president research and innovation at Ryerson. “Students are our secret weapon because they have been the backbone of the support, and being able to offer translation support, support in finding jobs, accommodation and so on has really led many people to want to work with us at Ryerson and the other universities.”

By leveraging students’ skills, drive, and fresh perspective on what it means to make Toronto a welcoming community, the success of RULSC led to its growth across three additional Toronto university campuses: the University of Toronto, York University, and OCADU.

Each campus brings with it a unique institutional identity that contributes to the pan-university Challenge’s ongoing success. While metrics on Syrian family arrivals and student engagement are telling, the true impact of the RULSC will be seen in the years to come, when this generation of students can continue the incredible inertia around private sponsorship in Canada to help additional populations in times of need.

“At some point, we have to figure out when we declare victory,” said Cukier. “We need to decide when we’ve done enough and that’s really a discussion of the four universities and also a matter of resources.”

Until then, RULSC volunteers and staff continue to work in small and large ways to make Toronto a city where refugees are welcome today –and tomorrow. And leaders like Wendy Cukier are on the road sharing the success of Lifeline Syria and selling the merits of Canada’s private refugee sponsorship program to other jurisdictions:

“Lifeline Syria extends the promise of safety to refugees through private sponsorship. By connecting refugees to private sponsor groups, it enables everyday Canadians to provide support to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in a tangible and meaningful way. Like other innovations in the sharing economy, it addresses emergent needs, bringing together people with money, skills, time, or other resources. The United States has the capability and resources to go far beyond our effort.” – Wendy Cukier speaking at the Niskanen Center, Washington, April, 2016.

Success

OCAD University, University of Toronto and York University have joined Ryerson University to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Syria, mobilizing communities to bring and resettle Syrian refugees throughout Canada. Initially established with a goal of sponsoring 10 families, or 40 newcomers, the wider-university RULSC upped its commitment to 75 Syrian refugee families or 300 people. On the student volunteers and community engagement side of the equation, RULSC easily met its goal to bring together 75 teams to sponsor 75 families.
The first Syrian family arrived in October. As of April 2016, Toronto's network of universities has raised more than $4 million, formed 93 teams, and helped 15 Syrian families, and over 95 newcomers settle in Canada. RULSC has attracted a network of more than 1,000 volunteers including students, staff, faculty, alumni and community members. A full range of students, faculty, staff and alumni have taken up the challenge, tapping community resources, experiences and skills in thoughtful and surprising ways: for example, over 200 self-identified Arabic speakers are receiving training as interpreters while payroll deduction programs make giving at work as seamless as your morning coffee.

RULSC is providing unparalleled experiential learning at all four universities. For student volunteers like Al-Nachawati, 22, it's a good fit: “University is not only about academic and professional growth, but also about developing a sense of empathy and making a difference in the lives of others.”

But Samantha Jackson and Farzin Yousefian take the cake – they cancelled their wedding ceremony and got married at City Hall. Rather than a reception, they hosted a fundraiser where friends and family could help them celebrate by donating to the Ryerson Lifeline Syria Challenge.
Get Refugees Cycling!

By kturner
November 9, 2015

London is a city that is rich in opportunities. But getting around the city can be difficult – particularly so for refugees and asylum seekers without their own transportation and limited means. A bike can help refugees who are trying to find their feet connect with the many resources that London has to offer: food banks, lawyers to help their application process, home office appointments, healthcare, education and much more. And, if they are lucky enough to receive status, it can help them get to work.

The Bike Project, describing itself as a ‘community of refugees, mechanics and volunteers,’ acquires abandoned or discarded bikes, restores them to roadworthy condition and donates them to refugees. Working from a storefront in South London, the project also offers free workshops to refugees on how to ride and fix their own bikes.

Cycling helps refugees develop physical ownership of their city and encourages newcomers to move freely and confidently through the streets of London alongside their neighbours. "I feel fresh when I ride the bike. It keeps my mind busy. It feels like therapy," says one beneficiary.

Importantly, the Project also helps the newcomers regain trust and form long-term supportive relationships. Project volunteers participate in workshops to develop bike maintenance skills and to learn more about London’s refugee community. Along the way, new friendships are formed and friends become colleagues. Today, The Bike Project has a rolling pool of about 15 core volunteers, half of whom are refugees who came to get a bike initially, and have since become core members of the team.

For Stein, the logic was indisputable: "On one hand every year in London, 27,000 bikes are abandoned; On the other hand, 20,000 asylum seekers arrive in the UK every year. So you have the supply of a resource and the demand (from) people who need them. My vision was to match the two."

Simple Solutions to Complex Problems

The Bike Project solution was simple – get as many refugees cycling as possible!

At an event co-hosted with the Klevis Kola Foundation for young people, the happiness the bikes gave was tangible. One 18 year old was thrilled with the freedom it would give him to get to football training sessions quickly and for free, without an agonizing decision about an extremely long and slow bus ride versus the expense of a train. Many of the young people The Bike Project works with are frustrated that they cannot afford to go to a gym, take exercise classes or swim as it is prohibitively expensive. Owning a bike gives them independence, healthy exercise and a way to socialize with friends.

According to Eleanor Brown, Youth Club and Mentoring Co-ordinator, it also opens up the whole of London to them: “One of our group was so excited at his new found freedom that he cycled from Crystal Palace to Tower Bridge, getting terribly lost on his way home, but delighted that his horizons are no longer limited to his small corner of South West London.”

"This is a really easy concept to get on board with – for those donating old bikes, for volunteers that help us fix the bikes, and for our refugee visitors who will use a bike to help improve their lives," says Project coordinator, Sarah Morpurgo, who attributes the success of the project to its simplicity. In principle, to set up a project fixing second-hand bikes for refugees, you only need three things: unused bikes, a mechanic, and refugees who want to cycle. In practice, Morpurgo cautions, it takes money to provide new helmets, lights and a lock for each bike, and the cost of tools, parts and safety equipment adds up quickly even when the bikes are free. So fundraising become a necessary part of the equation. However, Morpurgo insists The Bike Project can be set up on a very small scale: “Begin with unused bikes from friends and family, and scale up from there!”
Teaching Refugee Women to Ride

An example of how The Bike Project is scaling up is its newly launched Cycle Training for Refugee Women Project. It teaches women to cycle in London safely while giving them some independence and pride of ownership. It's helping boost the confidence of many women worn out or traumatized by their refugee experience and lengthy asylum and settlement processes.

Sarah Morpurgo comments: "A key turning point in the project was when we noticed that not many refugee women were coming down to our project. So we spoke to some ladies, and it became apparent that whilst there was a fervent desire to use a bike to get around London, few had had the opportunity to learn to cycle in their native countries. And if they had, they certainly did not have the means to acquire a bike now, often decades on from the last time they'd ridden. So in response, we launched a Cycle Training for Refugee Women project. This is now running with great success and participation, and is actually one of the highlights of my week."

Success begets its own challenges. Demand for refugee bikes is outstripping supply. To date, the Project has donated close to 1,000 bikes. Where to find more, and why, has become part of their story and how they connect their work with refugees to the broader community.

Morpurgo: "We have to continuously get the word out about the project, and think of new sources for abandoned bikes. We have worked with councils, police, housing associations, and many public buildings with bicycle racks. But we need to keep racking our brains for ways we can access abandoned bikes and get them to our workshop!"

Success

The fledgling organization won the 2015 London Cycling Awards Community Project of the Year, decided by public vote, officially honoured for its community spirit and commitment to bringing cycling to a wider audience in the city. The Bike Project has reached out across the English Channel with the August 2015 launch of Bikes Beyond Borders!, a special event organized to get bikes and other provisions to refugees in Calais, France.

Morpurgo is not content to leave it there. Her goal is to get as many refugees cycling as possible, in London and globally.

"At the moment, our weekly workshop is full to the brim (and spilling out onto the street!) and our women's cycling lessons are at capacity. And then there are all the other refugees in London, and the UK, and Europe, and globally, that would benefit from a bike. And all the abandoned bikes that can be found in these other cities. So whether that means we set up Bike Projects in other cities, or help other cities to do it themselves, we aim to provide bikes for as many refugees as possible. We'll have to wait and see how The Bike Project grows and changes down the line!"

For stories on other cities promoting social inclusion through biking, please see:

- Bristol, UK: The Bristol Bike Project
- Copenhagen: Integration in Action: Cycling Lessons For Better Social Inclusion
Helping Immigrants Become Kiwi Entrepreneurs

By ktturner
November 12, 2015
Entrepreneurship Inclusion

Chinese New Settler’s Services Trust (CNSST) was established in 1998 in an Auckland garage by Jenny Wang and a group of recent migrants with an entrepreneurial spirit. A former high school teacher, university lecturer and government officer in China, Wang struggled to establish herself in New Zealand, overcoming language and cultural barriers and experiencing firsthand the physical and mental isolation of the newly arrived. Her aim at CNSST was to smooth the path for new Kiwis like herself and to improve the quality of life for Asian New Zealanders by equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to gain a foothold in their new home and thrive in New Zealand’s multi-cultural society.

Located in the Auckland suburb of Panmure, CNSST was soon providing employment counselling and settlement services as well as holiday youth programmes, parenting support groups and free Chinese and Korean legal clinics. Of particular interest to a growing number of clients and community partners, however, are the programs offering the fundamentals of business and entrepreneurial support.

“Immigrant entrepreneurs know there are lots of excellent business services like Citizens Advice Bureau and Chamber of Commerce,” says CNSST founder, Jenny Chang. “But they need a bridge to help them get there. They need to talk to us in their own language, to gain a clear explanation to make things easy to understand.”

Nurturing the Entrepreneurial Spirit

Chinese New Settler’s Services Trust (CNSST) was established in 1998 in an Auckland garage by Jenny Wang and a group of recent migrants with an entrepreneurial spirit. A former high school teacher, university lecturer and government officer in China, Wang struggled to establish herself in New Zealand, overcoming language and cultural barriers and experiencing firsthand the physical and mental isolation of the newly arrived. Her aim at CNSST was to smooth the path for new Kiwis like herself and to improve the quality of life for Asian New Zealanders by equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to gain a foothold in their new home and thrive in New Zealand’s multi-cultural society.

Located in the Auckland suburb of Panmure, CNSST was soon providing employment counselling and settlement services as well as holiday youth programmes, parenting support groups and free Chinese and Korean legal clinics. Of particular interest to a growing number of clients and community partners, however, are the programs offering the fundamentals of business and entrepreneurship.

“Immigrant entrepreneurs know there are lots of excellent business services like Citizens Advice Bureau and Chamber of Commerce,” says CNSST founder, Jenny Chang. “But they need a bridge to help them get there. They need to talk to us in their own language, to gain a clear explanation to make things easy to understand.”

Bamboo Networks

In 1986 New Zealand finally abandoned its discriminatory immigration policy and adopted a points system based on Canadian and Australian models. This rapidly opened New Zealand to new immigrant sources, especially Asian. By 2013, almost one in four residents (23.1%) living in the Auckland region identified with one or more Asian ethnic groups. Within this group the number of Asian-operated businesses in the Auckland area is high and growing, especially among small businesses in the retail and food industries. The success or failure of immigrant businesses in Auckland has a significant impact on the cultural landscape and prosperity of the wider urban community.

Consistent with a 2010 study called Bamboo Networks, where Asian employers reported they relied heavily on their ethnic networks for advice and help to establish themselves during the initial phases of settlement. CNSST has been particularly successful in engaging members of the Asian business community to work with newcomers. Established immigrant business owners are ideally suited to help aspiring entrepreneurs with their business challenges, providing a bridge to specialist expertise and insider knowledge of the local business culture along with the sympathetic perspective of a shared immigrant experience, free of language and cultural barriers.

Social Enterprise and Community Hub

In 2008, Jenny was joined by property entrepreneur Kit Wong who assisted CNSST in putting together the formal structures and legal documentation of a registered social enterprise with a new capacity to generate income to support its services.

Since then, the Trust has grown and become an innovative responsive organization across Auckland, gathering together resources of people, knowledge, skills and money to help entrepreneurs.

One of their key social enterprise projects is MYOB software training for small business accounting. Jenny says: “Lots of small businesses and new immigrants are not familiar with MYOB but this software system is good for managing accounts.” Today CNSST is NZQA accredited for MYOB training which covers accounting and taxation, a beginner’s guide to payroll management, day to day processes, end of year reconciliation, advanced processing, business reports and analysis, and inventory management.
CNSST also works with business associations to organize special events to promote their business to the community. “If anybody has a request, the Trust will provide the relevant information and refer them to the relevant organization. It offers advice, workshops and forums. We also have informal contact with them as the employment team develops relationship with different employers,” explains Jenny.

In 2009, the CNSST organized the Chinese Entrepreneur Forum at the Auckland University Business School in partnership with the Office of Ethnic Affairs and over 50 entrepreneurs took part. In 2010, and again in 2014, the CNSST Employment & Enterprise Forum held workshops to enhance the capacity building of Chinese business in New Zealand.

Mixing business with a celebration of Asian culture, the CNSST organized the 2012 International Food and Moon festival in conjunction with the Panmure Business Association, bringing together 100 business groups with an investment and taxation workshop, food stalls and cultural performances.

Another key milestone in CNSST’s journey was the granting of funding by the government for a social housing project in 2013.

In recognition of the service they provide, the CNSST was a finalist in the HSBC and New Zealand China Trade Association (NZCTA) Chinese Business Awards in 2015 and commended for their vision, achievements and outstanding contribution to New Zealand-China relationships.

As Berinda Chin, Director, Office of Ethnic communities says: “CNSST has worked diligently for many years to support the communities they work with. These communities have grown from Chinese to include Korean, Japanese, Indians and even Pasifika. It is therefore heartening to know that their efforts gained them a nomination of a well-known mainstream business award.”

Success

Today CNSST employs 23 full-time staff in 7 locations, engaging nearly 200 contractors, part-time staff and volunteers to provide services to some 15,000 newcomers and community members annually.

CNSST is having a significant positive impact on local Asian communities in Auckland, by enabling Asian migrants to fully participate in and be productive members of society.

In 2013-2014 year alone, the Employment and Enterprise Services handled 4250 phone calls and around 200 drop-in related enquiries. Chinese/Korean newcomers were supported by one-on-one discussions and 23 workshops on the bank system, property sales and purchase, tax for business, the Labour Act, the medical system and the Road Code. With over 400 employers on the database, CNSST also offers a full range of services to a growing business clientele, from providing information to helping them to recruit staff.

The Trust has rapidly gained momentum with services across Auckland. But the immediate Penrose area where the CNSST office is located attracts many Asian immigrants.

“Since we came here, lots of Asian small businesses have come here too. People trust us. They know the area and it’s good for them to set up their business here. Immigrants are a high percentage of the business owners in this area,” says Jenny.
My Brilliant Career

By ktturner

Employment Inclusion

“Sweden is a place with two doors. The first is the door to the country; this door is open. The second is the door to the labour market, and it’s closed” – Sofia Appelgren, Founder, Mitt Liv, and Ashoka Fellow.

Sweden leads the world in its embrace of refugees from around the world, in 2014 receiving more applicants for asylum than any other country world-wide in per capita rankings.

The Swedish state does not base any statistics on ethnicity, so there are no exact numbers on the total number of people of immigrant background in Sweden. However, the country’s generous immigration policies have resulted in a population of 1.3 million foreign born residents living in Sweden and accounting for slightly more than 14% of the population. Within this group, young immigrant girls face the highest levels of joblessness of any demographic in the nation.

As a successful serial entrepreneur and innovator whose earliest business ventures began in high school, Sofia Appelgren was shocked by the discrimination faced daily by her “second generation, Turkish Swedish born” husband. Appelgren founded Mitt Liv in 2008, a social enterprise that works on two fronts: to create more professional and career opportunity for young immigrant women, and a labour market that values and promotes diversity. Mitt Liv matches dynamic and entrepreneurial young immigrant women with Swedish entrepreneurs and corporate leaders.

Through mentoring, training and a wide range of contacts, Mitt Liv (which translates to ‘My life’) opens doors for the ‘best and the brightest’ women of immigrant backgrounds and provides them with access to training and employment opportunities. To balance the integration equation, Mitt Liv partners with business to address social challenges through innovative business solutions.

Beginning in Gothenburg on Sweden’s West Coast, the program is poised to spread to Stockholm, Malmo and beyond.

An Invisible Wall

In Sweden’s close-knit business culture, corporate hiring operates on networking, personal relationships, and references. To a very large degree, immigrants do not have access to these resources. Immigrants in Sweden have tended to settle into affordable high-rise public housing on the city’s edge, reinforcing a segregated society and exacerbating their integration challenges. In the suburbs of the Sweden’s most segregated cities, Goteborg and Malmo, for example, over 80 percent of city residents were born outside of Sweden. And the population is booming, with forecasts predicting an increase in the foreign-born from 14% to 27% over the 10 year period ending in 2015.

Another problem is that the Swedish labour market favours the familiar; Swedish employers take fewer risks in hiring “unknowns” with foreign names and limited CVs. Often described as the “invisible wall,” this division makes employment and integration into the business world difficult for immigrants without personal and professional networks and Swedish work experience. In fact, it takes the average migrant between 5-9 years to access the Swedish labour market.

Not good enough, says Appelbaum.

"With our program, we are able to shorten this period considerably,” says Sofia. “The great force of our program lies in the fact that we do not approach women as victims, but work from their power. These women are very motivated and have often had a good education, they simply do not know their way around in the business sector. That is where we come in.”

The Mitt Liv Model

The organization believes that finding work is the key to positive integration. It seeks highly motivated young immigrant women and matches them with established Swedish business leaders who value diversity and seek to better understand and leverage its power to drive innovation and better business solutions. Mentoring is the catalytic experience that unleashes their potential while seeding diversity and new ideas into old world institutional culture.

Mitt Liv recruits immigrant women with what Sofia calls “true will” (drive and ambition) and enrolls them in Mitt Liv Chans (‘Chance of a Lifetime’), its individual mentoring program. “If you are driven and want to make a start in a job that is close to your competence, then this is the program for you” says Sofia.

The Chance of a Lifetime program matches ambitious young immigrant women with pre-screened mentors from the professional and business community. Promising young people gain access to insider knowledge, skills and network, while mentors gain knowledge and insight from a talented pool of young recruits about how to promote and manage diversity as an asset within their workplace. It’s a win-win for mentee and mentor.

And it’s hard work. For mentors, a nine month program, at least ten mentoring sessions, additional networking meetings and events – some on weekends – plus a programming fee and formal commitment from the host organization.

Eligibility requirements for the mentees are just as rigorous. Mit Liv puts out a call for applications through local school and community networks and selects potential program participants based on their immigrant status, background and educational attainment. Mit Liv is looking for young immigrant women with post-secondary education (or higher), valid residence permits, who are without job equivalent qualifications and lack professional contacts and networks. Applicants must also have basic Swedish language proficiency so they can hit the ground running.

Each participant is matched with a personal mentor with similar interests and career path in areas ranging from engineering and law to economics. Mentor and mentee work their way through the Chance of Lifetime curriculum together, covering topics such as Swedish work culture and social norms, designed to ease the transition into the labour
market. Participants build networks, personal relationships, and life-plans—giving them solid contacts for the future and opportunities to incubate their own ideas and develop their entrepreneurial skills.

Mitt Liv started with just 40 people in its mentorship program. Today over 400 people are mentored every year. Participants come from Syria, Somalia, Turkey, Iran and 40-odd other countries.

Reciprocity

Mitt Liv operates on the principle that integration is a two-way street. The organization works with both employees and mentees equally. Overturning the structure of traditional mentorship models, Mitt Liv has created a professional solution, creating a win-win, symbiotic interactive program for participating partner companies.

The goal is to support the women to see their own dreams as an option, offer them the tools to be competitive, and build a culture of entrepreneurship in a demographic inclined towards it.

The young program participants are not “victims” needing help, but rather equal partners who can contribute ‘expert’ insight and education to company employees. Sofia feels that "a relationship well-built has profound impact." The young participants reciprocate by sharing their knowledge of immigrant life and markets through paid lectures, participation in consumer research focus groups, forums, and field trips.

Partnership

Companies pay for the privilege of working with the Mitt Liv participants and employing their services—the joint partnership is celebrated and its high visibility attracts new people to the idea. In addition to mentoring programs, Mitt Liv offers lectures, training, counseling, networking meetings for organizations interested in the areas of diversity and development. Mitt Liv generates income by selling the partner package deal to a broad range of companies – from cosmetics to finance – containing access to guest lectures, discussion groups, mentoring, a forum to exchange experiences between partners within both internal and external diversity efforts. Financed by collaborations with partners that recognize the value and benefits of increased diversity in the workplace, the program is free for the mentees.

Today, Mitt Liv works with over 30 large corporations who are committed to a future of greater diversity in the Swedish labour market including Volvo, Danske Bank, Länsförsäkringar, Stena Fastigheter, the NCC, the Municipality of Norrköping and many more.

Mitt Liv’s newest collaboration is with Vasakronan, one of Sweden’s largest property companies, aimed at developing Vasakronan’s diversity efforts. The organization’s Regional Head Kristina Petterson in Gothenburg recognizes that while the organization is making efforts to recruit diverse staff they also need to work with their values to create a more inclusive and tolerant work culture. “Partnerships with social enterprises like Mitt Liv are incredibly valuable because they create opportunities for our employees to learn more about the foreign born population entering the Swedish market”

Success

In 2011, Mitt Liv sealed a deal with the city of Gothenburg for financial support – such a partnership between a major Swedish city and a social enterprise is a historical first in the region.

David Lega, the deputy mayor of Gothenburg and a longtime mentor believes that it is the Founder’s habit of looking for solutions, rather than focusing on problems that has allowed Mitt Liv to flourish. “She (Sofia) focuses on what people can do, instead of always getting stuck,” he says. What’s more, “she believes what she’s talking about.”

Accolades have poured in. Sofia was named an Ashoka Fellow in 2010 for her work “tackling the dual challenges of integration and joblessness among immigrant community in Sweden.” In 2012, the organization won the Anna Lindh Scholarship for being an organization with the courage to fight indifference, prejudice oppression and injustice. The following year, the organization was appointed by Ben and Jerry’s ‘Join the Core’ program as one of Sweden’s best social entrepreneurs. In 2015, Mitt Liv was nominated as one of Gothenburg’s best businesses.

With offices currently in Gothenburg, Stockholm, Malmo, Linköping and Norrköping, Mitt Liv has plans to expand further. While initially focused on young women, the program is now targeting both young men and women.

Sofia hopes that one day, an organization like hers won’t be necessary at all in Sweden and that integration won’t be a challenge for the newcomers to the country. For now, she points out: “Integration is not a quick fix, it’s a long term, hard work project.”
Small Towns, Big Returns

By ktturner

September 26, 2015

Economic Inclusion, Employment Inclusion, Living Together, New Gateways, Refugee Portal

For the small town of Nhill, with a population of less than 3000, some 350 km from Melbourne, Australia, these numbers tell only part of the story. ‘Win-win’ is how locals talk about the settlement of the Karen refugees in their community. The Karen have found jobs and a refuge – and the town has received an economic and social transfusion.

In 2010, the first Karen refugees from Myanmar arrived in Nhill, casual labourers who were recruited to fill workforce gaps faced by Nhill’s biggest employer, local poultry producer Luv-A-Duck, a multi-million dollar Australian business.

Unable to recruit the poultry workers needed to facilitate a plant expansion from the local population, Luv-A-Duck’s then-General Manager, John Millington, turned to AMES Australia, the country’s national settlement agency, for help. AMES offers employers a free recruitment service and a wide range of job-ready workers. Millington made arrangements for a group of Karen refugees to visit the Luv-A-Duck plant in Nhill, and hired four workers.

Today there are more than 50 Karen working at Luv-A-Duck and on local farms servicing the plant. Over 170 Karen and their families have successfully settled in Nhill. Through a well-planned recruitment and resettlement process, the Karen now comprise almost 12% of the local population (2015), including significant numbers of working age adults and families with young children.

Reversing the economic tide

Hindmarsh Shire Chief Executive Tony Doyle elaborates: “In retail, shops close affecting the viability of the whole town. There is an impact on the ability of schools and hospitals to be funded and provide services. It affects business at all levels.”

“The Karen settlement has been really good for us,” says Doyle. “By allowing Luv-A-Duck to grow, it has increased the company’s demand for more labour and essentially protected us from population decline.”

The Karen have provided a local employer with an unskilled workforce which has in turn allowed employment participation to grow enormously in the region, stimulating the local economy and feeding back into services and retail shops at the community level in what Doyle calls “a flow on effect.”

However, the impact of the Karen settlement on Nhill goes further than the usual economic indicators. Doyle describes the social and economic impact of the Karen as “extraordinary.”

“By allowing Luv-A-Duck to grow, it has increased the company’s demand for more labour and essentially protected us from population decline.”

Hindmarsh Council has made the resettlement and integration of the Karen part of an overall economic development strategy for the town. “We could double the number of Karen if we had housing and jobs,” Doyle said. The Council plans to lead by example by ensuring it employs Karen in its own municipal administration.

Getting to know one another

While employers like Luv-A-Duck are the driving force in attracting and recruiting immigrants to small communities, they need the entire community’s involvement to help make small towns welcoming places for the newcomers, encouraging them to stay.

“We learnt very quickly that it was important that the partners and kids of the workers were involved. We knew that they [the Karen] had to be looked after, engaged and connected to the community or the whole thing would fall over,” said former general manager, John Millington. Millington reached out to an older neighbor for help: “I told her I needed a ‘grandma’ for the Karen…. It was important because she is a person who knows everyone and everything that goes on in town.”

That senior resident became a lifeline to the newcomers, looking out for them on a daily basis and connecting them to neighbours and community members who wanted to get involved.

Preparing the wider host community for the newcomers was an important next step. Luv-A-Duck management provided background information on the Karen and their refugee experience. They explained the company’s recruitment challenges while reassuring people that local Nhill workers would have first option on the jobs. Luv-A-Duck staff were
included in discussions about the proposed resettlement. This contributed to a positive environment in which to facilitate relationship-building between the locals and newcomers.

On the other side of the equation, Karen families were supported through local community programmes that made sure the partners and kids of the workers were looked after. A mentoring programme was set up. “People bent over backwards to help and we had 15 to 20 volunteers in no time. We were very fortunate that this community was prepared to help them,” said Millington.

Economic impact

A ground-breaking economic impact study into the Karen resettlement in Nhill, titled ‘Small Towns Big Returns’, carried out by AMES and Deloitte Access Economics, found the resettlement of the Karen had had positive, sustainable impacts on Nhill and the surrounding area. “The resettlement of the Karen in Nhill has had a specific and sizable economic impact on this agricultural town. It has eased a capacity constraint on local production and at the same time boosted demand for local service provision. This has resulted in a four per cent-plus lift in regional production in 2013/14, and since 2010 contributed $41.5 million to Gross Regional Product,” said lead author and Deloitte Access Economics Director Matthew Wright.

What’s more, the study found the increase in the supply of labour had “the further indirect effect of increasing demand for labour to meet the needs of the growing Karen population.”

The study identified the following success factors:

- the availability of employment and accommodation;
- strong leadership in the host community;
- a welcoming host community;
- support for the new families;
- management of the degree and complexity of ‘cultural adjustment’ on both sides; and
- newcomers prepared to adapt to a new environment.

Success

Over five years, 70.5 full time jobs were created, representing a 3 % increase in total employment across the district, and $41.5 million was added to the Gross Regional Product. Alongside the economic success story, significant social outcomes have included the arrest of population decline; revitalized local services and increased government funding; and an increase in social capital across both communities.

The situation has been a win-win both for the Nhill locals and the Karen newcomers who have so successfully embraced their new environment.

Kim Moyle, owner of Halfway Motors who works with a Karen employee, agrees: “It is important for Nhill’s future …. [The Karen] are conscientious, kind and polite, they work hard and they’re happy.”

On a personal level, Millington’s relationship with the Karen led him and his family to visit the Mae Sot refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border to attend the wedding of a community leader. They were smuggled into the camp at night and experienced first-hand the life of a displaced refugee.

An estimated 150,000 Karen living in camps on the Thai-Mynamar border are seeking refuge, after fleeing their country to avoid being persecuted by the Myanmar government. Australia has made a home for close to 7,000 of them.
Giving Young Refugees a Shot at Success

By ktturner
September 29, 2015

Education Inclusion Refugee Portal

Sitting in a classroom in SchlaU-Schule in Munich, Germany, Mehdi, an 18-year old refugee from Afghanistan, dreams of becoming a pop star or, if that does not work out, an electrician. Next to him is 19-year old Naima, a Somali refugee who dreams of training as a medical assistant.

SchlaU-Schule is not just an ordinary school. Loosely translated as ‘smart school’, it was founded in 2000 by Michael Stenger to address a gap in Germany’s asylum system which prevented young refugees over the age of 16 from attending local schools, denying them the right to education and effectively excluding them from an essential step in the settlement process.

Education is a national policy area in Germany, but no nationwide laws exist to regulate the schooling of refugee children. Each state has its own policies for admission numbers, teacher training and language training as well as how long refugee children are required to attend school, if at all.

As a teacher of German as a foreign language with extensive experience working with migrant groups, Stenger understood that without schooling these young adults had limited opportunity to learn German, or to acquire the education and skills needed to integrate into German society and get on with their lives. SchlaU-Schule was founded with the belief that a special institution was necessary to ensure these young people had access to sustainable education and integration.

Exceptional circumstances

Refugees often flee their home countries under chaotic and traumatizing circumstances. For young refugees arriving in Germany without parents or family, the challenges of settling in and normalizing their lives are enormous, amplified by widespread discrimination and systems that fail to recognize their needs. Many arrive orphaned or unaccompanied by adults, without emotional support. Temporary accommodation, often chaotic and insecure, further isolates them from mainstream society and adds to their precarious situation. For some, a fear of deportation is a haunting daily experience.

SchlaU-Schule’s immediate goals are to prepare students for their final exams – whatever their literacy level entering the school – and to secure them a place in Germany’s vocational training and apprenticeship system. To make this work with limited means and outside the formal school system, SchlaU needed to accomplish its goals in an accelerated time frame while providing support for young people living with the stresses of exceptional circumstances.

A holistic approach

The SchlaU curriculum offers a comprehensive approach to refugee youth and unaccompanied young asylum seekers between 16 and 25, structuring courses equivalent to those offered in state schools and offering programmes that address their most urgent needs. Special language training, teaching of regular school curricula, legal assistance and social, pedagogic and psychological support helps prepare students to succeed at the basic state school exam, enabling them to qualify for post-secondary studies or vocational training and a professional career.

A key task of the school is helping prepare these young people transition to adulthood in the context of the challenges they face in integrating into their new home. Serving as a community hub, the school provides them with an important setting for their recovery and progress amidst loss, uncertainty and frequently undefined immigration status.

Nelson Osakue, an unaccompanied young adult from Nigeria, likes math and wants to study finance. He commutes to school from Olching near Munich, where he’s housed in a two-room asylum residence. For Osakue, whose German improves daily: “I think of SchlaU-Schule as a parent.”

Learner-centered approach

The school puts the needs of the students in the center of the learning process. A highly modular class system honours and fosters individual learning successes.

Providing individualized attention: At the school, the classes are small, with a maximum of 16 students, with teachers and social workers working on a one-on-one basis with the young people. The goal is to build much-needed relationships and trust between the teachers and the students.

“The success of teaching depends critically on a good teacher-student relationship,” says Anja Kittlitz, an educational researcher who works on curriculum development at the school.

Tailored education materials: The school creates its own educational materials tailored to the needs of refugee youth. “Many [language] textbooks that exist in the market can seem insensitive to refugee students who come from very different backgrounds and have had different life experiences,” So SchlaU teachers prepare their own materials, connecting learning to the realities that count, the student and the community he or she now calls home.

Socialization of students: Access to education goes long way in providing normalcy in an otherwise unstable environment for these young refugees. School is an important space for the refugees youth, not only for getting an education but also for peer-to-peer interactions and integration into society.

Realizing that real learning can only be achieved if the school also tends to the personal development and self-esteem of the students, the school offers students a range of extra-curricular activities such as a chess club, a school band, sewing classes and a theatre group, many made possible thanks to the support of local community volunteers.

Accelerated learning: SchlaU has empowered 96 percent of its students—distressed, often semi-literate and from all over the world—to graduate within two years from German secondary school which usually takes nine years of schooling. SchlaU pupils also outperform their native peers, with better grades on their exams than average Germans.

Facilitating school-to-work transition: SchlaU also helps with the transition from school to work by connecting students to training opportunities, apprenticeships and employers. All students participate in a mandatory two-week internship during their final year. Through mentorship programmes with pro bono business partners, graduates receive crucial vocational training. As a result, most of the SchlaU alumni who start vocational training complete their programmes and have a much lower dropout rate than native-born German apprentices (dropout rate is one in five for native-born Germans).

Success

In Munich, SchlaU-Schule has revolutionized the way refugees are received and treated throughout their asylum process. Today, the municipality of Munich recognizes the right of every underage refugee to attend school and made school visits part of the settlement services offered to young refugees on arrival. Having successfully established his SchlaU schools in Munich with 145 students, Stenger is expanding throughout Bavaria, Germany’s largest state. In 2014 more than 1500 students had travelled through SchlaU. In 2004 the Bavarian Government officially recognized SchlaU-Schule as a state-accredited school. Today the State of Bavaria covers two-thirds of the cost of the school’s teachers.

Through its successes, SchlaU has won national and international acclaim as a pioneer in the field of offering educational support to young refugees.

In 2014, SchaU-Schule was awarded the German School Prize (Deutschen Schulpreis) by the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

SchlaU continues to attract attention from the international community and partnerships with major universities, citizen organizations and foundations, such as Ashoka and Active Philanthropy, as well as big name private sector corporations like BMW and KPMG. Today, there are many institutions that have adopted the concept and work with underage refugees providing them with special education, the support of a guardian and housing. SchlaU-Schule serves as a best practice model for building political pressure in the area of refugee rights from the bottom up, one student at a time. Extraordinary results, accomplished with modest economic resources, Stenger’s work at SchlaU-Schule successfully makes the case that these forgotten students are willing and able to learn, integrate and replicate their school achievements in the wider world of work and society. SchlaU-Schule helps them find a home in Germany.
A Million Dollar Question: Youth Lead the Change

By kturner
September 24, 2015
Civic Inclusion, Economic Inclusion, Financial Inclusion, Municipal

Participatory Budgeting – Boston Mayor Marty Walsh

The caption on the t-shirt says “I’ve been managing millions since I was a teenager.” No kidding.

In January 2014, the City of Boston launched the first youth-led participatory budgeting process in the US, inviting teens and young adults to decide how to spend $1 million of the city’s capital budget through a process called Youth Lead the Change: Participatory Budgeting Boston. First announced in 2013 by former Mayor Thomas Menino, and now championed by Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, Youth Lead the Change represents an important project for the City, increasing youth civic engagement and making Boston a stronger city for all.

Youth Lead the Change (YLC) is a process designed for youth, by youth, that gives youth real power, over real money, to fund real projects for their communities.

Led and funded by the City of Boston, the project was implemented by Participatory Budgeting Project, a non-profit organization that empowers community to come together and decide how to spend public money, primarily in the US and Canada.

Participatory budgeting (PB) originated in Porto Alegre in Brazil over fifteen years ago, where it proved to be an important community development strategy. Since then, the model has been adapted and applied successfully around the world, including in North American cities such as New York, San Francisco, Toronto and Chicago. At the highest level in the US, the benefits of participatory budgeting were recognized by the White House in its 2014 Open Government National Plan for Action: “It’s a best practice for civic engagement, used by over 40 [US] cities, districts, universities, schools, and other institutions across the country.”

Engaging and Empowering Youth

The goals of the YLC project include civic education and engagement, and the inclusion of youth voices that are typically excluded from municipal politics and decision-making. The participatory budgeting process gives Boston youth a unique opportunity to learn how fiscal decisions impact their neighbourhoods and communities while learning how their city government works. For city leaders and managers, youth engagement in the capital budgeting process also becomes an investment in its citizens and the future success and prosperity of the city.

Strategies for empowering immigrant and minority youth are especially important as demographic shift continues to impact the linguistic, racial and ethno-cultural make-up of an increasingly urban ‘Metropolitan’ America. According to a 2011 Brookings Institution report on the 2010 US decennial census, 50% of infants in the US under age one are non-white. Today nearly one in four Massachusetts children are either immigrants or children of immigrants.

How cities respond and manage their growing diversity is important to community well-being and resilience. And no group is more impacted by social change than a community’s young people. Boston’s participatory budgeting model offers cities a fast track to youth engagement while planning forward to meet the city’s changing needs.

From Ideas to Agents of Change

Unlike the traditional top-down approach where city officials have complete control over capital outlays, Boston’s participatory budgeting process starts from the bottom-up, bringing together youth and young adults to brainstorm ideas and develop proposals before putting them to a public vote.

As a first step, the City established a Steering Committee made up of representatives from local youth organizations and city staff to oversee the process and determine its rules and structure, creating the YLC Rulebook to guide participants and Committee members.

Steering Committee members and the Mayor’s Youth Council representing diverse neighbourhoods used their networks to raise awareness about the project. Targeted outreach was carried out in Boston’s public schools and low-income and immigrant neighbourhoods. Translation and interpretation services were available to remove barriers to participation. Volunteers distributed information in classrooms and outside schools, including subway stations, malls and supermarkets, to recruit young people from all backgrounds and stages of life.
Next, Idea Assemblies were organized throughout Boston to inform people about participatory budgeting and its goals, recruit volunteers and start generating ideas for physical improvements to city parks, streets and schools.

Open to the public (of all ages), these neighbourhood assemblies challenged young people to think practically about how to improve quality of life in their city—from basketball courts to bike lanes, more green spaces to better libraries. PB eligibility guidelines allowed for a wide range of expression as long as the funds were used for “physical infrastructure projects that benefit the public, cost at least $25,000, and have a lifespan of at least 5 years.”

Over the course of two weeks, seven Idea Assemblies took place in Roxbury, Dorchester, East Boston, Mattapan, South Boston and Rosindale. A dedicated website was created to allow people to submit ideas even if they could not attend in person.

473 great ideas later

473 great ideas later, a core group of highly engaged young Change Agents was ready to work with the Steering Committee to turn the best submissions into a set of actionable investment proposals that could be put to the public vote. PB Change Agents are highly engaged young volunteers between the ages of 12 and 25 who “live in Boston and go to school, work or volunteer in the city.” No small commitment, Change Agents are expected to spend 15 hours a week over a 4-month period refining the PB decision-making process and pitching the best ideas.

To prepare the youth volunteers for an informed decision-making experience, the city provided orientation sessions and training, and assigned each change agent to a thematic committee guided by trained facilitators. Each committee then worked with city departments and officials who helped determine whether or not the ideas were eligible and feasible. Issue areas included: Education, Parks & Recreation, Environment, and Public Safety.

Through a process of careful deliberation, a total of 14 projects was finally selected to be included on the ballot. Projects were divided into four categories: streets and safety; parks/environment/health; community and culture; and education.

Then came the exciting part. The proposals developed by the Change Agents were put to the vote. Boston youth between 12-25 years of age were invited to select up to four of the 14 projects on the ballot.

A Winning Formula

The 2014 PB process brought in 1,500 eligible votes for seven approved capital projects, all to be funded and implemented by the City. Boston youth chose wisely and with great creativity. In the preliminary Idea Assemblies, ‘violence’ was identified as one of the three biggest problems in the community. A proposal for the installation of security cameras was one of the final seven projects chosen, right up there with skate board parks, Chromebooks and art walls, clearly demonstrating the ability of young people to have fun and make informed, responsible choices.

“Deliberation is an important part of developing proposals – the participants learn how to negotiate, advocate and see other points of where and that’s where the Project’s work happens,” says David Beasley, Participatory Budgeting Project’s Communications Director about the process. “Voting (then) makes sure that the results are validated and that the community has control and shows transparency.”

For Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, the Participatory Budgeting Project has had a tangible impact on city neighbourhoods and their young people: “This helps to foster a greater sense of responsibility in their communities, and helps create a climate of ownership and civic-minded engagement. I am committed to the participatory budget project not just for the impact it has with these capital projects, but the future investments it will bring by making our young people a part of our process.”

Alongside the commitment of the youth, David Beasley credits political will as the factor that most enabled the project’s success: “Boston has a long tradition of really engaged mayors. With participatory budgeting, they saw an opportunity to listen and hand over some power to young people. The group of young people who worked on the project have taken incredible ownership and made the work possible. It has been a combination of a lot of great work by a lot of young leaders and the political will to hold it up.”

Success

“I was extremely impressed by the projects that made it onto the ballot,” said Mayor Walsh, announcing the winners of the 2014 initiative. “The winning projects will make positive and meaningful change in the lives of Boston residents throughout the City. The City budget is not taken lightly, and these young people were dedicated and passionate, becoming a driving force in the way our community process is run. This is only the beginning, and I look forward to seeing all of the great things our young Boston leaders have lined up for the future.”

An evaluation of the first year pilot found some major successes with respect to effects on individual participants, who reported social benefits, heightened awareness and increased knowledge and skills. Both Change Agents and youth members of the Steering Committee cited a broader awareness of needs in other neighbourhoods throughout the City and a better understanding of government processes and democracy in general. In addition, many participants reported gaining specific skills including leadership, teamwork, networking, communication and professionalism.

The learnings from the first year’s process are invaluable as the City of Boston makes history by allocating $1 million of Boston’s capital funds for a second consecutive year.
Revitalizing Neighbourhood Economies

By kturner
May 22, 2015
Economic Inclusion, Entrepreneurship Inclusion

“We came to NDC with bad credit, no education… and they believed in our idea and they believed in us…” Haiyen and Neeson Vang, owners of The Clearance Rack, a thriving NDC-assisted business

Access to capital is a common challenge faced by immigrant and low-income entrepreneurs like the Vangs who do not have the assets to invest in their own business ideas and are often unable to qualify for a bank loan. The lack of education and training, often bundled with cultural and language barriers, makes it hard to know where to begin.

For over two decades, the Neighborhood Development Center (NDC) has successfully addressed these challenges and supported entrepreneurs in low-income and ethnic communities across the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul by providing training, helping develop businesses and creating jobs in the community, in addition to creating and developing incubators for entrepreneurs.

A Changing workforce

Similar to other urban areas in the US and globally, Minneapolis-St. Paul has been experiencing profound demographic changes. While the immigrant population is lower than the national average (7 percent versus 13 percent), not only have the Twin Cities served as hubs of refugee resettlement but the region has twice the share of immigrants from South East Asia and five times the share of immigrants from Africa, when compared to the nation as a whole. The Twin Cities are also touted to be one of the metropolitan areas in the country with the most Hmong immigrants (mostly originating from Laos).

NDC was founded over two decades ago in the face of these changes, prompted by a deep commitment to stimulate economic activity in core areas of poverty and offer support to individuals, including ethnic and immigrant communities, in inner city neighbourhoods. Initially offering only business training, NDC quickly expanded its offerings to include small business financing, on-going business coaching, and real estate services.

Since 1993, close to 5,000 aspiring entrepreneurs have received training which seeks to provide them with an understanding of how to start and operate a business. These 20-week long entrepreneur training programs are offered in five languages in various neighbourhoods. Free NDC workshops also provide business development skills to existing entrepreneurs.

NDC works closely with entrepreneurs from day one to understand their business needs, their long-term plans to grow and improve their business, the risks associated with their request, and the strategies they have in place to mitigate those risks.

Mihailo Temali, NDC’s Founder and CEO, believes in getting fully behind the entrepreneurs. “Not doing micro entrepreneurship training nor taking medium or high risk in order to have safer loans or generate more fees for lending, and inviting more capital takes away from being able to truly support low-income entrepreneurs of colour and immigrant entrepreneurs. I think it is important to work with low-income micro-entrepreneurs who require a considerable amount of training and business support.”

Target services for neighbourhoods

The organization maximizes the impact of its program by focusing 80 percent of its resources in four of the highest-need neighbourhoods in the Twin Cities. NDC seeks to create dynamic “hubs” of community revitalization through physical concentration, i.e. clustering the businesses in highly visible areas in their own neighbourhood, within a commercial corridor or beside public markets.

Working partnerships are developed with community organizations to achieve community-specific goals in each neighbourhood. “We build connections through a long list of community partners. These organizations are on the ground, trusted in their communities and bring people into their offices to start on the path to entrepreneurship,” says Temali. Since 1993, NDC has partnered with more than 30 community organizations in targeted Twin Cities neighbourhoods to identify, reach out, train and develop entrepreneurs.

Comprehensive long-term wrap-around services are provided for teaching, financing and supporting the entrepreneurs through their journey. The organization has very diverse culturally competent staff, representing the communities being served, operating in seven languages on a daily basis.

NDC prides itself on lending in culturally-appropriate ways. In 2001, a Sharia-compliant small business financing product was offered to meet the needs of the Muslim community. In Islamic law charging interest to borrowers – which is called “reba” - is prohibited. NDC has received many awards for creating the first Sharia-compliant financing program in the United States.

Targeted real estate development projects are undertaken to transform strategically located commercial buildings into small business incubators that provide tenants with stable, affordable places to do business, while serving as catalysts for the revitalization of neighbourhoods. NDC offers lending and consulting services to tenants of these properties. NDC has developed six business incubators in the last decade with 124 businesses operating within these incubators.

Success

The Neighborhood Development Center (NDC) was one of four 2013 winners of the Migration Policy Institute’s E Pluribus Unum Prize honouring exceptional immigrant integration initiatives. The EPU citation states “NDC has earned a place at the leading edge of practice in both the community development and immigrant integration fields, has worked in 25 diverse low-income neighbourhoods in St. Paul and Minneapolis since 1993, providing training to more than 4,250 entrepreneurs, including nearly 1,500 immigrants; $10 million in small business financing, nearly half to new and existing immigrant-owned businesses; and 40,000 hours of consulting to small businesses.”

Today there are more than 500 NDC-assisted diverse local businesses in operation ranging from a construction and demolition waste removal business and a midwifery to a craft brewery. NDC-assisted businesses employ close to 2,500 people at an average wage of $17/hour.

NDC has helped create dynamic, bustling marketplaces like Hmong Village, a vibrant economic, social and cultural gathering spot, which houses more than 300 small businesses that sell fresh produce, gifts and prepared foods while employing hundreds of community residents. Not only does the market build bridges within the Hmong community but it also serves to introduce the Hmong culture to the diverse residents of the Twin Cities.

The NDC model has been replicated in Detroit, Michigan, and the organization is about to create a national network to share its success and enable peer learning with groups in Detroit, New York City, Philadelphia, Syracuse and New Orleans, in addition to bringing micro lending and training to small rural Minnesota towns. In 2015, NDC became a founding member of the WE Global Network, a regional network of immigrant economic development organizations working in cities and regions across the Midwest. The ‘welcoming economies’ Network is a project of Welcoming America, and led by Global Detroit.

Temali attributes NDC’s success to respect for all people and communities, and the talent they bring. “The starting point is the recognition that the individuals in these communities have assets and talent – very commonly they are looked at as having liabilities and problems. We look at the part of the glass that’s half full. If you’re not starting from that point, nothing else matters.”
A new curriculum for the instruction of Islam to primary school students creates a more inclusive and equitable school experience for German families with a Muslim background.

It's not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

The German constitution grants parents the right to have their children educated according to their own religious tradition. But until now that's been restricted to Christian, or “official” religious communities.

No longer. Starting in the 2013/2014 school year, the German state of Hesse made good its commitment to fair and equitable government to some of its newest and oldest citizens by introducing religious instruction in Islam to primary school students in cities like Wiesbaden.

Coming of Age

Like many countries of migration, Germany continues to have conflicting attitudes towards its growing Muslim population which originated for the most part in a post-war generation of Turkish migrant guest workers who have gradually put down roots, and begun to take up citizenship. Almost half a century later, new generations and other nationalities have added to the German Muslim community, it’s grown, evolved and contributed substantially to German culture and economy - think only of the ubiquitous doner kebab, or the films of Fatih Akin. While Germany now calls itself “a country of migration”, many Germans have been slow to accept this population as German.

Not so in Hesse. With a well-integrated Muslim population four time higher the national average (20%), the government in Hesse has plenty of evidence to support a clear position on immigrant integration. (2013 Integration Report of Hessen, PDF): “One in every eight people in Hesse has a foreign passport, while one in four has a migrant background. Integration is not a specialized subject, but rather one that will determine Hesse’s sustainability. The State Government promotes the creation of structures necessary to also fulfill the requirements of people with migrant backgrounds in its child care centers, schools, during apprenticeships, in the job market and in the information centers.”

The State of Hesse is not only focused on these changing demographics, it is working to create more pathways to integration and foster social inclusion. And it’s working. The 2013 Integration Report reports that 96% of all people with a background in immigration feel comfortable in Hesse, an increase from 86% in 2011.

Opening up the education system

Opening up the education system to this growing share of the community is an important and logical step towards a more inclusive and equitable relationship with German families (and citizens) with a Muslim background. According to Nicola Beer, Hesse Education Minister and an early supporter of the Islamic instruction, “I think it’s clear now that for years we made the mistake of alienating people.” Now, Germans recognize that ‘we are here together, we work together, and we educate our children together.’

Most German states offer two hours of optional religious education in schools, starting in early elementary grades. Religious education is offered as a subject in public schools, in cooperation with religious associations, but only if they are an official religious community, by law. Until recently, that has excluded Islam due to the specific nature of Muslim migration to Germany. Muslim guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s expected to eventually return to their countries of origin and did not establish the organizations that would later be required to meet the standard for official recognition.

Until now. While efforts to establish Islamic religious education in state schools date back to the late 1970s, in 2008 formal Islamic Religious Education was established after being recommended by the German Islam Conference, to strengthen social cohesion and integration, and prevent extremism. While Islamic instruction is available in some form in most former West German states only two associations have qualified as official religious organizations, both in Hesse – the regional branch of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (Ditib) and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat community. Further distinguishing it from other states, Hesse developed a university program to support its curriculum and has taken charge of training teachers.

Religious teaching in German schools is nothing new

According to the German Islam Conference, initially Hesse did not offer Islamic religious instruction as did other states, but offered instruction on Islam in the context of teaching ethics (from 2002). However, that changed in 2013, when the government of Hesse re-vamped its curriculum to include religious instruction for the teaching of Islam. Why? According to the New York Times, because “of a growing consensus that Germany, after decades of neglect, should do more to acknowledge and serve its Muslim population, … to foster social harmony, overcome its ageing demographics and head off a potential domestic security threat.”

The Hesse curriculum places Islamic instruction on equal footing with state-approved curriculum in the Protestant and Catholic faiths. By offering young Muslims a basic introduction to Islam in primary school, and developing a curriculum that emphasized the values of tolerance and acceptance, the authorities aimed to “inoculate young people against more extreme religious views while also signaling state acceptance of their faith.”

Not an experiment, a success

“Islamic religious instruction in Hesse is a success story,” declared Minister of Education, Prof. Dr. R. Alexander Lorz. “It is a standard subject under the Basic [Education] Law, taught in German under state supervision… and judging by high student registration numbers has been a success.

“Islamic religious instruction in Hesse is therefore not an experiment,” Lorz continued, “but an educational policy event of importance to society. The religious instruction in question is provided in the German language, taught by state-trained teachers based on government approved curricula and subject to state supervision. There is nothing experimental in this approach as suggested by some media reports. It is our intention to expand this in the future according to the country’s needs.”

Indeed, a Brookings Institution report looking at religious education trends in 8 European countries, and the United States, identified three good practices for religious education in any country. The Hesse experience ranked high on all three criteria:

1. Establish high academic standards for teacher training programs and allocate adequate resources to ensure these standards are met.
2. Provide factual textbooks informed by academic scholarship.
3. Build upon current curricular and pedagogical good practices through international exchange and dialogue of scholars.
For Lorz, the success of the new religious curriculum also affirmed the very real public demand for Islamic religious education. The government’s position flowed from a growing consensus that Germany, after decades of neglect, should do more to acknowledge and serve its Muslim population “if it is to foster social harmony, overcome its aging demographics and head off a potential domestic security threat.”

For Hesse, this isn’t simply aspirational political rhetoric, it’s practical. According to a Bertelsmann Stiftung study, “Germany’s population is shrinking and ageing. Thousands of new workers will soon be needed. Yet immigration from the EU alone will not be enough to close the gaps in the long term. Stronger immigration from third countries is necessary.”

As Germany continues to open up both to external immigration and recognizes the need to better integrate its existing diverse communities, lessons from Hesse will serve the country well.
Tower Neighbourhood, Tower City

By Evelyn

Economic Inclusion, Spatial Inclusion

“Every season I have to convince the city that these are not businesses. We have to tell them that we are building communities and supporting local enterprise. If we don’t give them opportunities, how will these newcomers feel confident and integrate?” — Sabina Ali, Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee

Sabina’s struggle with the City of Toronto may now be at an end. As of 2014, the new Residential Apartment Commercial (RAC) zone permits a number of small-scale commercial and community uses on highrise apartment sites. Mixed use zoning is more than a planning tool or an investment consideration. For many newcomers, this means new opportunities for ventures that contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of their neighbourhoods.

Initially approved for 500 of Toronto’s 1200 sites, these highrise apartment buildings represent almost 20% of Toronto’s public housing stock and are predominantly privately owned, unlike in European cities, where apartment neighbourhoods tend to be publicly owned and run. According to Graeme Stewart of ERA Architects, and key initiator of the Tower Renewal Project, this creates its own set of challenges, as well as potential efficiencies and opportunities for community development.

Tower City

The Toronto area contains the second largest concentration of high-rise buildings in North America. The majority of these are modern concrete residential buildings, built during the City’s post-war expansion. The Tower Renewal Project is an initiative to re-examine these buildings’ remarkable heritage, neighbourhood histories, current place in our city, and future potential in a green and equitable Toronto.

A key goal of the Tower Renewal project, says founder Stewart, is to ensure that “healthy, complete, and vibrant neighbourhoods are better able to respond to local needs and opportunities, by allowing for a full range of uses within these neighbourhoods: commercial activity, social activity, and community services – amenities that most areas of Toronto take for granted.”

While the RAC zoning changes seem to make perfect sense in an urban setting, they have been a long time coming: “Surprisingly, these uses within Apartment districts have until now been largely prohibited. This is because the zoning of Apartment areas was conceived in the 1950s when Toronto’s suburbs were thought to function very differently. While this worked for the car-centric suburbs of fifty years ago, it has prohibited the appropriate evolution of these neighbourhoods in response to ever changing local needs, opportunities, and aspirations. So although the communities themselves have evolved, the physical neighbourhoods have largely remained fixed.”

The evolution of Toronto’s arrival cities

One of biggest changes in the highrise, or tower neighbourhoods throughout the city of Toronto has been their designation as “arrival cities” to the thousands of new immigrants fueling Toronto's growth over the past 30 years. Cited by journalist Doug Saunders, the arrival city concept positions “world’s great cities as living systems, as dynamic, vigorous, complex systems that evolve in response to the needs and aspirations of the people that inhabit them. One of the key attributes of self-organization is course correction: a kind of opportunistic adjustment to changing conditions that present both challenges, and opportunities that affect the survival of the ‘self’.”

Saunders see these tower communities and ’arrival city’ neighbourhoods as a launchpad to the middle class. Offering cheap affordable rent, access to community networks and proximity to work, the arrival city incubates immigrant success by providing the newcomer with the necessary ‘conditions for investment’ in a promising future: housing, employment and a path to citizenship or full membership in the host community. In Saunders’ model, high turnover and persistent low socio-economic indicators paradoxically signal the success of the arrival city neighbourhood – the newcomer arrives, connects, settles and moves on to a better life.

In Toronto’s tower city neighbourhoods the reality is more nuanced. For Graeme Stewart, Toronto’s arrival cities are transient for some, a first step towards integration; while for others these dense, highrise communities are home. Either way, newcomer and longterm resident alike are interested in making them better places to live: “The vast majority of people who live in these buildings like their neighbours, like their apartments, and feel that they’re invested in where they live. They know there is huge room for improvement. But, they’re not saying ‘get me out of here’, they’re saying ‘how can we make our neighbourhoods better.’”

Neighbourhood Assets

People like Sabina Ali at the Thorncliffe Centre Women’s Committee, epitomize Jane Jacobs’ vision for inclusive neighbourhoods: “Immigrant neighbourhoods that succeed in holding on to their striving populations are neighbourhoods that improve with time. They become civic assets in every respect, social, physical, and economic. Progress on the part of the population is reflected in the neighbourhood. Increasing diversity of incomes, occupations, and visions, education, skills and connections are all reflected as increasingly diversified neighbourhoods. Time becomes the ally, not the enemy, of such neighbourhoods.”

SPACING FILMS: Powers of Towers
from Spacing Magazine

In fact, the RAC zoning changes formalize an existing trend in these communities: commerce and entrepreneurship. Re-zoning buildings for commercial use is a very important thing in Toronto, says former mayor David Miller, “because commercial activity happens in apartment buildings today. But it’s all sort of hidden. And, it’s illegal from a zoning perspective. In many of the buildings there are a lot of newcomers who are quite entrepreneurial. So that entrepreneurial spirit can be reflected and you can meet real needs of people if you rezone the buildings commercial at the base.”

Enter Tower Renewal

Catalyzed by the Tower Renewal project, the mixed use principle central to the RAC zone is long overdue. Championed by urban visionaries like Jane Jacobs, the change is necessary to unlocking partnerships with private property owners and developers.
The beauty of the current situation, says Stewart, is the strength of the business case. Renewal builds economic opportunity into a important, undeveloped asset ideally situated to respond to Toronto’s changing demographics, largely fueled by immigration. The optimism of Stewart’s vision starts with the question, “how do we take advantage of opportunities by allowing these places to evolve with the needs and aspirations of their residents? One of the unique advantages and reasons why these neighbourhoods evolved as arrival cities is that they have 2, 3, 4 bedroom units (unlike much of Toronto’s new condo development) that are able to accommodate the demographics of families migrating to Canada.”

As Stewart expands, “The buildings aren’t the problem. The systems around the buildings are the problem, in terms of allowing for economies to evolve, allowing for people to engage, and allowing them to act as the type of neighbourhood that Jane Jacobs would suggest can emerge. Something as simple as allowing a few chairs to be put on the ground floor with a restaurant operating can completely change the dynamic under which these buildings can operate. They’re flexible and they can evolve.”

For the city’s new immigrants, Stewart sees immediate potential: “Putting community services and communal spaces right where they’re needed makes a huge difference. As soon as community spaces go in there, the spin-off effects are remarkable.”

Where it’s been most successful, says Stewart, is where there’s already a community partner in the neighbourhood. For example, Thorncliffe Park, has Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, a thriving settlement service provider. They’ve been able to scale up and provide the necessary language, job training, settlement services, and more. Toronto is already rich with many of these organizations. Stewart says what’s needed is “a process of connecting the dots, of making sure that the towers became a real centre of the conversation about service delivery.”

Building a long vision through partnership

Working with public and private actors was essential to move the Tower Renewal vision to practical change in Toronto’s zoning laws. Toronto Public Health’s Healthy Toronto by Design report series stressed how local communities shape the health of their residents. The United Way of Toronto helped identify policy barriers and alternatives to enable Toronto’s apartment neighbourhoods to reach their potential.

Grassroots engagement of residents was essential, allowing community members to take control of their neighbourhoods. Working closely with provincial and city governments, landlords and building owners and community service agencies was essential to building a vision that will work for these neighbourhoods into the long term future.

As Stewart notes, “A City-wide zoning change of this type is a first for Toronto, and would not have been possible without a diverse group of collaborators and stakeholders working together, often in new ways. It is a testament to what is possible through collaboration, and perhaps the start of new ways for social agencies, local communities, architects, and the City to work together towards a brighter Toronto.”

As Toronto City Councillor, Peter Milczyn, said: “This is a change that 10-15 years from now we will look back and say ‘this transformed Toronto’.”
Volunteering for Health, Heart and Work

By Evelyn
April 15, 2015

Civic Inclusion, Cultural Inclusion, Health Inclusion

Like many migrants seeking to improve their skills and create a better life in New Zealand, Jatinder Talwar found his initial job search attempts frustrating. He had completed his training as a registered nurse in India, but employers in Auckland kept turning him down for work because he didn’t have relevant New Zealand work experience.

While improving his skills completing the Health and Service Management course at Ntec Tertiary Group in Auckland, a teacher connected him to the Elizabeth Knox Home and Hospital (EKHH) volunteer scheme. Working twice a week as a volunteer at EKHH has opened a whole world of new possibilities for Jatinder.

The ‘Knox Home’ offers residential care to the elderly and young adults with physical disabilities. Its aim is to eliminate the “loneliness, helplessness and boredom” often present in long-term care facilities. They do so by creating a resident-centred community filled with variety and spontaneity, close and continuous relationships with staff and the opportunity for residents to give as well as receive care.

Values revolve around principles of partnership with Maori, celebrating and honoring cultural diversity in alignment with values of community, or whanau (family), allowing for direct connections with the community at large.

EKHH actively recruits global talent, promoting intercultural connection within the wider community and embracing large numbers of new migrant workers and volunteers. So the Knox community is extremely diverse. Over 26 nationalities are represented among residents and over 55 nationalities in the volunteer community speak more than 50 different languages.

A key volunteer initiative at EKHH works to help skilled migrant workers while they re-certify or gain the accreditation needed to practice in their chosen field. A six part communication workshop also supports migrants in their English skills, literacy and helps them develop interview and public speaking skills to get employment. Volunteer coordinator, Kristen O’Reilly explains how the programme helps improve the volunteer’s employment and earning potential: “Volunteers are migrants to Auckland and international students where English is their second language. Without employment skills and connections in the community, they lack confidence to find work.”

“…The programme aims to address these issues while they get their registration to work. Migrants can gain valuable New Zealand experience knowing they will have job prospects on completion of their registration.”

Living Together, Day by Day

Just by interacting day to day, a generational mix of residents is teaching newcomers all about New Zealand and its cultural values and supporting them with their English while the volunteers provide companionship and the opportunity for residents to give care as well as receive it.

Jatinder has gained a lot of confidence in his nursing skills while volunteering at EKHH learning from the broad range of responsibilities. The institutional culture has also made him a more caring professional, he’s learned how to make hospital living more like living in a residential home: “It’s about taking away the stress from patients and giving them a good living experience in a very relaxed, open environment.”

Along with EKHH English classes, Jatinder enjoyed Maori culture lessons, where he learned tips that help when making home visits to Maori or Pacific Island families through the employment he now has with the Senate Nursing Bureau.

“Such things as knowing you can’t touch a person on the head. And that you must remove your shoes when entering a home. That’s been really helpful.”

Another volunteer, Renee Zhang explains the residents have taught her about life and being positive: “Each resident talks to me about different things and tells me different stories but collectively, they all convey this idea of living optimistically and being kind to one another. My social skills have strengthened by talking to a wide range of residents, each with a different personality or background. Overall, volunteering has given me a massive opportunity to thrive in growth.”

Over the past five years, EKHH efforts to promote higher levels of resident participation and spontaneity through increased care and family engagement at the home have paid off. The wider community of staff, volunteers, family and friends are vitally involved in daily life at EKHH, which is clearly much more than just a home for the elderly. Residents and staff give back to the community just as much as the community gives to the residents.

EKHH resident Max Pemberton says: “I thoroughly enjoy speaking with all the volunteers here and get a great deal of satisfaction from encouraging them, especially the foreign students. I encourage them in their education. They are lovely people with big hearts and it’s obvious. It gives me so much satisfaction seeing them smile when I encourage them. It’s a unique programme and I enjoy seeing them grow.”
And Helen Wilson: “There are quite a few volunteers on the weekend who are all very nice and bright. They are very caring and fun to have around. The place would be lacking something without them.”

Success

The programme was initially funded with a grant of $10,000 from the NZ Department of Internal Affairs and its Community Organisation Grants Scheme which supported the Weekend Volunteer Support person for a year. The rest of the programme has been funded by EKHH itself. The programme has become an integral part of the community and with increased operational costs and building projects planned, EKHH will need additional funding to continue.

The programme has expanded considerably since it started in 2013 and now has 853 registered volunteers. In 2014, the programme won the Cultural Celebration Award in the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust Diversity Awards. But it has been successful in many more ways:

Kristen says: “Knox expected to see boredom and loneliness diminish in resident’s lives with the growth of this programme. The wonderful surprise to all was how much meaning it has had with volunteers.”
Sikh Formaggio

By Evelyn
April 14, 2015
Employment Inclusion Living Together

Parmigiano Reggiano and Grana Padano are two of the world's famous cheeses calling the Lombardy region of northern Italy home. The cows are Italian, the territory is Italian but surprisingly, the people who work on the cheese are not.

Over the past two decades, thousands of immigrants from India's Punjab region, many of whom are Sikhs, have immigrated to the central and northern provinces of Italy. Perhaps the least known of Italy's ethnic minorities, the country relies heavily on them for its cheese production.

The Sikhs arrived just as a generation of dairy workers was retiring, with no substitutes in sight. Young Italians in these provinces were not interested in working with cows or doing long hours at cheese farms and diaries, leading to labour shortages.

Enter the immigrants from the villages of Punjab, bringing with them the experience working in farms back home, to settle in the heart of the Italian agricultural heartland. Coming from a similar agricultural tradition, the Sikhs were ready to do any job, willing to put in long hours and work hard for a lower wage, so long as they could make a new life for themselves. A number of them in the Lombardy and Emilia Romagna regions found work as bergamini, as dairy workers are known in the native dialect, producing Parmesan and other cheese products.

"It (cheese making) was a profession that was traditional and typical of Northern Italy. But with the workforce dwindling, it was fortunate that Indians came to fill the labour gap and save the cheese-making economy," says Mayor Dalido Maligo of Pessina Cremonese, a municipality in the province of Cremona in Lombardy. Cremona has a dense Indian population – Indians of Punjabi origin constitute the single largest immigrant group, and make up about 20 percent of the total immigrant population.

Most of the Sikhs are employed as dairy hands but some who started in the diaries as assistants are now taking on key roles in preparing the cheeses, working closely with the master cheese-makers and have earned their respect and trust.

The Sikhs are seen as hard-working and honest people. Their contribution to the Italian economy has been recognized and appreciated by the people in the agro-industry. According to folks like Mauricio Sassi, a farmer employing the Sikhs, "None of our businesses would survive without them."

A sense of community

The Sikhs tend to live in the countryside within their own communities but have mainly positive interactions with the locals. The coexistence is based on the value of mutual respect. In addition to recognizing the similarities, what is different is also shared.

Nonprofit organizations like the Sikh Sewa Society facilitate the exchange of knowledge and provide information about the Sikh culture and religion, and help the locals understand the significance of the visible religious symbols such as the turban and the ceremonial dagger. The focus is on furthering the integration of Sikhs into society and inviting dialogue.

Like Italians, for Punjabis, food is an important part of their tradition – from the flavours of food to the energy that goes into preparing it, and the delight of sharing it with family and friends. "In Italy, eating is a tradition, so as in Punjab. We mix it up and eat both Indian and Italian food," says 22-year-old Jaspinder Saini, whose father moved to Italy
Success

Today, Italy has the second biggest Sikh population in Europe after the United Kingdom. Many of the immigrants have become Italian citizens, speak Italian, bought homes in the countryside and settled with their families. They have encouraged fellow villagers or family members from India to join them and have established vibrant Sikh communities.

The number of Sikh temples (Gurudwaras) is a testament to the intention of the Sikhs to keep their culture and traditions strong in their new home. In addition to keeping their religious traditions alive, the Sikh temples provide an anchor to thousands who long for the sounds and smells of home. In 2011, after a decade of bureaucratic challenges and financial hurdles, a temple was inaugurated in Cremona, in the presence of government officials, mayors and the local community. With over 20 of them in Italy, this one is touted as the largest Sikh temple in the country and in continental Europe.

Many of the immigrants have raised their children in Italy. The parents want their children to experience both Italian and Indian cultures equally. Prem Singh, one of the Sikh immigrants to Italy in the mid-nineties says that his three children “feel more Italian than Indian,” adding that they had no plans to return to his native land. “We have put our roots here. It’s our home, and that’s that.”
By the late 1990s, the Tower Hamlets borough in London's East End had the worst-ranked library service in the city. When asked, the community acknowledged the importance of its libraries, but usage rates just didn't add up. Buildings were inconveniently located, required a lot of upkeep, and weren't physically accessible. A system that had been designed 100 years ago was struggling to meet the needs of its current community.

Tower Hamlets is one of London's most diverse boroughs. The 2011 census reveals the largest Bangladeshi population in England, with British Bengalis making up 37% of the local population and white British less than a third. Dynamic, growing and poor, the borough was also facing high levels of unemployment and social exclusion. Tower Hamlets had a library system with the potential to provide its residents with learning opportunities to improve work and career outlooks, a meeting place to encourage social cohesion and connection, and support for families and young people—if only the system could re-invent itself.

And it did just that. After an unprecedented two-year consultation with the community, Tower Hamlets Council completely overhauled its libraries. From bricks and bookshelves to the Idea Store, an entirely new conception of the library was born. The innovative Idea Store concept positioned the library as a dynamic, evolving form of public space, wired to respond to 21st century users. Today, Tower Hamlets' internationally recognized Idea Stores occupy a central position in the community and are considered among the best libraries in the country.

Consulting the Community

The Idea Store concept developed partly in response to the British government's focus on encouraging urban revitalization in the late 1990s, capitalizing on the priorities of providing lifelong learning and library and community renewal. As a public service, the library's target audience was everyone in Tower Hamlets, but the redevelopment process paid particular attention to ways of drawing in non-users: less than 20% of residents used the library, which was markedly lower than the national average.

Over two years, Tower Hamlets Council's Arts, Leisure and Sports Committee undertook its largest public consultation ever to learn what residents wanted from their library—and, for those who weren't library users, what they would take to make them more likely to do so.

The comprehensive consultation included an awareness campaign (including roadshows and public exhibitions), questionnaires distributed at libraries and to households, an independent market research questionnaire, and canvassing schools and students for feedback. To increase the scope, many of these initiatives were offered in languages other than English, including Bengali and Somali.

The feedback from Tower Hamlets residents was impressive. One in 10 households in Tower Hamlets participated in the consultation, yielding vital information. Residents overwhelmingly agreed that the library was a critical community service, but many didn't use it: they didn't have time to travel there specifically, its hours were inconvenient, its holdings were of little interest, and the buildings were run down or unwelcoming. Residents wanted to be able to combine a library visit with other activities like shopping; they wanted more books, services, and access to computers and IT; and they wanted a modern, inviting space with good service that felt like it truly belonged to the community.

“Refreshing” the Library

In an effort to create these inviting spaces, the library studied retail stores to determine what made the retail experience so compelling. Changing how people think about the library was also important. Re-branding was a critical piece of the library's re-conceptualization process to incorporate strong customer interaction and ensure that the space, its people, and its resources would clearly communicate the new library's values to its patrons.

Through detailed market research and consultation work, a new idea was born: keep all the best parts of the traditional library, but re-brand it to attract new users while keeping current ones. Expand the range of services, and offer more community spaces and events. Make the spaces as inviting as retail stores, and embed them in places where people already go about their daily lives, at the heart of the neighbourhood, “near or beside supermarkets wherever possible, …. where people can come for a coffee, to meet friends, to take a break from shopping and to enjoy the many facilities”

"We want a visit to the library and lifelong learning centres to become a regular part of people's lives – to act as a focus as well as a resource for the whole community. The Idea Stores will engage people our current facilities don’t reach."

To realize that vision the Idea Store facilities would be designed to be attractive to look at and pleasant to be in,” using the best of modern architectural and graphic design and incorporating the best ideas from other councils and education bodies as well as the retail and leisure industry.

To achieve their goal of maintaining the best traditions of the library movement and education sector, the Council partnered with the Council’s adult education service, which was facing similar issues, and Tower Hamlets College to pool resources and work together to make “lifelong learning” an integral part of the community.

Success

The first Idea Store launched in May 2002. Since then, five more have appeared and the newest, Watney Market, opened in 2013. The new, modern buildings are beautiful, inviting, better located, and accessible. Idea Stores retain the core services of the library, but expanded: clubs for homework, jobs, and books; hundreds of adult learning courses in everything from career skills to cooking to dance; Children's Centres, which offer programs and support for families; cultural events and performances; community meeting spaces; cafes; access to computers and information technology; and much more.

The Idea Store concept proved a fantastic success. By 2009, the Tower Hamlets library system had some of the highest visitor numbers in the country. It was ranked 3rd in London and 4th in England for percentage of residents who used the services. It was also highly successful in attracting users from a wide range of ages and ethnic
backgrounds. Between 2001 and 2013, visitor numbers increased by an impressive 240 per cent. Idea Stores have also won numerous awards, including the 2003 LGC Innovation of the Year, the RIBA London Award in 2005 and 2006, and the Academy for Sustainable Communities Award in 2007.

To “future-proof” the library, Tower Hamlets continued to use market research and community consultation to inform their 2009 strategy review, ensuring that Idea Stores are at the forefront of innovation by delivering services that residents truly need and want, as Judith St. John, the head of Idea Stores, said in a TEDxEastEnd talk in 2012: “What we actually want to be doing, which I think we’ve done quite well in the Ideas Stores, is communicating with people, creating spaces of social cohesion that allow people to come in and create the things that they need in their lives. So for me, it’s not about saving libraries across the board—far from it. It’s about creating excellent library services that have relevance to people in the future.”
“When an immigrant decides it’s time to reunite with his or her family,” says Ramon Sanahuja, Director of Immigration and Interculturality, Barcelona City Council, it means “they have reached a certain stability. It is a very important moment in their migrant life.”

The path to successful immigrant integration depends on successful employment, a welcoming community, creating social networks, and more. But, where family is concerned, the process and time it takes to be reunited with loved ones can mean the difference between a constant yearning or feeling whole again in a new land.

Recognizing this, in 2007, Barcelona City Council’s Immigration and Interculturality office started the New Families in Barcelona program. It provides orientation and support to families before, during and after the process of family reunification.

“It is important for the cities to develop new welcome strategies considering the diversity of origins of newcomers, and the specific needs considering the difficulties that have to face regrouped families. We think that focusing policy efforts at the moment of family regrouping is key and it is much more profitable than in an earlier stage. Family regrouping is the turning point for migrants. When they decide to bring their families, they will invest their efforts in the hosting society rather than in the country of origin.” Ramon Sanahuja, Director of Immigration and Interculturality, Barcelona City Council

Supporting families wherever they need it

Like many immigration processes, family reunification is complex, takes time, and there is no guarantee that an application will be accepted. This makes the individual support, in particular, the pre-reunification services offered by New Families in Barcelona essential.

Key components of the New Families program include:

- **Pre-arrival / reunification assistance.** A team of multidisciplinary professionals provides individual support to applicants to prepare and plan for their family reunification. Each family receives specific attention and support before and after the arrival of family members.

- **Navigating the system.** Having an approved application is only the beginning of the process. “The family reunification process is an obstacle course,” says Gloria Rendon, past Coordinator of the Family Reunification Support Program. “It’s a long process in terms of requirements and time. It can take anywhere from one year to as long as four or five years for citizens from some countries, such as Pakistan.” As one parent, Carmen, comments, “It’s very helpful, because often we don’t even know how to take the first step for reunification, and we think it’s easy, but it’s actually quite difficult.”

It’s a true community network effort. According to program consultant Marta Rovira Martinez, it’s important to “provide welcome and support in a process through which immigrants gradually acquire social resources necessary to develop independently and with equal opportunities in the host society, in all areas of the city. The aim is to promote social inclusion and coexistence in the city.”

**Strategies for Happy Families**

Reunification is a joy and celebration. But it’s also a challenge for families who have experienced years of separation. Recognizing this, New Families provides specialized support to prepare families to deal with challenges that will arise in the reunification process.

A Parents’ Workshop helps parents to understand how to reconnect and re-establish relationships with teenage children they haven’t seen since for years. As one parent, Carmen, discovered, “After everything I’d had to go through for the reunification process, then I had to face the worst moment, when your kid gets here and everything’s unfamiliar. It’s very hard.” Youth feel the same way. Milagros says, “The best thing that happened when I got here was seeing my mother again. The worst was her not recognizing me.”

The Reunified Women Workshop arose because women can often be isolated in the reunification process. Rendon: “We designed these group sessions to help them become more autonomous and self-confident, and participate in city life in Barcelona.” At the same time, women are sometimes the first family members to immigrate, and reunification with spouses can be difficult. Sanahuja: “Very often husbands experience unemployment when they initially arrive, and are dependent in their wives income. This can create some tensions in the family. Therefore, we can prepare women for all this and other potentially difficult scenarios.”

Integrating youth into schools is also an important focus. According to Sanahuja, “the program is focused on successful school integration, because we noticed that without this help, they tend to leave school at15 or 16, and have many problems,” including achieving higher education, finding employment and connecting with their families and new city.

Getting the timing right matters, according to Rendon: “If we didn’t reach them the first month they got here and gave them a sense of belonging to the city, later on it was much harder to get through to a depressed teenager who felt rejected by the new environment.”
Barcelona’s 2010 Anti-Rumour Campaign is part of Barcelona City Council’s long-term strategy to improve coexistence among local and new immigrants. For Sanahuja, there’s a clear connection with the New Families program. “We really see both programmes as complementary projects working on integration of all newcomers in Barcelona. The anti-rumour campaign is focusing on the consciousness of all residents of the city to respect cultural diversity. On the other side, the New Families program is focusing on new residents and their specific needs.”

In their 2012-2015 Immigration Plan, Council continues this work: “This new plan, in the Barcelona tradition of working on immigration based on political and social consensus, makes a firm commitment to the intercultural perspective. Interculturality aims to establish the conditions for positive interaction, contact, dialogue and mutual knowledge by summing up the contributions of diversity in the common reference framework that is our city.”

A Spanish economic crisis, austerity policies and increase of unemployment in south Europe have all contributed to falling family reunification applications. However, that hasn’t stymied Barcelona City’s efforts to build on and create and welcoming city and ensure the integration of newcomers.

On the contrary, Council is harnessing the opportunity to shift efforts from initial reception policies to integration, inclusion and community cohesion. Mirrored in the New Families in Barcelona project, Sanahuja says the city’s goal is to “make people of immigrant origin genuine protagonists of the common construction of the city, from a perspective of full equality… The main objective of this program is to work in favour of integration and wellness of new residents of Barcelona.”

It is a goal all cities should aspire to.
Hayat means Life

By Evelyn

Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Social Inclusion

Sitting alone in a bedroom on a laptop, reading the finely tuned arguments and watching testimonials, a person’s mindset can change. The case for violence as a righteous or good tool can begin to resonate. What happens next is the question that keeps awake security officials, politicians, communities, and families.

Will he travel to fight in a foreign warzone? Will she plan an attack here, at home?

The problem of radicalization, also called home-grown terrorism, is not a problem for law enforcement to handle alone. Not least because of resources. Take France: if it was to launch a surveillance operation for every individual of concern, there would be a team following each of the 5,000 French citizens now under some form of observation, amounting to a small army on the streets.

Beyond a question of resources, there are simply other stakeholders that can be more influential than the security apparatus of government. They are families, and the agencies that support them.

Family connections count

One such agency is the Berlin-based Hayat (Arabic and Turkish for “life”), operating since 2011. Its goal is to counsel and support family members worried about the influence of extremist Islamic ideology over a relative. It’s a small outfit with a staff of three. Their primary point of contact with clients is by a 24/7 hotline, and those clients are family members – sometimes a mother, father, brother, sister, or uncle. Hayat staff are trained counselors, and can take calls in German, Arabic, Turkish, English, and a few others if needed.

A phone call typically comes from parents concerned about a child’s escalating interest in extreme causes or plans to travel abroad to fight, like in Syria. In other cases, the child has already left and the family doesn’t know what to do next. The Hayat approach is to coach family members to keep lines of communication open. These calls are hard on families. It can be a time of intense personal reflection and for parents, sometimes admitting mistakes. Hayat counselor Claudia Dantschke spoke about the strategy to help families through these calls: lots of talking because talking helps, no politically correct formulas, no slogans, and no quick judgements.

In some cases, law enforcement would not even be involved, but sometimes they are and Hayat is the bridge between families and government.

Looking for first causes, families first

Hayat founder Bernd Wagner saw a mistake in how law enforcement was dealing with extremism, focusing on arrests and jail but failing to look at first causes. Why do extremist ideologies hold such appeal? What supports can bring a person back? The program is a successor of sorts. The idea came from EXIT, another renowned program in Germany but focused on helping people exit neo-Nazi groups and thinking. Wagner believes there is a parallel between radical Islam and the far right, but Hayat focuses much more on families.

The case for relying on families as a counterweight to extremist ideology rests on a few main ideas. One is that extremists are tough to persuade when their beliefs are rooted in theology, so direct intervention by a stranger, even when a highly trained Hayat counselor is not likely to succeed. Instead, families are usually the best emotional connection to the individual. Positive relationships are the asset. Hayat counselors teach families to establish and maintain emotional connections. Families are encouraged to be caring and curious, and not engage in debate, provoke, or challenge beliefs. Positive contact can bring a person back.

“We counted on the fact that there would be feelings of doubt or homesickness. It’s at that point the family can provide an alternative view to that of the jihadist group,”


counselor Daniel Koehler told the BBC.

The first phase of contact between families and Hayat is typically emergency advice, when parents are desperate to stop children from leaving to fight or, if he or she is already gone, to persuade them to keep communicating. A second phase moves into the territory of background research and analysis, and sometimes local mediators like a religious leader are brought in to introduce alternative ideas and build trust.

Success

In the last three years, Hayat has had 83 cases and a majority of those are still active. In about 30 cases, according to Koehler, de-radicalization has occurred.

Hayat is popular with families outside of Germany too. The organization has taken international calls from families feeling like there’s nowhere else to go, who might be reluctant to engage authorities from lack of trust, fear or uncertainty. An initiative of ZDK Gesellschaft Demokratische Kultur, Hayat is funded by the German Federal Office for Immigration and Refugee Affairs (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge BAMF), but operates at arm’s length from government.

The idea has already traveled outside Germany. Pilot projects are operating or soon-to-be operating in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and other countries too are examining this model including Australia and Canada.
Future-Proofing the City

By Evelyn Municipal

In 2013, Bristol was invited to join the 100 Resilient Cities Network, a programme that helps cities “better address the increasing shocks and stresses of the 21st century”. Pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation, the 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) is designed to promote urban resilience around the world.

The fastest growing city in the UK, Bristol is alive to the challenges facing modern cities to build resilience into its infrastructure, city systems and communities. Since 2003, the population of Bristol is estimated as having increased by 11.7% due to a number of factors including a significant rise in net international migration, with immigrants now constituting 15% of the population. Local communities have changed significantly with at least 45 religions, at least 50 countries of birth represented and at least 91 main languages spoken.

In such a diverse setting, questions of inclusion, access and opportunity become important as does facilitating a process of engagement that generates dialogue and deeper understanding among the city dwellers, allowing them to survive and thrive even in challenging circumstances.

Building resilient cities

The Rockefeller Foundation’s city resilience framework identifies collective identity and mutual support which translates to active community engagement, strong social networks and social integration as one of the key factors for a resilient city's health and well-being.

Resilient cities are characterized not only by economic vitality and environmental sustainability but also cultural vibrancy and social diversity. The 100RC defines city resilience uniquely and broadly as the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, business and systems within a city to survive, adapt and grow, in the face of chronic stresses and acute shocks.

In being selected to join this programme, Bristol has committed to developing a resilience plan – the first tentative formulations of which were discussed at the launch of the 100 Resilient Cities project at an agenda-shaping workshop in 2014. Social resilience was a hot topic of discussion at the workshop with Bristol’s elected Mayor Ferguson suggesting that inequality of life expectancy could be a key performance indicator for resilience – even in a wealthy city like Bristol, the richest live nine years longer than the poorest.

The process is being led by a resilience officer, a new post funded by Rockefeller. According to Sarah Toy who will be taking on the role as the Chief Resilience Officer in February 2015: “Resilience planning is about making Bristol a better place to live, work and play for everyone, in both good times and bad. As well as focus on future-proofing Bristol’s city systems to ensure we have secure food and energy supplies, good public health and social and economic security we will be working with other cities across the 100 Resilient Cities network including Glasgow and London to share ideas and learning about how to create thriving urban communities where people help and support each other no matter what.”

In addition to the funding for the post, Bristol’s membership in the network gives it access to resources for drafting a resilience building strategy; access to the private and public sector, and NGO created resilience tools; and membership in a global network of peer cities to share best practices and challenges.

By 2050, over 70% of the world’s population will live in cities, making them a key point of engagement. According to Dr. Judith Rodin, President of The Rockefeller Foundation, “In a rapidly urbanizing world, cities cannot afford to remain crisis-driven and reactive. Cities like Bristol are at the forefront of fostering a resilience mindset that will be critical to proactively managing the inevitable challenges, shocks and stresses all cities will face.”
Closing the Opportunity Gap for Immigrant Youth

By Evelyn
December 2, 2014
Employment Inclusion

The dream of any social entrepreneur is to create a profitable business while having a tangible social impact. Mozaïk RH is the first French recruitment agency and HR consulting non-profit specializing in the promotion of equal opportunities and diversity. And Said Hammouche, has accomplished what many social entrepreneurs only dream of: creating a thriving business with documented social return on investment.

While many jobs go unfilled in France, youth from poor and marginalized neighbourhoods remain underemployed. Their potential goes unfulfilled and unrecognized and, with it, the country’s potential.

Unfair Bias is Bad Business

Gabriel Lenot, Head of Apprenticeship and Internship at Mozaïk RH, comments: “What is worse is that we mistrust these neighborhoods, even though they represent the future. For instance, the youngest département in France is Seine Saint-Denis which comprises the second-largest university network in the Ile-de-France region, with 60,000 students. In 20 years, its inhabitants will be an important source of our energy. Today, however, the young people who live there – the most mixed population in the whole of France – are burdened by an unemployment rate representing twice the national average.”

Young people from these areas take up to 18 months longer than the national average to find a job, and when they do, it is often well below the level of their abilities. Their applications are rejected nearly 4 times out of 5. Even the jobs they have access to are well below the level for which they are qualified. According to Lenot, the problem is clear: “Discrimination remains excessive.”

Said Hammouche, Mozaïk RH founder and an Ashoka Changemaker, chose to see this troubling situation as an opportunity. He created Mozaïk RH to close the opportunity gap and fight discrimination by promoting diversity and bringing talented professionals from marginalized social groups to corporate employers.

Closing the Opportunity Gap

For Mozaïk RH this waste of human potential is a lost opportunity needing a practical solution. So they created a business model that identifies talented young people and helps them develop employability skills while working to create a demand for them in the labour market. Very simply, Mozaïk RH matches graduates from low-income neighbourhoods with employers. But, its mission and work go well beyond a simple recruitment service for corporate clients.

Mozaïk RH recognizes that its candidates are actively discriminated against when applying for jobs, “because of their social or cultural background, or on criteria related to gender, disability or age.” To overcome these barriers, Mozaïk RH works with partner companies not only to provide good candidates but also to help employers recognize the potential of the new hires. To ensure this happens, Mozaïk works with partner companies to build capacity to better manage diversity. Mozaïk RH provides a suite of services to employers, including training, action plan and policy development and day-to-day support of diversity-related HR needs. They offer client companies HR consulting to actively promote the employment of overlooked groups, and become champions ready and willing to address inequality and discrimination in the workplace.

“Mozaïk builds the bridge between traditionally overlooked talent from low-income/immigrant communities and employers that would benefit from the skill sets and mindsets of many of these talented individuals. Employers find that when they hire frequently overlooked talent their new hires are generally highly motivated to have impact and also to prove that they merit the risk of hiring them.”

Mozaïk RH maintains a carefully selected database of 75,000 potential candidates for employers. By connecting youth to employment is only part of the equation. Mozaïk RH doesn’t leave these critical connections to chance. Relationships with both candidates and companies are closely followed and managed. Candidates receive training, workshops, coaching and the supports they need to find work. Companies receive support and advice before, during and after the recruitment process. Mozaïk RH works to ensure that candidates are ready and that companies see and value them. “[E]ach of its activities is designed to change the misconceptions and prejudices that influence recruitment.”

The return of their investment is high. Mozaïk RH has reduced “the time of unemployment of the candidates from these underprivileged areas from 18 months to 6 months.”

Scaling up for success

A good social entrepreneur sees value in building relationships with partners, and even competitors. Partnering with Adecco, one of the world’s largest HR management firms, allows Mozaïk to scale up their potential impact. In six years, Mozaïk has placed 2500 candidates into jobs. With Adecco’s help, they look to double that number in a shorter time. At the same time, Adecco, which lacked expertise working with diversity and at-risk youth, has become better at responding to increasing corporate demand for diversity hiring. Both organizations gain. But, most importantly, Mozaïk RH’s youth candidates gain access to more job opportunities and a greater share in shaping their future.

According to Ashoka, social entrepreneur changemakers like Said Hammouche “are redefining standards of how people present their skills and how employers find and vet talent.” As a result of Mozaïk RH’s efforts, “Employers find that when they hire frequently overlooked changemaker talent their new hires are generally highly motivated to have impact and also to prove that they merited the risk of hiring them.”

This social entrepreneur has truly become a changemaker.
Rooting Out Intolerance: the Kungälv Model

By Evelyn

November 27, 2014

Living Together, Municipal Welcome-ability, Social Inclusion

The City of Kungälv launched the Tolerance Project in 1995 on the fundamental premise: intolerant ideas exist in our society and with this, the conditions for racism and other forms of intolerance. As long as these attitudes exist, racism and intolerance among young people have scope to grow.

The Tolerance Project, also called the Kungälv Model, was born out of a crisis of violent neo-Nazi racism in this small Swedish coastal city north of Gothenburg and the failure of immediate action to resolve the deeper, long-term problem of xenophobia and racist violence. The initiative was spearheaded and led by the local Kungälv government after the assassination of John Hron, a 14-year-old Swedish boy of Czech origin who was murdered by four young Nazis in the summer of 1995.

Deeply resolved to prevent such a terrible crime from ever happening again, the municipality made a commitment to long-term action and coordinated efforts to change the structures that cause extremism in the local community from their very foundation and eliminate the conditions for intolerance to set root.

The Tolerance Project focuses on “young people with an intolerant world view.” At first glance, the model is exceedingly simple: identify local youth in or at risk of joining neo-Nazi gangs and then provide them with alternatives.

The path to success is, of course, much more complex. For the city of Kungälv, not taking action was not an option.

Out of crisis, tolerance

Imagine a project that roots out intolerance, eradicates local, organized racist groups and saves millions for the economy. Sound too good to be true? Not in Kungälv, Sweden.

The Tolerance Project looks to the future. It takes time to develop a culture of resistance to destructive and intolerant behavior patterns. The project model targets youth but includes a wider spectrum of stakeholders committed to on-going and persistent efforts to influence society’s attitudes. This includes challenging anti-democratic ideas and values and getting young people to see the value in participating in democratic processes. Research shows a connection between education and leaving destructive environments, so another important long-term project goal is to ensure that the participating student complete the compulsory nine-year school system, and continue onto upper secondary school.

Local issues require the analysis and insight of local actors. Teachers, social workers and community youth workers in Kungälv work together to identify high-school teenagers in or at risk of joining neo-Nazi gangs. They map local social structures and interrelationships to identify trouble spots and at-risk youth. As Christer Mattsson of The Order of the Teaspoon reflects: “Without this basic analysis we will never be able to understand how the structure chooses its victims. And we will not be able to identify and understand the driving forces in this destructive structure.”

Once youth are identified as at-risk, the project works with them to disassemble toxic activities and connects them to more positive relationships, activities and influences.

Recognizing the value of social investment.

One of the challenges faced by Kungälv was getting decision makers to see the importance of a long-term social investment approach on these questions of prevention. Curbing extremism is essential, but cities also need to see the real financial savings that investing in tolerance brings:

“Our common hope is that more municipalities and schools see the importance of the prevention and long-term work against intolerance. It’s an investment for the future, both for society and for individuals” (Erik Ullenhag, Integration Minister, Sweden; Anders Holm Shield, Councillor, Kungälv municipality; Christer Mattsson, Teacher and founder of Tolerance project, Kungälv municipality).

The Order of the Teaspoon, along with the Expo Foundation and the Kungälv municipality, engaged economist Ingvar Nilsson (SEEAB) and behaviourist Eva Lundmark to develop an economic model that calculates the financial impact of taking preventive measures against intolerance.

The result of their study “The Price of Intolerance” shows that a white supremacist group could cost the municipality over 290 million SEK over a 15 year period (43 million USD). The cost of running “The Tolerance Project” over the same period is about 13 million SEK.
Doing the math is easy. The “price tag of violence” is high. The cost of doing nothing, unsustainable.

Success

As Kungälv leaders and citizens will admit, their work is not finished, “nor will it ever be.” However after 30 years it is showing results. Today, there are no active Nazi or white supremacist organizations in Kungälv and no informal gangs. There is an increased sense of security, less vulnerability, and most important of all, less hatred. However, the greatest success of the Kungälv Model is its ability to get students of widely different backgrounds “to sit down together, learn together, live together.”

The efforts of Teskedsorden and Stiftelsen Expo to promote Kungälv’s success is paying off. The Kungälv Model is being replicated in other cities. For the 2015/2016 academic year, with $1 million in government investment and partner support (from Ministry of Labour, the National Agency for Youth and Civil Society Affairs, Natur & Kultur Foundation, and Skandia Ideas for Life), 20 other cities in Sweden will implement the Kungälv model and teachers will be trained to run their own Tolerance projects locally.

“Work against xenophobia and intolerance must continue constantly. Each new generation must be won for the idea of human equality. Xenophobic beliefs that are contrary to the principle of equal value are very much a challenge to the entire set of values which our democracy is based. Our common hope is that more municipalities and schools see the importance of the prevention and long-term work against intolerance. It’s an investment for the future, both for society and for individuals”

The Kungälv model has been highlighted by the UN as a viable and appropriate strategy to counter extreme intolerance among youths.
Swedish With Your Baby

By Evelyn

December 2, 2014

Living Together New Gateways, Social Inclusion

When Karin Bruce took parental leave to be home with her new baby what she missed most about her work were the meetings and conversations about “global issues, future scenarios and complex challenges.” She found many of the young parents in her neighborhood too “similar” and the conversation topics often narrow.

Karin wanted to meet new and different people, from different parts of Stockholm and from around the world. When she went looking for activities in the community that brought together native Swedes and immigrants, she quickly discovered that few of these were suitable for parents with babies. Not content to leave it there, she and fellow-parent Ylva Strande set about identifying local spaces and places where they could find the conversations and explorations they craved. By the end of 2012, Swedish With Your Baby [Svenska med baby] was born.

We can only create a Sweden for everyone if we meet.

Swedish With Your Baby brings together children and new parents from different neighborhoods and immigrant backgrounds. Through open drop-in sessions and group activities, participants share conversation, develop new social networks and receive support in matters related to society and parenthood – with cooing, babbling and laughter in the mix.

At first glance, the concept is nothing new. New parents with babies have always gathered informally to socialize, get support, make new connections and forge friendships. However, Swedish With Your Baby takes that age old approach and turns it into an integration experience. Now, parents with babies meet and interact across language, cultural boundaries, even geographic boundaries, and learn from each other. Men and women from Stockholm’s suburbs and those who have travelled from Stockholm’s city centre come together with a common bond – parenthood. Kids are a natural ice breaker, creating a comfortable and relaxing environment for learning and friendship.

“Swedish with your baby opens up lots of possibilities! It’s great for me that others want to learn from my experiences from Uzbekistan and we learn lots of things from each other…. I have a very small social network and it easily becomes a vicious spiral when I do not speak Swedish. It has been much easier to learn here, by talking to others, than to teach myself from books.” – Ziyoda, with six month old Zarina

From isolation to connection

“It is so easy to become isolated when you are on maternity leave. If you also do not speak Swedish very well it can be even harder,” says Amelie Edlund, a Swede who helped start a Swedish With Your Baby group in the Stockholm suburb of Tensta in 2013.

Immigration and integration can be an isolating experience, especially for women. Parenthood, with its uncertainties, disorientation and sleep deprivation can result in even further isolation. For newcomers, the impact is even greater. It can affect language acquisition and lengthen the time it takes to settle and integrate into their new communities. Swedish With Your Baby works to build bridges among new parents and their children, not only across different neighbourhoods in Sweden, but across cultures as well. Focusing on integration through play and language learning is a simple concept that has reduced isolation and created new connections between Swedes and newcomers.

The project has already seen success and growth in a short period of time. Meetings take place in libraries, community centres, church basements and locations in suburbs where many people who have recently immigrated live. Locations are chosen that are easy to get to for those who are not very familiar with Stockholm’s suburbs. People who live in the city centre and normally do not visit the suburbs get a good reason to do so. According to Swedish With Your Baby project manager Anna Liebiitis Jacobson, “It is about creating meeting places for people. There is a mutual exchange, where you get to meet others, but at the same time to practice the language.”

For newcomers the program has an immediate and tangible impact on their lives: “It’s very good for me to practice Swedish by talking to the parents who have Swedish as their mother tongue. Since I have not lived in Sweden for long, I also want to make friends…. It feels very natural to start talking and make new contacts. That’s why everyone is here!” Katarzyna, with 1 year old Filip

Local Swedes also find learning and growth in the interactions. Stefan Jansson, father of 18 month old My: “Here we are genuinely interested in each other, where we come from, why we live in Sweden, and what brought us here. There are many exciting life stories and I also learn how small, everyday situations with children can look quite different in other countries.” The groups have also made Jansson reflect more about the challenges of language learning and planting the seeds of empathy: “I practice expressing myself clearly so that other parents who are learning Swedish will understand. It has made me also think very hard about how I read stories and teach my language?”

Growing and replicating

Since its start in Stockholm at the end of 2012, Swedish With Your Baby meetings has welcomed over 2,000 participants from all over Stockholm, including newcomers from over 60 countries. In the fall of 2014 parents are meeting in nine suburbs around Stockholm, and there are plans to start up in several other cities. A growing number of enthusiastic participants, extensive media coverage and enquiries from all over Sweden to expand operations suggest that Swedish With Your Baby is needed.
Swedish With Your Baby recently won the 2014 Aftonbladet Wendela Prize as well as Stockholm County Council’s prize for fighting xenophobia and racism, both rich awards that reflect growing recognition of the importance of creating welcoming communities for new immigrants. Personal interactions, getting to know each other at the local level is one important way that xenophobia can be combatted. $50,000 Krona in award money, along with recent funding from the State Inheritance Fund, Skandia Foundation Ideas for Life, and commitments from the municipalities of Nacka and Botkyrka mean that Swedish With Your Baby will continue to develop and meet this need in more neighbourhoods in Stockholm and in cities around Sweden for a long time to come.
Language and Learning at Play

By kturner
September 30, 2014
Education Inclusion

Lutharsiny and her husband came to New Zealand from Sri Lanka in 2010. Their two children were born here. But she says, “Home is very hard, looking after children very hard.”

Leaving home for work in another country is an exciting prospect. But it can also be daunting – especially for families who must make sense of a foreign world on their own, often with little command of English.


The Safari program provides an informal supportive environment for migrant and refugee mothers and children. They bond over shared experiences while gaining skills and confidence in English, learning about early childhood education and schooling in New Zealand.

Long-term implications

The project is one of five administered under a partnership between Auckland Regional Migrant Services (ARMS) and Auckland Refugee Community Coalition (ARCC). It arose from their mutual concern about the lack of access and attendance by refugee and migrant children in early childhood education and the potential long-term implications for these children and their mothers if they were not assisted to become “school ready.”

Robyn Langford, a paid coordinator, leads the Safari program along with a project assistant, ARMS volunteers and a driver. She says Safari supports families with barriers such as little knowledge of English and lack of access to transport. There are English classes for mothers and other learning opportunities related to positive parenting, child development, health workshops and the opportunity to create pathways for mums.

Safari runs three mornings a week at the Lynfield Recreation and Youth Centre in a central Auckland area with a diverse population. Mothers from 10 different cultural backgrounds attend. There are 45 families enrolled at the playgroup with 57 children actively participating. Around 10 to 20 children and 15 mums attend each session.

The playgroup environment is based on New Zealand’s Te Whairiki early childhood curriculum, a framework for providing early learning and development within a socio-cultural context. It emphasizes learning partnership between kaiako/teachers, parents and whanau/families.

Support activities

Mothers and children participate in a range of learning and play activities assisted by organizations like the Auckland City Art Gallery and local libraries.

The gallery’s outreach programme is a regular, art-focused program for mothers only. Facilitator Andrea Gaskin has developed workshops that explore identity with a strong emphasis on language to support the work of Safari’s English teachers who attend the workshops along with the mothers.

Denise van Kempen, an English teacher, says the women who attend the sessions are always keen and excited to discover what they’re going to learn. “They learn a new technique each time. For some, it is their first time to express themselves through art. They also learn English as the art teacher often asks the women to match descriptive words to pictures and objects.”

Safari mums are also introduced to parent support agencies and health services. Doreen Wakefield, the central Auckland HIPPY (Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters) coordinator visited in February. This home-based programme supports parents in becoming actively involved in their four and five year olds’ learning. Parents and children work together for 15 minutes a day with storybooks, puzzles and learning games that help children become successful learners at school. Several mums are keen to join when their children become eligible at four years.

Success

The Safari programme is now running at capacity and could be expanded if more funds are made available.

Mother’s speak enthusiastically about the ways it has helped them. Some have taken up opportunities to become volunteers, home educators, participated in more advanced English training, enrolled in a certificate in Early Childhood Education and food handling certificate courses. There’s also been the opportunity to be involved in a social enterprise project.

Due to the programme’s success, it has been replicated in Massey East which is also an area with a high migrant population. While the central Safari group has a diverse ethnic mix, in Massey East, families are mainly Burmese.
Nurturing immigrant entrepreneurs in Sweden

By kturner
Entrepreneurship Inclusion

“Entrepreneurs with a foreign background are often a key to international markets. Knowledge of business culture and language along with networks in other countries removes many barriers to exports. I have personally experienced the power of the mix of Swedish and Iraqi contractors on a trip to Kurdistan,” says Maroun Aoun, the CEO of IFS or the Swedish Association of Ethnic Entrepreneurs.

Using immigrant networks in their countries of origin to boost exports is a means the IFS uses to forge ties between migrant businesses and mainstream businesses and organizations in Sweden. The power of transnational networks is also an idea that the city of Aachen in Germany has also been exploring to stay competitive in an increasingly globalized economy.

About 1.8 million people with immigrant background live in Sweden. And, like in many other parts of the world, they tend to start businesses more often than the native-born. There are around 70,000 migrant-owned businesses that together employ about 250,000 people.

Unforeseen hurdles

But despite their many successes, would-be immigrant entrepreneurs face hurdles when it comes to contacting financiers and raising capital. This happens mainly because they fail to present their business concept and plan in a convincing manner.

“Language difficulties, cultural differences, and limited knowledge of the regulations which govern entrepreneurship in Sweden can make starting a company harder for an immigrant. They can also find it hard to get loans or a rental contract,” says Aoun. IFS was founded in 1996 to help immigrants overcome these hurdles. It aims to stimulate and increase entrepreneurship and raise competence among individual business owners.

In collaboration with Almi, its parent company owned by the Swedish government, IFS offers Rådgivning or free advisory service across the country. Rådgivning advisors represent Sweden’s new-found diversity and can communicate in 28 languages. It is a significant move for a country still coming to terms with immigration. “It is a new phenomenon for many Swedes. They do not understand why people move,” says Aoun, a first-generation Swede of Lebanese heritage. “It may be because the country has been ethnically homogenous for long and does not have a significant colonial legacy unlike other immigrant magnets.”

Targeted programs

IFS, along with its partner agencies, has initiated several projects to promote entrepreneurship. The Young Urban Movement Project or YUMP for instance is a selective entrepreneur educational program for youth who are entitled to government financial aid for higher studies. With the help of partner companies and other organizations, Yump can offer our students a unique concept you will not find elsewhere.

Participants looking to us with their idea. From the time they are accepted, Yump will help them with the concept, business plan, start-up and then develop their business further. It’s what makes us unique and sets us apart from other similar programs.

YUMP Academy works as a combination of training, competition and a kickstart for your business. The Academy is mainly based on e-learning but you will have physical meetings with business coaches to develop your idea. You will also get the opportunity to further in the process take advantage of an advisory board with a broad range of competences.

To promote these programs, IFS, in collaboration with the European Refugee Fund, the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise and others, has produced two films: Start Your Own Company in Sweden and Ayten – Kurd, Swede, Entrepreneur. The films portray migrant entrepreneurs who have succeeded in Sweden. They are being screened all over the country.

Another IFS initiative is to create a corporate culture that offers equitable business opportunities for everyone. Towards this goal, it plans to pilot a program similar to the public procurement plan of the National Minority Supplier Development Council in the United States. “Not only would this initiative provide better insight for immigrant entrepreneurs into the supply chains of Swedish companies, it could spur the economy as a whole,” Aoun said.

Success

The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth has found that 22% of immigrant-owned businesses target their goods and services, at least partially, for the international market, compared to 15% by Swedish-born owners. Immigrant entrepreneurs also tend to be more ambitious, with 86% hoping to expand their business, compared to 76% of natives. Also, 65% of foreign-born small business owners aspire to hire more employees as part of their expansion, compared to just 48% of Swedish-born owners.

Read our interview with Maroun Aoun on taking ideas about integration from Canada to Sweden.
Second Chance School

By kturner
July 30, 2014
Education Inclusion Employment Inclusion

“We cannot tolerate young people’s social exclusion. To overcome it, we need real investment in young people, both financial and political: an investment in their education, to support their autonomy, to allow them find their way to the labour market and quality jobs, and to ensure that they are not submitted to any kind of discrimination.” — Peter Matjaši, President of the European Youth Forum

Each year in France, over 150,000 youth leave school without a diploma or professional qualification. In Marseille, disenfranchised youth aren’t considered lost. They’re ready for a second chance.

The “École de la 2ème chance” (E2C) of Marseille was the first “school of second chance” established in Europe and since its inception in late 1997, has helped nearly 5,000 young people find employment or skills training.

E2C caters to young adults, 18 to 25 years without diplomas or qualifications who have been out of school for more than a year. Mostly, these are young adults who left the school system three years before entering the programme. On average, E2C students in Marseille are 20 years of age, evenly split among gender lines and represent over 12 nationalities. While not overtly focused on immigrant or visible minority youth, per se, 11% of E2C Marseille’s participants are born in countries outside of France, including Algerian, Tunisian, Moroccan, Comoran and other youth.

The school’s mission is to ensure professional and social integration of youth through education and training. Success is measured as employment, professional qualification or diploma, or skills training/apprenticeship with an employer. At its core, the E2C model fights against the exclusion of youth in French society, in particular, in the labour market. “The initiative aims at giving them fresh motivation, getting them acquainted with the world of business, leading them towards developing their employment goals and integrating them into the labour market” (Muslims in Marseille. London: Open Society Foundations, At Home in Europe Project).

Local lessons for national policy makers

Launched in 1997, E2C in Marseille is a shining example of how problem solving at the local, city level can contribute to better policy making at national and international levels. The E2C Marseille model of hope has influenced the emergence of dozens of other similar programs across France and Europe. In France, the E2C network now consists of 42 schools operating in more than 110 sites in 46 Departments, 18 regions and 4 overseas territories (2012).

E2C schools recognize that the traditional education system has not worked for these youth. Training plans, career guidance and goals are constantly evaluated and adjusted along the way to meet the specific needs and progress of each learner. On average, each learner spends about 6 and a half months at E2C programs, during which they are considered trainees, and are paid a vocational training wage. Their pedagogical approach is unique, personalized, and based on five key principles:

- Take a holistic approach that takes into account the youths’ current situation;
- Develop partnerships with employers to support the training efforts from the start;
- Prefer informal active learning facilitation rather than passive learning;
- Involve a wide range of local and regional economic and social actors to respond to the socio-economic reality of the area concerned;
- Recognize and accredit the prior learning skills of young adults.

The E2C model works, endorsed by students and creating opportunities for youth leadership. In 2010, E2C Marseille received an innovation award for their digital/distance platform for the development of their online platform, part of their regional expansion project, to allowing them to further grow their project and reach more youth. “Destination Chance” was created by E2C students. Its aim is to promote the various activities carried out by young people, such as sports projects (sporting activities as a model of inclusion), a network of alumni, a business exchange to continue to make connections with employers, and a variety of projects that continue the civil society/social inclusion approach of E2Cs.

Employers get it, and are on board

To ensure economic inclusion, employer participation is essential. For migrant or minority youth, it is even more an essential part of their integration process. Without employers, there cannot be success.

E2C works directly with employers and businesses to engaging corporate partners to support youth employment, training and mentoring. Working relationships with trade organizations, chambers of commerce, as well as networks of local and regional economic leaders are also critical to the program’s success.

E2C is also a signatory of the Diversity Charter movement in France – a growing network of civil society, corporate and government actors. This focus on diversity, championed by the corporate sector, clearly works in favour of economic inclusion of E2C Marseilles youth. According to research conducted by the At Home in Europe Project, employers have helped put a positive spin on diversity: “In the workforce, public action favoured prevention and strategies of instruction to combat discrimination, before letting civil society partners take over. There is very little litigation with respect to ethnic and racial discrimination in the recruitment process or at work, but there are many charters. Even more so since the positive term, “diversity”, emerged in 2004–2005, shedding a benevolent light on a policy previously thought of as a hard sell. Due to the success of this new term, the word “discrimination” has almost disappeared from the spheres of public policy, both at the national level and in Marseilles” (Muslims in Marseille).

Success and a growing movement

The “School of Second Chance” concept was proposed in late 1995 by the European Commission as an instrument of struggle against exclusion through education, putting into practice a concept promoted by Edith Cresson while she was European Commissioner. E2C Marseille was launched in 1997 with European funding, but today it is funded by a variety of partners and is a shining example of how problem solving at the local, city level can contribute to better policy making nationally and internationally. The E2C Marseille model of hope has influenced the emergence of dozens of other similar programs across France and Europe.

E2C Marseille was both the pilot project that sparked the creation of all other E2C schools in France and the founding member of the network of French schools (E2C Network France). In France, the E2C network now consists of 42 schools operating in more than 110 sites in 46 Departments, 18 regions and 4 overseas territories (2012).

Today, the E2C Network is demonstrating collective impact, growing from 1,428 young people hosted in 2004, when the Network was created, to 14,150 in 2013. The E2C Schools have increased tenfold their support for young unskilled and unemployed efforts towards vocational integration and social sustainability.

Recognized by law since March 2007, E2Cs are now positioned in the formal vocational training system, delivering a “certificate of competence.” Funding for E2C Marseille and other schools comes from diverse sources, including the EU, state and regional governments.
Quick! I am Sick! Mobile Technology for Newcomers

By ktturner
June 26, 2014
Uncategorized

Adrian is proud of his eight-year old son’s facility with English and his general ease in adapting to the ways of his new Canadian surroundings. “He is now our family’s interpreter when we visit our doctor,” says the newcomer father from Romania. What he doesn’t know is that his case is not unique. His son is among the horde of children doing a task they shouldn’t be doing.

Health care providers and managers say this is not an ideal situation as children might be getting exposed to health information about their parents that they either can’t comprehend or isn’t appropriate for them to know.

With various studies conducted over the past few years indicating that language is an enormous barrier for many newcomers when accessing healthcare, iamsick.ca, a social enterprise, has come up with a solution to bridge the gap. “With the support of the broader community, we are leveraging Canada’s diversity to reduce barriers through web and mobile technology,” says Ryan Doherty, its president and co-founder.

Using publicly available data, the site provides a curated listing of all emergency rooms, urgent care centres, walk-in clinics, and pharmacies. It also helps you find physicians and pharmacists who speak your language. The service, currently available only in Ontario, has a database of healthcare providers who can speak 25-plus languages other than English or French.

“Translation can be expensive and not accessible. It’s common to have children of immigrants translating for their parents on medical issues,” Dr. Meb Rashid, clinical director of the Crossroads Clinic at Women’s College Hospital in Toronto, was quoted as saying in the Toronto Star. “You do need a more sophisticated command of the language. Something like this, that acknowledges the difficulty in language access, is a tremendous help.”

Expansion into British Columbia

Fresh from a crowd funding campaign that raised over $3,000 but fell short of the $9,000 goal, Ryan, a University of Toronto Medical Biophysics doctoral candidate, was optimistic of expanding into British Columbia by July. The west coast province was selected as it received most votes from supporters of the fundraiser.

“While reaching our funding target would have allowed us to expand quicker, it isn’t holding us back from our vision of leveraging technology to help everyone access healthcare in Canada,” says Ryan.

He and his multi-disciplinary team, that includes tech advisor and co-founder Sherry-Lynn Lee, are now looking at establishing more partnerships with healthcare providers and organizations.

“Later this year, we will be piloting a few new features that focus on access beyond just awareness. They are related to family medicine and will improve same-day and after-hours access to family doctors.”

One-stop resource

Initially the online guide was just a locator for nearby health facilities with information on opening hours. The team came up with the idea in 2012 when some of their fellow University of Toronto friends complained about not knowing where to go when the campus clinic closed.

Even as a simple locator it had its uses. “It was a one-stop resource for answering ‘Where?’” says Jemy Joseph, a University of Ottawa medical student, from her clinical experience. “Even during a rotation in Moose Factory [a very remote island in Ontario], I was able to tell my patients when the pharmacy was open!”

It was only this spring that the language filter was added to the website. Ryan estimates a potential audience of more than 700,000 users across Canada who could use an interpreter due to language barriers in healthcare.

Apart from language and the dangers involved in using children and youth as interpreters, there are other gaps the iamsick.ca project could help bridge. These include cultural differences brought about by ethnicity, a care provider not knowing how to use an interpreter appropriately, a lack of reliable professional interpreter services, and lack of printed information in the patient’s first language.
Empowering Youth to Empower Parents

By ktturner
May 30, 2014

Education Inclusion Living Together

“The instructor went through things too quickly. I couldn’t keep up.” “The computer course was in English. My English is very weak and I cannot understand well.” “I was embarrassed to ask questions in my English class, so I did not learn a lot.” Voices of newcomer adults now in the YEP program.

It’s the most Canadian of stories. In 2010, two young people meet at a Tim Horton’s coffee shop to talk about an idea. Inspired by their own lived experience, they see the potential of youth helping newcomer adults in their community integrate faster, feel more at home, less isolated and more connected. Why not flip the education model on its head? Youth teach adults.

Having identified the problem and a viable solution, Agazi Afewerki and Mohammed Shafique quickly put their coffee shop talk to work. They skipped the usual planning stages and scouted their Regent Park neighbourhood to recruit youth tutors and adult learners. Ten days later, with 10 youth paired with 10 adults based on their native language, they launched Youth Empowering Parents, better known as YEP (‘yep’ is colloquial English for ‘yes’).

Building community

To Agazi and Mohammad, the idea seemed simple. Train community youth about teaching etiquettes to tutor adults in computer skills and English as a Second Language (ESL) using a simple curriculum and tools that young people could easily master.

When their 12-week pilot project proved successful and their intake doubled, they decided to develop a new curriculum tailor-made for volunteer tutors as young as 12 years old but with enough teaching guidelines to give the youth confidence and ensure learning targets are met. Equally important was promoting youth leadership in the community through training.

“Since our curriculum is already there and guides them on how to teach effectively, we teach the youth about patience, community leadership and doing general needs assessments to identify where the gaps are for adults,” says Agazi. “Instead of just teaching the curriculum, the youth go outside of it and do other things.”

The youth tutors now see themselves in a different light as service providers and not service-recipients. In a Globe and Mail article, Mohammad commented on how youth have broken “free from their traditional roles as service receivers. YEP is really one of the first programs that actually allows them to be providers of a social program in a meaningful way.” Agazi agrees, “Youth have something to offer and this program enables them to use their skills to give back to the community.”

A launch pad to learning and a better life

Inspired by the shared experience of many immigrant families, where children help parents integrate into Canadian society, the YEP program is sensitive to newcomer needs. Many immigrant learners do not thrive in traditional classroom settings. They might be too shy to speak out, think their accent is too thick, or their English not good enough to use. Connecting them with youth tutors from the same community, who speak the same language makes the difference. Youth trained to be empathetic, patient tutors can help adults overcome their reluctance to speak up and ask questions and accelerate the learning process. Many adults gain the confidence they need to enter full time studies or training.

With 90% of YEP’s clientele identified as immigrant women, courses are offered after school hours to enable stay-at-home housewives to participate. The strategy is paying off. Adults report improved quality of life, happiness and independence. And kids can be kids, not having the pressure of playing interpreter or being the leader and decision-maker in the household.

There have also been financial implications. With Skype training, adults can call home anywhere in the world free through computers instead of buying telephone calling cards. Some of the adults who learned Skype said it was the first time they saw family members in 15 years.

Success

Since its beginning, YEP has served over 800 participants with a retention rate of over 80% for both youth and adults. In 2011 YEP received the UNAOC Intercultural Innovation Award in Doha. The program has been recognized as a Vital Idea by the Toronto Community Foundation and designated an Agent of Change by the Centre for Social Innovation.

YEP’s focus now is on scaling up the program. “We’re now working on creating our own organization and growing teams to go out into communities to offer the program. Our pitch to other organizations is to let us use their spaces when they are not being used,” says Agazi.

The program is now running in five locations in Toronto and is being replicated in cities across Canada, starting with Ottawa. Afghanistan and Ethiopia are two other countries on the radar.

This Good Idea will be featured in “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.

Gateway to New Audiences

By kturner
June 2, 2014

Good Ideas We Are Watching

When Jovanni Sy took over as the artistic director of Gateway Theatre in Richmond, B.C., the Toronto native saw something familiar. His mostly white audiences did not look like the population of his new home which was more than half of Asian descent.

It was one of the biggest problems facing Canada’s theatre establishment: how to attract new audiences in an increasingly diverse society.

Jovanni also realized that the Chinese community, Richmond’s dominant ethnic group, was not averse to live entertainment. It was already a big consumer of the performing arts in either Cantonese or Mandarin and had all the potential to become Gateway’s patrons, too.

His initial solution was to attract this new audience group by offering shows by Chinese-Canadian playwrights. When he got to know people living in and around Richmond better, Jovanni came up with a more original idea: bring in Chinese-language productions from abroad and present them with English surtitles (also known as supertitles, they are translated or transcribed lyrics/dialogue projected above a stage or displayed on a screen).

This August, the Gateway Pacific Theatre Festival will be featuring three productions from Hong Kong with English surtitles. If this pilot project succeeds, Jovanni plans to roll out a year-round Chinese-language, English-surtitled, alternative to his company’s subscription series of English-language plays.

Jovanni hopes all this activity will lead to producing new Canadian productions in Cantonese and Mandarin which could then be exported. “How great would it be if we could actually do George Walker or Judith Thompson in translation – regional Canadian production that we can then export overseas?” Jovanni asks in a *Globe and Mail* article. “We see our role down the road of being that gateway between Chinese-speaking countries and English-speaking Canada.”

Maytree’s Cities of Migration project has highlighted similar efforts to expand audiences and build bridges between communities. Two examples from Down Under, in Auckland, New Zealand, and Sydney, Australia, stand out.

Indian theatre in English

With Bollywood movies now reaching mainstream audiences outside South Asia, Auckland’s Prayas theatre company is attempting to do the same with works of Indian playwrights.

A not-for-profit organization formed by Indians living in the city, Prayas – which means “an attempt” in Hindi – is reaching out, sharing and integrating with the wider local population through theatre, music, song and dance.

Since 2005, Prayas has produced one show per year in English. Bringing together talent from across Auckland’s diverse population, the plays discuss social issues with lacing of humour and a few surprises.

In 2009, it created, *Khoj – The Search*, the story of a young man’s journey from Mumbai’s Colaba to Auckland’s Sandringham. Using Canadian author Rohinton Mistry’s debut collection of stories, *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, as its inspiration, Prayas held a series of theatre workshops to incorporate local migration stories into the script.

Prayas’ first play attracted more than 550 people from the wider community. The third was seen by more than a thousand. The company has also been recognized by the larger artistic community. It was invited to perform at an Auckland street theatre festival, which was an opportunity to perform for a more mainstream audience than usual.

Orchestrating new audiences

In the late 1990s, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra (SSO) realized that although its musicians reflected Australia’s increasing cultural diversity, its audiences continued to be mainly Anglo-Australians and Australians of western and eastern European origins.

SSO was definitely not growing its audience from among other ethnic groups that call Sydney home. Apart from English, Cantonese and Mandarin were among the top six languages spoken in the city along with Italian, Greek, Arabic and Vietnamese. While these groups regularly engage in a variety of cultural entertainment from outside of their communities, the orchestra was not in the mix.

In 2000, SSO decided to break this trend by engaging with Sydney’s long-established Chinese, Japanese and Korean communities. The strategy was to both cultivate these markets and use their feedback to help shape programming.

And it worked. In the first nine months, sales to Chinese and Japanese speakers in the community grew from 127 tickets a year to 1,250. In the first month of the bilingual ticket sales telephone line, annual subscriptions for the orchestra season went up by 200%.

A multicultural audience development project by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and other Australian case studies like *Who Goes There?* and *The World Is Your Audience* provide further insights into audience development in culturally diverse cities.
Milan Bus Stories

By kturner

Living Together, Municipal, Public Space, Refuge Portal, Role of Media, Spatial Inclusion

In 2009, residents of Milan came face to face with first and second generation immigrants in their city. Not via a protest. Not via news about a migration tragedy or scandal. Waiting for a bus, tram, subway, if they looked up from their daily paper, smartphone or tablet, they had an opportunity to, if only briefly, learn about one of their neighbours.

For three months in Milan, lettera 27 provided them with "authentic and significant stories from Italians and first and second generation migrants, publishing them on posters, in important meeting places and on public transport. They were published in Italian, the shared language, as well as in the authors’ own languages."

The stories give a name and face to people and stories that exist in cities invisibly, to challenge people to think beyond stereotypes when they hear the words "migrant" or "asylum seeker" and create the opportunity for connection.

Since 2009, this media campaign that literally travels throughout the city, has also travelled to other Italian cities and continues to travel. From Milan to Naples and Modena in 2010, to Parma in 2012, Lampedusa in 2012 and Palermo in 2013, "these faces and these stories tell us about ourselves, how we were and what we are today, but also what we might become through paths of respect and mutual recognition, throughout interaction processes in which conjugate democratic values and shared ownerships. We owe it to ourselves, as well as them." (Alessandro Triulzi, lecturer at the University of Naples L'Orientale and organizer of Confini (Borders), a project of lettera27).

In each city, the campaign transforms just a little to reflect local reality and stories. In Milan, the campaign became part of the 2010 of African Asian and Latin American Film Festival, presenting a set of short video interviews with 14 film directors. In Naples, a video story was added in transit stations to promote the campaign, telling one immigrant’s Italian arrival story.

"I arrived forcibly in Lampedusa and they moved me to Rome without telling. Naples is the third Italian city where I have been but for me it is the first, because I have come here by myself, with my desire."
In Modena, a bookstore exhibit added to the travelling campaign. In Parma, postcards and catalogues added to the posters and placards on transit. In Lampedusa, the campaign coincided with the Lampedusa In Festival, a local culture and arts festival, and local protests about the treatment of asylum seekers on the tiny Italian island.

While primarily focused on posters and placards presented to passersby on transit, in Milan, teachers and students at a local primary-secondary school created a video telling the students' stories of immigration and integration. "The stories collected and the video produced are the result of the work done by both teachers and students. The teachers interviewed the students who also sent a postcard to invite a friend to visit their home country. "Luoghi Comuni": Kids have their say" immediately proved to be a good educational practice, developing close collaboration among teachers, and between teachers and students. The project opened up new perspectives by bringing together students and teachers, Italians and migrants, kids – who express themselves in their new language – and their families (proud to have children like this!)."

The campaign is promoted and curated by CISS – Cooperazione Internazionale Sud Sud, as part of 'Talenti integrati', a project which started in 2012. "It's success is built on the stories, but also the large number of collaborators and partners that come together in each city to make the campaign work. "The stories tell the tale of 'luoghi comuni', experiences that have shaped people's identities, symbolic imagery and different languages. As they move through the streets of the city, they reveal the hidden richness between people, giving each person a face and a name, while transforming a distracted and rushed moment into a smile and occasion for complicity with other people.??"

In a country with some tension around migration and asylum issues, Luoghi Comuni offers Italians an opportunity to connect at a more personal level with the people they might otherwise only come into incidental contact with, or get to know through unbalanced media or political stories.

On the face of it, it's a simple idea to place posters on public transit to amplify migrant voices and tell short stories of struggle, success and sense of place. Put them in front of a captive audience as they travel through their city. Let them make the personal connections to these stories. Hope that these everyday encounters lead to deeper common understandings of a shared humanity and a sense of neighbourly connection.
Projet Proxité: Professional Mentoring for Youth

By kturner
May 1, 2014

They really never had any reason to meet, given their different life experiences and trajectories. Yet Drias and Nicolas, Tarik and Valérie, Kilani and Vanessa were brought together by Projet Proxité which offers educational support and career advice to young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Proxité pairs students with professionals acting as volunteer mentors, who focus on the particular needs of the young person. This can range from straightforward homework support or advice around interviews and resume writing, to building the students’ confidence or helping them figure out what career they wish to pursue.

Social and geographical boundaries

The distance from Saint-Denis to Paris may be short but the challenges faced by the young people of les banlieues défavorisées can make for a long journey out of poverty.

The region with the largest proportion of immigrants in France is the Île-de-France (Greater Paris), where 40% of immigrants live. According to INSEE, French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies, responsible for the production and analysis of official statistics in France, about 35% of the urban region’s 4 million people are either immigrant (17%) or born to at least one immigrant parent (18%) in 2006. Within this region, Saint-Denis is a commune in Paris’ northern suburbs (banlieues). Here up to 56.7% of young people under 18 are immigrants, including 38% of African origin. Islam is the main religion.

Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often struggle in the school system by the time they reach the age of 15. These challenges emerge from a variety of factors, including poor career advice leading to lowered aspirations and lack of support structures both at school and at home to allow for good educational achievement.

Tailor-made

Proxité was founded by a lawyer and a social worker who realized that just a small amount of additional support every week could go a long way in improving young people’s achievement in school. It started small, with a group of ten volunteers who all wished to help young people in Saint-Denis finish secondary school. A few years later, the project developed a new mentoring program for older pupils, to facilitate their access to the labour market.

Ten years later, it is a flourishing project. Over 250 mentors and mentees are active in four different locations around greater Paris. Students receive the advice they need, which helps build their confidence and increases their chances of entering the labour market. It also gives mentors an opportunity for civic engagement and the development of long-lasting relationships between people whose paths were unlikely to cross otherwise. Proxité builds cohesion and solidarity across social and geographical boundaries.

For secondary school students, Proxité offers mentoring primarily based on homework support. The mentor and the young person meet around 2 hours every week in the local branch of the organization and focus on the particular challenges faced by the student. For older students, Proxité offers mentoring that takes place in the mentor’s workplace and focuses on career choice and labour market inclusion.

Since it was set up Proxité has engaged with 900 young people in school or workplace mentoring schemes and has branches in Saint-Denis, Nanterre and Noisy-Le-Grand, three towns bordering Paris that include a significant number of residents from disadvantaged background. It organizes regular activities, including a weekend study session every year for school children, and visits to different companies for older students.

Success

Proxité’s young people have better results in school (in 2013, 20 of 22 youth completed their bachelor’s degree) and have improved their access to the job market.

Mentors take great pride in watching their mentees progress and see the concrete results of their relationship when a young person progresses to the next school year or finds a job.

"I am so proud to be able to say I contributed to building someone’s future; it has been an invaluable experience," says Mohammed, mentor to Steeve.

The mentoring relationship benefits both mentor and mentee and beyond the one-to-one relationship that it creates, also leads to a wider sense of community cohesion.

Key to Proxité’s success is its partnerships from public, private and third sector organizations. It works in close partnership with the city councils of Saint-Denis, Nanterre and Noisy-Le-Grand as well as municipal structures, such as the “Mission Locale”, a local public organization that supports labour market inclusion for young people between ages 16 and 25. It has also developed strong partnerships with many companies, which provide financial support but also, crucially, encourage their employees to act as mentors to young people.

In 2011, Proxité received an award for solidarity by the Feuilhade Foundation.
Courting Justice: Families and The Law in Australia

By kturner
May 2, 2014
Cultural Inclusion

“We see our families in so much trouble with the law but no one stops to say this is what is going on. If only we can tell our community that there are things we can do with law, people then we won’t be so afraid of what is happening.” — A South Sudanese community leader

For most people, navigating through the court system and judicial process can be perplexing in the best of times. But as a refugee or an immigrant there is the added stress of learning new local customs, culture and language, not to mention how the country's many institutions function.

Moving to a new country, especially under trying or tragic circumstances, can place enormous stress on families as different family members struggle to communicate in a new language, seek work and schooling and go about daily business with few social networks outside the family unit.

The strain on family relations during this time can be profound and sometimes leads to domestic violence, family breakdown and child protection concerns. This, in turn, can bring about additional distress when police or government officials intervene in what may be perceived as private family matters.

Recognizing this, as part of the Living in Harmony program (now the Diverse Australia program), the Family Court of Australia partnered with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to fund an initiative to develop community-driven education strategies around the Australian legal system, and particularly, family law, for new and emerging communities.

A targeted approach

Established over a period from 2003 to 2006, and encapsulated in the 2008 report (PDF), the Living in Harmony partnership aimed to:

- Develop and strengthen relationships between new and emerging communities and the Family Court;
- Foster cross-community relations between new and emerging communities about matters of families and the law; and
- Examine how the Family Court could contribute to community harmony by strengthening community leadership, family units and inter-community relationships in new and emerging communities.

Working and building trust was essential for the program’s success. Developed with direct input and partnership with representatives of Afghan, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Iraqi, Somali and Sudanese communities, four separate pilot community education strategies were developed, implemented and evaluated. Over four sites, more than 45 government and non-government agencies were involved and more than 1500 community participants attended consultations and community education workshops.

Bespoke models

Following these extensive consultations in each pilot area, a variety of approaches targeted at particular communities were used to cover a range of subjects. In Melbourne, for example, ethno-specific community organizations partnered to deliver community education sessions organized by bilingual educators and presented in their own language. Court staff attended as a “resource” for the bilingual educators.

In Parramatta, a multi-agency approach with community facilitators addressed the safety, well-being and long-term successful settlement of children and their families. They focused on the concept of "the best interests of the child," which is enshrined in Australian law through the Family Law Act 1975.

The Tasmanian approach involved a number of family-related service providers using playback theatre – spontaneous, improvised theatre created through collaboration between performers and audience where someone shares a life story, chooses actors to play the different roles, and then watches as their story becomes a conversation that gets people thinking and talking about the issues at hand.

The Adelaide approach with Somali, Sudanese, Ethiopian and Eritrean communities used storytelling and role play, methods traditionally used to pass on living skills and cultural and social histories in these communities. A range of government and non-government organisations were involved.

Success and Recognition

Strong relationships were forged among individuals and between organizations. New and emerging communities gained improved knowledge of their own rights and responsibilities as well as an understanding and appreciation of the family court and judicial systems in Australia.

Outcomes for the Family Court have been equally profound, especially in terms of developing deeper cultural competencies. Knowledge of how new and emerging communities perceive the Family Court and a better understanding of their desire to settle into Australian life has been incorporated into the day-to-day business of the Court.

The Family Court is more able to work towards mutual understanding and benefit. Relevant information is also shared with other organisations in order to help facilitate culturally responsive and appropriate services in other sectors as well.

The Family Court was a 2014 winner of Migration Council of Australia’s (MCA) Migration and Settlement Award.
“Intercultural gardens bring together Germans and immigrants … from all strata of society to cultivate fruits and vegetables, exchange seed and recipes, build small, wooden community houses and clay baking ovens, cook, organize barbecues, and celebrate. Working the soil together, which has allowed many to use their knowledge and abilities for the first time in Germany in an international context, also creates a field of learning that goes far beyond planting and harvesting garden produce.”

A flourishing garden, like most good things, starts with the seed of an idea. In this case, a desire to do something you’ve always done, but in an unfamiliar place. Connect that desire to a local resource and the result can be magical and transformative.

“It was not by chance that the intercultural garden movement in Germany had its beginnings in an immigrant centre. In 1995 Bosnian refugees found themselves stranded in Göttingen, awaiting the end of the war in their home country, women unaccustomed to idleness who missed their big vegetable gardens. Together with the Ethiopian agrarian engineer [Tassew] Shimeles, they went in search of suitable land to cultivate even in exile. This was the start of a success story,” says Christa Müller, sociologist and managing partner of the Stiftungsgemeinschaft anstiftung & ertomis in Munich. Shimeles, who has lived in Germany since 1980, was a key catalyst in the creation of International Gardens Göttingen and continues to support what has become the Intercultural Gardens Network.

In Göttingen, people from a number of countries and different religions work side by side on a common effort — to grow fruits, vegetables and herbs. And for one schoolgirl, it was much more than that. With a widely scattered family of origin, the community garden gave her an opportunity to re-constitute her idea of family: “I was in the garden from the age of about three or four. Just about all the members of the Göttingen International Gardens are my ‘aunts and uncles.’ It’s like a second home. We see each other here all the time. When we’re in town, you notice how many people know me, give me a smile or greet me, or stop for a chat. And most of them know me from the garden,” As Shimeles explains it, “The soil connects us with our neighbors, with other people and institutions. The soil connects us with our innermost strength.”

Creating new community

In these gardens, this connection grows community. Refugees, traumatized and longing to return home, plant seeds of self-reliance, strength and resilience. Children who might otherwise be isolated because of their immigration status and stigma grow roots in their local community. They learn to work the land with the families, get to know other children, build new skills. Women who might be isolated bloom in the garden, which becomes a primary place for their integration experience. Because there may be many women from different countries, they must speak German, a valuable skill that furthers their integration. They meet and network with other women, build confidence in a safe environment, all of which have a direct impact on them. All gardeners are seen as having the potential to contribute, be valued, to seek their place in life. A Kurdish gardener stated that her engagement in the association enabled her to do something for others, allowing her to lead a meaningful life.

Like a garden itself, there is no right way to do create an intercultural garden. In Göttingen, a grass-roots democratic organization leads the way. In some community gardens, immigrants lead the way. In others, community, church groups or committed individuals who want to reclaim or restore a piece of land take the first steps. Some local gardeners may wish to rescue a previous garden, others might want to create a space for newcomers to come together. Others may simply want to garden and enjoy fresh vegetables and herbs. As Christa Müller puts it, in an intercultural garden, “This diversity is deliberate.”

Abundance rather than scarcity

The foundation Stiftungsgemeinschaft anstiftung & ertomis in Munich plays a central role in the Intercultural Gardens movement in Germany, providing educational support and a funding program that invests in a vision of the city as a place of “abundance rather than scarcity.” Their Intercultural Gardens Network provides advice for those interested in setting up new gardens, conducts research and knowledge transfer projects, shares information across the network and with organizations interested in the model outside of Germany. Through their efforts, Germany has intercultural gardens, neighbourhood gardens, self-harvest projects, guerrilla gardening actions and the growing number of mobile urban agricultural projects.

The foundation monitors the network and has noted how each garden in the network learns from the others, but develops its own unique approach and focus. Some communities concentrate on developing intercultural methods in environmental education work, others specialize in therapeutic work with traumatized refugees, while some others focus on vocational training and the development of micro-enterprise in the fields of horticulture or catering.

Success – cross-pollinating ideas across Germany

Since 1995 the Intercultural Gardens Network has taken the good idea from Göttingen, cultivated and grown it across Germany. The foundation maintains a current database of 385 gardens in Germany. Of these, 193 are intercultural gardens.

For Sedika Baqaie, a newcomer from Afghanistan and community gardener in Kassel: “The garden is a village where different cultures meet and come together to help one another with their problems.” Kassel’s intercultural garden was awarded the 2004 prize for social integration by the social ministry of the federal state of Hesse. In 2010, Mayor Klaus Wowereit was equally eloquent on the occasion of the Intercultural Gardens annual meeting in Berlin: “Intercultural gardens enrich our cities … promote the peaceful coexistence and establish a sense of shared responsibility and feeling of home.”


204/541
International Gardens Göttingen itself has received many awards for its work, including the 2002 integration prize of the former federal president Johannes Rau; a prize from the Alliance for Democracy and Tolerance for its role in promoting civic engagement in the same year; and in 2006 the "Göttingen Peace Prize". In 2007, Göttingen was selected by the London Sustainable Development Commission as one of eight international projects to be studied as an inspiration for future urban policy. The garden continues to expand and innovate, most recently adding a health and nutrition and beekeeping education project.
Naan in the Park: Re-imagining Public Space

By Itturner
February 26, 2014

Civic Inclusion/Living Together

Thorncliffe Park is unlike any other place in Toronto. This densely populated neighbourhood in Canada’s largest city is seen by some as its version of Hong Kong. More than 30,000 people live in 34 high-rise buildings compactly organized into an area of approximately two square kilometres. Apart from its density, it is also very diverse – the kind of “arrival city” that new immigrants are often attracted to.

Immigrants like Sabina Ali and her husband, who came to Canada in 2008 “to check out the country as place to settle down and raise our four kids.”

Thorncliffe was their first stop. Having worked and lived in Saudi Arabia, the family felt immediately comfortable within the predominantly South Asian and Middle Eastern mix of the local population, helping them feel settled and ready before venturing into the wider community. “Being a newcomer, the transition stage is really a big one,” says Sabina who is quick to dismiss any notion of insularity in choosing the area to set up home. “You also need to come out and meet people to break unseen barriers.”

Being a gregarious person from cosmopolitan Hyderabad, India, Sabina felt at home in multicultural Canada from day one. On day two she made friends with a group of women in R.V. Burgess Park – a public park in the Thorncliffe neighbourhood. The rundown condition of the park, which is located in one of the richest cities on earth, struck Sabina’s “new eyes” as incongruous. Given her education in human resources and social work, she was quick to rally the group of six women to form the Thorncliffe Park Women’s Committee (TPWC).

Warming fire

Sabina’s forceful drive to create the committee was very much in evidence this February 2014 at the 6th Annual Winter Carnival held in the park. A warming fire, soup and hot chocolate were all that were needed to get the neighbours out and animate the park. Thrown in for good measure was fun and games for the children. One of the carefully selected prizes were tickets to the Ontario Science Centre. The world-class public education and entertainment centre is a neighbourhood landmark but its admission fees are beyond the reach of many Thorncliffe residents. For Sabina, the smiles on the faces of children made coming out on a cold Saturday afternoon worth the effort. “Doing my little bit for positive change in their lives gives me satisfaction,” says Sabina as she trundles the gear used for the carnival into a small shed painted with bright art by the neighbourhood children.

“When we started as a group, we were just doing the clean-ups and trying to make the park a better place for everyone. Then we introduced the recreational programs. Soon we were asking ourselves how we could help women in the area, many of whom come from countries where English is a second language, develop self-esteem and gain confidence,” explains Sabina on how TPWC made itself relevant in a neighbourhood designed in the 1970s to serve 12,000 people. Today Thorncliffe Park’s vibrant community boasts the largest public elementary school in North America, with 900 children enrolled in kindergarten alone.

From opening up public space for community participation to exploring opportunities for work and civic engagement, the TPWC has facilitated an active role for women and local residents in community life in every sense of the word. But it has not always been easy for this pioneering group of women. The weekly summer bazaar, for example, has presented repeated challenges. “Every season I have to convince the City that these are not businesses. We have to tell them that we are building communities and supporting local enterprise. If we don’t give them opportunities, how will these newcomers feel confident and integrate?” The market provides a platform for women to participate in public life.

“At the next level I take them to other markets in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area] so they can gain exposure to the broader community. It’s a different experience for them. It’s one step at a time to self-employment and being part of the local business community,” says Sabina. The TPWC also runs a catering group made of local women that has gained business through the different connections and partners it has made in the city.

‘Money well spent’

Early on, the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office (TNO), a community-based non-profit agency, was quick to notice the initiative and enthusiasm of the women’s group and helped TPWC with an initial grant of $1,000. Jehad Aliweiwi, the former TNO executive director, sees these women as social entrepreneurs and their projects as good models for micro-economic development. He says the grants to TPWC are money well spent. It was not long before others followed, including the province’s Ontario Trillium Foundation, recognizing the transformative power of local action.

When the Maytree Foundation looked to partner with community-based organizations in the GTA to deliver a civic literacy program, Jehad’s office was quick to identify Sabina as a local leader with experience in connecting residents to each other and capable of facilitating discussions about developing and implementing community projects.

“Sabina’s forceful drive to create the women’s committee and then mobilize the group to create opportunities for women’s participation made her a perfect match for our program,” says Alejandra Bravo, Manager of Leadership Programs at Maytree. “It has been a privilege for me to have in a small way contributed to her development, putting into her hands tools to train others on how governments, especially local ones, make decisions to identify the key pressure points for community.”

Success

The women’s success hasn’t gone unnoticed. Sabina was one of the two winners of the 2014 Jane Jacobs Prize. The prize is awarded to Torontonians who embody Jane Jacobs’ passion for creative and intelligent city building.

Last fall, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne visited their pop-up container garden. “It was a great event and a wonderful opportunity for the garden volunteers to showcase their good work. This garden is one way of engaging women to grow local and culturally diverse food in urban areas,” says Sabina. There are drop-in classes during spring, summer and fall. A small area is reserved for children, and teachers in neighbourhood schools incorporate it as part of their curriculum. One such class was about diversity.

The teacher matched learning about plants to explain diversity among people.

The TPWC is also credited with opening North America’s first tandoor oven in a park. “The idea came when we were discussing types of cooking fires within the community members from Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. The most common thing was the tandoor. As other parks have pizza ovens, we thought being a predominantly South Asian community, it would be good to have a tandoor that others in the city could learn about,” says Sabina. “We believe that food brings everyone together.”

Efforts like this has propelled R.V. Burgess to become the first park in Canada to be named a "Frontline Park" by City Parks Alliance, an independent group of urban parks administrators and advocates across America. The group says the park was selected "because it exemplifies the power of partnerships to create and maintain urban parks that build community and make our cities sustainable and vibrant."
Mission Export Education

By kturner
February 12, 2014
Uncategorized

The bird that partakes of the berry, his is the forest.
The bird that partakes of knowledge, his is the world.

— A Whakatauki (Maori) proverb

International education is worth NZ$2.3 billion (US$1.9 billion) to the New Zealand economy and is the country’s fifth largest export industry. Its 2013 national budget set aside NZ$40 million for investment over the next four years in marketing and promoting the export education industry and doubling its value by 2025.

Universities are an important stakeholder and marketing tool for the sector, especially in Auckland, the country's largest city that attracts more than half of New Zealand’s international students. A 2014 objective, for example, is to seek new student markets in South America and Asian nations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines. That makes removing barriers that might discourage international students a top priority.

To make this possible, the Auckland Tertiary Education Network (ATEN) was established in 2012 by three universities and two polytechnics in the Greater Auckland Region in partnership with the Auckland Council. The ATEN network brought together rival institutions to identify key aspects of welcoming and integrating international students. International students are not only important economically to these institutions. They also play a pivotal role in enriching the intellectual environment of the university and exposing local students to the world. This diversity dividend makes all students better global citizens.

A collective voice

Paul Spoonley, Massey University’s Distinguished Professor, says ATEN’s purpose is to provide a collective voice to address issues affecting international students such as personal safety, transport and food options. “A lot of what attracts and retains international students is not necessarily curriculum-based. It is what happens off-campus that will provide the foundation for internationalising New Zealand universities,” he says. A student who feels comfortable and secure is also more likely to achieve academic success. It's a win-win formula.

The ATEN network brings key stakeholders in the academic sector together to develop insight and better strategies for how to attract and retain international students. That includes looking at the policy environment where New Zealand shares common ground with countries like Canada and Australia. New Zealand provides a pathway to permanent residents and ATEN aims to extend existing schemes to link international students with employers, provide advice and guidance and work especially valuable if they become permanent residents” Spoonley adds. Currently, the NZ government has various visa options for international students who want to work in New Zealand or become permanent residents. ATEN aims to extend existing schemes to link international students with employers, provide advice and guidance and work with relevant groups such as Career Capable Auckland (a partnership of Careers New Zealand, corporate employers and the Committee for Auckland).

The Business Case

ATEN promotes two key benefits for regional economic development from international students. First, there is a multiplier effect from non-educational spending which contributes a significant income source for Auckland businesses. Additionally, international students provide an important talent pool for New Zealand employers. “This is especially valuable if they become permanent residents” Spoonley adds. Currently, the NZ government has various visa options for international students who want to work in New Zealand or become permanent residents. ATEN aims to extend existing schemes to link international students with employers, provide advice and guidance and work with relevant groups such as Career Capable Auckland (a partnership of Careers New Zealand, corporate employers and the Committee for Auckland).
Looking Forward to Success

ATEN aims to use its collaborative strength and active partnership with regional governments and the Auckland Council to push the central government to implement measures to encourage international students to stay on in New Zealand after graduating. This includes advocating for quicker processing of visa applications.

ATEN’s overall goal is aligned with the nation’s aim to increase the percentage of international students in Auckland and the rest of New Zealand. The effectiveness of the game plan also depends on its ability to gain the central government’s support for key actions to make Auckland and other New Zealand cities more welcoming destinations and cities of migration.
Charting a Path to Citizenship

By kturner
January 28, 2014

Education Inclusion, Living Together, Political Inclusion

For many immigrants in the United States, a community college education is the ticket to a brighter future. Described as the "Ellis Island" and "workhorses" of higher education, local community colleges in the United States play a central role in integrating immigrants and helping them move up the economic ladder by providing affordable access to second language (ESL) instruction, workforce training, vocational certificate programs, and undergraduate education. As the number one choice for immigrants seeking post-secondary education, community colleges are a natural delivery partner for citizenship programs developed by organizations such as the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). For whatever the current immigration debate might suggest, the U.S. remains a global leader when it comes to opening its doors – and citizenship – to the world. Every year some 700,000 people become naturalized U.S. citizens. Many of them achieve their goals with the help of citizenship programs made possible by grants from USCIS.

Opening Doors to Opportunity

Montgomery College in Wheaton, Maryland, runs one such program that has been cited for its "best practices." Every year 300 students, young and old, benefit from the Montgomery program, which is carefully tailored to its diverse population. People like a singer from Ethiopia who fled to the U.S. to escape political persecution or a vibrant young woman from Senegal who could not read or write.

"Our students come from all walks of life: we have served students from 67 different countries, speaking 35 different languages," said Nancy Newton, director of the program at Montgomery College. "We serve teachers, lawyers, diplomats, engineers, mothers, fathers, 18-year olds who have had a green [permanent resident] card for 5 years, and 80-year olds who have had a green card for 25 years."

Enhanced Integration Tasks

An aspect that was written into the grant was the need for students in the program to think beyond the naturalization test and interview. "What happens after they become a citizen and how will they give back or get involved in community life are the issues the program tries to tackle," Newton said.

Montgomery College has developed a series of Enhanced Integration Tasks© (EIT) to make students accountable for their own learning and integrate with the community. Students complete these tasks in their own time with friends, family members or independently. A couple of examples include becoming a volunteer in the local community, attending a Town Hall meeting, and visiting a museum.

"The EIT is really the backbone of our program. Through an innovative curriculum, the program has seen students become volunteers in the community, get involved in their child's school, become more involved in local and state politics through communication with Congressional Representatives, State Senators and local government leaders, and attendance at Town Hall meetings," said Newton.

As naturalization is a costly (with a hefty $675 application fee) and emotionally loaded process, free programs like the one offered by Montgomery College provide confidence and some peace of mind for those preparing for the test and oral interview, according to Newton. Although the whole process is not difficult, it could be daunting, she says. "You are with a government official, in unfamiliar surroundings, and you don’t have family and friends around you."

Success

In 2010, Newton was named a White House Champions of Change for Immigration Integration by President Barak Obama. The Montgomery College EIT program she helped design received the best practices citation.

"We recognize that many organizations can help people prepare for and pass the naturalization test and interview, but our ultimate goal is having the students look at what it means to become a citizen of the United States," said Newton.

In the three years it has been funded by the USCIS, the Montgomery College program has served 932 people of whom 757 have become naturalized citizens so far. The program is now in its fourth year and third grant period for two years ending in 2015.

Montgomery College is working with other colleges, organizations and networks across the United States to advance educational and vocational opportunities for immigrants and is a member of the Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education.
Brains for Trains: Harnessing diversity for global success

By kturner

Good Ideas We Are Watching

When it comes to communication, Thales Canada knows a lot. Be it delivering urban rail signalling systems, avionics or military command and control systems to customers at home and around the world. The company also knows that when 90% of your business is outside Canada, a multilingual workforce is an obvious asset.

Thales put this knowledge into action in Toronto, one of three locations in Canada for the French multinational firm and global leader in electronic systems. Toronto, the country’s largest city and business hub, is also one of the world’s most diverse cities demographically. “Diversity: Our Strength” is the city’s official motto.

“The talent pool in Toronto is a major advantage,” says Michael Mackenzie, Vice President, Ground Transportation Systems. “It definitely facilitates our success. Multi-million dollar global projects require sensitive negotiations and strong working relationships. With overseas clients in areas such as Asia and the Middle East, it is a competitive advantage for us to have staff who understand the customers’ cultures and values, and who can communicate in the local language. Being confident about customer comprehension is critical. Having these capabilities allows us to break down barriers, and more effectively understand and provide solutions that address the unique needs of our customers.”

Being able to converse in other languages is only the beginning.

Working with multicultural teams

In its Toronto office, half of Thales Canada’s high-skilled employees are immigrants, originating from over 29 countries and speaking over 30 languages among them. Seventy percent are engineers, with training and experience from all over the world.

Mackenzie believes that having a diverse workforce also helps Thales by building critical skills into the workplace culture where business solutions are often driven by collaborative problem-solving and teamwork. For example, at Thales global projects can be comprised of a consortium of suppliers where Thales develops the train control system while other companies provide the trains and infrastructure. Understanding how to work across and within multicultural teams is just as important as comprehending client needs.

Thales hires for skills first, and will often conduct interviews in a candidate’s native language, using employees who share that language to help assess a future colleague’s skills and experience. The phrase “Canadian experience” is seldom uttered, while international experience is welcomed and discussed in detail.

English language training isn’t about fitting in as much as expanding skill sets. The company also pays for professional memberships and offers tuition reimbursement to assist internationally experienced engineers work towards licensure.

Success

With immigrants in senior management roles, new immigrant hires are inspired by what’s possible at Thales. And with a retention rate of over 95%, it’s clear that immigrant employees are invested in a rewarding career with the company.

“Ultimately our business is selling and implementing safe solutions,” says Mackenzie. “Having a diverse staff that includes immigrants with international education and experience means that we’re able to develop and deliver those solutions more effectively and provide a higher level of customer satisfaction.”

Thales Canada’s efforts to better integrate skilled immigrants in the Greater Toronto Region labour market hasn’t gone unnoticed. Its Transportation business unit won the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council’s (TRIEC) annual RBC Immigrant Advantage Award for 2010.

In its submission, Thales Canada strongly associated a direct link between business success and skilled immigrant employees, and a high level of immigrant satisfaction with their level of employment.
Matchmaker, Matchmaker, Make Me a Match

By ktturner

December 19, 2013

In the past decades, the make-up of Amsterdam's population has changed, but not its civic leadership. Just over 50% of Amsterdam residents have a migrant background; yet the civic boards and advisory committees that makes decisions about so many city institutions and services do not reflect these changes. While this begs the question of whether this lack of representation can serve community interests, it also represents a lost opportunity to benefit from the diversity of perspective, culture and experience within the city’s population.

For residents and citizens with a migrant background, the boardrooms and decision tables of civic institutions are often neither accessible nor familiar spaces. Members of new or minority communities may not have forged the connections to social and professional networks that are often associated with these institutions. Figuring out how to open doors can be an enormous obstacle to entry let alone to sustained civic engagement.

For over a decade, addressing this issue has been the prime concern of the Atana network. Atana has developed a board matching service that recruits and trains professionals with a “double cultural background” to become board members, advisors and consultants within the cultural sector and local non-profit institutions. At Atana, people with a double cultural background are “people who are at home in the Netherlands, but are also rooted in one of its many other cultures.” The Atana network includes a range of backgrounds including people from Suriname, Turkey, the Dutch Antilles and Morocco. More importantly, they all bring much-needed professional skills, ranging from strategic management to marketing and communication to finance.

Recruiting, Training, Matching

Founded in 2000 and financed by the Dutch government, the Atana network was launched to help local civic and public institutions, agencies and organizations recruit new board and council members of diverse backgrounds. With demand for its services growing, in 2005, Atana teamed up with Binoq, a culture consultancy with a focus on cultural diversity, innovation, and research and consultancy, to bring professional management to their highly successful operation.

Components of the Binoq Atana program include selection, training, matching and networking. The selection process favours applicants with skill sets needed on boards, such as finance, legal, marketing and communications, management and HR experience. Once accepted into the program, Atana members are brought together at quarterly networking events where prominent speakers share their insights about politics, culture, the social sector or industry.

Critical to the program’s success is the governance training that is provided to all participants. Through a mix of training sessions, lectures, case studies and on-site visits, members of the Atana network learn about the Dutch cultural sector, managerial skills, and diversity. In depth case studies form the basis for group training in public administration. Atana learners also get to shadow professionals at work and meet with the directors and chairs of a variety of cultural institutions.

Success

Since its founding, Atana has held over 20 rounds of training to its roster of board candidates, and successfully made over 350 matches to boards and advisory councils, including major cultural institutions such as the Dutch Dance Theatre, the National Ballet, and the International Theatre Festival.

Success travels fast. The project has expanded to Maastricht, Hofstad and Lelystad and other cities in the Netherlands. In 2013, the city of The Hague also started a program with a focus on the education sector. It has grown to include other services such as a database of volunteers as well as consultants. Volunteers have been placed with the Dutch Heart Foundation, Amnesty International (Amsterdam), and Dutch Migration Institute while consultants have worked with the Council for Culture and the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts.

Atana is one of many organizations that focus on improving governance diversity. Toronto’s DiverseCity onBoard is another example. A winner of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and BMW Group’s Intercultural Innovation Award, it has been able to introduce its model in Canada, the United States and Europe.
All Parisians, All Citizens

By kturner
November 28, 2013

Political participation as a means of integrating migrants

Shortly after coming to power in 2001, Paris Mayor Betrand Delanoë found an ingenious way of circumventing the law that excludes non-EU citizens from the right to vote at municipal elections. He did so by setting up an advisory council made up of non-EU Parisians that could act as an intermediary channel between these residents and municipal leaders. Aiming for balanced representation, the Council membership ensured gender and age balance, as well as the regional representation of the citizens' countries of origin.

Under the motto, “All Parisians, All Citizens” (“Tous Parisiens, tous citoyens”), the Council advises the Mayor on issues that were of particular relevance to life in Paris for migrants and non-nationals. In its first 10 years, Council activities focused on a wide range of topics, including campaigning for the right of non-EU citizens to vote at local elections, ensuring adequate housing for migrant workers as well as improving public transportation at night, since the majority of the bus and metro users are migrant workers who tend to work outside traditional working hours, and often live far from the city centre or their place of employment.

Citizenship of residence versus citizenship of nationality

Paris’ Citizens Council was originally meant to be a temporary measure put in place until the right to vote for third country nationals was legislated. Although voting rights have been a political commitment of successive Socialist governments in France since the 1980s, it has yet to be implemented and is regarded by some politicians as contrary to the principles of the French Republic which enshrine individual rights over that of la collectivité (community). While the Citizens Council may challenge the traditional link between citizenship and nationality by promoting the concept of a citizenship of residence, the Assembly is part of a wider trend by the Mayor to improve participatory structures at the municipal level and is one of a series of councils (local residents councils, youth councils, etc) that highlights the Mayor’s intention to increase direct participation of people in decision-making at City Hall:

“Our city’s identity should not be reduced to an origin, a religion, or a territory – but should rather be associated with the notion of tolerance, justice and generosity.” Bertrand Delanoë

(“L’identité de notre ville, n’est pas réductible à une origine, à une religion, à un territoire – elle correspond à une idée de la tolérance, de la justice et de la générosité” Bertrand Delanoë)

Success

The success of the Mayors’s Citizens Council resulted in a majority of Parisian districts (arrondissements) taking the decision to set up their own local councils. To consolidate this widening base of community support, in 2011, the Paris Mayor decided to restructure the Council into an Assembly made up of representatives of the local district councils. With the local branches comes a diversity of perspective and recommendations for action on a wide range of local issues, making the Assembly more effective and more useful to the Mayor as a conduit of the interests and needs of his constituents, including the non-EU nationals that call Paris home.

In the 20th district for instance, the local authority has taken on board many of the Assembly’s suggestions, including the organization of an annual fair on the theme of “a mixed and secular Republic” (Fête de la République laïque et métissée), and the publication of a welcome guide for newly arrived migrants in Paris, translated in six languages. “Some of our suggestions have even been voted by the municipal council” says Yoba proudly.

Today, the Assembly remains a consultative body, with the power to influence decision-making rather than to execute any real power. However, it carries the weight of mayoral voice, the will of the people and offers a good platform to advocate for the right to vote for non-EU citizens, sending a strong signal to the 10% of non-EU Parisians that their issues and voices are taken into account.
Anonymous Job Applications Help Overcome Hiring Biases

By kturner

Employment Inclusion Municipal

Do hiring managers really need to know how old a job applicant is, or if she has children? What about where the applicant was born or what he looks like? Anonymous job applications, which exclude personal information that is not related to an applicant’s qualifications or experience, are one way that leading employers are trying to focus on choosing the best person for the job.

Various forms of anonymous job application procedures have been tried in many places around the world, including in the public sector – for example, in the local governments of Helsinki (Finland) and Gothenburg (Sweden). Both Canada and Belgium prohibit the inclusion of personal information on applications for public sector jobs. And it is a particularly welcome innovation in German cities.

In Germany, job applicants traditionally list a number of personal characteristics in their applications that are not related to their qualifications, such as place and date of birth, nationality, and marital status. In addition, it is common practice to attach a photo, which makes characteristics like race, gender and age quite obvious to potential employers.

In 2010-11, the city of Celle was one of eight public and private sector employers that took part in a pilot project initiated by the federal government’s Office Against Discrimination. The pilot project aimed to test how anonymous job application procedures could reduce biases in hiring.

Previous research conducted by the Office Against Discrimination indicated that bias in hiring was most likely to happen in the initial stages of the hiring process. Often, a brief glance at an applicant’s name, gender or age was enough for human resources staff to discard an application. In particular, these biases affected people with a migrant background, women with children, and older workers. This confirmed studies conducted in other countries showing that employers are influenced by these types of biases.

The pilot therefore focused on the initial stage of hiring – the job application.

During the pilot, the participating employers tried a variety of methods to try to prevent these biases from influencing the review of applications – including blacking out personal details such as name, age, gender, and marital/family status, or using standardized application forms developed for the project. In the end, using standardized forms proved to be the most efficient method.

“The anonymous application process means that whether you will be invited for an interview depends only on your qualifications and not looks, gender, age or background,” says Christine Lüders, head of the federal government’s Office Against Discrimination.

Indeed, this pilot showed results similar to those conducted in other parts of the world – ethnic minorities and women are demonstrably more likely to be invited to an interview.

“I was skeptical at first,” says Jockel Birkholz, the head of Celle’s human resources department. But he admits, “In the traditional process, I glanced at the photo, the CV, the marital status – there were biases despite all attempts at objectivity.”

Anonymous job application procedures are being credited with improving the hiring process. Mayor of Celle, Dirk-Ulrich Mende says, “We are now looking more at qualifications during the hiring process. This is the case for both leadership and apprenticeship positions. Many people who we’ve hired [with anonymous job applications] wouldn’t have been chosen before. And all of them have succeeded.”

It has been embraced by the human resources department, which finds the process more efficient. The standardized application forms make it easier for human resources staff to review the applications. “We can narrow down the candidates faster because we concentrate on a few important criteria,” explains Birkholz. This has become increasingly important as the city is often flooded with job applicants. Mayor Mende believes this is because the anonymous procedures have helped the city improve its reputation as a good employer.

The pilot was so successful that the city of Celle decided to continue using anonymous application procedures after the pilot ended. And this good idea has now spread to Göttingen, Hannover, Mainz, Mannheim, Offenbach and Nürnberg and to eight German states.

“The anonymous application process clearly leads to more transparency, objectivity, and equal chances during the decision-making phase and is an important building block towards a workplace without discrimination. We will continue with this process,” pledged Mayor Mende.
Youth Employment Drives Diversity Goals

By ktturner

Employment Inclusion Municipal

City managers in Cologne, Germany were puzzled. Apart from demographic changes, they noticed a significant drop in the number of applications for jobs in the city’s public service, one of the largest employers in the region. Recognizing the diversity of their increasingly multicultural city, the city managers and HR training personnel flagged the issue of recruiting young people “with a migrant background” into the civil service training programs as an important objective for Cologne’s future. Taking up the business case for diversity became a welcome driver in the city’s commitment to increase intercultural openness.

Since almost 50% of Cologne’s youth have a migrant background, it was important that this message reached them and their families. For the most part, young people are not aware of the range of career options available in public service. However, the youth recruitment issue was addressed by an innovative support program introduced by the city in 2007 and it’s been a great success so far. There has been a steady increase in the number of trainees with a migrant background, and by 2012 they accounted for 34.5% of all newly recruited staff. This roughly reflected the composition of Cologne’s population.

Starting with 22 youths, the pilot “Integration of Youths with a Migrant Background in City of Cologne Programs” was kicked off in 2008 as part of the EQUAL Communities Initiative funded by the European Social Fund (2000-2008) to address employment inequalities. The core components of the program include targeted, individual supervision; the elimination of language deficits; and an initial assessment of training needs. Applicants have the opportunity to prove themselves in a six-month trial period across a wide range of vocational fields. Each placement is formalized in advance with a Letter of Intent between the Cologne Job Centre and the City of Cologne to ensure that, wherever possible, these young people are recruited from unemployment benefit programs such as ALGII (U 25). The Job Centre covers the cost of living (via Basic Security Benefits for Job Seekers SGBII) during the trial period.

Tailored solutions

Following a successful qualifying test and orientation assessment, the applicants are offered a six-month practicum and then receive help in finding a job that suits them. For some it’s customer service, for others traffic control. The choices are broad enough to meet every interest.

In addition to technical and vocational training, academic classes are held once a week at the Rheinisches Studieninstitut für kommunale Verwaltung (Rhone Institute of Municipal Administration Studies). Here, the emphasis is above all on German language proficiency, an essential workplace competency. Other subject areas include administrative and municipal (public) law and legislation, as well as organizational management, decision-making and essential social and communication skills. Weekly lessons also include sessions tailored to individual learning needs on topics ranging from self-help to conflict resolution.

“What is also especially encouraging is the number of young people who no longer have to rely on ALGII support thanks to entering training measures offered by the City of Cologne,” says Beate Blüggel, Director of the Regionale Arbeitsstelle zur Förderung von Kindern und Jugendlichen aus Zuwandererfamilien (RAA – Regional Section for the Support of Children and Youth from Immigrant Families) and Managing Director of the Zentrum für Mehrsprachigkeit und Integration (ZMI – Centre for Multilingualism and Integration). In 2011, out of 19 participants, 10 young people were taken on for training as office administrators; another as a surveying technician, and another as a road maintenance worker. Not every trainee continues with the city but all benefit from the training experience, including the city of Cologne. “While the young migrants get the opportunity to prove themselves in the profession of their choice during the six-month practicums, Cologne, as a multicultural city, can gain from the language potential and knowledge of cultural backgrounds that the young migrants are able to provide,” says Beate Blüggel.

Putting language skills in context

Intensive public relations activities and outreach ensure public awareness of the recruitment project. Project co-ordinators work with job centres, vocational officers at schools, through community and intercultural centres and with parents. Presentations and promotional activities target vocational orientation sessions, training exchanges and trade fairs as well as other events run by the City of Cologne’s Council on Integration Affairs.

Although migrant status is declared on a strictly voluntary basis, Cologne’s Human Resources Department has been developing testing procedures for applicants with a migrant background since 2005. Vocational assessments are made independent of language proficiency testing since many applicants are still in the process of learning German. Instead, results are adjusted for the “average increase” in language proficiency that can be expected by the end of the training program. “In this manner, our assessment compensates for disadvantages arising from migration itself, whatever the language skills. We are currently assessing whether the entry requirements can be opened even further,” says Ina Beate Fohlmeister, former Director of the City of Cologne’s Intercultural Department.

Success

In addition to the special focus of the project “Integration of Youths with a Migrant Background in City of Cologne Programs,” large numbers of young Germans with migrant background also apply to the city’s youth training programs in the “conventional” way. Out of 4,085 applicants in 2011, 1,103 were submitted by young Germans with a migrant background, accounting for 27% of all applications. Of special note is a steady increase in the training rate among migrants, rising from 29.5% in 2010 to 30.4% in 2011 and 34.5% in 2012. Maybe this is the secret to the program’s success; it builds awareness and sends a message about inclusion however one chooses to apply to the city’s training programs.

In 2007, Cologne became the first municipality to sign the “Charta der Vielfalt” (European Charter of Diversity), an initiative led by four major German enterprises, Daimler, Deutsche Bank, Deutsche BP and Deutsche Telekom, to promote diversity in businesses and create a work environment free of prejudice. By becoming a signatory to the charter, Cologne has declared its commitment to promoting integration and diversity at all levels, ages and backgrounds. Programs like Cologne’s youth employment initiative are putting good policy to work.
The Dilemma Workshop

By ktuner
October 31, 2013

Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal New Gateways

A teenager takes his younger sister to the library. The librarian looks at him, sees his Middle Eastern background and wonders whether the girl is "oppressed." The siblings pick up on the tension as they check out books. Has the librarian rushed to judgment? Has the library ceased to be a comfortable place for them?

This "intercultural dilemma" is the kind of experience discussed within an innovative workshop model designed for city staff in Botkyrka, a district within the larger municipal region of Stockholm.

Botkyrka is Sweden's most ethnically diverse municipality, with the highest percentages of first and second generation immigrants in the country. More than 50% of Botkyrka's population has roots outside of Sweden. In one neighbourhood, 90% of inhabitants come from a migrant-origin background. The urban-rural split in the region's diversity is especially striking, "so different and distant that they might as well be on different planets."

These disparities became a matter of concern to Botkyrka's civic leadership when they learned that many residents with a migrant background did not identify with Botkyrka as "home" but as a "place of transit." Overcoming this divide was essential to the district's future outlook. The city needed an integrated strategy that respected diversity and could ensure that all Botkyrka residents felt part of the same community and could work together to realize its vision of equality and respect for cultural difference.

Essential to the success of the workshop is the ability of the facilitator to provide a trusting environment. Participants need to be able to speak freely about situations they have experienced where misunderstandings, biases or prejudices may have had a negative impact on communication with colleagues or the public. Without that sense of safety, there is no opportunity for learning and growth.

"One of the keys to the success of the dilemma workshop is to create trust, and an environment where people can share their experiences without feeling like 'I am not good.'"

Playing games with intercultural intelligence

The Botkyrka Intercultural Strategy's first goal was to incorporate a non-discriminatory and intercultural approach as a core competency for district managers and employees. To make sure the strategy was understood within the civil service, the district offered "Intercultural Dilemma Workshops" where participants could analyze situations of intercultural conflict and learn how to overcome them. The aim is to break down stereotypes and accept differences within the workplace while developing the intercultural 'intelligence' needed to respond appropriately to one's own implicit bias in new or unexpected situations.

Yet introducing interculturalism would be no easy matter. One of Botkyrka's challenges was to translate its aspirations into an action plan that could deliver results. A 15-year plan was developed with short- and long-term goals at each five-year marker. Importantly, the plan begins with the city government itself. As first responders and service delivery agents, the district's administration employees and managers had to buy into the intercultural strategy in order to apply it effectively. City authorities recognized it is one thing to introduce an intercultural approach and another to have residents and civic employees understand it.

"One of the goals of the Intercultural Strategy is to narrow, and not increase, the distance between people with immigrant backgrounds and people with traditional Swedish backgrounds," says Helena Rojas, Director, Division for Democracy, Human Rights & Intercultural Development.

Success

From the individual employee and section head to the wider organization and public, the intercultural workshop aims to develop a continuous support structure that results in systemic change. "The individual always has responsibility [for him- or herself] but the district also has a responsibility to support the individual. That's the Dilemma Workshop. We have an expectation from our employees," says Rojas, "You can't bring your preconceived ideas about people to work." For Rojas, this means finding ways for the librarian to understand her biases. Botkyrka's Dilemma Workshops offer city employees a trusted space and trained professionals with whom to build the intercultural awareness and competencies they need to do their job.

"We have an expectation from our employees," says Rojas, "You can't bring your preconceived ideas about people to work." For Rojas, this means finding ways for the librarian to understand her biases. Botkyrka’s Dilemma Workshops offer city employees a trusted space and trained professionals with whom to build the intercultural awareness and competencies they need to do their job.

Launching in mid-2011 across all eight divisions of the public service, each half-day Dilemma Workshop begins with an introduction to the concept of interculturality. The main exercise is to discuss a number of real-life case studies from within municipal departments, including examples offered by participants themselves. Participants are placed into groups where they are encouraged to walk through the case study scenario or describe their own experience, and then analyze and discuss how intercultural skills, or a lack thereof, affects the outcome. Next, workshop facilitators help participants look at the impact of "structural conditions," such as language barriers, cultural differences or institutional culture on the situation as well as explain what needs to change for the situation to improve. The aim is to create a safe space for intercultural learning that includes room for debate on the pros and cons of different solutions.

The question governing any proposed solution is: how will this outcome reflect on Botkyrka and its institutional culture on the situation as well as explain what needs to change for the situation to improve. The aim is to create a safe space for intercultural learning that includes room for debate on the pros and cons of different solutions.

"One of the keys to the success of the dilemma workshop is to create trust, and an environment where people can share their experiences without feeling like 'I am not good.' You have to create that atmosphere for people to tell their stories and not be ashamed of these things," says Rojas.

Essential to the success of the workshop is the ability of the facilitator to provide a trusting environment. Participants need to be able to speak freely about situations they have experienced where misunderstandings, biases or prejudices may have had a negative impact on communication with colleagues or the public. Without that sense of safety, tough questions and issues, such as the case of the library encounter, would remain unanswered.

The Botkyrka Intercultural Strategy's first goal was to incorporate a non-discriminatory and intercultural approach as a core competency for district managers and employees. To make sure the strategy was understood within the civil service, the district offered "Intercultural Dilemma Workshops" where participants could analyze situations of intercultural conflict and learn how to overcome them. The aim is to break down stereotypes and accept differences within the workplace while developing the intercultural 'intelligence' needed to respond appropriately to one's own implicit bias in new or unexpected situations.

"We have an expectation from our employees," says Rojas, "You can't bring your preconceived ideas about people to work." For Rojas, this means finding ways for the librarian to understand her biases. Botkyrka’s Dilemma Workshops offer city employees a trusted space and trained professionals with whom to build the intercultural awareness and competencies they need to do their job.

"One of the keys to the success of the dilemma workshop is to create trust, and an environment where people can share their experiences without feeling like 'I am not good.' You have to create that atmosphere for people to tell their stories and not be ashamed of these things," says Rojas.

Success

From the individual employee and section head to the wider organization and public, the intercultural workshop aims to develop a continuous support structure that results in systemic change. "The individual always has responsibility [for him- or herself] but the district also has a responsibility to support the individual. That's the Dilemma Workshop.

Everyone has a share of the responsibility,” says Rojas.

In the case of the librarian, the department was able to start a working group where employees could bring such issues up for discussion with colleagues. The Dilemma Workshops have proven to be one the key tools to incorporate interculturalism within the district government: 12 workshops have already been held within 8 departments. Botkyrka’s Dilemma Workshop model has been recognized as a best practice by the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities program.
Enter the St. Louis Mosaic Project

On June 19, 2012, the 18-member St. Louis Regional Immigration and Innovation Steering Committee was launched, representing a diverse mix of regional business, civic, economic development and academic leaders. A year later, vision and action came together as the St. Louis Mosaic Project, under the slogan, “Regional prosperity through immigration & innovation.”

Engaging the local business community and helping them understand the value of diversity is key to making the Mosaic Project a success. “Few St. Louis organizations provide services targeted at the local business community. This includes both services directed at helping local business hire immigrants and services to help immigrant entrepreneurs. This is a key area to attract and retain immigration. Efforts to increase services in this area could be tied to efforts to retain foreign-born college students by assisting local businesses in the process of sponsoring work visas and internships.”

Getting the local population on board would be equally important. So far, the project that has done most to generate enthusiasm among the local population is the Mosaic Ambassadors. The Mosaic Ambassadors Program is a low key but high impact strategy for better educating and connecting immigrants with native-born St. Louisians. Ambassadors are citizens who make a simple commitment to share information, visit at least three immigrant restaurants or businesses in the area and, importantly, make that important message of welcome real by inviting a new immigrant home for dinner. Other Ambassadors operate “pop-up” sites at local corporations with large numbers of immigrant employees where they promote St. Louis’ welcoming and integration services and distribute helpful information.

The appeal of the Ambassadors has been magical. Within weeks of its announcement in June 2013, hundreds of St. Louisans had expressed an interest in participating. Mosaic surpassed its initial goal of recruiting 50 Ambassadors with over 200 applications in the first three weeks.

Welcoming Cities Initiative

Immigrants “create opportunities and make the pie bigger,” said Betsy Cohen, project director. “We need to look at things we can do as a community. We need to become more welcoming and figure out all the points we need to connect services and resources so that when people come here they can immediately plug in.”

While Mosaic Ambassadors roll out the welcome mat and explore the contribution of immigrants within the local population, St. Louis is laying the important groundwork for its Welcoming Initiative, a campaign to recruit and retain immigrants with a clear message about services and opportunities in St. Louis. Building an inclusive community model has been a priority from the outset, according to Betsy Cohen: “Hundreds of immigrants have also been sought out for their input and assistance in achieving the St. Louis Mosaic Project’s goals. Project staff and members are highly visible at local meetings, social gatherings, and with the media to share the St. Louis Mosaic Project’s story and goal.”

Insight from local experts was available from the beginning, but learning from other cities is an essential part of their plan for success. Strauss was commissioned to identify immigrant ‘welcoming’ and integration best practices elsewhere and to offer recommendations for St. Louis immigrant population growth. The St. Louis City Mayor and St. Louis County Executive have also signed on to the Welcoming Cities and Counties network run by the national Welcoming America.

Charting a path to future prosperity

Mosaic is also tapping into good ideas from outside the country. The highly successful Halifax Connector Program, developed by the Greater Halifax Partnership and replicated in cities across Canada, has been identified for Mosaic’s ongoing work to bring business and new immigrants together.

Access to employment is the number one concern for new immigrants, and a significant strand of St. Louis’ Mosaic strategy. A Career-Path initiative, initially focused on health and engineering sectors, is underway to support labour market integration of immigrants to the St. Louis region.

There is also a special focus on retaining international students in St. Louis, a valuable asset in this high density educational corridor. Betsy Cohen: “We have thousands of talented international students from all over the world at our top institutions. Keeping these students will add both talent and cultural diversity to our community. One program announced recently has our Regional Business Council of company leaders opening their influential Mentor program to international students for the first time. In the new [mentoring] class, 11 of the 136 students are international to help them connect with local leaders so we can retain them.”

Early successes

Mosaic’s early successes include the support of the Mayor’s office and city executive, recruitment of top public and private leaders, blending of business and social justice priorities without one being sacrificed for the other, financial commitment of seed funds from St. Louis County to hire project staff with other project funding from other regional sources, and major, substantial and sustained local and national media coverage.

We asked Betsy Cohen for the secret to Mosaic’s success. She didn’t hesitate: first, the evidence that makes for a believable vision, and then leadership for the passion it inspires about getting the job done.
Operation Black Vote

By ktturner

October 9, 2013

Good Ideas Archive

Civic Inclusion Political Inclusion

Ever looked at your political leaders and thought how far they are from representing diverse populations? In the UK, just 4% of the national Members of Parliament (MPs) and local councillors originate from an ethnic minority background, despite minorities making up 14% of the wider population. The absence of ethnic minority leaders is common across other areas of public life too, including in local policing, education and the voluntary sector.

But Kacey Akpoteni’s experience suggests that, with a helping hand, people from ethnic minority backgrounds can leap forward to be local and national leaders.

A resident of Birmingham, Akpoteni had always been interested in playing a leading role in her local community. But it wasn’t until she joined the newly launched West Midlands Civic Leadership Program in her neighbourhood, that she received a fast-track education in the road ahead to becoming a local leader.

To become a councillor or local official, she would need to hone practical skills such as budgeting and political administration, as well as build professional networks. As an ethnic minority woman, she would probably need to work twice as hard to overcome the barriers she was likely to face. Luckily for Akpoteni, the six-month Civic Leadership Program aimed to give her a head start towards ultimately achieving her goals.

School for Civics

Operation Black Vote (OBV) launched the West Midlands Civic Leadership Programme in April 2013. Founded in 1996, OBV has long-standing experience of running projects to support democratic participation among ethnic minorities. Its recent work builds on the past work of running shadowing and mentoring schemes to include practical skills training aimed at giving participants an even better chance of success.

For OBV Deputy Director Francine Fernandes, the Civic Leadership Programme tackles an important set of issues: “The UK population is set to be increasingly diverse, and we have to make sure that our civic leadership reflects that. There have been so many barriers in the past, but OBV’s work shows that when minorities are supported to step forward in public life they can really challenge the gap in representation.”

The Civic Leadership Programme works by introducing 40 potential ethnic minority leaders in Wolverhampton and Birmingham to the reality of public life in four main areas over a six month period:

- politics (through placements with local councillors);
- education (school governors);
- the criminal justice system (Safer Neighbourhood Teams); and
- the community sector (charity trustees).

Participants shadow officials for up to ten days over the course of six months, supported by additional practical training provided by OBV and by mentoring support to regularly assess their progress.

Fernandes explains: “We set up the program through a tried and tested methodology, selecting 40 outstanding individuals from an open call for applications. Now the program is nearly finished, we’ve been thrilled by the early feedback. One Birmingham councilor who worked with two of our participants described them as “exactly the quality of individuals which civic governance requires [and]... a model for every aspirational civic leadership model that there could be.”

A promising future

So how has Kacey Akpoteni found the Civic Leadership Program since she began in April 2013? She has shadowed a local councilor, sat in on committee hearings and meetings, and received training aimed at accelerating her learning. Akpoteni has already been appointed to sit on a major local funding committee and plans to stand as a council candidate in the next local elections.

Reflecting on her experience so far, Akpoteni says, “So far a lot of ‘myths’ have been busted for me about civic leadership in the UK. I’m certainly going further in civic life after the program. Ethnic minorities aiming to enter politics need to step up to the plate.”

Success Ahead

The first session of the West Midlands Civic Leadership Program finished in October 2013; its impact is to be evaluated after that. Outcomes from previous OBV civic leadership schemes across the UK suggest that it will have impressive results. A 2012 OBV scheme similar to the Civic Leadership Program in London saw 50% of participants taking on a leadership role within their community within six months of completing the program.

OBV had a similar result with its MP Shadowing Scheme, launched in 1999 in partnership with the Department for Communities and Local Government to promote the importance of increasing the low levels of BME representation in parliament and local authorities. The Scheme has produced over a dozen councillors, MP’s assistants and its first MP, Helen Grant.

Equally important, many of these “shadows” have moved on to local constituency offices and community centres around the country to play an important role as Parliamentary Ambassadors helping to raise awareness amongst BME communities about the value and importance of positive engagement in democratic institutions. Programs like these...
are giving emerging young leaders like Kacey Akpoteni the tools she needs to promote the fundamental benefits of an equal and representative governing body to all communities.

The success of OBV’s civic leadership programs has attracted numerous political awards including the Local Government Chronicle Award, the Channel 4 Political Award and the Ebony Business Recognition Award.
A little girl received her free eye glasses this fall at a school in Scarborough. Before placing the glasses on the child, the optician asked, “What do you see out the window?” The little girl replied, “I see a tree.” After fitting her glasses, the optician asked, “Now, what do you see?” The little girl almost shrieked, “Oh! I see leaves and their different colours! I see the tree trunk! And, oh, I see a bird. Look! I see a bird in that tree!” She promptly hugged the optician and the school community support worker, and began to dance!

One six-year-old boy stopped at the doorway of the hearing screening room, “Do my parents have to pay for this?” he said with his hands up in front of him in a “stop” gesture. “No? Well, okay then, I’ll sit in your chair.”

Families in high needs neighbourhoods, many of them newcomers, often find it difficult to access health care for their children. Barriers include a lack of medical insurance coverage, lack of accessible transportation, inability for parents to take time off from work, lack of family financial resources to follow interventions prescribed by health care providers, and a lack of confidence in navigating the health care system due to cultural and language barriers.

This means many children may be going to school with undiagnosed and untreated health issues that prevent them from learning to the best of their ability.
Travelling Clinics

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the largest school board in Canada, serving approximately 260,000 elementary and secondary students; 75 languages are represented in approximately 600 schools. Teachers, principals and parents had already raised concerns about the pressing need to help students who did not have access to health care resources that directly impacted their school day. This led to the establishment of a pilot project which checked the eyesight and hearing of students in the TDSB’s Parenting and Family Literacy Centres.

Through the TDSB’s charitable foundation, Toronto Foundation for Student Success (TFSS), financial and in-kind supports were secured from philanthropists and private institutions to allow the program, now called the Sprott Asset Management Gift of Sight and Sound, to be expanded to help tens of thousands of students in low-income communities. Parents are notified that their child has been identified as having a possible vision or hearing problem to facilitate further examination by a specialist. Follow up procedures are set up so students can receive appropriate care and be given free glasses and hearing aids as required.

Critical to the program’s success is the use of on site clinics at individual schools. At first, students and families were expected to obtain further services, eye wear and hearing devices on their own, but only 50% obtained the appropriate follow-up. In the case of visiting specialists such as audiologists, fewer than 10% of families referred made it to the downtown clinic due to transportation and language barriers. The introduction of extra clinics in schools has resulted in 90% of children receiving the eye glasses and hearing aids they require.

“This is a fantastic initiative to help level the playing field for our inner city children in order to help them reach their full potential,” explains one teacher. “Students have access to formal eye exams and the opportunity to receive a free pair of glasses. Parents are grateful for the early detection and feel that their child’s medical needs are supported. They also are learning to navigate the Canadian health system.”

Accreditation and work experience for new Canadians

Health care professionals from the Canadian Hearing Society and immigrant doctors who are seeking accreditation in Canada travel between schools to hold clinics. Donors help pay the cost of the clinics and even fund the costs of the doctors.

Six International Medical Graduates (IMG) are currently part of the program – each one able to provide 100 vision screening clinics. Not only can they obtain valuable Canadian experience, they act as role models to newcomer students.

Success

This integrated initiative has delivered a key service to a vulnerable population in a trusted part of their local community: the local neighbourhood school. What’s more, students who had been identified with a history of low academic performance or had been referred to Special Education programs were able to be enrolled into “regular” mainstream classrooms.

Over the past several years, over 45,000 students in high priority neighbourhood schools, from junior kindergarten to Grade 12, have received selected vision and hearing procedures in the school locations. Next steps for the project include procuring universal screening, inspiring policy change and obtain permanent, stable funding. The TDSB is requesting government funding for a three-year vision and hearing screening clinics program at all its Model Schools for Inner Cities which serve up to 60,000 students.

The Gift of Sight and Sound project has paid other dividends including a better understanding of the barriers to health care facing students and families in inner city neighbourhoods. Over 80% of children in need of another hearing assessment did not have a family doctor while 11.5% of children were without a valid health insurance card. A new pilot project at the TDSB, the Model Schools Pediatric Health Initiative, now aims to introduce medical clinics in priority neighbourhood schools.

In 2010, the Gift of Sight and Sound received the CBC Toronto Vision Award for Immigrant Inclusion in recognition for employing international doctors – by giving them Canadian experience for accreditation and providing alternative careers in healthcare.
Fit for Finance

By kturner
September 25, 2013
Financial Inclusion Municipal

With research reporting that the average German was less financially-savvy than the country's robust economy might suggest, local authorities in Offenbach seized a unique opportunity to host an innovative financial literacy project called (f)in-fit – Fit for Finance.

Aimed at an often neglected population, the Offenbach project recruited and trained motivated Germans with migrant backgrounds as intercultural mediators who could help educate and guide others in the community on financial matters and improve their chances on the labour market.

Finding the right fit

Located in Germany’s industrial heartland, Offenbach is one of the most diverse cities in the country (30% with migrant background), and growing. Germany’s well-maintained socio-economic data provides ample evidence that immigrants and Germans with migrant background are often over-represented in the low income or low education groups most vulnerable to financial exclusion. According to Evers & Jung, a Hamburg-based research company, Germans with a migrant background are more likely to be "unbanked," or less likely to make use of financial services, including the use of cash cards, online banking and term deposits.

In 2006, city leaders in Offenbach embraced (f)in-fit knowing the region’s future prosperity could ill afford the social and economic cost of leaving this group behind. With the support of city council, the (f)in-fit financial education project was launched as a pilot in the Offenbach region led by Evers & Jung, with funding from the Levi Strauss Foundation (San Francisco). Because many financial literacy projects fail to reach the groups most vulnerable to financial exclusion, Evers & Jung wisely reached out to community-based Ethno-Medizinische Zentrum e.V. (EMZ) in Hanover for help replicating its award-winning MiMi (“With Migrants for Migrants”) concept, which was originally developed to promote prevention and education in healthcare using a mediator approach. The (f)in-fit pilot adapted the MiMi model, aiming to build a financial literacy campaign based on training members of the target community as mediators who could provide knowledgeable guidance and advice on banking, access to credit and related financial products and services.

Importantly, (f)in-fit’s community-based mediators were able to provide information in the client’s first language, often a significant barrier to accessing mainstream financial services. Sharing a common ethnocultural background also meant that the financial mediators possessed the intercultural competencies that help establish trust and comfortable, open communication.

In Offenach, the (f)in-fit pilot was tailored to the specific needs of the Russian and Turkish community, the largest groups within the city's migrant community. Says Ahmet Kansiz, a mediator in the (f)in-fit project: "We know where we can reach our countrymen best, we speak their language and we are aware of their cultural background. The chance that we can motivate them to take part in a community group session is therefore very high.”

The (f)in-fit mediators received 50 hours of training delivered by high skilled financial professionals from the partner region. A financial literacy curriculum covered topics ranging from banking, saving and credit to insurance and pensions. Trainees received a specially-developed handbook on private finance for migrants (PDF), which was also available in Turkish and Russian.

Beyond the training of intercultural financial mediators, the (f)in-fit project aimed to reach a target audience of young migrants within a community-based environment and to develop instruments for measuring community outcomes. Critical to the program’s success was not only the involvement of regional financial service providers, businesses and banks, but also increased awareness within this group of new and emerging needs for financial education and services within the community.

Success

While the (f)in-fit project failed to realize its goal to spearhead a county-wide, broad-based multilingual franchise, Offenbach’s vision of a financial literacy campaign using cultural mediators for a “multiplier” effect remains a compelling model that merits further study.

The evaluation of the pilot program’s mediator training sessions gave strong evidence that the motivation of the participants was very high. All 17 of the mediators trained were very proud to be part of this project and felt that the project had strongly contributed to their personal development.

“I feel a strong will in me to share what I learnt about finance with others. In my daily life I experience that many friends of mine don’t know much about financial matters and keep on making expensive mistakes,” says Ahmet Kansiz. It is important that something is done about that.”

The (f)in-fit project was recognized as a best practice in financial literacy coaching in the 2007 Survey of Financial Literacy Schemes In The Eu 27.
The Youth Ambassador Project

By ktturner

Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, Social Inclusion

A mayor, a boxer and a bishop walk into a hip-hop video…. It sounds like the beginning of a joke. But, in the Belgian city of Ghent, it’s the culmination of the city’s exceptional efforts to create a welcoming and inclusive city. Launched in celebration of Ghent’s Day against Racism campaign, the video is only one part of the city’s 10-point action plan to eliminate racism and discrimination. An innovative Youth Ambassador project is also helping move the city strategy forward.

A history of integration

Ghent’s modern-day prosperity owes much to its industrial past and the waves of immigrants that have helped fuel the city’s growth. According to Marc Van Acker, of Ghent’s Integration Office, “Ghent has always tried to promote itself as a hospitable city offering opportunities to migrants who find themselves within its boundaries. This city policy is both a translation of and a catalyst for a very vivid civil society that supports this idea of Ghent being a warm and welcoming city. So there is this kind of almost historical inclination to being an inclusive city.”

Today, Ghent is home to over 150 nationalities. Municipal leaders recognize that “good integration of these newcomers into society is very important” and work actively to ensure that Ghent continues to be successful and can be a model of integration to others.

This includes current programs like Making Integration Work in Ghent, which pairs newcomers with local coaches to facilitate their integration. A commitment to doing integration well also means being prepared to look outside its own city walls. In September 2013, Ghent University convened an international research conference on issues of segregation and inequality in European and North American schools. Later in November, the city of Ghent hosts the EUROCITIES’ annual conference, themed ‘Smart citizens.’

And, then there is the Ambassador project.

Focus on youth

Since 2006 the City, through Gent, stad in werking’s (Ghent, city at work) Latent Talent project has been working to improve the local labour conditions of second and third generation immigrant youth. This approach focuses on much more than merely improving youth unemployment numbers. It means that their city is working to become a more inclusive place for all migrants and their families. Their long-term goal is to change local attitudes, stereotypes and perceptions.

According to Van Acker: “The Ambassador project is important on different levels. It tackles the many still widespread prejudices and misconceptions about migrants that linger among some of society’s important leading persons, such as teachers or employers. At the same time it is a strong motivator for young migrants who are all too often de-motivated or disappointed. Ambassadors make a plea to society to offer opportunities to migrants and to the latter [youth] to seize these opportunities. They are a constant reminder of the hard work that still has to be done. Paying lip service to the fight against racism is not enough.”

It’s a long-term vision to create a better, more prosperous city for all. The Ambassadors are a key part of this approach.

Who are the Ambassadors?
Ambassadors are immigrant youth volunteers who have overcome barriers and have found employment success. They share their stories about school and their rocky road to success in the labour market. And they don’t just talk to other youth like them. They present and dialogue with teachers, parents, employers and other organizations in the city. So far, they have spoken to over 3,200 people who are responding positively to the initiative:

“Each of these groups, each of the individuals in these groups can be important for the improvement of the situation of young migrants on the labour market. Young people need to be motivated not to give up, but to go to school and get at least a high school diploma. Meeting a role model from their own community – someone who is successful – is important… Parents have a responsibility towards their children… Teachers have a very important role towards their students… When employers/recruiters hear another story of success -despite all difficulties- they start to see the individual instead of the ‘migrant.’ Their image of the group improves, and in the future they will no longer see the ‘migrant’ but the individual person behind the stereotype.” (Ilse Neyrinck, Policy Advisor on Participation)

The Ambassadors program is a great example of working to enable youth voices to speak about their own experiences, challenges and success.

“Each of these groups, each of the individuals in these groups can be important for the improvement of the situation of young migrants on the labour market. Young people need to be motivated not to give up, but to go to school and get at least a high school diploma. Meeting a role model from their own community – someone who is successful – is important… Parents have a responsibility towards their children… Teachers have a very important role towards their students… When employers/recruiters hear another story of success -despite all difficulties- they start to see the individual instead of the ‘migrant.’ Their image of the group improves, and in the future they will no longer see the ‘migrant’ but the individual person behind the stereotype.” (Ilse Neyrinck, Policy Advisor on Participation)

The Ambassadors program is a great example of working to enable youth voices to speak about their own experiences, challenges and success.

“For them it is an enriching experience that enhances their social skills. They also get to know a lot of interesting people, partners,” says Neyrinck. “Thanks to this project, their social network is extended. The volunteers get individual coaching and we organize group meetings for them where experiences are shared and can be discussed.”

Success

In 2012, the project became part of the City of Ghent’s Office of Integration Services and is being promoted outside of the city. To enable successful replication of this good idea, the City has created curriculum focused on two ambassadors telling their own stories. It includes a series of exercises and assignments and a DVD with seven short films about the project. The original Gent, stad in werking project website has links to three of these videos.

For the city of Ghent, helping other communities see the value of being recognized as a welcoming city is essential for their future prosperity. As Marc Van Acker says: “Being recognized as a welcoming city is crucial for the development of any city. An open climate has throughout history proven to be a force of attraction for investors and innovators, be it social, cultural or economical.

This Good Idea will be featured in “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.
Career Bridge Internships a Win-Win for St. Michael's Hospital

By kturner
September 9, 2013
Employment Inclusion, Health Inclusion

When Mehmet Bahar started as a Career Bridge intern at Toronto's St. Michael's Hospital, he had no idea it would result in a job offer six months later.

A recent immigrant from Turkey with a Master of Engineering degree and project management certification, Mr. Bahar redesigned the hospital's environmental auditing process, which measures hospital cleanliness – from wards to kitchens to surgeries. The result? Improved communication between the hospital supervisors performing the audits and the employees responsible for cleaning the different areas. In three short months, the average audit score improved by 15%.

Because of his success on that project and others during his internship, as well as his education and training, the hospital offered him a six-month contract position as project manager in its environmental services department.

Bridging the skilled immigrant gap

Skilled immigrants are often at a disadvantage in the labour market. Their international work experience is undervalued. A 2005 Statistics Canada study shows that only 40% of skilled immigrants are working in the occupation or profession for which they were trained. This makes structured internships for skilled immigrants a particularly positive initiative with benefits for both employers and interns. Newcomer professionals prove themselves in a respectful and encouraging environment and gain the confidence to search for work in their fields. Employers facing a skills shortage find qualified candidates.

Since 2004, St. Michael’s Hospital has worked with Career Edge Organization to participate in its Career Bridge paid internship program for internationally educated professionals (IEP). Career Edge pre-screens applicants and ensures they have a mentor and a coach. All interns have at least a bachelor’s degree (assessed by a Canadian credentials evaluation agency) and three years of international work experience in their field.

The structured program is an attractive way to tap into diverse talent in a city where almost 50% of its population is born outside of Canada. This makes finding global talent a priority, explains Kevin Kirkpatrick, manager of recruitment at St. Michael's.

“Our executive vice presidents have a philosophy that they wanted to be supportive and reflective of our patient population,” he says. “When an EVP [executive vice president] says we’re going to commit and align resources to this program, that’s the true driver.”

Projects provide clear objectives to measure success

Each year the hospital sets aside funding for six to eight interns who are placed throughout the hospital. The paid internships range from four months to one year in length, though the majority of placements at St. Michael’s are four months long.

All the interns are assigned to at least one project for the duration of their internship. This ensures there are objective goals against which to measure the interns' progress and skills.

“We get really talented people through the program and we get a really good idea of their skills by the time the internship ends,” says Mr. Kirkpatrick. “It’s very much a win-win. The IEP gets access to Canadian work experience and we get access to strong candidates who can be considered for available positions.”

Launching new professionals

Since St. Michael's Hospital began working with the Career Bridge program, it has sponsored more than 45 internationally educated interns. About half were hired after their internships finished. The program has benefited the hospital by enhancing an important part of its human resources strategy: the recruitment and retention of internationally trained professionals.

"Managers and their teams get to work with a skilled professional with global experience that brings diversity, creativity and innovation to workplaces in Canada," says executive vice president and chief administrative officer John King. "For us, it improves access to learning experiences, while delivering great work. And we get more than our money’s worth from these individuals because they’re hard working, keen and driven to succeed."

Involving interns in the hospital’s general orientation program for all new employees has helped to ensure their success by making them feel part of the hospital community. Those who start at the beginning of the year can also take part in the hospital’s IEP Transition and Integration Program, which runs from January to June. This program was originally created in partnership with the Government of Ontario and Citizenship and Immigration Canada to support the integration of IEPs who are already employed by the hospital. The program includes an orientation and transition program for IEPs; workshops for mentors and managers to increase their knowledge of IEPs’ experiences and challenges; and a corporate IEP balanced scorecard for continuous improvement and evaluation.

Success

The IEP Transition and Integration Program was a highlight of Mr. Bahar’s internship at St. Michael’s. He found it a very useful way to become familiar with the hospital’s culture and practices. All employers should offer this kind of program to help newcomers learn about the workplace culture and be successful in their new jobs, he believes.

In addition to the Career Bridge and the IEP Transition and Integration programs, St. Michael's offers two more ways to assist immigrant job-seekers: a newcomer volunteer program and support for internationally educated nurses. In recognition for innovative programs that “help newcomers make the transition to work life in Canada,” the hospital earned the Best Employers for New Canadians award in 2013, for the sixth year in a row.
More than Bricks and Mortar: Employability and Housing in Refugee Communities

By kturner  
September 3, 2013

Employment Inclusion Refugee Portal

When Youssouf first arrived in Bolton, Greater Manchester, as an African asylum seeker, his chances of finding employment seemed slim. Although he had a professional background in local government and was keen to work, local unemployment levels and some hostility towards asylum seekers made him wonder how he would possibly get his foot on the ladder.

Meanwhile, a Bolton housing association was suffering a skills shortage. Their manager particularly identified that they needed people who would understand the housing needs of refugees and asylum seekers in the area.

The innovative Reach In project, run by housing charity HACT, matched them up for a work placement. Now Youssouf is employed as a customer services officer with the housing association and leads HACT’s liaison efforts with refugee community members.

Getting Started

Reach In was developed by The Refugee Programme at HACT in 2008. The original idea was simple: the project would place refugees in short-term work placements with housing sector organizations to help build mutual understanding and promote integration. During the 3-6 month placements, refugees would gain work experience, receive on-the-job training and a professional qualification. Housing providers would embed and reflect a more informed understanding of refugee needs into their services.

Reach In was piloted in 2009, following which it was more widely rolled out in towns across the UK. As the project took shape and built support among both housing providers and refugees keen to take part, it became clear that there were wider benefits to this work than had been originally anticipated.

Marcelle Dopwell, the HACT Project Manager, explains: “At the beginning of Reach In, we placed much more emphasis on the way that this contact could help housing providers to understand refugee needs. But during the first pilot we saw the longer-term benefits for the refugees of gaining valuable work experience – about a third of those we put in placements gained employment afterwards.” The Reach In project showed that its simple approach could have visible benefits in a short period of time.

Reaching into Bolton

For a town like Bolton, with a newer history of migration, the Reach In initiative was particularly significant. Since the 1980s Bolton has faced the challenge of diversifying its economy away from its historical reliance on a declining manufacturing sector. Although the town has made significant progress, it has not been an easy transition.

In 1999, a new inflow of international migrants began to arrive in Bolton, introducing the potential for new social and economic tensions. The national government had begun a policy of dispersing asylum seekers to urban areas outside London and the South East. Bolton was the second local authority in all of the UK to accept refugees through the Government’s Gateway Protection Programme, which processes a limited number of asylum applications made overseas and arranges for their accommodation in towns and cities across the country, often resettling people directly from refugee camps.

Despite the insistence of local authorities that asylum seekers were not placing pressure on the local social housing stock, this perception remained among some residents. In addition, some asylum-seekers reported that they were struggling to find employment, essential to their future success in UK but also to a present sense of security and well-being.

When the HACT Reach In project began working in Bolton in 2009, it seemed that it could provide a partial answer to some of these issues. Project organizers began by building on HACT’s longstanding relationship with the local authority to develop partnerships with key housing providers: Bolton Community Homes and Bolton at Home.

HACT coordinated the placements for refugees, providing dedicated support through a project team that was in regular contact with Bolton-based service providers and refugees.

Success

In its first three years in Bolton, ten refugees were placed with housing providers, resulting in lasting success stories such as that of Youssouf. According to HACT’s Marcelle Dopwell, “The work in Bolton really illustrates the transformative effect that projects like this can generate in towns where immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon. Bolton had some really committed local housing providers alongside a local authority committed to making the project work – this made all the difference.”

The model developed by the Reach In project successfully demonstrates how mutual contact between refugees and public service providers can lead to better employment outcomes, stronger mutual understanding and more effective services – even in towns without a long history of immigration.

Please note, some names and identifying details have been changed in this article.
First-time visitors to Hong Kong are startled when they stumble upon thousands of domestic workers congregated in the public spaces around prime real estate areas of downtown Hong Kong. While on any other typical day, there is the usual mix of local and expat businessmen, executives, and high-end shoppers walking the streets amidst soaring skyscrapers and luxury shops, on Sundays a complete metamorphosis of the city occurs. With mats made out of different materials, from towels to cardboard to shower curtains, domestic workers claim spots on the roads, elevated footpaths, parks, underpasses and sidewalks and transform the heart of Hong Kong into a festive holiday enclave.

Sunday is the usual day-off for the 300,000 plus migrants from South East Asia living and working as domestic workers for Hong Kong families. Because they are required by law to live in the homes of their employers, they frequently lack privacy and personal space, with the result that the phenomenon of the city’s maids, nannies and caregivers congregating every Sunday in different locations throughout the city has become part of urban landscape (most notably in two areas known as Central and Causeway Bay). Primarily women, many from the Philippines, they gather to chat, gossip, eat, sing, and play together. Moreover, a growing number of cultural groups and other types of organizations are reaching out to help the workers understand and protect their rights, maintain their cultural and national identities, as well as nurture the community as a whole through festive activities.

Sundays in the city
In many other cities around the world, the temporary occupation of urban public spaces by migrant workers is a commonplace, usually occurring on the city’s margins or in the more affordable spaces on the urban fringe. However, in Hong Kong’s case the dense, hyper-developed nature of the city’s built form means that migrants are gathering in some of the most exclusive and central areas of the city, rather than on the periphery, away from the general public’s eye. As such, it is a very controversial practice.

You don’t have to participate at many of these gatherings to observe how space is used before it becomes clear that domestic workers have not intentionally chosen to gather in posh downtown areas on their days-off, but do so simply because it’s the most conveniently accessible and suitable space available. The central spaces happen to be close to where they work and close to key products and services such as remittance agencies, the post office, Filipino and Indonesian produce markets and so forth. Furthermore, in good weather the domestic workers can enjoy the open spaces of the parks while the various covered areas are perfect whether rain or shine.

Besides their location, these gatherings in public spaces offer something deeper, namely empowerment for the domestic worker communities. For many migrants, it is a special day in a special place that provides an alternative identity that goes beyond a stereotyped self-image of a "foreign domestic worker". In these spaces, they can see themselves as members of a community, as friends, spouses, sister, mothers, artists and so forth. Above all, it is a place that allows them to recharge, express themselves and feel more at home.

Many domestic workers feel very fortunate to be able to use public spaces as places of recreation and leisure on their days off every week. They are grateful for the level of accommodation that’s been made by the Hong Kong government which provides greater leeway than other domestic worker importing cities (Dubai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, etc) where migrants’ rights to gather freely in public spaces are severely limited.

The relative acceptance that such practices enjoy today are new and not without public criticism. In the past, the Hong Kong public has viewed domestic workers and their "invasion" on Sundays as a major problem for hygienic and aesthetic reasons. Many felt that the mass gatherings tarnished the image of Hong Kong and brought a lot of inconvenience not only to landlords and tenants, but also to the tourists and the general public. A few organized attempts were unsuccessfully made to relocate the domestic workers away from central areas. However, over the years Hong Kongers have generally grown accustomed to the weekly gatherings and the Hong Kong government has tacitly accepted the Sunday spaces.

Success
Smartly, the Hong Kong government has focused its efforts on increasing security and the number of sanitation workers available to tend these areas as the best way to avoid conflicts between the different stakeholders of the site. There are multilingual signs issued by the government around the key gathering areas with reminders to clean up the litter in different languages, such as Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines. An important city decision was made to block off these areas to cars and make them fully pedestrian spaces every Sunday – a benefit to the domestic workers as well as anyone else who wants to enjoy the streets.

The Hong Kong government neither encourages the Sunday gatherings, nor discourages them. However, with small but significant adjustments in their sanitation services, policing detail and through public information they have succeeded in minimizing conflicts and managed to accommodate the needs of domestic worker on their well-deserved Sundays off.

Hong Kong’s example of accommodation provides small but useful lessons for other governments of migrant-heavy cities on how support and accommodate the needs of migrant populations. In Singapore, for example, the city state finally passed a law starting 2013 that foreign domestic workers are entitled to one day off a week. This will result, no doubt, in a significant rise to the number of domestic workers looking for public spaces to meet and socialize on Sundays over the next few years. To avoid conflicts like Hong Kong faced in the past, it would be wise for Singaporean authorities or any other cities of migration for that matter, to learn what they can from Hong Kong. With global mobility and ever-increasing demand for service workers on the rise, cities that value and respect the low-paid service class on which so much of city commerce and living depends, will be the cities that thrive and prosper.

Contributed by JT Singh (edited and condensed for publication by editors).
Diversity Day: Today and Every Day in Mannheim

By kturner
July 30, 2013

A flash mob may not be the usual way to celebrate diversity. Then again, what is the norm when you and your fellow Mannheimers are celebrating the country’s first ever Diversity Day?

On June 11, 2013, Mannheim joined cities across Germany to promote diversity and inclusion. More than 360 events were organized in cities such as Munich, Hamburg, Berlin and Dortmund to celebrate the positive factors and benefits of embracing diversity. Businesses, organizations, municipalities, community groups and the public were all encouraged to be creative in celebrating diversity and to actively participate in this nation-wide event. In Mannheim, the mob flashed the question we all need to ask: “What does diversity in the city of Mannheim mean to you?”

Cause for Celebration

Germany’s Diversity Day was inspired by the success of the corporate-led Diversity Charter (Charta der Vielfalt) which was imported to Germany from France in 2006 and has now been signed by some of the country’s largest companies. The German charter takes a broader approach than the original French charter by covering 10 fields of discrimination: gender, race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion, philosophy, physical ability, age, sexual orientation and identity. Established by corporate giants Daimler, Deutsche Bank, Deutsche Telekom and BP Europa SE, with the support of Maria Böhmer, Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, the German Charter seeks to make the recognition, appreciation and integration of diversity (from cultural background to sexual identity), particularly in the workplace, its primary goal. In 2010, the Charter became a public-private partnership when the German government joined the group. Over 870 organizations in Germany have now signed the Diversity Charter including both the public and private sectors – 20% are large corporations and more than 50% belong to the private sector.

Taking a Diversity to the Streets

The City of Mannheim had no trouble embracing the ideas behind a national celebration of diversity. Located in southwestern Germany, Mannheim’s population of almost 320,000 includes 40% who have a migration background (from 170 countries). The city views its diversity as a significant asset and has integrated diversity as a core value in its marketing strategies, branding and tourism. The city’s marketing division, Stadtmarketing Mannheim GmbH (City Marketing Mannheim LLC), demonstrated its commitment to embracing and fostering diversity by becoming a signatory of the Diversity Charter in March 2012.

Mannheim’s contribution to the national celebration was organized to reach a variety of audiences. A video featuring local celebrities speaking about diversity was widely shared through Facebook and the city’s diversity blog. Local Diversity Day events included the performance of “Wir!” (We!), an intercultural music and dance project, and a series of walking tours that profiled immigrant entrepreneurs, the city’s LGBTQ history, and even included a tour in German Sign Language. While the flash mob led by city administration trainees released multi-coloured helium balloons into the sky, people on the street were invited to pause and record their opinions on diversity at a specially-set up video booth. A compilation of clips from the video booth will soon be available on Facebook and YouTube—with English subtitles, to reach an even greater audience.

Success

Mannheim’s event was a cooperative venture between the city administration, community groups and local businesses. Stadtmarketing Mannheim GmbH considers the city’s diverse socio-cultural capital as an untapped resource that also attracts international professionals to the city and the entire Rhine-Neckar region. The day’s events were
officially opened by the Chairs of CSD Rhine-Neckar, a LGBTQ organization, and SCA Hygiene Products, another recent signatory of the Diversity Charter.

The Charta der Vielfalt (Diversity Charter Association) has organized a competition for the most creative Diversity Day event in Germany — cities like Mannheim promise to make it a stiff competition.
Building New Working Lives

By ktturner
July 22, 2013
Employability Forum

A paediatrician. A civil engineer who has spent a decade building roads and bridges. A teacher who speaks three languages. All are accomplished and dedicated professionals, and all are refugees.

But for many, the search for work that uses their skills and experience ends in disappointment. Finding a good job requires confidence and an understanding of how the local labour market works, as well as employers who are receptive to the contribution they can make. And with the stakes made higher by hostile public debate about the impact of immigration on employment levels in the UK, refugees often find themselves up against a brick wall.

Enter the Employability Forum: a small, independent charity working on a series of innovative projects to improve the employment opportunities for refugees and migrants, primarily in London. At the heart of this work is a collaborative and multilateral approach, bringing together direct support to refugees, bridge-building with employers, and work at the policy level. The aim is to generate sustainable, long-term improvements in the employment options for refugees in London and across the UK.

Supporting refugees

Understanding the local job market is essential to finding employment in a new country, and some refugees find they need to retrain or obtain voluntary experience before they can secure work at their skill level. Employability Forum provides some direct services, including training and advice with individual refugees in London to help increase refugees’ confidence and understanding of the UK employment system.

Building on this expertise, Employability Forum is now bringing together an innovative online resource for those guiding refugees through the “transition” from state support to employment in the UK. “The idea is that the website will be a live online resource for people supporting refugees across the country looking to find employment. With a membership area, this will allow people to share information and build networks around the common goal: to support refugees to live independently in the UK,” says Director Beryl Randall.

Changing attitudes

Supporting refugees into employment would be unsustainable without increasing employers’ recognition of the skills that refugees can offer. Employability Forum has tested different ways of engaging with employers, working particularly closely with London schools to build mutual understanding by convening work placements for refugee teachers. Schools involved in the scheme regularly provide positive feedback about how having refugees in placements helps them to increase the understanding of diversity in the school. But the bigger sign of success is in the employment rate for refugee teachers following their work placements: in 2012 over 50% of refugee teachers involved in the project secured employment after their placement.

In order to develop attitudinal change among the employers of the future, Employability Forum also works to educate children about the reality of being a refugee. Randall describes the “Refugees into Schools” project as “an amazing project I am incredibly proud to be part of. We supported refugees to share their own experiences of conflict, seeking asylum and building a new life with schoolchildren in over 100 London schools. Over 5,000 children engaged with the reality of what being a refugee means, and were encouraged to raise their questions with our volunteers on a one to one level. The schools reported back to us that there were significant attitudinal changes in the children as a result – this is the sort of impact that will help future refugees to be received with a better understanding of what they have been through and what they have to offer.”

Building strategic partnerships

Employability Forum also aims to build understanding among policy-makers about the benefits of supporting refugees into employment. It co-chairs the Refugee Integration Working Group with the Home Office, which brings together policy-makers from across government to ensure that policy development on employment and migrant integration issues considers current evidence from the voluntary sector and local authorities. Employability Forum’s collaborative and multilateral approach means that it has developed a good reputation among the organizations and professional associations with which it has collaborated. It has even received some external coverage of its work in the national press.

Ultimately, bringing about long-term improvements takes time, but progress is being made. “We want to have an impact in the long-term. Our overarching goal is to see more effective integration of refugees in this country,” says Randall. “Helping people to get into work, to support themselves and have future opportunities ahead is a crucial part of that. We have a long way to go but we will get there, one step at a time.”

This Good Idea will be featured in “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.
Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project

By ktturner

July 23, 2013

Living Together, Spatial Inclusion

Not only does diversity lead to more vibrant neighbourhoods, it makes them economically stronger and more sustainable. New South Wales gets this. In Sydney, the region’s largest city, 25% of residents are born overseas. The committed community members and active entrepreneurs in this diverse population are recognized as an important economic asset in Sydney’s small business ecosystem. A local sustainable living initiative is now looking at leveraging that diversity as an environmental asset as well, aiming to remove cultural and linguistic barriers to build consensus and cooperation around environmental issues.

The Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project (ESCLP) is a joint project of the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW and the regional government’s Office of Environment and Heritage. ESCLP is raising awareness of Australia’s environmental challenges by involving the region’s ethnic communities in sustainable living projects. Multilingual workshops have increased the participation of culturally and linguistically-diverse groups and created space for participants to learn from one another. The opportunity to exchange views on environmental issues and hear what other cultural or community groups have to say or how they are impacted has helped foster a stronger sense of belonging while contributing to a healthy, harmonious community and environment.

Language and outreach matter

Many newly-arrived immigrants share the concerns of most households when it comes to environmental sustainability – too much waste and over consumption. Yet, language, cultural barriers or an ineffective means of communication can exclude newcomers from participating on issues of concern to the whole community.

To address these challenges ECSLP’s team of bilingual educators deliver environmental workshops, field trips and art projects in local languages, including Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Greek, Italian, Korean, Macedonian, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. Sharing a language and cultural background facilitates more open communication between the educators and newcomers. By using a range of different delivery modes to offer choice, ECSLP has further contributed to increased community participation. This approach aims to engage the whole community so ultimately all Australians will be better prepared and more effective in addressing matters such as waste generation and management, energy, sustainable gardening and water consumption.

However, it is sustained relationship-building and education that makes the biggest difference in ECSLP’s work with diverse communities. Fieke Greets, Project Officer at the Office of Environment & Heritage, explains: “Behaviour change doesn’t come from a one-off workshop and certainly doesn’t happen through just giving people information.” Such change requires long-term interaction and engagement, peer-to-peer support and learning, and a platform to connect with others trying to do the same.

Greets knows that it is crucial to build good relationship with community gatekeepers for the project to succeed. A successful strategy used by ECSLP is to identify key community leaders and trusted individuals who can help connect the project to contacts and resources in target groups. Involving these leaders in the early stages of the planning has also helped build trust and a sense of ownership among them. “These representatives are instrumental in promoting the project to others within their community,” says Greets.

Success beyond conservation

For Yasmin Mohamed, an Arabic speaker who started work as a bilingual educator in 2008, this dialogue is essential to raising awareness within her community. While the immediate priority of newly-arrived immigrants is settlement, Mohamed believes that engaging newcomers on sustainability issues is part of a long-term community conversation that impacts positively on the overall integration experience, helping to instill trust, common values and social bonds. Other community benefits include positive responses to intergenerational conflict and social isolation.

ECSLP also supports local councils and organizations working with diverse communities to develop their own projects and foster participation in council and other environmental activities. This includes project advice; information about local, state and Commonwealth programs and rebates; access to translated resources; and specialist bilingual facilitators.

Success

Building on ECSLP’s success, the Ethnic Communities’ Council of NSW (ECC) launched a new Multicultural Leadership Sustainability Project called “Step Together.” This project helps culturally and linguistically-diverse organizations develop strategies to raise environmental awareness and implement community projects to reduce waste, water or energy. For example, ECSLP is working with the Spanish and Latin American Association for Social Assistance and another Spanish community group to tackle waste management and recycling through the Step Together project. ECSLP has plans to continue working with ethnic community organizations across New South Wales.

The Ethnic Communities’ Council of NSW (ECC) has received the Premier’s Award for Sustainability in 2009 (Green Globe Award) for its outstanding contribution to raising awareness of sustainability issues among ethnic communities in New South Wales.
Transport Links, Racism Divides

By ktturner
June 27, 2013

Living Together Municipal Welcome-ability, Public Space, Role of Media, Social Inclusion, Spatial Inclusion

Arundhati experiences verbal abuse daily as a fare inspector for Dublin's Light Rail Tram Service. Being an easy target for abuse is an exhausting price to pay simply to do one's job. And for frontline public transport workers like Arundhati, an immigrant background can also raise the disturbing spectre of racism.

Racist incidents also pose a danger to the safety and comfort of commuters. So when reports of racial abuse of city transport workers found their way into local media, transportation companies like Dublin Bus, the National Transport Authority, Veolia Transport Dublin Light Rail Ltd, and Irish Rail (Iarnród Éireann) banded together to do something about it.

The result? Dublin's Transport Links, Racism Divides, a high profile publicity campaign across the city's buses, trams, trains and taxis. And back at head office? Staff training, improved monitoring and reporting of incidents.

A city on the move

Traditionally a country of emigration, Ireland's years of economic boom have attracted a significant wave of migrants; 2011 census data indicates the share of migrants in Ireland is over 17% and in parts of Dublin as high as 50%. Integration is working; naturalization rates are high. Ireland regularly recruits skilled migrants from abroad, and pitches its education system as one of the best globally, hosting large numbers of international students.

The workforce is changing too. People of diverse ethnic backgrounds are well represented in public services as well as in the private sector. This diversity is reflected in the employees of major transport companies. Dublin Bus, for example, employs 3200 employees, 15% of which are migrants.

Changes like these require innovative responses when problems arise. When Dublin Bus, Veolia and others were investigating the increasing number of racial incidents, they also discovered that drivers and inspectors were reporting lack of knowledge on how to deal with these situations. Suddenly, the issues were not only about racism, but about the management of a diverse workforce.

To address these issues, the transport companies came together to form a partnership to engage Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) to devise a strategy that all parties could support and actively promote.

Taking Racism Seriously

ICI has a long history of dealing with migrant issues, including leading such successful public information campaigns as "Did You Know You Can Vote?" and "Count Us In." After examining reports of racism that had been registered with its Racist Incident Support and Referral Service, it conducted three separate focus groups – Asian healthcare workers, Dublin Bus drivers originally from Africa, and a multi-ethnic group from Veolia Transport. While many of the participants were naturalized Irish citizens, they discussed the kinds of everyday racism they faced in their jobs, and the feeling that their complaints were not properly understood by management. In 2011, these findings were published in the report Taking Racism Seriously: Migrants' Experiences of Violence, Harassment and Anti-Social Behaviour in the Dublin Area.

This research was the basis of the partnership ICI forged with Dublin transport companies and resulted in the development of a new campaign to help stamp out racism on public transport, called Dublin's Transport Links, Racism Divides, co-sponsored by Dublin City Council. The campaign involved developing posters and ads, holding a photo call which featured employees of the transport companies and a media campaign. The slogan and advertising were displayed by the public transport partners on buses, trams and suburban trains.

To further the campaign’s reach, the National Transport Authority (NTA) contacted Dublin’s 12,000 licensed taxi drivers – earning the NTA a Metro Eireann’s Africa Day Award on May 25th 2013 for their exceptional efforts. Campaign ads were also prominently displayed close to the taxi stands at the Dublin airport.

Back at head office

In addition to the public awareness campaign, the transport companies provided staff with training and developed innovative systems for reporting racist incidents that could improve institutional response to racism on trains, trams and buses. A mobile phone app was designed to engage younger and social media savvy commuters who were encouraged to capture episodes of abuse in images or to report incidents to a public e-commons accessible via a special “stop racism” email address.

Says Gery Murphy, Chief Executive of the National Transport Authority: "Neither transport users nor transport employees should ever be subject to racist comment or attack. We have taken this initiative, with the Immigrant Council of Ireland, to ensure that all transport staff are trained, and that high profile messaging is immediately visible across Dublin’s transport modes – buses, trains and trams – stating clearly that we will not tolerate any racism.”
Success

The launch of the anti-racism awareness campaign was timed to coincide with the International Day Against Racism on March 21, 2013 and the European Week Against Racism. The campaign resulted in a significant increase in reports of racist incident, suggesting that the campaign’s clear messages and high level support from Dublin City Council, transportation authorities and citizens paid off, giving victims of abuse the confidence to report what had previously gone unreported. Future plans include expanding the campaign to other Irish cities in time for the 2014 International Day Against Racism.

Denise Charlton, Chief Executive of the Immigrant Council of Ireland said: “While we are currently responding to one serious racist incident a week, it is clear a lot more goes unreported. Complacency is one of the greatest barriers we must overcome in terms of racism and this united front will assure people that this is a problem which the [transport] operators are determined to confront.”

This joint effort on the part of the transport companies models good corporate behavior, and shows how responsible employers can protect workers and the wider community from racist incidents. Actions like this make cities better, safer and more inclusive.

Contributions from Fidèle Mutwarasibo, Immigrant Council of Ireland, and Anna Ludwinek, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, edited for publication.

This Good Idea will be featured in “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.
Investing in Character

By kturner
June 26, 2013

Good Ideas Archive

Take un- or underemployed skilled immigrants with tremendous drive and character, but no credit history, no assets, and no success with mainstream lending institutions. Mix in a community that sees incredible potential in its newcomer population and is willing to put their credit where their confidence is. What do you get? Alberta’s Immigrant Access Fund (IAF).

The IAF Loan Program provides internationally trained newcomers, regardless of occupation or training, with loans of up to $10,000 to help cover costs to get back to work in their field in Canada. While most loans cover training, professional fees, exam expenses, assessments and books, IAF Canada Executive Director Dianne Fehr maintains an IAF loan is for whatever will lead to employment success.

“IAF invests in people who the banks would turn away – people who have skills and abilities our society needs…. IAF loans are made to people who are trustworthy and are of good character. We lend to people not based on where they are today, but where we believe they will be in the future.”

The key question IAF asks is, what will help get this person fully employed in their chosen profession? This means, for example, loans can be used to cover living expenses while the applicant is studying. According to Fehr, if the money allows a newcomer to work fewer hours in order to focus on their studies, IAF will support that. In one case, IAF paid for the cost of snow tires for a doctor who had to travel outside of the city to meet his medical residency requirements. In another, a highly certified mechanic with a job offer needed a loan to buy his own tools (a job requirement). The IAF loan can also cover the costs of child care so the newcomer can attend classes.

Investing in immigrant futures

IAF invests in people with potential. That means it doesn’t just focus its loans on professional newcomers, but to all skilled newcomers, including tradespeople. For example, having worked as an architectural draftsman and teacher, newcomer Anthony Marks was open to exploring his career options when he arrived in Canada. A loan from IAF helped Marks cover the cost of a welding program which will help him secure a related job in Edmonton. While starting a new career in a new country at age 48 may seem daunting to some, Marks’s attitude fits the profile that IAF looks for in its clients. “For the first few months it was real tough… But there are a lot of opportunities if you are dedicated,” says Marks. IAF is continuing to expand its loan services to newcomers who may be pursuing trades certification.

A value-added approach

A lending program that is flexible and community focused is part of IAF’s niche success. When starting the program, the option of partnering with a bank or formal lending institution was excluded in favour of a flexible community-based approach that allowed IAF to lend to whomever they want, be flexible in renegotiating loan terms should a newcomer experience difficulty and ensure that their loan work is connected to the local community. Fehr explains.

“IAF lends to people who typically cannot access mainstream credit because they are unemployed or in low paying ‘survival’ jobs, do not have a credit history in Canada, and have no assets… We call our approach ‘value added’ because we refer loan applicants and recipients to other community supports that will help them integrate, explore pathways to working in their field in Canada and provide guidance outside of IAF’s expertise. We make them feel welcome.” 2012 Report to the Community (PDF)

Each IAF loan is rooted in the place where the newcomer lives and is based on trust. If someone is having trouble, IAF’s loan managers are available and ready to refer them to community supports for help. Pre-loan, if they decide a loan applicant’s learning plan isn’t going to be successful, the applicant is referred to a community partner for help refining the plan.

According to Fehr: “Loans are just part of a bigger picture of helping newcomers get work. They’re grounded in immigrant experience. We know that it’s difficult. We know that people have difficulty when they come. There are lots of pieces in the puzzle of getting back to work, but the financial barrier is a key one. Without help, many people may not get beyond that. We give them what they need.”

Vanessa Desa, Dianne Fehr - Immigrant Access Fund (IAF) C...

High social return

“Micro loans have been proven globally to be an effective tool to alleviate poverty among people unable to access mainstream credit due to lack of employment, credit history, and collateral. IAF is applying this body of knowledge to the licensing and training requirements of Canada’s skilled newcomers.”

As a “lender of last resort” for newcomers, IAF partners with community agencies that have either experience with micro loan programs, or strong ties to the immigrant population in their community. Community volunteers work closely with IAF staff to make loan decisions and build relationships with the people they loan to. These local connections have helped IAF establish a trusted network of advisors that reduces risk and ensures low write-off rates. At the same time, newcomers build their credit rating in Canada, essential for future loans, mortgages and more. As Fehr says, “We’re not a bank; we don’t want to just lend money. We want to add value to those interactions and relationships.”

IAF takes a long view of its investments in immigrant success. Its model is based on the concept of a “social return on investment (SROI).” To calculate a social rate or return, University of Calgary researchers looked at the probability that an IAF loan will lead to increased earnings over someone’s working life. They found: “The longer the remaining working life after accreditation, the greater the total benefit accruing to the upfront investment. The higher the probability of success in terms of finding employment in the
immigrant’s chosen field, the larger the gain in earnings over the high school age earnings profile.” The study (PDF) showed IAF has an average social rate of return of 33% on loans. By any formal investment measure, a 33% SROI is a huge success.

Replication

While micro-loans for newcomers are not entirely new in Canada, the IAF’s unique approach is growing. With offices in Edmonton, Calgary and a new affiliate serving Saskatchewan, IAF is now exploring an innovative “e-loan model” to reach newcomers in cities where there are no local micro-loan options. It aims to launch the model this Fall. IAF maintains close ties to other Canadian micro-lenders, looking to develop new opportunities for newcomer and lender alike.

The micro-loan model confirms that investing in the incredible wealth of human capital arriving in Canada each year reaps huge dividends. IAF’s success is limited only by the amount of money they have to loan.
Social Justice Charter and Citizen’s Bill of Rights

By kturner
May 28, 2013
Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, Municipal Welcome-ability

“This Charter seeks to advance a fair and just society and to promote respect for every citizen, encourage community participation, strengthen community wellbeing and reduce the causes of disadvantage.”

The opening words of the Hume City Social Justice Charter preamble could not be clearer: this inclusive vision of community for all residents, whether immigrants or third generation Australian, encourages all to partake equally in the life of the city.

The Social Justice Charter lays out a compelling, welcoming vision for the municipality, one that installs human rights at the heart of civic life. The first of its kind in Australia, it is centred on the notion of equality – more specifically, on the goal of helping the disadvantaged to realize economic and social equality.

In this regard, the Hume City Charter is quite remarkable. By focusing on human rights, Hume City steps back from considerations of “us” and “them,” and lays aside questions of national, religious or cultural identity. According to the Charter, citizenship doesn’t matter. So long as you find yourself residing in Hume City, for whatever reason or duration, you are an equal member within its urban community.

Charting a new course for social justice

Hume City is located in the southeastern state of Victoria, 20 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, and has one of the highest immigrant and low-income Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Australia. Almost 30% of a population of 167,000 is born overseas, representing 140 nationalities with 125 languages other than English spoken at home. The city’s challenge was how it would address issues of social cohesion and encourage community participation, especially amongst immigrants and indigenous peoples.

Introduced in 2000, the Hume City Social Justice Charter affirms “Hume City Council’s commitment to social justice and human rights.” Developed after extensive review and community consultation, the Charter was revised in 2004 to include a Citizens’ Bill of Rights, using the language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements. Since Hume City Council sees the charter as a “living document,” it was revised again in 2007 to include the State of Victoria’s own newly-created Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Additionally, the current charter is available in Arabic, Assyrian, Greek, Italian, Turkish and Vietnamese.

The charter was not meant to be a list of worthy intentions. Embedded in the social justice framework is a practical emphasis on principles, rights, actions and accountability. To implement the charter, Hume City developed eight Social Justice Action Plans covering issues such as community empowerment, diversity and affordable housing. Each of these three-year plans included measurable outcomes which are reported annually and posted on the city website. In the 2010 final report of the One City, Many Cultures Action Plan, new projects included the re-activation of the Hume Interfaith Network, developing a bilingual story time at local libraries, and the adoption of an information telephone service connecting calls with multilingual interpreters.

Success

Since Hume City’s efforts preceded the state of Victoria’s own Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, it was a logical place for the state government to run a pilot project, Everyday People, Everyday Rights, to help residents better understand and assert their rights. More than 5,000 people participated in a variety of activities that resulted in the development of a Human Rights Passport (published in English, Turkish and Arabic), extensive media coverage, and the training of 35 human rights community educators.

Following the lead of Hume City, other Australian municipalities have followed with their own charters. The City of Ryde, northwest of central Sydney, adopted a Social Justice Charter in 2008 to help the city commit to building a just and inclusive community as did the City of Port Phillip, Victoria in 2011.
Heritage and Modernity in Singapore’s Urban Renewal

By kturner

Economic Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal

Modern Singapore is a vertical metropolis, where tall blocks of residential flats, condo towers, skyscrapers and elevated highways dominate a planned and orderly urban landscape. Inside the vertical city, Singapore’s historic neighborhoods tell a story closer to the ground, of a time when city streets rather than air traffic and shipping lanes were the vital arteries of the city’s growth, moving goods, people and setting the stage for the city’s economic and social development.

A unique architectural feature of these neighborhoods is the street-based ‘shophouse’ which has long served as both storefront, marketplace and home to the traders and immigrants of multi-ethnic backgrounds that flocked to the strategically-placed South Asian port.

Modern Singapore’s Chinatown district, like many of these older districts, was once considered an immigrant ghetto, troubled by poor living conditions and poverty. Today, the historic quarter has been transformed by the city’s vision for a vibrant and revitalized neighbourhood where locals work, live and play.

From ghetto to multicultural heritage

In the 1980s, the Singaporean government recognized the need to address the neglected buildings across neighbourhoods in Chinatown, Little India, and the old Malay quarter of Kampong Glam. These neighbourhoods were filled with dilapidated and abandoned ‘shophouses’, typically two or three-story row buildings with a business on the ground floor and residences above. With their European neo-classical columns and Chinese and Malay floral and geometric motifs, Singapore’s shophouses are both architecturally distinct and reflective of the region’s multicultural heritage. Traditional shophouses contributed to street culture in a variety of ways, serving as multi-unit residences, specialty shops, wholesaling and cottage industries, offices, eating houses and market stalls. This diversity of activity brought Singaporeans together in a busy, bazaar-like atmosphere while helping maintain the unique cultural traditions of multi-ethnic groups living in close proximity in congested city spaces.

While the city had considered demolition as part of the urban renewal plan, they moved forward on a conservation plan instead. They recognized that the preservation of these communities would help define Singapore’s unique heritage and modern multicultural identity, while having the potential to drive renewed economic and cultural activity back into the heart of the city.

Singapore’s Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) established the Conservation Master Plan (1989) which included new restoration guidelines, laws, and policies, as well as an educational component to promote heritage conservation and its cultural and economic benefits to local residents and businesses. The URA consulted with the private sector and invited new business opportunities to revive commercial activity and tourism in the historic areas.

The URA was a partner with the Singapore Tourism Board, along with local stakeholders like the Chinatown Business Association (CBA) to encourage further development. Now, to draw both tourists and local Singaporeans, Chinatown not only hosts its annual flagship Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festivals which draw huge crowds, but it also has year-around commercial activities including the Chinatown Night Market, Chinatown Food Street, and the new Chinatown Heritage Centre, a museum housed in a former shophouse. Some restored shophouses have been converted into boutique hotels, gallery spaces, and clubs. “We want to bring people back to Chinatown, but not just during the major festivals,” says James Ong, executive director of CBA. “We want Chinatown to become a place where people would want to come and have a good time throughout the year.”

Success

In 2006, Singapore’s Conservation Programme received the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Global Awards for Excellence, which recognizes projects that provide the best cross-regional lessons in land use practices. The ULI recognized Singapore’s Conservation Programme as good practice because it “clearly demonstrates that heritage conservation and modernity are not necessarily in opposition. Its balanced, market-oriented approach encourages owners and developers to restore their properties to accommodate new functions. It thus ensures that old buildings remain economically viable and are well maintained to prolong their life spans.” By December 2012, in between Singapore’s modern towers, over 7091 heritage buildings and their evolving urban neighbourhoods have been revitalized across the city.
Beyond the Border, Behind the Men

By ktturner
May 24, 2013

Photo credit: JT Singh

The children react to his time in Singapore differently. They will frequently ask "why doesn’t father come back home?" – wife of Golam, a Bangladeshi migrant worker, Beyond the Border, Behind the Men

Golam has spent 16 years as a migrant worker. Away from his wife and family in Bangladesh, he is one of over 100,000 Bangladeshis and nearly a million migrants holding work permits in Singapore.

For many Singaporeans, a low-skilled worker like Golam registers only as a stereotype: the construction worker, the shipyard worker, the cleaner. Now a multi-media arts project aims to change that careless perspective. Beyond the Border, Behind the Men (BTBBTM) is on a mission to expand the “singular” narratives of the faceless foreign worker and to uncover more about an economic group that makes up almost one-fifth of the city’s population. Through music, theatre, photography and film, the BTBBTM project works to remind viewers of the individual and human stories that lie behind the cliches.

No longer nameless

BTBBTM is using the power of the arts to convey a message of hope and inspiration. This ambitious initiative was founded in 2012 by three young friends after they had spent time volunteering with the Cuff Road Project, a community organization located in Singapore’s Little India that provides free meals and assistance to mainly Bangladeshi migrant workers in distress. Their volunteering experience showed them that these men had more to share than tales of “anguish and despair” related to workplace injuries and errant employers, but also a “rich tapestry of emotions, warmth and glow.”

“We wanted to start this because we felt that all the stereotypes and mis-perceptions about these migrant workers had to be addressed,” says co-founder Bernice Wong. “I think the main point was how similar they were to us, in the sense that we all had our own families to care for, lovers to love, dreams to work towards to, our fair share of joy and sorrow. Hopefully by drawing attention to our similarities, our family and friends can gradually appreciate their presence a little more.”

Inspired by the friendships they made at the Cuff Road Project, the group took a trip to Bangladesh to meet and film the men’s families. The short film, Beyond the Borders, Behind the Men, provides a glimpse of the lives of three Bangladeshi men and their families – the sister missing her brother, the father proud of his son’s accomplishments, the lonely wife. Interspersed are shots of the migrants themselves – Jahangir playing the tabla, Saiful enjoying an outdoor game of carom and Golam returning home. At the end of the film, the men are no longer faceless, nameless migrants, and no longer the sum of their stereotypes. The viewer is left with the message: “Like us, they are also sons, fathers, husbands, storytellers and dreamers.”

Says construction worker Rashedul Haque after watching the film, “Making a living in Singapore is difficult because of the living conditions we are placed in, but the film shows the stories behind what we are struggling here for.”

Building a movement

The initial plan to produce a short documentary and photo exhibit to chronicle these migrant stories was quickly revised in response to the enthusiasm of the migrant participants. When the group learned that some of the migrant workers were talented musicians, a jam session was organized with 20 Singaporeans and 20 Bangladeshis which led to the creation of a band and a YouTube video with more than 20,000 views. A concert of pop songs and Bangladeshi folk music also raised money for a new recreational space at the Cuff Road Project facilities.

The collaboration also opened the eyes of the migrant workers. For Jahangir, the tabla player shown in the film who came to Cuff Road Project after injuring his backbone in a six-metre fall at work, participating in BTBBTM changed his perceptions of the city: “Singapore boys and girls are my brothers and sisters. I see no difference between Singaporeans and Bangladeshis — we are all friends.”

The concert was followed up by a performance of the group’s first play, Hard Times, Easy Money. Written by a migrant participant of BTBBTM, the play dramatizes the lives of foreign workers caught up with “unscrupulous middlemen with equally unscrupulous local employers.” Sponsored by the Migrant Workers’ Centre, the cast of Bangladeshis and Singaporeans performed in front of an enthusiastic outdoor crowd of more than 1,000 in the Little India neighbourhood.
Beyond the Border, Behind the Men (Full Film) from Vimeo.

Success

Beyond the Border, Behind the Men uses the powerful mediums of music, film, photography and social media to make a difference in the lives of Singaporean workers and the city they live in. BTBBTM's work has attracted recognition and new funding from various organizations such as Our Better World, the National Arts Council (Singapore), the Singapore International Foundation, and the National Youth Council. With growing support, the group will continue to develop creative channels that can make a positive difference in the way people interact with Singapore's migrant workers.

The project demonstrates the transformative power of the arts as a tool for advocacy. Singaporeans who have always seen migrant workers working tirelessly on construction sites are now gaining a new perspective on the men behind so much of the city's growth and development.

“Our migrant friends are just like us, coming to work in Singapore out of their love to provide for their loved ones,” wrote a visitor to the BTBBTM photo exhibition. “Thank you and your team for your love for our migrant friends and creating love amongst us with them!”

Contributed by JT Singh (edited and condensed for publication by editors)
Cook and Share a Pot of Curry Day

By kturner
May 29, 2013
Cultural Inclusion Living Together New Gateways

In the last decade, the population of Singapore has risen by one million, with a majority of permanent residents arriving from the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Although almost 75% of the city-state’s citizens are of Chinese origin, the PRC newcomers have little in common with Chinese Singaporeans – whether it’s the use of English in everyday life or their tastes for various kinds of food served in the region. This influx of new permanent residents from mainland China has created tensions among local Singaporeans who worry that Singapore’s cultural identity – based on its multi-ethnic population and multicultural past – is threatened.

Since independence from the United Kingdom in 1965, Singapore has made maintaining good inter-ethnic relations a high priority. Not only does the country have English, Mandarin Chinese, Tamil and Malay as its official languages, the government has a long-standing ethnic integration policy to ensure proportional representation of its main cultural communities in areas ranging from housing to seats in parliament. For example, to prevent the development of so-called ethnic enclaves, the flats in the government-run housing system (HUB) are apportioned according to an officially designated quota system which specifies the proportion of Chinese, Indian, Malay and Others (C.I.M.O.) who can own apartments in any one building. In recent years, Singapore has also responded to its changing demographics by actively promoting the need for further integration through public campaigns and the introduction of a National Integration Council to promote social cohesion.

The Curry Affair

So what happens when a newcomer family from mainland China complains about the aroma of a curry being cooked in the neighbouring flat of an Indian Singaporean family? In highly regulated Singapore, a solution was quickly dispatched through the government-run Community Mediation Centre (CMC) which offers community mediation services in order to cultivate “a more harmonious, civil and gracious society.” CMC provides a neutral platform for ordinary Singaporeans to resolve disputes amicably without resorting to litigation. Through CMC, the two quarreling families were able to come to an agreement: one family would try eating a curry while the other was asked to cook the dish when the other family was not at home.

The story does not end there. In the summer of 2011, when news of the “curry affair” became public knowledge, Singaporeans reacted as if the decision was an attack on their multi-ethnic, food-obsessed way of life. The desire to stand up for Singapore’s multicultural identity led to a grassroots movement that rallied around curry as an everyday and essentially Singaporean food, available at hawker stalls throughout the city. Over 61,000 people joined a Facebook event page to “Cook and Share a Pot of Curry Day” as a way to show pride in Singapore’s multicultural identity. While the pro-curry response initially had an anti-foreigner bias, complaints about the biased tone of the conversation quickly resulted in a more positive and inclusive discussion, one that encouraged newcomers to join in.

Success

The success of the 2011 culinary event has led to the establishment of “National Curry Day” held annually on the third Saturday of August when everyone in Singapore is invited to cook, eat and share curry recipes. What began as a dispute between neighbours over a curry pot has been transformed into a celebratory event that builds social cohesion, strengthens a common identity and introduces newcomers to Singapore’s unique culture.

Contributed by JT Singh (edited and condensed for publication by editors)
From the Multicultural Classroom to the Multicultural Staff Room

By kturner

May 28, 2013

Education Inclusion

In Germany's second largest city, Hamburg, nearly 14% of the population is made up of immigrants. In schools, this can be even higher – overall, one-third of students in German schools have a migrant background. However, less than 5% of their teachers do. This is a missed opportunity to provide positive role models and teach cultural sensitivity that would benefit all young learners. With their multicultural and multilingual heritage, teachers with a migrant background are a great asset for German schools, will help break down stereotypes and offer exemplary models of immigrant integration.

To help close this gap, the "Teachers with Migration History" network [Hamburger Netzwerk „Lehrkräfte mit Migrationsgeschichte“] supports existing teachers with a migrant background, and encourages students to train to become teachers. Ultimately, the network aims to promote a vibrant, intercultural school system in Germany.

Supporting teachers with migrant background

The network helps those teachers who are already in the school system through capacity building and training. For example, it supports professional development for teachers with a migrant background, and has recently set up an online forum where its members can exchange information, share their experiences and support each other.

Where consultations with its members found that some teachers with a migrant background had experienced discrimination, the Network supported those teachers in addressing or finding resolutions to these incidents.

Encouraging students to become teachers

One of the network’s key long-term objectives is to diversify the teaching staff at Hamburg schools. To this end, it teamed up with the Zeit Foundation Ebelin and Gerd Bucerius to develop a “More Migrants as Teachers” project, which encourages students with a migrant background to train to become teachers. A four-day conference gives aspiring teachers an opportunity to hear from teachers with a migrant background and encourages them to choose a teaching career. The network has worked actively to recruit participants in this training, and has been replicated in other German cities such as Bremen.

In addition, the network works to promote the inclusion of internationally trained professionals in the Hamburg teaching profession. One of its greatest successes has been to work with the Ministry for Education and Vocational Training and regulatory institutions to simplify the accreditation process, thus enabling more teachers with a migrant background – especially those who gained teaching qualifications abroad – to work in German schools.

Promoting intercultural education and parent involvement

Another key objective is improving intercultural education in schools. The network has been working to develop modules in intercultural teaching that can be used by all teachers in German schools. It provides training on intercultural education, leadership, cultural mediation and intercultural consulting at Hamburg schools, for example. These modules are developed and delivered in cooperation with local authorities and regional partners such as foundations, academic institutions, migrant organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

More recently, it worked with the Counselling Centre of Intercultural Education and the Institute for Teacher Training and School Development to develop training so teachers can earn a formal qualification in “intercultural education.” This training and qualification has been available to teachers since February 2013.

Further, the network recognizes the importance of parental involvement in education. The network provides migrant parents with information on how the German school system functions and advises them on ways to increase their children’s success in school. The network acts in partnership with migrant organizations and offers counselling in the migrant families’ own language about the Hamburg school system.

Success

The network now has 150 members, of which around 60 are actively involved in its programs through training and forums. What started as an informal network of professionals offering support to teachers has become a successful model that has been replicated widely and influenced the German school system itself. Other similar networks have emerged in Berlin, Hessen, Bremen and Stuttgart, highlighting the need for such supports across the country.

As a result of the network’s efforts, Hamburg has one of the highest proportions of students with a migrant background studying to become teachers in the country – at just over 20%, the network is on its way to building a teaching workforce that reflects Hamburg’s diverse student population.
The Cuff Road Project: Meals and a Friendly Ear for Jobless Migrants

By kturner

Social Inclusion

From transit stations to housing flats, migrant workers across Singapore are the engine of city growth. They represent one quarter of Singapore’s population of over five million people. Many are manual laborers from Bangladesh, China and India who are – literally – building the vertical city from the ground up. As such a significant share of Singapore’s population, the city’s success clearly depends on them.

However, employment for many of these low-waged city builders include precarious situations, with unpaid salaries, unscrupulous recruiters, overly-dangerous work leading to injury, and employers refusing to bear the cost of medical treatment. While migrant workers who have been injured at work can file cases for permanent injury compensation under Singapore law; these cases often take many months to settle. In the meantime the applicant is not allowed to work and has no source of income for such basic necessities as food and accommodation. The same is true for foreign workers who agree to act as a witness in a case against their employers.

Hot meals

Stepping into this gap is The Cuff Road Project (TCRP) which aims to help the most vulnerable workers through offering them not only a hot meal, but advice on how to follow up on their case, a friendly ear and even access to a free medical clinic. The project was started in 2008 after members of the city’s local community sector visited Singapore’s Little India and discovered penniless migrant workers sleeping on the pavement. The Cuff Road Project is a joint initiative of the anti-poverty group ONE (Singapore) and the non-profit advocacy organization Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) which runs the day-to-day operations.

The project organizers work with two restaurants in Little India to serve free meals – breakfast and dinner on weekdays, lunch on weekends – which cost TCRP $2 per meal for each client. Workers who show up to one of the restaurants are briefly interviewed to ascertain eligibility for the food program. They must show either a government-issued document that states they do not have a work permit or, if they have a work permit, a letter from a doctor or lawyer as evidence that they are injured or have a case pending. If the worker meets the criteria, case details are recorded and a meal card is issued, to be updated monthly to validate details of current status and to track participation. More than 600 workers register each month, of which approximately 80% are awaiting a claim for permanent injury compensation.

On any given day, the restaurant is packed with migrants. Volunteers are busy interviewing, listening and advising participants. Often, it is the first time that the voices of these migrant workers are being heard. TCRP’s free meals work as an incentive for migrants to come together to gain advice or find help to deal with their circumstances. Through this process, volunteers gain deep insights into the lives of migrants in Singapore – both a meaningful learning experience and important for further advocacy or research.

Success

The Cuff Road Project is a critical contact point for the Transient Workers Count Too organization and their work with the migrant worker community. Migrants in distress get free restaurant meals in a safe clean environment where they can eat, use facilities, and gather in dignity. Volunteers on site monitor the food program and assist the men with issues such as preparing for meetings with government agencies and doctors, negotiating with employers, and keeping in touch with loved ones abroad. Student volunteers have also organized medical screenings, beach barbeques and used their experiences for school projects resulting in short films or presentations. The migrants themselves are invited to visit schools and community organizations to give talks to TCRP volunteers about their issues.

The project has inspired many offshoots, from a program specifically developed for workers from China to groups that provide additional services such as physiotherapy, breathing exercises, and even computer classes. Three former volunteers with TCRP have started their own project, Behind the Borders, Behind the Men, to tell the stories of Bangladeshi migrant workers.

Today, Singapore’s manual labourers are starting to receive access to much needed help. The Cuff Road Project currently feeds over 200 workers a day and has served more than 360,000 meals between March 2008 and December 2012.

Contributed by JT Singh (edited and condensed for publication by editors)
Strangers Become Friends

By kturner
April 22, 2013

Education Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal New Gateways, Social Inclusion

International students are increasingly seen as an important part of the urban prosperity agenda. They are potential immigrants and employees in aging societies, offer future access to global markets and intercultural competencies, and can help open up a community to becoming a welcoming and diverse society.

In 2002, the city of Erfurt, located southwest of Leipzig, recognized that it needed to embrace its international student population as an engine of growth. The previous decade had seen the re-opening of the University of Erfurt and new opportunities for local development emerge against the backdrop of German reunification. As the city began to attract growing numbers of students from around the world, civic leaders started to register the value of being a destination city in an increasingly mobile world. The city council, the University of Erfurt, the Erfurt University of Applied Sciences and the Thuringian Institute for Continuing Education eV embarked on a project to promote openness and a culture of welcome with the aim of establishing the city’s reputation as a friendly and tolerant regional capital.

The result was Fremde werden Freunde (Strangers Become Friends). The program connects international students with local residents, universities and businesses to help newcomers feel more welcome while strengthening local civic engagement and opening cultural horizons.

Inspired by a similar program in Frankfurt, Erfurt adapted Strangers Become Friends to meet the needs of a city newly attuned to issues of diversity and integration. “Erfurters should realize we are at the beginning of having a cosmopolitan city,” says project manager Petra Eweleit.

Erfurt is well on its way to becoming that city. Today the state capital of Thüringen has a population of 206,000, of which 3.7% are foreign-born. The international student population has grown from ten per year to 200 a term, or approximately 500 in residence annually, from countries such as China, Indonesia, France, Afghanistan and Serbia.

A culture of welcoming

Eweleit recalls the discussions that took place during the project implementation: “We must do something to include international students in our daily lives. We wanted to show the international students that Erfurters welcome them warmly. We wanted them to come to our city to live.” The organizers also realized their efforts needed to include the host community. As Eweleit remarks: “We wanted our inhabitants to be more open-minded, sensitive, and create a culture of welcoming.”

Reaching the projects’ dual audiences – cultivating international students and long-time residents – required a multi-pronged approach. An important part of the project was developing a network of local hosts to mentor students and engage in an intercultural exchange that could enrich both visitors and the city. Called “Ambassadors of Welcome,” hosts come from all walks of life – families, single persons, retirees and young people – and include politicians, business owners and members of local civic clubs. Recruitment activities fanned out across the city: workplace presentations, visits to community organizations as well as a publicity campaign that involved newspapers, radio interviews and a dedicated website.

Program activities include a welcome reception at the Town Hall to introduce foreign students to their mentors; group field trips to strengthen relationships; regular monthly meetings; and workshops covering topics such as “intercultural competence” or the history and cultural geography of specific countries. Together the mentor and student may visit cultural or sporting events, go for walks through the city or even visit the mentor’s family during celebrations. Mentors also help students organize visits to physicians or assist with administrative tasks. Students have the opportunity to practice German and learn about everyday life in Germany.
Making the business case

The program is committed to finding new and innovative ways to deepen the quality and sustainability of its integration efforts. One such strategy is co-operation with industry.

Against a backdrop of skills shortages and growing global competition, the integration of students into the city’s economy was quickly embraced by local business leaders. In 2006 the program was expanded to include the participation of local businesses. Companies provide mentors and internships, and involve students and staff in site visits, job fairs and business events with the support of the local Chamber of Commerce and other project partners. Students gain valuable working experience in Germany, and local enterprise taps into a pool of talented young people with technical, linguistic and intercultural skills as well as potential access to international markets. It’s a win-win situation.

Success

“I’ve become a different person, a citizen of the world. I love you, Erfurt. Although I now go back to my homeland, Erfurt is always my other home.” Sari a.m. (Indonesia), 2004

Strangers Become Friends has reached its second decade. What began in November 2002 with 46 pairings and students from nine countries, today has matched some 1,200 students from 93 nations, about 200 per semester. Alumni are known to keep in touch even to attend each other’s weddings. The project’s success is a testament to the cooperation of partners, The University of Erfurt, the Erfurt University of Applied Sciences, the Erfurt City Council and the Thuringian Institute for Continuing Education who jointly finance the position of the project manager.

In 2006 and 2007, the project was recognized for its “imaginative and effective civic engagement,” and in 2010, the German federal Foreign Office awarded the project the top prize for “international students’ support and integration.” Its success in developing a culture of welcome – helping newcomers to integrate, increasing social cohesion, building intercultural awareness, dispelling myths and creating openness – has attracted other German universities to come to Erfurt for guidance on how to start their own “Fremde werden Freunde.”
Neighbourhood Mothers Leading the Way in Neukölln

By ktuner
April 17, 2013

Civic Inclusion, Education Inclusion, Living Together Municipal, Social Inclusion

The premise of this award-winning program, Stadtteilmütter ("Neighbourhood Mothers") project is simple: the people best able to help immigrant mothers integrate into their new communities are those who have shared similar experience in the past – other mothers.

The mothers first meet, informally, over a cup of tea. They talk about the needs and challenges of everyday life in their new homes, especially as it relates to their children and families, their education, health and wellbeing. Afterwards, they might meet up to ten more times, to discuss specific challenges and needs, and what supports or services are available in their community.

Mothers helping mothers

The area of Neukölln in Berlin has a long tradition of welcoming immigrants. Today, nearly half of the district’s population (42%) is foreign-born; many are immigrants from Turkey, and more recently, Roma families from Romania and Bulgaria. Rapid growth combined with changes in the make up of the local population have led to a number of challenges, including the isolation of newly arrived communities, pressure on local schools, and difficulties in reaching out to families who did not always speak German.

“Neighbourhood mothers” started in 2004 as a grassroots outreach project. It aimed to promote access to information and services that would help families with young children. Neighbourhood mothers with immigration experience and who can speak German undergo training before being sent out to meet with recently arrived, often isolated, families. These newcomers may be encouraged to attend other women’s groups, or to make use of local childcare facilities. The fact that this advice is provided by women with a similar background and family culture helps build trust and the confidence needed to ask questions, get answers and become receptive to change.

Familiar and sympathetic to the challenges faced by the new immigrants, neighbourhood mothers are community facilitators – lifelines to immigrant families in need of city services, support for school-aged children, or help with learning German.

Getting involved in children’s schooling

In Neukölln, where some schools have up to 85% pupils who don’t have German as their first language, neighbourhood mothers encourage parents to get actively involved in their children’s integration in the German school system, which, in turn, can help improve their children’s academic outcomes.

The program cooperates closely with with local childcare centres, “parent cafes,” school-based youth centres, school officials and teachers. These partnerships have contributed to the success of this work. Until 2009, the neighbourhood mothers worked exclusively with families who had children up to six years of age. Today it includes families with children up to age 12, and the Neighbourhood Mothers now receive further training on primary schooling and can connect parents with early education professionals and teachers.

Success

What started as twelve Turkish women receiving training has now become a network of over 100 neighbourhood mothers from all different nationalities. It has been sustained by strong partnerships with various local and regional bodies, including the District Office Neukölln, Jobcentre Neukölln, as well as the Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment and Senate Department for Integration, Labour and Social Affairs.

“The neighbourhood mothers … are a living example of hands-on integration work. Four thousand families, with over 10,000 children, have received advice and guidance from the neighbourhood mothers. What’s more, the idea is easily transferable to other districts and cities all across Europe, and beyond.”

District Mayor Heinz Buschkowsky, initiator of the Neighbourhood Mothers project

The project has received numerous awards, including the Metropolis award (2008), the Citizenship Award (2011) and the Helga and Edzard Reuter Foundation Award for outstanding achievement in the areas of integration and international understanding (2012). It has been replicated in other parts of Berlin and has also been adapted in Denmark where a similar initiative has developed across the country. It is still going strong in Neukölln, where some of the newest neighbourhood mothers are local Roma women helping newcomers from Romania and Bulgaria. These Roma neighbourhood mothers have already received training and are catering to the needs of this new population, showing how this flexible model can work in the long term.

The real success of this project lies in the way it empowers women on both sides of the relationship. Newcomers receive valuable advice, information and confidence, while neighbourhood mothers gain employment, income and status in the community.

On a larger scale, the project benefits the local government, by increasing the interaction of immigrant families with local mainstream service providers and facilitates their interaction with hard to reach communities. Finally, it benefits the Neukölln neighbourhood as a whole, by contributing to increased integration and cohesion.
Making Friends and Sharing Dreams: International Summer Youth Program

By kturner

Living Together Municipal Refugee Portal Social Inclusion

When refugee families arrive in Boise, Idaho, from faraway places like Burma, Bhutan, Iraq or the Democratic Republic of Congo, they have great hopes for the future, not least of which is an education for their children.

Many refugee parents are surprised to learn that schools in the United States take a three-month summer recess, leaving their kids with much idle time and the parents often wondering how they will continue to learn and settle in. From an academic standpoint, experience has shown that most students lose some of the knowledge gained in school because of the long break.

The long summer break does not serve these young people well. For students with limited English proficiency, the knowledge loss can increase to several months of grade-level equivalency, effectively widening the achievement gap in relation to their higher income, native English speaking peers. In addition to a steeper learning curve, refugee youth also face challenging obstacles to social adjustment and integration in the public school system.

When state funding cuts threatened Boise schools summer programming and other opportunities for middle school students, a group of local stakeholders took up the challenge to find a solution.

Collective action

In the spring of 2012, the Idaho Office for Refugees convened a group of stakeholders to consider a plan to counteract the negative impact of program cuts, with the goal of keeping refugee students actively engaged in learning and socializing over the summer. The group included teachers and administrators from the Boise and neighboring Meridian school districts, refugee resettlement agencies, Boise Parks and Recreation, Boise State University, and local agencies like the YMCA. Out of a handful of brainstorming sessions and planning meetings, Boise’s first International Summer Youth Program was born, built on the concept of peer mentoring and intercultural exchange.

Although planners had a great deal of experience in youth programming, the idea of pairing refugee students with native born peers was new. Starting with a small scale project to test the feasibility of the concept, the planning group agreed to target middle school age youth (grades 6—8) and to offer enrollment to recently arrived refugee students and native peers who were struggling in school, academically or socially. A special outreach effort was made to reach American youth and their families with an interest in culture and language exchange. The goals of the two-week program were to introduce refugee youth to the larger Boise community; to promote academic and cultural literacy; and to develop a greater appreciation of world cultures among all students.

Who am I? Creating self-portraits
Program activities included creative ways to help students explore notions of personal and cultural identity. Program instructor, Revital Zilonka, currently a PhD candidate in bilingual education, developed an activity that addressed the question, “who am I?” To begin, the class created their own life maps. Students were asked to think about how a life map would look and how their language, culture and experience would shape this map. Students discussed how geography shapes culture and language, and how culture and language relate to history and immigration. Each student then created a life-sized self-portrait using symbols, magazine clippings and other images, in addition to their own drawings. This activity gave each student an opportunity to express personal creativity and to connect it to their culture and experience, as well as an opportunity for cooperation when students took turns outlining his or her figure on the paper.

Discussions ranged from children’s rights to what a perfect world might look like. One student visualized equality, another food security, and yet another “no bullying; everyone would have friends and love, and there would be no poor and none too wealthy and no one would be judged for where they’re from.”

But it wasn’t all serious. An important part of the summer program was daily physical activity. The game of choice? Soccer.

**Lasting Impact**

Testimonials from both students and parents speak to the impact and value of the International Summer Youth Program. Rachel, a middle-school Boise native, was surprised by her experience. “I thought everybody—the people from different countries all around the world—would all be so different,” she said. “When I came here, I realized that everybody is just the same. Some people have different colors of skin or some people speak different languages, but that’s it.” During the two-week program, Rachel became best friends with Fatima, whose family had recently arrived in Boise from Iraq.

Another student’s parent observed: “My daughter’s friend was impressed by the refugee youth and how brave they have been in their young lives—not just during war and upheaval, but in coming to a new country and going to school where they didn’t speak the language. Both girls made friends with refugee girls.”

**Success**

The partnerships gained across local organizations and agencies were an indispensable factor in the overall success of the program, building on the infrastructure and expertise of the stakeholders involved. For Paul Schoenfelder, manager at Boise Parks and Recreation, collaboration was the key to the program’s success: “We were able to tap into the organizations’ strengths and resources to make the program happen. Boise Parks and Recreation has the background, skills, and infrastructure in place to run a summer camp.” The school districts, charter schools and refugee agencies were able to reach out to students and their families, while Boise State University provided curriculum guidance and helped recruit the instructor for the program. Other community resources included the use of the local community center as a home base, along with support staff, transportation for field trips, a registration system to sign up for the program, and a city scholarship fund that is available to all low income youth.

The value of the summer program for all involved was immense and plans for a second 2013 season are underway. For program leader Zilonka, “the most amazing thing was to be able to communicate with [kids] who didn’t speak English at all . . . Non-English speakers and English speakers bonded, cooperated, played together, shared food, went to many activities, and had fun. It was one of my best experiences ever as a human being and as an educator. It was a beautiful and precious experience to be part of these kids’ two weeks of summer camp.”
Getting Credit for Credentials

By kturner

Employment Inclusion Municipal

Unlike many employers, The Regional Municipality of York did not stop and wait when they ran into trouble evaluating skilled immigrant credentials, they created their own tool.

The Regional Municipality of York (York Region) governs a community made up of nine local municipalities north of Toronto. As a major local employer in an area where 43% of the population is foreign-born, York Region has more than an ordinary mandate to ensure its hiring policies and practices are inclusive of all applicants.

"Many new immigrants are choosing to live in York Region. As the regional government, we need to take the lead and develop a workforce that reflects the community we serve," says York Region Human Resources Acting Director Beverley Cassidy-Moffatt. "To support this goal, we developed the foreign credential process guide to ensure consistency in our hiring practices among both Canadian and internationally-trained candidates."

Recognizing barriers to employment

A major barrier to employment for new immigrants is recognition of foreign credentials and experience. When York Region made the decision to diversify the workplace, it needed a reliable and innovative tool to help its recruiters and hiring managers overcome this obstacle. Not able to find an evaluation tool elsewhere to help them assess applicants, York Region developed one of its own: Foreign Credentials Evaluation Process Guide. What's more, the York Region guide has been widely recognized as a tool "designed to promote a consistent and effective hiring process based on merit." (reported the Toronto Star)

The innovative foreign credential process guide was developed to fill a gap when research among other Toronto region municipalities failed to identify an available resource. It consists of a flowchart for when and how to assess foreign credentials, scenarios, templates for assessment requests and other resources. Easy to use, the guide is designed to promote an effective hiring process that leads to hiring decisions based on merit and does not exclude diverse candidates.

Multiple strategies at work

The process is working. York Region is already seeing a growing number of skilled immigrants within its workforce. However, the foreign credential process guide is only one of several strategies targeted by York Region to recruit new immigrants for some of its hard-to-fill positions. York Region is also a leading employer partner with Professional Access and Integration Enhancement (PAIE), a bridging program that provides internships and was instrumental in the recent hiring of internationally-trained engineers by York Region.

Recruiting skilled immigrants from the diverse York Region community has become part of the new normal for local employers. Quoted in the Toronto Star, Alex Walker, a co-CEO and president of Markham-based SMTC, said: "To be globally competitive, you have to be competitive in different cultures. We don't proactively go out and say, 'Guys, we need to recruit from these communities.' It is a given."

Success

York Region’s efforts to diversify its workforce are producing results. Twenty-seven percent of the Region’s workforce now consists of immigrants and, at last count, York Region’s employees speak more than 60 languages.

“At the Region, I’ve been able to transfer some of my skills and technical background from the Philippines,” says Leany Moreno, an industrial treatment engineer who first joined York Region through the PAIE program. “There is great opportunity here for me and I am always looking forward to coming to work because of the supportive environment.”

York Region was recognized for its innovative work with skilled immigrants in April 2013, receiving the TRIEC Immigrant Success (IS) Toronto Star Award for Excellence in Workplace Integration. The IS Awards recognize employer leadership and innovation in recruiting and retaining skilled immigrants in the Toronto Region.
Hiring skilled immigrants isn’t the only way York Region measures success. In a 2011 survey, employees rated support for diversity as one of York Region’s top five internal strengths. Michele Samuels, Manager of Regulatory Compliance: “I, myself, am a minority and have lived in three different countries. Working in an environment that is diverse makes it a happy place for me to come to; makes me very comfortable. It also gives me an opportunity to mentor other staff.”

As with most efforts to increase diversity and inclusion, York Region has experienced additional benefits from its efforts. Michele Samuels: “We do a lot of communication to our community. By having diversity within the Region, we’re able to craft communications messages in a way that we know will be impactful for our diverse communities.”
The Vancouver Dialogues Project: Where the Gold Mountain Meets Turtle Island

By kturner
April 12, 2013
Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, New Gateways, Social Inclusion

"You cannot come to this country and spend time without realizing the important relationship, we, who are newcomers, can have with the original inhabitants." – The Rt. Hon. Adrienne Clarkson, 26th Governor General of Canada

"If you are not First Nations to Turtle Island [North America], you are an immigrant." – Rupinder Sidhu, activist and performance artist

Vancouver’s earliest Chinese immigrants referred to Canada as a place of opportunity – the Gold Mountain. Less well-known is Turtle Island, the legendary name used by many First Nations people. As one of Canada’s three founding nations, Aboriginal communities are largely absent from conversations about diversity and multiculturalism. Immigrant communities have little chance for interaction and often maintain outdated stereotypes. Yet both groups have much in common, rich cultural histories as well as the experience of displacement, racism, and living outside of the mainstream.

The City of Vancouver is situated on Canada’s west coast within the traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples. In 2006, almost half its population was foreign-born, with immigrants and aboriginal peoples representing the two fastest growing demographic groups. Seeking a new approach to the city’s diversity and multicultural identity, in 2007 the Mayor’s Task Force on Immigration adopted an immigration plan that recognized the importance of First Nations and urban Aboriginals, stating: “This goal of inclusion is understood to be consistent with our existing commitment to honour and value the role of First Nations as the initial occupants of Canada.”

Within three years of that commitment, Vancouver launched the “Dialogues Project” to help create “a strong relationship between indigenous and immigrant communities with the City.”

Dialogue Circles

Developed by the Social Planning Division in collaboration with 27 community partners, “Dialogues Between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver” aims to “build mutual understanding and respect” through activities that include dialogue circles, community research, and a youth and elders program.

Diversity was built into the organizational structure of the project. Its steering committee co-chairs included a Councillor from the Musqueam Indian Band, the Executive Director of the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre and a professor of Asian migrant communities from the University of British Columbia.

Sharing stories and cultural perspectives lies at the heart of the Dialogues Project. In a review of the project in Canadian Issues (Summer 2012), co-chair Wade Grant recalls how his Chinese grandfather met his grandmother in the market gardens in the Musqueam community: “We’ve always had that welcoming feeling, but over time, the immigrant community sort of left our community and the connection was lost… I always wondered: why did we lose that connection with the immigrant community.”

Questions like this are central to the dialogue circles. Over 18 months, nine different groups met three times each, building trust and deepening the conversation between members. Facilitators were prepared in advance to deal with contentious issues as pre-selected participants spoke of their personal experiences of racism, stereotypes and the effect of colonization on Aboriginal communities. Emerging from the discussions was a repeated emphasis on the importance of intercultural understanding among the communities present.
Cultural exchanges are an especially rich opportunity for exploring new and shared histories. The local Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh Nations welcome visitors to their reserves, as do the Chinese, Jewish and Ismaili communities, while First Nations and Mayan communities meet to share traditional healing practices.

Says Project Lead Baldwin Wong about developing a program in uncharted territory: “Everything we proposed was brand new so we didn’t know [if it would work]. We had this belief that things could work in this vision. Until you get to the organizing, planning and delivering of the project, of the initiatives, we couldn’t tell.”

Success

One significant outcome of the Dialogues Project was the publication of Vancouver Dialogues: First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities. It documents the entire process and includes examples of the kinds of conversations that took place, short profiles of participants, and reflections on what activities worked. Other published resources include a DVD, a short film on youth and a collection of individual stories from a Vancouver neighbourhood called Our Roots: Stories from Grandview-Woodland.

What began as an 18-month project has grown steadily into a longer term vision. The Vancouver School Board Settlement Program started its own cultural exchange project, involving over 200 families to study the ties between Aboriginal and Chinese communities. The research component of the project has resulted in the development of an online Newcomers’ Guide to First Nations that will be launched in 2014. The first of its kind in Canada, it will include digital stories of the local First Nations in the area such as the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

Vancouver City Council has proclaimed that 2013-14 is a Year of Reconciliation in Vancouver, part of a greater effort to acknowledge past injustice to First Nations peoples and to further develop a culture of shared understanding and awareness of history for all its residents.
Many highly skilled immigrants face a common challenge when looking for work – a lack of business connections and networks. How can communities help newcomers quickly overcome this hurdle? By connecting them with established business, government and community leaders in their industries.

**Connecting Immigrants and Industry**

The Halifax Partnership – Halifax, Nova Scotia's economic development organization – created the Connector Program to address this challenge. Robyn Webb, Director of Labour Market Development, spearheaded the initiative in 2009. At the time, she saw a wealth of skilled immigrants who were struggling to find work in the city, while businesses were facing chronic labour shortages. She saw an opportunity to connect these two groups through what she calls ‘intentional networking’.

“A lot of small businesses don’t have an HR person,” Webb explains. “So how do they mitigate the risk when they’re hiring? By reaching out to a trusted person they know and saying, ‘do you know someone who would be a good fit for this position?’”

Webb adds that referrals make all the difference for newcomers as well. “It's not enough to simply apply for a job online or hand your resume out to employers. It's also about who you know in the community.”

The Connector Program is an effective solution that helps both employers and immigrants through a simple Match, Connector, Refer process that:

1. Taps into a willingness among knowledgeable business and community leaders who volunteer as Connectors to share their professional networks with newcomers (Connectees);
2. Facilitates interactions between Connectors and newcomers through 30-minute meetings and networking events;
3. Provides immigrants with opportunities to learn about the local job market, build a business network through referrals, and improve their job search and networking skills; and
4. Helps industry professionals meet pre-qualified talent that may be a fit for their business or a contact in their network.

“The most important thing is that each Connector agrees to provide the newcomer with three referrals in their business network,” Webb explains. “The Connectee meets with those three new people and before long they've met 12 contacts in the local business community who have provided insight into the local job market and potential career opportunities.”

**A Multiplier Effect**

The Connector Program was designed to meet recruitment and retention goals by building and expanding networks between newcomers to Halifax and established members of the community. Because Connectors are employers as well as established community members and business leaders, when the professional network of the newcomer grows, so does the potential job pool for the Connector.

This multiplier works both ways: addressing local labour market needs by enriching the local talent pool available to employers while connecting newcomers with opportunities to contribute and settle in their new community. The Program has ambitious objectives: to raise awareness and change perceptions on the benefits of hiring immigrants; help newcomers establish a professional network and find employment in their field; connect local employers to skilled, employment-ready newcomers; and establish Halifax as a welcoming city and make it the destination of choice for talent.

After meeting with newcomers interested in the insurance industry, one local executive commented: “I met a group of very bright, focused and keen young men and women who see a positive future for Nova Scotia. I’ll be chatting with my contacts in the local insurance industry this week.”

For Prasad Ranay, a Connector program participant: “For me, being a person from outside of Halifax it makes a lot of sense for the initial touch and contact with the community. It's expanded my network as well as expanded my skills and reach in the community.”

**Success**

The Connector Program has proven to be a model that works. After its initial success connecting immigrants in Halifax, it was expanded to include local and international post-secondary graduates. Networking events like #HireMEHalifax make the most of an evening of networking, live pitches, and youth hiring resources.

The proof is in the numbers. Over the past 10 years, the program has engaged over 1,000 volunteer Connectors to meet with more than 3,000 Connectees. As a result, over 1,200 Connectees have found jobs in their fields.

The Connector Program is now innovating and expanding even more. On March 20, 2019, with support from the Province of Nova Scotia and the Government of Canada, the Halifax Partnership is launching Connector+, a digital networking platform that will create more opportunities for industry leaders to meet young professionals in Nova Scotia.
The goal is to connect 3,500 post-secondary graduates in the first two years. While focused on expanding the reach and success of the Halifax program, Webb also spends much of her time sharing the Connector model with communities around the world experiencing similar labour force challenges.

Today, there are over 35 Canadian and international communities that have replicated the face-to-face program with help from the National Connector Program led by the Halifax Partnership. Following the Connector+ pilot in Nova Scotia, Webb hopes to roll this new digital model out to National Connector communities.

To learn more about the Connector Program visit www.connectorprogram.ca

The Connector Program has been recognized by the Conference Board of Canada and the International Economic Development Council.


This Good Idea was featured in the “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.
Immigration to Toronto, Canada’s largest city, is staggering – in 2006, 46% of people living in Toronto were born outside of Canada, and, of these, 20% were recent immigrants who arrived in the last five years. Torontonians trace their roots to many different places in the world, and more than 30% of residents speak a language other than Canada’s official languages (English and French) at home. The most frequently spoken home languages are Chinese languages, Tamil, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.

Few institutions reflect and serve the diversity within the community better than the Toronto Public Library (TPL). TPL is the busiest urban public library system in the world, with 98 branches, 1.3 million card-holders and a collection of 11 million items. In 2011 alone, TPL users borrowed 33 million items and made 23 million online visits. Recent immigrants are among the library’s regular patrons – in fact, more new Canadians are logged as “frequent users” than the overall Toronto average.

Why? Because TPL has worked hard to reach out to new immigrants, building a collection of materials in more than 40 languages, hosting English as a second language (ESL) classes in library branches, dedicating a section on their website to newcomers to Canada, and publicly posting a list of the library’s multicultural service goals.

Library Settlement Partnerships

For all Torontonians, the public library is an open, free and accessible community space that has been called “the great equalizer.” For recent immigrants, the library is also a space to meet others and access the resources that can help them settle into their new home.

In particular, TPL hosts a Library Settlement Partnership (LSP), which places settlement workers in public libraries. The settlement workers provide multilingual one-on-one information and referral services, as well as group information sessions to new immigrants. These workers provide information on a range of topics, such as how to get provincial health insurance and driver’s licences, register children in school, and where to find job search help and programs. Settlement workers can also connect clients to library staff for assistance with library programs and special services, such as TPL’s Business Development Centre or income tax clinic.

LSPs are funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the federal ministry responsible for immigrant selection and integration. The program builds on the itinerant service model demonstrated by the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program, which reaches out to immigrant parents through their children’s schools. Both programs are founded on the principle of delivering settlement services where immigrants already are, rather than forcing immigrants to seek out those services.

Partnership is a key component of the LSP program. The settlement workers are employed by local settlement agencies – in Toronto, nine agencies place settlement workers in 19 library branches. The workers bring settlement expertise, cultural knowledge, and multilingual skills, while the library provides space for the settlement worker and access to clients who might not have been aware of settlement services, or how or where to find them.

Success

TPL was one of three public library systems selected by Citizenship and Immigration Canada to pilot LSPs in 2007. Following the success of the pilot programs, LSPs have expanded to include 11 public library systems in the province of Ontario – including Hamilton, Kitchener, London, Ottawa, Waterloo, Windsor, and four systems in the Greater Toronto Area.

Further, the itinerant model demonstrated by SWIS and LSPs has been applied in other municipal institutions. In 2011, the City of Toronto piloted a program to place settlement workers from local agencies in city facilities, such as recreation centres, children’s services centres, public health clinics and city-run shelters.

Despite challenging economic times and cuts to both TPL’s budget (City of Toronto) and federal funds for integration programs in Ontario, the LSP continues to serve newcomers in Canada’s most diverse city through the world’s busiest library system.
Reflecting the City: Employment Equity at Work

By kturner
April 1, 2013

Good Ideas Archive

Once faced with a declining population, today Saskatoon is Canada’s fastest growing city. Thanks to a booming provincial economy and an influx of immigrants targeting the city through government of Saskatchewan-led immigration programs, the number of visible minorities has more than doubled in less than a decade, up to almost 8% from 3% in a population of 260,000. For the City of Saskatoon this presents not only economic opportunities but also a new civic responsibility to ensure its government reflects the population it serves.

Making equity the measure of success

The province of Saskatchewan has a proud history of progressive leadership on social policy, protecting farmers, promoting unions and spearheading a national campaign for universal healthcare. In that tradition of responsible government, in 2004 the City of Saskatoon instituted a Cultural Diversity and Race Relations Policy, establishing employment equity targets that matched the changing diversity of its population, and strategies to make the workplace more welcoming and inclusive. In 2012 the City of Saskatoon met the goal set out for visible minorities by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, the result of an intensive community outreach and concerted efforts to make the employment application process as transparent as possible.

Outreach and communication

For many new immigrants with foreign university degrees, obtaining highly coveted civil service jobs is a recipe for professional and social success. Getting there, however, can feel like a mystery to the uninitiated newcomer. To recruit skilled immigrants into public service, the City of Saskatoon recognized it had to overcome the barriers to employment as perceived by newcomers. The City devoted resources to developing partnerships within immigrant communities, conducting outreach and information sessions with organizations like the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association and the International Women’s Association. Along the way, both applicants and community workers become better educated about the hurdles that are part of the employment application process.

A trustworthy partner

One of the biggest obstacles to employment is obtaining recognition of foreign credentials, something that must be done before the job application process can even begin. The City of Saskatoon helps potential applicants through the pre-employment maze by providing information that ranges from how to get degrees assessed to what additional courses of study may be needed for certification. A diversity coordinator from the City’s Employment and Compensation branch provides additional coaching and ongoing support throughout the application process itself, from practical advice on how to write a resume that best represents the applicant’s experience to tips on what kind of questions will be asked at an interview.

The approach is clearly working. Mubarka Butt, City of Saskatoon’s Employment and Total Compensation (Human Resources) Branch Manager explains: “If you are putting the effort forward every single year and you have put a concerted effort forward in educating, bringing people along, building relationships, raising awareness, being transparent and building credibility for your organization as a diverse and inclusive employer, the numbers are inevitable.”

Changing the internal conversation

Developing a diverse workforce is about more than achieving employment equity targets. Essential steps to creating a welcoming work environment include promoting intercultural awareness, encouraging an attitude of mutual respect and advocating the use of inclusive language.

For example, the Human Resources Department provides as needed “positive interventions” to help managers cope with the issues that can arise around accommodating cultural differences. In one case, a city supervisor asked, “How am I supposed to accommodate five workers who want to go to Friday prayer at the mosque at the same time?” The answer started with a conversation and ended with a solution: There are two Friday prayers at the mosque that are one hour each. Send a few to the first prayer, the others to the second. The shift will remain covered and the employees will feel respected.

According to Butt, making sure everyone is comfortable is key: “We say, let’s take two steps back and let’s talk about understanding, let’s talk about awareness, let’s talk about respect.”

Success

Compared to cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, Saskatoon’s new demographic profile puts it at the “infancy stage of diversity.” However, like many new gateway cities, the city is getting it right, from the start. In 2013, the City of Saskatoon was recognized as one of Canada’s Best Diversity Employers for the second year in a row.

The City of Saskatoon has incorporated its goal to reflect the region’s new immigrant and ethno-cultural reality in its workforce in a new ten-year strategic plan, published in 2012. Workforce diversity is a measurable “success indicator” and key to its broader mission to build “a culture of continuous improvement.”

“For any organizations that are at the same stage as we are – don’t be afraid to tackle the issue head on. Because if you don’t do it now, it might be too late to do it ten years later when you realize you are fully diverse now from a population standpoint but are not inclusive,” says Butt. “We want to make sure that while we are diverse, we are inclusive at the same time.”

Internships, ‘Canadian’ Experience and Employment

By kturner
April 14, 2013

Employment Inclusion, Municipal

New immigrants to Canada face a challenging Catch-22 when trying to find jobs commensurate with their skills and experiences: they can’t get a job without Canadian experience but they can’t get that experience without a Canadian job.

The City of Montreal, the largest employer in Montreal and the surrounding suburbs with more than 25,000 employees, recognized this barrier was preventing many bright and talented individuals from fully participating in the Quebec labour force.

To help newcomers, as well as recent graduates, overcome that barrier and help the City be more reflective of the population it serves, the City launched the Professional Sponsorship Program (Programme de parrainage professionnel) in 2006.

The program has a tripartite funding model. Emploi Québec provides a wage subsidy equivalent to the provincial minimum wage and the City of Montreal tops up the minimum wage to the appropriate compensation level based on the job. The province of Quebec’s Department of Immigration and Cultural Communities finances an annual evaluation as well as the training for mentors and mentees.

How the Program Works

The program includes a six-month paid internship with the City of Montreal and aims to increase the workforce integration of ethnic and visible minorities, who account for nearly 85% of all participants. To be eligible for the program, applicants must have a post-secondary degree or diploma and less than one year of work experience in Quebec in a field related to their education.

The work placements include a wide variety of positions and give participants the opportunity to develop their skills in a stimulating job related to the field in which they trained. One foreign-trained engineer who came to the City as a trainee building inspector intern was paired with an employee who mentored him. After several weeks of coaching and on-the-job training, the intern was able to work successfully on his own and then was hired on a permanent basis after the internship.

The mentoring and training components of the internship program are essential to its success. Not only do new entrants to the Canadian workforce need to learn the technical ins and outs of the job, but they must also learn to adapt to a new workplace culture. To that end, mentors and interns both receive diversity and interpersonal communication training. This training helps them become more aware of their own perception of cultural differences, better understand others and teaches them to communicate using negotiation, mediation and problem solving.

Success

"This program promotes intercultural and intergenerational understanding while promoting careers in Montreal’s public service," says Mary Deros, a member of the City’s executive committee responsible for diverse communities, at the launch of the sixth internship cohort in September 2011. In addition, the program promotes the exchange of expertise, meets the needs of the workforce and prepares a new generation for skilled, in-demand jobs, she said.

Since the launch of the program in 2006, 269 people have participated in the program. Of those, 156 (58%) have found permanent jobs after their internships. Within this group, 118 (76%) were employed by the City of Montreal.

Update! In March 2013, the city recognized the success of the most recent and seventh cohort of interns to complete the program, bringing the number of interns who have completed the program to 329. Erika Duchesne, with the City’s executive committee responsible for diverse communities, took the opportunity to thank the mentors without whom the program could not operate: “Your dedication, your generosity and your commitment to sharing your valuable expertise and experience with the municipality makes me proud to count you among the exemplary employees of the City of Montreal."
Access Without Fear: Building a City of Sanctuary

By kturner  
March 13, 2013  
Living Together, Municipal

On February 21, 2013, Toronto became the first Canadian municipality to formally provide a sanctuary for non-status or undocumented immigrants. While the City of Toronto has long had an informal Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy that meant city staff could do their jobs without asking about immigration status, it is now implementing a formal Access Without Fear policy.

As Toronto Star reporter Nicholas Keung wrote, “Council’s vote was significant at a time when the undocumented population is expected to surge in 2015, when many legal but temporary foreign workers will see their four-year work permits expire under a new federal law and potentially move ‘underground.’”

City staff is reviewing ways to implement the decision, including ensuring that all residents have access by removing identification requirements to a wide range of core service areas, such as healthcare, education, income support programs, employment protection, affordable housing, settlement services, social assistance and legal services. At the time of the vote, Toronto City Council also requested the Federal government establish a regularization program for undocumented residents and that the Provincial government review opening access to its funded services.

Staff will consult widely with community groups, some of whom were instrumental in bringing this policy change to Council. Many are part of the Solidarity City Network, an informal collective of Toronto residents who advocate for regularization of undocumented people. Their key argument, supported by the City, is that undocumented people need access to services to reduce fear, increase public health and safety of all residents, and contribute to the city’s prosperity. After all, most of them pay taxes.

With Access Without Fear, Toronto joins a growing "sanctuary city" movement now in 36 US cities and 14 cities in the United Kingdom, respectively, where local governments are adopting formal policies that ensure all residents can access municipal services, regardless of immigration status. As a result of Toronto’s decisions, the city of Hamilton is also considering such a policy.

Related Links:
- Sheffield, United Kingdom: Cities of Sanctuary, Communities of Welcome
- Webinar: Welcoming Cities: Municipal Leadership on Immigrant Integration
- San Francisco: What is the Sanctuary Ordinance? (City and County of San Francisco website)
Racism Free Edmonton

By kturner
February 20, 2013

Living Together, Municipal, New Gateways, Public Space, Social Inclusion, Spatial Inclusion

What would you do if you heard someone tell a racist joke, or use racist language? Would you say something? In Edmonton, Canada, 24,000 residents have pledged to speak up for a city free from racism.

The population of Edmonton has grown by approximately 25% in the last ten years; now more than a million people call the city their home. And while Toronto and Vancouver are often thought of as the hometowns of Canadian diversity, the provincial capital of Alberta is catching up – 18.5% of Edmontonians are immigrants, 17% are visible minorities, and 5% are Aboriginal peoples.

Diversity can bring challenges as well as opportunities, so when the Canadian Commission for UNESCO spearheaded the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD), Edmonton was among the first cities to join. In 2007, Racism Free Edmonton was established and incorporated into the Deputy City Manager’s Office as an expression of the city’s commitment to action.

By choosing to take an anti-racism approach to its work, Racism Free Edmonton explicitly names the racism and discrimination that many Edmontonians face. This challenges the often polite Canadian conversation on multiculturalism and the idea that racism is no longer a problem in Canada. It is also a clear statement that racism is unacceptable in their city.

In addition, by framing the issue to include immigrants, racialized, and Aboriginal Canadians, Racism Free Edmonton brings together the city agencies and community organizations that work closely with each of these communities.

While both of these approaches have come with challenges, they have also presented opportunities – to acknowledge experiences of racism and discrimination, to create a space to talk about those experiences openly, and to explore how widespread these experiences are.

“Eliminating racism is another step towards making Edmonton a great place to live for everyone,” explains Ann Mah, Edmonton Public Schools.

Turning words into action

The City of Edmonton is a lead member and funder of Racism Free Edmonton, a collaborative partnership between 16 government departments and agencies, educational institutions and community organizations. It aims to build an inclusive community that respects the cultural diversity of immigrant, racialized and Aboriginal communities.

Racism Free Edmonton started out by consulting with the community and developing an action plan that identifies specific activities to address barriers to full participation in economic, social and political life. Through consultative community meetings with Aboriginal and racialized participants, Racism Free Edmonton identified six areas of focus: education, employment, housing, media, policing and justice, and youth. Significantly, the plan includes specific tasks to monitor, evaluate and report on successes and challenges.

In 2010, Racism Free Edmonton launched a public awareness campaign called, “I’m Committed to a Racism Free Edmonton.” Over an eight-month period, the Racism Free Edmonton partners distributed postcards and 100 large scrolls around the city and in public institutions such as schools. By signing the scrolls and postcards, or by making a pledge on the Racism Free Edmonton website, people in Edmonton committed to specific actions to eliminate racism in their city.

For example, residents committed to “accept people for who they are,” to “stand up for those being discriminated against,” and to “believe that there is more to a person than a ‘single’ story.”

Throughout the campaign, Racism Free Edmonton was supported by its partners and by public figures such as City Councilor and Multiculturalism Initiative Liaison Amarjeet Sohi. “Edmontonians have affirmed their commitment to being an inclusive city,” said Councillor Sohi. “Now we must work together to continue our strategic work to identify and prevent discrimination. This work calls for courage, and, above all, partnership.”

Success

By the end of the eight-month campaign, 24,000 Edmonton residents had pledged their commitment to ending racism in their city. Further, 20,000 people visited the Racism Free Edmonton website during that time.

To keep up the momentum created by the campaign, Racism Free Edmonton continues to hold public events such as an employment symposium, a free speech forum and intercultural awareness events for adults and youth. To learn more, in 2011, the city partnered with the University of Alberta on a study that explores Edmontonians’ experiences with racism and discrimination.

The Racism Free Edmonton website has information for the public on understanding institutional, systemic, and individual racism, as well as the importance of standing together with the victims of racism, thinking critically about what is presented in the media, and re-considering the use of words like “disadvantaged” and “underprivileged.”
Racism Free Edmonton also provides three-day anti-discrimination training to public institutions and community organizations, at no cost to the participants. All of the senior leadership at the Edmonton Police Services have taken this training.

“The Edmonton Police Service has a long history of working with community partners. We will continue to strive to break down language and cultural barriers and foster respect and understanding — the cornerstones of our commitment to a racism-free city,” said Michael J. Boyd, C.O.M., Chief of Police, Edmonton Police Service.

As a result of its work, Racism Free Edmonton has been recognized as a promising practice by both the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD) and by UNESCO. By 2012, 54 Canadian municipalities in nine provinces and one territory had joined CCMARD.

In the future, Racism Free Edmonton is considering broadening its work to address other kinds of discrimination, to continue to build an inclusive community for all Edmonton residents.
Taking Time for Community Safety

By kturner
January 30, 2013

Civic Inclusion, Municipal, New Gateways

“How do I safely identify a police officer at the door?” It was a simple question, but it puzzled the law enforcement officer who heard it at an English as a Second Language class. “It’s a given to me that if there is a police officer with a badge at the door that… that’s the police, you answer the door,” said Captain Jeff Ankerfelt, Brooklyn Park Police. “Why did you ask that question?”

A woman from the Ukraine answered, “My brother answered the door for the police and I never saw him again.”

This example from the Brooklyn Centre’s Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP) training video illustrates the obstacles police face in gaining trust in newcomer communities. This is particularly true in the new suburban cities in the United States that are experiencing significant growth in their foreign-born populations. For example, almost 40% of all students in this Minnesota city of 30,000 come from homes in which a language other than English is spoken. The newly-arrived include Hmong, Latino, South Asian, Somali, and Liberian immigrants.

Cultural and language differences present challenges for most new Americans, sometimes making it difficult to become familiar with local laws and customs. Understanding the role of police in the community is an important part of settling in. At the same time, local police often lack the necessary intercultural understanding and communications support needed to help bridge this gap.

“Working together to build safer communities”

As a new city of migration in the US Midwest, Brooklyn Center police found themselves at an occasionally tense impasse with some of their newest residents. Before the situation could develop into a possible public safety issue, the police decided to forgo “business as usual” and look for partners that could help them find a solution.

In 2005, Brooklyn Center established the Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP) to build trust between themselves and the area’s new immigrants and refugees. In cooperation with the police departments of neighbouring Brooklyn Park, Richfield, and Hopkins, and with the support of the Hennepin County government and the Northwest Hennepin Human Services Council, the JCPP initiated an intensive community assessment involving representatives of the urban region’s different cultural communities. The aim? A community policing model to enhance communication and understanding between law enforcement and cultural communities.

The motto guiding the JCPP strategy is: “Working together to build safer communities.” Brooklyn Center Police and their partners committed themselves to actively inform newcomers about local police procedures and laws; provide training to officers about cultural diversity, customs and practices; and promote opportunities for positive interaction for both groups. Investing in a two-way process—one that engages both newcomer and receiving community—is a strategy that’s being put to work by police in other jurisdictions, too, such as Newport News, Virginia (Police Take Community Outreach to City Hall).

Success

The JCPP’s strategies include appointing a community liaison officer to promote trust within immigrant communities; providing cultural and language training for police officers; police-led community outreach and workshops delivered through their New Americans’ Academy in refugee resettlement classes and local community centres; and establishing a multicultural advisory committee for ongoing consultation. Finally, the JCPP actively recruits young “multicultural cadets” and offers them counselling on a future career with the police force. An offer of employment is conditional upon the cadet’s completion of training, and success in meeting educational and performance requirements.

“I feel like I am serving as a bridge and as someone that the community can look at and see themselves,” says former multicultural cadet, Officer Todd Nagbo of the Brooklyn Centre Police. “I am someone they can talk to without feeling like they are afraid.”

Since 2005, this program has been successfully replicated in four suburban cities in Hennepin County. In 2009, the JCPP received the Civil Rights Award from the International Association of Police Chiefs.
Thinking Big: A Film Festival Highlights Small Town Diversity

By kturner  
January 27, 2013

Living Together Municipal New Gateways

Karima arrives at her first day at a secondary school. She speaks no Spanish. Will she ever make any friends?

Karima Spanish chronicles the challenges facing an immigrant teenager to learn a new language, fit in with her classmates (or not) and make friends – in under six minutes. The student-made short film is part of the Andoenredando project, one in a series of initiatives undertaken by the municipality of Torre Pacheco, Spain, to promote social integration, combat discrimination and ensure equal opportunity for all, including newcomers.

Torre Pacheco is a small town with big ambitions. In June 2012, it held its fourth annual National Short Film Festival for Diversity (Andoenredando: festival para la Diversidad). The week-long festival receives entries from all across Spain which are judged by award-winning filmmakers in categories that range from Best Short Fiction Film to the Youth Jury Award. The films focus on social justice and intercultural dialogue, mirroring the priorities of the municipality.

Andoenredando is the social participation and raising awareness component of the Torre Pacheco plan. Its title is a play on words suggesting the process of “untangling;” its focus is intercultural dialogue. Its dedicated website showcases the wide range of programming available to encourage social integration and community engagement among young people from different backgrounds through innovative uses of new media – as demonstrated in the short film, Karima Spanish.

Beyond the film festival and student-made films, programming includes classroom workshops, online tutorials, television interviews, social networks and creative cartoons. Elementary schoolchildren learn stop-motion animation (where a series of photographs capture the incremental movements of 3-D objects) to create a short films on cultural diversity, which are screened online and featured among the over 200 short films screened annually in the film festival (part of the main Andoenredando website).

Since its inception in 2008, thousands of young people have participated in Andoenredando activities and events – at school, in city neighbourhoods and at home via the internet and special television programming. Almost 800 students have participated in multi-media workshops “aimed at raising awareness and prevention and fight against ethnic discrimination.”

Torre Pacheco’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 2010, the Spanish Observatory for Racism and Xenophobia (OBERAXE) recognized Torre Pacheco for its social participation work in “tackling social integration, raising awareness, and intercultural conviviality.”

Torre Pacheco continues to achieve remarkable outcomes across a wide platform of activities. In 2011, over 2,300 immigrants used the housing services (either for counseling, information or mediation) while 200 more were provided with accommodation. Another 1,300 newcomers successfully accessed services at the local health centre. While students participated in intercultural activities at local schools, community outreach ensured that the parents and families of some 650 immigrant students also received information and counseling.

A broad canvas

Located in southeastern Spain, Torre Pacheco has a population of 30,000; over 25 % of residents have a migrant background (well above the national average of 16 %). In 2008, the municipality began to roll out a series of projects designed to respond to the significant demographic change in its population. Despite world-wide economic pressures, it chose to increase resources to migrant issues in order to provide better services to newcomers and build bridges between communities.

The larger public service program for the “Reception and Integration of Migrant Individuals and Families” embodies the municipality’s intercultural approach, a major priority of the city. It includes direct services to immigrants in the areas of housing, social services, education, and healthcare. Administered through Torre Pacheco’s Municipal Institute of Services for Social Action (IMSAS), program staff includes over 30 social workers, mediators, psychologists, lawyers, educations and administrative officers who are available to work with area residents; an additional six social mediators are available as needed. Funding comes from the Ministry of Labour and Immigration and the European Integration Fund.

Success

Since its inception in 2008, thousands of young people have participated in Andoenredando activities and events – at school, in city neighbourhoods and at home via the internet and special television programming. Almost 800 students have participated in multi-media workshops “aimed at raising awareness and prevention and fight against ethnic discrimination.”

Torre Pacheco’s efforts have not gone unnoticed. In 2010, the Spanish Observatory for Racism and Xenophobia (OBERAXE) recognized Torre Pacheco for its social participation work in “tackling social integration, raising awareness, and intercultural conviviality.”

Torre Pacheco continues to achieve remarkable outcomes across a wide platform of activities. In 2011, over 2,300 immigrants used the housing services (either for counseling, information or mediation) while 200 more were provided with accommodation. Another 1,300 newcomers successfully accessed services at the local health centre. While students participated in intercultural activities at local schools, community outreach ensured that the parents and families of some 650 immigrant students also received information and counseling.
Immigrating to a new city can be an exciting and bewildering experience. Do you have to register as a resident? What city services are available? How do I enroll my children into school? The challenge of accessing such information is further compounded when language and cultural barriers are present. To help a growing population of newcomers learn about practical information and essential services, the City of Bilbao created an easy-to-use online multilingual resource guide (Guía de Recursos Multilingüe).

Like other cities in Spain, Bilbao has had to adjust to changing demographics. Located in the Basque region of northern Spain, this city of 350,000 has had virtually no population growth over the past decade even though the percentage of migrants went from 1% to 8.2% between 2000 and 2010.

Seven Languages

Bilbao’s multilingual resource guide was developed by the Immigration Bureau of the Office of Equality, Cooperation and Citizenship (Área de Igualdad, Cooperación y Ciudadanía) in 2008 and is available on the city’s official website in seven languages: Euskera, Castilian Spanish, English, French, Romanian, Chinese and Arabic. Since the multilingual feature is fully integrated throughout the website, city staff can answer questions by referring to any part of the guide, then click on the appropriate language to share the required information in translation.

The guide offers practical information on a wide array of city services and programs, including health care, social benefits, education and employment services. Topics range from how to obtain a driver’s licence, what to do in the case of spousal abuse to how to legalize one’s status in Spain. It also informs newcomers of the role of the Citizen Advice Bureau for in-person advice and provides a directory to the many immigrant associations found within Bilbao. Maps and visual materials also help users navigate easily towards the information they need.

To spread the word about the online guide, the city fell back onto an older form of marketing. Posters were placed in a variety of neighbourhoods and districts, particularly ones with a higher immigrant population.

Success

Keeping the guide reliable and relevant is key to its success. Staff make sure to keep the website up-to-date on procedures, office locations, contact information, and new legislation or information about resources and services. Simple and effective, Bilbao’s popular online multilingual resource guide is used not only by residents but also by municipal staff, and the many community and cultural associations and NGOs in the city. In 2011, the guide received over 80,000 page views.

This use of modern communication technology was recognized as a good practice in 2009 by the European Network OPENCities which has also praised another program coming out of Bilbao’s Office of Equality, Cooperation and Citizenship – the Women, Health & Violence: Guide for Women. Both are examples of the city’s commitment to social cohesion in a diverse community.
Participation, Politics and Impact

By kturner
December 19, 2012

Living Together Municipal Political Inclusion

While 28% of the population in Dortmund have a migrant background, only 5% are represented on the local council. Clearly, their voices are not being heard.

Dortmund, a city in North Rhine-Westphalia with a population of 580,000, is not unique. The gap between political leadership in Germany and the people they serve was widely reported in the 2011 study, Diversity seeks Council: Councillors with a migration background in German cities, by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (with the Heinrich Böll Foundation and Stiftung Mercator). While Germans with a migrant background make up almost 20% of the population (and over 25% in cities), they are significantly underrepresented in Germany’s political parties, parliaments and ministries. On average, only 4% of all council members have a migration background.

Addressing the Problem

To address this gap, the City of Dortmund looked to its 2008 master plan on Migration and Integration that had been developed through a participatory process. Since improving the representation of migrants was already a theme within the plan, launching Politik Mit-Wirkung (“Politics with Impact”) was a natural outcome. The project aims to increase the political participation of ethnic communities, coordinated by the city’s Migration and Integration Agency and its advisory Integration Council (Vorsitzender des Ausländerbeirates der Stadt Dortmund). “Mit-Wirkung” is a play on words, suggesting both “Politics with Impact” and “Politics with Participation.”

The chairman of Dortmund’s Integration Council, Adem Sönmez, had already emphasized the need for a change in the status quo at the official launch of the master plan participatory process in 2006: “The political participation of immigrants is very important. We, as representatives of the migrants, must have decision-making authority and not only an advisory role.”

Putting a face on the political process and initiating political dialogue are the primary strategies used to engage Dortmund’s minority communities. To start the process off, the Integration Council and the Migration and Integration Agency held information sessions with district mayors, city managers, and local politicians to determine their willingness to talk about their political careers. To help participants identify with the politicians, a particular preference is put on politicians with a migrant background. After potential participants are pre-selected for their interest in “imagining their political career,” a public session is set up to discuss all the issues around taking up political work.

Success

The district of Huckarde hosted the first Politik Mit-Wirkung event in September 2011, bringing together local residents (with or without a migrant background) and representatives from three different political parties to talk about their experiences and what role their migrant background played (if any). Their message concerning the importance of political participation of all residents was well-received and many participants completed political party membership applications. Due to the positive feedback from that first event, more sessions have been organized in other districts. Today Politik Mit-Wirkung has become an integral part of the city’s political integration strategy.
In February 2008, the Munich City Council unanimously approved a policy of intercultural integration, emphasizing a resident’s right to equal access to core institutions such as education, labour market, housing, and health care. Among the list of essential principles, the city affirmed that “intercultural integration is achievable only if institutions adopt a policy of intercultural orientation and intercultural mainstreaming.”

That meant change for the city’s bureaucracy itself. With 30,000 public employees, Landeshauptstadt München is one of the largest employers in the region. Although about 35% of the city’s population has a migrant background, in 2006, only 11% of public service trainees represented that population. Mainstreaming intercultural diversity in the city of Munich would mean leading by example.

Moving to an Intercultural Opening

Munich has examined the issue of integration for more than four decades. The former Lord Mayor Jans-Jochen Vogel first described Munich as “a city of immigration” in the late 1960’s. In 1972 the city undertook its first study of the impact of the growing foreign population on municipal services. This resulted in the establishment of an immigrant advisory council, comprised of newcomers to Germany, in 1974.

In 2008, with its updated and newly-minted intercultural integration policy, the city of Munich started its program of “Intercultural Opening” (Interkulturelle Öffnung) by offering a broad system of support to managers and staff through its social services department. Recognizing that the project would not succeed unless it had buy-in from all department heads, the new Office for Intercultural Work (Stelle für interkulturelle Arbeit) moved quickly to establish an Integration Task Force to address the individual needs of all municipal departments.

Today the Office works on developing the intercultural openness, or cultural competence, of the city’s ever-changing civil service, focusing on staff development. Each city department produces a strategic plan with tailored targets and implementation measures based on an initial strategy workshop and analysis of its diversity indicators. Munich’s intercultural opening program model includes cross-cultural training, benchmarks, a series of studies, assessment tools and, finally, assistance with recruitment and interviewing strategies for its HR personnel.

Success

A critical part of the “Intercultural Opening” project has involved developing a set of integration indicators to measure success. When the city published its first integration report, “Munich Lives Diversity” ("München lebt Vielfalt") in 2011, over 3,000 people had attended cross-cultural courses. Significantly, the proportion of new trainees from a migrant background had also increased to 16%, a significant step towards achieving the city’s goal of 20% by 2013.

Like other German cities, such as Hamburg and Bremen, Munich has developed smart strategies for recruiting young people from a migrant background into the civil service. For example, when applying for trainee positions with the city, intercultural competence is promoted as a recognized skill and valued asset to the city’s future workforce.

In 2012, specialist intercultural training for 600 firefighters and paramedics on the city’s front-lines was being scheduled. By 2013, all top managers will have received a cross-cultural training. To ensure their broader diversity targets are realized, 560 managers are also being trained to improve personnel selection procedures.

By ktturner

January 2, 2013

Municipal - Municipal Welcome-ability - Political Inclusion

The champion boxer. The celebrity chef. The star soccer player. Standing side-by-side with their “naturalization pilots.” These are the faces of a public relations campaign led by the City of Hamburg to promote German citizenship to long-time and well-integrated residents with a migration background.

In a city of 1.8 million, about 400,000 – more than 20% – have a migration background. Of these, 236,000 do not have German citizenship although more than half meet the requirements for naturalization based on the length of their residence in Germany. Why? Many are hesitant or may need guidance to enter the process because of linguistic barriers, fear of the bureaucratic process or lack of understanding about the benefits of naturalization. Yet, there are many good reasons to naturalize. Freedom to choose where to reside in the EU, for example, to travel freely in almost every country in the world or the full right to vote, to name but a few. But naturalization means more: it is a commitment to Germany as a new home and its values.


“Naturalization is much more than an administrative act. It is the declared belief in our state and our society,” said Hamburg Mayor Olaf Scholz. “Those who have lived here for a while and have met the requirement should also become German citizens because only then do all the possibilities of participation exist.”

Naturalization Pilots

A unique feature of the Ich bin Hamburger project are the volunteer facilitators who work as naturalization “pilots” to guide qualified city residents though the naturalization process. Anyone between the ages 17 and 73 can volunteer, from high school graduates to professionals, job seekers and pensioners. In short, anyone with or without migration background who has an interest in providing information and advice about attaining citizenship to interested parties. The city is assisted by a Turkish community organization, Türkische Gemeinde Hamburg und Umgebung e.V., which works to confirm the legal status of applicants for naturalization as well as managing volunteers. The program tries to match applicants with volunteers who share a language, and/or similar community or professional networks. Additionally, all volunteer pilots receive training on the rules governing naturalization and residency rights from local officials, representatives of the Interior Ministry as well as from experts on immigration, residence and nationality law.

Most naturalization pilots have experienced the process themselves, and offer sympathetic support to applicants who may feel overwhelmed as they maneuver between various agencies, consulates and embassies. These trusted community ambassadors help those who are hesitant because of lack of information or who may have become “stuck” in a poorly understood bureaucratic process. The best pilots are generally well-connected to their communities and able to promote the project at work, in their neighbourhoods and within their social networks. The program has attracted volunteers from a vast array of backgrounds with countries of origin that include Armenia, Iraq, Croatia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Bolivia, Eritrea, Russia, Togo, and of course, Germany.

Success

The Ich bin Hamburger campaign has appeared on billboards across the city, is publicly endorsed by the city’s Mayor, and includes an official naturalization (Einbürgerung) website with information and downloadable official documents. Testimonials and success stories round out a highly successful communications strategy.

Speed is another principle that guides Hamburg’s naturalization campaign. Assisted by a growing network of expert naturalization “pilots,” a well-informed and interested applicant can now qualify quickly and take the next steps towards citizenship with ease. As a result, 85 volunteer pilots have advised about 600 people interested in attaining citizenship since the project started in 2010 while more than 2,000 people have been informed about the campaign and the naturalization project. Led by the Department of Labour, Social Affairs, Family and Integration, the Ich bin Hamburger project has been extended with renewed funding until 2014.
The Open Library Welcomes the World at Home

By kturner
January 4, 2013
Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal

In 2005, the public library system in the Comunidad of Madrid took a bold step towards inclusion. Recognizing the region’s growing immigrant population (17% in 2010), it launched a project to facilitate the integration of newcomers. Initially focusing on language barriers, the Biblioteca Abierta (Open Library) introduced new multilingual collections and services such as Spanish language lessons and computer literacy courses. As an essential public resource and form of public space, multilingual library services are both inclusive and able to foster a sense of connection and belonging.

Inspired by the success of public library programs like the “New Americans” program at Queens Library, New York, the Comunidad of Madrid has developed the Biblioteca Abierta to promote equity and greater social cohesion across the city. Funded by a number of Comunidad ministries, the Biblioteca Abierta initiative has three objectives: to overcome language barriers through knowledge of the Spanish language and culture; ensure all residents have equal opportunities through workshops; and allow everyone to share in each other’s cultures.

Cultural Centres in Your Local Library

Research into the city’s local population showed not only that the city had a growing immigrant population, but that there was significant demand from these “new neighbours” for reading and book lending services, and periodicals and audio-visual material in their own languages. As there are no other bodies in the region which provided these services, the Biblioteca Abierta program created “Cultural Interest Centres” within public libraries to provide information, guidance and mediation, as well as access to the culture of different countries. In these centres, both immigrants and the local population can enjoy the riches of the many cultural communities living in Madrid and take part in cultural activities such as discussions, meetings with writers, cinema festivals, concerts, conferences, art exhibitions and workshops for children, including storytelling, reading workshops, writing workshops, and more.

To attract immigrants who may have never used the public library system, the Biblioteca Abierta recruited 40 fully bilingual intercultural mediators, fluent in Spanish and in one of the other languages represented in the newcomer community and in its new multilingual collections – Arabic, Romanian, Russian, Bulgarian, and Chinese (Romanians and Moroccans make up the largest groups). Many of the mediators had experience working in the libraries’ language-specific cultural centres and were well-positioned to promote libraries to the city’s newest communities and actively engage their participation, using information and materials specifically developed for newcomers.

Each centre in the Biblioteca Abierta has a variety of resource materials, including approximately 100 items aimed at teaching Spanish to newcomers. Each language-specific centre also contains works most representative of the literature, music and films of that language. To ensure that the cultural learning is two-way, translations into Spanish of important authors are offered as well as books about the home country’s history, geography and culture.

Library activities that facilitate social inclusion include social events, breakfasts for intercultural dialogue, children’s workshops, exhibitions as well as workshops featuring topics such as immigration, violence, cultural prejudice and healthy eating. To make sure that these programs meet the needs of everyone in Madrid, special coordinators train staff to understand the Biblioteca Abierta’s open, intercultural approach – from promoting active tolerance and overcoming ethnocentrism to establishing links between communities and seeking common areas of understanding amid the cultural diversity of the city.

Success

Biblioteca Abierta, Madrid’s Open Library project, has been able to draw on average 15,000 to 20,000 people annually to participate in its activities, many entering a library for the first time. The number of bilingual intercultural mediators has increased from 40 at the program’s start to over 275 within 20 cultural centres. Workshops about everyday life in Madrid (job seeking, citizen rights, health and more) have proven popular particularly within the Moroccan community where a majority of participants are women. The library has also finally addressed an important missing component of their collections – other languages from Spain – and added Catalán, Galician and Basque into the system. More languages have been added to the collections, including German, French, English, Hungarian, Italian and Portuguese.

So far more than 50 libraries in 24 municipalities within the wider urban region of the Comunidad of Madrid – from the city of Madrid with a population of over 3 million to urban "villages" with less than 5,000 inhabitants – have tailored the Biblioteca Abierta to meet the needs of local communities.
In 2005 San Francisco city leaders learned that 20% of the adult population (and half of the city's Blacks and Latinos) did not have bank accounts. Along with low-income immigrants, many paid steep fees to predatory lenders and cheque-cashing services or became victims of crime because of the large amounts of money they carried or held at home. People mistrust banks for a variety of reasons. For undocumented immigrants or those fleeing oppressive regimes, it might be concerns about the need for U.S.-issued identification. For others, it's a matter of basic consumer education to overturn a general mistrust of banks and formal institutions.

A bank account is a critical part of financial empowerment. With an account, people save more and can access financial services that are essential to save for the future, establish credit and access asset-building instruments such as loans for a car, small business or home mortgage. When people are "banked," they are also in a position to contribute to the overall health of the city. Each time a cycle of financial insecurity is broken, a cycle of growth begins, and everyone benefits.

In 2006, the city of San Francisco, led by the Mayor Gavin Newsom, launched Bank On San Francisco to introduce the "unbanked" to mainstream financial services. The program is a partnership of various local bodies including the San Francisco Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE), the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, and EARN (Earned Assets Resource Network), as well as local financial institutions, and community-based organizations.

Participating banks and credit unions allow individuals with no or poor banking history to open no- or low-fee accounts with no minimum balance, to have their first overdraft charges waived as they learn how to bank and receive financial counseling. One particularly unique aspect of the program includes permitting Mexican Matricula and Guatemalan Consular ID cards to be used as primary identification when opening accounts.

Success

Bank On San Francisco's success has also attracted national attention. In 2007 the City of Seattle started its own Bank On program, followed by Evansville, Illinois. Soon after, the San Francisco Office of Financial Empowerment (OFC) began work with the National League of Cities' (NLC) Institute for Youth, Education and Families to launch the Bank On Cities Campaign as a way to help other cities start their own programs.

To provide technical assistance to support these efforts, the OFE and NLC (with support from the James Irvine Foundation) created a web portal (joinbankon.org) offering tools and resources for other cities planning Bank On programs. It now includes a "Research Your Community" tool which provides estimates of the number of unbanked and underbanked households in a community and, with a mapping tool, shows you the neighbourhoods where those households aggregate.

The city’s OFE initially aimed to reach 10,000 unbanked families. Today, more than 72,000 accounts are active. In 2008, the reported average account balance was $980 in mainstream financial institutions such as Bank of America, San Francisco Federal Credit Union, and Citibank. More than 100 U.S. cities have launched, or are making plans to implement a Bank On program (including the U.S. Department of Treasury).

"Bank On San Francisco makes a bank account something that everyone in San Francisco can have," said José Cisneros, Treasurer for the City and County of San Francisco. "Now there’s no need to use high-priced check cashers. The banks and credit unions participating in Bank On San Francisco are offering so much more to individuals who open these accounts."
Despite language barriers, immigrant entrepreneurs in cities world-wide are posting big dividends for local economies. In New York, immigrants account for 49% of all self-employed workers. So when the city of New York’s Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) talks about “leveraging the City’s assets to drive growth, create jobs and improve quality of life,” they have no trouble recognizing immigrants as one of the city’s greatest resources.

Competition To Help Reach Immigrant Ventures and Entrepreneurs (THRIVE) is an immigrant entrepreneur support competition. Launched by NYCEDC in 2011 as part of its mission to “make the city stronger,” the project generates financially sustainable business plans that can address the challenges faced by immigrant entrepreneurs in New York City.

Rather than award individual entrepreneurs, Competition THRIVE invites established non-profit organizations to develop proposals for scalable programs that promote growth opportunities for the city’s immigrant businesses. The plans must address the challenges they face, such as access to credit, financial management, language barriers, and access to business networks and are judged according to feasibility, applicability, scalability, and sustainability.

Partners such as Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation (as co-funder) and Lawrence N. Field Center for Entrepreneurship at Baruch College (as administrator) help anchor THRIVE in the practical realities of contemporary business practice. Action is the keyword. The plans aim to help immigrant entrepreneurs start, operate, and expand their businesses in New York.

With help from the partner organizations, the NYCEDC developed a two-round competition. In round one, judges choose five finalists to receive $25,000 of seed funding to pilot their projects and refine their business plans. After seven months of mentoring and skill-building, the top winner is awarded $100,000 of funding and promotional services to further scale their program.

A Winning Proposal

The first Competition THRIVE received 39 proposals and in May 2012, the judges awarded the Queens Economic Development Corporation (QEDC) the top prize to expand their foreign language contractor training program which helps immigrant home improvement contractors to grow and expand their businesses by overcoming language barriers.

QEDC’s winning pilot program addresses challenges faced by the City’s Chinese community in becoming Home Improvement Contractors licensed by the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs. The program provides training by a qualified instructor prior to taking the licensing exam. In addition to one-on-one business advisory services in the trainee’s native language, the training course includes consultation with marketing and business development experts. The program gives immigrant entrepreneurs the opportunity to go from working in an unlicensed, underpaid, and uninsured environment, to legitimizing and formalizing their business for larger growth opportunities. The pilot successfully targeted Chinese-speaking contractors in Flushing, Queens, and will now expand to include other language groups. Based on the success of its inaugural year, the City and Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation have announced a commitment to a second year of Competition THRIVE.

“The THRIVE competition proved to be highly effective means to discover and support a best in class intervention to foster the growth of immigrant owned enterprises in NYC,” said Gary Hattem, president Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation. “Creating a sustainable infrastructure of support for these businesses will have a lasting impact on the City’s overall competitiveness.”

City Success

“Supporting our City’s immigrant entrepreneurs is vital to the success of New York City’s economy,” said New York City Economic Development Corporation President Seth W. Pinsky. “By making critical seed funding available, Competition THRIVE has encouraged highly respected organizations such as QEDC to implement innovative programs that address the unique challenges facing these entrepreneurs, allowing them to grow their businesses across the five boroughs.”

New York City’s immigrant population has more than doubled since 1970 – from roughly 1.4 million to 3 million – and immigrants now represent nearly 40 % of the City’s population and 43% of the City’s labor force. Immigrants are a significant and important piece of the City’s entrepreneurial economy: Immigrants make up 49% of all self-employed workers in the City compared to 25% in New York State and only 12% in the U.S.

The NYCEDC has ensured that promoting immigrant entrepreneurs is an important priority. Other programs and initiatives include kitchen incubators, a food manufacturer business expo to support immigrant-owned businesses and a series of free NYC Business Solutions courses in Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Russian, and Haitian Creole.
Making Maternity Services Migrant-Friendly

By kturner
December 3, 2012
Health Inclusion, Municipal

For many overworked health practitioners, pregnant migrant women with complex needs can often be seen as a difficulty. In 2006, one-fifth of all births in the West Midlands were to women born outside the UK.

New research highlighted the challenges faced by migrant women giving birth and the complex needs of this frequently marginalized population. For the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership (WMSMP), maternal health became a strategic priority.

WMSMP was created in 1999 in response to the UK’s regional dispersal policy for asylum seekers. In 2007, it expanded its scope to include the integration of refugees and vulnerable migrants. Hosted by the West Midlands Councils, the partnership aims to improve knowledge about migrant populations, promote access to public services and migrant participation rates through a multi-agency approach that includes statutory service providers such as Primary Care Trusts, voluntary sector organizations and the UK Border Agency.

Identifying the specific needs of migrant populations in the region as they pertained to maternal healthcare was an important early step. In 2008, WMSMP contributed to the first-ever review of the impact of migration on maternal health in Birmingham. The report, “Maternity, mortality and migration: the impact of new communities,” identified a possible link between migration and higher rates of infant mortality. Recommendations tabled with the report included a call for increased coordination between health actors, the need to tackle language barriers, and better information and training to health professionals.

Two years later, the partnership published the Migrant Friendly Maternity Services Toolkit, based on additional recommendations from the University of Birmingham report, “Delivering in an age of super-diversity” (2010). The toolkit offered local service providers up-to-date information and guidance on how to deal with migrant populations and learn from successful case studies.

To further its work at the systemic, or institutional level, the WMSMP has also developed a training course to assist health practitioners, community groups and policy makers increase their knowledge and understanding of issues around access to healthcare within migrant communities. Other activities include holding events such as seminars and information sessions as well as channeling local engagement into its partner regional and national bodies.

Success

Other WMSMP projects include the “Hope” project in Birmingham which gives financial support to destitute pregnant women and new mothers to improve their access to healthcare. The Primary Care Trust has also trained women from deprived local communities to become pregnancy outreach workers in order to help women access the required services and support.

In Coventry, the MAMTA program aims to empower women and improve maternal and child health for Black and minority ethnic women while another pilot project has midwives working with asylum seekers (securing free training for two groups of midwives in Coventry and Birmingham). Wolverhampton was specifically praised for its commitment to addressing the needs of migrants by the Race for Health peer review of its local health services.

The maternal health strategy is just one of the WMSMP’s many priorities, which include unaccompanied asylum seeking children, migrants who have no recourse to public funds, promoting a refugee and migrant focus to housing and employment organizations, and developing further partnerships in the region. It has also published “Where Our Journeys Meet” (2009), a resource to build understanding about the asylum process and the experiences of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds with material designed to raise awareness, develop practice and dispel myths and misinformation about migrants.

The West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership’s work has been recognized by the International Labour Organization and the Social Care Institute of Excellence.
Wolverhampton India Project

By ktturner
November 30, 2012
Economic Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal

Tapping into the potential of immigrant communities and business networks to connect local economies to emerging markets is a smart local development strategy for cities. This was the impetus behind the Wolverhampton India Project (WIP), which was launched at the Houses of Parliament in 2007 by the Wolverhampton City Council, the University of Wolverhampton and local partner organizations.

Following the idea of a local MP, Pat McFadden, the project recognizes the city’s diversity and considers the presence of the Indian community as an asset. Some 15% of residents come from India, mostly from the states of Punjab and Gujarat. The India Project builds on existing links to engage in a “win-win” partnership and strengthen economic, educational and cultural ties with India.

Liam Byrne MP said that the Indian population of the West Midlands gives the region a strategic advantage in an ever more globalized world. One significant action for the project was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Wolverhampton Chamber of Commerce and the Confederation of Indian Industry Punjab State. Its objective was to increase trade connections with India which will benefit Wolverhampton’s economy and Indian-owned businesses in particular.

The project has attracted key business actors such as the UK India Business Council (UKIBC), UK Trade & Investment and the India Pakistan Trade Unit (West Midlands). The participation of these groups alongside the city has facilitated joint ventures and partnerships between the two countries. In particular, the UKIBC, who has funded a project officer, has been able to increase its profile across the West Midlands Region while leveraging its national networks in both UK and India.

The Wolverhampton India Project has set up a dynamic collaborative framework which was originally business-oriented but has expanded to other fields. The partnership approach between Wolverhampton and India has now extended to education, sports and culture. Links between schools, colleges and the University have been encouraged through initiatives including a joint partnership between two secondary schools to run a young enterprise business focusing on exports; a collaboration between four Wolverhampton secondary schools and six schools in Punjab to discuss the impact of climate change on their respective countries; and the provision of English teachers in rural Punjab schools. Additionally, the Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club and the JCT Mills FC in Punjab are participating in joint coaching and community initiatives.

Success

One of the most striking results to date was the opening of a new State Bank of India branch on the Wolverhampton high street in October 2011, a decision based on the success of the project. Rajnish Kumar, its regional head, comments on the benefits to the broader community: “We recognize the potential of setting up in the West Midlands due to the increasing number of Indian companies investing in the region, which has doubled over the last three years.”

The Wolverhampton India Project demonstrates how immigrants can benefit the local community by encouraging their transnational links in a globalized economy while making the most of Wolverhampton’s diversity. The potential of such populations and businesses as transnational drivers for local economic development and integration what makes this project a success.
The Polish Forum and the Fire Station

By kturner

Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal Political Inclusion

Hertfordshire, a county located just north of London has experienced a significant wave of Eastern European economic migrants (especially Polish) after the 2004 expansion of the EU. The Polish community now comprises 8% of the population in the district of Welwyn Hatfield which had very little experience of migration prior to 2004. In fact, Poles are now the largest community of foreign nationals in the UK.

Members of the nascent Polish community organized to create the Welwyn-Hatfield Polish Forum as a way to network with each other. In turn, they decided to organize a “Polish Day” in 2009 at the Hatfield Town Centre and in partnership with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield Ethnic Minority Group. Attended by almost 1500 people, the day’s objective was to deliver an event for families and members of the local community and celebrate Polish culture with traditional food, music and dancing as well as promote local intercultural dialogue and improve links with the new members of the community.

The event was a good way to make the Polish community more visible and brought people from different social, ethnic or religious background together. It offered space and a platform to address issues around migration and provided important information related to the living and working experiences of many migrant workers in the borough. The “Polish day” has also helped identify people in need of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes and has led to a partnership with Hertfordshire College. Overall, the organization of this event strengthened the ties between the Polish community, the borough council and local NGOs.

In the meantime, the Forum developed a relationship with the local fire station commander, who provided a meeting space at the station. It wasn’t long before the Hatfield Fire Station was also offering ESOL classes for adults and drop-in information sessions on housing, health services and childcare.

Getting Out The Vote

Thanks to continued close ties with the Hertfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service, the Polish Forum used the facilities of the Hatfield Fire Station in 2011 to organize a voting day for parliamentary elections in Poland, with the active support of the council, the Polish embassy and Broxbourne and East Herts CVS. This was the first time a fire station had been used for another country’s national elections. The voting was monitored by five local council officials, all members of the Polish community from Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, Hoddesdon and St. Albans, with a representative from the Polish embassy present to ensure that proper procedures were followed. The event received large media attention and the involvement of the council made the Election Day a success with a turnout of 93% among registered voters.

Hatfield’s Polish elections day accomplished more than simply giving the county’s Polish population a chance to exercise their civic rights. The event increased the visibility of the Polish community, improved its connections with the council and the voluntary sector and offered an exemplary model of civic action to all city residents.

Success

The case of Hertfordshire County shows how migrants can participate and enrich the life of the local community. The Polish day and the Polish election have created stronger links between Polish organizations, the local authority and the voluntary sector but also better cohesion for the whole community. The Welwyn-Hatfield Forum has inspired neighbouring areas and pushed for the creation of a county-wide Polish Forum which would give more visibility to Eastern European migrant workers. Last June, the Polish community of Stevenage organized a “Euro 2012 Respect Community Football Cup” aimed to bring together diverse communities from across Hertfordshire.

The whole project demonstrated new ways of engagement and proved the importance of effective partnership between organizations. The Forum has helped increase civic participation by highlighting the rights of EU citizens in the UK, such as the right to vote in local and European elections, and by providing a successful model of sustainable community partnerships.

Michal Siewniak from CVS Broxbourne and East Herts says of the experience: “I passionately believe that societies who are recognizing existence and contribution of migrants benefit enormously from their regular input – socially, culturally and economically.”

In 2009, the Hatfield station commander received the East of England Regional Council’s Equality Award for the work with the Polish community, proof that furthering social cohesion can take place anywhere.

“The Fire Service is about so much more than putting out fires,” says Keith Emsall, county councillor. “It’s about making people safe and giving people a better quality of life.”
Meet Your Neighbours

By kturner

November 13, 2012

Cultural Inclusion, Education Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, New Gateways, Social Inclusion

What happens when you take a group of girls from different schools – one Muslim, one Roman Catholic and one secular – on a two-day trip to get to know one another? They talk.

In 2007, 18 teenage girls from three different schools – one Islamic, one Roman Catholic and one secular – left the comforts of their familiar surroundings for a residential weekend away in Darwen, Lancashire, where they spent two days getting to know one another. The aim? To bring girls from different backgrounds together to learn from each other, to engage with each other, to talk together about their different beliefs and cultural traditions; but most of all to discover the many things they had in common.

The “Meet Your Neighbours” program that brought these young people together was developed by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council in a unique partnership with the Department for Communities and Local Government, Unison North West (a branch of the largest public sector union in the UK and Europe) and the Improvement and Development Agency.

Designed to bust myths, create understanding and build friendships across communities, the Meet Your Neighbours programme came out of a pioneering community forum, the 100 Voices Project, convened by Blackburn with Darwen after a 2006 report found Blackburn to be one of England’s most segregated cities. The borough has a large, established and growing Asian community and the highest proportion of Muslims (19 %) outside of London. Half of all schools are at least partly segregated on religious grounds.

City and community leaders learned that opinions are often shaped by misconceptions and stereotypes and that it is important that people from different background have the opportunity to meet. Open and honest dialogue builds understanding and relationships across perceived differences and, by focusing on shared experiences, interests and aspirations, it is possible to move beyond previously held preconceptions.

Building Bridges

“Meet Your Neighbours” was designed to build bridges across faith groups through intercultural dialogue. Ice-breaking exercises got the girls to discuss their favourite things and where they hoped to be in ten years time. The teenagers discovered they had shared interests, such as music, and similar aspirations and ideals. The girls participated in team games, drama and art activities and had debates about cohesion and difference, as well as enjoying a celebratory group dinner. Two weeks after the trip they reunited to share the experiences with funders, teachers, school governors and parents. They were also encouraged to share what they had learned with their peers at school.

Reflecting on the program, some of the participants commented: “We all got on really well without spotting the differences”; “It has opened my eyes”; “I thought different, you know, about how Catholics were and how they would react but everyone was really nice.” Participants described how the experience had changed their perceptions and given them a greater awareness and understanding of other faiths and cultures.

Success

The success of the project, and its capacity for fostering lasting inter-faith friendships, is evident in the fact that the girls who participated in 2007 initiated a reunion later that summer. The program was rolled out again in 2008, this time for 24 boys from four different schools. It was thought that boys would not take so well to a program which relies on social mixing and conversation; however, feedback was overwhelmingly positive. One boy commented, “I was surprised that many people could get along so easily, without different religions being a problem.”

The project produced a toolkit that can be used by other local authorities and has potential for building lasting links between schools. The strength of the “Meet Your Neighbours” program is summed up best by one of the participating teachers: “There is so much more that unites them than divides them.”

Bookshelves and Bollywood: Delivering on Diversity

By kturner
November 5, 2012

Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, Public Space, Spatial Inclusion

Auckland City Council’s 30 year Plan to become the world’s ‘most liveable city’ includes city services like Auckland Libraries, the largest library service in the southern hemisphere. With 40% of its population born outside of New Zealand, and over half of these newcomers arrived in the past decade, Auckland Libraries must work hard to keep pace with the diversity of the people it serves. This means catering to a young city – the median age is 34 – and developing library programs that include meaningful interaction with children and young people.

Typical of Auckland Libraries is its annual community programming for Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights. In 2011, activities included Diwali exhibits, “sari wrapping” workshops, Bollywood dance performances, Diwali ukulele, family histories and Indian food traditions, and Diwali storytelling across the city. Special Q&A sessions about library services were promoted to the South Asian community and conducted by Hindi speakers.

Auckland Libraries is working to keep pace with the diversity of the people it serves. Re-constituted in November 2010 as part of the newly formed Auckland Council, Auckland Libraries merged seven public library systems to create one new regional library service. Specialist roles ensure a focus on the development of approaches to serving diverse communities effectively.

Internal staff networks, specialist collections and digital service units and a service development unit assist Auckland Libraries to serve the information needs of its diverse clientele by establishing activities in languages other than English and promoting the wealth of ethnic and cultural material on offer (e.g. Press Display’s 2200 online newspapers in 54 languages from around the world, books, DVDs and magazines in over 40 different languages in community language collections). The Libraries have even developed a special website, the Chinese Digital Community, with the New Zealand Chinese Association (Auckland) to preserve the country’s Chinese heritage.

Abigael Vogt, Team Leader of Multicultural Service Development, explains that the key is to deliver services which are “accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the residents and community groups.” To do this, her team works with local libraries to identify and respond to the specific needs of their local residents and community groups. School groups and community organizations are engaged to contribute to library programming through visits and performances.

“There is always a balance we have to manage in selecting our activities,” explains Vogt. “Libraries seek to deliver outstanding customer services and make a difference in the lives of individuals at the same time as building a sense of belonging for everyone and all communities in the library space.”

Success

Other than Diwali, Auckland Libraries’ annual events calendar include Chinese (Lunar) New Year, Samoan and Maori Language Weeks, World Refugee Day, Matariki (Maori new year), Waitangi Day (celebrating the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand’s founding document) and Pasifika festival (Pacific Island nations cultural festival). Regular community and learning programs and activities include Mandarin and Samoan Storytimes and computer classes in Mandarin. Auckland Libraries develops programs with partner organizations to engage particular communities, e.g. the Talanoa Pasifika participatory educational sessions for school children which introduce them to Auckland Museum’s Pacific treasures, library resources and wider Pacific concepts and knowledge paradigms.

Auckland Libraries was awarded a New Zealand Diversity Award 2011 by the Human Rights Commission in recognition of its contribution to the national diversity action program.
Community First: Christchurch’s Emergency Response

By Evelyn

October 24, 2012

Best Practice Guidelines for Engaging with CALD Communities in Times of Disaster, for Christchurch City Council.

It was exactly this type of thinking and action that enabled the New Zealand Police and Settlement Support New Zealand (SSNZ) to respond quickly to newcomer and culturally diverse communities in Christchurch in the aftermath of the February 2011 Earthquake.

Knowing our communities

In the aftermath of the earthquake, the Police set up their earthquake response headquarters in a Buddhist temple with assistance also coming from mosques and other ethnic community hubs – a telling example of the goodwill already established between Police and ethnic communities in Christchurch.

The Police have put an emphasis on recruitment of people from ethnic communities and building better communication lines with ethnic communities that in the past may have felt marginalized explained Joris de Bres, Race Relations Commissioner. “That hard work paid off when the Police were able to quickly respond to the varying needs of communities in Christchurch – from getting Police on the ground that could speak different languages to having frontline staff who are sensitive to specific customs and culture.”

Underscoring the Police’s increased capability and capacity in working with ethnic communities is the NZ Police Ethnic Strategy Towards 2010 – Working Together With Ethnic Communities Race. Joris de Bres says, “What’s particularly impressive about the Police, is that not only are they one of the first public agencies to develop an ethnic strategy…. but they also have the highest level of commitment to the strategy and they have resourced it well.”

Despite Settlement Support New Zealand (SSNZ) headquarters being taken out of action by the earthquake, availability of ongoing SSNZ service was made possible by Immigration’s national office Settlement Unit staff that were able to pick up the services. All migrants who had arrived in New Zealand in the previous four years and had indicated they would settle in the Christchurch region – a total of 11,454 migrants were contacted through a mass mail out and via other media channels in various languages.

Within 40 hours of the earthquake, a Settlement services helpline was set up for four weeks to all newcomers affected by the earthquake. In the four weeks following the earthquake, the helpline service received 429 enquiries from newcomers, ranging from people worried about their applications, passports and immigration status, to requests for language assistance and by the third week to more complex enquiries, especially from people who were feeling stressed and emotional. Such calls generally took more time, required a response that involved interpreters, and required follow-up communications with various support groups and individuals in Christchurch.

Lessons Learned

A wide range of positive actions occurred which helped government and non-government agencies communicate with communities and vice versa. The two examples above highlight those actions which were widely identified as having worked really well, that is:

• Use of bilingual workers, either already working in an agency locally or brought in because of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds as additional workforce;

• Having culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) adviser roles within agencies. These people generally had the trust of community leaders and contact was two-way, conveying information as required; and

• A number of support services provided outreach contact to their client base, and needs identified were able to be passed on to agencies. Having a copy of the client / member database which was accessible was critical to enabling this to occur.

Moreover, since established communication channels and relationships were two-way, certain communities such as the Chinese, Korean and Filipino communities were able to respond well to support agencies, such as providing the Police with an emergency support centre with accompanying resourcing, as well as responding to the information needs of their communities.

Under situations of stress, even when migrants speak acceptable English, they may prefer to receive information in their own language. This makes the response of agencies, such as the Police and SSNZ, with frontline staff capable of engaging with diverse communities in different languages and sensitive to specific customs and cultures, all the more valuable in emergency situations.

Success

The NZ Police Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Services (MPES) received three awards at the Institute of Public Administration NZ (IPANZ) Public Sector Excellence Awards in 2012.

New Zealand Police won two category awards, both for MPES-led initiatives. The Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Wardens programme was a joint winner of the Te Puni Kōkiri Award for Crown-Māori Relationships and the Cultural Response Team, which worked with victims’ families from 20 nationalities in the aftermath of the February 2011 Christchurch earthquake, won the Office of Ethnic Affairs Award for Excellence in Diversity. The Cultural Response Team also picked up the State Services Commissioner Award for Excellence in Responding to the Canterbury Earthquakes.
Police Commissioner Peter Marshall says these successes are extremely welcome but should come as no surprise to anyone who saw the Cultural Response Team in action in Christchurch, or who has had dealings with the Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Wardens.

This Good Idea will be featured in “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.
New Haven Promise

By kturner
August 31, 2012

Education Inclusion Living Together

We last featured New Haven, Connecticut, Mayor John DeStefano in our Good Ideas collection where he introduced a municipal ID card for all residents, regardless of immigration status.

His latest project, The New Haven Promise, is aimed at students. Although the city is home to the wealthy and prestigious Yale University, it has a high school drop out rate of 38 per cent. And of the students who do go on to college, only half remain in their second year directly out of high school.

The program aims to develop ‘college-going ambition’ within the school system by providing scholarships to state colleges and universities to local high school graduates, all funded by partner Yale University.

The New Haven Promise, announced in November 2010, was the result of a key question that was circulating in the mayor’s office: What does it take to help move an entire city forward into the next generation?

The answer, according to Mayor DeStefano, was simple: “The most powerful way that we as a city can organize and envision our future is around the aspirations and potential of our young people.”

Modelled on a similar program that was first started in 2005 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, eligible high school students graduating this year will have 25% of their tuition at state colleges or universities paid by funding partner Yale University. The following year’s graduates will have 50% of their tuition covered while the class of 2014 will receive their entire higher education for free.

The New Haven Promise is part of a broader move towards educational reform as well as a means to revitalize the city by attracting new families to New Haven. Even immigration status will have no bearing on a student’s participation in the program.

Says Mayor John DeStefano, Jr., “[This is a] contract that says to kids: If you work hard, you demonstrate academic achievement and display appropriate behaviours, we’ll give you the tools to go to college and therefore inject choice and opportunity in your lives.”

Source: Public School Kids Get A College “Promise” In New Haven Independent, November 9, 2010

Source: New Haven, Seeking to Get More Students Into College, Will Pay Tuition In New York Times, November 9, 2010

More like this:

- Video: Conversation with Mayor John DeStefano at The 2010 International Cities of Migration Conference
- Good Idea: Urban Citizens: Municipal Identification Cards (ID) For Inclusive And Safe Communities
- Learning Exchange: Routes to belonging: the role of cities in the civic and political integration of immigrants, March 2009 (archived webinar): featuring Good Ideas and city representatives from Dublin and New Haven
Welcoming Diverse Leadership

By kturner
September 20, 2012

Civic Inclusion Living Together Municipal Political Inclusion

The suburban community of Richmond Hill north of Toronto attained its multicultural identity and urban status virtually overnight. Once a small town, its population not only doubled to 185,000 within twenty years, but the proportion of visible minorities increased to constitute almost 50% of the community. This rapid change created challenges both for long-time residents (some of whom resisted the change), and for newcomers (who often reported feeling unwelcome).

The response of the town’s leaders was direct and to the point. In 2007, they embarked on a new strategic plan guided by a single phrase, “We are a welcoming community.” To ensure all voices in the community were heard, the town organized a series of consultations including open houses, ethnic forums, youth contests, surveys as well as informal conversations hosted by Mayor Dave Barrow with leaders from diverse communities.

Over 2,000 residents took part in the development of the Town’s 2009 Strategic Plan. However, city leaders recognized that more work would be needed to address the city’s diversity and make the Town of Richmond Hill and its governance more inclusive.

DiverseCity onBoard

Outreach to diverse communities became a top priority for the city’s leadership. To ensure its citizen committees reflect the area’s diverse demographic, the Town approached DiverseCity onBoard to discuss ways it could help Richmond Hill progress towards its goal.

Launched in 2005, DiverseCity onBoard (DoB) was created by the Maytree Foundation to bridge the growing gap between the diversity of Toronto’s population and its leaders, and to help connect public institutions to the talent they need for competitive growth and urban prosperity.

The DoB program does this by identifying qualified pre-screened candidates from visible minorities and immigrant communities for professional appointments on the governance bodies of public agencies, boards, commissions, committees and voluntary organizations. From a roster of 1,500+ candidates, DoB has matched over 600 individuals to board and committee positions to date.

Recruiting residents to the Town’s committees

Building on its highly successful community engagement process, the Town partnered with DoB early on in its citizen’s committees appointment process to reach out to local residents who had already self-identified as eager and skilled board volunteers.

They decided an open house would deepen outreach to potential committee members, while creating an opportunity to help residents learn more about how to become active in their local government. Each committee of Council with citizen representation participated in the event, hosting its own booth and providing background information on its roles and responsibilities. Local agencies also participated.

At the DoB booth, residents also learned more about the professional benefits of joining public boards and committees. Cathy Winter, manager of DoB, recalls: “In addition to meeting with our own roster members who had attended the event, we were able to reach out to a much wider audience about our board matching program.”

Success

The new appointments process in Richmond Hill opened doors to citizens who might otherwise have never become involved in municipal governance. Visible minorities now account for 22% of the membership of all citizen committees in the Town. In 2010, DoB recognized Richmond Hill for embracing diversity in board governance and making it a priority to recruit board members from diverse backgrounds.

“Richmond Hill has grown into a dynamic, well-educated, multicultural town that is on the cusp of further change in how we, as a community, will function and look,” says Mayor Dave Barrow. By developing an open-ended engagement process, Richmond Hill is working towards meeting the needs of all its residents, today and in the future.
Taking a National Language and Integration Class Local

By kturner  
March 6, 2013

Education Inclusion Municipal

Language fluency opens or closes doors for many immigrants, whether at work, school or during the everyday business of daily life. Learning the language is the single most important lever to integrating into a new culture.

In 2005, a new immigration Act in Germany introduced provisions to ensure all newcomers from non-European Union countries receive language training. The City of Wuppertal acted immediately to build on its experience in creating a multicultural society that valued diversity.

With a population from over 150 source countries, Wuppertal has a long history of working to build an open, welcoming culture. In 1980 Wuppertal opened the state of Nord-Rhein Westphalia’s first and only adult education program dedicated to supporting foreign workers (VHS, die Bergischen Volkshochschule). Since 2002, the Department of Immigration and Integration (Sprach/Integrationskurs Beratung) has been a central contact for both newcomers and local residents while supporting the city administration by monitoring local progress.

Tailored language training

Wuppertal’s practical approach aims to meet the needs of program applicants, their families and local employers. Language level and professional background are assessed during a personal interview by city social workers who are trained to identify additional factors that can interfere with language and job acquisition. A continuous process of support and feedback ensures that applicants do not fall through the cracks.

Training is offered in 14 language schools across the city – part-time, full-time, day-time and evenings. The classes consist of 600 hours of German language instruction and 30 hours of classes about the basics of German culture, history and law. Applicants are required to have had a residency permit for at least two years, but many who participate in the language programs are from EU countries or are long-time residents who can still benefit from the free language training. Successful completion of the training means an accelerated naturalization process – seven rather than eight years.

Wuppertal also offers special integration courses for young people, senior citizens, women and even German nationals with poor language skills. Customizing the approach to the audience means greater success in the longterm. For example, parenting courses are available for those with young children; classes are offered with childcare; older immigrants have the option of taking classes at a slower pace; and discussions are tailored to the interests of young people. Additionally, specialized courses are available for individuals with limited schooling in their home countries and may have basic literacy needs.

The participation of the local job centre helps ensure newcomers are also better oriented to the realities of the job market. Importantly, the program includes services for the unemployed, often long-term residents with a migrant background still marginalized by low language skills or unemployment.
Regular interaction between Wuppertal's language programs, employment and integration services and the Federal Bureau of Migration has resulted in new program development, including: for the first time, language courses for deaf persons offered in schools and migrant-led organizations; bridging courses to connect integration to formal language classes; and vocational language classes targeted to job level (from high skilled professionals to qualified craftsmen to low-skilled workers).

Success

Interest in the nationally-sponsored language and integration courses was high right from the start in Wuppertal. Although federally-imposed quotas were cancelled by 2008, the municipality continues to regularly increase the number of reserved spaces available within the city's program. Since the 2005 Immigration Act, almost 6,000 people have attended the courses, making Wuppertal a nation-wide leader in attendance.

Today, immigrant integration in Wuppertal is more of a movement than a city service, and has the support of the mayor, the city manager and all democratic parties in the city council, and is regarded as a model of social and economic success to other German cities.
From Asylum to Employment: The Wuppertal Partizipation Network

By kturner
September 24, 2012
Employment Inclusion Municipal Refugee Portal

What happens when refugees and asylum seekers are denied access to employment as they await a change in their status? Stuck in a jobless limbo, many find themselves socially isolated and increasingly vulnerable as time goes by. Unemployment erodes their skills and denies them the work experience and confidence needed to enter the job market.

In the North Rhine-Westphalia city of Wuppertal, asylum seekers had lived in cramped transitional housing for years, without legal access to jobs, their young people stigmatized by limited educational qualifications. Then, in 2007, changes to the federal Asylum Seekers Benefits Act resulted in new opportunities for a population formerly denied access to both employment and training. Earning wages sufficient to be independent of social services became a mandatory requirement to qualify for residency and the right to stay in the Germany.

Jobs and Job Readiness

The City of Wuppertal responded by introducing an intensive job readiness project to help asylum seekers find long-term employment. In 2008, the city established Partizipation, the Wuppertal Network for the promotion of labor market integration of “abode claimants and refugees.” (Wuppertaler Netzwerk zur Förderung der arbeitsmarktlichen Integration von Bleibeberechtigten und Flüchtlingen). Operated by the city’s Department of Immigration and Integration, the Partizipation Network was created specifically to help this local population seek either training or a job placement.

The Partizipation Network is a multi-sector initiative led by the city of Wuppertal with local NGOs as operational partners. Its systematic, proactive approach includes door-to-door recruitment of clients (asylum seekers on the city lists) and more cold-calling to identify potential employers and job placements. Community partners such as Diakonia Wuppertal, the Catholic Women’s Social Services (SKF), and GESA (Gefährdtenhilfe Wuppertal eV) provide focused job coaching, training courses, mentoring and help with resumes and job applications. Their expertise also helps prioritize the needs of this client group, ensuring women are not left behind, for example, and motivating young people to participate.

Step by Step Approach

Once identified, trained social workers meet face-to-face with clients to assess their educational and professional qualifications, German skills, motivational readiness and ability to participate in employment. Together, they develop a work plan to guide the next steps in the job search. Signed by both parties, the work plan includes follow-up appointments every 4-6 weeks.

Essential to the success of the labour-market integration program is the scale of support offered to a client group marginalized by lack of opportunity. Appointments, reminders, counseling, guidance and support for the participants are as important as the interactions of project managers with employers and other stakeholders.

Success

Within six months, city social workers started receiving calls asking how to sign on. They also noticed a change in the attitudes of participants and their families as children saw their parents become first-time job seekers and job-holders.

Pilot project outcomes included 157 people finding work, including 78 full-time jobs. At the end of two years, most participants were also able to successfully extend their residence permits. The project has since been replicated in the neighboring cities of Remscheid and Solingen.

Wuppertal's intensive intervention resulted in both improved integration and cost savings for government. Began as a pilot project with funding from the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs BMAS and the European Social Fund, it’s noteworthy that the Partizipation Network succeeded during a time of financial crisis. In 2010, the pilot project was rewarded with three years of new funding and a mandate to expand its services as Partizipation Plus with new partner, Job Center Wuppertal.

Unlocking Auckland's Diversity

By kturner
October 1, 2012

In November 2010, the new City of Auckland emerged as seven authorities from the greater metropolitan area were consolidated into one unitary body, the Auckland Council, making it the largest local government reform in Australasia. These sweeping changes are grounded in the Mayor’s vision of Auckland moving up in the ranks of the world’s Top 10 Most Liveable Cities — and in the hearts of all Aucklanders.

A large part of Auckland’s liveability is its diversity: 37% of Aucklanders and 46% of its working age population were born overseas. The city is the gateway to New Zealand and the place where most international newcomers, both immigrants and refugees, settle. The “world” at Auckland’s door has propelled the settlement and diversity agenda and its impact on the economy to the fore.

Aucklanders

Auckland is a medium-sized Asia Pacific city of just under 1.5 million people with a growing population that comes increasingly from source countries in the Asia Pacific region and less from traditional northern European countries. Auckland is well-prepared to harness the potential within the city’s diversity.

Launched in 2007, before the region’s amalgamation, the Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy (ARSS) is the city’s primary vehicle for jointly working on settlement issues, and now plays an important role in supporting Auckland Council’s vision for a liveable city. Developed by the Auckland Sustainable Cities Program, the strategy identifies opportunities and makes recommendations for various agencies and non-government organizations to better support international newcomers to settle and contribute to New Zealand’s prosperity.

“Auckland will be an inclusive place of opportunity for all,” says Mayor Len Brown, initiating the Strategy’s first action plan. The yearly plans integrate multiple agendas, including economic development, settlement, diversity, and social development, to provide a unified working platform for the city’s agencies, sectors and communities.

New Ideas

The ARSS is the result of a comprehensive and inclusive engagement process that brought together migrant and refugee community representatives, local stakeholders, non-government organizations and business representatives to inform and strengthen the city’s commitment to change.

Central to the ethos of the ARSS is a long term perspective that builds on existing settlement work while incorporating the principles of sustainable development; its quadruple bottom-line framework includes a focus on environmental, economic, social and cultural settlement outcomes. To develop a more coordinated approach to settlement policies and programs, the strategy brought the New Zealand Government on board and signed up key government agencies. The joint leadership of two levels of government provides explicit acknowledgment that integration is a two-way process between existing communities and international newcomers.

With the central government on board as a key stakeholder, the strategy could be embedded in both national and regional economic and social agendas, emphasizing labour market integration as well as community connectedness. ARSS also aims to reduce duplication of services, to help programs and agencies become more effective and to foster innovation across a range of players while ensuring services remain relevant and current.

Managing the challenge

Despite initial growth in the number of integration activities underway at regional, district and local levels, by 2009 the ARSS was losing traction in Auckland’s fast changing environment, triggering an implementation review. Determined to get it right, the strategy’s governance group overhauled its plan to instigate cross-cutting ways of working together, including improvements to support collaborative behaviours and new cross cutting delivery platforms.

The resulting Settlement Action Leadership Teams (SALTS) were formed to improve economic, community and public sector service delivery outcomes. The Economic SALT, for example, has two immediate priorities and key messages: Auckland’s businesses are ready for migrant employees, and migrants are ready for workplaces in a new country.

Other priority areas include building community connectedness between newcomers and host communities and bringing together government agencies and sectors to focus on improvements to Auckland’s public sector service delivery.

Success

The ARSS is midstream in the implementation of its 2009-2014 plan and has already achieved 30 milestones. The strategy has attracted over 50 partners covering all sectors (government, NGOs and community networks). Successful projects include developing cultural awareness training; preparing a downloadable guide on how to stage events and encourage the participation of newcomers in civic and community life; and establishing the Auckland Refugee Community Coalition to provide a collective refugee voice.
Semana Intercultural: Valladolid’s Week of Sharing Ideas and Cultures

By kturner
September 24, 2012
Cultural Inclusion Living Together Municipal Service providers

It may seem odd that a Spanish city would celebrate the bicentennial of the independence of Latin American countries from Spain, but in 2010, the city of Valladolid made it an integral part of its VIIth Semana Intercultural. Incorporating its colonial history into the celebrations of local immigrant groups from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, and Ecuador was another way the city’s annual intercultural event goes beyond a festival of ethnic songs and dances.

The City of Valladolid takes pride in a cultural festival that unifies residents through shared traditions and common experiences. Since its establishment in 2004, the Semana Intercultural has become a major event on the city’s cultural calendar. Each autumn, the public festival rolls out a week of activities aimed at raising awareness and strengthening intercultural co-existence. Playful and participatory, it is a well-coordinated effort involving many city departments, agencies and immigrant associations who come together to create rich programming that targets all segments of society.

Set a Common Course

Valladolid is a medium-sized city of 314,936, located in the autonomous region of Castille and Leon in north central Spain. Like many Spanish cities, its immigrant population is small (6.35%), but growing. The city’s Semana Intercultural was originally organized as part of Valladolid’s first municipal plan for integration (2005-2008) to help “educate and sensitize the public about acceptance, appreciation and respect for cultural diversity.”

In 2011, the VIIIth Semana Cultural rallied over 8,700 participants and was formally recognized as a permanent program of Valladolid’s municipal Council and focal point for its work on civic participation and inclusion. Its greatest success has undoubtedly been to achieve the coordination and joint efforts of various associations of immigrants within the municipality as well as various departments and levels of government.

Now entering its ninth year, the city’s practical cross-departmental approach ensures all pertinent departments work together, from Social and Family Welfare and the city’s Immigrant Service Centre to Tourism and Commerce. The city also collaborates with the local Municipal Council of Immigrants, a consultative body convened by the city with representatives from local immigrant associations, trade unions and non-profit organizations. Additional financial support comes from the Junta of Castille and Leon and the Government of Spain.

Playful and Informative

Each year’s Semana Cultural event contains key programming elements, such as a concert for youth, a festival of cultures and a day devoted to the discussion of migration issues. In 2010, the theme was “set a common course” and included a children’s puppet show in schools, a performance by an Afro-pop band, and a community roundtable on the management of cultural diversity in the municipality.

But cultural offerings are not a one-way street. Introducing Valladolid’s own culture and history to newer residents of the city is as important as sharing good food or cheering at concerts. For example, a literary walking tour through city streets featured in the acclaimed recent novel, The Heretic, by Miguel Delibes, was aimed specifically at immigrants. The novel’s hero is a local boy during the historic Spanish Inquisition who challenges intolerance.

Success

Valladolid’s model of connecting culture with civic participation and social awareness has resulted in many accolades. The nearby town of Leon followed in Valladolid’s footsteps and has held its own Intercultural Week for the past five years, also in cooperation with local associations and organizations working with immigrants.

In 2010, Spain’s Ministry of Labour and Immigration recognized the initiative in a published compendium of successfully implemented local plans that raise awareness issues of equality and non-discrimination. In 2012, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) selected it as an “innovative practice.”
Reaching out to Migrant Entrepreneurs in Munich

By ktturner
August 24, 2012
Economic Inclusion, Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Municipal

The winners are from many backgrounds – Turkish, Hungarian, Tunisian, Russian, Kurdish and Iranian. Ilhan Alakara has run a travel agency for ten years. Sisters Besma and Ikram Cherif own a personnel management firm. Amir Roughani has a staff of 142 employees in his IT company.

Since 2010, the City of Munich has handed out the Phoenix Prize at an annual gala at City Hall, awarding €1,000 to each of three winners who exemplify “outstanding economic achievements and social responsibility efforts of migrant enterprises.” These exemplary individuals may be successful entrepreneurs. They may have hired or created opportunities for young trainees or apprentices from migrant backgrounds, supported diversity within their workforce or invested within the city. Their stories are part of Munich’s success story.

The Phoenix Prize is one of four components of the Migrant Entrepreneurs in Munich (MEM) program, run by the city’s Department of Labour and Economic Development, Local Employment and Qualification Policy. It is part of the Munich Employment and Qualification Program (MBQ), through which the City of Munich pursues its primary labour market strategy. Currently sponsoring more than 110 projects and activities, the program seeks to improve the employment prospects of disadvantaged persons on Munich’s labour market. Migrant entrepreneurs belong to one of the key target groups.

Munich, the third largest city in Germany, takes its economic success seriously. This means recognizing the importance of migrant enterprises. In a city of 1.3 million, over 35 per cent of residents has a migration background. The city estimates that the over 12,000 migrant-run businesses has resulted in the employment of over 100,000 people from all sectors of life.

Four pillars
MEM describes the four pillars of its migrant entrepreneurship program: providing assistance, helping with qualifications, creating dialogue, and promoting recognition. Launched in 1999 to provide training for established migrant entrepreneurs and their employees, the program has grown to include specialized services to help new and emerging entrepreneurs get started, develop business plans or help them assess their qualifications and needs for further training. The Business Dialogue Forum with Migrants offers support for business start-ups through counseling services with experts. Other offerings include a training course on how established entrepreneurs or business leaders can mentor young entrepreneurs and pass on the required knowledge and relevant skills needed to succeed in the labour market.

Outreach remains a critical part of MEM’s ongoing success, including building a growing network of successful migrant organizations, businesses and leaders who are interested in helping foster migrant entrepreneurship in the city. The diversity of MEM’s office staff provides ready access to a pool of foreign language skills and knowledge about informal communities and networks that helps them recruit new clients from districts with a high percentage of people with a migration background. Other recruitment strategies include monitoring advertisements in local ethnic media and maintaining a multilingual website in languages such as Turkish, Greek, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Kurdish and Croatian.

Success
MEM is now considered Munich’s information and counselling hub for business development in the city’s migrant communities, helping small business operators and employers and future entrepreneurs to build bridges with mainstream institutions. With growing recognition for the Phoenix Prize, cities such as Nuremberg have expressed interest in replicating its success. MEM team members are increasingly in demand at local and international conferences and seminars to share good practices on migrant entrepreneurship. Funding for the program comes from the City, the European Social Fund and the European Union.
From Hope to Fraternity: Marseille Espérance

By kturner
August 23, 2012

Civic Inclusion, Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, Municipal Welcome-ability

The port city of Marseille in the south of France has a long history of migration. Its Jewish community is the third-largest in Europe and approximately one third of its population is of North African origin. Some demographers predict that Marseille will be the first city on the European continent with a Muslim majority.

Yet, the most ethnically diverse city in France has also been the most successful in staying free of the outbreaks of social unrest and ethnic violence that have troubled the banlieue of Paris and other cities.

Marseille is a city of immigrants.

The diverse realities of modern French society are not easily addressed through official channels. Information on religion or ethnicity is generally not collected in France on the principle of laïcité, or secularism, which prohibits the recognition of religion or ethnicity in political life and the collection of ethnic or religious data by the state.

Breaking with tradition, in 1990 the Mayor’s Office established Marseille Espérance, to acknowledge the importance of community identities in the public sphere and open lines of intercultural dialogue. The first of its kind in Europe, the forum's unique formula ("peaceful and open secularism"), allowed the mayor to bring together the city's religious leaders (Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists) with the aim of encouraging harmony and understanding amongst all Marseille citizens, regardless of their origins, culture or religion. The organization's message of a cosmopolitan and fraternal Marseille was further consolidated under new mayor Jean Claude Gaudin after 1995 and actively promoted to media.

Members of Marseille Espérance meet regularly with the Mayor to address the social needs in the city. An example of the forum's success is the unanimous backing given by Marseille Espérance to the ‘grand mosque’ project of Marseille. Proactive mayoral leadership, backed by all of the religious leaders of Marseille Espérance, accelerated a century-old search for a suitable site. Today the mosque’s construction is underway. Marseille Espérance is also available to act ‘on demand’ to potential threats to the peaceful coexistence of city residents and has a successful track record of mediating issues of community conflict.

Marseille Espérance’s narrative of inclusion, cohesion and coexistence around the unifying figure of the mayor has been widely distributed through the media and local networks. Local media has responded enthusiastically with a large increase in the number of articles written on Muslim civil society organizations.

Success

To commemorate Marseille’s 2600th anniversary in 2000, Marseille Espérance initiated the ‘Tree of Hope” sculpture project. 350,000 city residents “signed up” to the message of tolerance, hospitality and sharing symbolized by the project and the values of Marseille Espérance; their names are engraved at the base of the tree. A replica of the tree has been presented to its twin city, Shanghai, and its partner city of Algiers.

Other innovative projects sponsored by Marseilles Esperance include the “cubic metre of infinity,” an interfaith prayer room and place of introspection at the Paoli-Calmettes Hospital, widely regarded as unique in Europe, and the Marseille Espérance Prize, endowed by the city of Marseille, and awarded each year at the Marseille Documentary Film Festival.

In 2004 the Fondazione Laboratorio Mediterraneo awarded Marseille Espérance its Mediterranean Peace Prize for its work in facilitating inter-cultural dialogue and understanding. The Marseilles model has also been adapted by the City of Brussels and in Barcelona.

Submitted by: Joseph Downing, European Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science. (edited and condensed for publication by editors)
In the past 10 years, the immigrant population in Madrid has grown by 10%. Today, more than 17% of the citizens are foreign born, coming from 183 different countries. This has enriched the city and created some challenges for the municipal leaders who have led the way forward from the start.

In 2005 the city council of Madrid launched its 1st Plan for Social and Intercultural ‘Living Together’ (I Plan de Convivencia), focused on a specific action program which established services to promote integration and living together for all citizens. Four years later, the council decided to update the Plan to be responsive to the current situation and to build on the experiences they had gained to date.

The 2nd Plan of Social and Intercultural Living Together (2009-2012), bases its action plan on three basic concepts: universality, whereby the city of Madrid promises to provide services equally to all citizens of Madrid, regardless of origin or status; active integration; and intercultural living together.

The Plan focuses especially on the mechanisms and actions required to allow a complete and free incorporation of newcomers into a welcoming society—with the same opportunities, rights and duties as all citizens. Special attention is given to government service areas such as: information and analysis; welcome/settlement; participation; training and job placement orientation; social integration and living together support; public awareness; and anti-discrimination.

The Living Together Plan also seeks to promote increased knowledge and understanding of the culture of origin of the city’s newest neighbours by encouraging the celebration of traditional cultural events and bringing residents together to share the city’s public spaces by supporting intercultural meetings in sports arenas, schools, parks and city offices.

For the city of Madrid, knowing one another, recognizing and respecting all cultures — la convivencia — is the basis for living together and sharing a common future. In the words of Concepción Dancausa Treviño, Executive of the Government Department of Family and Social Services, “A diverse society is not only a successful society but also a more open, tolerant and free society.”

Article submitted by: Monique Dissartz, Fundación Bertelsmann. The Fundación Bertelsmann is a partner in Cities of Migration. Condensed and edited for publication.
Move over, hockey. Ask Guyan Ferdinands about his favourite sport and he’ll tell you cricket is the only game in town. The 16-year-old Toronto high school student was just named the best under 15 bowler in North America by the international Americas Cricket Association.

Gayan Ferdinands is just one of the growing number of young cricket players who will benefit from the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants’ (CIMA) Mayor’s School Cricket Tournament.

“This is really great. I hope this tournament will help the sport get more recognized in Toronto,” Gayan said.

Success on the School Field

Fans say cricket is the fastest growing sport in Toronto, with more than 50 school teams across the city. In some schools, it’s more popular than basketball.

The CIMA Mayor’s School Cricket Tournament was initiated in 2011 by the City to recognize Toronto’s thriving public school cricket program, building on the success of the classic Mayor’s Tournament that has brought the mayor, city staff and corporate and community partners together every summer since 2005 to enjoy the centuries-old game of cricket.

The success of the 2011 school pilot program was all it took to persuade the Toronto Catholic School Board (TCDSB) and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) to join the partnership to promote the 2012 tournament within the school system.

The main objective of the school cricket program is to increase access to school cricket through a well coordinated inter-school cricket tournament. The CIMA School cricket program raises the game’s profile while a carefully-designed program introduces cricket as a vehicle for team building, cross-cultural communication and leadership development. The program provides Toronto’s diverse population of young cricketers with an opportunity to continue playing a game they have grown to love while raising the profile of the game and its young stars across the wider community.

Youth and cricket are a winning combination for CIMA chairman Amal Ratnayake: “As good management accountants, our members understand the value of partnerships in community building. We are delighted to be able to build a strong partnership between TDSB, TCDSB, the City of Toronto and CIBC to engage our young people through the game of cricket.”

Cricket Across the Pond

In 2012, the City of Toronto also became CIMA’s partner in promoting the Cricket Across the Pond (CAP) scholarship program. CAP is a community initiative organized by the Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation in partnership with CIMA Canada, and sponsored by the Royal Bank of Canada. CAP is designed to provide opportunities to young people from Toronto’s diverse neighbourhoods and develop social cohesion and interaction through cricket.

CAP uses cricket as a vehicle to reach out to youth from Toronto’s diverse neighbourhoods, by giving them a sense of hope, increased self esteem and opportunities to become positive role models in their communities. The program provides young Toronto cricketers with leadership and communication skills and the opportunity to travel to the UK and act as ambassadors for Toronto.

“Now in its fifth year, Cricket Across the Pond scholarships have touched the lives of over 60 young Torontonians, leading them toward positive pursuits in life” said Ratnayake of CIMA Canada. “The CIMA Mayor’s School Cricket Tournament will provide aspiring school cricketers, a great opportunity to showcase their talent and a chance to shine in a sport that is passionately followed by many Torontonians”

Working in partnership with the British Consulate General in Toronto and the Borough of Kingston upon Thames in the United Kingdom, CAP provides young Toronto cricketers with the opportunity to travel to the UK, represent Toronto and learn leadership skills as ambassadors. The aim of the annual UK tour of the CIMA Mayor’s Team is to help these young Toronto ambassadors develop into positive role models in their communities.

“We’re proud to be part of helping send these young cricketers to the birthplace of the sport,” said RBC’s DiSalle. “It’s part of our commitment to build healthy and vibrant communities, where we can pass along cherished traditions to our children.”

Success

The 2012 CIMA Mayor’s School Cricket Tournament brought some 40 school cricket teams from across Toronto together to compete in the tournament. Eight teams qualified to play in the finals and around a thousand people attended the tourney. This summer some of those young Canadian cricketers from Toronto are preparing to represent their city and country internationally at CAP.

“We have launched this tournament to give Toronto youth who play cricket an opportunity to participate in their own tournament,” Toronto mayor Rob Ford said. “It is amazing what kids can do when given the opportunity.”

CIMA has partnered with the City of Toronto Dept. of Parks, Forestry & Recreation to host the Mayor’s Trophy since 2005. The inaugural event gained media attention with the support of former Mayor David Miller. Since then Toronto’s annual celebration of cricket has grown in popularity and profile to provide Torontonians of all ages with an opportunity to showcase and celebrate Toronto’s diversity through cricket.

Today, City of Toronto spokesperson Ranil Mendis notes the City also invites people who can make a difference to the game. In 2012, participating teams included Go Transit, CBC, the Toronto Sun and the Toronto Star newspapers as well as the Toronto Police Service. The Mayor’s Trophy has become a vehicle to bring Toronto’s vastly diverse communities together while helping raise funds for youth cricket initiatives in Toronto and internationally. For further details please visit: www.cima.mayorscricket.com
Putting Women’s Health in Women’s Hands

By Evelyn
Health Inclusion Municipal

How do you address immigrant women’s health and safety in hard to reach marginalized or minority communities? In Bilbao, it was through “agents of empowerment,” women trained to help each other within the comfort of their homes and without fear of discrimination or backlash.

In 2008, the City Of Bilbao was galvanized to action by the tragic death of a young woman following an abortion and evidence that this may not have been an isolated case. Research suggested that lack of information and access to services increased the vulnerability of marginalized and minority women on health-related issues. With an eye on the city’s surging population and a high birthrate among its new migrants, the city chose to focus its new health promotion strategy on women.

Developed by Bilbao’s Office of Equality, Cooperation and Citizenship, the award-winning Programa Mujer, Salud y Violencia promotes sexual and reproductive health among immigrant women, including prevention related to gender-based violence and issues related to cultural and sexual identity. The “Women, Health and Violence” program also aims to empower individual women to participate and become leaders in their own communities.

Brave New World

Bilbao is the largest city in the Basque region of northern Spain and like many cities in Spain, immigration is increasingly critical to its future. Since 2000, Bilbao has maintained its population of around 354,000 thanks only to the constant supply of foreign nationals which has offset the decline of the native population. Between 2000 and 2010, its percentage of migrants rose from 1% to 8.2% of the population, a demographic trend likely to continue towards the national average of 12%, or higher. Today, the majority of Bilbao’s foreign-born inhabitants are from Latin America, with newer communities of Romanians, Chinese, Roma, North and sub-Saharan Africans.

Agents of Empowerment

Engaging Bilbao’s diverse communities was the city’s first step. To deepen their understanding of the needs of immigrant women and for more effective outreach and dissemination, the Women, Health and Violence program partnered with community organizations. They also wanted to promote the role of local institutions as a resource. Secondly, women who had agreed to act as “agents of empowerment” received training; five women from each group. Health agents were selected for their leadership potential and ability to connect with other women in their communities. Their responsibilities included creating a safe space for conversation, encouraging intercultural exchange, and promoting the multiplier effect of discussions about gender violence and sexual health through community forums.

Success
In 2010, the Women, Health and Violence program successfully trained 35 empowerment agents and in 2011, 26 more women received the program's diplomas. To date, 465 immigrant women from 38 different nationalities have participated directly. The city has also distributed over 3,000 copies of a print and online resource, *Women, Health & Violence: Guide for Women*, focused on sexual health among other topics. The guide was published in Romanian, Chinese, French, Arabic, Castilian and Euskera; 3,000 copies have been distributed.

Programa Mujer, Salud y Violencia was recognized by the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Immigration, as an example of city councils implementing local plans to raise awareness on equal treatment and non-discrimination (2010). The program was also recognized as a best practice by the [European Network OPENCities](https://www.open-cities.net) (2011).
Mentoring Skilled Immigrants at City Hall

By ktturner
August 23, 2012

Municipal

When Maggie Chen, a PhD in economics, was settling in Canada, she was paired with mentor Susan Brown, Senior Policy Advisor at the City of Toronto as part of the municipality’s Profession to Profession Mentoring Program. By accompanying Susan to workplace meetings, Maggie recognized differences between the Chinese and Canadian workplaces.

"Taking initiative is a common expectation here," says Maggie. "Coming from a much more formal workplace culture, I learned that I had to adapt. I know I fully understand the different approach because my mentor gave me the opportunity to learn by doing."

Maggie’s story is a common one. Without professional networks or contacts and often unfamiliar with the nuances of the work culture, many new immigrants struggle to find work that reflects their past experiences and education. In the eyes of corporate Canada, immigrant job applicants can look unfamiliar or untested and pose a potential hiring risk.

The Mentoring Partnership

With 50% of Toronto made up of immigrants, their inclusion in the labour market is vital to the prosperity of the city. But talking to Torontonians about the importance of immigrants to the region’s economy isn’t enough for the City of Toronto – the organization is leading by example. "Taking a leadership position in furthering the employment of skilled immigrants is critical to Toronto’s economic and social development," says Cheryl Borland, Workforce Transition & Employment Equity.

Each year, the City of Toronto invites members of the Toronto Public Service to volunteer as mentors to skilled immigrants through its Profession to Profession Mentoring program, a part of a broader project called The Mentoring Partnership (TMP) (Good Idea – Building Professional and Occupational Networks: The Mentoring Partnership). The program matches skilled immigrants with professional employees in similar professions for a four month mentoring experience that focuses on building professional networks, gaining information on their profession and workplace culture in Canada.

As part of the Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council, TMP is a collaboration of 12 community delivery organizations and 50 corporate and has brought over 4660 mentors onboard. As of April 2012, The Mentoring Partnership has matched over 6,700 skilled immigrants with Canadian mentors.

Success

As one of the original partners for TMP, the Profession to Profession Mentoring program began with 29 mentors representing three professions: accounting, engineering and IT. Today the program has spread to include 16 professions across the organization, resulting in more mentoring opportunities for more skilled immigrants. In 2011, 165 city staff volunteered as mentors while over 600 skilled immigrants have received 24 hours of mentoring each from city employees since the program began in 2004.

Senior management at The City of Toronto have championed the program and opened the workplace to skilled immigrant mentees. Mentors are encouraged to invite their mentees to attend professional development sessions with them, adding value to the experience for the mentees. The City hosts its own annual recognition event, as well as mentor networking sessions to further enhance the mentor and mentee experiences.
Lost in Translation: Auckland’s Primary Health Interpreting Services

By ktturner
June 25, 2012
Health Inclusion-Municipal

PHOTO CREDIT - Waitemata District Health Board, Asian Health Support Service

Lost in Translation: Auckland’s Primary Health Interpreting Services

By ktturner
June 25, 2012
Health Inclusion-Municipal

PHOTO CREDIT - Waitemata District Health Board, Asian Health Support Service

Myo, an immigrant from Burma, depends on her daughter to translate her questions and make sure she understands the doctor’s instructions when she visits the clinic for her diabetes. But Myo’s daughter is not a professional, so even with some of this clarity, Myo’s health is at risk.

For a growing number of Auckland’s residents, Myo’s story is a familiar one. Yet, in a city with 37% diversity, the 4.1% non-English speaking population can be easily overlooked. Language proficiency is a well known barrier to accessing and receiving primary health care. Communicating across cultural differences can also challenge non-English speaking newcomers when it comes to seeking services and conveying symptoms to practitioners.

Interpreting Primary Care

Here lies the value of the Primary Health Interpreting Service (PHIS) initiative, a free service for non-English speaking clients and their health care providers. Launched in November 2008, as a signature project of the Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy (ARSS) Migrant Health Action Plan, PHIS is a cross-cutting government initiative for improving settlement outcomes while improving migrant health. Managed regionally by the Northern DHB Support Agency (NDSA), PHIS is delivered locally through the three Auckland region District Health Boards (DHBs): Waitemata, Auckland and Counties Manukau.

PHIS adapted an existing service model by adding telephone interpreting services and extending the service to primary care. The original model, Interpreting Service Providers, was developed by DHB to provide face-to-face interpreting services in secondary care settings and proved so successful it quickly generated interest among primary care service providers. Patients like Myo – and her family doctor – now have access to interpreters and a better prognosis for good health.

PHIS is available 5 days a week to a wide range of primary health services, from general practice to pharmacy services, laboratory services, palliative care services, family planning and well child services. The PHI service offers:

- telephone interpreting;
- on site interpreting;
- appointment confirmation; and
- telephone assignment (this service checks that clients are taking medications and following instructions for prescribed treatments).

Addressing commonly found issues

Although interpreting services in primary care is not new, research shows that these services are not well used by general practitioners (GPs). Common reasons cited are:

- GPs preferred to use family members as interpreters rather than professional interpreters as doctors’ perceptions were that interpreted visits take longer;
- practices were unaware that PHIS were available; and
- where practices were aware of PHIS, reception staff attitudes to the use of interpreters was a critical factor in their use or non-use.

Determined to get it right, PHIS implementation is supported with rigorous and on-going education and training of health care professionals, including the all important gatekeepers – frontline reception staff.

To promote institutional and attitudinal shift essential for systematic change, primary health service providers who register to use PHIS are encouraged to complete two online accredited training courses: Culture and Cultural Competency and Working with Interpreters. The courses increase the cultural proficiency of primary health staff working with culturally and linguistically diverse clients and improve skills in utilizing interpreters to get maximum benefit from the interpreted consultation.

Success

An evaluation of the Auckland DHB Refugee Health Collaborative conducted in 2012 showed a more than 50% increase in the use of interpreters over a 2 year period (2010-2012). Since PHIS was introduced in 2008, significant change has occurred in the health sector, with a continuing and growing emphasis in favour of primary care.

“Through an interpreter I found the information regarding my diabetes which had already been explained before. But my daughter might not get that information. Maybe she doesn’t quite understand the health terminology,” Myo commented.

For patients like Myo, access to PHIS interpreters means a better prognosis for good health.
Everyday Policing for Equality

By kturner
September 24, 2012
Living Together, Municipal

In 1993, Stephen Lawrence – a young black British teenager – was brutally murdered in a racist attack in London. The 1999 Macpherson report of the inquiry into his death, found the police to be institutionally racist, and heavily criticized the police for its handling of the case. For local authorities across the country, the challenge of how to embed equality and diversity principles into community policing could no longer be ignored.

Leicestershire’s Diversity Unit

The Leicestershire Constabulary Diversity Unit was established to coordinate existing programs and actively promote all aspects of diversity in the force as a strategy to improve community cohesion and protect minorities by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Today Leicestershire Constabulary is widely recognized as a leader in the field of diversity and good community relations, and is at the forefront of recruiting officers and staff to reflect the diverse ethnic make-up of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Approximately 40% of Leicester’s population has an ethnic minority background and the city is projected to become Britain’s first plural city, where no ethnic group will form a majority, within the next ten years.

The Leicestershire Constabulary Diversity Unit aims to provide an equitable workplace for all staff, and is responsible for centrally coordinating their equalities activities. The Diversity Unit is further responsible for providing specialist advice and guidance on all issues of diversity and equality which includes age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. It also oversees the force’s equality strategy, collecting and publishing comprehensive employment monitoring data to improve public accountability and analyze the impact of new policies more efficiently.

Increasing awareness of opportunities in the police force for members of minority groups is a key focus of the Diversity Unit. Recruitment events are held in community centres, mosques and through events organized by the police, such as the Khidmah sports event, as well as football and cricket matches organized by local groups. Officers are encouraged to attend local festivals, events and to contribute to local media and community radio stations. It’s all part of a strategy to gain recognition, trust and help generate a positive response to marketing campaigns aimed at increasing diversity in the force.

Ambassadors of Diversity

The Unit has an Equality Supporters Scheme, where individual officers are trained in equality rights and act as ‘ambassadors’ for diversity within the force. There are Equality Supporters in all departments and at a number of levels, and they provide support to other officers who feel they have been mistreated or harassed.

Another strategy which has proven very effective is the Emergency Interpreting Service. Leicestershire Police have a contract with a local organization to provide interpreters for non-English speakers going through the justice system. This service ensures that everyone understands their rights and receives equal treatment regardless of their background and language needs.

By embracing diversity and incorporating it into their organizational structures, decision-making processes and ways of communicating and managing, Leicestershire Constabulary are becoming a police force which better reflects and serves the interests of the diverse cultures and communities within which they operate.
Kia Ora. Welcome to Aotearoa New Zealand. For Pau Thang and his family, recent newcomers to Wellington from Burma (Myanmar), the traditional Kiwi welcome included a chance to connect with the culture and people of their new home at their local Marae, or Maori meeting house.

“We are very happy about it, because it was the first time we had experienced the Maori culture, so we really enjoyed it”.

The Marae Welcome Program is offered through Wellington’s newcomer services to people who have lived in New Zealand for less than five years and is a key strand of the broader the Wellington Regional Settlement Strategy (WRR). At the last New Zealand Census in 2006 about 23% of the Wellington region’s residents were born overseas. Slightly more than one quarter of this group were recent arrivals.

Welcoming Newcomers

The Marae Welcome Program connects newcomers to New Zealand’s indigenous people and helps them understanding the significance of Maori culture in New Zealand. Activities include educational workshops on the Treaty of Waitangi (the founding document of New Zealand as a nation), Maori culture, its language, and history. Interpreters are on hand to bridge the language barrier among participants.

Programming offers practical as well as cultural insights. For example, an overview of kaitiakitanga (the Maori role as guardians of the environment) shares Maori customs about caring for the land while informing newcomers about the country’s fishing protocols.

Responding to changing times

“Aotearoa (New Zealand) is different today from what it was 10, 20, or 30 years ago” reflects the Hon. Mahara Okeroa, a respected tribal leader and former Member of Parliament, “Today we are providing the welcome we should… I applaud the initiative.”

The New Migrant Marae Visits program is delivered through partnerships between local government and Maori Iwi in each of the five participating municipalities. Marae leaders worked with WRSS government advisors to ensure an optimal experience for newcomers and meaningful dialogue with the Maori people. Municipalities provided publicity and recruited participants through local settlement support coordinators working within each City Council.

Reaping the Rewards

“Thank you for this great opportunity to learn more about the culture in my new country,” says newcomer Anika from the Netherlands.

Feedback from participants and their Maori hosts has been enthusiastic. Local Marae report that their experience has helped connect them with newcomer communities. Several Marae have even incorporated a new migrant welcoming component into their annual Waitangi Day activities, which commemorates the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The partnership model has also strengthened connections between municipalities and local Marae and created a valuable context in which all parties can come together to discuss the impacts of migration and the changing demographics of local communities – sometimes with unintended consequences.

After participating in a newcomer welcome in Wellington City, a member of the Te Awe Maori Business Network reflected on the value of the international skills and connections of the newcomers in the room. As a result, the Te Awe Maori Business Network partnered with Wellington City Council to hold a Maori-Chinese Business Expo networking event. Success travels fast – a Business Expo with members of the Indian business community in now in development.
The World in a City: The Olympic Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

By Evelyn Municipal

During the bid process for the 2012 Olympics, former London Mayor Ken Livingstone described London as “the world in one city.” London’s winning bid pitched the city’s multiculturalism and diversity as major strengths and promised to host the most accessible Games ever. Nelson Mandela, Nobel Laureate and former Prime Minister of South Africa, supported the bid by calling London “a wonderfully diverse and open city.”

To be ready for the Opening Ceremony, approximately 200,000 will be employed by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). It is LOCOG’s responsibility to ensure the city stands by its commitments to diversity by making the process of getting involved fair and open to all Londoners. Hosting the Games requires an inclusion strategy capable of working on a national scale.

The LOCOG diversity promise

The 2008 LOCOG Diversity and Inclusion Strategy emphasizes that diversity and inclusion must be “an intrinsic part of business life” to create a work culture where everyone feels welcome and respected. The LOCOG strategy incorporates these values into all aspects of its day-to-day business activities – from recruitment to communication, decision-making and procurement.

Critical to the LOCOG’s strategy is its Diversity and Inclusion Business Charter with its supplier promise: “We will be easy to do business with; we will be transparent, and will actively promote diversity and inclusion to everyone we do business with.” It follows in the footsteps of the Greater London Authority’s commitment to socially responsible procurement, a policy that Ken Livingstone called, “a significant opportunity to improve the quality of life of all Londoners through the way in which we buy our goods, works and services.”

All LOCOG’s contracts, tenders and business opportunities are posted on CompeteFor, an online marketplace where any business can register. The transparency and accessibility of LOCOG’s procurement process opens up the supply-chain, improving access for small and minority-run businesses. Over 25% of London’s businesses are BME-owned (Black, Minority, Ethnic people).

LOCOG actively promotes diversity among its suppliers by encouraging them to advertise sub-contracts on CompeteFor as well as checking every potential contractor for an equal opportunities policy. Suppliers are also asked to complete the “Diversity Works for London” (DWFL) online assessment which measures diversity and inclusion performance. DWFL is a Mayoral program that encourages and supports businesses to realize the benefits of London’s diversity. A suite of business support products helps companies to improve performance through the strategic management of diversity. LOCOG was an early adopter and the first organization to receive the Mayor’s “Diversity Works for London” Gold Standard in 2009.

In recruitment, LOCOG Personal Best training program provides opportunities to groups which are under-represented in the workforce, assisting them into long-term, sustainable jobs. Between April and December 2010, 1,164 people received employment support from Personal Best of which 47% were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Success

LOCOG’s Diversity and Inclusion Business Charter has been described as “a bold and potentially groundbreaking attempt to tackle the issue of diversity in the supply chain” by the Commission for a Sustainable London. By 2011 over 134,000 UK businesses were registered on CompeteFor; 38,683 were London-based, like the Asian-owned RedLine Bus Company from Bedford that is supplying vehicles for the Games. Of these 17.7% were from ethnic minority communities, 20.3% run by women, 1.7% run by owners with a disability and 2% by LGBT people.

LOCOG staff are enthusiastic in their support. One Human Resources employee said, “London can be very proud that those behind the scenes are as culturally diverse as the local communities that make this city so fantastic.”

LOCOG continues to work with partners in UK government and the Rio 2016 Team to lead the sports sector in implementing inclusion policies, “going for gold” and a lasting legacy beyond 2012.
Do not Judge a Book by its Cover

By kturner
Cultural Inclusion: Living Together Municipal New Gateways

Sometimes the best way to break down barriers and fight stereotypes is through a simple conversation. Through a unique travelling library program called the Living Library (Biblioteca Humana), students in Valongo, Portugal, have the opportunity to hear and exchange life stories with others in their communities. Organized to visit schools, the Library allows students to hear first-hand about the experiences of individuals from diverse backgrounds (the “books”) who have faced prejudice in their daily lives.

The Living Library is one of several programs in the municipality’s Value Difference project, a major initiative undertaken by the city to create a more open and welcoming culture in Valongo.

Valongo is a small city of 100,000 located in northwestern Portugal. However, like many larger urban centres, Valongo’s city leaders recognized a need to address the growing diversity within its midst. The cross-cutting Value Difference project was developed by the city’s innovative social service agency, Agência para a Vida Local, which promotes human rights, equality and active inclusive citizenship. Project activities are delivered through the local settlement agency, the city’s Support Centre for the Integration of Immigrants.

Do not judge a book by its cover

The Living Library program targets teenagers aged 14-18 and is delivered in cooperation with local schools where teachers prepare students for a lively conversation with the guest “books.” Modeled playfully on a regular school library, the class visits the library and reserves a “book” for a limited period of time. Of course, the books are real people telling real stories, and it does not take long before living book and teenage “readers” are engaged in a dialogue. The books in the Living Library are volunteers representing diverse community groups, such as immigrants, who are often victims of discrimination or social exclusion. The “readers” are organized in small groups to respond to these life stories and talk about their own prejudices and stereotypes. The goal is to deconstruct stereotypes based on the slogan: “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

Critical to the success of the Living Library is making sure that students have a safe space to ask challenging questions. Before the session, the class teacher discusses the goals of the project and together they prepare questions so the teenagers do not become blocked during the experience. The “readers” are split into four groups and spend twenty minutes which each of four human book volunteers and a librarian who is there as a facilitator. Examples of the stereotypes explored are: ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and disabilities. Finally, the activity is evaluated and teachers integrate it during classes.

Success

The Living Library program within the Value Difference project has been recognized for its efforts to address discrimination by breaking down stereotypes and promoting interculturality. What began as a project of three schools and 150 students has now spread to 6 schools, 450 students and engages 5 immigrant volunteers – an impressive record in this small city and new immigrant gateway. The Living Library has been recognized by the Alto Comissariado para a Integração e Diálogo Intercultural (the National Mechanism for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue) as a best-practice and is being replicated across Portugal, in cooperation with immigrant NGOs such as Pontos nos Is and Amizade de Leste.

The Value Difference project also received a national prize, “Melhores Práticas Autárquicas em integração de imigrantes 2010” (Best Practices in the Integration of Immigrants 2010), for work that included a three-day Interculturality Fair, an Immigrant Employment space, a job fair and a business expo – in addition to its Living Library.
The Philadelphia Story: Economic Integration through Integrated Services

By kturner
June 1, 2012

Economic Inclusion, Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Financial Inclusion, Municipal

Kaita Lassina dreams of new car lifts for his eight-year-old auto repair shop and expanding his business. However, without formal credit history at the bank it will be difficult to raise the money he needs.

Access to capital is a common challenge faced by immigrant entrepreneurs. While some business owners rely on informal lending circles for the financial stimulus they need, working outside the formal economy can also limit further growth.

The City of Philadelphia is working to bridge the divide between immigrant entrepreneurs and mainstream financial institutions. With a lending circle model familiar to many immigrant communities, the Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA) helps microenterprises like BB Auto Repair become credit-worthy.

Re-vitalizing Philly Neighbourhoods

Philadelphia’s future depends on immigrants. Between 2000 and 2010, Philadelphia experienced 0.6% population growth, the first increase since 1950 and directly related to immigration. In 2010, over 20% of the population had a linguistic or ethnic minority background, up from 9% only a decade earlier. Traditional Italian and Irish sections of the city are now home to the city’s largest Vietnamese, Cambodian, Mexican, Laotian, and Indonesian communities. Nowhere is this better represented than in the world of small business.

Citywide, Philadelphia’s commercial corridors display incredible diversity. Newcomers have invested in previously vacant parts of the city, bringing increased commercial activities and new entrepreneurs seeking to sustain and grow their businesses during an economic downturn.

The City of Philadelphia quickly recognized the role of immigrant entrepreneurs in revitalizing communities, providing goods and services to neighborhood residents, and developing the local economy. To help immigrant entrepreneurs navigate the system, the Department of Commerce recruited multilingual and multicultural staff and implemented language services. However, technical assistance programs and language training were not the only issues standing in the way of immigrant business success.

Immigrant entrepreneurs needed access to credit to grow their businesses and confidence in the financial institutions that could help them develop sustainable investment practices.

Lending Circles

ROSCA was launched in 2010 when the city invited two of its community partners, micro-lenders FINANTA and Entrepreneur Works, to design and coordinate a lending circle program for low income business owners. ROSCA lending circles typically are made up of 14 entrepreneurs who receive a $1,400 loan and must pay back $100 per week during a 15 week period. Participants gain credit history while developing professional networks and relationships with lenders (who report back to credit bureaus). Business counseling workshops help entrepreneurs improve their business processes as well as appreciate the importance of credit and on-going investment in their businesses.

Success

The City’s Department of Commerce offers an English for Entrepreneurs course to ROSCA graduates to help improve customer service and increase sales. Instruction for non-native speakers is offered in Mandarin, French, Korean, and Spanish by delivery partners such as the Welcoming Centre for New Pennsylvanians who can teach small business owners the nuances of American English – like not to be offended when a customer uses “Yo!” as a greeting. Topics include cross-cultural communication, as well as conflict resolution, safety and security.

Philadelphia’s combined programs to support entrepreneurs are revitalizing city neighbourhoods while making the city’s economic development efforts more inclusive and successful.

“By connecting the microloan process with credit building, this program contributes to the long-term viability of entrepreneurs, their businesses and the jobs they provide,” says Mayor Michael Nutter.
We are New York Project

By kturner
August 22, 2012

Municipal

A little girl reads haltingly from an English storybook before bedtime. Her mother sits beside her, helping her work out some of the more difficult words. Later, the mother retreats to the living room where her husband is watching a soccer game on television. She interrupts him to express her anxiety about an upcoming meeting with the teacher, flashing back to last year’s parent-teacher conference which she sat through helplessly, unable to understand a word the teacher said.

For New York City’s 1.8 million adults who need help with English, the storyline is all too familiar. And that’s the point. This opening scene is the first in a nine-episode series broadcast twice-weekly on public television and available on the internet, called We Are New York (WANY). Created by the Mayor’s Office of Adult Education in partnership with the City University of New York in 2009, the goal of WANY is to take advantage of the reach and popularity of television to help adults practice English, while at the same time navigating essential public services, such as schools, banks and hospitals.

From Television to Real Life

Each episode of WANY guides the language learner through challenging, but realistic situations, such as going to the doctor or opening a bank account, using everyday conversation spoken at a slower pace. Viewers can also download program scripts in six of the city’s most commonly spoken languages.

WANY program developers have also established conversation groups across the city’s five boroughs to help English language learners overcome the strangeness of a new language by meeting face-to-face with New Yorkers. The groups are led by city-trained volunteers and allow participants to discuss the television programs, including the problems characters face and how they overcome them. Newcomers can practice English words and phrases around issues that most concern them as immigrants or share the ordinary events of daily life with their new neighbours and fellow residents.

Policy Matters

The WANY project stems from a 2003 policy decision initiated by the Office of the Mayor to ensure all New Yorkers, including immigrants, can access the City services they need and are entitled to receive. About half of all New Yorkers speak a language other than English at home, and 25% of residents do not speak English as their primary language.

Recognizing that “for the 1.8 million New Yorkers with limited English proficiency, interacting with government all too often can be a challenge,” Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg issued three separate Language Access Executive Orders to establish better access to city services for non-English speakers.

Now all city agencies are mandated to provide services in Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Italian and French Creole; additionally, callers can access the 311 Customer Service Center in 170 languages. City agencies are also required to provide interpretation services, including telephone interpretation, oral or written translation services, and translation of essential public documents in the most commonly spoken languages.

Success

The popular We are New York television series amplifies the city’s efforts to improve immigrant access to services. Since its launch, an estimated 4,000 New Yorkers have improved their English language skills while learning how to access essential city services. Nearly 13,000 students have watched the series in the classroom.

In 2010, WANY was recognized with two local NY Emmy Awards. The city continues to bring newcomers and New Yorkers together, recently celebrating the start of its 500th conversation circle.
More than half of children under six living in Nuremberg, Germany are immigrants. Yet a report conducted on behalf of the city’s Integration council and its partners found that immigrant children are under-represented from formal pre-school programs – such as daycare and nursery centres – that are designed for children three-years-old and under.

Preparing the next generation for future success is a major goal of Nuremberg’s vision for the city. The City of Nuremberg is working to make early education more accessible to all of its residents. Kindergarten, the parents and the social environment are viewed as essential to success in formal education, and also as important socialization agents for these children. This has become a central topic of the national debate about education. In Nuremberg, education has also been declared a top priority. The city’s goal is an inclusive approach to education in the city that ensures success in school for all its children.

Initially the campaign focused on youth. Activities included kindergartens, school-based activities, immigrant recognition awards and cultural newsletters. As part of this process, Nuremberg is undergoing close monitoring of formal education programs to determine how to strengthen the participation in, and the quality of education, particularly for the youngest residents. All institutions – not just those run by the city – are involved in a city-wide consultation on the subject. The city also broadened its strategic scope to include building relationships between parents and institutions that work with children.

A number of measures are already being implemented to help level the playing field, and provide equal access to early education for all children, regardless of cultural background. A systematically-designed series of seminars and parent training events has been welcomed by parents from both German-born and immigrant families. The training includes information about programs to help children improve their learning skills as well as practical advice for parents to help them support the child’s progress within the family. Some courses specifically address issues affecting immigrants, and many are offered in different languages. The city has also created a variety of information media for parents, some of which are published in 16 different languages.

A good start in school is a key strategy of the “Bayerische Bildungs- und Erziehungsplan” (BEP), the 2005 education plan for the state of Bavaria. Research has shown that language acquisition and proficiency is a critical determinant of success at school. Recognizing the value of early intervention, including children entering pre-school, language programs were established to help level the playing field for all children seeking entry into the public education system. To identify those in need early, preschool children undergo language testing 18 months prior to primary school. Children who may need more language support to be successful in the classroom can access up to 240 German lessons to help prepare them for school. Primary schools also offer remedial language classes for the youngest students and individual tuition in the German language is available to those who need it from grade 3, when the curriculum starts preparing children for future testing.

Teachers require support too. Since December 2008, daycare institutions in Nuremberg have had access to a language consultant program instituted by the Bavarian State Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, Family and Women. Language consultants support and advise school teams on how to improve their language teaching for the city’s youngest children.

Under the watchful eye and feedback loops of the city’s monitoring systems, increasingly precise data helps city officials and teaching staff tailor city’s educational programs to the needs of Nuremberg students – not only those of the youngest children and the children of immigrants, but all children attending educational institutions in Nuremberg.
Community Ambassadors for Seniors

By kturner
June 28, 2012

Health Inclusion Living Together Municipal

Five days a week, seniors meet at the India Community Center in Fremont, California, to do yoga, have lunch or take part in a round table discussion on issues of the day. For these members – many of whom are immigrants – the community centre is an escape from the isolation that can affect seniors of all cultural and faith backgrounds.

It’s also a first point of contact for seniors who often face challenges accessing essential social services. Recognizing the unique way in which cultural and faith communities can connect with residents, the city formally partnered with community organizations like the India Community Center to create the Community Ambassadors Program for Seniors (CAPS).

CAPS is a unique civic partnership between the City of Fremont’s Human Services Department and ten local cultural and faith-based organizations, strengthening connections between native- and foreign-born community members. CAPS integrates immigrants through a unique model that engages the full community and supports seniors in their own language, within their own cultural norms, and does so where seniors live, worship, and socialize. Ambassadors serve as a bridge between the formal network of social services and their respective faith and cultural communities.

Strength In Community

Like many cities in America, Fremont has an aging and increasingly diverse population. Nearly half of residents are foreign-born, including one-third of seniors in a population of 214,000. Fremont is also home to one of the country’s largest group of Afghan refugees.

In 2004, Fremont’s Human Services Department conducted a series of focus groups in nine languages to find out how best to reach the city’s immigrant seniors, nearly one-third of which live below or close to the poverty line. An invaluable resource emerged from these conversations: a new pool of volunteers. Many residents came forward to work as “ambassadors” within their respective communities. They embraced the opportunity to be useful and draw from their previous work experiences as professionals here or abroad.

Launched in 2007, CAPS includes a comprehensive volunteer ambassador training developed in conjunction with the City of Fremont, San Jose State University and the Stanford Geriatric Education centre. The course covers topics ranging from active listening to information on housing, legal and cash assistance and health issues.

CAPS ambassadors help seniors access essential services through people they know and trust, in their own communities and languages, and according to their own cultural norms. The city’s Human Services Department has also ensured that city programs are adapted to meet the needs of the diverse communities they serve. The social security office, for example, now has a Punjabi-speaking professional to work with Fremont’s large Sikh population.

Since 2007, 138 volunteer ambassadors from each of Fremont’s distinct communities have completed a 40-hour training program designed to help them provide information and referral services to seniors and their families. Ambassadors also meet bi-monthly with the city’s Aging and Family Services staff to review difficult cases, share best practices and receive ongoing training.

Success

CAPS ambassadors have conducted outreach to over 1,500 individuals and helped over 700 seniors receive individual support to access services. Outcomes include an increased level of trust among ambassadors and city staff, between ethnic leaders and local service providers, and between ambassadors from very diverse cultures and religious backgrounds. In 2010, the City of Fremont’s Human Resources Department received the Network of Multicultural Aging Award from the American Society on Aging.
Looking Ahead: the TPS Recruiting and Hiring Strategy

By kturner
December 21, 2012
Employment Inclusion, Municipal

For an organization to be progressive and competitive, it has to be able to attract the brightest and most creative minds. In the policing world, being the best also means being relevant in communities increasingly represented by people from different countries, ethnicities, backgrounds, and experiences.

Recognizing the benefits of diversity is an emerging global trend which public and private institutions are beginning to realize. A growing number of police services recognize the importance of diversity in their own ranks, and in their human resource management. When people bring an array of experience with them to a position, progressive change is never far behind.

Breaking New Ground

The Toronto Police Service (TPS) is the largest municipal police service in Canada and the country’s second largest police force (after the iconic Royal Canadian Mounted Police). Toronto police serve a highly diverse population. Over 140 languages and dialects are spoken in Canada’s largest city and in a population of 2.5 million (5.5 million in the GTA), 49% of Toronto residents belong to a visible minority.

In 2005, when newly appointed Chief Bill Blair took office, the Toronto Police Service did not reflect Toronto’s growing diversity. Blair took decisive action by appointing the city’s first black deputy chief, Keith Forde, and putting him in charge of the organization’s transformation. “Not because it was morally the right thing to do,” explains Blair, “but because it was the smart thing to do. It was good business practice and it was going to make us more competent, smarter and better able to serve the communities we are mandated to serve and protect.”

Today TPS actively recruits in its diverse communities, emphasizing the importance of language skills, cultural competencies and diversity of perspectives. Recognizing it’s not enough to hire a diverse workforce, new recruits are encouraged to gain the experience and skills needed to move up into leadership positions. Since 2005 the proportion of visible minorities has increased by 86 per cent and aboriginals by 38 per cent.

“We hire, train and promote employees for the people of the city we are policing,” Deputy Chief Keith Forde said.

Success

In 2009, newly minted Constable Trisha Barbero became one of the first three Filipino women hired to join TPS that year, breaking new ground for minority women.

“It’s overwhelming,” said Barbero, a graduate school student when she applied. “I was quite surprised we are the first – you don’t expect to be a part of history like this.”

Barbero’s recruit class was made up of 16% women, 33% visible minorities, and 18% with previous policing or military experience. A total of 60% spoke a language other than English, with 22% speaking two languages or more, including American Sign Language, Arabic, Cantonese, Farsi, French, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, to name just a few.
To recruit the best in the face of increased competition, and maintain its leadership in the policing field, the TPS Employment Unit is guided by a new “Recruiting, Hiring, and Customer Relations” strategy. The strategy includes an Ambassador Program, a Media & Communications Plan, a Blended Interview, and an Enhanced Mentoring & Recruiting plan.

Looking ahead, TPS Employment Unit priorities include programming to increase the number of culturally competent candidates applying to the police and maintaining its goals to provide first-class policing for the city through effective leadership, a dynamic work environment and sustainable funding.
When officials in the city of Bremen investigated why so few young people with a migrant background were applying for the city’s many training positions, they learned that civil service jobs were rarely considered an option. The demographic had few family members, friends or contacts who worked for the municipality.

To address this issue, Bremen started a new campaign in 2009 to recruit more young people into the civil service under the slogan “You are the Key…to your Future and your City” (Du bist der Schlüssel…für deine Zukunft und deine Stadt). It included an easy-to-follow website that provided young people with profiles of the kinds of jobs and careers open to them.

You are the Key: An Inclusive campaign

Located in north-west Germany, Bremen is the country’s tenth largest city with a population of 500,000. The “Free Hanseatic City of Bremen” boasts the fifth largest manufacturing workforce in the country and is a major local employer. Approximately 25% of the region’s population has a migrant background with the top three countries represented being Turkey, Poland and the Russian Federation.

To recruit this largely untapped population, Bremen embarked on the “You are the Key” campaign (named after the iconic symbol of the city) through its municipal education and training department. Similar to programs in cities like Hamburg, the aim is to recruit for a wide range of departments, including police, firefighters, law enforcement, judicial administration, financial management and general administration.

The campaign messages were developed carefully to manage a rather tricky problem of how to recruit selectively while maintaining the city’s commitment to equality. Excluded minority youth needed to feel they were “equal among equals.” The city, which employs more than 25,000 people, had already promoted employment opportunities; in 2005, its cross-departmental strategy for integration had been shortlisted by the Bertelsmann Stiftung as a best practice. The new program was meant to be a more inclusive approach.

The “You are the Key” program consists of a number of approaches to reach its audience including a print media advertising campaign, a career fair, a new cross-departmental website devoted to promoting the various career options and job openings, a series of short films, and outreach to migrant organizations. There are even Twitter and Facebook accounts.

The outreach targeted not only young people, but their parents as well. While a German-language brochure described the various streams within the civil service, the Russian and Turkish translations have been tweaked to address parents in an opening letter. It recognized the role they play in advising their children regarding career choices and emphasized Bremen’s commitment to promoting diversity within the civil service.
Success

“We want the proportion of migrants to increase in public service,” says Mayor Karoline Linnert. “We need their intercultural competence. The administration should be as colourful as our society.”

In 2009, 19.6 per cent of applicants came from a migrant background. By 2010, proportion had jumped to 25 per cent as a result of the campaign, with its use of examples of successful young city trainees, in conjunction with the recognizing the achievements of bilingual candidates. The look of the campaign itself was also received well by city employees and many felt it strengthened the city’s brand as an employer.
Giving Equality a Sporting Chance in Greenwich

By kturner
June 28, 2012
Living Together Municipal Social Inclusion

Half-time at Charlton Athletic Football Stadium and 26,000 fans are watching a film about diversity in the community of Greenwich, London. The film One Game, One Community is the brain-child of a group of young people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds on a specially-funded film course. Film-making is just one of the activities that the Charlton Athletic Race and Equality Partnership offers.

The ground-breaking partnership between Greenwich Council and Charlton Athletic Football Club delivers a full program of courses and activities aimed at promoting social inclusion, tackling inequality and discrimination, and building community cohesion through sport, art and media.

Building bridges in the community

The CARE Partnership, the first collaboration between a UK local authority and professional football club, has been delivering its program since 1992, giving young people, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, the opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds. Opportunities range from accredited sports coaching qualifications and film production to women’s football and digital photography.

Sport has enormous potential for building bridges between communities and team sport in particular, can help to develop social networks, forge friendships, and overcome differences by promoting mutual understanding. CARE’s annual football tournament gives individuals the opportunity to form teams, regardless of their background, and brings together around 200 young people every year, from 17 national and ethnic groups.

Art and media can also facilitate contact and friendship between groups. CARE offers a variety of interactive courses in arts and drama, as well as multimedia and digital technology, which have proved to be a useful platform for cross-cultural interaction. Participants produce a variety of drama productions, films and art exhibitions.

The CARE Partnership develops community interaction and dialogue by uniting people from different backgrounds and has proven invaluable to community engagement and inclusion. The project provides a platform for cross-cultural communication, which is essential for changing attitudes and values necessary to facilitate positive interaction; all this while helping young people to gain confidence and develop practical skills and qualifications.

Success

In a challenging economic climate where efficient use of resources is essential, collaborative working has become increasingly important for delivering services and activities. The CARE Partnership model has proven crucial to providing a flexible approach and delivering positive benefits for local communities. CARE is recognized as an example of ‘best practice’ by the UK Commission on Integration and Cohesion and was also commended by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights who stated: “CARE plays a crucial role in helping to tackle social exclusion…and build positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.”

An evaluation of CARE’s arts program, which works with 19 different ethnic groups, found that 78% of participants felt that they had a better understanding of people in their local community because of the program. According to one participant, “…my views and opinions on communities have changed in positive ways.” Several participants also reported gaining confidence and having met people they would not normally meet.

A recent project, working with young people who were not in education, employment or training, resulted in 60% of participants gaining opportunities in one of these areas and was recognized as one of the ‘best performing programs’ by the London Development Agency.

The essence of CARE’s innovative program is perhaps best captured by a participant who explained that: “The most important thing I learned was how different communities can work together.”
Mayor's Office of New Bostonians

By kturner
April 30, 2012

In 1998, Mayor Thomas M. Menino made the remarkable decision to open a new kind of city agency. One of the first of its kind in the United States, the Mayor's Office of New Bostonians (MONB) was founded on the recognition that a growing number of residents were immigrants, and that more coordination of city services was necessary to ensure that they felt at home and had the chance to be fully integrated into all areas of civic life.

It was an opportune idea. Two years later, the US Census defined Boston as a majority-minority city (where minority groups make up the majority of the population). Today immigrants make up 27 per cent of Boston's population, speaking 140 languages.

The Mayor's Office of New Bostonians is the municipal agency dedicated to welcoming the city's newcomers and getting them established. What makes it successful is the centralized coordination of services, including a pool of interpreters fluent in 17 languages that is available to 20 city departments and for newcomers, free legal advice relating to discrimination and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes offered by the city. The agency also conducts research and serves as an advocate for immigrants citywide. It is the go-to place where an immigrant can find help with practically any problem, confident that the city will respond.

"I created the Office of New Bostonians because I recognized how important diversity is to our city," said Mayor Thomas Menino in a MNOB newsletter.

Incorporating Change

Run by founding director, Rev. Cheng Imm Tan, the Office's success comes from it's ability to work across city departments. Services that are not supported directly may be accessed through a paid staff of five, helped by some 60 volunteers, ranging from community workers to immigration attorneys.

Beyond providing services, the MNOB also monitors the changing needs of Boston's immigrant communities and fine-tunes its work accordingly. In 2006, a survey of 800 immigrant communities resulted in the New Bostonians Summit Initiative and its focus on three policy priorities: English language acquisition, economic success through family-sustaining jobs, and kindergarten to grade 12 education. A series of summits have since brought together stakeholders from a wide range of sectors (such as business, philanthropy, and labour) as well as extensive input from immigrants and the organizations that serve them.

Success

The success of the Mayor's Office of New Bostonians is easy to assess. It funds 25 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) for some 1,000 adult learners annually; has helped register more than 5,000 immigrant voters; holds an annual event for immigrants to help them learn how to access city services; developed an ESOL curriculum for parents and caregivers in partnership with the Boston public school system; and developed a dual strategy to help immigrants find productive work through employment and support for immigrant entrepreneurship. The annual "We Are Boston" fundraising gala celebrates the achievements of individuals from diverse communities.
The Mayor's Office of New Bostonians has become a national model for helping newcomers connect with city government. The latest city to follow Boston's lead is Chicago which opened its Office of New Americans in 2011, dedicated to welcoming its newly-arrived residents and getting them established in productive lives.
Relying on Immigrant Networks: Business Network Aachen

By kturner

Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal

How does a city re-charge its economic engine and stay competitive in a globalized economy? For the city of Aachen in North Rhine-Westphalia, the answer lies with its entrepreneurs, and in particular, with immigrant-run companies in knowledge-intensive sectors. Such leaders have an edge in promoting the city to networks in their executives' countries of origin.

Aachen likes to use the phrase “Europe is here” to highlight its location in Germany on the border of Belgium and The Netherlands (known as the Euregio Maas-Rhine), as well as its historic status as home to the legendary emperor Charlemagne. Once a manufacturing hub, today the city’s economic strength lies in its high-tech sector and international status as a university research centre. In a city of approximately 260,000, representing over 150 nationalities, one in six residents is a post-secondary student, many with international ties.

Not surprisingly, a city that can attract and retain bright, young minds is also home to a growing number of international companies. One in twelve companies in Aachen is foreign-owned. The city is also seeing the emergence of a significant rise in the number of “transnational entrepreneurs.” The city wanted to tap into networks already in place where immigrant entrepreneurs have access to two or more sets of networks, in Aachen and other cities in Germany and in the country or city of their birth.

The network

In 2010, the city began planning the Business Network Aachen with the goal of targeting innovative, growth-oriented “ethnic” companies. Its aim was to combine regional economic expansion with the integration of migrants in the city. By developing a member-driven network of entrepreneurs, executives and leaders from trade associations, public institutions and industry-related organizations, the network would stimulate the growth of business opportunities while changing public perceptions about immigrants and their contribution to the city. Funding for the project came from the city and a state grant, “KOMM-IN North Rhine-Westphalia,” which focuses on innovation in municipal integration work.

Officially launched in April 2011, the Business Network Aachen holds regular networking events as well as workshops to discuss strategies, plans and goals to develop existing and new contacts for building business opportunities. Since the emphasis is on inclusion, not all members need to have an immigrant background. They only need to be interested in strengthening Aachen as an international business location to become a member of the voluntary network. To ensure success, other prominent organizations are also involved, such as the Aachen Chamber of Commerce and the RWTH Aachen University.

Success

“For Aachen, globalization means a great opportunity. We are an international city,” said Mayor Marcel Philipp at the launch of the Network in March 2011.

The Business Network Aachen has already achieved some significant milestones. Under its winning slogan, “International networking par excellence – made in Aachen,” the organization now has members representing 37 countries and 35 different industries and is seen as a community of “internationally-active/interested” companies. This has given entrepreneurs of all backgrounds the opportunity to break out of the usual pattern of limiting their networking to German-only circles and leverage their skills, resources and diversity to strengthen their potential on national and international economic markets.

The Business Network Aachen has sent successful trade missions to Istanbul and Bursa in Turkey, and hosted a follow-up German-Turkish Business Forum in Aachen that was co-organized with the city, the Aachen Chamber of Commerce and AGIT (Aachener Gesellschaft für Innovation und Technologietransfer), the economic development agency for ‘Technology Region Aachen’. Based on the success of its first year, the network plans to incorporate itself as an association.

As Frank Malis, the director of the Aachen Chamber of Commerce, has commented on the region’s economy: “The much-quoted ‘globalization of the economy’ is taking place right on our doorstep.”
A Charter of Rights for Urban Citizens

By kturner
March 22, 2012
Living Together Municipal Municipal Welcome-ability

In Canada, citizens and non-citizens have their rights protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In Montreal, residents also have their urban rights as citizens recognized. On January 1, 2006, the city introduced the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities (Charte montréalaise des droits et responsabilités), following in the footsteps of many European cities. In North America, it was the first to enact its very own charter of rights.

The Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities is often described as a "tool of pro-action"—one which lays out the responsibilities of both the municipal government and citizens towards each other, establishing a common framework for moving forward as a city. It is meant to be the groundwork for a new understanding of citizenship in the city.

A Living Legacy to Human Dignity

On January 1, 2006, the city introduced the Montreal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities (Charte montréalaise des droits et responsabilités). Five years later, Mayor Gérald Tremblay views the development of the charter and its translation into languages like Spanish, Mandarin and Arabic as an important moment in the life of the city.

"It's a legacy," he said in an interview with the Montreal Gazette, "because it's our values that unite us as a people and if we have those values and we start focusing on what's essential – family, the community, proper housing, parks, cultural activities, we are sharing our values."

"Then we'll be recognized one day as people who have respect for human dignity."

An Idea Grows

Montréal occupies a unique role within Canada. It is a fully bilingual city located in a province that is officially French-speaking. The city has always had a very delicate balancing act to master, ensuring that speakers of both English and French are treated fairly, while respecting Quebec's need to preserve its French identity within the larger Canadian framework. As one of the country's largest urban centres, it is also Quebec's economic hub, receiving the majority of the province's immigrants.

Into this mix came an idea that first took root in 1998, in the form of the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City. By 2000, the "Right to the City" was enshrined in the first such charter and approved by more than 70 cities. Its aim was to identify "the fundamental rights of city dwellers and the basic principles that must govern city life in order that the human rights of all those who live there be respected and encouraged."

Today the movement to recognize urban rights includes more than 350 European cities. However, in 2002 when the Charter found its first footing in a North America, Montreal was grappling with a recent provincial decision to amalgamate 27 boroughs in the region around the city of Montreal. In the mayhem of municipal and administrative re-organization, the Charter offered city leaders an important symbolic document and set of governing principles to guide the way forward.

Charter for an Inclusive City

The Charter is the product of a municipal task force on democracy. The task force met over two and a half years, consulting extensively with the public, and completed its work with the submission of a draft document to the municipal government. By using a process of civic engagement to define the roles and responsibilities of citizens, the Montreal Charter was able to create a covenant between citizens and the city administration that underpins all urban service provision.

It begins by describing the city's common principles and values including:

- The city is both a territory and a living space in which values of human dignity, tolerance, peace, inclusion and equality must be promoted among all citizens.
- Human dignity can only be preserved as part of a sustained struggle against poverty and all forms of discrimination, and in particular, those based on ethnic or national origin, race, age, social status, marital status, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability.
- Respect, justice and equity are values that give rise to a collective desire to enrich Montréal’s position as a democratic, united and inclusive city.
The Charter also advocates that active citizenship is necessary to build trust and belonging in the city; that diversity is a resource that “is further enhanced by fostering the inclusion of and harmonious relations among its communities and persons of all origins”; and, that Montreal is a French-speaking city that provides services in English, under the law.

The Charter further delineates the rights and responsibilities under seven broad themes, including democratic life, environment and sustainable development, and municipal services. It also empowers an independent ombudsman to act to investigate complaints based on the charter.

**Success**

The Montreal Charter has received much international attention, including recognition at the 2006 UN-HABITAT World Forum III as part of its focus on inclusion, urban policies and local democracy. It is one of the reference documents for the Global Charter Agenda for Human Rights in the City project. In October 2011, the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities project reported that Montréal placed 5th out of 40 cities in the Intercultural Cities Index.

The city of Montreal has continued to develop its Charter, fulfilling the final provision of the original charter to review and revise it after four years in 2010, when the review was conducted through a public consultation process. And in partnership with McGill University, the city has started a translation project to ensure a broader community could gain access to the charter which has resulted in versions in seven languages.
Business Law for Immigrant Entrepreneurs

By kturner
March 21, 2012
Entrepreneurship Inclusion

Starting a small business is a challenge anywhere, in any economy, whatever the tax or legal system. It is one thing to come up with the great idea, it is another to navigate the risks and pitfalls of a business start-up.

The average immigrant entrepreneur has the initiative, drive and appetite for hard work that's required for success. But managing risk and understanding the legal structures of a new country? That really is like speaking a new language.

Sanjay Pandrala knows this all too well. Equipped with a background in horticulture from India and a dream to start his own business, Pandrala had already attained the required licences his business needed (as mandated by the province of Ontario) when he ran into trouble. When it came to actually starting his business – registration, contracts and the like – Pandrala found himself lost in the Canadian legal system.

Fortunately Pandrala got help when he needed it most. A unique Toronto-based legal service called Connect Legal introduced Pandrala to its Free Lawyer Matching Program. It wasn't long before his new company, BUGMAN Pest Control Landscaping Services and Trading, was up and running thanks to the volunteer lawyer from a major Toronto law firm who helped him create the customized contracts essential to running his business.

"I could not have started the business without Connect Legal," said Pandrala while sharing his story on CBC Radio's Metro Morning.

Providing services to new entrepreneurs

Started in Toronto in March 2010 by commercial services lawyer Marion Annau, Connect Legal fosters entrepreneurship in the immigrant community by providing legal education workshops and pro bono (free) commercial legal assistance to low-resource immigrant entrepreneurs.

Many immigrants are accidental entrepreneurs. A 2010 Statistics Canada study found that 33% of self-employed immigrants became self-employed due to a lack of job opportunities in the paid labour market, compared to just 20% of those self-employed who were non-immigrants.

This makes the services provided by Connect Legal, a not-for-profit, even more critical for newcomers.

"I understand the complexity of legal requirements," says Annau, "For people who didn't grow up in our legal system and are speaking English as a second language, they would be even more opaque."

Connect Legal's business model was inspired by Annau's work in New York City with an organization called Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (VLA). Like other American legal clinics serving low-resource groups (for example, North Carolina Lawyers for Entrepreneurs Assistance Program), VLA relies on volunteer lawyers to deliver pro bono legal assistance to individuals who could not otherwise afford a lawyer.

After returning to Toronto, Annau approached the head of pro bono at the law firm where she had started her career, McCarthy Tétrault LLP, and found support for the fledgling non-profit. Other high profile legal firms were quick to follow.

Two-pronged approach

Clients like Pandrala work with Connect Legal in two ways. First, entrepreneurs are identified for the program through Connect Legal's partnerships with local community organizations, non-profits and educational institutions with existing programs to support small business. Once these organizations have pre-screened the business idea for viability, the aspiring entrepreneur is eligible for Connect Legal's commercial law workshops which are targeted to entrepreneurs and small business owners.

For clients whose businesses need further assistance and have been in Canada for less than ten years, Connect Legal also provides the Free Lawyer Matching Program. Successful applicants to this program are paired with volunteer lawyers from Connect Legal's well-established professional network. Each lawyer works one-on-one with the client/entrepreneur to address specific legal needs related to the growth of his or her business. This includes drafting contracts, obtaining permits and negotiating agreements that are essential to starting and building their business.

"In my workshops, I tell them it's like the rules of a soccer game," says Annau. "If everybody tries to play soccer and nobody knows the rules, it will be the worst soccer game ever."

The purpose of commercial law, Annau continues, is to set up a playing field where everybody knows the rules: "Until you know the rules, you either crash into them head first or you run your business in a very inefficient way."

Success

Since its inception in 2010, Connect Legal has assisted more than 700 small business owners through its workshops and Free Lawyer Matching Program in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), engaging a growing network of community partnerships that includes including Centennial College, Microskills Development Canada, Newcomer Centre of Peel, and the Canadian Youth Business Foundation Newcomer Program. In the 2012 program year, 380 entrepreneurs participated in a total of 33 legal education workshops.

Hundreds of hours of pro bono services have been provided to immigrant entrepreneurs who would not otherwise have had access to legal advice. At the same time, 100% of the participating lawyers surveyed are interested in doing more pro bono work with these enterprising new Canadians.
This Good Idea will be featured in “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.
Mapping Community Cohesion in Waltham Forest

By kturner
February 16, 2012
Civic Inclusion, Living Together Municipal

Eleven local people arrested on terrorism charges. It is the shocking news that no city council wants to hear. But that is what faced the Borough of Waltham Forest in London’s East End when police found evidence of an alleged plot to down a transatlantic flight to North America in August 2008.

“That was a real wake up call obviously,” says Claire Whitney, Community Engagement Manager for Waltham Forest, “having terrorists, local people, educated in the borough, and arrested on terrorism charges.”

The arrests were a turning point for the local authority which moved quickly to invest more emphasis and resources into its social cohesion work, first with the local Muslim community and quickly, broadening its efforts to include all youth. Council leadership was rewarded with public recognition for the council’s achievements in dealing with a critical situation.

In 2012 all eyes are once again on Waltham Forest as the borough plays host to the 2012 Olympic Games.

Opportunities and challenges co-exist in equal measure as economic and social drivers shape the borough’s future.

Mapping and Tracking

Waltham Forest is one of London’s 32 city boroughs, and among its most diverse, with a history of migration going back to the early nineteenth century when the earliest Jewish immigrants arrived from Central and Eastern Europe. Today, it has a population of 235,000; more than 40% of its residents have a minority ethnic background with post-war migration coming from the Caribbean and South Asia, and most recently, refugee settlement from Somalia and Eastern Europe. The borough has the third largest Muslim community (15%) in London and one third of the population is under the age of 25.

Improving social cohesion was on of the Waltham Forest Council agenda long before the 2006 arrests. The council established launched its Community Cohesion Task Group as early as 2003 in response to rising tensions related to British participation in the Iraq War. The multi-sector taskforce conducted a survey, Religion and Faith in Focus, that mapped religion, ethnicity, gender and economic activity in the borough and established an invaluable benchmark to guide future development of its cohesion work.

But it was the 2006 arrests that spurred the council into greater action. It commissioned a report, “Breaking down the Walls of Silence,” by the Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo). Among its chief findings, it reported that many members of the Muslim community felt unrepresented by the council; young people felt disengaged and often worried about gangs and gang culture; and intergenerational tension were felt across the community.

Where to begin?

A re-assessment of its social cohesion work-to-date against new survey data suggested Waltham Forest Council still had much to do. For example, it became obvious that little of its previous community cohesion strategy had been embedded in schools or within the community. Also, the prior assumption that the borough’s twelve Muslim councilors ‘represented’ their religious community, or a wider Muslim mosaic, was dashed when closer examination revealed that all were members of the same mosque.

Determined to get it right, Council turned to the iCoCo report to inform the next iteration of the borough’s Community Cohesion Strategy (2008-11). The revised strategy identified three priorities:

1. understanding and responding to the impact of migration and newly arrived communities;
2. building trust, contact and dialogue between communities; and
3. promoting active citizenship and engagement.

The strategy led to a new wave of reports documenting and measuring migrant and cohesion issues as well as projects involving interfaith activity, youth engagement and women’s groups.

New Ideas

Two projects among many from Waltham Forest have been singled out for their innovative work from different parts of the borough’s cohesion agenda.

The iMuslim project was developed in direct response to the tensions in the borough due to the arrests. A series of short films were made by a group of young Muslims to explore the portrayal of their community in the mainstream media. They helped recruit the film company and were then trained to storyboard, film, edit and even animate the films. They also conducted interviews and discussion group sessions with nationally renowned journalists and script writers from the television series, The Bill. Not only did the young people appreciate having their voices heard by media professionals, they also learned that the media is not all against them and that they can change negative perceptions and stereotypes.

On the other hand, the Youth Independent Advisory Group (YIAG) was developed to create a way for young people to interact productively with police. In particular, the group developed training for police regarding a controversial subject for area young people – to improve how police conduct stop and searches. Another part of the work involves youth as peer trainers on anger and conflict management. The feedback on the sessions, which have involved young offenders has been very positive with comments like “they could relate to me, they understood us more.”

In the background to this work, however, was the implementation of the national Prevent strategy in 2007, the “preventative strand of the government’s counter-terrorism strategy.” It too became an element of the Waltham Forest Community Cohesion Strategy (2008-11). Admittedly, Prevent has remained a challenge for the local ‘cohesion agenda.’

Success

“Waltham Forest’s robust leadership, particularly from elected members and officers, has been augmented by police, head teachers and faith community leaders. It has been a crucial element in terms of tension monitoring and maintaining cohesion in the longer term.” [Beacon Award]
Waltham Forest's many-pronged response to the high profile arrests have led to much recognition. It first received the Beacon Status (now the Local Innovation Awards Scheme) in 2008, followed by another Beacon award for Building Cohesive and Resilient Communities in 2009 and 2010 with the Waltham Forest Metropolitan Police Service.

New Challenges

Today cohesion work in Waltham Forest has new challenges. The national government introduced severe austerity cuts in the spring of 2011, resulting in an immediate loss of funding for Waltham Forest’s cohesion work, totaling 65 million pounds over three years and a reduction of 40% of staff. This was followed by the UK riots in August, which spread to the borough.

“There are two issues emerging for Waltham Forest. One is how do we deliver cohesion work going forward and building on the good work that we have done,” say Whitney. “But also the potential cohesion impact as a result of the budget reduction.”

While the YIAG program is still running, the pressure means that local authorities like Waltham Forest, are looking to continue their work with existing voluntary agencies.
Creating Language Empathy in Corporate Canada

By kturner
February 15, 2012

Employment Inclusion, Good Ideas We Are Watching, Living Together, Social Inclusion

Imagine you’re having a personal conversation with a colleague. It could be about anything — the movie you saw on the weekend, the new restaurant you ate at last night, the latest book you enjoyed.

Now imagine that every time you use a verb during the conversation — saw, ate, enjoyed — you also have to come up with a synonym — watched, ingested, liked. A simple five-minute conversation all of a sudden becomes much more difficult and challenging.

At 3M Canada in London, Ont., all supervisors employed by the multinational technology conglomerate complete this language exercise as part of their leadership training. The deceptively simple exercise helps them understand the experiences of their skilled immigrant employees who speak English as a second language, says Sarah Tattersall, Manager of Recruitment and Talent Development at the manufacturing company.

Many of Canada’s immigrants are highly skilled, with years of training and international experience that make them an asset to any organization. But many of these immigrants also speak English as a second language, which can affect communication and teamwork in the workplace.

“When I first did the exercise, it was so clear to me the challenges that someone else would have if they didn’t speak English as a first language,” she says. “How much thought, how much time I spent thinking about ‘What would that word be?’ And so you lose your train of thought about what your message is supposed to be and you’re not 100 per cent listening to what the other person is saying. You can clearly understand how people can get lost in conversations even though they’re fluent in English.”

Ms. Tattersall added the exercise to 3M’s supervisor training in 2011 after learning about the exercise from accounting and consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers at a conference for human resources professionals in Toronto earlier in the year.

Learning by Doing

Initially, both people having the conversation would have to come up for synonyms, but this became too difficult. Both parties were concentrating so hard on what their next word was going to be that they weren’t paying attention to what the other person was saying.

“That’s not the experience people have in the workplace. Typically, it’s one person who’s struggling and the other person isn’t,” says Ms. Tattersall.

3M changed the exercise so only one of the two people having the conversation had to come up with a synonym for every verb she used. Then the two switch roles so each person gets the opportunity to experience what it’s like to have to think hard about language and then to also have to wait for her conversational partner to find the right words.

Before the exercise begins, the trainer gives participants some context by talking about how Canada’s demographics are changing and how that affects recruitment and hiring. With more and more skilled immigrants coming to Canada, all workplaces, including 3M, are becoming more diverse.

After the exercise, the trainer debriefs participants by asking them about their experiences what they thought about their partners’ ability when waiting for them to come up with a synonym and how they felt when it was their turn to think of synonyms. The facilitator also asks participants to think about how the conversation would play out in different scenarios, such as at a team meeting or networking event, as opposed to casual conversation.

Participants are surprised by how hard they have to concentrate during the exercise, says Ms. Tattersall. Not only are they listening to the person they’re speaking with, but they’re also thinking about how they’re going to formulate their response, which can be very distracting.

“Everyone finds it challenging,” she says. “The reaction from everyone is: ‘It’s so much harder than you think and we have full command of the English language. If it’s that hard for us, can you imagine how hard it’s going to be for someone who doesn’t have English as their first language?’”

3M Canada works with the London-Middlesex Immigrant Employment Council, which engages employers in the delivery of strategies that facilitate the recruitment and retention of internationally trained individuals in employment opportunities commensurate with international training and experience.

Source: hireimmigrants.ca
Minding Minority Interests at City Hall

By kturner
February 7, 2012

Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, Municipal Welcome-ability, Political Inclusion

When the City of Antwerp was looking to improve its relations with minority communities, it decided to approach the Brussels-based Minderhedenforum (Forum of Ethnic Cultural Communities) for help. The city council wanted a new way to reach out to community organizations and the Forum’s ten years of work appeared to be a successful model to adapt.

A number of issues were of concern to the city and minority groups. In 2009, controversy erupted after a headscarf ban in schools became world-wide news, just two years after the city banned the wearing of all religious symbols by city employees. Meanwhile, the previous local elections in 2006 resulted in a far-right Flemish nationalist party gaining 30 per cent of the vote; the opposition of minority voters prevented it from becoming the largest party at council. In spite of such political engagement, research by the Open Society Foundations showed that Muslims (particularly those from the Moroccan and Turkish communities) felt little trust in city institutions.

Minority relations in the city were stalled and with an election called for 2012, important decisions for the city’s future were on the horizon.

Needing change

As a port city of almost 500,000 located in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Flanders), almost 30 per cent of its citizens are foreign-born, coming from over 170 countries. Approximately 120 ethno-cultural organizations exist in the city as do a number of umbrella ethno-cultural organizations. Although Antwerp already had an ‘Ethnic Minorities Council’ (allochtone overleg en advisiesraad) in place with representatives from minority organizations, it was seen as ‘old-fashioned’ and ‘polarizing’, and not as a source of policy advice. The city recognized that it needed a new start.

“There wasn’t that much trust,” says Rafike Yilmaz, policy advisor to Leen Verbist, Alderman for Social Policy, Diversity and Windows. “The organizations weren’t working together, they were working in their own little islands,”

“There had been frustrations at both sides,” says Naima Charkaoui, Director of Minderhedenforum. “The federations said that they were not involved enough, they were not listened to, they did not have real opportunities to participate. And the city realized they needed a new start.”

The Forum was seen as the right fit because it was an established non-profit umbrella organization. It already represented 17 ethno-cultural federations which, in total, included over 1,500 organizations and had an established history as an official ‘participation organization’ in Brussels. Its structure allows it to “engage as one voice” with various levels of government.

In 2010, the Forum accepted the council’s invitation to open a new branch in the city. The aims of the Forum were specific:

- to strengthen cooperation between the existing federations of ethno-cultural minorities through consultations and discussions;
- expand and diversify networks as well as link the federations with non-migrant organizations; and
- encourage participation in local government policy by developing policy advice, focusing on the 2012 elections and organizing training sessions regarding engaging with local government.

Whereas its earlier work focused on coordinating discussions between member federations in Flanders and Brussels, the Forum tailored its work in Antwerp to local circumstances by opening participation to individuals not formally connected to a member federation. Anyone can participate in training or discussion sessions.

“We have lots of different ethnicities here in Antwerp,” says Yilmaz. “It is a strength of Minderhadenforum that they can focus on the big communities but also the small and even the individuals.”

Local elections and beyond

The central theme to the Forum’s work, however, is helping to prepare minority communities for the upcoming local elections in October 2012. The Forum is providing a list of recommendations and facilitating contact between voters, local ethno-cultural organizations and politicians. It is also developing tools that can be used by member organizations (and the Forum itself) to provide training sessions for local voters on a number of topics, such as what it means to vote, what the different political parties stand for and how to register to participate.

The elections are important for another reason. The official relationship between the city and the Forum runs until October 2012. Then the new city council will decide whether the Forum continues for another six years until the next election. The Forum was not interested in a mere short-term contract designed to sway voter impact. It needed to ensure that the interests of minority groups be represented fairly in the business of local government for the long term. As such, the Forum required an independent relationship with the council and could not worry about the city shutting it down if the Forum’s community-based message was unpopular with some councilors.
“Because of these local elections we think this is a real opportunity even in the short term to work on this civic participation,” says Charkaoui. “This gives us some time to really build up something and in the worst case scenario even if we have to stop we can leave something behind so this hopefully reinforces participation of minorities in the local elections.”

Success

In November 2011, Minderhedenforum Antwerp had its official launch with a day devoted to talks, workshops, and debate on topics ranging from improving the diversity of city staff to reviewing a recent report on “Muslims in Antwerp”. Upcoming projects include media workshops for young people with local journalists to learn how to get the voice of youth to the decision table.

Critical to their success is Antwerp City Council’s recognition of the Forum’s status as an independent organization and third party voice for minority interests in the city. The Forum has already issued a public statement on their opposition to the headscarf ban by Antwerp City Council, in the belief that a public discussion of such matters lessens public frustration and results in better decisions. For example, public discussion over a partial ban in the city of Ghent by the Forum resulted in less frustration and anger from minority communities with the city.

“I think the importance of this initiative is that in a situation of really difficult relationships, the city chooses to work with an independent partner and a critical partner,” says Charkaoui.

“You have to have faith in an independent partner knowing that in the long run this will lead to a better relationship even if in the short run it can give more friction and more discussion and difficult issues coming on the table.”

This Good Idea was identified by the Open Society Foundations’ At Home in Europe project as a good practice promoting inclusion, social cohesion and nondiscrimination. For more on this practice and the At Home in Europe project, read Living Together: Projects Promoting Inclusion in 11 EU Cities (OSF, 2011)
From Neighbours to Citizens: the Barcelona Interculturality Plan

By kturner
April 23, 2012
Civic Inclusion Living Together Municipal Municipal Welcome-ability

A working plan on immigrant integration does not happen overnight. In Barcelona, a sustained commitment from city leadership and a willingness to experiment contributed to winning strategy for the intercultural city.

Unveiled in 2010, the Barcelona Interculturality Plan is the result of more than a decade of work by Barcelona City Council. Intended to serve as a road-map for the Council’s desire to address the challenges of “coexistence in diversity in Barcelona,” the plan represents a new kind of city policy that makes interculturalism, with its focus on the relationships and interaction between citizens, a fundamental and integrated part of city practice across all departments and services.

The model that we have begun to develop in Barcelona has its roots in what unites us, not what separates us.” – Barcelona Interculturality Plan (March 2010)

Rapid Response

In a period of ten years, the immigrant population of Barcelona jumped from 3.5% in 1997 to just over 17% of the city’s residents. It was an important trend that Barcelona City Council was prepared to address, especially since more than 150 nationalities were represented in the city.

In 2001, the Commission on Immigration Policy was established by the Barcelona City Council to identify a pragmatic set of policies that would have the support of all stakeholders, from politicians to local citizens. Chaired by the Mayor, the Commission produced the first Municipal Immigration Plan in 2002, approved unanimously by all the political parties. The Plan was to provide a framework for monitoring the city’s immigration policies and the integration of immigrants at every level of civic life in Barcelona and in Catalan society.

Next, in 2008 the Barcelona Intercultural Dialogue was initiated to engage the wider community on these issues through a programme of collaborative community projects, consultations and public debates aimed at bringing city institutions, organizations and residents into a conversation about the importance the city’s new diversity and its impact on the city’s responsibilities, from town-planning to social participation.

By 2010, this deliberate, broad-based process of community consultation culminated in a new vision for the city. Barcelona’s revised Interculturality Plan was launched to foster “positive interaction, contact, dialogue, and mutual familiarity" amongst immigrants and long-time residents alike and to provide a shared foundation for community life that would transcend cultural differences.

Developing the Plan

The Barcelona Interculturality Plan was developed in three stages (2008-2010). The first stage included studies that defined the plan’s concepts and goals as well as an analysis of how Barcelona fared regarding diversity. The second was participatory, based on public opinion surveys (“Five Questions on the Plan”) for both city departments and citizens; survey themes included: “valuation of diversity, difficulties identified for interaction, factors facilitating interaction, common elements shared by all Barcelona residents, and identification of real spaces of interculturality in the city.” Finally, all inputs were brought together to form the core content of the plan itself.

The public consultation was a critical part of drafting the plan. A new website (www.interculturallitat.cat) was designed to host public discussion on the plan and to let visitors follow its development through news updates. Submissions ranged from 1,200 fresh ideas for the Mayor from students aged 14-18 to in-depth interviews with experts to interviews with 170 people across all sectors of the city. Social media like Facebook helped get the word out while nearly 40 public working sessions were held in different territorial and sectoral councils with over 400 participants. Specialized software was used to analyze all of the data, including text, video and audio. The results showed that 34.5% of respondents saw cultural diversity as an asset while another 21.2% believed it was a threat to society. This analysis also provided a benchmark for monitoring the city’s commitment to developing public consensus around its intercultural goals.

Interaction is at the heart of the strategy

A key outcome of the consultative process was a ‘strategic commitment to interaction’ in all municipal policy — from economic promotion to education. Putting interaction at the centre of the Plan was identified as key to building a shared sense of belonging and a common set of civic values. The Barcelona Interculturality Plan provides a detailed list of principles, strategies and targets for implementation ranging from the promotion of trilingualism (Catalan, Spanish and the language or origin) to ensuring that new immigrants have easy access to entrepreneurial start-up and business incubation support. The BCN Anti-Rumour campaign addresses discrimination directly while inclusionary policy ensures local services support the ordinary pleasures of daily life, such as sporting and recreational facilities.

Barcelona City Council’s commitment to interculturality – from Council leadership and voice to its action plan, budget allocation for implementation, dedicated crossdepartmental co-ordination structure and systems for accountability – is paying off. In August 2011, the Council of Europe ranked Barcelona 6th among 29 cities in its Intercultural Cities Index.
The 5 Estates Project: Bringing Diverse Communities Together

By ktturner
January 22, 2012
Living Together Refugee Portal

How can residents in housing estates filled with different communities overcome their mutual suspicions and learn to trust each other? It was an important question facing the borough of Dudley, a former industrial centre in the West Midlands after legislation in 1999 made it one of many “designated dispersal areas” for refugees and asylum seekers in the UK.

In 2007, research conducted by the University of Birmingham and the UK Refugee Council (Refugees’ Experience of Integration) found that the representation of asylum seekers and refugees in local decision-making in Dudley remained low and these groups were rarely consulted on issues that clearly impacted their lives. Migrant communities felt a growing sense of disengagement and powerless to change their neighbourhoods or the services provided for them. The report also recommended that developing and strengthening “bridging networks” with the broader community would be a key factor in improving social cohesion.

Problems already existed on the Dudley housing estates which were built by the local council for people with low incomes. Although asylum seekers and refugees account for 0.16% of the area's population, the borough had a history of British National Party activity, resulting in an upsurge of racism that many migrants had to deal with on a daily basis. Windows were broken and racist graffiti had appeared after the 2005 London bombings.

Tenants and Residents’ Associations

In 2009, the 5 Estates Project was founded as a two-year pilot project set up by the Centre for Equality and Diversity (CfED) in partnership with the Dudley Federation of Tenants and Residents’ Associations (DFTRA).

The impetus for the project came after a member of the DFTRA executive approached the CfED, formerly the Dudley Racial Equity Council in 2006, to discuss how to counter some of the problems on the housing estates and reduce tensions between communities and the social isolation of migrants. A key objective was also to encourage migrant communities to participate in local decision-making processes as few attended the TRA meetings.

Says Kenneth Rodney, Chief Executive Officer at CfED, “We were convinced that we needed to work with TRAs to access isolated migrants and challenge myths about migration.”

The strategy was to use the existing Tenants and Residents’ Associations (TRAs) as a vehicle through which to build positive relationships and break down barriers between migrants and the wider community. Together, they chose 5 housing estates across Dudley to initiate the project.

Reaching out to the community

Through funding from the Barrow Cadbury Trust, the project was able to hire a part-time community development worker to engage with the local community through outreach sessions, workshops and training as well as develop close relationships with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees on the estates.

Door knocking sessions and leaflet distribution proved successful in identifying where migrant communities were living within the estates and led to the identification of social issues. Furthermore, they generated interest in the project, with many becoming active members of the 5 Estates Project Steering Group or their respective TRAs. As a result, many migrants on the estate now are engaging in discussions with the wider community and contribute to local decision-making.

Key initiatives have included a theatre show, several celebratory events, regular coffee mornings and football competitions and a pre-Christmas seasonal get together event, which have resulted in building bridges and promoting intercultural dialogue. Workshops brought residents together from across the TRAs, as well as church representatives, mental health officials and other local community advocates. The project also organized trips to meet the mayor and the local elected representative at the Houses of Parliament.

One of the most successful activities has been a series of ‘Big Clean’ up sessions which bring together newcomers and the wider community to clean up the local area, thereby creating a sense of responsibility and common purpose. An evaluation report by funder Barrow Cadbury stated that afterwards, “people are beginning to recognise each other on the streets and say ‘hello’.”
According to the 5 Estates development worker Thierry Barholere, the scheme is also helping to ‘challenge stereotypes and dispel myths about refugees and asylum seekers’. A number of community awareness sessions have been organized during which asylum seekers and refugees have had the opportunity to tell their life stories. Myth-busting tools such as these, aim to develop empathy and connection between individuals on the estates. Said one participant: “Once you get to know each other, you realise we are the same.”

**Success**

“The TRAs used to complain: we invite them [migrants] to meetings, but they don’t come,” says Rodney. “Now they understand they’ve got to be positive about involving migrant communities – they have a responsibility to build bridges.”

By creating opportunities for residents to come together for a shared goal and cultivating an openness in discussions that enables people to speak inhibited about their prejudices without feeling judged, the 5 Estates Project is not only having an extremely positive impact on building shared pride and tolerance but also significantly improving local quality of life. Over 550 people participated in the 47 community meetings and events: 50% of whom are visible minorities.

The project also had impact outside of the housing estates. The mayor of Dudley and other politicians supported the 2010 Dudley Refugee week while the council is now publishing borough information in different languages. Importantly, other local TRAs have now shown interest in the project.

“Five Estates works because it’s based on partnerships,” says Rodney.
Taking Teachers on Community and Faith Walks

By kturner
December 14, 2011

Cultural Inclusion, Education Inclusion, Good Ideas We Are Watching, Living Together, Municipal New Gateways

When the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) was looking for a way to support educators in being responsive and relevant in their teaching practices, the purpose was to bridge gaps between the home, school and community. One approach was the introduction of Community and Faith Walks which teachers in some of Toronto’s inner-city schools have been participating since 2008.

The Toronto District School Board is the largest school board in Canada and one of the five largest in North America. With close to 600 day schools, it serves approximately 259,000 elementary and secondary students in the regular day school system. The board has been recognized as one of the most diverse in the world, with over 80 languages represented (Good Idea: Integration Through Education: Toronto’s Second Generation Makes the Grade).

Walking past the school yard
Before the teachers attend the walks, they participate in a framing session that supports the unpacking of biases. They also follow up with a debriefing session that facilitates sharing, consolidates learning and supports next steps. There are two kinds of walks in the programme – community walks and faith walks.

Community Walks: Educators in Toronto’s inner-city schools often live in communities other than those they work in and may not be aware of the variety of lived experiences of the students they teach. Community walks help them see the beauty, challenges, and possibilities of each community as well as the resources available to families and students. They provide teachers with tools and first-hand experiences in creating curriculum and learning environments that are culturally responsive and locally relevant. Participants visit local community agencies, nearby parks, grocery stores, apartment buildings, daycares, and health centers.

Faith Walks: Faith can play a crucial role in a child’s development and learning experience. Educators must be aware of the religious diversity in their schools to support the creation of practices that honour and value this diversity. Participants of Faith Walks visit places of worship such as mosques, temples, churches, and synagogues, and speak with religious leaders about supporting students of that faith in a pluralistic education system.

“Going on a Community Walk and debriefing with my colleagues brought about the understanding that there are limited spaces for students in the inner-city to play in a safe environment,” explains Bruce Currie, Model Schools for Inner Cities Teaching and Learning Coach.

“So, we really need to make sure that we are supporting daily physical activity and allowing children an opportunity to demonstrate their learning through bodily-kinesthetic activities and not simply pencil and paper.”

Success
After going on a Community or Faith Walk, many teachers have changed their curriculum and instructional practices to be more reflective of the students’ lived experiences. Administrators have questioned and revisited their school goals and budget decisions as a result of this experience. Several parents have expressed increased trust and faith in schools where educators participate in these events.

“I felt proud to see all these busy people coming to our home; I gave them a speech about how Bengali families run,” said Mr. Mujib, parent at George Webster Elementary School.

There has been a steady increase in the number of Community and Faith Walks since 2008. In 2010-2012, administrators and teachers from 15 schools attended a “model” Community and Faith Walk that they then replicated back at their schools. Currently, all staff members in the Model Schools for Inner Cities program, serving schools in high priority neighbourhoods, are being trained on the process and are using this awareness to support innovative teaching, supporting children’s well-being and parent and community engagement.

The TDSB Walks Initiative was also part of the Maytree Foundation’s tour of four cities in Germany in November 2011, called Good Ideas from Toronto: An Exchange of Immigrant Integration Practices.
For the Spanish island of Tenerife the recent growth of its population by migration and the diversity of cities like Santa Cruz de Tenerife is a new phenomenon. While its location 210 kilometers off the northwestern coast of Africa may suggest migration by perilous sea journey, the reality is more similar to the experience of other Spanish cities than most media reports would have you believe.

Fortunately for Tenerife, the great majority of immigrants are attracted to the island’s economy and thriving tourist industry (5 million visitors a year). Like Spain, which welcomed 650,000 migrants a year at the height of its construction boom in 2005 (and 650,000 more when the government called an amnesty for illegal immigrants with job contracts), Tenerife’s newcomers include a mix of Spanish-speaking migrants from South and Central America, Europeans, as well as immigrants from Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, India, Korea and Russia. Since 2001, the foreign-born population has doubled. In 2010, one in four residents of the tiny Canary Island was born outside of Spain.

Tenerife’s vibrant tourism industry and the local economy depend on a friendly workforce and safe, attractive neighbourhoods and communities. With an application to become a World Heritage site in the works, social cohesion is a top priority for local government.

However, when Tenerife’s Council registered the significance of the current demographic trend, they were concerned about how little interaction existed between the many different immigrant groups. Few were represented by formal community associations, and Council members were not always sure who to contact when community participation was needed to support the city’s integration efforts.

To overcome the situation, in March 2010 the Council’s Economy and Competitiveness Department launched a project to create a network of immigrant associations and community groups with the goal of fostering social cohesion through improved communication and opportunities “to know each other better.”

Adding “Togetherness” Together in the Same Direction
The Council’s emphasis on networking immigrant associations representing countries of origin or specific ethnicities was based on the assumption that immigrants themselves would ‘best represent the voices of new citizenship’ and support the city’s efforts to encourage integration.

Originally named “In the Same Direction,” feedback from the network of immigrant associations encouraged the Council to include “together” in the project’s name to reinforce the idea that this was not merely a top-down initiative, but a true participatory process.

Today the project is called Together in the Same Direction (Juntos En la misma dirección) and is a network consisting of immigrant associations, government agencies, social organizations and others. The network is supported by the Tenerife Immigration Observatory (OBITen) and the Universidad de La Laguna.

Voices of New Citizenship
The objectives are simple: to improve the civic engagement of the immigrant associations, increase their organizational capacity through training workshops, and allow for better communication between the various actors in the field through an online forum and island round tables. The work also includes five working groups focused on issues of community concern: social services, violence against women, co-development, social participation, and communication.

Although the project is relatively young, the feedback it has received from participants has shown it has great promise. Training sessions on conflict-resolution have received praise from newcomer groups while the publication and distribution of a guide to all the immigrant associations on Tenerife (also available online) has been useful to the municipal agencies.

Other gains included a feeling of empowerment from participating in the project, improved relationships with other associations, and all groups recognizing that they are working together on a shared agenda for integration and social cohesion.

Future plans involve diversity training for public and private organizations, improved communications strategies that speak to a multicultural population, and more collaboration between immigrant groups around community development.

Success
Tenerife Council’s decision to focus on communication strategies and community participation as the first step towards improving the integration of the island city’s newest residents has made important inroads, especially in terms of networking across the associations – they no longer feel so isolated.

Julia Milián, the president of the Socio-Cultural Association for the Integration of Women in Tenerife, who is originally from Peru, says that Juntos En la misma dirección has “brought together immigrants from everywhere, and dispelling the fear we have of making contact with others when we arrive in a new country.”

For Carmen Navarro, formerly Tenerife councillor responsible for immigration, Together In the Same Direction has opened doors to new associations and allowed mainstream politicians a new perspective on the settlement and integration experience of immigrants in Tenerife.

“It’s great to feel we’re not alone,” says Navarro. “Being able to work as a network and support each other has been really helpful.”
Engaging in Copenhagen

By kturner

When the City of Copenhagen was updating its local planning documents and policies for immigrant integration in 2010, it made an important discovery. Policies and planning alone were not having much, impact on the city's diversity agenda.

The percentage of Copenhageners with an immigrant background doubled in the previous decade, jumping from 11.5% to 22.2%. As an employer, the City of Copenhagen appeared to have been successful in matching the diversity of its workforce to that of the city's population. However, a deeper analysis showed a troubling reality. The majority of these public employees were working in low skill jobs such as cleaning.

Diversity without equity was not the commitment to inclusion that the City was looking for. The City challenged itself to ensure that its future work force would reflect the city's diversity across all area, and levels, of work.

The earlier 2006 Integration Plan was comprehensive in its scope and included all the important sectors – education, employment and housing. What it lacked was the actual participation of non-municipal actors, such as major companies, educational institutions and cultural organizations. The City recognized that an effective strategy would require all sectors and all stakeholders to be part of the work of making immigrants feel part of Copenhagen.

Living in Copenhagen must be easy, and Copenhagen wants to be the most inclusive city in Europe. An actively engaged city is a better city. – Engage in CPH

Copenhagen’s new Integration Policy (2011-2014) includes an action plan for engaging all sectors and stakeholders. A key component of this progressive program is a Diversity Charter and Board that actively invites business and institutional leaders outside the local government to assist the city in its ambitious goal of becoming “the warmest and most welcoming major city in the world.”

I’m not a Dane, but I am a Copenhagener

When the city embarked on updating its original integration plan it followed the usual steps to engage community by holding focus groups and asking for input through a dedicated website. Additionally social media were used, and the municipality decided to hold an online forum with a popular tabloid newspaper.

What they learned surprised them. People didn’t want to hear about integration (which was associated with assimilation), but wanted to use words like inclusion and diversity. Over and over again, city officials heard the desire to see Copenhagen as an inclusive, open-minded city at odds with media reports and outsider perceptions about the country’s growing xenophobia.

One statement was often repeated in various ways: “It is difficult to become a Dane, it should be easier to become a Copenhagener.”

Citizenship is for Everyone – Engage in Copenhagen

The input had an enormous impact on the integration planning process, leading to the new inclusion policy (2011-14). Engage in Copenhagen. Monitoring immigrant employment or school scores remains important, however the Plan’s new focus is on belonging, inclusion and citizenship for all Copenhageners.

“I inclusion is a feeling of belonging,” says Anna Mee Allerslev, Mayor of Employment and Integration. “That is, if you feel like a Copenhagener, you are included in the city.”

To engage all Copenhageners, City Council committed to building new partnerships across the city. For the city’s Office of Employment and Integration this meant reaching out to employers and signing them up to an innovative Diversity Charter, the city’s roadmap for engaging business and institutional leaders.

Diversity Charter

Inspired by the diversity agenda set by the city of London for the 2012 Olympic Games, as well as the seminal French Charte de la diversité, now replicated in Germany and Spain, the city developed a Diversity Charter that seeks to actively engage the business community in the work of making Copenhagen “most inclusive city in Europe.”

The Diversity Charter and its Diversity Board are central to the Engage in Copenhagen campaign. Signatories ‘affirm’ the three guiding principles than inform the Copenhagen approach govern the campaign:

- Diversity is a strength.
- Everyone should have the chance to participate.
- Being an involved citizen is everybody’s concern.

Companies, educational institutions and other non-profit organizations who sign the charter pledge to “promote the quality of life and growth in Copenhagen” by making diversity the norm in their organization; contributing so that diversity is seen as an asset in the public debate; and by supporting initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion and which fight discrimination in Copenhagen. Diversity Board members make a further commitment to speak about the program publicly and in the media.

The aim is to have one hundred companies and organizations sign the charter. As of October 2011, the City was well on its way to its goal with a roster that includes CEOs from Microsoft (Denmark), Copenhagen Airports, the Confederation of Danish Industry, Save the Children Denmark, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights.
Related projects include Diversity Plus, a collaboration between the municipality and the Organization for New Danes, which promotes ethnic minorities in employment. Thirty participating companies receive a diversity analysis with advice on how to make diversity an engine of growth.

Moving Forward with Diversity

The city’s vision may sound ambitious, Copenhagen’s Mayor for Employment and Integration, Anna Mee Allerslev, believes the city is ready for a ‘diversity movement’ similar to what happened regarding the environment.

“Just like the climate movement, the diversity movement has a severe impact on our growth and quality of life,” she says. “And just like there is no reasonable alternative to green energy, there is no reasonable alternative to growth through diversity.”

In the meantime, the city is making sure to measure the outcomes of the various parts of the campaign including checking in with the Diversity Charter companies. The main question: Are they starting new initiatives within their organizations and with new partners?

Monitoring and reporting is critical to the project’s potential with annual report and action plan for the following year. The success will be measured against a 10-point Intercultural City Index.

Addendum: Cities as employers and buyers of goods and services

Copenhagen’s long tradition of working closely with employers and unions on job creation was first documented in its 2006 Integration Policy. As the country’s largest employer, the city of Copenhagen has always been keenly sensitive to the opportunity to model a positive approach to diversity and to provide leadership through good recruitment and diversity management practices in its own offices.

Cities are not only major employers, but also a major buyer in the local economy. So in 2007, when a city of Copenhagen audit revealed that 15,000 private-sector suppliers with a total turnover of approximately 6.5 billion DKK, were accounted for in sales to the council, the City responded with a proactive procurement policy. The municipality instituted the insertion of mandatory ‘social clauses’ in any municipal contract with suppliers of goods and services that exceed the value of half a million DK (source: CLIP Case Study on Diversity Policy in Employment and Service Provision: Copenhagen, 2008).

This Good Idea was identified by the Open Society Foundations’ At Home in Europe project as a good practice promoting inclusion, social cohesion and nondiscrimination. For more on this practice and the At Home in Europe project, read Living Together: Projects Promoting Inclusion in 11 EU Cities (OSF, 2011).
Diversity Moves Frankfurt

By kturner

December 13, 2011

Civic Inclusion Living Together Municipal Municipal Welcome-ability Role of Media

In Frankfurt, immigrant integration is not just good for business, it's everybody's business. The internationally-known "City of the Euro" has built a solid reputation on more than balancing its books. Frankfurt has played a pioneering role in developing and implementing the earliest integration policies in Germany.

In 2009 when the city decided it was time to review its 20-year old policies, its methods were equally forward-looking. The city launched its Diversity Moves Frankfurt (Vielfalt bewegt Frankfurt) campaign to canvas its citizenry about what integration meant to them. Recognizing that "every idea deserves a chance," the campaign emphasized participation and welcomed a diversity of opinion as an expression of a healthy democracy that was essential to framing a common vision of the city's future. The campaign was accompanied by a community participation process unprecedented in its scope. Its principal medium: the Internet.

By the end of the consultation, over 47,000 people had participated in the process from a wide cross-section of Frankfurt society. A broader view of integration could now inform public discourse, including the idea that Frankfurt's diversity was even more varied than once assumed.

A changing city

The city of Frankfurt was the first city in Germany to grapple seriously with the issue of migrant integration in the 1980s. In 1989, it opened the Office of Multicultural Affairs (Amt für multikulturelle Angelegenheiten, AMKA), the first of its kind in the entire country. Controversial in the beginning, integration initiatives such as Mama lernt Deutsch – Papa auch (Mama learns German – even Papa!), are today regarded as exemplary at both national and international levels.

Frankfurt's approach was a model of success. However, with a population that included international migrants from over 170 countries representing a population of 670,000 (37% have a migration background), by 2009 the levels of diversity in the city were far from the once-held image of a migrant population mainly from Turkey and Italy.

For Dr. Nargess Eskandari-Grünberg, Head of the Department for Integration and city councillor, it was time for a new concept for integration and diversity that moved away from the idea that integration only involved "foreigners."

"We live in a city, but Frankfurt is a city with no walls. We do not decide on who comes to us," said Eskandari-Grünberg in a speech at the time. "Therefore we must not rest on our laurels. We must decide how we want to live together."

Asking the academics

Starting in 2009 and led by AmkA and the Integration Commission, the project launched with an invitation to two prominent academics to provide a sort of 'blueprint' for the public discussion. One was Steven Vertovec, Director of the Max Planck Institute, who had coined the term "super-diversity" to describe how many large cities had changed in their populations due to "new migration" patterns.

Among their recommendations was the idea that integration "should take into account the realities and the special potential of Frankfurt as a European metropolis of global culture." In other words, Frankfurt was both a city of migration and an international financial capital, but needed to seek "renewed engagement, improved cooperation and better coordination" between the relevant players.

"These are like two different planets so now it is our task to bring together the two separate spheres," said Helga Nagel, Head of AmkA.

I am a Frankfurter, because…

Critical to the success of the campaign was public participation in the consultation process. The medium for framing this issue and motivating the wider population to participate was the Vielfalt bewegt Frankfurt website.

The website included public information and core documents, such as the 236-page study, but more importantly, it actively invited audiences to provide their feedback in various ways throughout the campaign. Key was the idea that "integration was everyone’s business." Visitors to the site could ask questions about the process, add to a "diversity map" of Frankfurt to highlight locations and neighbours of interest, and login to register a personal profile that linked to all their posts on the site.

The online engagement component of the campaign took place in three phases, from October 2009 until February 2010. To start, people were invited to send in videos or blog posts on the subject, "I am a Frankfurter, because…" Next, the public was invited to answer five surveys to help determine important issues and priorities for the project. The final phase asked for new ideas that may have been missed in the process. Together, all three phases were completed in less than six months.

To ensure the process truly worked, old-fashioned outreach was also included. This involved a "road show" approach where students armed with web-enabled netbooks from Goethe University and the University of Applied Sciences visited government offices, schools, institutions and city squares to ask the public for their opinions. Local advisory councils, citizens' associations and other informal networks also participated and spread the campaign deeper into city neighbourhoods and sectors. In total, over 48 project-specific events brought out the people and opinions of Frankfurt, including a live chat show with the Integration Commissioner.

Success

Reflecting on this unprecedented city-wide consultation, Helga Nagel observed: "We have become a true cross-cutting department [i.e., AmkA, the campaign hub]. What has always been our philosophy is now binding policy."

In September 2010, the Frankfurt am Main City Council adopted the new Integration Concept that was developed by AmkA, and made an authentic expression of the people of Frankfurt through the Diversity Moves Frankfurt process.
Team London and the Mayor’s Mentoring Scheme

By kturner
October 24, 2011
Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, Social Inclusion

Aaron Harriott is a 17-year-old professional footballer. But without the experience of mentoring, he doubts he would have achieved his ‘dream job’: “To be honest in the beginning I didn’t like being told what to do and was quite rebellious. But after a while I realised that my mentor was trying to help me…I think it’s really important for people my age to have someone show them what they can do with their lives.” Aaron was first mentored at age 11, and now hopes to volunteer himself.

In August 2010, the Mayor of London Boris Johnson launched the Mayor’s Mentoring Programme to provide positive role models for disadvantaged young teenagers. As part of London’s innovative use of the voluntary sector to resolve wider social problems, the scheme has already attracted 1,700 volunteer mentors.

The hope is that the Mayor’s Mentoring Programme will make Aaron’s story more common. The programme aims to provide positive role models for disadvantaged London teenagers, reducing their involvement in crime and giving them greater commitment to education and employment.

The teenagers will spend two hours a week with their mentor. Parents will be involved in the matching process, helping select a suitable mentor. Once ‘matched’ the mentors will work on individual programmes, which may include sports, literacy and homework, and advice and help for the young person.

Former Deputy Mayor Ray Lewis devised the scheme, building on the disciplinary philosophy of his school, the Eastside Academy, which provides a structured learning environment for troubled black teenagers.

He says: “This programme is all about preventative work and catching boys before they fall into a vicious circle of crime. Let’s be honest, many of our boys are growing up in single parent households with no father figures… It is easy to criticize our young people who behave badly but unfortunately some have never been taught right from wrong and mentoring is a real solution.”

The mentoring scheme is being rolled out across seven of London’s poorest boroughs, including Brent, Croydon, Hackney, Haringey, Lambeth, Waltham Forest and Southwark.
Football legend Ian Wright speaks about mentoring

Team London: Connecting Volunteers, Building Impact

The Mayor’s Mentors project is a key part of the wider Team London initiative, which aims to develop and engage with the voluntary sector across the city. Partnership working is at the centre of this scheme, bringing together willing individuals, voluntary organisations and the private sector to target the most pressing and difficult community problems.

The scheme also hopes to increase participation in civic projects across London, building volunteers’ sense of belonging in the capital and contributing to greater social cohesion.

Team London builds on an American idea, Cities of Service, initially developed by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg as NYC Service. The idea of ‘impact volunteering’ is central to the project, where the efforts of volunteers are directed toward specific and achievable social goals.

Building Success

Team London adapts these ambitions to the local situation. The problem in London has not been a lack of willingness to volunteer – the Mayor’s figures suggest that around 1 in 4 Londoners are already regular volunteers, and up to 70% volunteer informally. Over 300,000 people have volunteered for the Olympic Games in 2012.

Instead, the problem has been the difficulties of connecting willing helpers to meaningful opportunities, and the lack of a strategy for targeting the energies of volunteers where most needed.

Team London’s approach resolves both these issues. Their clear, free and easy to use web page acts much like a conventional jobs site where individuals can log on and apply for suitable roles. Although only launched at the end of June, the site already lists nearly 60 voluntary opportunities, many of which remain ongoing.

The second idea is to target volunteers where they are most needed. To do this, Team London has identified three priorities for the London voluntary sector, through public consultation: Cutting Crime, Quality of Life and Youth Opportunities.

The voluntary roles hosted on their website should all tie directly into these priorities, and the Mayor’s office have devised particular projects – like the mentoring scheme – that operate within them.

By providing strategic priorities, and facilitating voluntary opportunities, Team London are successfully managing the flow of volunteers, directing them to work where the community is most in need.
From Public Space to Common Ground

By ktturner
October 19, 2011
Living Together Municipal Municipal Welcome-ability, Spatial Inclusion

The public square. Every city and town has at least one—and many more, if you include parks and boulevards, stretches of waterfront and open air cafes where people gather together, or come alone to watch the world go by.

It is in these public spaces that we most often bump up against our neighbours: we watch their dogs as they sniff out new trees, run into someone who lives down the block, overhear friends arguing about politics and families planning their next day trip. These shared spaces are a literal and metaphorical place for a city’s residents to come together, where communities experience common ground.

Small wonder then that the city of Madrid, looking to promote integration and ease the social changes being brought about by increased immigration, decided to do so by paying attention to its public spaces. In the past 10 years, the immigrant population in Madrid has grown tenfold. Today, more than 17% of the citizens are foreign born, coming from 183 different countries.

In 2009, Madrid’s city council initiated a public space revitalization program, geared specifically to immigrant integration. Born of the Hispanic culture’s tradition of socializing in the city’s streets and open spaces, and increasing use of these spaces by immigrants, the program aims to foster positive interactions between old and new Madrid residents of all cultures, and to develop a shared culture around the use of public spaces in the city.

Common Ground, Shared Spaces

The public space program is part of a larger initiative, the Madrid Plan for Social and Intercultural Coexistence. It was first introduced in 2005 as the Plan de Convivencia to focus on a specific action program in immigration and which established a number of services to promote integration and living together of all citizens. Four years later, Phase Two was launched, guided by three basic principles:

“The first is universality, by which we undertake to properly tend to all of the inhabitants of Madrid, regardless of their origin or legal status. Then we have the principles of active integration and intercultural coexistence, which highlight the need for the municipal services to absorb the phenomenon of immigration in its entire complexity.” – Foreward

With the aim of developing that last element in particular, the Madrid Plan “focuses on the mechanisms and actions that, beyond mere shelter, allow the full and free incorporation of immigrants into Madrid society”—key among these, the use of public space.

One of its aims is to promote the intercultural knowledge between new neighbours by allowing them to celebrate its traditional cultural events, and creating ways to broaden the Convivencia (living together) in public spaces by supporting intercultural meetings in schools, parks, sporting fields and other city institutions.

Through the Madrid Plan, public spaces in 21 districts across the city are animated by programming designed to stimulate community engagement. Over 50 city outreach agents are active in the city’s parks and squares, promoting activities “aimed at promoting neighbourly co-existence.”

The outreach team is multidisciplinary, multicultural and trained to work with communities of many origins. Activities range from exhibitions about racism, to celebrations of particular ethnic or religious festivals, to sports leagues and intergenerational workshops. Hundreds of activities take place each year (440 between January and October 2010 alone) involving tens of thousands of participants.

Success

Madrid’s public space program has been recognized across Spain and is now included in government case studies of best practices in cities. It has also been recognized by the European Union’s OPENCities project.

Calgary’s Employment Forums Go Face-to-Face

By kturner

October 20, 2011

Employment Inclusion, Municipal

Many immigrants who come to Canada want to work for municipalities because government jobs are held in high regard in their countries of origin, says Cheryl Goldsmith, Human Resources Advisor at the City of Calgary.

The challenge is to ensure those who are enthusiastically applying to work at the City are a good match for the jobs, she says.

To that end, Goldsmith and her colleagues partnered with the Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary to establish the Immigrant Employment Partnership Project. The project’s mandate is to “promote employment for newcomers and other immigrant stakeholders in Calgary, and to educate these groups about the careers available with The City of Calgary,” says Goldsmith.

One-stop shop for skilled immigrants

The project has been an outstanding success. This is partly due to the emphasis on employment forums — a “one-stop shop” for new Canadian professionals interested in a career with the City.

Typically, each forum features direct interaction with City of Calgary hiring managers. The forum begins with a general presentation on the recruitment process, followed by individual hiring managers presenting information on how their profession is practiced within the municipality. During these programs, the managers discuss what types of jobs are available, as well as what qualifications and qualities they’re looking for.

Finally, the managers sit down one-on-one with the immigrants, who will get a chance to ask questions. “This is valued as one of the best parts of the forum,” says Goldsmith.

She cites the work of the Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary in helping to co-ordinate the agencies to work with the City at these forums. “We always make sure to keep a balanced focus on our partners in the immigrant employment and settlement sector,” she says.

Employer forums on the horizon

In the past, the forums have focused on the immigrant professionals and immigrant employment counselors. Looking ahead, the partnership hopes to also focus on employers.

An “employer forum,” says Goldsmith, would share the model of the Immigrant Employment Partnership and highlight the importance of:

- Working as a partner: sharing the leadership and training responsibilities between the employer and the immigrant-serving agencies.
- Sharing expertise: gaining essential knowledge from immigrant-serving agencies about interviewing immigrants and analyzing their résumés.
- Being creative: participating in career fairs targeting immigrants and reducing barriers in electronic recruitment.

“Partnership is such a viable model because of the learning opportunities,” says Goldsmith. “Peer-to-peer and cross-sector learning has opened so many doors for the City as an employer. Our hiring processes have been greatly improved because of our partnerships.”

The upside to this multifaceted approach to immigrant recruitment has been an overall improvement in human resources services at the City of Calgary. The City now has International Qualifications Assessment Services guides available online, which allows both HR and hiring managers to quickly check international credentials.

“At present, there is a much higher internal awareness of how international credentials factor into the hiring process,” says Goldsmith. “Before this information was provided on our intranet, résumés with such credentials might have been screened out.”

The City of Calgary has more than 14,000 employees.

Source: hireimmigrants.ca
Language-Wise in the Global Classroom

By ktturner
October 11, 2011

Education Inclusion

I like to work in groups because I think that is good...to appreciate other people's cultures. For example I learned from talking with my Hindu group that they believe in a lot of different gods. This is important for me because if I meet someone and I know about their beliefs we can exchange ideas. — Ashley

Ashley is a grade 10 student at the International High School (LaGuardia Community College campus), who originally hails from Ecuador. In order to advance, grade 10 students need to present a portfolio consisting of several pieces of written work, which is evaluated both by teachers and fellow students. The above passage is from Ashley's portfolio—specifically, from a reflective essay she wrote about her educational experiences.

Like many young immigrants to the United States, Ashley will need to attain near native fluency in English, as well as mastery of high school curriculum, to be successful at school and make the most of the opportunities her new country affords.

From English to World Culture to America

The Internationals Network for Public Schools aims to help Ashley, and thousands of students like her find their way to school and future success by offering a high school experience that is tailored to integrating young immigrants' needs.

If the biggest challenge to immigrant student success is achieving enough proficiency in academic English to graduate from high school, the key obstacle is time. According to New York University professor Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, it takes five to seven years under optimal conditions for a non-English-speaking student to achieve the academic language skills of his or her native-born peers. For immigrant students to have a reasonable chance of overcoming this hurdle, special programs are required. This is where Internationals stepped in.

Internationals at School

Founded in 1985, Internationals is a network of small public high schools that are part of the publicly-funded education system in the United States. The Internationals network differs from ordinary high schools in that they serve the English language learner population exclusively. Today there are 12 high school campuses in two states with particularly high immigration rates: New York and California.

Students of Internationals schools come from over 90 countries, and speak more than 50 different languages. The schools are as diverse as the students they serve: one location in the Bronx, for instance, is 100% Latino, while another in Brooklyn is eclectic – the student body is 36% Hispanic, 31% Asian, 10% European, and 23% Black (African and Haitian). All these students face similar challenges though: mastering English, acquiring the soft skills they need to navigate social interactions fluidly, and learning a curriculum for which they might not have been prepared in their countries of origin.

Peer Support

Internationals takes a collaborative, integrated approach to education. Language development takes place in all subject-based classes as well as in a dedicated classroom. Teams of teachers work as a group to plan curriculum and instruction and make decisions regarding the academic, linguistic and social and emotional development of their students. Within classes, students work in small groups with others who speak their native language; this allows those who are more proficient in English to help those who are newer to the language in the comfort of their mother tongue.

By developing the capacities – and confidence – of its students, Internationals schools are not only helping the individuals who pass through their halls, but the broader communities in which they live. The vast majority of these students come from low-income homes. Every student who graduates and goes on to college has much better odds of rising out of poverty, and becoming a contributing, participating, successful resident of their new country.
Success

Graduation rates from the Internationals schools, most of which are located in New York, are more than double the rate for English language learners in their region as a whole. And a stunning 90% of Internationals students will go on to college. In 2007, New York’s municipal government gave five out of six area Internationals schools an “A” rating; in that same year three of the city’s top 20 schools were Internationals schools. Attendance at the schools is similarly impressive, ranging from 88–95%.

Internationals schools have a broad network of supporters, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. In 2009, the Internationals Network for Public Schools was recognized with an E Pluribus Unum Prize.
Shelbyville’s Ambassadors of Welcome

By kturner
October 18, 2011
Civic Inclusion Living Together New Gateways

In May 2011, PBS aired a unique documentary, Welcome to Shelbyville. It examines the challenges immigrants to Shelbyville, Tennessee have faced, and takes a look at this small town’s efforts to build a new, broader community that welcomes these new immigrants and helps them adjust to life in the United States. Made in collaboration with The Welcoming Tennessee Initiative (WTI), the film was part of a strategy to bridge the gaps between old and new Tennessee residents.

Shelbyville is a small town in the middle of Tennessee—approximately 16,000 people southeast of Nashville. Like many smaller cities in the United States, it’s seen a drastic increase in the diversity of its population over recent years: first substantial growth in the Hispanic community, followed by a wave of Somali immigrants brought in to work at a local meat processing facility.

By the end of the film, which is a portrait of the town over the course of a year, many longtime Shelbyville residents have clearly come to recognize the valuable contributions new immigrants make to their community, and have made the transition from fear to curiosity about and appreciation of those immigrants’ cultural backgrounds. So how did the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative (WTI) bring these changes about?

The Power of Language

The Welcoming Tennessee Initiative (WTI) was created in 2005 to counter the overwhelming growth in anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric circulating the state: “The current reactionary and at times hateful rhetoric about immigrants fails to recognize the economic and cultural contributions that they make to our state along with the rich immigrant traditions of the past which have made Tennessee what it is today.”

One of WTI great insights is that language is a powerful tool for shaping perception. The organization has developed a Welcoming Tennessee Pledge which actively work to overcome the sense of the “other” — the “us vs. them” dynamic which can negatively affect public discourse about immigration. The pledge identifies traditional Tennessee values and connects them directly to immigrant integration.

For instance, the second item on the pledge reads “Welcoming Tennessee members believe Tennessee residents are hospitable, welcoming and inclusive of diversity and that we have a shared responsibility to treat all our neighbors with respect and decency.” Since hospitality is the hallmark value of the American south, WTI shows how welcoming immigrants can be an expression of a distinctly Tennessean value—one that local residents already embrace.

Welcoming Ambassadors

To help accomplish a shift to a more positive view of immigration, WTI has trained dozens of “Welcoming Ambassadors.” These are volunteer leaders within their local communities who facilitate discussions about immigration amongst both existing residents and newcomers, and act as advocates for immigrants who are still finding their way in their new homes. Ambassadors use public forums to provide information and answer questions about immigration, immigrant communities, and to build bridges between older and more recent residents. WTI put its ambassadors on the road through Welcoming Committees, groups of ambassadors who work collaboratively to share their work with other Tennessee communities.

In the larger city of Nashville, WTI created a billboard campaign to help support a shift to a more positive dialogue around immigration, installing 50 signs across the city.

Success

These efforts have already shown great results. The local paper, The Tennessean, reported that in 2008, 63 percent of Tennesseans were in favour of allowing illegal immigrants to gain citizenship via a guest worker program, up from 54 percent in 2004.

In 2009, The Welcoming Tennessee Initiative was recognized with an E Pluribus Unum Prize, which honours exceptional immigration integration projects while the film, Welcome to Shelbyville was aired in May 2011 on PBS. Portions of the documentary were also adapted for inclusion in Building a Nation of Neighbors, a video tool to facilitate greater understanding between existing American communities and their new immigrant residents.

WTI’s Welcoming model has been replicated across the United States by Welcoming America, a nationwide organization dedicated to immigrant integration.

This Good Idea will be featured in “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.
Immigrant Businesses get a Helping Hand

By kturner
September 26, 2011
Entrepreneurship Inclusion Municipal

Supporting immigrant entrepreneurs has become high on city agendas around the world as studies show that immigrants start businesses at a higher rate than native-born citizens. EnterpriseHelsinki, a free business counselling service to the city’s entrepreneurs, has the proof – 35% of their clients are immigrants, triple the actual size of their population.

Another reason to support immigrant entrepreneurs? A City of Helsinki report states these businesses have longer ‘lifespans’ than those started by members of the ‘original’ population.

Although EnterpriseHelsinki has worked with newcomers since it opened in 1993 (as NYP Business Services), it has also added new streams of specialized services to meet the needs of such entrepreneurs, particularly as Helsinki’s immigrant population has grown. Out of a population of a little more than half a million, almost 8% of the population consist of foreign nationals.

Beyond ‘pizza and kebab’ businesses

Similar to other city-led business counseling services such as Barcelona Activa and Vienna’s Mingo, EnterpriseHelsinki (run by the city’s Economic Development Unit) is a one-stop service centre where companies with growth potential get all the information they need to start and run a company in Finland through personal consultation and online business tools.

One of the aims of EnterpriseHelsinki is to help immigrant entrepreneurs before they encounter problems within Finnish business culture which is known for its bureaucratic nature. Although they start more businesses than native-born Finns, they are seen to seek help only once they have encountered problems. That is why it offers business counseling by connecting new entrepreneurs with experts, free of charge, in Swedish, English, Russian, Estonian, German and Arabic.

Beyond providing confidential counseling and guides to entrepreneurship (as well as a multilingual website), the agency offers various classes and workshops on different topics regarding starting a business, mainly in Finnish, but also in English and Russian.

In this way, EnterpriseHelsinki is able to cater beyond the aging stereotype of immigrant businesses – the ‘pizza and kebab’ entrepreneurs.

“Immigrants just don’t establish restaurants or cleaning companies,” says Elie El-Khouri, Project Manager of Enterprise Helsinki. ‘Now they start up IT companies just like Finns.’

A different kind of entrepreneurship course

In 2001, Enterprise Helsinki set up an entrepreneurship course that catered to unemployed immigrants who had sufficient knowledge of Finnish and an idea of a potential business. Held in Finnish, the free full-time course runs seven weeks, 20 students at a time. Participants go through topics such as business economics, marketing, sales, legal issues, developing a business plan and how to set up a company. They can also have key concepts explained in English and Russian.

Each student has a business advisor throughout the duration of the course with access to counseling in languages such as English, German, Swedish, Russian, Estonian, French or Arabic. This gives participants the additional opportunity to ensure they understand the concepts discussed during the lectures. Potential entrepreneurs can apply for the program through local job centres and are able to receive some extra compensation to their unemployment benefit while they study.

Part of the emphasis of the course is to prepare immigrants to do business in Finnish. They work on their language skills and learn about local business culture.

“In Finland, if you don’t speak Finnish, it is difficult to run a business here,” says El-Khouri, who often advises immigrants to improve their language skills as they study entrepreneurship.

Success

In the past five years, EnterpriseHelsinki has further grown as an organization, first working with the Regional Business Services for Immigrants to include neighbouring cities to its work; then becoming part of the EU-project ‘Multicultural Business Services,’ which is now known as ‘Become an Entrepreneur in Helsinki.’

The program continues to grow. In 2010, 765 migrants used the business counseling services (34% of total clients) while 270 new businesses were established. By the fall of 2011, EnterpriseHelsinki had held 22 of its seven-week Entrepreneurship courses. In 2010, 40% of its immigrant clients were women.

Now the City of Helsinki has expanded its economic strategy to encourage even more immigrants to start businesses, recognizing the difficulty of newcomers to find jobs without adequate Finnish.
Talking Business in your Mother Tongue

By kturner
September 20, 2011
Entrepreneurship Inclusion Municipal

More local governments are recognizing the importance of immigrant entrepreneurs to the economic vitality of their cities. Not only are such entrepreneurs creating businesses that supply the needs of their own communities, they also provide goods and services for the mainstream.

Since 2007, the city of Vienna has made moves to recognize the importance of this group by creating a stream within its business incubation agency, Mingo (which stands for “move in and grow”), meant to address the unique needs of immigrant entrepreneurs.

Over 30% of entrepreneurs in Vienna have a migrant origin background, which equates to approximately 16,000 businesses. Out of a population of 1.7 million, almost 30% of residents were born abroad and 44% have a migration background.

‘Let’s talk about your business. Ideally in your mother tongue’

The decision to include a stream only for migrant entrepreneurs in Mingo was the result of a 2007 study that showed that the ‘business-as-usual’ kind of outreach had typically failed. Although Mingo offered services such as coaching, workshops and even office space to company founders, young entrepreneurs, newly self-employed and others, it had trouble attracting those with a migrant background.

Flyers and advertisements that detailed city services for entrepreneurs typically failed to reach migrant-run businesses because they were delivered in German.

To counter this problem, the Vienna Business Agency (Wirtschaftsagentur Wien) added Mingo Migrant Enterprises (MME) to the roster of services provided by Mingo in 2008. Its purpose was to support at least 300 entrepreneurs within three years in order to improve their economic potential.

“In the case of this target group, it is usually a manner of breaking down people’s inhibitions about accepting help,” says Dr. Gabriele Tatzberger, Department Manager, Mingo.

“Often they do not know about promotion opportunities, which is precisely why we have special programmes for self-employed individuals with a migration background.”

In order to break down barriers, MME took the unusual step of offering its services not only in German, but in a number of other languages common to migrants in Vienna.

Its motto? “Let’s talk about your business. Ideally in your mother tongue.”

The move was particularly savvy since the Vienna Business Agency already promoted the city as a hub for international business, declaring that “Vienna’s economy speaks all languages.”

The services MME provides to migrant entrepreneurs resemble what is offered through Mingo itself – such as coaching on issues regarding financing and developing business plans – but goes further by including intercultural classes to help immigrants understand Viennese business culture; networking events as well as personal consultations for entrepreneurs in a number of languages such as Turkish, English and Russian.

In 2011, MME expanded its services to with free bilingual one-day workshops where the speaker addresses participants in both German and another language (English, Polish, Turkish, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian). While the workshops are held in German, technical terms are explained in the mother tongue language. Participants are able to ask questions in either language and trainers can respond in either language too. In addition to these workshops, MME works with the VHS Landstraße – Adult Education Center and the Academy for the Promotion of Adult Education among Immigrants to hold another series of classes in English which cover topics such as project management, finance and accounting, and strategic management.

Success

The plan for the entire Mingo project was to run until 2010, but its success has led to the continuation and growth of the project. At last count, almost 560 entrepreneurs had contacted MME for further information or support, about 150 people have received free coaching for business-founders, and 35 immigrant entrepreneurs participated in free finance coaching. Networking events have taken place within various migrant communities including Turkish, Polish, Bulgarian, American, Chinese and other groups from the Balkan and Eastern Europe.
Toronto Inspires Settlement Website for New Aucklanders

By kturner
September 14, 2011
Good Ideas We Are Watching

One of the more frustrating experiences for many newcomers is simply trying to figure out what settlement services are available to them. To help ease that difficulty, the Auckland Regional Migrant Services Trust (ARMS) has introduced a one-stop-shop to meet the needs of newcomers. Launched in August 2011, the website www.settlement.org.nz, already includes information from 75 service providers.

The website found its model in Toronto-based www.settlement.org, which was developed by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI). The OCASI site covers questions many newcomers ask such as how to get a driver’s licence or enrol children into school, a forum for asking questions and a list of services by community.

Unlike the OCASI website which is a province-wide endeavour, the Auckland site is city-specific, addressing newcomers as ‘New Aucklanders’. It covers similar topics, such as job hunting, accreditation for professional qualification as well as tips for daily life such as using public transportation and the postal service.
Fighting Fiction with Facts: the BCN Anti-Rumour Campaign

By kturner
Living Together Municipal Municipal Welcome-ability Role of Media

It’s a familiar refrain.

“Immigrants are invading…”

“Immigrants receive more financial aid to open their businesses…”

“Immigrants are overcrowding our health services…”

“Immigrants don’t want to integrate or learn our language…”

Whatever the turn of phrase or group targeted, misinformation has the power to create conflict and misery for its victim and send messages that can be difficult to dispel.

In November 2010, when the Barcelona City Council unveiled its long-term strategy to improve coexistence among local and new immigrants, it launched a clever public service campaign to dispel rumours, misconceptions and the prejudices that many local people held about minorities and immigrants.

Among the city’s weapons? They recruited and trained ‘anti-rumour agents’ to dispel myths and spread the campaign through local organizations and the city’s neighbourhoods. Their mission? To contradict uninformed ideas about immigrants and combat discrimination. How? To take action as needed while traveling though the ordinary business of daily life.

Campaign Tools: The Human Touch

Debunking myth and rumour, often the unintended products of misinformation, is the primary aim of the campaign. Since individual contact plays an important role in changing people’s minds, campaign organizers recognized that a key strategy to eliminate discrimination would be to put a human face on the message –and the messenger.

Based on a similar project enacted in 2003 by the regional council of nearby Vallès, the first part of the project identified the main stereotypes and prejudices that were circulating in Barcelona. These included five themes:

- the arrival of new migrants;
- abuse of social and health care services;
- failing to declaring income or paying taxes;
- anti-social behaviour in public spaces; and
- taking jobs from locals.

Next, they equipped the ‘anti-rumour agent’ with accurate information about migrants and techniques for addressing misconceptions with nimble situation-based action at work, home or in the street. So, when someone complained that ‘subsidized apartments go mainly to foreigners’, the city anti-rumour agent could quickly interject: “Today only one in 20 immigrants receive such a benefit.”

Community network

Recognizing that the greatest challenge was not framing the message, but getting it out into Barcelona’s streets, the city launched its campaign through a network of 80 local organizations that work in the field of social cohesion and coexistence. The Anti-Rumour Network members are all connected through a dedicated website offering information, free training sessions and online guides to address key challenges. Once trained, anti-rumour agents are able to spread their messages throughout their own networks as well as participate in public discussions and debates. More than 30 information and training have been held at local civic centres (casals) with more to come.

The Anti-Rumour Network also uses a variety of innovative approaches to carry its message – some more unusual than others. In addition to a city-wide advertising campaign, the project has hosted a public debates with leading local figures, supported street theatre and produced tongue-in-cheek videos for non-readers. However, its greatest success has been comic books.

Blanca and Rosita

One of the more unusual approaches used by the campaign used to publicize its message is a comic book series called Blanca Rosita Barcelona. Written by acclaimed-Spanish illustrator Miguel Gallardo, it tells the story of Rosita, an elderly woman from southern Spain who lives in Barcelona with her young Peruvian caregiver, Blanca.

Each volume explores a campaign theme through the context of everyday life. For example, the story of Rosita and Blanca’s visit to the doctor aims to dispel the myth that immigrants supposedly overuse or have easier access to health and social services. It also informs us that most immigrants are young people who use the health care system less than the older Spanish señora. The comic ends with a ‘Did you know?’ section that provides official data about the subject. The comic books are distributed for free at social service centres, libraries and Citizens’ Advice Bureaux (OAC).

Did You Know?

The ‘Did you know?’ part of the campaign is based on key messages on the BCN Anti-Rumours Network website. New on the site is an amusing series of four videos, based on sketch comedy, that poke fun at various stereotypes, such as losing cultural identity because of immigrants.
Success

Since the launch of the Anti-Rumour Campaign and its network as part of the City of Barcelona’s Interculturality Plan (devoted to improving cultural diversity within the city), the campaign has celebrated a number of milestones. More than 350 people have been trained as ‘anti-rumour agents’. The first issue of Rosita Blanca Barcelona received a print run of 10,000 copies which was doubled for the second issue. A third volume (out of five) is underway. And a new guidebook to combat prejudices and stereotypes is now available online.

Barcelona City Council means business. Not only has it created a dedicated intercultural dialogue fund of €200,000 per annum for community led projects that promote anti-rumour campaign goals, BCN has also invested in a powerful partnership with local media organizations to educate journalists, promote awareness and be ready to respond constructively to negative news. A media monitoring group that includes organizations like Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya (Professional Association of Journalists) and the Taula per la diversitat (Panel for Diversity) on the Consell Audiovisual de Catalunya (Catalan Broadcasting Council), and others, will meet regularly to discuss how the media deals with cultural diversity and share good practices –and respond to bad ones.

Most importantly, the BCN Anti-Rumours Network is proving to be a travelling Good Idea. Other city councils in the state of Catalonia are working on establishing their own versions, such as in El Prat, Castelldefels, Tàrrega, Arbúcies and Mataró. Spanish towns in Granada and the Basque Region have shown interest as have other European cities, including Athens and Geneva.
Reaching for the Stars: VIPs go to School

By kturner

Education Inclusion

How do you encourage teenagers to think about improving integration in their own schools? Put down the textbook and offer a contest where the prize is a celebrity visit at your school. But with a twist – the stars themselves have a migrant background.

Eres joven, ¡triunfarás! (You are young, you will succeed!) asks students aged 10-18 from across Spain to submit their ideas on projects that can improve integration in their schools. A web-based project led by the Fundacion Bertelsmann, it includes a jury to decide the winners, then sends the celebrity ‘ambassadors’ to appear at the first prize schools.

Among the ambassadors are soccer star Bojan KrKic (whose family is originally from Serbia), pop singer Chenoa (born in Argentina) and reality star-dance teacher Sergio Alcover (whose father is from Equatorial Guinea).

A Good Idea that Traveled

Introduced to Spain in 2010, the Eres joven, ¡triunfarás! program builds on the success of its German counterpart, Alle Kids Sind VIPs (All Kids are VIPs). Alle Kids Sind VIPs was founded in 2008 by the Bertelsmann Stiftung where it was a runaway success. By year two, students had submitted over 100 entries from schools across Germany to win a chance to spend time with their heros – integration ambassadors like soccer star Mario Gomez, actress Susan Sideropoulos and TV presenter Daniel Aminati.

For both programs, the educational objective is to improve academic outcomes for new immigrants and students with a migrant background. In Spain, for example, students of foreign birth scored lower at school then their Spanish-born peers, resulting in a lower rate of higher education (including vocational training). In broader terms, however, this playful, youth-oriented project positions integration and greater cultural awareness as a route to more positive, inclusive experience for all young people in the education system, and the wider world outside school.

Partnership

In Spain, the Fundacion Bertelsmann developed Eres joven, ¡triunfarás! in partnership with the Ministry of Education with a multi-pronged purpose. It aimed to raise awareness about the role of youth in the integration of migrants; identify successful school-based activities and promote their transferability; demonstrate to parents the importance of cultural diversity; inform policy-makers of the contest results; and finally, present a positive image of migrants through celebrity ambassadors and organized events.

The competition itself consists of students (on their own, in small groups or as classes) submitting school-based projects online. All entries address the theme, “Integration requires equal opportunities in education,” and must describe how the project increases awareness of the cultural diversity around them. Students, with the support of their teachers, are encouraged to be as creative as they like and use any format. Submissions can be videos or websites, musical or dance performances, research or school events. A youth advisory group helps choose the winners.

“I am proud of my foreign roots”

When it came to replicate the program, the Fundacion Bertelsmann realized that they had to tailor the project to their circumstances. First of all, the two education systems were quite different. But a more important issue was the history and relative youthfulness of the local immigrant community in the two countries. Immigration to Spain took off with an influx of non-Spanish-speaking migrants in the late 1990s, whereas in Germany, large numbers of migrants had been arriving since the 1950s. Integration issues were different but another challenge for the Spanish project was finding enough celebrity ambassadors with a migrant background more challenging.

Choosing the right ambassadors is a critical part of the project. As role models, these celebrities help boost the self-esteem of students with similar backgrounds as well offering a positive image of cultural diversity. The students behind the winning projects (and their class) are rewarded with a visit from the ambassadors, including a chance to interact and ask questions about any topic they want. And see their hero in action, whether it be on the basketball court, break dancing or behind the microphone.

Soccer star Boran KrKic tells students, “I am proud of my foreign roots,” while rapper El Chojin points out that “being different is not to be inferior.” These important lessons as well as the exciting experience itself are carefully recorded. The ambassadors, who participate free of charge, appear in videos on the Eres joven, ¡triunfarás! website and across social media channels like YouTube.
The ambassadors also share their personal experiences. Singer Chenoa spoke to 80 students at a Madrid school about her own experience of moving from Argentina to Spain when she was eight years old. "My main concern was to feel accepted," she said before performing a couple of songs to a winning class. In this case, the award winning “Project Patio” used school lunch breaks for crafts, cooking and sports as a way to make new friends and improve integration at the school.

**Success**

Forty nine submission, ten finalists and three award winners later – two from Madrid, the other from the region of Murcia – and the Eres joven, ¡triunfarás! project is Spain was being rewarded with the kind of success that had made it a hit in Germany. Along with ‘Project Patio,’ the three winning projects included a ‘wiki’ called ‘The World Isidra’ on the places of origins of students at a Madrid school and an ‘Intercultural Calendar’ that celebrates the diverse traditions of all students at the school.

In its first year, the competition’s website also received more than 4,000 visits while the YouTube videos were viewed over 7,000 times. The celebrity ambassadors were popular outside school, too, garnering over 100 articles from local and regional media as well as coverage on radio and television.

What keeps this project going both in Germany and Spain are the direct messages from the ambassadors to the students. When rapper El Chojin (known for his Rap against Racism project) visited the school that won for its wiki project, he told the students “I’m here to try to support what you are doing, because I think it’s important.”
Chicago Opens Office of New Americans

By ktturner

More American mayors are recognizing that supporting immigrants is essential to the economic health of their cities. In the summer of 2011, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced plans to open an Office of New Americans to achieve that aim.

“Chicago’s vitality has been built on the strength of immigrant populations that have come to enjoy new freedoms and access new opportunities,” said Mayor Emanuel in a press release. “I want to make Chicago the most immigrant-friendly city in the world.”

To do this, the office will act as a hub to connect immigrants to existing services from the city, community organizations, private institutions and schools; it will also develop partnerships between them. Some of the efforts include encouraging more immigrant parent engagement with the school system; promoting US citizenship; creating a ‘centralized language access policy’ for Chicago; increasing access to city, state and federal programs for community organizations; and support the Illinois DREAM Act to allow immigrant students to have access to funds to attend college.

Led from within the mayor’s office, it will also include an emphasis on the role of immigrant entrepreneurs as immigrants are 50% more likely to start a new business than other members of the community.

Mayor Emanuel’s ambitious stand on immigration reform has already resulted in two major steps forward. The city’s new Welcoming City Ordinance builds on the vision of Chicago as the most welcoming city in the country by incorporating basic protections for undocumented Chicagoans. At the same time the new Chicago New Americans Initiative will directly assist 10,000 immigrants gain citizenship in what the Mayor’s Office calls the “most comprehensive municipal effort in the country.”

Since 2005, the state of Illinois has also had its own Office of New Americans. Other cities with similar offices include New York, Boston, Los Angeles and Houston.
Count Us In!

By K Turner

Living Together Political Inclusion

Paula was born in the Philippines and grew up in the United Kingdom. She worked in the financial industry and is now semi-retired. She now lives with her Irish partner in an affluent area of Dublin. She has a British passport and is eligible to vote in Ireland.

During the 2011 general elections while she was doing some cleaning in her house, a canvasser of a major political party knocked on her door. When she answered, the canvasser mistook her for a domestic worker as she fitted the profile of the Filipino domestic workers working in the suburb of Dublin where she lives. As if this were not enough, the canvasser assumed that she did not have a word of English and spoke slowly to her, asking: "Do ... you ... understand ... English? ... When ....will ... the ... homeowners ... be ... back?"

Around the same time, staff at the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) were hearing similar stories. Canvassers bypassing people who did not sound or look typically Irish. People distributing leaflets who ignored a foreign accent or a non-Irish face. ICI staff realized these behaviours were based on a false assumption that migrants do not vote. This was an issue of concern to the ICI’s stakeholders especially those who became Irish through the naturalisation process. After internal discussions on the issue and after dealing with a few calls from other naturalised citizens, the ICI decided to take the initiative in highlighting this experience.

Stand Up and Be Counted

On February 17th, 2011, the Immigrant Council of Ireland launched the Count Us In campaign. The aims of the campaign were: (1) to raise awareness among naturalised citizens of their right to vote in the 2011 General Election; (2) to remind political parties and candidates of the need to engage with naturalised citizens and with the issues pertaining to immigration and integration; and (3) to remind politicians and canvassers that the electorate in Ireland was diverse.

A photocall was staged in front of Leinster House (the parliament building) in Dublin with naturalised citizens and established Irish nationals supporting the campaign. The ICI secured a small grant that was used in the production of a YouTube clip, securing the service of a freelance photo journalist and of a public relations consultancy.

After hearing about the campaign in the news, Paula contacted the ICI and agreed to participate on a live radio interview about the Count Us In campaign. Sharing her experience with a wider audience and meeting with people who had experienced the same thing helped her to put it behind her. The fact that the campaign went viral after catching bloggers’ attention and was covered in the mainstream media helped raise awareness about Paula and other voters who did not 'look or sound typically Irish'.

Sharing ideas behind the Count Us In campaign

The first channel through which the campaign was shared with the wider audience was through a press notice and this was followed by a press release. Following the photocall, the campaign received wide coverage. This included:

- TV3 News at 5.30pm: News package with Dianne Connor
- IrishTimes.com: Call for election focus on immigrants
- Broadsheet.ie: 'They're voting for the guy who does the funny accents of foreigners'
- NewsTalk.ie: 'Criticism of lack of migrant election candidates' podcast interview with Fidèle Mutwarasibo, Integration Manager, Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Metro Eireann: Citizenship delays deny immigrants of right to vote

Another aspect of the work on the campaign was the production of a YouTube video where a number of naturalised citizens shared their views and experiences. This was important in documenting the campaign and sharing with others who might be interested in running a similar campaign.
Feedback

The feedback on the campaign was positive as highlighted by Paula's case study. Although it is difficult to ascertain the causal effect, a naturalised citizen of US American descent was appointed to the Seanad (Irish Senate) by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Enda Kenny in May, 2011 after the ICI had called the incoming Taoiseach to appoint a naturalised citizen to the Seanad in February!

The fact that the story of the campaign was picked up by the media highlights the fact that the campaign was timely and relevant. The coverage was also positive and in many ways the campaign marked the beginning of a debate on Irishness in 21st century Ireland.

This Good Idea was submitted to Cities of Migration by Fidèle Mutwarasibo, Integration Manager, Immigrant Council of Ireland.
Making Space for a Sikh Parade

By kturner

Cultural Inclusion Living Together Municipal-Spatial Inclusion

The first time the small Sikh community of Badalona requested permission to hold a religious procession through the streets surrounding their temple, their request was denied by the local city council.

The reason? “The lack of time to inform and prepare the neighbours.”

Badalona’s Sikh temple had been established for a decade, but its members and Sikh leaders remained outsiders to the local community. There was little interaction with the people who lived around it. Indeed, the local Neighbourhood Association’s members, many elderly and originally from other areas of Spain, were suspicious of immigrants in general, let alone this ‘new’ religious minority.

The city of Badalona sits on the outskirts of Barcelona with a population of 220,000. Recent years have seen increased diversity in the city as well as high unemployment rates in the working class neighbourhoods where the 10-year old Sikh community has settled. The majority of the men in the Sikh community are construction workers working locally and in nearby Barcelona; in most families, the women stay at home. Both men and women speak the local languages of Catalan and Spanish poorly.

This all sounds like a typical new immigrant scenario until you factor in the Sikh temple at the heart of the newcomer community. Built with a capacity for 300 people, the temple was not only new to the neighbourhood, it was soon attracting new members from Sikh communities in and around neighbouring Barcelona as well.

Prepare the neighbours

In late 2009, the Sikh community decided to try again. They approached the Badalona’s Department for Citizenship and ‘Living Together’ for permission to hold their religious procession. This time, the city council agreed, with one caveat – they had to work with the local Neighbourhood Association to “prepare the neighbours.”

Although the temple and the Neighbourhood Association office were situated on the same block (separated by only a few doors), the two groups had never met. In fact, when the community located its house of worship on the block, the police called the Association to collect information, making the local community more suspicious about the newcomers. Over time, with neither conflict nor engagement, suspicion was soon replaced by disinterest.

To overcome this lack of communication, the city decided to initiate a formal facilitation process to build bridges between the two communities. UNESCOCAT (the UNESCO Centre of Catalonia), a local agency devoted to promoting diversity, was asked to intervene since they had already established a relationship with the Sikh community as part of their work with inter-faith dialogue.

Their objective was clear – to create a relationship of mutual trust and gain the support of the Association leaders regarding the street procession.

Mediation leads the way

The mediation process began with some important strengths. The relationship between Unescocat and the leaders of the Sikh community had already created trust in the dialogue process for the Sikhs; Badalona city council’s involvement legitimized the process; and the two groups had no history of conflict.

The first phase started with a series of meetings meant to get the conversation started. Representatives from UNESCOCAT and the Department of Citizenship and Living Together, sat down with Sikh leaders to hear about their religion as well and why the street procession was culturally important. This led to a public meeting at the Neighbourhood Association where the Sikh leaders led a discussion about Sikhism, and answered questions on a range of cultural issues, including gender (a concern from Association). The event was a success and was even covered by a local television station.

More importantly, the intervention resulted in a strategic decision. The Sikh community and the Neighbourhood Association submitted a joint application to Badalona city council for permission for the street procession. Further, the application was for a street procession rather than as for a religious event in case the council had to defend it from any political or neighbourhood opposition. With this reassurance, the council approved the request.

Moving forward, it was important to include local community in the organization of the parade itself. Neighbourhood Association leaders were invited to participate and were accompanied by a Sikh youth during the parade. Information leaflets were developed and handed out to explain the celebration. The parade ended with formal thanks to the neighbourhood, as well as to mediators and politicians who were also asked to speak publicly.

Success

The parade was a great success, attracting Sikhs from around Catalonia. Approximately 1000 members of the Sikh community joined the procession, many carrying ceremonial daggers of the faith. While the large number did surprise many locals, they were quickly converted by the Sikh tradition of offering everyone food as a gesture of welcome. Many politicians and government officials were present – including a number who had been opposed to the parade.

In 2011, the Sikh community of Badalona was once again joined by fellow residents for another celebratory parade through the neighbourhood.
Can an innovative marketing campaign – ads on the subway, a slick website, flyers targeting parents – help a city improve the diversity of its municipal workforce?

Each year the city of Hamburg recruits over 600 people for training towards jobs in areas such as the city administration, taxation, police and fire services. Annual monitoring of the city’s vital signs – from economic data to demographic profiles – also made it clear to city officials that their recruits did not represent the diversity of the city’s population. Young people of migrant origin were underrepresented with the city administration and services.

In 2006, the city of Hamburg set an ambitious target to increase cultural diversity among its city workers. At the time, only 5.2% of candidates came from a migrant background even though they represented 26.3% of the city’s population (and 45% for the 6-18 age group). The plan, legislated by the city Senate, aimed to have up to 20% of applicants, trainees and apprentices come from a migrant background within five years.

A People’s Campaign

Recruitment is every employer’s challenge. To reach out to potential applicants from across the city landscape, the city launched a highly innovative marketing campaign – Wir sind Hamburg! Bist Du dabei? (We are Hamburg! Won’t you join us?) – aimed to prove to young people and their parents how determined the city was to attracting young people with different cultural backgrounds to the civil service.

Its key message is clear: “We are looking for young people who come from different cultural backgrounds. We need your experience, your knowledge and your intercultural competence.”

To achieve the city’s goals, the Senate’s own Centre for Training and Personnel Development (ZAF-Zentrum fur Aus- und Fortbildung) ran the campaign. ZAF focused on three areas: improved marketing and outreach of training opportunities, a new emphasis on ‘intercultural competence’ to open up the applicant pool, and a program of individualized support during the training.

The Wir sind Hamburg! Bist Du dabei? campaign’s hub is a web niche within the city’s own website. It includes information on how to apply, what qualifications are necessary, who is eligible (German citizenship is not necessary) and links to multilingual brochures in Turkish, Russian and German. The site also contains other examples of outreach from a team representing the city at a local dragonboat race and video diaries about working for the city of Hamburg.

What about having your daughter or son trained by us?

Considered critical to the campaign’s success was the decision to include parents into the marketing pitch. Recognizing that parents played an important role in helping decide students’ career choices, publicity materials were directed specifically at this target group. Flyers like the one entitled "Wie wäre es, wenn wir Ihre Tochter oder Ihren Sohn ausbilden?" (What about having your daughter or son trained by us?) describe the city’s recruitment goals and outline the various training options and opportunities available to their children.

These multilingual flyers were distributed to migrant organizations as well as other groups involved in intercultural work with parents. They were also given out at parent-teacher nights, other events at schools as well as made available at various city agencies. It turned out to be one of the most useful approaches to outreach. In an evaluation of the project, most parents not only found the flyers informative, they also stated that it was the first time they heard of the new training opportunities within the city.

Beyond informing parents and students that the city of Hamburg is hiring, the campaign has also emphasized the importance of intercultural awareness within the city Senate’s training and human resources departments. Officers in charge of training and personnel go through comprehensive training courses on diversity and intercultural competence. The screening test for candidates, as part of the application and selection processes, includes both “culture-open” components and intercultural knowledge questions.

Success

Wir sind Hamburg! Bist Du dabei? made an impact very quickly. At the starting point in 2006, 5.2% of the candidates newly recruited for training towards middle-level and upper middle-level civil service within the city administration were of migrant origin. By the following year, the number had doubled. In 2013, 100 of 600 newly recruited trainees from an immigrant background, representing a total share of 17% – a big leap forward for the Senate of Hamburg and all its residents.

This Good Idea was identified by the Open Society Foundations’ At Home in Europe project as a good practice promoting inclusion, social cohesion and nondiscrimination. For more on this practice and the At Home in Europe project, read Living Together: Projects Promoting Inclusion in 11 EU Cities (OSF, 2011).

This Good Idea will be featured in “Marketplace of Good Ideas” at the 2014 Cities of Migration conference in Berlin. Learn more about the conference.
Do our democratic institutions reflect the increasing diversity of our society? An important indicator of whether equality and integration have been achieved is the degree to which diversity is represented in political decision-making.

Today’s cities provide the perfect laboratory for testing the idea that local governments, in theory anyway, are representative of the communities they serve.

In German cities, where up to a third of the population may have an immigrant background, the contrast between a diverse society and councils that are still mostly homogeneous can be striking.

So German researchers at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity – in co-operation with the Heinrich Böll Foundation and with the support of the Mercator Foundation – decided it was time to put theory to the test. They have recently conducted the first comprehensive analysis of German city councils to assess the level of immigrant representation (meaning “individuals with a migration background”) in 77 German cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants.

Results of the study were presented in Berlin on 29 June 2011. A longer publication will be available in autumn 2011.

The slides of that presentation and an abstract of the study can be found here.

For a summary article, see: Diversity on City Councils? Shortcomings Abound. (June 28, 2011)
Building an inclusive city is the right thing to do. It is respectful of the citizens whom the City is intended to serve. Building an inclusive city also makes good economic sense.

When the City of Hamilton learned that it will have the privilege of co-hosting the 2015 Pan Am Games, with Toronto and 14 other municipalities in southern Ontario, the city saw an opportunity to put its inclusion policies to work.

Since August 2010, the City Hamilton’s has used its Equity and Inclusion Policy (PDF) to ensure City Council and corporate management embed principles of equity and inclusion within their business practices and delivery of service. The Policy also incorporates a commitment to meet the needs of under-served communities, and refers explicitly to ensuring that all residents must have equitable access to City services, programs and opportunities. A second principle ensures that diverse communities and individuals are included in crucial decision-making tables during public engagement processes.

Building on the momentum of the Pan Am Diversity Policy released by the Toronto organizing group in March 2011, the city’s Community Services Department commissioned a new paper on how the it can advance social inclusion in the areas of engagement, participation, and employment during and after the games: Social Inclusion in the City of Hamilton (Caledon Institute, June 2011 – PDF).

In Hamilton, the construction and retrofit of Pan Am venues will become a vital part of the physical space of the community and a living legacy of the Games. So will the opportunity the City will gain to engage with citizens and build a shared sense of belonging, participation and economic opportunity.

Look for further updates on this Good Idea We Are Watching!
Kangaroos, Football and the Local Community

By ktturner
July 26, 2011

A passionate fan base brings excitement, local colour and box office success to most of today’s top sports events. Sports teams all over the world have built reputations for volunteering within the community, promoting local events, and occasional gifts of philanthropy in the form of scholarships, equipment and free passes.

But how often do they build the facilities to bring the community to them?

Disaster Strikes

When a 2006 fire destroyed part of the historic playing field belonging to the North Melbourne Football Club, the Australian rules football team was already facing numerous challenges.

The Kangaroos is the unofficial name of North Melbourne’s football team, an inner city team that had made the sport a ‘religion’ in the working class community.

Another issue was changing demographics. Forty percent of North Melbourne’s population was now born overseas; in some neighbourhoods, more than 60% spoke a language other than English at home. The area has the highest proportion of residences with no internet connection while the median income is among the lowest in the City of Melbourne.

Finally, the league had even tried to relocate the Kangaroos to a more lucrative market in Queensland in 2007.

Starting Fresh

After the Kangaroos survived the league’s push to move, the Club began a new effort at rebuilding its North Melbourne identity. The challenge of how to recruit local support to redevelop the Arden Street facilities into a new training centre quickly morphed into a more strategic conversation about how to make the project relevant to the local community.

It helped that the Club had brought in a new chair, board and chief executive who recognized the importance of reconnecting to the community around the team. Conversations with other Kangaroo supporters brought on board the Scanlon Foundation (with their interest in football as a way to promote social cohesion) along with the Australian Multicultural Foundation.

Their support along with funding from the state of Victoria allowed the Club to unveil plans in June 2008 to build a state-of-the-art Learning and Life Centre in June 2008 as part of the redevelopment specifically to benefit residents in the area.

Planning

The aim of the project was to create a unique and rewarding community and sports club relationship through the ‘Learning Centre’ in the proposed Arden Street redevelopment.

To achieve this, the club undertook extensive community consultations in three stages in 2008 to ensure that the program and learning activities delivered through the centre were relevant and appropriate in meeting the needs of the community.

Stage one was a general community consultation, followed by one specifically oriented to youth led by the Centre for Multicultural Youth. The last consultation was aimed at youth and families living in local housing estates.

A key objective of the study was to determine the scope, type of projects and potential partners for the Centre. It was determined that the Centre was to be a place where schools and community groups would use; engaging with our multicultural and indigenous communities; as well as using sport and education to promote social cohesion.

“Our major reasons for doing this is to make North Melbourne [Football Club] relevant to Melbourne and to engage the multicultural community using education and sport as the unifying force. The best investment for us is our members and the community,” said Eugene Arocca, the club’s chief executive.

Success – Not just about Football

Now known as The Huddle, the Learning and Life Centre opened in March 2010. As a department within the football club with the specific task of engaging the local community, it includes the Huddle classroom, a multi-purpose court, meeting rooms and a lecture theatre.

The programming at the Huddle is not just about football, but has a much broader focus through three streams to engage the community.

- The Education Program includes full day programming for students aged 8-16 years from local primary and secondary schools with tailored activities for newcomer students.

- The Homework Program has tutorials and education support for teenagers with limited or no internet access as well as classes during the school holidays, such as study skills, driving courses and recreational activities).

- Finally, the third stream, Community Programs, provides recreational programming for community.

“All programs are free of charge to participants which is one of the obstacles facing the multicultural community,” said Sacha Hercog, Manager Community Programs.

“We offer netball, volleyball, and journalism and photography workshops. We are unique in the Australian Football League that we don’t provide programs focused solely on football.”
The football component is still an important part of the Kangaroos' work. Leaders of diverse multicultural communities have been appointed as North Melbourne Community Ambassadors while program participants from targeted communities are invited to attend games and undertake game education sessions.

The players themselves also participate within the classes. The Huddle even has its own blog where a young player drafted by the North Melbourne team, who was a Sudanese refugee, writes about his family's journey from Sudan to Australia.

Engaging community has become an intrinsic part of the club. At a recent league event celebrating multiculturalism in the sport, many fans wore The Huddle's "Our Club, Our Community" t-shirts while community ambassadors sent out messages via twitter in languages such as Hindi and Mandarin.
Music and the Urban Soul of New Zealand

By kturner
July 11, 2011
Uncategorized

It may sound like a song from the popular children’s television show Sesame Street, but People in your Neighbourhood (PIYN) is an Auckland project, like its namesake song, showcases the diversity found within the city’s music scene.

Started in 2009 by the British Council New Zealand, PIYN was launched as an innovative music collaboration to highlight Auckland’s increasing creative and multi-ethnic diversity while working with artists from the UK.

Beginning with a cross-cultural album and moving to live performances and a documentary, the project’s success has grown through the years and is ready to launch in Melbourne, Australia.

In the Beginning

PIYN was part of a larger program to develop intercultural dialogue through the British Council (BC) to represent the changing ‘face of the mainstream’ in the arts.

The project was developed by Gareth Farry, the BC’s development manager in Auckland, who had previously helped establish the country’s first multicultural talent agency. The idea of producing a multicultural and multi-language album started to interest Farry when he noticed the changes occurring in the local music scene.

“The vocalists are already working in different languages and applying their cultural musical context in a new urban landscape that is Auckland,” says Farry.

Initially, the idea was to gather young, diverse musicians and give them the opportunity to collaborate musically by producing an album together that combined ethnic musicians and songwriters, alongside other more established producers and artists. The hope was that they would create a work that combined the latest in production values, while retaining distinct elements of the different cultures involved.

The result was a free downloadable album that brought together 17 local musicians with UK-based Urban Soul Orchestra in an eclectic collaborative mix of soulful beats and rhythms. The self-titled album features New Zealand-born Chinese writer Renee Liang, Korean rapper Joshua Jang, Brother J singing in Maori and English, GuZheng player Xiya Chen, Spanish Flamenco singer Maite Elguetta Clavelle, and Brazilian singer songwriter Mani Fegundes. The bulk of the tracks include both English and another language (the recording is available here).

According to Farry, this is the first time something like this has been produced in New Zealand.

“PIYN is a whole mix of cultures collaborating with world class talent from the UK and others here in a modern intercultural urban music project. This is not ‘World Music’, but global music,” says Farry.
“The album will act like long strands of a net, reaching out into ethnic communities in New Zealand and drawing the music back to a central creative hub. The idea is to create ‘stars’ in each community.”

Next Steps

Since the completion of the album, the musicians have performed together including in Auckland and at WOMAD in New Plymouth. The show is a choreographed multimedia event with traditional Chinese strings, Pacific drumming, Asian street breaking and African dancing as well as street fashion.

To connect directly with cultural youth in Auckland, posters were produced in a range of languages while advertising targeted ethnic newspapers, radio and media to draw those audiences to the mainstream event. Although labour-intensive, the effort was seen as critical because appropriate and respectful communication is a cornerstone to the project.

“In order to directly engage ethnic audiences in Auckland, it is vital that they are communicated to in their own language, and in a context that will foster inclusiveness,” says Farry.

“99.9% of our communication is in English yet that is not the mother-tongue of many, many people living here. If we don’t learn to communicate more widely we get left behind and we all miss out. These are hybrid cultures, they are highly creative and there is no precedent.”

Success

Since the completion of the album, the PIYN project has continued to grow. A documentary that provides a behind-the-scenes look at the musical collaboration is finished and more performances have taken place in Auckland, Wellington and Taupo.

PIYN has also broadened its scope to include capacity-building for the arts as well as acting as a catalyst for collaboration between artists of different cultural backgrounds. The new focus is on providing workshops to aspiring ‘creatives,’ which allows for greater outreach as well as one-to-one mentorships. PIYN has also developed an online toolkit to help artists build their businesses.

Recent projects include bringing UK’s HipHop Shakespeare to Auckland as well as hosting an online collaboration project, ‘the Other Side of the World,’ where UK and New Zealand musicians created an online music project using Skype and other programs. There are plans to release an EP and make it available via Creative Commons New Zealand.

Its continued success has resulted in PIYN introducing its project to Melbourne and Brisbane in association with British Council Australia in July 2012.
In Barcelona’s Nou Barris district, an award-winning park on the former grounds of the Santa Creu Mental Institute transforms the feeling of isolation created by disjunctive streets, high-density housing, district boundaries and the physical limitation of the site to create a green community for one the city’s more diverse neighbourhoods.

From rural institution to urban zone

The former Santa Creu Mental Institute, located in Barcelona’s Nou Barris district, sits on a large centrally located property in what was once the rural outskirts of the city. An artifact of late 19th century modernism, the complex was once the 2nd largest of its kind in Spain, its grounds part of a man-made site spread across a number of terraces built into the hilly terrain.

Although the institution and its grounds had become derelict with disuse by the 1950s, for the first wave of worker immigrants arriving from the south of Spain during this period the rural settlement provided inexpensive housing. As a result the area underwent sudden, disorderly and large-scale urban development over the next generation.

In the 1990’s the site was formally taken over by the municipality of Barcelona to house administrative offices for the rapidly expanding city. The district now experienced a second wave of immigration of people from Romania, Ukraine, Ecuador, Pakistan and the Philippines who were attracted by the district’s lower housing prices in comparison with other zones of the city. Like the earlier wave of immigrants, these newcomers would once again transform the ethnic composition of the district but also the sprawling, heterogeneous design of an area increasingly dominated by the network of small businesses that multiplied through its neighbourhoods.

Sprawling settlements

While the site possessed a history centuries old, the rapid growth of high-density housing had transformed the area radically. The site’s original rural topography was now dominated by a disjunctive pattern of streets, and a chaotic mix of spatially unconnected high rise and low rise buildings. Aggravating the situation was the fact that the area had no underground car parks. Over the years, the area’s remaining public space had been exploited for parking –not for the parks or green spaces that local residents could enjoy.

Also problematic was the sense of physical isolation experienced by residents. While transportation to Barcelona’s city centre, less than two kilometers away, had been improved by the building of a ring road for the 1992 Olympics, communication with central Barcelona remained weak and left residents feeling detached and removed from much of what the city center had to offer.

Neighbourhood renewal

In 1997, Barcelona’s city council recognized an opportunity for action. It embarked on a project to create a new urban plan for the Nou Barris district that would integrate both the sprawling character of the urban site and the social needs of the area’s diverse population. The project included demolishing old buildings to create new public space, improving sections of the road system and creating 1,750 new parking spaces, almost all of them subsurface. The Council also recognized in the old psychiatric hospital an ideal home for the district’s new civic centre. Its size, position, historical significance and architectural quality made it the perfect site for what is today one of the biggest public libraries in Barcelona, as well as being home to the Municipal Council of the Nou Barris District and its Municipal Archive.

The Council plan also included designing an urban park that integrated the area spatially by linking new open spaces to older and derelict grounds. Marked by both its style and function, the park was to serve as a playground where residents could spend their leisure time in more spacious, healthy and pleasing surroundings. The inspiration for the park design came from the early cubist and very colourful pictures of Pablo Picasso, which the young artist painted in 1909 at La Horta de San Juan (in Catalonia). Aside from arching sculpture, geometric walking platforms and cubist inspired benches, the park features a traditional Mediterranean gardens with trees, lawns, ponds, paths and tiled walls.

Success

In 2007, the work of Barcelona architects and landscape architects, Andreu Arriola and Carmen Fiol, was recognized when the Parc Central de Nou Barris won the International Urban Landscape Award (IULA), receiving a EUR 50,000 prize. The jury felt that the Parc Central performed an important ‘integrative task in a rapidly expanding and multi-ethnic quarter of Barcelona.’ Bernd Knobloch, Chief Executive Officer of Eurohypo, said: “Near-to-nature spaces laid out in the middle of cities are islands of recreation and places of encounter. In an age of increasing urbanization of the world, they also make a major contribution to protecting the climate.”

These findings would also appear to be corroborated by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and its Community Green report.

*“Green space has a proven track record in reducing the impact of deprivation, delivering better health and wellbeing and creating a strong community. The simple presence of green space is related to a reduced risk of serious problems like depression and lung disease. Living close to green space reduces mortality, which can help reduce the
significant gap in life expectancy between rich and poor.”

Today, the Parc Central Nou Barris is the second-largest urban park in Barcelona, and is fully embraced as a public commons, recreational facility and meeting place that successfully tells a story of historical transformation, neighbourhood revitalization, social integration and good living in a multicultural urban society.
It Starts with Soccer

By kturner

Living Together, Refugee Portal, Social Inclusion

Like music, sport has the power to overcome cultural and ethnic differences, to rally a community and to create a sense of confidence and belonging.

For many newcomers, however, the practical necessities of housing, schooling and employment leave little room for other interests or local offerings.

“Sports is the last thing that they will think of on top of all the other resettlement things,” says Dr. Arif Saeid, Community Services Manager for Refugees as Survivors, an Auckland-based non-profit that provides services that include community development.

For Saeid this was a missed opportunity.

A Beautiful Game

In the city of Auckland, soccer is being used as a deliberate and strategic tool to reduce the social isolation of young refugees and to help them feel a sense of connection and belonging – both with each other and to the wider community.

The Refugees in Sport Initiative was started in 2006 by Refugees As Survivors (RAS), a non-profit refugee mental health agency that provides services that include community development.

After conducting a series of community consultations, the organization realized that programs were needed to enable refugee youth to achieve better access into mainstream sports and have a safe place to meet with others who both shared and understood their experience.

The initial focus was on soccer as it was seen as the sport that would appeal to the most people while addressing issues that had been identified as the barriers preventing refugees from participating in community activities, such as cost of services, language and cultural difference.

“Soccer is a universal language and culture. It has its own culture and it doesn’t need [a specific] the language. You can play on a team,” says Dr. Saeid. “It’s a point of integration. It helps refugees get more involved in the community and it helps them with better settlement.”

Winning Partnerships

Working in partnership with what is now the Auckland Football Federation and local soccer clubs (with the support from the City of Auckland), RAS developed a series of practical programs to help refugees achieve better access into mainstream New Zealand sports.

The Refugees in Sports Initiative now provides young players with a “passport” to local clubs as well as financial support to enable them to join (a fund supports refugee families to subsidize 50% of club fees and equipment for their children – both boys and girls).

With the Auckland Football Federation, RAS also created the “All Refs,” an all refugee soccer team (clothed in United Nations blue!) who play against local teams through the financial sponsorship of a private firm, Malcolm Pacific Immigration Consultancy. They arranged for exhibition games to bring players and their families together as well as offering coaching clinics and workshops.

The program has also expanded to offer other sports such as cricket and martial arts. It also includes another fund to encourage girls from refugee backgrounds to also participate in both team and individual sports, such as tennis and swimming.

Success

“Refugees from all countries and all languages love soccer, and many of our groups just need a place to play and some support” says Dr. Saeid. Formerly a medical practitioner with Medecins San Frontiers in Afghanistan, he remembers the dark days when sport was banned in his native country and the debilitating effect it had on the community.

More than 400 youth have participated in the program and show better levels of integration into wider society, reduced social isolation as well as improved self-esteem and cultural pride.

“Thanks to RAS, we are able to showcase our talent and do something that we really enjoy,” says Mohammed Shakir Nesar, team leader, All Refs. “Our team has traveled to places like Hamilton, Whangarei and Wellington to play against the local teams. We have moved beyond being a group of refugees and now have Kiwis and Europeans in our team.”

RAS has also made sure to include projects that empower participants. One example is training their soccer players to become coaches. Twelve were chosen for to learn through the support of NZ Football.
In 2009, RAS added a new program to its repertoire, the Refugee Youth Action Network to focus on training a new generation of youth leaders from the various refugee communities. The pilot phase provided outdoor leadership training to 90 young people and in 2011, RAS opened a new youth centre for the project.

The New Zealand Human Rights Commission has recognized the Refugee in Sports Initiative as part of their Diversity Action Program.
A Scholarship for the Entire Family

By kturner
June 21, 2011

Education Inclusion

For Dr. Roland Kaehlbrandt, chair of Frankfurt’s Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft, ‘creating a culture of respect and recognition’ is key to helping immigrant students achieve their academic potential. At the Stiftung this means spending less time asking newcomers to ‘integrate’, and more time spent inviting them inside.

Dr. Kaehlbrandt’s work with immigrant children in Germany’s 5th largest city has taught him that many of the institutions we take for granted can present formidable cultural barriers for those ‘outside’ the system. In the school system, for example, children can experience these barriers both inside and outside the classroom.

So to help kids in the classroom, the Stiftung decided to look outside Germany’s highly structured educational system to the parents outside the classroom door.

In the Beginning

The German school system officially begins in grade one, at the mythical ‘age of reason.’ At this age, the average six year old may have attended kindergarten, but many have not. In Germany today, an increasing number of children entering school are also speaking German for the first time. Approximately 50% of Frankfurt students (and 70% of children under the age of three) come from families with a migration background.

In Grade 5 (age 10), students change schools again and are streamed into one of a five different kinds of secondary schools. This time the choice of school and type of program will structure the balance of the student’s schooling and influence the range of options available post-high school. For children whose second language is German, the transition can be difficult especially if parents do not understand how the educational system works.

In 2007, the Frankfurt foundation, Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft, received a call for help from the director of a local school. How do you help immigrant children and their families get through this important step within the education system?

A Scholarship with a Twist

Since the Stiftung Polytechnische Gesellschaft was already known for the scholarships it gave out, the answer seemed obvious. This time, however, the Stiftung looked beyond the envelope to a more structured form of support that opened doors for student success by engaging his or her entire family – the result is the Diesterweg Scholarship, named in in honour of the early 19th c. educational reformer, Adolph Diesterweg.

“So we said we are going to make a family scholarship where every member of the family will be a member of the scholarship, will get a certificate and be a part of a whole program,” says Dr. Kaehlbrandt. “They will get strength and pride of being part of the community.”

Started in 2008, the Diesterweg-Stipendium is a two-year preparatory program that runs through grades 4 and 5. Fourth grade teachers recommend students and their families to participate with an emphasis on those who have a high potential for academic success but may need additional support due to lack of German fluency or parental understanding of the school system.

The first group of scholarship recipients included 22 students in 21 families from across the city. The Stipendium includes extra classes in German and other academic subjects and money for educational materials. However, to create a continuum of support between the classroom and the home for immigrant students, the program also offers field trips for the entire family and support for parents at parent-teacher meetings at school. Parents even have their own classes – the ‘parent academies’ – where the intricacies of the German education system are discussed among other topics.

During the summer holidays between grades four and five, the students also participate in DeutscheSommer, a three-week summer school focused on German language training. Children come from a variety of backgrounds such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Ethiopia, Bosnia, and Lithuania.
Symbols of Integration

While the Diesterweg Scholarship's primary emphasis is on the educational success of the children enrolled in the program, its organizers are clear that improving the opportunities for integration into German society for the families involved is equally essential.

“The main problem of these families is the lack of access to the rich offerings that we have in a city like Frankfurt,” says Dr. Kaehlbrandt.

Family field trips include visits to the public library or the state legislature as part of the syllabus.

Building pride and belonging has become an important part of the project. The foundation holds a formal ceremony at the start of the program for the families, which includes guests of honour from the city and state governments. At the end of the two years, all participants receive an official certificate to celebrate the completion of the Diesterweg Scholarship.

“Family field trips include visits to the public library or the state legislature as part of the syllabus. Building pride and belonging has become an important part of the project. The foundation holds a formal ceremony at the start of the program for the families, which includes guests of honour from the city and state governments. At the end of the two years, all participants receive an official certificate to celebrate the completion of the Diesterweg Scholarship.”

“Family field trips include visits to the public library or the state legislature as part of the syllabus. Building pride and belonging has become an important part of the project. The foundation holds a formal ceremony at the start of the program for the families, which includes guests of honour from the city and state governments. At the end of the two years, all participants receive an official certificate to celebrate the completion of the Diesterweg Scholarship.”

“We want them to be citizens of our city. We want them to become citizens of this democratic republic.”

Success

Not only were students from the first round able to successfully make the transition to secondary school, the Diesterweg Scholarship students participate with enthusiasm and gain self-confidence. The European Forum for Migration Studies observed that that children in the Scholarship program were able to attend and feel comfortable in 'higher' level secondary schools while parents gained a better understanding of the school system and had more confidence interacting with teachers.

Parents also reported a greater connection to the community. On one field trip to the Hesse [state] legislature, a father from Eritrea said: "It is only now that I feel I am a Hesse."

"In moments like this, the successful integration of these families and the immediate impact of the Diesterweg scholarship are most tangible," says Gisela von Auer, program director. "Almost all families confirmed that they feel better accepted and at home in Germany after the two years scholarship."

Today, the Diesterweg Scholarship program also receives support from the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, Integration and Europe (Hesse), the Department for Education and Women (Frankfurt), the Office for Multicultural Affairs and the Foundation/Association for German Sciences.
El gato de Raval

Like Toronto’s Kensington Market, or Chinatown in New York and San Francisco, Barcelona’s Raval is a neighborhood created by waves of immigrants who first came seeking jobs in the city’s 19th century textile mills and today continue to contribute to the character and energy of the district. Almost half of all neighbourhood residents have a migrant background.

Located in the heart of the Ciutat Vella (old city) district of Barcelona, the influx of new immigrants and migrant workers to Raval’s cramped streets has not always been easy. Over the years, a large and varied network of services, associations and ad hoc initiatives came in or were created to address emerging social problems and stresses.

Today, says Nuria Paricio, Director of the Fundació Tot Raval, “Este és otro mundo” (this is another world).

Fundació Tot Raval is the community foundation and umbrella organization at the heart of the Raval neighbourhood. Since it was founded in 2001, Fundació Tot Raval has acted as a coordination platform for the people of El Raval, empowering the community by working to support and coordinate the efforts of over 60 neighborhood organizations, associations and other initiatives actively engaged in the revitalization of the Raval neighborhood. The foundation’s membership includes organisations such as the Islamic Cultural Council of Catalonia, the National Library of Catalonia and the A. Rosa Sensat Teachers.

The Fundació provides a variety of work spaces and forums to support community participation (board of trustees, committees, project work groups, seminars, etc.) and collaborative efforts to identify issues and reach common solutions—as well as to pool precious resources.

By enabling the diverse members to work together, the Fundació Tot Raval makes sure that initiatives aren’t duplicated and reinforces the success they achieve. By networking and generating synergies among the neighbourhood agencies and local authorities, the foundation is having a positive impact on the general population.

Fundació Tot Raval encourages cross-cutting actions and multicultural projects that boost coexistence and social cohesion, promote networking, and contribute to better education and employment outcomes. In the entrepreneurial spirit of Barcelona Activa, the Fundació also fosters cooperation between businesses and works to invigorate the local economy and culture with a view to helping make the Raval an inclusive, dynamic neighbourhood committed to the future of all its residents.

Fundació Tot Raval’s unique approach to local development, cross-cutting nature of its activities, the quantity and diversity of its members, and the participatory spaces it stimulates make it a Good Idea worth watching.

For more information, contact:

Fundació Tot Raval
Pl. Caramelles, 8
08001 Barcelona
Tel. 93 442 68 68
Fax: 93 442 68 81
info@totraval.org

www.totraval.org
Bridging More than the Digital Divide

By kturner
May 18, 2011

Education Inclusion, Living Together, Refugee Portal

In the age of Facebook, Youtube and Skype, living without access to the Internet, let alone basic word processing software, can mean barriers to services and exclusion from an important aspect of mainstream culture.

For refugee families like the Phillipos, from Burma, who arrived in New Zealand with few possessions and limited English language skills, the digital divide is even greater.

To bridge this gap, the New Zealand not-for-profit, Computers in Homes (CIH) took an existing program that provides low income families with computers and training and modified it to cater specifically to refugee families and their unique needs. Computers in Homes recognized an opportunity to make internet access and basic computer technology a passport to improved integration outcomes for immigrant children and their parents.

"It is critical that children with refugee backgrounds engage in the New Zealand education system," says Di Daniels, National Coordinator, Computers in Homes, "and that their parents learn how to support them in their learning."

For the Phillipo family, who lived in a refugee camp in Thailand for more than 15 years, the program is life-changing.

"In Burma I couldn't even afford to buy an apple... having a computer in my house is like gold," says Christopher Phillipo. "We are very lucky to be in New Zealand."

Computers at Home

The Refugee Computers in Homes program is offered to 90 refugee families each year. They receive 30 hours of basic computer training, including how to use email, create word processing documents and even surf the Web. At the end of the training, families receive a refurbished computer to take home with free Internet access for one year (followed by a subsidized rate).

Most importantly, they also receive free transport, childcare, interpreters and a family liaison home visitor to help the success of the 30 hours of basic computer training.

"This removes barriers for attending training," says Das. "We don't want anyone to not be able to attend because they have no car or childcare."

In the case of the Phillipo family, both husband and wife, Christopher and Rosawanni, took part in a Refugee CIH class aimed at the Burmese community that has settled in the city of Porirua, 25 km north of Wellington. In addition to the instructor, a translator was available to ensure the lessons were understood by all. By the end of the course, participants had even created their own resumes online.

The Phillipo family is thrilled with their computer. The children use the Internet for homework and, of course, play games while the entire family uses it to listen to Burmese news on BBC radio. Having email and live chat means they can keep in touch with friends and family abroad easily and economically. Christopher Philipo has begun to further his education, taking another computer class at the local Polytechnic.

"Because of all the opportunities in Porirua my family has a very bright future, once I have mastered English, I would like to get a job in the computer industry – maybe I could be a computer teacher."

You've Got Mail

Over 500 refugee families from a multitude of countries, including Columbia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Cambodia, Somalia, Burundi and Afghanistan have gone through the Refugee CIH program and received computers. The number of communities offering the program has also grown thanks to a 'Starter Kit' developed by Computers in Homes.

Schools have reported increased communication between refugee parents and teachers. Parents are able to not only connect with their children’s education, but are able to access the wider community itself.

"For many in the course, this was the first time they had ever been in contact with a computer in their lives. In conjunction with an English course, these families are now able to search the Internet, communicate with distant relatives, and use basic word processing software," says Daniels.

"Creating a computer culture and digital learning experience in homes helps children with e-literacy," Das continues. "We take the parents with ‘techno-fear’ who have never touched the computer before from being non-users to confident users."

Success

The Refugee Computers in Homes is part of a larger program born out of a pilot project led by the 2020 Communications Trust (initially started by the Wellington City Council to improve digital literacy), which recognized that children from schools in low income neighbourhoods had the least access to computers and internet at home.

In 2000, they began Computers in Homes to help families in greatest need to use the internet, email, and basic computer skills in their everyday lives, and to enhance their performance at school and at work. Today, the flagship program has provided training and computers to over 5,000 New Zealand families across the country.
The success of the original CIH project resulted in funding from the Ministry of Education, Refugee Education division, to establish and customize the Refugee CIH program. However, both programs have a similar goal: empowering communities for greater success and welcoming all New Zealanders into the digital mainstream.

Today Refugee CIH operates in communities large and small (such as Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Nelson) offering training to small groups at local migrant organizations, high schools and community education centres. Refugee CIH is also supported by Regional Migrant Services, local training providers, community volunteers like the Rotary Club as well as local ethnic community leaders who act as a liaison with refugee families.

Postscript

In October 2014, Computers in Homes was recognized as one of three finalists for the prestigious IT Education Award in Auckland. No wonder — during the last 14 years Computers in Homes has provided foundation digital literacy skills to over 12,000 families in communities across New Zealand, providing over 50,000 students with the opportunity to develop their IT skills and become an IT professional. Congratulations!
New Zealand Police finds Engagement with Migrant Communities

By kturner
April 20, 2011

Cultural Inclusion, Living Together Municipal

Can Sikhs legally carry ceremonial daggers? How do you comfort a Muslim woman? What days would a Hindu not attend court?

Over the past few years, the New Zealand police have made a concerted effort to foster a sense of inclusion and participation from the increasingly complex communities that comprise the population of New Zealand.

“It’s all about confidence and trust,” says Kefeng Chu, Strategic Ethnic Advisor, Police National Headquarters. “Police need to understand different religions and how they can affect daily interactions. We want the public to think, ‘police here do understand my culture and my religion’.

Quick and reliable answers to hundreds of questions about religious protocols are answered in the police handbook ‘A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity’. The handbook’s second edition was launched by Commissioner Howard Broad and Race Relations Commissioner Joris de Bres in March 2009 as part of Race Relations Day celebrations.

Updated from the 2005 first edition, it contains overviews of seven religions (Maori spirituality, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism), plus information directly relevant to police interactions, such as issues around death, providing blood samples, attitudes to police dogs and how to approach sensitive matters. The 2009 edition also includes a New Zealand Statement on Religious Diversity from the Human Rights Commission.

How a handbook helps

An awareness of these issues can ease investigations, says Kefeng. For example, police should be aware that a Muslim family would expect to bury their kin as soon as possible after death, preferably within 24 hours.

“Police may not be able to agree to this, but showing understanding of their religious need and being willing to negotiate creates a sense of trust that helps everyone involved.”

He says, for example, the book helped a community constable answer a member of the public who queried whether a Sikh was allowed to walk around with a ceremonial knife (kirpan).

“The answer is yes, of course it’s legal. Police only need to get involved if it is used as a weapon, and I know of no case in the world where that has happened,” says Kefeng.

The guide has also been used for police training and Race Relations Commissioner, Joris de Bres reported at the launch of the 2009 edition that New Zealand participants in the Asia Pacific Interfaith Dialogue in Cambodia in 2008 had specifically commended the guide and recommended that a similar guide be provided to other government department staff.

“While we live in a secular state in New Zealand, this does not mean public servants should be ignorant about the beliefs of the communities they serve. To deliver public services effectively, public servants need to understand their clients and gain their confidence,” he said.

Building upon success

NZ Police have a number of other complementary initiatives underway as well. For example, the police website is translatable into 11 languages and scripts as well as English, and includes a section dedicated to ethnic communities that explains communicating with police; personal rights; safety; and crime prevention. For telephone communication, police use a government-provided translation service called Language Line to provide interpretation for speakers of 39 different languages and Ethnic Liaison Officers are available in the Auckland region, Hamilton, Wellington, Palmerston North, Nelson, Napier and Christchurch. As well, a number of documents have been developed to enhance positive interactions with the growing migrant and ethnic communities including:

- Multilingual Phrase Book;
- Bill of Rights Advice;
- Judges Rules Caution translation; and
- The Maori and Pacific Responsiveness Strategies.

The police are also the sponsor of the secondary schools’ Race Unity Speech Awards in conjunction with the Human Rights Commission and the Baha’i community, as well as ethnic football tournaments, New Zealand Communities Football Cup. They have established a Police Equity and Diversity Network at Police National Headquarters in Wellington and have made changes to their uniform code to accommodate Sikh headwear for Sikh police officers.

This collection of strategies and tools demonstrates in the clearest way the continuing commitment by Police to provide a good service to all people in the community and feedback from the community has been very positive.

Source: The New Zealand Police Online Magazine
COMRàdio: Syndication model delivers the village square

By kturner

Living Together, Role of Media

In the autonomous region of Catalonia in Spain, COMRàdio is creating a network of syndicated radio programming for local municipal stations with a focus on content aimed at immigrant integration. The programming is offered in Spanish as well as Catalan in an attempt to reach both newcomers and native-born residents.

Since the 1960s, Catalonia has received various waves of migration – from Andalusia and Extremadura in southern Spain, from north and central Africa, Latin America and finally, other parts of Europe. With Barcelona as the capital of the region, it has also attracted many English speakers as well.

It is with this diverse population in mind that COMRàdio has developed a multi-pronged approach to meeting the needs of its many audiences. Sindicada is an online platform that syndicates radio content to over 140 municipal stations in the region as part of the Consorci de Comunicació Local (Communication Municipal Consortium). This allows smaller stations to have access to high quality production. Five hundred pieces of content are downloaded to the network each week.

“Our goal is to integrate all these people from different backgrounds,” says Francesc Triola, Director General, COMRàdio. “And how do we do it? By creating a common space, the radio, where they can know each other. The radio would be like the village square where everyone that lives there can go, talking and knowing each other and, thus, creating empathies.”

From One to Many

One example of syndication is the offering of a Catalan language course that began at a village radio station. The community had received many migrants and the lessons were seen as an opportunity for newcomers to learn the language. Now broadcast once a week, over fifty stations now use this content via Sindicada.

“In Catalonia, these small stations were the first to do programs for immigration matters,” says Triola, “because experience shows us that it is important to talk about matters of everyday life where immigrants live, that is to say, in towns and cities.”

In 2007, COMRàdio started LatinCOM which offers Spanish-language programming in recognition that either many already speak Spanish or will learn it first before Catalan. The content allows the Latin American population to keep in touch with news from the continent as well as share stories with their home countries through more syndication. There are also future plans to create programming in English.

COMRàdio’s Sindicada service received the 2010 Bdigital Award for Digital Innovation as well two honourable mentions from the Radio Association of Catalonia.
Amsterdam To Toronto: Top Points for Police

By Evelyn
April 19, 2011
Living Together, Municipal

Last fall, Commissioner of Police, Patrick Voss, of the Netherlands Police Agency left his home in Utrecht, The Netherlands to spend two months in Canada. His purpose was to study how the Toronto Police Services handled community outreach programs and diversity management within the force itself.

Like other countries in Europe, the Netherlands has an increasing immigrant population with people from almost 140 countries. Improving how to work with diverse communities has become a point of concern for the country’s police forces.

In 2008, a national program called Politietop divers, naar een duurzaam perspectief (Diversity in Police Leadership: Towards a Sustainable Perspective) was created to focus on the large numbers of women and ethnic minorities joining and leaving the force. Its mandate came from the Board of Regional Police Force Managers and the Board of Chief Commissioners.

To help senior officers ‘develop intercultural competencies’, Politietop divers worked with the Institute for Integration and Social Efficacy of the University of Groningen to create a work-study immersion program called Top-POINT (Police Leadership International).

But its long-term agenda is to understand diversity in a larger context.

Understanding Diversity

For Comm. Voss, who kept a blog in Dutch of his time in Toronto (you can read it via Google Translator here), the trip was a whirlwind of new experiences. In Toronto, he was assigned to Superintendent Sam Fernandes, whom he called ‘Mr. Diversity.’ Each day was different. Activities ranged from learning about Aboriginal peacekeeping to visiting high school students in at-risk neighbourhoods to attending an official dinner with members of the local Muslim community.

What was it that impressed Comm. Voss? (who is also the Acting Head of the National Operational Coordination Centre in the Netherlands National Police Agency). “The positive, pro-active attitude [within Toronto Police Services] and the way they respect each other’s culture and the appreciation of ‘difference,’” he says. “It is about leadership with a strong vision in combination with responsibility given to all levels of the police service.”

Success

What was important for Voss was the impact of the Toronto experience on his work – from learning how to be more open-minded to building bridges with other organizations.

“Today, I have a stronger focus on using and respecting the differences, giving them value and encouraging the use of differences,” he says.

More important are the new ideas Comm. Voss now seeks to introduce as part of the program’s mandate to improve diversity policy. This includes a community outreach program and multicultural training for police officers that will foster a more open attitude amongst police officers towards citizens.

The Top-POINT program plans to send other senior Dutch police officers abroad to visit and learn from a wide variety of cities, including Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Capetown, South Africa.

Back in Toronto, the Police Services is now busy with its own plans to send one of its own officers to the Netherlands on a reciprocal work-study placement. Good Ideas on the move!

Related Good Ideas on Community Policing:

- Wellington: Walking the Beat: New Zealand Police finds engagement with migrant communities
- Cardiff: Language from the Law: The Cardiff E.S.O.L. Police Project
- Madrid: On the Front Lines of Integration
For all the talk of social media, we know that conversation takes place best when done face-to-face. But add people from different cities into the mix and the barriers to the best exchanges begin to grow. But a new initiative, the Dialogue Café, aims to change that through state-of-the-art high-definition video.

Started in early 2010, the first cafe was held between Lisbon at the Museum of Design and Fashion (MUDE) and Rio de Janeiro at the Candido Mendes University (UCAM), using CISCO Systems Inc.’s Telepresence technology. The company specially-developed ‘pods’ containing large video screens that could allow participants to appear life-sized as well as showing more people on screen.

Café conversations have included a series of meetings focused on The Future of Cities with an emphasis on designing for our future selves in 2025 or 2050 with participants from Lisbon, Amsterdam, London and New York as well as sessions on Entrepreneurship and the Development of a Sustainable Smart City between cafés in Amsterdam and Rio de Janeiro.

Initial funding came from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Anna Lindh Foundation to create the Dialogue Café Association whose partners now include the UN Alliance of Civilizations and CISCO. The Association finds local partners such as businesses, city governments and civil society organizations to run each city-based café by physically hosting the ‘pods’. For cities without official cafes, participants can even use CISCO offices.

“Cafés were always places for conversation and the exchange of experiences. And it is precisely that aspect that Dialogue Café aims to tap into, but this time on a global level,” says Executive Director Sara Piteira, “using the technology we now have and which allows us to talk almost face-to-face with someone of the other side of the world.”

Future cafés are planned for London, Florence, Ramallah, Tel Aviv, Cairo, Istanbul, Toronto, New York and Mexico City. Updates on the project can be found the Dialogue Café blog.

In December 2010, the Dialogue Café pod system won the prestigious GOOD DESIGN award. The awards, founded in by architects Eero Saarinen, Charles and Ray Eames, and Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. in Chicago in 1950, recognizes designers and manufacturers for “advancing new, visionary, and innovative product concepts, invention and originality, and for stretching the envelope beyond what is considered ordinary product and consumer design.”

- Find more related Good Ideas and related resources on media
Police Take Community Outreach to City Hall

By kturner
April 20, 2011

In the early 2000s, a group of Spanish-speaking police officers in Newport News, Virginia realized that the city’s Hispanic population was changing. On their patrols they came across newcomers who were surprised to learn they spoke Spanish and began to tell stories of the robberies and home invasions they were experiencing.

But when the officers went to update these reports, they found nothing. Crimes were going unreported by newcomers from Latin America with little English and even less trust in the authorities based on experiences of police brutality in their homelands. Newport News Police realized how vulnerable these people were and that their city was facing a potentially serious problem.

Although Hispanics represented a little over 5% of a population of 180,000 in Newport News, the newer part of the community was particularly vulnerable. Many were men who had traveled to the US to work as labourers and had limited English skills. They were more transient, shared housing in cramped conditions, and often sent the money they earned back to families in their countries of origin.

These workers were also known as ‘walking ATMs’ because they didn’t use banks; instead, they carried their paycheques in cash or kept their savings in their rooms. This made them vulnerable theft and to violent gangs who demanded payments for ‘protection’.

First Attempts

In 2003, Sargeant Xavier Falero and fellow Spanish-speaking street cops in Newport News applied and received support from their police chief to launch the Hispanic Community Outreach Program.

Armed with police information brochures translated into Spanish for the first time, the officers went out to Hispanic churches in the community to do their outreach. But their initial attempts failed. The few people who attended were wary, worried about a potential police raid. The police received the same response when they tried another approach by visiting a neighbourhood in a mobile police station – a command bus with no windows. Again, few people showed up.

“It looked like we were going to arrest people,” remembers Sgt. Falero.

Success came when Sgt Falero showed up wearing a polo shirt and a police services vehicle that looked liked an ice cream truck. Now as many as 100 people would show up to learn about making a police report or how to use the 911 emergency phone system. Trust was beginning to build.

Police Training

Outreach efforts soon revealed that many police officers had little understanding of the diversity within the Hispanic and Latino communities, where the population included the native-born as well as newcomers from countries such as Mexico, Uruguay, and El Salvador. Language barriers worked both ways. Spanish-speaking officers sometimes needed interpreters because they could not understand the many dialects used within the community.

Police calls that were supposed to be quick started running long and cutting into scheduling resources because comprehension was such a problem for most officers. So the department developed an 8-hour Spanish course for new recruits to learn key terms and phrases so they could initiate questions and answers on their calls while they waited for an interpreter. Sgt. Falero also put together cultural awareness training to help established officers understand the nuances within Hispanic-Latino communities.

Building Trust for the Long-term

One result of the Hispanic Community Outreach Program was an unexpected, short-term rise in crime. Good News! Previously unreported crimes were finally being tracked.

Within the year, the crime rate began to drop again as police efforts to educate the community on how to avoid becoming victims of crimes started to pay off.

Despite the early success, the police department noticed that by 2006, the reporting of crime had begun to fall again. The transient nature of the target community meant that a more sustained effort would be required to teach the latest newcomers that community police officers could be trusted.

To broaden their outreach, officers began to play soccer games with local teams, and Sgt. Falero began regular radio appearances on Hispanic stations.

As Police began to consult regularly with local Hispanic leaders, they found themselves reporting back on other issues the community was facing, such as difficulties accessing city services such as health care or housing related to information and language barriers.

Newly informed, the City Manager realized that most city agencies were unaware that there was a problem and recognized an important opportunity to improve city services.
In 2008 the newly minted Hispanic Advisory Committee (HAC) was formally re-convened to meet with a working group made up of city departments including public health, the fire department, and the school system.

Success

Through the support of the City Manager, the Hispanic Advisory Committee has taken a leadership role. With its own strategic plan in place, they have held public consultations for Spanish-speakers to ask questions of all city departments and related agencies; added Google Translator to the city website; and proposed multilingual signage in city buildings. They have also worked with the Health Department and Human Services to hire bilingual staff.

In 2010, the city was recognized as a gold winner by the National League of Cities' 2010 Awards for Municipal Excellence in the category of cities with a population of 150,001-500,000 for its outreach efforts with the Hispanic community.

Sgt. Falero has led this transformative initiative from the beginning. “I can’t believe it started because a couple of street cops said, ‘this is not right.’” He credits the leadership of both the Newport News police chief and the City Manager for the success the city has experienced.

“If the city government doesn’t believe it’s an issue, they are not going to address it,” says Falero. “If you don’t have that cohesiveness between city management and the police department, it can be very difficult to get it off the ground…You have to get that perfect mixture.

Can it be done? Yes.”
Prayas: Indian theatre in English for all New Zealanders

By kturner
April 13, 2011
Uncategorized

Just as Bollywood movies are increasingly reaching more diverse audiences, the Prayas Theatre Group in Auckland, New Zealand, is sharing the work of Indian playwrights with a broader audience.

The Prayas Theatre Group is a not-for-profit organization formed by Indians living in Auckland. The word ‘prayas’ literally means “an attempt” in Hindi and the group represents an attempt to reach out, share and integrate with the wider local population through theatre, music, song and dance.

Since 2005, Prayas has produced one show per year. The shows are all based on the works of noted Indian authors and playwrights but performed in English. Bringing together talent from across the diverse Indian population in Auckland, the plays discuss a range of social issues – a thief with principles, institutional double standards, meaningful yet forbidden relationships – with liberal lacings of humour and a few surprises.

Prayas has also developed its own work based on the experiences from within the community. In 2009, they created, *Khoj – The Search*, the story of the 12,000 kilometre journey of a young man from Colaba, Mumbai to Sandringham in Auckland. Using Canadian author Rohinton Mistry’s debut collection of stories, *Tales from Firozsha Bagh* as their inspiration, they held a series of theatre workshops with community members to incorporate local migration stories into the script. Says one character, “New Zealand has embraced us with open arms, given us our home. But it is a pity that that we still feel we are outsiders.”

A changing city...

About two thirds of all migrants from Asia to New Zealand settle in the greater Auckland area. Between 1986 and 2006, the Asian-born population in the Auckland region increased by about 50%. In the 2006 census, there were more than 75,000 people of Indian origin in the city of Auckland.

“At Prayas we believe that initiatives have to be taken by minority communities to integrate. [With Prayas] “…our aim is to build and enhance the community’s image and to engage the wider New Zealand society,” says Amit Ohdedar, the group’s Founder-President.

Success...

The first play performed by Prayas was *Habib Tanvir’s Charandaas Chor*, the story of a thief with principles. The show brought out more than 550 people (largely from the wider New Zealand community) for the performance. By the third production, a play called *Our Street*, the audience turn out had exceeded a thousand.

“The biggest success of Prayas is how it has managed to integrate with various community groups across New Zealand through the language of theatre. Emotions are universal, and Prayas and its theatre group portrayed this convincingly to an audience.” says Sudeepta Vyas, General Secretary and Producer of *The Terrace* (2007).

Prayas is also actively working to extend its reach and impact. The troupe itself now includes New Zealanders of various ethnicities, from South Asians, Pacific Islanders, Maori and Europeans. It is supported by numerous organizations, including the ASB Community Trust, the Asia New Zealand Foundation, Auckland City Council and Creative New Zealand.

In 2008, the Auckland City Council invited Prayas to join other ethnic arts groups to develop a play called *Our Street*, showcasing the city’s diversity. The Prayas contribution involved a story where two families, a North Indian and a Samoan, separately prepare for the weddings of their eldest daughters and the ensuing complications. The performance, held in the Auckland Town Hall, introduced multi-ethnic audiences to new cultures and music.

Prayas has also been recognized by the larger artistic community. In December 2010, the group was invited to perform as part of Random Acts of Christmas, an Auckland street theatre festival that included other companies from around the world. It gave Prayas the opportunity to perform for audiences that were more mainstream than their usual mix. It also allowed them to follow through on their initial inspiration: to reach out, share and integrate with the wider local population through theatre, music, song and dance.

*Upcoming plays include Rabindranath Tagore’s Rakta Karabi (Red Oleander) in November 2011 and Mahasweta Devi’s Rudali in May 2012 at The Auckland Performing Centre.*

Related Good Ideas:

- Leicester (United Kingdom): *Asylum Dialogues*
- Chicago (United States): *Youth on Stage: Real People, Real Stories, Real Community*
- The Hague (Netherlands): “City Mondial: Looking Forward from the Past”
- Oakland (United States): *A Soap Opera For Success: The Grand Cafe Telenovela*
- Paris (France): *Narratives of Belonging*
- Toronto (Canada): *Diaspora Dialogues: Writing the New City*
Chicago: Redrawing voting districts to favour minorities

By ktturner
March 9, 2011

Good Ideas We Are Watching, Political Inclusion, Spatial Inclusion

On March 7, 2011, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed the Illinois Voting Rights Act of 2011. The Act focuses on how Congressional and state legislative districts are drawn with emphasis on racial and language minority communities. It was approved by the State Senate (53-4) as well as the House of Representatives.

“Communities that have been divided into multiple districts will now be more united and thus better able to elect candidates who represent their interests,” says Lawrence Benito, Deputy Director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR).

The ICIRR says the Act recognizes how three types of districts that may be redrawn:

- “Crossover districts” where the minority is potentially large enough to elect the candidate of its choice with help from voters outside the minority;
- “Coalition districts” where minorities could form a coalition to elect the candidate of their choice; and
- “Influence districts” where a minority can influence an election outcome even if its preferred candidate cannot be elected.

Chicago’s Chinatown is one community that will benefit from the changes. The most recent census figures show that its population has increased by almost 40%. Currently, the community is split into three state senate and Congressional districts as well as four ward and state representative districts.

“Even though there are rapidly increasing numbers of Chinese voters and residents,” says CW Chan, Chair of the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC), “we are so cut up that our collective voting power, along with accountability of elected officials and attention to issues, are greatly diminished.”

Recognizing immigrant contribution

For Maria Pesqueira, ICIRR Board Vice president and Executive Director of Mujeres Latinas en Acción, the new legislation “shows that our elected officials value the contributions of immigrants and the need to support growing communities that are becoming more important to the political process and direction of our state.”

Source: Governor Quinn Signs Landmark Voting Rights Bill. The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

Connect to more Good Ideas:
- Advocacy
- Citizenship training
- Civic engagement
- Community building
- Media
- Political participation
- Volunteering
- Voting rights
Turin: Bibliomigra brings the library to the people

By ktturner
March 8, 2011

Once a week, a book-laden three-wheeler arrives at the Balon Flea Market in the Porta Palazzo, Europe’s largest open-air market. This is the Bibliomigra, a mobile lending library with 2,000 books circulating in 14 languages. Anyone can get a 'library card' – identity documents are unnecessary – and books can be loaned for two weeks.

The Bibliomigra caravan rolled forward in 2007 and stopped across six neighbourhood routes in Turin. Its collection contains books, newspapers and magazines in languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Albanian, Romanian, Hungarian, Russian, Italian, as well as in the Sicilian and Piedmont dialects. The project is a collaboration between the municipal library of Turin and the Associazione Arteria.

The Turin Library sees the Bibliomigra as one of its many ways to target migrant readers and describes it as a way to “facilitate active citizenship, intercultural encounter and exchange.” For residents interviewed by the Bibliomigra’s staff, the project’s success is about more than books:

“The first time I discovered Bibliomigra two years ago, I was really impressed – the people were so kind, open, no discrimination, no racial prejudice -they treated me like a Frenchman, like an Italian, with respect.

At home in Senegal, I have hundreds of books, I ‘ve always been a big reader, but I have not had a lot of formal education, Everything I’ve learned is through reading. These open, smiling people make it easy.”

Watch the video (in Italian):

More than books

Immigrant integration is particularly important in Turin. In inner city, historic districts like Borgo Dora / Porta Palazzo, the proportion of migrants has been reported to be as high as 50%. Launched in 2007 with support from the Campagnia di San Paolo, the project was originally designed to encourage the social use of public space and promote intercultural dialogue.

While regeneration activities redevelop play areas in neighbourhood parks and gardens elsewhere in the city, Bibliomigra is also creating public spaces to integrate the city’s youngest residents. In addition to its travelling bookshelves, the colourful caravan makes a natural backdrop for plays, puppet shows and dance performances.

Working solutions

Last year, a change in city government led to a cutback in services that have recently begun to be reversed. Arteria has revamped the Bibliomigra and now uses volunteers to keep the program going.

Despite such pressures, they also have new plans for the mobile lending library, including going carbon-free by using bike trailers and starting smaller “street libraries” led by community members.

This is another project that comes out of Turin’s The Gate economic development strategy which we profiled as a Good Idea, the Porta Palazzo and the Balon Flea Market. A Good Idea we will follow with interest.

For more information about the Bibliomigra:

- Bibliomigra Project at the City of Turin
- Bibliomigra – eine fahrende und mehrsprachige Bibliothek in Turin (in Bibliothekarisch.de, May 26,2010)
- Video: Bibliomigra / Arteria Associazione

Related Good Ideas:

- Turin, Italy: Porta Palazzo and the Balon Flea Market
Take One Hour Before Eating: Pharmacies in Translation

By kturner

February 8, 2011

Good Ideas We Are Watching, Health Inclusion

Community pharmacists are an essential service that we often take for granted. In New Zealand alone, they provide direct consultative advice to over 85 per cent of the population.

And while today’s medicines can prevent illness, cure serious diseases and control chronic conditions – all of this can only happen if the medications are taken correctly and with an complete understanding of unique needs of the patient. Yet the WHO estimates that 50 % of patients with chronic conditions do not properly follow their prescribed treatment.

In Auckland, community pharmacists realised that as the diversity of their client base was rapidly increasing, it would be even more difficult to ensure that all clients, including people with limited English, understood how to take their medication properly. To find a solution, they turned to their voluntary professional association, the Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand, to which 75% of community pharmacists belonged.

The Guild responded to the front line needs of their members by developing a research project with the help of the National School of Pharmacy at the University of Otago and identified six languages to focus their efforts. Following the feedback from their members, a basic list of phrases and questions was expanded to include another language (Hindi) as well as provide a comprehensive coverage of the questions, instructions and warnings often used in pharmacist-patient communication. General greetings in each of the languages were added to assist the pharmacist to establish verbal rapport with customers.

Launched in October 2008, the Pharmacy Translation Kit contains seventy-six words and phrases translated into Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Maori, Samoan and Tongan. It includes basic greetings, questions about medical history, information about prescriptions, instructions for using medicines and explanations about what medicines do.

For example, a phrase such as ‘Do not stop taking this medicine, even if you feel better’ is translated into each language, each colour-coded differently. The phrases are also divided into different categories to make them easy to find.

The Pharmacy Translation Kit was sent out to 150 pharmacies with the Chinese translations used most often. According to Pharmacy Guild President Ian Johnson, the project did help pharmacists break down the language barriers and get their message across. Despite its success, the Pharmacy Guild has not yet reprinted the kit, although it does plan scoping out further interest with members this year.

A professional association creating its own translation kit – now that’s definitely a Good Idea worth watching!

For further information, contact the Pharmacy Guild Of New Zealand at: membership(at)pgnz.org.nz.

Related Good Idea:

- Seattle (US): Interpreting Diversity in Healthcare
- Vancouver (BC): Promoting Healthy Living: The Multicultural Health Fair
- Auckland (NZ): Last Words: Cultural Approaches to Death and Dying
- London (UK): Dealing with Diabetes: The Maslaha Project
No more Doctors as Stone Masons! Recognition of the Qualifications of Immigrant Doctors and Nurses

By kturner
February 16, 2011
Employment Inclusion

When Alexandru Godina arrived in Portugal from Moldavia, the only work he could find was a stone mason despite his experience as an internist and head of a small-town clinic.

Yet, as with the rest of Portugal, the city of Lisbon has a shortage of qualified medical professionals.

And like most global cities, they also had hundreds of highly educated and underemployed immigrants like Godina, already living within the city, waiting for the chance to use their training and skills.

Many of these were doctors who had come from countries that did not qualify for automatic recognition of their degrees.

Since the recognition process involves financial, administrative and support barriers, many of these medical professionals were as a result, grossly underemployed and forced to work jobs that were not reflective of their training, ambitions or potential contribution to their new country.

Working Solutions

To bridge the gap between the lack of practicing doctors and immigrants whose skills are unrecognized, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation together with the Jesuit Refugee Services created the Professional Integration of Immigrant Doctors project. It was part of the foundation’s effort to involve more practical experimentation in the area of social and professional integration of immigrants.

The program ran from 2002 until December 2005 and had the goal of helping 120 immigrant doctors, not currently working in the medical profession, to transition back to their professional careers.

Since each of the doctors in the pool had a different background and unique challenges, the project subsequently provided each one with a tailor-made solution. However, all of the candidates still went through the following stages: candidate selection, gathering of all required documents, delivery of the documents to medical school; training period, final exam, and registration in the medial council and professional integration.

In addition to social support through the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the program also provided practical financial support to alleviate cost barriers for application and translation fees, textbooks as well as Portuguese language courses focused on technical medical terms that would help transition immigrant doctors into the Portuguese hospital environment.

The project also used strategic partnerships as a way to create the administrative and governance framework that would best support the project. For instance, through partnerships with migration services, the project was able to expedite the renewal of visas; with frequent contact with the medial council, they facilitated the bureaucratic process; and they used their contacts in the Ministry of Health to lobby to support the placement of these doctors in the labor market.

Building on Success

By the end of the project, almost 90% of the doctors (including Alexandru Godina) were practicing medicine again and as a result, contributing and integrating more fully into Portuguese society.

The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Jesuit Refugee Service used the pilot as a jumping off point to refine their ideas. In 2005, they started a new two-year program focused on the qualification of nurses with the help of the Amadora-Sintra Hospital and the Francisco Gentil Nursing College, incorporating lessons learned from the initial project. For instance, they added support for the individual nurse or doctor’s family to create a more successful and holistic integration. Another improvement features a more efficient and organized Portuguese language course since it was identified as a key factor for success.

However, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Jesuit Refugee Service realized that the only way to facilitate the long-term entrance of recognized doctors into the labour market and overcome administrative time gaps was through legislative and systematic changes that included agreements with both health institutions and the Ministry of Health.

By late 2008, the success of the previous projects led the national Ministry of Health to partner with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Jesuit Refugee Service, and fund a new program, the Professional Integration of Immigrant Doctors (PIPMI) that will matriculate -and integrate- another 150 immigrant doctors per session. In December 2010, the Foundation renewed its commitment to this groundbreaking programme for a third year (2011).

As Andre Jorge, Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, says, “This program is an example that can improve the lives of immigrants who come to us and simultaneously meet the needs of the country’s development.”
Ordinary Acts of Courage

By kturner
February 4, 2011

The Freedom From Fear Award is a new national award that honours ordinary people in American communities who commit extraordinary acts of courage on behalf of immigrants and refugees - individuals who have taken a risk, set an example, and inspired others to awareness or action.

In designing the award, founders Geri Mannion and Taryn Higashi took aim at the “unsung heroes” amongst us rather than professional advocates and organizations. The award shifts the story from the immigrant to the host community and the ordinary people and places where inclusion and integration take place - in schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces and city streets. It invites us to consider the give and take required of all parties, or the two-way dynamic of successful immigrant integration.

Freedom from Fear

The Freedom From Fear Award takes its name from former U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's famous “four freedoms” speech 70 years ago in which he outlined four fundamental freedoms that people “everywhere in the world” ought to enjoy:

- Freedom of speech and expression
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom from want
- Freedom from fear

Based on nominations from people “like you”, awardees will receive a $5,000 cash award. Nominations are now being accepted and the deadline for submission is February 28, 2011. Winners will be announced in the late spring of 2011.

Mannion and Higashi decided to donate the $10,000 cash prize accompanying the Scrivner Award to establish the Freedom From Fear Award. Since then 40 other individuals and foundations have contributed to help launch the award.

A Good Idea with legs! We look forward to the awardees and their stories of ordinary and “extraordinary” acts of courage.

Putting Justice to Work for Domestic Caregivers

By kturner
January 20, 2011
Uncategorized

Wanted: Caregiver for 24-hour on call service. Live-in. No time off. Restricted privacy and freedom of movement. Wages at less than minimum wage, non-negotiable.

Unfortunately for tens of thousands of domestic workers worldwide, this job description could be their own. In cities as modern as London, Vancouver or Lyons, domestic workers continue to find themselves in situations “disconnected to the millennia” as one concerned London neighbour described it.

Women like Rose, for example, had her passport immediately taken from her by her employer and against her will when she arrived in the UK from Africa to work as a nanny. Powerless and facing verbal and physical abuse, Rose was deprived of humane living and working conditions until she was able to escape with the help of a kind neighbour and seek assistance from Kalayaan, a registered charity that has provided advocacy and support services in the UK for migrant domestic workers since 1987.

Each year, more than 16,500 domestic worker visas are issued in the UK, and their recipients come to work as housekeepers, nannies, gardeners or cooks. While many of these workers are treated well, their isolation increases their dependence on their employers and contributes to a lack of understanding of their rights, leaving them open to potential abuse. Kalayaan is currently the only organization in the UK providing support services to migrant domestic workers.

Improving quality of life...

Kalayaan recognizes that domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitative practices and can face physical and psychological abuse, discrimination, low pay and long hours. Migrant domestic workers often speak little or no English and are made vulnerable by dependence on an employer for information about their job, their housing and their immigration status.

Kalayaan works with migrant domestic workers to overcome these barriers and improve their quality of life through free and confidential advice on immigration and employment, support in retrieving passports from employers, assistance in accessing healthcare and mainstream services, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, as well as practical emergency assistance to workers who have recently left abusive employers.

From April 2008 to the end of March 2009, 356 new migrant domestic workers registered at Kalayaan and approximately 1,000 formal advice sessions were given to new and existing service users. Kalayaan also serves as a sanctuary for workers who have recently left abusive employers.

“When workers come to us it is often the first time they have told their story to anyone,” Camilla Brown, Kalayaan’s community advocate, says. “They are very afraid, very emotional, and find it hard to trust that we are not part of the same system as their employers. Most believe that they are illegal.” Brown mentions, “A lot of the first couple of sessions is telling people that they don’t need to be afraid any more.”

A work in progress...

Kalayaan actively campaigns for justice for migrant domestic workers. Changing abusive practices is especially challenging when the worker has little status and no profile, and the employer is powerful. Last year, for example, Kalayaan identified over 20 cases of alleged trafficking involving diplomatic missions in London alone, a situation that received massive media coverage when exposed. In spite of its efforts to work with the police and the Home Office to raise awareness that it is illegal to take a worker’s passport, Kalayaan recorded an increase of 27% (from the previous year) of workers reporting that their passports have been seized by employers.

In many of these cases the workers have little knowledge of their immigration status and rights in the UK. Kalayaan efforts to actively promote a better understanding of worker rights and immigration information includes reaching out to migrant domestic workers, as well as to employers and the larger community.

Kalayaan also regularly conducts research to support its mission and policy goals. It has collaborated with Oxfam and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to request that the Low Pay Commission amend the National Minimum Wage legislation. Brown says, “We want to remove any doubt about domestic workers’ entitlement to access this basic protection.”

Kalayaan was one of five organizations identified by the Trust for London to inform its special initiative (2007-2010) on tackling forms of ‘modern day slavery’, including people trafficking. Each organisation provided a particular area of expertise whether it be adults, children, domestic workers or women in sexual exploitation. The Trust released its final report for this important work in December 2010: A Chance to be Free: Tackling Modern Day Slavery.

In partnership with COMPAS at Oxford University, Kalayaan recently researched the living and working conditions of migrant eldercare workers in private households (2009). They explored the ways in which these workers negotiate their employment and social relationship with their care user; the impact of race and racism on their experiences of employment; and make recommendations to promote the inclusion and greater support of migrant care workers.

This research was funded by the Big Lottery Fund, which also organizes outreach events with Kalayaan, including a series of one-day photography workshops providing migrant domestic workers with basic training in the use of digital cameras to help express their life narratives. Other sources of funding and support include Trust for London (formerly City Parochial Trust), Henry Smith Charity, Oak Foundation, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Tudor Trust, and the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

High Standards

Kalayaan is registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, meaning that the standard of its services is regularly monitored and has scope to affect change in UK policy and research sectors. Kalayaan is also providing critical insight to the UK Border Agency as a member of its steering group on overseas domestic workers.

The organization is creating change from the ground up, improving living and working standards for individual migrant domestic workers in the UK and earning the recognition it deserves. In December 2010, Kalayaan’s significant achievements were recognized with a Guardian Charity Award.

“I’m so thankful for having them in my life,” says J, a Filipina domestic worker who escaped physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her employer. “They gave me the confidence I needed.”
DiverseCity’s School for Civics

By klerner
January 13, 2011
Political Inclusion

Good Ideas Archive

Why does it matter who walks the corridors of power?

For Alejandra Bravo, the question goes to the heart of democratic institutions and values: “Elected leaders are powerful symbols of participation and inclusion and, for future generations, of what they can and cannot aspire to become.”

Leaders in public office have influence that goes far beyond their ability to affect government decision-making and policy development. Leaders signal who belongs and who doesn’t. As our representatives, they are – or should be – a reflection of who we are as a society.

A political junkie with 15 years of experience as a campaign volunteer and two-time city council candidate, Bravo is keenly aware that the city’s leadership in appointed and elected office does not reflect the diversity of Toronto, where nearly half the population is made up of visible minorities. No surprise then that participation at the ballot box by immigrants and visible minorities is lower than in any other group.

Toronto is Canada’s largest and famously multicultural city, but many groups are still excluded from playing a meaningful role in shaping their own, and their city’s future. According to Bravo, that was a problem that needed attention:

“There’s a cost when we fail to broaden inclusion and engagement. We are signaling to successive generations of racially and ethnically diverse youth that they are not fully part of society. When people feel they don’t belong, they feel disconnected from their surroundings. They don’t feel listened to and valued.”

Practical Solutions

In 2007, when Bravo approached the Maytree Foundation to pitch the idea of a “campaign school” to help community-based leaders in Toronto get involved in the political process, she found an organization with a long, successful record of promoting inclusion and diverse leadership in the GTA and across Canada.

For Maytree, changing the face of Toronto’s leadership was key to a brighter future for the whole city.

Leadership diversity pays dividends greater than just the inclusion of marginalized communities. Harnessing diversity helps drive competition and economic prosperity – in the workplace, in the boardroom and in the broader society.

Maytree’s leadership and integration programs had already identified some of the barriers that prevent newcomers and diverse cultural communities from active participation in the political process; for example, how to gain the tactical campaign knowledge that is generally learned through years of volunteering with candidates. Other barriers ranged from gaps in practical information to a lack of networks (particularly for those born outside of Canada) and access to media and media training.

To accelerate the rate of political inclusion, participants needed training to gain both technical skills and practical knowledge. In 2007, Maytree hired Bravo to develop and implement a pilot program to fill that gap.

Welcome to School4Civics

Maytree’s School4Civics (School for Civics) was launched as a non-partisan training program designed to build the capacity of a new generation of diverse civic and political leaders committed to making progressive social change.

Participants were selected based on their demonstrated commitment to social change, their involvement as a community volunteer and existing political and advocacy campaign experience.

The inaugural program focused on how to build long-term political power (beyond a single campaign), on planning strategically to increase political impact as well as acquiring the technical skills required to run a campaign. The six-month calendar also included training in interpersonal skills and network development.

The program’s expert faculty included political strategists, campaign managers and former candidates with front-line experience from a multi-party perspective. Training specifics included: framing your key messages, public speaking, campaign management, fund-raising, building coalitions and balancing personal and public life.

A year later, School4Civic’s success was folded into DiverseCity: The Greater Toronto Leadership Project, a three-year initiative launched in November 2008 by Maytree and the Greater Toronto Civic Action Alliance (formerly the Toronto City Summit Alliance). School4Civics became one of eight initiatives undertaken by DiverseCity to promote diverse leadership and the promise of a stronger, more prosperous city region.

School4Civics continues to adapt its programming to participant needs and opportunities in the political landscape. In 2009, it introduced e-learning events in a dynamic webinar format to increase participant access and initiated training for campaign managers. A key lesson was understanding that political inclusion and power is about more than the face on the campaign poster.

In 2010, the program focused on recruiting municipal campaign volunteers in preparation for the upcoming municipal elections. The curriculum was designed to ensure the workshops were sufficiently participatory and flexible enough to address different levels of skill and experience among participants. The goal was to make sure participants could get to the podium with a real understanding of the material.

Another DiverseCity initiative, DiverseCity Counts, raised the bar on accountability by conducting the first ever survey of diverse leadership across public, private and nonprofit sectors of the city. The 2009 benchmark showed just how far we still have to go for a just society. While the Greater Toronto Region’s population has 49.5% visible minorities, across the five municipalities studied the urban region has only 10% of its elected officials and 4% of senior leaders across all sectors.

‘What get’s counted, get’s done’ is the program’s call to action. Annual reports are tracking the city’s progress towards more representative leadership.

Measuring Up for Success

To date, School4Civics has trained 100 leaders. Fourteen candidates have registered to run for city council or school board. Two program graduates have graduated to become senior policy advisers to a mayoral candidate

All 2010 graduates worked on the recent municipal campaigns and 90% of all graduates have participated in a provincial or federal race or in a nomination contest since the start of the program. Together they have increased awareness of the lack of diversity in elected office, particularly in municipal government, and collectively they have raised public expectations for change by showcasing new candidates and leaders prepared to stand for elected office. And it has certainly received extensive media attention as well as interest from political parties.

As first time city councilor candidate and School4Civics graduate Louroz Mercader says, “Together we have created a movement of change for the future.”

In 2011, the School4Civics expects that even more alumni will be seeking nominations or otherwise participating in the Ontario provincial election. To support these broader efforts, School 4Civics is currently launching a new program focused on “Understanding political party nominations.” It is designed to help participants navigate the provincial nomination process to secure a riding.

DiverseCity School4Civics is working to ensure that our public leaders speak for all of us. By identifying and training diverse leaders to run or manage election campaigns, the program aims to ensure that the political process meets the needs of all Canadians.

Most importantly, the program goes beyond planning for a single campaign. DiverseCity School4Civics trains leaders to make a lifelong commitment to creating social change.
Karakia: Cooking Up Inclusion

By Evelyn

December 9, 2010

Living Together, Role of Media, Social Inclusion

Food and the rituals that surround it are an easy way to introduce new tastes, explore new cultures and make new friends. Sitting down to a shared meal establishes an immediate sense of commonality. Conversation is part of the sauce. While this can happen unintentionally, Televisió de Catalunya has put the spotlight on food as a deliberate tool to increase cultural understanding among the region’s diverse ethnocultural groups… and to boost programming back at head office.

New Migrations, New Kitchens

Spain’s northern province of Catalonia has a long history of migration, much of it from regions within Spain itself. However, the first decade of this century has brought the largest number of international migrant’s to the region in its history. In 2008, the foreign-born population reached one million persons, representing 15% of Catalonia’s total population and 21% of all international migrants in Spain as a whole.

Suddenly, many Catalans were living and working next door to people who spoke different languages, followed different customs and ate different food. This could either be an opportunity for new cultural experiences or a breeding ground for mistrust and suspicion.

At Televisió de Catalunya (TVC), it was an opportunity to explore new ideas and get a taste of the wider world. So, why not start in the kitchen.

Have A Seat

In the late 1990’s, TVC was looking for a way to establish increased connection with the ordinary people who were the mainstay of their popular local programming. This included a desire to tap potential audiences in the growing new immigrant population. They decided that food, the sort that people cook at home for their families on a day to day basis, would be the ideal way to make these connections work.

The result was Karakia, a cooking show that is filmed in a private homes and features recipes from the diverse communities that have come to Catalonia.

Launched in October 2001, the show has produced more than 100 episodes, featuring over 400 families from more than 90 different countries. Karakia has created a collection of over 700 recipes to add spice to their ongoing success. Culinary treats range from Turkish mezes to couscous from Senegal to brownies from the US.

Karakia has established itself as a positive and popular television show for ordinary and culturally diverse communities across the region. It also broadcasts a valuable counterpoint to how immigrant groups were being portrayed by the media. Instead of negative images of isolated individuals, Karakia showed immigrant families interacting in their homes with their neighbours and families, cooking and eating together, speaking Catalan, sharing stories about their cultures, local news or maybe just the price of oranges. Most importantly, it was a conversation shared with thousands of other viewers in Karakia’s audience.

Success

Karakia has become one of TVC’s most popular and widely viewed programs, averaging 185,000 viewers and a total screen share of 7.2%.

In 2004, Karakia it received an award from the City of Barcelona for “the skill and originality of the programming, which reflects the pluralistic and cosmopolitan image of the city… and, through the kitchen, the discovery of different cultural traditions of communities that have recently come to the country.”

It has also won the GAC Script Prize (2005), Catalan Viewers’ Zapping Prize (2008); Bronze Angel Communications Prize (2009).

The success of this pioneering program has become a model for other television shows increasingly eager to incorporate diversity and multiculturalism into their characters and storylines. The authenticity and cultural sensitivity of Karakia’s programming has also been recognized by educators who have worked with TVC to bring Karakia episodes into primary and secondary schools, as well as university classrooms, to teach their students about the diversity all around them. To give them a taste of real life.
Swimming to Safety

By Evelyn
December 8, 2010

Health Inclusion, Refugee Portal

You are never far from the water in New Zealand. With 15,134 km of coastline and spectacular rivers, lakes, sounds, straits and fjords, waterside diversions are one of the nation’s key attractions.

Across the Auckland urban region, you can explore two diverse coastlines, three major harbours (the Manukau, the Waitemata and the Kaipara), over 10,000 kilometres of streams, two thermal springs as well as numerous lakes.

Naturally, local residents of all ages enjoy a range of recreational activities including swimming, rockfishing, boating and other water sports.

Water safety and drowning prevention is a key issue for the whole Auckland region but none more so than for its refugee and new migrant communities.

Community Action

Drowning was identified as the major cause of accidental death for new settler populations in the Auckland region (2004-2008). The city’s growing population of newcomers presents a whole new set of challenges when it comes to keeping its residents and others safe in, on and around water.

“With 39% of Aucklanders born overseas, and coming to New Zealand without the same water safety culture and experiences that ‘kiwis’ have developed, it is important to target migrant communities to ensure we build a water safety culture across our region,” says Teresa Stanley, Business Manager, WaterSafe Auckland.

To address the over-representation of the migrant population in the regional drowning statistics, in 2008 WaterSafe Auckland (WAI) established the New Settler Water Safety Reference Group and embarked on a programme of community education initiatives that put cultural safety alongside issues like drowning prevention, water safety promotion and public education.

New Settler Water Safety Reference Group

Working alongside both migrant organizations and other swimming and water safety organizations, such as Surf Life Saving and coastguard organizations, the New Settler Water Safety Reference Group created a platform for organizations and individuals working with new migrants and refugees to share expertise, ideas and resources.

“Organizations and individuals must work together to build safe communities,” says WaterSafe Auckland CEO Sandy Harrop.

This cross-sector approach has resulted in culturally appropriate swimming and water safety programmes, resources and workshops that are tailored to community needs. The collaboration has helped create messages that are consistent, streamlined and accessible across the community. WaterSafe Auckland also works with community providers including libraries, churches and migrant groups to avoid duplication of resources and to ensure resources are distributed widely across all sectors of the new migrant communities.

“Many Asian people don’t have a concept of water safety. I think the promotion of water safety has to be continued. There are many functions/meetings in Asian society, I think we should go inside their society so the messages of water safety and rock fishing will spread.” (Kam Kammie, Youth Leader St John, Newmarket and member Chinese NZ Youth Trust)

Success

WaterSafe Auckland was formed in 1994 and is recognized regionally as the coordinating body for water safety activities in the Auckland region. Its partnerships with a wide range of organizations have resulted in innovative and effective programming. Here are a few examples.

The ESOL Water Safety Teaching Kit (2008) supports the language needs of students at international language schools and ESOL departments across the region, along with workshops and ongoing support for their tutors. Teaching resources are distributed to 130 international schools.

Learn to swim courses are offered to refugee communities through the New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) Refugee Swim programme and water safety workshops are provided at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre. School holiday programmes are also offered to refugee children, who, coming from land-locked countries, often have little or no aquatic experience.

Muslim Women-Only Swimming sessions are held in two Auckland locations on weekends in partnership with the Auckland Regional Public Health Service and Refugees as Survivors. Evaluation from these sessions has highlighted the benefits for women in this community to be able to participate in physical activity and socialize outside their homes.

A New Settler Water Safety DVD produced by WAI in collaboration with WaterSafety New Zealand and the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), aims to assist those in the New Settler and Asian communities in becoming more aware of safe practices in and around water. The DVD is viewable in English, Chinese, Cantonese and Korean. These popular bilingual guides in ACC’s ThinkSafe series in Korean-English and Chinese-English are now being produced in Arabic, Farsi, Hindi, Japanese, Somali and Vietnamese. These are currently in PDF format and can be downloaded from WaterSafe Auckland website.

Saving Lives

The combination of these efforts may be reflected in the declining of drowning statistics for Asian groups, which was dropped from a high of 13 percent of New Zealand’s drowning toll in 2004 to only 3 percent in 2007 and 5 percent in 2008.
Over the past five years WaterSafe Auckland has led the delivery of water safety education to schools and community to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse urban region. New Mayor, Len Brown, and the new 'super city' will soon be taking the success of this local initiative across the newly integrated Greater Auckland region.
Listen Up! Making a Business Case for Diversity

By kturner

December 17, 2010

Role of Media

Whether it’s in their cars, offices or homes, from 5:30 – 8:30 am, all over the city, people in Toronto start each day listening to CBC Radio’s Metro Morning.

Nearly a million listeners tune in each week, to hear host Matt Galloway and Metro Morning’s unique mix of news, views, city events, music, traffic, weather, and local community stories.

Metro Morning is the number one morning radio show in Toronto and it has been, for the past eight years.

But that wasn’t always true.

In 2001, when Susan Marjetti became the new manager of CBC radio 99.1 Toronto, Metro Morning was number 4 in Toronto. The audience was largely older, audience growth was stagnant, and new and younger listeners were not coming to the station.

Susan correctly diagnosed the issue. Toronto had changed. But CBC had not.

A call to action

Today, more than half of Toronto’s population was born outside of Canada. However, things looked very different in 1961 when Toronto’s population had a diversity mix of only 3%.

Thirty years later, that trend was taking off and marketing intelligence was sounding a clear warning: update your product brand and messages or get left behind.

Metro Morning was at risk of becoming irrelevant.

The former Vice-President of CBC Radio, at that time, summed it up this way: “If we don’t get this right, we’ll be a precious emblem to a dying elite.”

In February 2002, Susan and her team set out to contemporize the program.

Moving Forward

Susan’s mission then and now was to “connect and reflect the city”. The goal was to be more relevant to more people and grow audience for Canada’s public broadcaster in Canada’s largest city.

Armed with audience and market research, she put together a multi-disciplinary “transformation team” to re-design the local program concepts and formats starting with morning and afternoon drive.

She galvanized her team by launching the change process with a single question: “Do we look and sound like Toronto today in all its richness and diversity? ”

The answer was “no”.

Across the city, Susan and her team organized a series of speaker events and staged editorial panels were organized to bring community leaders and speakers together to inform and educate their thinking. Not everyone was a fan of the public broadcaster. One female respondent said, “I don’t listen to the CBC – you’re old, you’re white, you’re male and you’re worried.”

Over the course of the next six months, the Toronto “Transformation team” met on and off, to completely re-imagine the morning show’s mandate, and programming.

Success… But Not Overnight

In September 2002 the CBC launched a new version of Metro Morning with one over-arching goal: to be more relevant to more Torontonians by looking and sounding like the city it represented—in all its diversity.

It did sound diverse.

Reaction was swift and not all of it was positive. Within a few months, Metro Morning dropped in the (BBM) ratings (Dec 2002).

One year later, Metro Morning would go to number one for the first time in its history (Dec 2003). Metro Morning has been the top rated morning show in Toronto 26 times since then. (Both BBM and PPM audience results)

Looking back at this challenging transition period, Marjetti advises, “You need to be clear about the vision and values. You need be confident and stay the course. And you need to build a great team”.

Business Case for Success

“Radio is ultimately an ideas business,” says Susan. “If you want to change the ideas at the story meeting table, you have to expand the range of perspectives at that table”.

The transformation team strategy really took off when it moved inside the broadcasting organization to look at CBC hiring and recruitment practices. In 2001, the CBC Toronto team had a 2% diversity rate. Today, CBC Toronto, locally, is 25-percent diverse.

CBC Toronto is an industry leader in Canada. It is recognized internationally for its success in addressing diversity issues across the country and the institutional spectrum.
Four out of the five local Toronto radio program hosts are themselves from diverse backgrounds. More importantly, half of the CBC’s local Toronto station leaders reflect the diversity of the communities they represent. Metro Morning has doubled its audience reach in the coveted 35-49 year old demographic that drives the city's economic growth and vitality.

**Good Ideas travel**

What CBC learned with its local morning radio show in Toronto, informed the national strategy as well.

The CBC’s business case for diversity continues to drive audience ratings and market reach – a classic success story that has become a business case taught by the Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario.

CBC Toronto is now expanding its highly successful audience growth strategy in local radio to the local Toronto supper hour news, as well.

**Update**

In May 2011, the show won two Radio and Television News Director Awards (RTNDA) for Best Information program and the Diversity Award for a radio townhall (“Turning point: Talking about Violence in the South Asian community”). Metro Morning has now been the top rated morning show in Toronto 31 times since the change (PPM audience results).

The local supper hour newscast on CBC Television hired Dwight Drummond and Anne-Marie Mediwake, who are described as “Canada’s first and only diverse anchor team,” in October 2010. Both come from immigrant families and CBC audience research says that the 25-54 audience has increased by 57% since they started.

**Related Ideas:**

- **CBC Sports and Diversity:** Interview with Kim Clark, Director, Inclusion & Diversity, at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in Toronto, with CBC Sports colleagues Joel Darling and Saphia Khambalia
- Calgary (Canada): [Hockey Night In Canada – In Punjabi!](#)
- Boston (USA): [MIRA: Media Advocacy With A Human Face](#)
- The Hague, 2010 Cities of Migration Conference: [Media Lessons for Local Leaders](#)
  - Media Panel: Migration and the Media – [Video Summary](#)
  - Media Panel: Migration and the Media – Part 1 of 4 (video)
Timing, Tempo and Beat: Youth and Community

By kturner
November 25, 2010

Many community-based programmes reach out to disadvantaged youth. However, the Tiempo Joven programme does what few others dare. Tiempo Joven involves young people directly in the planning, management and financial operations of its programmes.

The kids are in charge and they’re doing a great job.

Translated loosely as “Young Time”, the programme was launched in April 2003 by the Fundación Tomillo in the Orcasur neighbourhood of Madrid to address gang violence and isolation among young immigrants living in areas with few resources. Tiempo Joven offers neighbourhood youth an opportunity to create and participate in workshops that reflect their interests. This includes activities ranging from rap music to percussion, break-dancing, theatre and radio.

By involving youth at every level of the programme design, from implementation to the budget, the programme helps participants develop confidence, a sense of community investment, and transferable skills.

All this happens while engaging youth in their favourite activities, such as the performances of young rappers Taller de Hip-Hop in Rapsodas in Barrio (see video, below). No wonder that the success of the programme’s unique approach has now been replicated in four other districts around the city.

Coming Together for Change

Just over 13% of Madrid’s population is made up of immigrants, the second highest total percentage in the country, and approximately 14.7% are children or adolescents. Most live in crowded and dilapidated neighbourhoods in the south of Madrid.

The Orcasur neighbourhood where Tiempo Joven was first launched is the poorest district in Madrid and has some of the highest rates of unemployment, school failure and crime. Most of the immigrants in this area are from Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Morocco. Crowded housing and the lack of local resources creates a sense of overarching dislocation amongst these young people and makes them particularly vulnerable to gangs, (especially those that divide along cultural or racial lines).

To meet these challenges, Tiempo Joven uses innovative recruitment strategies and a unique participatory approach to bring youth from these conflicting groups together around a concrete, shared goal.
Since access to information is limited within this group and in these areas, for example, mobile workshops are set up throughout the community to reach and enroll young people in the programmes.

Once enrolled, participants are treated like council delegates and are invited to participate in the development of the programmes they hope to be involved with. At the heart of this model is the Council of Young Social Entrepreneurs, composed of representatives from all the workshops. Representatives are responsible for organising activities, calling meetings, resolving conflicts, making proposals and managing programme costs. The Council members also act as formal representatives for young people in the district.

This strategy has resulted in an unprecedented level of citizen engagement among neighbourhood youth and, along the way, public spaces have been reclaimed as community meeting spaces.

Success

In the past seven years, more than 3,200 young people from over 16 different nationalities have taken part in the Tiempo Joven programme.

Today, these formerly vulnerable and at-risk young adults can share an experience of success and a sense of control over their lives and circumstances instead of remaining "victims" and passive beneficiaries of help at society’s margins.

Programme participants take with them the ability to organise themselves, to analyse projects and to resolve the conflicts they identify in their neighbourhoods. The outcomes of their work – from theatre performances, solidarity markets, intercultural cooking competitions all contribute to creating a community that is friendlier, more habitable and welcoming to cultural diversity.

Tiempo Joven’s success has been recognized by local private funding from the Iberdola Foundation and the Fundación Sara María as well support from all three levels of Spanish government: the Ministry of Education (the central government), the Department of Education (the regional government) and the General Directorate of Immigration (the municipal government of Madrid).

Tiempo Joven Inmigración y Ciudadanía project was recognised with an award at the 6th UN Habitat Good Urban Practices Competition in 2006.
On the Front Lines of Integration

By kturner
November 9, 2010

Employment Inclusion, Municipal

Police play a unique role in society that requires that they understand the needs and opinions of the community they serve and protect.

When the community trusts and respects the police force, it makes the relationship stronger and more effective for both.

In the district of Fuenlabrada, on the outskirts of Madrid, the local police service is actively working to incorporate these principles into practical measures that will increase social cohesion and trust.

Located just 20 km south of Madrid, Fuenlabrada has a young population of 205,000 that is reflective of the rapid demographic change in the area. Over 30.4% of the population is under 25 and over 16% of the population is made up of non-Spanish nationals. The largest groups of immigrants come from Morocco, Ecuador and Romania.

Between 2000 and 2005 the population of newcomers to the region more than tripled.

City leaders realized that to create a positive environment for immigrant integration and to reduce discrimination, more needed to be done.

With the support of municipal delegations, the Madrid City Council launched a master Plan for Social and Intercultural Co-Existence. The plan was recently renewed (and will now run from 2009-2012).

It was the involvement of community organizations like the police that helped to make this Plan into a reality.

The police: the front lines of integration

The Fuenlabrada Police have long-recognized that public agencies should reflect the communities they serve. They have developed a proactive approach that works internally to increase diversity, and externally to build community relations.

Building on existing initiatives to recruit women into policing, the force now offers free training to minorities and the children of minorities who are interested in joining the Fuenlabrada Police services (and who meet the basic eligibility requirements).

Internally, the force supports this outreach by offering cultural awareness and diversity training to all its officers.

To increase community trust and build relations with diverse communities, the Fuenlabrada Police provide information sessions on understanding Spanish law and legal process to help newcomers appreciate both their rights and obligations. To ensure that their approach would be both effective and meaningful, the Fuenlabrada Police also created a community forum convened with representation from rights organizations, religious groups and diverse communities.

This evolved into a monthly consultative forum that allows the police to check in regularly with the community to identify emerging issues and discuss ongoing concerns such as how to standardize community policing procedures to minimize discrimination.

To increase awareness of these efforts, the police have also made this information available in Romanian, Arabic, English and Spanish, and rolled it into a larger multi-language public information campaign aimed at helping citizens understand their rights.

From local to global

In June 2010, the success of these community consultations resulted in the launch of a Manifesto for the Police Management of Diversity by the Fundación Secretaria do Gitano, the Fundación Pluralismo y Convivencia, the Open Society Justice Initiative and the Unión Nacional de Jefes y Directivos de Policía Local (Unijepol); with the participation of Amnesty International as an observer organization. The Manifesto establishes recommendations for positive actions to help police services reflect the diversity of the society they serve while promoting public safety

In addition, the signatory organisations have agreed to create a Platform for the Police Management of Diversity which will be open to any community agency interested in helping local police authorities become more open and responsive to Madrid’s diverse society, and ensuring its most vulnerable minority groups receive equal treatment from the police.

The actions of the Fuenlabrada Police are now part of a larger global initiative. Across Spain participants include the Local Police of Girona, the Catalan police, the Police School of Catalonia and the Local Police Academy of the Community of Madrid. The UK Ministry of the Interior is also involved, as are the London Metropolitan Police, the Police in Leicester County, the National Police and police Academy of Hungary and the Ministry of Interior.
The Key To France: Not All Roads Lead to Paris

By kturner
September 30, 2010
Living Together New Gateways Refugee Portal

When Anouka arrived in France as a refugee, she, like most newcomers to France went to live in metropolitan Paris.

Immigrants and refugees naturally tend to concentrate in urban centres.

The reason?

City centres such as Paris provide more of a shared cultural community and in the short term, seem to offer more employment and resource opportunities.

Currently, more than 40% of all French immigrants live in the Paris metropolitan area. This includes 180,000 asylum seekers and refugees granted humanitarian protection. Paris is also home to 41% of asylum seekers and 51% of all refugees living in France.

In general, these immigrants tend to be concentrated in the outer margins or banlieue of the city.

The result is a high population density that compounds the difficulties of settlement, making it more difficult to find housing and employment. It also prevents the host community from being able to fully benefit from the skills and talents of these newcomers.

The goal of the Key To France project is to address this imbalance.

By encouraging immigrants to settle in geographic areas with skills shortages and more accessible housing, newcomers have greater access to housing and employment opportunities. The Key to France mobility projects allow migrants who previously encountered difficulties integrating into the host society to have an increased opportunity to reach a stable social, familial and professional situation. Having a stable job and their own flat also contributes to better recognition and relationships with the host society.

Encouraging newcomers to settle outside of Paris is also part of the solution to the employment needs being experienced in areas with a scarcity of local workforce. Places such as Chaumont, Melun and Saint Denis that have declining working age populations and that are in need of the skills that immigrants, like Anouka can provide.

Background…
The Key to France project was launched in 2004, by France Terre d’Asile a non-governmental organization advocating the rights of migrants since 1971. Today, there are 31 centres around the country providing accommodation and counselling for asylum seekers and helping them to find the regions where their skills are most needed.

Unique to the Key to France project is the holistic and personalised approach that they take to settlement.

After an interview to assess the candidates current situation, the programme staff compile an individual mobility plan for the participant.

Next, participants learn about the region where their skills are needed and receive contacts for employment and housing opportunities. Some participants may also be directed to professional training to further their career prospects.

The process of relocation takes 4 -5 months on average, so Terre d’aisle also provides a loan or aid to participants to help with their move.

Post arrival staff will follow up to check on their adjustments into their new homes and communities.

Success…

Since the beginning, more than 500 newcomers have completed their mobility plan and started the process of making smaller cities into new gateways for immigrants and refugees throughout France.

With each person that is resettled, there is the opportunity to share the benefits of immigration in previously overlooked towns and cities.
Welcome Back to a Healthier Community

By kturner

Employment Inclusion
Health Inclusion

Dr. Maria Ait Rais, a medical doctor from Morocco, arrived in San Francisco in 2005. She had been in the US for just one week when she came to the San Francisco Welcome Back Center. She had previously practiced medicine for two years but now, new to the Bay Area and with very limited English, medicine no longer seemed like an option. She spent the first two years studying English; then she focused her time preparing for the licensure exams – with a dictionary at hand – while being a mother to her newborn son.

Dr. Ait Rais' story is a familiar one for internationally trained health professionals in cities across the United States. Highly skilled talent is wasted while a critical shortage of minority representation in community health care (from nursing, pharmacology, dental hygiene, respiratory therapy, psychology and social work, to name a few) leaves many communities under-served.

A local issue, with broader implications

In 2004, Dr. Louis Sullivan, former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, tabled a report which concluded that, “the lack of minority health professionals in America is compounding the nation’s persistent racial and ethnic health disparities.”

A startling example of the situation Sullivan describes is seen in the state of California where the Latino population comprises 31% of the total population, but represents only 4% of nurses and 4% of physicians throughout the state. The services and treatment that health care professionals provide are based on their skill and ability to interpret and diagnose the needs of their patients. In newcomer and diverse communities, this often means navigating linguistic and cultural barriers that can reduce effective communication and limit health literacy.

Enter the Welcome Back Initiative, a project started in San Francisco that is helping internationally trained health professionals use their skills while addressing these essential health gaps in community health care.

Welcome Back

The Welcome Back Centers offer assistance to internationally trained health professionals. Orientation services, in-depth educational case management and vocational support are among the services provided and are all designed to help these professionals navigate complicated licensure and certification systems so that their professional skills can be put to use in the job market in an appropriate and productive way.

“We see our work as building a bridge between untapped resources and unmet needs,” says the programme’s founder. Dr. José Ramón Fernández-Peña.

The services are all free, offered in multiple languages (e.g. English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Russian) and available to all foreign trained health professionals living in the Center’s service area.

Staff at the Welcome Back Centers offer individually tailored support to their participants. A new participant begins with an initial interview during which basic demographic information is collected. This is followed by an in-depth appointment with an educational case manager who reviews their professional and educational experience. The educational manager then provides information and guidance about licensing requirements, credential validation agencies, health-related programmes and when needed referrals to English language courses.

The Welcome Back Centers also offer workshops and other group activities such as licensing study groups which serve as peer networking and professional support opportunities. The Welcome Back Centers have test preparation lending libraries for participants to be able to borrow books and materials that would be otherwise expensive to purchase.

Success

Success travels well. The Welcome Back Center model has been replicated in nine US cities in eight states including California, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maryland, Washington, Texas, New York, and Colorado. These centers currently comprise the Welcome Back Initiative.

Over 10,500 health care professionals have been served through the Welcome Back Initiative and thousands are in the process of obtaining the licenses and certificates they need to share their skills and experience with their local communities.

To date, over 2,435 participants have validated their credentials, 1,447 have passed their licensing exams and 839 obtained licenses in their original professions. Over 460 have obtained advancement in their health careers and 1,540 obtained employment in the health sector for the first time. In addition, 87 physicians have been accepted into residency training programmes.

This includes Dr. Maria Ait Rais who, with the assistance of the Welcome Back Center first began volunteering in the healthcare sector, then became a research assistant at the Children’s Hospital in Oakland, and in July of 2010, after acing her licensure exams, began her medical residency. “The Welcome Back Center is a place where an immigrant can come for support and where you can feel like you can accomplish your goals.”

To help support this replication, the Welcome Back Initiative has developed materials that will allow other jurisdictions to more easily duplicate their success.
"As we've begun to see results, we've learned that there are larger structural elements that affect what we do," says Dr. Fernández-Pería.

To advance systematic change, the Welcome Back Initiative is now also working with policymakers and other partners to reduce the structural barriers that prevent internationally trained health professionals from practicing in the United States. This includes working with educators, regulators, employers and legislators to identify opportunities to expedite licensing processes while ensuring that professional standards are maintained.
London: Making Museums A Hub For Integration

By Evelyn
September 1, 2010

Cultural Inclusion Living Together Refugee Portal

Museums have an important role to play in connecting communities and showcasing stories. However, most exhibits are still generally curated without the involvement of the community or culture that they depict.

This year, in celebration of Refugee Week, the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London, took a different approach. For Refugee Week, the Museum offered visitors an opportunity to see the V&A collection from the perspective of a refugee through unique tours of Museum galleries guided by refugees from around the world. Refugees from Rwanda, Burma, Iraq, Somalia, Darfur, and Uganda presented collections from the Museum's galleries as springboards for their own personal stories and experiences.

Clare Paul, V&A's ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and Arts Education Officer, created these tours in 2007 to engage refugee communities and help break down cultural misconceptions. How? By inviting refugees to act as cultural interpreters and tell their own stories. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. As Clare Paul notes, “People are very engaged. They're connecting with the refugees... and that's changing attitudes. The tours are an opportunity to see the world through someone else's eyes.”

The volunteer tour guides also were enriched by their experiences. Fayhha Abdulwahab, a refugee from Iraq who led her own tours, states, “When I remember what happened to me I feel bitterness in my soul. But when I see people listening and sympathizing, it helps remove it. I feel that there’s hope in humanity.”

Visitors were also able to create their own artwork in workshops led by refugee artists from around the world. Workshops included poetry, an Afghan kite workshop, and an “Ayacucho Peruvian Retablo” (brightly coloured decorative story box) workshop. These workshops allowed museum visitors to explore how stories and memories are collected and can be expressed through art and how to connect their own personal experiences to their work.

The museum also offered one-hour “taster” classes on the diverse languages spoken by refugees in London. These short lessons included Luganda (Uganda), Somali (Somalia), Karen (tribal language spoken by the Karen of Burma), and Kinyarwanda (Rwanda).

Performance opportunities were as varied as they were diverse. Over the course of the week, visitors were treated to musical performances ranging from Salsa and Congolese Rumba to Balkan rock and folk. An architectural exhibit examining notions of refuge and retreat was used as a backdrop to a series of short performances of drama, movement, and song by young refugees and asylum seekers from the Pan Intercultural Arts Future and Fortune Groups.

The successes of the V&A's Refugee Week highlights the important role museums can play in recognizing the contribution of different communities to a city's cultural heart. In this case raising cultural awareness through active participation also means breaking down barriers and challenging prejudice.

Other Resources:

Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) Website
Taking the Swedish National Diversity Plan to School

By kturner
May 25, 2011
Education Inclusion Municipal

In a classroom in Malmö, Sweden a group of 15-year-old boys are standing on their chairs laughing and shouting as they work together to navigate their way across the classroom. The group is made up of a mix of immigrant and Swedish born students and the teachers are similarly diverse.

Welcome to the Swedish diversity plan, a national vision that is being implemented locally in schools with internationally recognized results.

Until the 1950’s, Sweden’s integration policy was characterized by an intense pressure towards assimilation. No longer. Now, a pluralistic, multicultural commitment to integration is legally enshrined in framework legislation that includes the National Action Plan for Human Rights 2006-2009, the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Xenophobia, Homophobia and discrimination (2000) and the seminal Government Bill, Sweden, the Future and Diversity: from Immigration Policy to Integration Policy (1997). This last piece of legislation positioned diversity as a starting point for the formation and implementation of new policies in all sectors and levels.

Schools: The Hub of Integration

The population of Sweden is approximately nine million. About 1.5 million residents were either born outside Sweden or were born to immigrant parents. The majority of this group live in the country’s three largest cities: Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. Of these, the City of Malmö has the highest population of immigrants (37.3 %).

While the Swedish national government has established the broad framework for diversity and integration, it is local governments, especially schools, who are developing and implementing the programs that will make it a reality.

In Malmö, schools are the natural hub for integration. Unlike many other Swedish cities, Malmö has a particularly young population: 47% of its inhabitants are less than 35 years old. This is predominantly due to immigration: 50% of children living in Malmo have parents who are foreign born.

The focus of these programs is the promotion of both Swedish and native language skills as well as subject lessons (particularly math) offered in their respective native languages. Every child and young person is entitled to additional language support for studying Swedish. Special teaching methods designed for multicultural learners are applied to take students of migrant origin to same language skill level as their native Swedish peers.

Also immigrant children and young people are taught in their native language 2 hours peer week since learning support in individual subjects in their native language is a legal entitlement for every student.

A Welcoming Learning Environment

"We do not discuss whether or not teachers should be allowed to wear a headscarf. Our concern is, rather, whether we have enough teachers wearing headscarves," explains a spokesman for the Ministry of Education.

This approach is part of the recognition that diversity is a resource and an asset. On behalf of the Swedish national government, Malmö schools have also developed and implemented a Diversity Plan. Its main initiatives emphasize language development and language competence; they target 32 communities with large proportions (above 18 percent) of children and young people of migrant origin.

As part of their support for the Diversity Plan, Malmö schools also support "ideas schools" for diversity. This involves a network of model primary school educators that work together to develop strategies for successful diversity management in education. This includes after school mentoring programs and programs for parent cooperation.

For older students (those in upper secondary schools) Malmö has a Diversity Group. It is made up of students from schools across the City who meet regularly with educators, sociologists and others to find ways to cooperate on issues of diversity and particularly to tackle segregation at schools. The schools have also collaborated with local businesses to create opportunities for students to take part in work placement assignments.

Other initiatives in Malmö schools include: mentoring projects for teachers and students, advanced classroom management training for teachers, increased reading competency through reading groups, and regular teacher training on these issues.

Success: Shared

In Sweden, about 14 percent of students are of migrant origin. However, according to data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Swedish migrants have an overall high level of educational attainment. In fact, second-generation immigrant students attain much better results than their Swedish born peers.
For instance, the proportion of students to qualify for upper secondary education is high for those of migrant origin (approximately 77 percent) as for Swedish students (approximately 90 percent).

The Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) also ranked Sweden first out of 31 countries in the category of education.

Malmö’s experience and success in the field of educational diversity has been recognized both nationally and internationally. In Sweden, additional funding was specifically given to the Malmö Center for Diversity in Education so that the city could share its expertise at a national level.

In 2008, in recognition for its work in promoting social integration and improving equal learning opportunities at schools, the City of Malmo was shortlisted as a nominee for the Carl Bertelsmann Prize. Since 1988, the German Bertelsmann Foundation offers this annual award to honour innovative policies addressing key global challenges.
Gateway to Little Burma

By kturner
June 1, 2010
Civic Inclusion Living Together Municipal Refugee Portal

What US city is now home to the largest population of Burmese refugees?

It would be understandable if what comes to mind is New York, Miami, San Francisco or Chicago.

Try again.

The city is Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, one of America’s new “gateway cities”.

Gateway cities are smaller, mid size cities that are becoming target destinations for new immigrants. While their size might make them more welcoming, they often have less established infrastructure and fewer existing services to assist with integrating immigrants into the community.

The City Fort Wayne has a long history of welcoming immigrants. However, the needs of the recent Burmese population are quite different than the city’s founding immigrant communities.

Many arrive in Fort Wayne fleeing political and religious persecution. Often they have spent years in refugee camps in Thailand, without meaningful education or employment opportunities. Most speak very little English on arrival and are completely unfamiliar with American culture.

The City of Fort Wayne recognized that more proactive and directive measures would be needed to enable these newcomers to successfully establish themselves. Fort Wayne has since been uniquely successful in collaborating with the federal government, third party organizations as well as the local and national religious and immigrant serving agencies, in order to advance this agenda.

Welcome to Fort Wayne
Fort Wayne has 250,000 residents, nearly 6 percent of which are foreign born. While this is still half the national average, the Burmese arrivals doubled these figures during peak years in 2007 and 2008 against the backdrop of a fierce national debate on immigration reform.

Fort Wayne is no stranger to diversity. Historically called the City of Churches, a nickname going back to the late-1800s when the city was the hub of regional Catholic, Lutheran, and Episcopal faiths, Fort Wayne boasts a culture of religious tolerance and intercultural dialogue. Religious organizations like Catholic Charities offer resettlement services, and liaise with other community agencies to ensure needs are met.

Today Fort Wayne’s newcomer community reflects the religious diversity of Burma itself, in this case a mix of Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. The New York Times has even run an article on Fort Wayne’s ‘temple boom.’

**Language and the police**

The influx of Burmese-speaking people to Fort Wayne has city officials and volunteers working on ways to help the immigrants communicate better with emergency workers. Volunteer Rick Piatt has a class of eight Burmese adults learning English in which they play out police and fire-related scenarios. That includes explanations about descriptions are important to police when there is a missing child or when someone is the victim of a crime.

While citizenship issues make it difficult to find police officer candidates among the Burmese immigrants, other reasons include a well-founded mistrust of authorities.

“They’re all afraid of police in [Burma],” explains Nyein Chan, Director of the Catholic Charities resettlement program. “I tell them they pay for the police [with their taxes] and need to call them in an emergency.”

Nyein Chan was himself a refugee from Burma who arrived in Fort Wayne in the mid 1990’s. Today, Chan directs weekly orientation sessions for new refugees in Fort Wayne. Most refugees to the US receive a three day orientation session by the U.S. State Department before leaving the refugee camps. Those arriving in Fort Wayne will receive additional instruction on health, citizenship, public services, education, employment, laws and other aspects of American life.

The meeting opens with a Karen-language video produced by the Department of State. Speaking in Burmese, Nyein Chan explains the dozens of things the refugees will need to know to get their lives started in this country. Some are official, bureaucratic necessities: knowing where to go, who to ask for and what sort of help is available. Other lessons are more unique.

For example, when encouraging his clients, Nyein Chan reminds them that their self-sufficiency indirectly benefits those still living in the refugee camps. If a community adapts well, he argues, immigration officials will be more likely to accept more people from the same group.

**Being Counted Towards a Shared Future**

Fort Wayne recognized the launch of the US Census Decennial campaign in 2009 as an opportunity to make the city both more inclusive and fiscally sustainable.

In the 2000 Census, the recorded Burmese population for all of the United States was 18,000, far below accepted estimates.

The low result meant that the Burmese community did not attain the required population threshold to qualify for government assistance. This includes benefits such as Burmese language versions of government forms and tests, translation services, and the ability to qualify for grants, aid and scholarships from foundations and the government.

Census data provides more than a demographic profile. It also determines political representation (via congressional districts), and the allocation of more than $300 billion USD annually to state, local and tribal areas. Accurate reporting of local newcomer data can increase the level of state and federal funding the city receives to support essential programs.

Being counted also has an important symbolic value. Census participation is a form of representation and a good indicator of the civic engagement of newcomer communities.

The City of Fort Wayne established a Complete Count Committee to work in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau with a mandate to boost the participation of hard to count populations, like the Burmese community.

The Committee’s primary focus was to increase participation by communicating the benefits of having an accurate count to the community while reducing mistrust about dealing the government in general. These efforts extend beyond the Burmese population to support active citizenship and increased civic participation, generally.

For example, Palermo Galindo, the city’s Hispanic and Immigrant liaison, is co-chair of the Complete Count Committee. He acts as a liaison between the Latino community and the Census Bureau, going to local predominately Spanish-speaking churches with Census Bureau workers to explain the process and let people know the government will not use the information against them. He also works with contacts in other minority communities to get the word out.

As of May 1, 2010, Fort Wayne has succeeded in bringing together education, media, business as well as faith and community based groups around its Decennial Census goals. The City of Fort Wayne broke all return census records and the State of Indiana was one of the top 5 states in the country.

**Success**

The US National League of Cities has recognized, the city of Fort Wayne for its leadership on local immigrant integration, and unique ability to engage so many diverse stakeholders on this shared city agenda.

Fort Wayne was selected as one of the first cities to participate in the NLC’s signature pilot program, Municipal Action for Immigrant Integration Project (MAII). No surprise that a key component of the MAII program is The NewCITYzen Naturalization Campaign, specifically designed to assist cities in developing a strategy to increase immigrant outreach in advance of the 2010 Census.

As Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry states: “Our community has been enriched by the talents, skills and cultures of those that call Fort Wayne home. Our city is stronger and more vibrant because of its diversity. It is hallmark of our All-America City and something for which we all should be proud.”

Fort Wayne’s success in making newcomers count is a strong endorsement of this new gateway city’s openness and accountability to the changing urban landscape.

**Related resources:**

See the Cities of Migration Webinar: Making Integration Count: Local Gateways to Citizenship
Oslo, like other new “gateway” cities, is more likely thought of in terms of mountains and fjords than for its urban scene, or its success in integrating newcomers.

Geographically isolated and without a colonial past, Oslo is not a natural recipient of historic migration trends. In fact, until recently, Norway was a country of net emigration.

However, this is no longer the case. Oslo has become an important receiving centre for asylum seekers and refugees and, for its size, one of the largest in Europe.

The municipality of Oslo has also made diversity and the ideals of inclusiveness and harmony part of the city’s identity.

**OXLO – Oslo Extra Large**

In June 2001, after a racially motivated murder, the City of Oslo began a high-level campaign to cultivate and promote cultural diversity. The city unanimously passed a resolution and adopted a charter that recognized the equality of all citizens and entrenched a commitment to tolerance, mutual respect and understanding.

The result was OXLO, the Oslo Extra Large Campaign.

Based on the City of Oslo’s special values document, “Oslo – a city for all,” the OXLO campaign became an essential part of larger city planning strategy. It became a cornerstone of the City of Oslo’s Plan of Action Against Racism, Nazism and Intolerance as well as the Action Plan for Equal Treatment in Municipal Employment – all measures designed to make the city more tolerant and free from racism and prejudice.

**Oslo – a city for all!**

Today Oslo is a city of approximately 600,000 inhabitants. Over 26 per cent of the population and 50 per cent of the children have a minority background. Diversity is a comfortable part of the city landscape and, thanks to the city’s standards-based approach, an increasingly important part of its structures and institutions.

In 2009, 20% of the Oslo city council (12 of 59 members) had minority background, and five out of the seven political parties in the council included minority representation. A new OXLO campaign poster (above) depicts representatives from the five political parties holding hands around the slogan: "We want to be the city of Oslo for all. A city of tolerance for differences and diversity. Let us stand side by side, not back to back...."  

Oslo’s Council of Immigrant Organizations (RiO) has been in existence since 1988. The leader of this consultative body is elected by the city government, and its 300 members are elected by migrant-serving organizations to represent community interests. Since 2004 all municipal agencies, city districts and the city government itself are obligated to consult RiO in all matters regarding the development of public services to ensure the needs of users with minority backgrounds are met.

Further, non-citizens who have resided legally in Norway for three years have the right to vote in local elections, and Oslo’s City Hall has been used for citizenship ceremonies since the revision and expansion of the Citizen Act in 2006.

Other changes that have occurred under the OXLO campaign include:

- Public agencies must address 15 mandatory criteria when recruiting, including the requirement to interview at least one qualified ethnic minority for the position;
- A city-wide crisis management task force was established in 2005 with representatives from 15 different organizations to provide rapid response to incidents of youth, violence and racism;
- The establishment in 2005 of the Office of Diversity and Integration (EMI) provides oversight to the OXLO Campaign and supports consultations with minority groups and NGO service providers;
A proactive approach to city-wide intercultural competence, including tools such as the “Diversity Mirror”, a benchmarking device used by public services to develop an organizational culture and profile representative of a diverse society. The DM is now used by schools, kindergartens and offices for employment and social welfare to develop a diversity profile which can be used to monitor and improve attitudes and non-written codes of action and plan how to make their services better suited for users with minority backgrounds.

Dedicated communication tools such as an Internet-based newsletter called the “OXLO Bulletin” highlights OXLO campaign successes and a city website for “Cultural diversity in the media” that features concerts, exhibitions and festivals organized by artists with minority backgrounds.

A consistent city effort is made to recognize, monitor and celebrate diversity, from the weekly OXLO bulletin featuring theatre performances to community information booths to the annual OXLO Prize awarded by the municipality for special achievements in anti-racism activities.

Success...

In 2005, the City of Oslo reaffirmed their commitment to the OXLO campaign, and subsequently embedded principles that underlie the OXLO manifesto in a major chapter of its Municipal Master Plan 2008, "Oslo Towards 2025."

In February 2010, the mayor of Oslo became a signatory to the first EUROCITIES “Charter of Integrating Cities,” and a third party expert review by Intercultural Cities, a joint programme of the Council of Europe and the European Commission, noted:

"The commitment of the City of Oslo to the integration of migrants is undeniably sincere and the expertise of its officials in putting this into practice is admirable. Oslo scores highly in comparison to many other cities across a wide range of integration policies and practices... and a broad range of partners from civic society are included in the development and implementation of policy."

Most importantly, the success of the OXLO campaign is matched by that of the city’s ethnic minorities.

The level of unemployment is low – about 5% – and the level of education is high, with second generation students out-performing their native peers in some districts and moving on successfully to tertiary education; 13% of the University of Oslo and 17% of the University College of Oslo are from minority backgrounds.
The Bristol Bike Project

By kturner
May 25, 2010
Refugee Portal

The Bristol Bike Project is built on a simple and powerful idea: collect unwanted bikes, work with refugees and asylum seekers to repair them and then give the bikes to them to allow them to get around the city.

"Refugees who have been given leave to remain are given a room to sleep in and vouchers for food, but they can't use them for travel. We have given bikes to people who were having to walk for over an hour to get to appointments," says James Lucas, one of the project's co-founders.

The Bristol Bike Project began in December 2008 as a backyard initiative. The project has since expanded into a workshop space with six regular volunteers and is open four days a week (the entire project is run as a volunteer operation).

To date, over 150 asylum seekers living in the City of Bristol are riding bikes they repaired themselves. In addition to working with refugees and asylum seekers, the Bristol Bike Project has also expanded their reach to include an ever growing cross section of underprivileged and marginalized groups such as the homeless, the mental health sector, recovering substance abusers and detached youth groups. They also offer a women's bicycle maintenance group.

The Bristol Bike Project was recently profiled in the The Guardian as well as in a short documentary film, that was subsequently selected to be screened at the OneWorld documentary film festival in Prague (will be screened to over 50,000 school children), the Unchosen festival in Bristol, the International Bike Video Festival in Bochum in Germany, and the Videothque of the Sheffield international documentary festival, as well as being screened at numerous local venues.

For more stories on the inclusive nature of sports, please see:

Auckland: Walking School Bus
Munich: Buntkicktrif! Integration Through Sports
Copenhagen: Integration in Action: Cycling Lessons For Better Social Inclusion
East London: Digging in for Community

By Evelyn
May 26, 2010

Living Together, Spatial Inclusion

East London: Digging in for Community

Just a stone's throw away from the bustling East London streets of Brick Lane, the "Coriander Club" meets twice weekly to manage the community gardens at Spitalfield's City Farm. The Coriander Club consists of mainly older women from Bangladesh, and this communal gardening provides them with opportunities to cultivate South Asian produce... and socialize.

Members of the Coriander Club tend to live in Tower Hamlets, an area better known for its street markets and curry houses than for its green space. With its rabbit hutch and guinea pigs, grazing heritage sheep, and abundance of vegetables, aromatic herbs and wildflowers, the Spitalfield City Farm is a definite curiosity in the area.

Despite its young and diverse population profile (24% of the entire Bangladeshi population in the UK is concentrated here), Tower Hamlets remains one of the most deprived boroughs in the country. It has high overall levels of both unemployment and dietary illnesses (including lifestyle diseases such diabetes and cardiovascular disease; for more on this subject, see the Maslaha Project).

Lutfun Hussain, the current Project Coordinator of the Coriander Club, founded the initiative in 2000 as a way to engage a specific group of local people that were considered at risk for social exclusion. However, something as simple as growing plants soon provided a greater sense of ownership, accomplishment and community. Today, the women keep fit and active by growing the organic vegetables for their families and the cooking classes help to promote healthy diets. Through its membership with the Women's Environmental Network, the Coriander Club participates in cross-cultural activities during International Women's Week, such as recipe- and seed-swapping, and it has even produced its own bilingual cookbook.

We look forward to following how this Good Idea continues to grow.
Barcelona: ODAME, School of Entrepreneurship for Women

By Evelyn

Entrepreneurship Inclusion

Creating equal opportunities to start and grow small businesses is important to the entrepreneurial culture of a city like Barcelona, especially when equal means men, women, and immigrants.

Patricia Galvez, a 41-year-old Peruvian-immigrant living in Barcelona, was an enterprising woman ready for a career change. For 17 years, her foreign credentials and pharmacy degree went unrecognized by Spanish institutions, and she settled for a job as a chemist’s assistant.

Her enterprising idea was to create her own Latin American import business after she identified a market gap in Spain’s food industry. It was impossible to find rocoto, a spice commonly used in Latin American dishes. So Patricia set out to change that.

The tough question was how would an emerging entrepreneur with little means turn her ideas into a successful business?

Patricia turned to the ODAME – Enterprising Women program at Barcelona Activa, the city’s internationally recognized local development agency. The ODAME program was originally developed through the European Social Fund’s ambitious EQUAL Community Initiative, part of an EU plan to “become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. When Barcelona Activa’s set its sights on building an entrepreneurial culture in the city that would stimulate innovation and nurture small and medium-sized business, it made sure these opportunities were open to all its citizens.

None of this is possible without equality between the sexes.

The flagship program, ‘Become an Entrepreneur in Equality’, recognizes the economic contribution of members of society who have been financially excluded due to gender, race, or class. Established by Barcelona Activa, the Local Development Agency of the Barcelona City Council, the program offers supports and promotes the presence of business women in the city of Barcelona.

Enterprising women like Patricia take part in all the training courses, including business counseling and learning marketing tools, and receive personalized advice from the technical staff of the project. Patricia also received the financial support she needed to set up her own business through a micro-credit loan.

In the past 23 years, 3,850 emerging female entrepreneurs have participated in Barcelona Activa’s ODAME Program. 48% have created their own company, and out of that group, 61% have created a company in the technology/communications sector. Reflecting ODAME’s commitment to multiculturalism and non-discrimination, 12% of the students are from other EU Member States, and 9% are from the EU.

ODAME helps new businesswomen like Patricia achieve economic independence every day in the city of Barcelona.

Other Resources:

- Read the Good Idea on Barcelona Activa: Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Immigrants
- Watch the Cities of Migration webinar presentation by Josefa Sánchez García, Head of ODAME
- Download the Presentation of The Price of Admission: Financial Inclusion Strategies for Migrants (PDF)

To Contact this Good Idea We’re Watching:

Ms. Josefa Sánchez
ODAME: Entrepreneurship for Women
Tel: 0034 607 23 66 34
Barcelona, Spain
josefa.sanchez @ barcelonactiva.cat
Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Immigrants

By kturner
April 12, 2010

Entrepreneurship Inclusion Municipal

Diversity and innovation are part of Barcelona’s DNA and essential traits of this 21st century city.

Barcelona is known internationally as a creative hub for artists, architects, musicians and design. So, when setting the course for the city’s economic development, Barcelona city leaders looked to the historic success of its creative industries and the entrepreneurial drive of innovative small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) as a model.

The result? Barcelona Activa, the city’s dynamic local development agency. Established in 1986 with a mandate to drive business growth and diversify the economic development of the city, Barcelona Activa balances strategies to support entrepreneurial success with a commitment to developing human capital and quality employment.

New immigrants in the city

In addition to Barcelona’s commercial reputation as a centre for business innovation and magnet for hip urban culture, the city is Spain’s second largest urban area after Madrid. The last 10 years have brought a surge of newcomers to Barcelona. Between 2002 and 2008, the immigrant population of the city grew from 3.5% to 17.3% of the city’s total population. As of 2009 18% of the city’s population were foreign registered residents with a very youthful profile; only 2.1% of the immigrant population is over 65.

Beyond their initial reception and settlement, Barcelona does not have migrant-specific support services. Rather, services are provided by mainstream providers and then adapted to social diversity where appropriate. Immigrants to Barcelona already have the entrepreneurial spirit; nearly a third of all participants in the activities of boosting entrepreneurship are immigrants, despite making up only 18% of the overall population.

Barcelona Activa was able to respond quickly with programs and an advice centre that could harness this new source of entrepreneurial energy and investment. Training and employment activities that had been established to reach young people and women, as well as the traditionally business-minded, were adapted to meet the needs of new immigrants. Being ready made it easy.

Glories Entrepreneurship Centre

Since its creation in 1986, Barcelona Activa has established a reputation as a pioneer in providing support to entrepreneurs, innovation and professional improvement both nationally and internationally.
20 years later, Barcelona Activa operates 30 programmes for entrepreneurship and has become one of the main motors for employment and innovation in the city of Barcelona, annually coaching upwards of 1000 business projects, resulting in the consolidation and establishment of more than 300 recently created businesses. Each year more than 40,000 participants pass through its Glories Entrepreneurship Centre, for business plan coaching, training activities for entrepreneurs, to use the resource centre’s e-resources, or for networking and marketing activities.

Barcelona’s Glories Entrepreneurship Centre is organised depending on the purpose of the visitor – business start-up, training and orientation rooms, classrooms, auditorium and offices. Since 2004, all city residents can go to this centre free of charge and make their business dreams into reality. The Centre contains all the tools necessary to start a business, including professional advisors ready to help iron out the details throughout the different phases of the project.

Success

In 2009, Barcelona Activa’s contribution to the city and wider community was recognized by the OECD as the “gold” standard:

“Barcelona’s...innovative and highly effective approach to economic development has been a constant source of learning and inspiration for cities and regions throughout the LEED Programme”

Sergio Arzeni — Director, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs and Local Development, OECD

Many who have benefited from the services at Activa have gone to set up successful small businesses which address gaps in the market, such as production of Argentinean food specialities, importing Peruvian vegetables or clothing from China.

Overall, the Entrepreneurship Centre sees a business creation rate of 60%, and a business survival rate of 91% in the first year. The model has been recognized as best practice by the Habitat Programme of the UN, and the best local project of support for entrepreneurship by Eurocities. Its model has been shared in other cities, such as Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Bilbao, Rome and Andorra. Special program offshoots include ODAME, for Enterprising Women.
Banking on Affordable Credit

By Evelyn

Financial Inclusion

Imagine a world without bank cards, ATMs and fast cash. Then think about paying rent, buying a fridge or putting gasoline in your car…. If you can afford a car.

Being “unbanked” refers to an inability to open a bank account. It also describes a world where you have no status and little history. Being unbanked means being financially excluded and is among the most common ways that anyone, but especially migrants and newcomers, can become marginalized and cut off from the economic and social commerce of society.

The lack of a bank account impacts one’s ability to secure regular and stable employment as well as to access basic services such as heat and water or signing up for cable. The “unbanked” are also unable to build a credit history or create proper savings accounts. The inability to cash a cheque or cover your rent “until next week” suddenly puts you at a higher risk of financial exploitation.

How big is this problem? According to the Financial Services Authority and the Government and Financial Inclusion Taskforce, 10-15% of the adult population in the UK do not have access to a bank account.

Isn’t It Time You Got a Fair Deal?

Located in the multicultural streets of London, Fair Finance is a social enterprise that is offering a range of loan products to the ‘unbanked’ in the city’s East End. Fair Finance serves all those who are financially excluded; although their outreach is not limited to migrants, over 60% of the personal loans and 83% of the business loans that Fair Finance provides are to people from black and minority backgrounds (BME).

Why? UK research has shown that low income, poor education and insecure employment contribute to financial exclusion and that these factors are disproportionally found among those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. For instance, 59% of Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups in the UK and 37% of the black population live in low-income households, compared to 19% of the white population.

Fair Finance exists to bring affordable loans and money advice within reach of poor Londoners, especially the low-income families and minority communities preyed upon by doorstep lenders and loan sharks, as well as legal money-lending services with interest rates soaring up to 1069%.

“We've made a big impact on the lives of East Londoners,” says Fair Finance Managing Director Faisel Rahman, “People come to us because we provide honest loans at fair rates.”

Since 2005, Fair Finance has provided money and debt advice as well as access to bank accounts and microcredit business and personal loans – all in a transparent and sustainable manner. In its first three years, Fair Finance has helped over 3000 ‘unbanked’ Londoners access bank accounts and saved clients nearly £1m in interest.

Preventing Financial Exploitation

As the larger commercial banks abandon inner city areas, payday lenders with average interest rates that start at 600% per annum step in.

The result? A small loan soon escalates to a serious debt in the thousands.

By providing emergency credit at a fair rate and offering it to individuals in “high risk” (and migrant heavy) industries such as catering and taxis, Fair Finance is helping prevent the financially vulnerable from being further exploited.

More importantly, it brings a vital service to those who were previously financially excluded and the opportunity to assume greater control over their lives, their finances and their future.

Fair Finance loans, as opposed to payday or doorstep lenders, save the individual anywhere from £20 to £100 a month in reduced interest payments. To date, Fair Finance has given over 1,500 people debt advice representing £12m in managed debt. Noteworthy, is a modest ‘bad debt’ rate of only 6% on £1.1m in personal loans – substantially lower than credit card companies.

A Travelling Good Idea…

Ironically, Fair Finance replicates in London’s East End the landmark social experiment that transformed millions of lives in Bangladesh and earned Muhammad Yunus, architect of microfinance and founder of the Grameen Bank, a Nobel Prize. Managing Director Faisel Rahman first came up with the idea for Fair Finance while he was working in Bangladesh on a World Bank £120m microfinance programme.

In a conference held by the Runnymede Trust, Rahman explained how he found similarities in rural Bangladesh and East London, “It was one of the main drivers that brought me back to the United Kingdom. How was it that we were finding new ways of providing services in a village and the same people seemed forgotten about in the United Kingdom. What was happening in Bangladesh is now happening here. We are returning to old style banking – relationship lending – and putting humanity back in the lending process.”

Bringing socially responsible financial services has not gone unnoticed.
Fair Finance has been cited by the Bank of England’s 9th Annual Report on Small Businesses (2001) as a model of community-led innovation through partnership working; recognized for excellence in community enterprises by the Development Trusts Association in 2001; cited as an example of best practice by the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal in 1999; cited as an example of innovation and good practice by the Royal Town Planning Institute in 2001; and was also cited as an example of good practice by Microfinance Gateway, the website of the International Consultative Group to Assist the Poor in 2001.

More importantly, Fair Finance brings a vital service and future opportunities to those who were previously excluded—regardless of race, gender or postal code.
Toronto: DiverseCity Counts, Measuring Leadership Success

By Evelyn
May 17, 2010

Good Ideas We Are Watching

“What gets measured, gets noted, gets done”
– Ratna Omidvar, Co-Chair, DiverseCity, The Greater Toronto Leadership Project

The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is one of the most culturally-diverse regions in the world. Statistics Canada reports that 49% of the city’s population is foreign-born and about 40% is comprised of visible minorities. Ensuring that the leadership of a region reflects the population’s diversity has important social and economic implications.

Launched in 2009, DiverseCity Counts is a three-year project being conducted by Ryerson University’s Diversity Institute to measure the diversity of leadership in the Greater Toronto Area. This project is part of DiverseCity: The Greater Toronto Leadership Project, an initiative of Maytree and the Toronto City Summit Alliance and led by a steering group of impressive leaders — including senior representatives from major financial institutions, consulting firms, think tanks and service organizations. It is being funded by the provincial government of Ontario, and the release of its first benchmarking report was marked by a public event attended by more than 150 leaders including the Ontario Minister Responsible for Immigration.

The results from the DiverseCity Counts 2009 report reveals that visible minorities are under-represented in all the most senior leadership positions in the GTA. Just 13% of the 3,257 leaders we studied are visible minorities. However, some sectors have much higher levels of representation than others. Education, for example, reported a diversity rate amongst senior managers of 20%. The corporate sector fared less well: 4% in total, with more success in the corner office than the boardroom.

The under-representation of visible minorities in leadership represents a lost opportunity on the agenda for creating urban prosperity. As one of the most richly diverse communities in the world, the GTA has enormous potential to leverage its diversity for success in the global economy. What are the advantages of diverse leadership?

Diversity in leadership

- helps organizations attract and retain the best talent;
- supports improved financial and organization performance;
- provides stronger links to domestic and global markets; and
- promotes social inclusion.

In June 2010, the 2nd annual DiverseCity Counts report will be released. This time the study will include a unique look at media, asking hard questions like “How well does this important institution reflect the diversity of the population in both its media coverage and in its leadership?”

As DiversityCity Counts keeps counting, Cities of Migration will keep watching.

Contact:
Sandra Lopes
counts@diversecitytoronto.ca
Tel: +1-416-944-2627
www.diversecitytoronto.ca/diversecity-counts/

Related Good Idea on Diverse Leadership:
- Toronto: Changing the Face of Leadership: DiverseCity onBoard
Helsinki: Business Counseling for Entrepreneurial Success

By kturner
April 12, 2010

Entrepreneurship Inclusion

Immigrants arrive to new cities everyday with a wealth of innovative business ideas. How is your city helping new entrepreneurs turn good ideas into tangible and local success?

The City of Helsinki’s Economic and Planning Centre and Business Development offers EnterpriseHelsinki, a proactive and practical business-counseling service to help new entrepreneurs launch their ideas with confidence.

The City of Helsinki recognizes that small-mid sized business enterprises are essential for building a healthy and sustainable local economy. EnterpriseHelsinki is a one-stop service centre where companies with growth potential get all the information they need to start and run a company in Helsinki through personal consultation and online business tools. EnterpriseHelsinki offers business counseling by connecting new companies with experts, which are free of charge, and available in Finnish, Swedish, English, Russian, Estonian, German and Arabic.

Today, 37% of clients are immigrants. EnterpriseHelsinki offers basic and advanced entrepreneurship courses designed to familiarize new immigrant with Finnish business culture. Business advisors – all with experience of working with immigrants – give confidential, “hands-on guidance” on all aspects of establishing, running and developing a business, from writing an effective business plan, right through to applying for a start-up grant or loan.

Their program Regional Business Services for Immigrants offers evening courses in English, which cover topics that include Labour and Business Law, Business Economics of a small company, Company legislation, and Offline and Online advertising.

Cities of Migration will be watching for more successful local business initiatives from The City of Helsinki.

To Contact this Good Ideas We’re Watching:
EnterpriseHelsinki
Mr Elie El-Khoury, Project Coordinator
POBox 37, 00099 City of Helsinki, Finland
Visiting address: Kaisaniemenkatu 6 A, 6th floor
Tel. +358 9 310 36360
Telefax +358 9 310 36369
E-mail: yrityshelsinki(at)hel.fi
Website: http://www.yrityshelsinki.fi/en

Related Good Ideas on Social Entrepreneurship:

- Turin: Porta Palazzo and the Balon Flea Market
- Vancouver: To Bean or Not To Bean
- Boston: From Boston’s Back Streets to Mainstream Success
Antwerp: Weaving Newcomers into the Local Marketplace

By kturner
April 7, 2010
Living Together Refugee Portal

Many European fashion designers, stylists, and artists are flocking to Betet Skara, a local weaving house in Antwerp, employing Assyrian Christian refugees who use traditional weaving techniques brought with them from southeast Turkey.

The professional craft of hand weaving, a once declining industry in Belgium, is being revitalized by this local social enterprise that has successfully integrated the "hidden" skills of an immigrant group into the city’s textile marketplace.

Within the Assyrian community the techniques and weaving patterns are passed on from generation to generation. In Turkey, it was their profession, their occupation, and their source of income. However, as newcomers and political refugees, the Assyrian community arrived in Antwerp faced with the challenges of unemployment.

When Aldegonde Van Alsenoy, founder and coordinator of Betet Skara, had the entrepreneurial genius to promote the community’s knowledge of the ancient art of pit weaving as a ‘professional qualification’, she was on her way to creating a small business enterprise.

Success

What started as an employment program for a group of political refugees is now a full business enterprise offering its services to fashion and interior design companies across Europe. The company is located in the heart of the energetic fashion city of Antwerp. This melting pot of creativity in fashion, interior design, and architecture is also fertile soil for local social entrepreneurship. The company has been awarded the 2005 Plus Prize and 2005 Ambassador of the Social Economy, and been recognized as an IDELE good practice.

The collaboration between European designers and Assyrian weaving art has lead to innovative creations that have become the trademark of Betet Skara.

To contact this Good Idea We’re Watching:
Betet Skara
Mrs. Aldegonde Van Alsenoy
Bisschopstraat 18
B-2060 Antwerpen
T +32 (0) 3 235 36 42
F +32 (0) 3 235 36 42
info@betetskara.com
www.betetskara.com

Related Good Ideas on Social Entrepreneurship:
- Turin: Porta Palazzo and the Balon Flea Market
- Vancouver: To Bean or Not To Bean
- Boston: From Boston’s Back Streets to Mainstream Success
Imagine being able to set up a bank account, build a credit history, obtain a credit card and organize a mortgage all before you leave your country of origin. That's the idea behind ScotiaBank's StartRight Program.

ScotiaBank is a Canadian bank with a presence in more than 50 countries and a strong commitment to serving multicultural communities. In cities such as Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary, the "We Speak Your Language" program posts customized signage that lets customers know what languages are available among branch staff to support their communication and service needs. In the City of Calgary, for instance, bank employees have skills in a total of 42 languages.

With the StartRight program, immigrants can increase the rate at which they integrate by acquiring a sense of confidence and institutional connection upon arrival. At the same time, ScotiaBank is signing up an entirely new customer base which will likely continue to bank with them as they settle into work, pay taxes, buy properties, businesses and invest in their new lives. A win win situation for all parties.

For more on institutional services and financial products see:

- Chicago: Muslims and Mortgages: American Home Ownership Through Flexible Financing
- London: Banking on Success: Diversity at Lloyds TSB
- Lisbon: One Stop Shop: Mainstreaming Integration
In Menden, All Kids are VIPs

By kturner
February 12, 2010
Good Ideas We Are Watching New Gateways

The “All Kids Are VIPs” campaign invites German students between grades 5-12 to submit project ideas on how they could improve integration at their schools.

By prompting students to think about solutions to these issues, the campaign heightens awareness and sensitivity to the challenges that immigrants students face and empowers the students to find ways that they can help create a more welcoming environment for newcomers.

School children submit their ideas to the Alle Kids Sind VIPs website – as text, pictures or in video format! When winning ideas are selected, celebrity ambassadors (Germans of migrant origin themselves) are invited to an exciting launch event. Child-friendly ‘ambassadors’ include sports heroes such as the footballer Mario Gomez, the actress Susan Sideropoulos and TV presenter Daniel Aminati and Shary Reeves.

The Bonifatius School in Menden, Germany, was among the recent winners. Competing against the over 100 schools that took part, students in Menden organised a sports festival for children at St. Maria’s, a local kindergarten. The sports festival allowed children from immigrant families to improve their German in a playful and uninhibited way through games and physical activity. Three time boxing world champion Ina Menzer, a celebrity ambassador for “All Kids Are VIPs” also came to train with the students and talk about her childhood experiences as an immigrant.

“I know how it is to have to keep your fists up and be strong no matter what,” she explained. “When my family arrived in the city of Mönchengladbach from Kazakhstan, I was 10 and couldn’t speak a word of German. Only by working hard and having a lot of self-discipline was I able to make it. That’s what I’d like to give these kids: the ambition and perseverance that go hand and hand with being a good boxer.”

Cities of Migration will be watching for updates from this exciting student-led program.

- For related ideas on empowering young people, please see:
  - Montreal, CA: “Play it Fair”
  - Birmingham, UK: “Meeting, Mediating and Mentoring: The Power of Peer Mentoring”
  - Chicago, US: “Youth on Stage: Real People, Real Stories, Real Community”
  - Oldham, UK: Peacemaker: All People, All Communities
  - Paris, FR: Narratives of Belonging
The Government of Singapore has introduced a Tuition Grant Scheme (TSG), to help international students subsidize the high costs of technical and university education. The policy is part of an overall strategy to both recruit and retain international students to Singapore.

With a population of 4.5 million and an extremely low birth rate, Singapore, needs immigration to remain economically competitive. The TSG is part of a larger economic strategy to become a “talent capital of the global economy.”

A government economic review panel recommended a target of 150,000 foreign students by 2012 – more than double the 2005 figure of 66,000 – estimating that this would not only create 22,000 jobs but also raise the education sector’s contribution to the gross domestic product from the current 1.9 percent ($3 billion or US$1.9 billion) to 5 percent.

Singapore is taking the lead on building the international student market. Founded in 2002, the Global Schoolhouse initiative has helped to build up the Singapore Education brand-name. By combining Asian school systems with Western education styles, Global Schoolhouse has attracted foreign universities like INSEAD, Chicago Booth Graduate School of Business and New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts to set up operations in the city. Today, Singapore is home to 16 leading foreign tertiary institutions and 44 pre-tertiary schools offering international curricula. It’s goal is to have 150,000 students targeted by 2012.

In exchange for TSG support, international students are required to sign a Tuition Grant agreement that requires them to work in Singapore for a minimum of 3 years after graduation.

Cities of Migration is particularly interested in the policies and initiative that will follow from the TSG program – specifically, what will Singapore be doing to ensure that international graduates are able to both find employment and then integrate into the society to the degree that it become “home” and they ultimately decide to stay.

As patterns of migration become more fluid and immigrants often cycle through a number of cities, Singapore’s lessons in retaining global talent, is something we will watching closely.

Related Good Idea We are Watching:

Helsinki: Moving international talent from university to employment
One Stop Shop: Mainstreaming Integration

By kturner
Civic Inclusion-Municipal Welcome-ability, New Gateways

Housing and employment, visas and banking, schools and hospitals, or a soccer pitch for week-end recreation? Where to start when you need help settling into a new neighbourhood and job?

Bringing services together under one roof, applying reliable service standards and ensuring open access to everyone (regardless of status) is the operating principle and genius of Lisbon’s One Stop Shop. Better yet, centralized One Stop Shop services are available to all city residents, and not just migrants.

The One Stop Shop model streamlines services to immigrants into one service location. This helps integrate migrants into both city life and work much faster and with less frustration and fewer false starts.

Lisbon was not the only migrant receiving city who thought this was a good idea. Migration experts conducted a Europe-wide search to find the best model for immigrant service delivery and it was this Lisbon One Stop Shop model that they selected.

How it Works

The One Stop Shop is a simple idea at the hub of a complex range of services and community needs.

At a One-Stop Shop in Lisbon, over 30 different services are available in one location, including the social security and inland revenue offices, judicial services, banking services and everything you need to know to connect to local government offices. Information is available on schools and the national sports institute, as well as on the electricity and water board. One Stop Shop visitors can do everything from buying internet services to applying for a national health card.

The location and hours of operation permit maximum accessibility, including proximity to urban parking, public transport and extended opening hours (8h30 – 20h00; and Saturday opening).

The convenience of the One Stop Shop service centres also attracts non-immigrants to these locations. This helps “mainstream” city services and promote the healthy development of diverse neighbourhoods and inclusive communities.

Language and cultural mediators are also available for additional practical help and to provide better information on the rights and duties of immigrants in EU Member States. As such, these mediators provide an essential link between government, public institutions and immigrants. This furthers the integration of both immigrants and the receiving society by addressing the two-way challenge of integration in a sensible and flexible way.

More than it seems...

Not only immigrants, but also employers and public institutions benefit tremendously from short, simple and transparent procedures for the application and acquisition of work and residence permits, family certificates, and so on. When these services are delivered correctly and with fairness, a powerful message of respect and dignity is communicated.

As well, this experience of welcome is key to well-integrated communities, according to Rinus Penninx, the coordinator of the IMISCOE Network of Excellence on International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe, and lead reviewer of the INTI One Stop Shop project: “In open and inclusive societies, immigrants are welcomed as citizens-to-be.”

Reliable access and accurate information helps build trust in local government and public institutions. Trust promotes attachment and a sense of belonging, both important steps towards active civic engagement and participation.

Success
In 2005 the original National Immigrant Support Centres won first place in the Best Practices in the Public Sector Awards in the category of service provision, and was featured as an example of best practice in the European Commission’s Handbook on Integration for Policy-Makers and Practitioners. The Common Agenda for Integration (2005) defined the ‘one-stop-shop’ as a priority initiative in strengthening the capacity of public and private service providers to interact with migrants from outside of Europe. In 2007, the original Support Centre in Lisbon was averaging nearly 750 users a day (270,212 annually).

From September 2007 to February 2009, the High Commission for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI) in Lisbon was funded to coordinate the EU-INTI programme to study and further develop the One Stop Shop model (OSS). The OSS Project included eight country partners in seven EU member states involving partnerships between various Government offices, agencies and non-governmental organizations to examine the feasibility of developing a handbook for replicating the One-Stop Shop model in cities across Europe.

Indeed, a major achievement of the EU-INTI project is the Handbook on How to Implement a One-Stop-Shop for Immigrant Integration, launched at the final conference of the project in Lisbon on 6 February 2009. Happily, this excellent guide to developing your own One Stop Shop is also available for download in German, Greek, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.
Toronto: Cultural Interpreters for Mental Health

By KTurner

Good Ideas We Are Watching, Health Inclusion

As a mental health cultural interpreter for the Toronto based Afghani community, Julia Ghani sees her work as a form of bridge building: working with the community to build understanding across cultures, generations, language and traditional stereotypes.

Her work is part of a pilot program called “Adopting Mental Health Services for Newcomer Families” designed to address the mental health needs of the Afghani community in the city of Toronto. The pilot program is being run by Diversity in Action Scarborough (DIAS) and in partnership with The Psychology Foundation of Canada.

Mental health issues are difficult for all families – but this stress can be further aggravated in certain newcomer cultural communities. For those who may have experienced traumatic events, language barriers can make it even more difficult to describe or contextualize what they are experiencing. Many feel reluctant or unwilling to accept help for what is often considered to be a personal problem, or a private family issue.

To create community support for the program, Diversity In Action, launched an extensive community outreach program in 2009. Newspaper and magazine articles and news features as well as TV and radio ads in the local ethnic press were all part of a strategy to challenge traditional thinking around mental health and highlight the availability of accessible information and services through cultural interpreters.

Unlike technical language translations, Julia assists clients and professional therapists by providing the cultural context of family roles and expectation. She speaks with parents to help them understand the unique stresses that their children are experiencing (and vice versa). As well, as an ambassador in the community, Julia actively works to help the Afghani community understand that mental health is a medical issue.

The pilot project is now being reviewed as a potential model for the Tamil and Mandarin speaking community in Toronto. That is one more bridge that Julia has helped to build across communities.

Contact the DIAS pilot project, Adopting Mental Health Services for Newcomer Families.

Related Good Ideas on health issues:

- Hannover, Germany: MIMI-With Migrants, For Migrants – Intercultural Health in Germany
- London, UK: Dealing With Diabetes – The Maslaha Project
- Sheffield, UK: Accommodate Sheffield – Better Together
- Vancouver, Canada: Promoting Healthy Living In Multicultural Communities
Jumping Ahead with Math!

By kturner
Uncategorized

Who's afraid of math?

Forget the stereotypes of who can and cannot do math. The philosophy behind the JUMP Math program is that every student has the potential to think mathematically and can excel at math class, including the most disadvantaged children, and those facing the greatest learning challenges.

JUMP (Junior Undiscovered Mathematics Prodigies) mathematics is a teaching programme developed in Toronto by Canadian author and mathematician John Mighton that has shown that success in mathematics helps develop the confidence and the cognitive abilities that children need to do well in all other subjects.

“We strive to increase children’s chances of success, to reduce socio-economic disparities, to engender a sense of belonging and, most importantly, to endow voiceless children with opportunity.”

Classroom results show that even at-risk students using JUMP Math receive a performance “jump” that raises their academic achievement and puts them close or on par to mainstream standards. It also improves their scholastic confidence and personal expectations.

How Jump Math succeeds

The JUMP Math program is based on a step-by-step approach to learning that begins with confidence building exercises and methods that minimize the differences between students. As with language learning or music, students master the basics using meaningful cognitive practices and, with success, soon acquire the joy, confidence and creativity to move ahead.

Mighton believes the JUMP Math approach helps reverse stereotypes about mathematical ability that can sideline poor students and lower expectations for their potential to learn and be successful. When all students are viewed as equally capable of learning and succeeding at math, argues Mighton, children feel more confident, less excluded and the classroom dynamics improve. Success ultimately contributes to more educational opportunity—and less inequality in student outcomes.

Since its founding, JUMP Math has caught the attention of teachers, researchers, and school board officials across Canadian cities, including Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Toronto. Project managers and participating schools have taken great care to track and evaluate student outcomes and classroom impact.

Toronto teacher Mary Jane Moreau, started using the JUMP program in her grade 5 class. At the time, student scores on a standardized computation test ranged from the 37th to the 75th percentile. After a year of JUMP, she says, “all but one were in the 91st-to-the-99th percentile.”

Going global, with confidence

Now Jump Math is on the move, testing its methods and taking its success to classrooms outside Canada.

In 2006, JUMP Math implemented a UK pilot in Lambeth, an inner-city area of London which is the third neediest borough in England and where 79% of the school population is from diverse (BME) groups. Over a three-year period, Lambeth has seen a 7% rise in its national test scores in mathematics, moving from close to the bottom to within two points of the national average.

Based on JUMP Math’s success in Lambeth, the program was recently recognized by the UK Department for Education and Skills in “What Works with Children with Mathematical Difficulties.” Lambeth has been awarded a grant by the London Challenge to make JUMP Math available to more students in Lambeth and other boroughs.

Research at the Vancouver School Board in 2007 reports that teachers also experience increased confidence in their teaching abilities after using the JUMP Math program. What’s more, teachers observed an increased experience of social inclusion among students. The program helped students develop more confidence and fostered “a sense of connection or belonging to the larger group.”

Jump Math is a good example of how good ideas can lead to success reaching well beyond the original proposition. This innovative program helps students enjoy math while levelling the field of opportunity in education — so that no child is left behind.

A surprising journey

Dr. John Mighton is an award-winning playwright and writer who completed his Ph.D in mathematics and now teaches at the University of Toronto. He began JUMP Math as a student after he himself almost failed his first year of calculus. A passion for math and his personal belief that we all have mathematical potential led Mighton to found JUMP Math as a kitchen table tutoring group in 1998. Today Jump Math is a charitable organization operating internationally from Toronto.

Mighton has combined research in cognitive science and case-study evidence from the classroom to train teachers and produce free teaching guides that demonstrate how any student can master fluent mathematical literacy given the right kind of practice.

You can read more about Jump Math and the work Mighton has done to dispel classroom myths about learning in his books, The Myth of Ability: Nurturing Mathematical Talent in Every Child and The End of Ignorance. Jump Math was also featured in The New York Times in April 2011: A Better Way to Teach Math.

Try Jump Math for yourself (pdf)!
Putting Quality into Multi-Ethnic Schools (QUIMS)

By kturner
January 27, 2010

Education Inclusion Municipal

However evasive the Swiss passport may be, Switzerland is currently home to one of the highest populations of immigrants in Europe.

In Zurich, 25 per cent of all school children are from other nationalities and around a third of all students speak another language other than German at home. The educational attainment of these students is cause for concern; even those among the second generation lag behind their native peers, particularly in the areas of science, math and reading.

The immigrant population of Switzerland is almost 24 percent, higher than many “classic” immigrant countries like Canada, the US and Australia. However, Switzerland also has the lowest naturalization rate in Europe. This means that while many of these Swiss residents are second- and third-generation descendants of immigrants, they remain foreign nationals and their children are being left behind.

Meeting The Challenge

Against a background of growing numbers of middle-class families leaving inner city districts with ethnically diverse populations, the Canton of Zürich recognized that educational reform was required to reduce inequality in education, to integrate all students into schools and promote social cohesion.

In 1996, the canton initiated a school improvement project “Quality in multi-ethnic schools" (QUIMS) that would lead to the gradual development of an area-wide model of quality assurance in multi-ethnic schools as well as send a powerful political message against social segregation and for a common public primary school.

The QUIMS project aims at raising the standard of education in these schools for all students, so that they will be equally attractive to Swiss middle class parents and pupils and their non-Swiss peers. Secondly, the project strives to close the gap between the achievements of different social groups (as reported by international PISA scores). A third goal is to improve students’, parents’ and teachers’ satisfaction with the school environment.

How it works

QUIMS began ten years ago as an experimental pilot program. Today it is part of the legislative framework of the Canton of Zurich and mandatory for all public schools (grades KG to 9) who have more than 40% or more of students from immigrant backgrounds (excluding Germany, Austria and citizens of Lichtenstein) or who are not native language speakers. QUIMS offers extra financial and professional help to these schools, with the caveat that the money must be used to develop special projects in line with the aims of the program based on local needs.

All QUIMS schools customize local programming based on three obligatory fields of action, including:

- **Language Support:** including promoting literacy for all students using language competence assessments, creative work for oral and written proficiency as well as support for integrated “native language and culture lessons;”
- **Attainment Support:** Using a variety of learning methods to support cooperative learning, problem solving and to increase the involvement of parents and mentors; and
- **Integration Support:** Building a shared culture of appreciation, respect and understanding through the use of intercultural mediators to liaise between parents and teachers; and the establishment of parent councils.

QUIMS schools are well-supported to ease the transition to the new quality standards. They receive well-structured schemas for school development and additional support from the educational administration, including advisory services, professional development, materials, handbooks, local networks and evaluation.

Before the QUIMS measures can be implemented, a dedicated QUIMS officer is selected to receive training through a special certification process conducted by the Zurich University of Teacher Education. The selected QUIMS officer prepares and coordinates the QUIMS activities for the entire teaching staff.

Schools that are participating for the first time receive introductory training sessions as well as regular advice and updates during their first two years. Teachers receive ongoing QUIMS training and the opportunity to network and learn from the experience of other schools.

Success

The QUIMS approach focuses on the processes of teaching and learning, rather than performance data. Like other good integration practices, it includes a two way dynamic that addresses local needs and moves on to benefit the larger community.

QUIMS starts by dealing with teachers’ concrete requirements and problems in the classroom and moves on to sensitize the teachers to issues of ethnic and social inequality and stereotyping.

The QUIMS program reaches beyond the challenges of linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom, to look at how power structures in the overall organization of schooling can contribute to discrimination. It starts to analyze the structural barriers, for example, that might prevent a child from an immigrant background with a good school performance from attending a secondary school for higher achievers. QUIMS demonstrates the potential to address broad systemic change in Zurich’s educational system and in the community-at-large. That is an important accomplishment.

Since its’ start as a pilot project in a few Zurich high schools in 1996, the QUIMS program is now available in almost 100 schools in the Canton of Zurich, where it has been scaled up into law since 2006. In 2008, it was nominated for the prestigious Carl Bertelsmann Prize for 'Education and Integration.'
Please note the important distinction between "immigrant" populations in Switzerland which include non-naturalized foreign residents of the 2nd and 3rd generation and the "foreign-born" category used for Canada, US and Australia. In 2006, Canada’s population of foreign-born was 19.8%; the United States of America (12.5%); Australia (22.2%). However, 85% of Canada’s foreign-born population in 2006 had also been naturalized (attained citizenship). Source: Canada 2006 Census.
Orchestrating New Audiences

By Evelyn
March 31, 2014
Uncategorized

In the late 1990s, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra (SSO) recognized that although their musicians reflected Australia’s increasing cultural diversity, its audiences continued to be comprised mainly of Anglo-Australians and Australians of western and eastern European origin.

As Sydney had become an increasingly multicultural city, it meant the SSO was not attracting new audiences. Other than English, Cantonese and Mandarin were among the top six most commonly spoken languages along with Italian, Greek, Arabic, and Vietnamese. From television to movies and mainstream concerts, all of these language groups were regularly engaged in a variety of cultural entertainment from outside of their community but the orchestra was not among them.

In 2000, the SSO decided to actively break this trend by deliberately engaging with Sydney’s significant and long established Chinese, Japanese and Korean communities. The strategy was to both cultivate these markets and use their feedback to help shape the SSO programme.

The result was an 18-month promotional and communications campaign designed to better understand the interests of these communities.

The SSO discovered that the local Chinese, Japanese and Korean communities were well disposed towards classical music, with the increase of Asian western classical musicians on the international stage attesting to the success of Asian musicians in the genre. These local communities were also inclined to take a more active role in the Symphony’s programs, particularly when an ethic soloist was featured in a programme.

The SSO further learned that many members of these communities had:

- already participated in educational programs and concerts centred on classical music
- an educational and economic profile that provided them with a reasonable amount of disposable income for entertainment
- a strong focus on cultural maintenance
- invested heavily in the next generation’s economic and professional ascendance
- a well organised community, business and media communication infrastructure.

The SSO also realized that these communities had limited awareness and access to its products and that a strategic marketing plan was needed to promote existing programs more widely.

A new approach, new success…

With this in mind, the SSO used a successful multi-layered strategy to encourage more participation by Asian audiences. They began by reaching out to ethno-specific media, hotlines, and booking agents to directly reach this market.

One example is that they linked the orchestra’s website to Chinatown.com.au, a popular local community bulletin board. Other strategies included ethno-specific media launches and interviews by musicians in their own languages. Editorial coverage and endorsements of the SSO in local ethnic media successfully captured reader interest as they were both familiar and credible in the eyes of the community.

The SSO also worked hard to increase its visibility within the Asian community. Engaging people on the ground wasn’t too difficult either as Chinatown forms one of the largest ethnic concentrations in Sydney’s central business district. This meant that distance was not a major challenge and the message could be concentrated effectively in association with regular daily life. And it worked! In the first nine months, sales to Chinese and Japanese speakers in the community moved from 127 tickets in a year to 1,250.

As audiences from these diverse communities continues to grow, it’s an encore for the SSO all the way.
Delicious! Celebrating Culture through Food

By ktturner
February 11, 2010
Living Together

A Taste of Harmony celebrates Australia’s “hotpot of cultures” through the joy of food. For a week in March, at the end of an Aussie summer, workplaces across Australia – big and small, and from every industry – are encouraged to gather their colleagues together for a tasty multicultural lunch.

Designed to coincide with Australia’s national Harmony Day, A Taste of Harmony is a week-long campaign that uses the office lunch hour to celebrate the increasing cultural diversity of Australian workplaces.

Employees bring in dishes that reflect either their cultural background or their favourite ethnic foods. The result? Colleagues and office mates are brought together to experience and enjoy new cultures, as well as raising office morale and contributing to a more engaged workforce.

Why it works

Susie Babani is Group Managing Director, Human Resources, at ANZ, someone who has always championed diversity issues, “…but if there’s one thing I’ve learnt in my career, it’s this – when you start to frame diversity in terms of its business benefits, you start to get momentum.’

The effective management of cultural diversity in the workplace helps Australian businesses maintain a competitive advantage and respond to the challenges of globalized markets and a changing customer base. Research has found that diverse teams operating in inclusive workplaces are better at innovation, problem solving and creating new products.

For Peter Scanlon, of the Scanlon Foundation, the diversity advantage is also a national asset: “A Taste of Harmony gives all Australian businesses the opportunity to recognise and celebrate cultural diversity with the aim of achieving greater understanding and appreciation of what has, and continues to be a key strength of our nation.”

It’s hard to resist

It's a simple idea that's having a big impact. More than 60,000 Australians shared diverse lunches in 2009, and 500 Australian businesses have already registered to participate in the 2010 campaign. It doesn't hurt that top celebrity chefs are lining up to act as event ambassadors and provide inspiration… as well as online recipes.

Participation in A Taste of Harmony is free and simply requires workplaces to register online to receive a promotional package designed to help support individual events in the workplace and create a celebratory atmosphere for the lunch on the day. The pack contains a poster, napkins, balloons and table toppers and is supported by online ideas.
feedback, downloads and games as well as a gallery of images from 2009. The campaign website offers a database of recipes as well as the opportunity for feedback and connection.

Leading companies such as Deloitte, ANZ, Heinz, Australian Industry Group, Emcorp Solutions and Mitchell Communication Group have signed on as key sponsors and campaign champions. These are businesses that recognize a culturally diverse workforce helps interpret and meet the needs of a growing customer base in new and international markets. At ANZ bank, for example, workers represent 134 cultural backgrounds, speak 91 languages and follow 84 religions.

A Taste of Harmony is an initiative of The Scanlon Foundation, a philanthropic organization dedicated to support the creation of a larger, cohesive Australian society.
Montreal: Sports hijab helps girls make the team

By kturner
December 21, 2009
Cultural Inclusion, Living Together

In 2009, a controversy erupted at amateur sporting events in Canadian cities over the wearing of the hijab by young female athletes. Newspaper reports told stories of soccer teams forfeiting the right to play because of the coach’s refusal to withdraw hijab-wearing team members. In another instance, young champions of tae kwon do were also disallowed to participate in a martial arts tournament.

Although the sports officials referred to safety concerns, others described the actions as racist and intolerant of the religious and cultural differences of immigrants in a secular and multicultural society.

In Montreal, a 26 year-old industrial designer named Elham Seyed Javad decided to focus on the needs of competitive young athletes rather than issues of religious accommodation.

According to Seyed Javad who is Muslim and does not wear a hijab, “Your beliefs shouldn’t prevent you from playing sports.”

Seyed Javad designed the sports hijab to eliminate the issue of a free flowing hijab which could get pulled and cause injuries. It fits tightly around the head and is attached to the wearer’s sports shirt. She points out that her “Resport” design is “more than a hijab”; it can be used by any athlete who needs to keep their hair protected during sport activities. Her choice of name, “Resport” is a wordplay combining ‘sport’ and ‘respect.’

A number of schools in Montreal have endorsed the use of a safe hijab in sport because it helps ensure that all kids are involved in this important part of a typical Canadian education.

In the face of the 2009 debate in Quebec on reasonable accommodation, Salam Elmenyawi, president of the Muslim Council of Montreal, finds such sporting and practical reactions encouraging. “I think its a normalization of wearing the hijab by having the institutions offer it,” he comments.

It lets girls be girls.


Back to e-zine
VALOA: Moving international talent from university to employment

By kturner
December 16, 2009
Good Ideas We Are Watching

As a result of increased international cooperation between universities, the number of foreign degree students in Helsinki and across Finland has grown. Currently, Finland has 11,000 international degree students and aims to increase this to 20,000 students by 2010. Finland's total national population is just over 5 million.

Attracting international talent is the first step. Retention is the next. The VALOA project, led by Career Services at the University of Helsinki, has joined 19 other universities, city councils and entrepreneur organizations to create a framework to transition these students into the local market. The project is starting in the Helsinki metropolitan area in late 2009 and will specifically targets small and medium size enterprises that are internationalizing and growing.

The tools being used include training university teaching and guidance staff to promote international students into the Finnish job market, an employers tool kit that will include practical tools to make obtaining permits and contracts simple as well as resources on guiding an international university student into a new job. The project will also be actively working to to do its part to promote their work and help make the attitude of local society more welcoming to newcomers overall.

For more information, contact: Paivi Jyry, Project Manager, Career Services, University of Helsinki at Paivi.Jyry@helsinki.fi.
Toronto schools help remove the taboo of sex education

By kturner

Good Ideas We Are Watching, Health Inclusion

Some of the greatest cultural integration challenges happen inside the home and between generations. For many immigrant parents, the idea of sex education for children is not just foreign, its taboo.

"Many newcomers have this impression from the media that Canada is a very open place and kids are taught about sex at a young age and so are encouraged to have sex,” says Anda Li, Toronto Public Health sexual educator and administrator. “These parents get a letter about sex education at their child’s school and they don’t know what the teachers are going to tell their kids. And it is so difficult for them to ask because sex is such a taboo in their cultures.”

Breaking down these barriers is the goal of the Toronto Public Health’s Raising Sexually Healthy Children Peer Parent Leadership Training Program. The results are worth it, “Raising sexually healthy kids can reduce sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and even gay bashing,” says Li. "If young people are going to engage in sexual activities anyway, we should talk about it openly, so they know how to protect themselves and how to say no.”

To date, over 106 parents form seven cultural communities have graduated from the program and become Parent Mentors in their community Julie Wang, one of the graduates, now runs a Mandarin speaking workshop where she answers questions for parents about everything from masturbation to contraception and helps answer questions that other immigrants parents have but are too uncomfortable to ask. Recent funding has made it possible for graduating parents to deliver 52 series of workshops around the city.

Toronto Public Health acknowledges the input of the Ethno-Specific Family Sex Education Peer Parent Leader Coalition representing Bengali, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil and Vietnamese communities. For more information, contact: Toronto Health Connection at the City of Toronto.
Engaging Newcomers in City Parks

By kturner

Health Inclusion
Living Together
Municipal
Spatial Inclusion

Ricardo Gambetta, Manager of Immigrant Integration Programs at the National League of Cities, shared this green project with us, a "Good Idea We Are Watching:"

Park officials, city planners and immigrant advocates are exploring opportunities to increase usage of city parks among local immigrant communities and seeking ways to incorporate these new residents into the traditional public parks system. This is especially critical given that minority and immigrant children experience high rates of obesity. The opportunity for physical activity provided by city parks can help to increase fitness and reduce obesity among immigrants.

Public parks are one of the most important assets in cities, and parks facilities should be available to all residents. One of the challenges faced by new immigrants is the lack of awareness regarding city services, which might explain their limited use of city parks and facilities in some cities.

In addition to providing health benefits and recreational activities, experts agree that city parks play an important role in the immigrant integration process. The key question is: how should city parks adapt to the recent demographic changes in their communities?

For the last few years several cities have been trying to answer that important question. For example, a 1993 study focuses on Boulder, Colo. The City of Chicago and the University of Chicago published a similar report in 1987, and the City of Indianapolis Parks Department published another study on the same topic in 2004. Most of these studies and reports show that immigrant populations represent a traditionally underserved group in the public parks system.

The New York City Parks Department recently published a report on this topic, entitled "Parks for All New Yorkers: Immigrants, Culture, and NYC Parks." The study was the result of a public and private partnership of several organizations and was funded by New Yorkers for Parks.

The report states that ethnic and cultural background has a decisive influence over an individual’s preferences regarding recreation. Changes in demographics bring changes in the popularity of different sports.

According to the report, parks are tools for immigrant communities and serve as gathering places for social activities and interaction with other groups and communities. While newcomers use and enjoy park facilities, they encounter some language barriers that limit this use.

Another finding is that it is important for parks officials to consider their diverse international population during the planning, development and implementation of potential parks programs. Finally, the New York report mentions the financial limitations faced by the parks department and the challenges regarding potential funding for some of the recommendations and proposals suggested in the study.

Recommendations to local parks and recreation departments from this study include: recognize the importance of outreach to local immigrant organizations; train parks staff in the areas of managing diversity and cultural competence; encourage the translation of important safety information; review food concessions to include a more diverse pool of vendors; and develop internal and external immigrant friendly parks policies.

"Parks for All New Yorkers: Immigrants, Culture, and NYC Parks" can be downloaded from the New Yorkers for Parks website.

Reprinted with permission of the National League of Cities (NLC). To learn more about NLC's Municipal Action on Immigrant Integration (MAII) programs, contact Ricardo Gambetta at gambetta@nlc.org.
The convention is that a foundation advances its mission by funding nonprofit organizations – from community service providers to think tanks and policy advocacy groups.

Until recently, local or municipal governments have rarely been considered as prospective support recipients by foundations and other grant-making organizations.

This is where the Chicago Community Trust breaks new ground.

As part of their recent strategy to support immigrant integration initiatives, the Chicago Community Trust has made a series of direct grants to municipal governments in Chicago after determining that a partnership with the city government would be an effective way to advance their agenda.

The Chicago suburbs of Berwyn, Mount Prospect, Schaumburg and Skokie all share two characteristics: they have their own local governments and rapidly rising immigrant populations. According to the 2000 US Census, 25% of residents in Berwyn and Mount Prospect are foreign born; in Schaumburg, nearly 40%.

The Chicago Community Trust launched a three year $1.5 million immigrant integration initiative to address new and changing needs that emerged in the community along with these demographic shifts. The innovative funding model included support for “local government leadership” on immigrant integration.

However, this was not the first time in its 94 year history that the Chicago Community Trust has advanced its work through direct government support. In 1919, during an earlier wave of European immigration, the Chicago Community Trust launched a variety of initiatives with local government in an effort to integrate the city’s newest Americans.

**Partnership for Success**

The Chicago Community Trust experience has found that funding to local government, particularly during periods of economic downturn, can be an effective way to achieve results: “A governmental agency,” says Clare O’Shea, Senior Planner at the Village of Mount Prospect, “can impact an entire community with a grant.”

Local governments have the infrastructure and longevity, as well as the reach and authority, that few non-profits can match. A grant to a local government not only delivers services but also the potential to leverage broader community support for greater investment and impact. Local infrastructure and existing programs that can help the foundation funding go much further.

The Chicago Community Trust granted $50,000 to the Village of Mount Prospect to conduct a feasibility study on the development of an immigrant-serving community resource center. This study was able to persuade the local government to proceed with the project as well and helped to raise $600,000 from businesses such as Wal-Mart and community groups like the Kiwanis Services Club to defray costs.

The Village of Mount Prospect worked with other service providers in the community to gain their support and involvement. The result? A 2,400 square foot, “Community Connections Centre” where residents can go for programs ranging from financial assessment and employment counseling to community policing services. In addition to the Village, the Mount Prospect Public Library, School District 214 Community Education, Community Consolidated School District 59, and Northwest Community Hospital are partners in the Center.

Ngoan Le, Vice President of Programs at the Chicago Community Trust and the driving force behind the initiative, explains: “If we give a grant of $50,000 and that allows us to have the entire set of local government, including their housing agencies, human service agencies, etc., working on immigrant integration, we think that is pretty good leverage.”

**Power to Influence Change**

The Chicago Community Trust found that local government partners also had the capacity and reach to influence stakeholders beyond the originally funded project. Intergovernmental and cross-sectoral interactions create natural opportunities for ideas to spread.

“Our grants are not just influencing the local government we’re funding; they’re actually influencing other local governments in our region” says Le. For example, the Regional Immigration Integration Symposium, organized by the Village of Skokie in June 2009, brought together public representatives from a number of neighboring municipalities to learn about programs funded by the grant.

Much like venture capital in the private sector, grants to governments can also provide seed money for more innovative and experimental ideas that otherwise might not be tried. If these programs are successful, then they can be brought to scale.

“There are a lot of things you might want to do but you don’t have the money to do,” says Village of Schaumburg Management Analyst, Jennifer Maltas.

The Village of Schaumburg has seen a steady rise in South Asian immigrants, with the 2007 Census estimating that one in six local residents were of South Asian origin. While many new residents were visible in the business director, they were under-represented in the civic and community life of the village. With the Chicago Community Trust grant, the local government laid the groundwork for creating an advisory group of South Asian community and business leaders, recruiting South Asian residents to serve on the Board of Health and Arts Foundation as well sponsoring community events that celebrated the South Asian community. Two years into the grant, the city has increased South Asian participation at civic events ranging from membership in the Schaumburg Business Association to South Asian residents on community boards.

“Without the grant, I don’t think any of our communities would have embarked on what we did or have gone as far,” concludes Maltas.
Peacemaker: All People, All Communities

By kturner
November 12, 2009

"Increasingly what we saw was a situation where communities were becoming isolated and were looking more and more inwards; fear and resentment were taking place over a generation."

When Rajah Miah returned from university to the Oldham neighbourhood where he had grown up, he found a community dangerously isolated by its differences and headed for serious breakdown.

Self-segregation between the Asian and White communities had created a social divide that was now encroaching on the neighbourhood’s spaces. Public areas were increasingly occupied by one or the other group with little to no contact between the two.

There were housing complexes where white children had never met an Asian friend and vice versa. Most of the primary schools were single race and many of the secondary schools 99% White or 99% Asian.

When they did interact, it was with mistrust and suspicion.

Deeply concerned by the depressing slide into segregation, a group of young Asian men took action by forming a small voluntary organization with the simple objective of halting this decline by creating opportunities for young people to meet and befriend other people from different communities and ethnicities.

Community contact

The PeaceMaker founders believed that when youth from the two communities began to interact, they would befriend one another and realize that their similarities far outweighed their differences. They started by using their informal networks and youth club contacts to bring groups together and promote a culture of dialogue and interaction.

After the 2001 Oldham race riots which were some of the most severe that the UK had ever seen, PeaceMaker’s work took on an entirely new importance. They emerged as the voice of hope amidst the tensions that Oldham and the surrounding northern towns were experiencing.

The importance of their message suddenly became clear. Sitting back while different ethnic ‘communities’ developed parallel but entirely separate existences was no longer an option.

The human, social, and economic costs were far too high. Communities were waking up to the fact that, for too long, they had concentrated on what divided rather than what united them. Today, PeaceMaker is increasingly called upon by national government and by regional and national policy makers to find out what Britain’s diverse communities are saying about their lives and aspirations as British citizens.

To do this, PeaceMaker turned to youth. They had their young ambassadors enter communities and engage in debate, not only within Black and Asian neighbourhoods, but also directly with some of the most demoralised and disenfranchised White communities.

By going directly to the communities for input, PeaceMaker was able to create programs that directly addressed their needs. Since its founding in 1997, PeaceMaker has matured into a service delivery agency in its own right, setting up and running projects that formally recreated the opportunities for multicultural experience.

Youth Focused and Youth Driven

The challenge with all youth focused programs is making sure that they remain relevant to the groups they are seeking to involve.

With the foresight that first prompted their creation, Peacemaker began involving youth, their target audience, directly in their programming as well as the organization’s leadership. PeaceMaker prides itself on having real leadership by young people from their target communities and has two permanent youth seats on their Board of Directors.

To ensure the relevancy of their work, Peacemaker has had peer educators and the young people that participate in the projects conduct a comprehensive review of their work.

These young people work with trustees and senior members of staff to review the programs for relevance and impact both in Oldham and as it relates to the interests and concerns of young people across the country. This program scrutiny allows PeaceMaker to identify gaps in service delivery and create new project ideas to address the changing needs and concerns of young people both in Oldham and across the North of England.

Success

With the launch of a small grants programme, PeaceMaker is now further empowering young people from the local community to create their own initiatives and share their own stories. This work actively helps combat the stereotype that young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, do not care about their community. By putting young people from the community in positions of public leadership, PeaceMaker supports the view that youth are a valuable resource that can shape the future of the town.

To compete for this funding, the applicants had to explain what they would do with £1,000 to benefit their local community and then design a plotline for a documentary film about their community.
The three successful groups – a local football team, a white working-class youth group, and a local secondary school media group – each participated in PeaceMaker’s inter-community mentoring programme. Through this project, they were connected to PeaceMaker’s diverse group of mentors, participated in film lessons and workshops and then designed and filmed their own documentary about their community.

These films were screened to an audience of local service providers and decision-makers to allow them to hear young people describe their needs and concerns for both themselves and their communities, in their own words. The films were submitted to British and international film festivals for young people to showcase their work to a wider audience.

Two years ago, 24-year-old Shipon Uddin began to mentor Ryan Newton, 16, who lives on Oldham’s Holts Village estate. Through the Peacemaker programme, they made a video, Separate Lives, which documented the experiences of young white and Asian people in Oldham. The video has since been presented in Burnley, Bradford, Newcastle upon Tyne and London.

Uddin says: “Where I live is a mixed area. But when the riots started, I used to walk past the white kids and they used to put their heads down. I would also put my head down. I was not drawn into any of the trouble, but one of my friends was sent down. When you live in Oldham, you see how different people stick together. I didn’t like that. It’s just the colour of our skin that is making us live apart.”

“When we got together with the guys from the Holts estate, we noticed we did have a lot of things in common, like the sports and films we liked. And some had the same opinions as myself. Before Peacemaker, I used to see people differently. The project really makes you think about British people.”

Today Peacemaker’s motto is “All people, all communities” and their integration agenda is positioned as the “way forward for Britain.”
With sculpted scenes of exotic topical life adorning the exterior and the building’s colonial origins, the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration in Paris, could be considered a controversial (or ironic) choice for a museum dedicated to immigration.

Inside, there is nothing historic about the animated gestures and lively exchange of young adults negotiating English, French and Portuguese with the help of simultaneous translation. The discussion covers issues from urban regeneration, finding space to “hang out”, to community relations with the police and plans for the future.

The topic? What does it mean to “belong”? This is the central question asked to teenagers in Paris, Lisbon and London as they embarked on a new transnational ‘tri-city’ project to learn what it means to belong to a particular place or community, using intercultural dialogue and film to document their learnings.

The Belonging Project

BELONGING invited young people to talk about what belonging and identity means to them, especially when they are managing multiple, flexible identities (e.g. daughter, Parisian, Muslim, friend, French) and “belonging” can mean attachment to more than one place (France, Portugal).

Working in small groups with creative video artists and film-makers, the participants each made short films (up to 3-min.) on diverse topics under the project title (in three languages): Belonging / Chez Nous / Pertencer.

What is unique about the project is its inter-urban perspective. It involves young film makers from three cities -youth from culturally mixed backgrounds living on the ‘the margins’ of the cities of London (Newham), Lisbon (Casal da Boba) and Paris (20th arrondissement) filming in their own cities and then coming together to share and discuss their experiences.

The resulting 43 short films provide insight into the thoughts, aspirations and cares of young urban migrants and their views on “belonging.”

What emerged was a picture of young people whose experience across all three cities was as similar as it was different. They were all exuberantly young, unequivocally Parisian, Lisboner or Londoner, and also individuals who moved fluently from one identity to another within their particular community and place.

Cross Cultural Convening

The three locations chosen for organizing the workshops were the Cité des Amandiers estate in the 20th District of Paris, the London Borough of Newham and Casal da Bobalín Lisbon. These areas have similarities in their population make-up and histories. Common features to all the three areas include:

- “Young Neighbourhoods” or areas with a high proportion of young inhabitants. Those under 24 years of age make up 27.31% of the population in the 20th District of Paris, 41% of Newham and 49% of Casal da Bobal;
- Historically, these areas have seen the settlement of large numbers of migrants, often to fill labour shortages. As a result, all have high proportions of ethnic minorities and migrants;
- The areas all suffer from poor socio-economic conditions, with high unemployment rates and low educational attainment;
- Finally, two out of the three areas (Casal da Boba and the Cité des Amandiers) have experiences significant tensions between young people and the police.

While each film addressed individual experiences, a few geographical themes did emerge. For instance, in Lisbon belonging was defined by where you live, in Paris it was defined by how you live, and in London the focus was more on personal identities.

The young people discussed important topics like migration and community, but also loneliness, being bored, and how absurd it can sometimes seem to be asked to name a country to which you belong. The common experience that emerged across cities was a sense of identity within each group that was unifying, yet locally and culturally distinct.

One of the London attendees described how meeting the other groups at the Paris workshop had helped him think about the issues in different ways: “The Portuguese and the French people welcomed us with open arms, and the language did not stand as a barrier … we found a way to communicate in other ways. It was interesting to see how their videos were different to ours. We showed how great it is to live in London, and did not really think about crime or any of the bad things… I think discovering this was the highlight of the trip, because it opened my mind to a whole new world”.

Discussions and messages from both the films and the dialogue between the young people also offer a unique opportunity to look at their perspectives through a policy lens. The films become a powerful channel for migrant voice, allowing these young people to share views on major issues and reach a wide audience of friends, institutions, policy makers as well as local community leadership.

Success

The Belonging video collection and intercultural dialogue were designed to be available for the closing celebrations of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and to ensure that the voices of Europe’s youth were at the table.

The project produced views and recommendations by young people on issues such as migration, anti-racism, and community development that can be used to inform policy debates. In addition, the content generated from the project has been used to develop educational resources for the English national curriculum on anti-racism, identities, citizenship and making of new communities.

The Belonging partnership successfully combined Manifesta’s experience of devising and producing European projects addressing cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and social exclusion/inclusion, using arts/culture, film and video production – with Runnymede Trust’s experience on racial equality policy and research.

Belonging films have been showcased on the BBC London website, shortlisted at the StrangerFestival in Amsterdam and screened at the Roundtable on the Inter-Ethnic City organised by the UN’s Alliance of Civilisations (UN AoC) at its headquarters in New York. All the films will be broadcast by RTP, the national public service television in Portugal.

Breaking news: as of November 2009, six of the Belonging films have qualified in the first stage selection of PLURAL+, the UN AoC’s international youth film competition which will announce its finalists on December 18, 2009, on International Migrants Day -we are crossing our fingers for Belonging!
Diaspora Dialogues: Writing the New City

By kturner
November 30, 2009

Cultural Inclusion, Living Together

Recognizing ourselves in the narrative is at the heart of the best storytelling, regardless of the sound of your voice or where your narrative originated. Diaspora Dialogues is a Toronto-based literary project that supports the creation and presentation of new fiction, poetry and drama – specifically works that reflect the complexity of the city back to Torontonians through the eyes of its richly diverse communities.

The success of established writers such as Shyam Selvadurai (above), a Sri Lankan Canadian author whose 1994 novel *Funny Boy* won the Books in Canada First Award, helps animate the work of Diaspora Dialogues which brings established and emerging writers, poets and playwrights together at events such as Toronto's annual "Word on the Street" Festival.

"Diaspora Dialogues began in 2005 as an answer to the question: if there was a program to stimulate the creative voices of Toronto's immigrant writers what would it look like," says Helen Walsh, President and founder. "Diaspora Dialogues provides an outlet for writers and artists who are new to Canada, who are under-represented and who may not have found their audience and market. It's a two way relationship, since they provide longer term residents of the city with an up-to-date and ever changing picture of Toronto as it exists now, today."

New Voices, New Perspectives

Diaspora Dialogues uses a multifaceted approach to cultivate both the diverse creative voice of the city and a broad audience for their work. To identify new and emerging voices of Toronto, Diaspora Dialogues holds an annual open call for submissions of fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry and drama. Selected participants are then brought together with established writers like best-selling author Lawrence Hill (*The Book of Negroes*) and others, such as Priscilla Uppal, Michael Redhill and Yvette Nolan, for a rich learning experience.

Through an adjudicated process, a shortlist of approximately 15 emerging writers is chosen. Each of these writers is then matched to an established writer for a programme of mentoring activities designed to help them develop their writing skills as well as learn more about their profession, namely how to get their work published or performed.

The mentoring program is free and designed to foster professional and artistic relationships. All program participants have the opportunity to read their work in Diaspora Dialogues' popular multi-disciplinary reading and performance series that takes place at venues around the city. Emerging writers are actively promoted at these monthly events, and event programming strategically mixes established writers with newcomers to ensure maximum profile and audience.

A selection of finished pieces by mentee writers are also published in the annual Diaspora Dialogues anthology, *TOK: Writing the New City*. The newest volume in the TOK series marks an expansion into Canadian urban spaces beyond Toronto. Drawing from culturally diverse voices in Toronto, Vancouver, Halifax, and Montreal, *TOK: Writing the New City, Book 4* investigates what it means to live in the contemporary Canadian city through fiction, poetry and drama.

Diaspora Dialogues also hosts professional development seminars for the writers and artists (alumni) who have come through its programme, including sessions on practical issues such as tax planning for artists and how to find and work with an agent.

Supporting younger voices

Diaspora Dialogues has also successfully taken this mentoring program into the city's high schools to support the growth of young creative voices in the city. Working collaboratively with local high school teachers, Diaspora Dialogues offers after-school creative writing workshops for students in Grades 11 and 12. These in-school workshops are led by professional writers and consist of three 60-minute sessions over a three week period. Each session focuses on a specific genre, such as fiction writing, play-writing and spoken word/poetry writing.

The Diaspora Dialogues secondary school programme helps students develop creative voice as well as personal confidence – and occasionally introduces them to future audiences. Some of these young writers go on to showcase their work alongside their professional mentors at local venues. Past mentors have included Griffin Prize nominee and York University creative writing professor Priscilia Uppal, actor and playwright Marcia Johnson and Commonwealth Prize winner Olive Senior.
Success

Since its launch in 2005, Diaspora Dialogues has worked with over 350 emerging and established artists from a wide culturally diverse urban landscape through literature, spoken word, poetry and even theatre. Today, with large-scale partners such as the Toronto Public Library and international arts festivals such as Toronto’s Luminato and Nuit Blanche, Diaspora Dialogues is reaching new audiences, creating more opportunity and widening the lens on how Torontonians see themselves in the city.

Local success has also brought Diaspora Dialogues international recognition, including invitations to participate in cultural festivals like the London Literature Festival, the LIFT Festival of Theatre (upcoming in July 2010 in London) and Scotland’s Edinburgh Festivals (Book, Fringe, International) in August 2011.
Porta Palazzo and the Balon Flea Market

By kturner

November 10, 2009

Economic Inclusion, Entrepreneurship Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal Public Space, Spatial Inclusion

On a typical Saturday in the city of Turin, 100,000 visitors descend on Porta Palazzo, Europe’s largest open-air market. For over 150 years, this sprawling market has offered a cornucopia of footwear, clothes, house wares, toys and food from across Italy and around the world.

With over one thousand merchants and 700 street vendors, Porta Palazzo is a commercial hub whose opportunities have always attracted newcomers to the city. This regular influx of new cultural communities also makes the market an urban lab for cultural integration. In 2000 nearly 20% of those living and working in the market were foreign born, compared to the city average of 4%. Today, over 45 nationalities live in this densely populated inner-city neighborhood.

Unique to Porta Palazzo is the Balon flea market and its mix of registered, formal and informal vendors. Since 1935 irregular migrants have had the right to ‘exchange’ goods on the market by a special city statute. However, in 2001, that right was temporarily withdrawn, and the relative stability and security of the area rapidly declined and threatened the commercial vitality of the market and the whole neighbourhood.

Hostilities between groups who were legally licensed as market vendors versus those who were not started to escalate, fueling tensions between diverse groups. Surrounding environmental and physical space issues were also exacerbating the tensions (each day the market was generating 15 tons of trash). City officials recognized that an intervention was required.

Living, Not Leaving

The City of Turin recognized that a multi-faceted approach was needed to successfully address the variety of factors threatening the social and commercial viability of the Porta Palazzo market. Fortunately they were well-prepared to move forward quickly.

Since 1998 the Porta Palazzo had been the focus of Turin’s major economic development strategy, called “The Gate.” Its overall message was to convince residents to stay in the neighborhood and invest in its future while investing in their own futures — hence the project’s motto, “Living, Not Leaving.”

Initially financed by the European Union, the Porta Palazzo project identified the quality of urban space as an incentive to economic development, as well as the means to resolve high levels of local unemployment and crime. Unemployment in the neighborhood stood at 12.8%, compared to about 6% in the city as a whole, and barriers to formal entry into the labor force pushed many immigrants into illegal or informal work, often in the neighborhood’s daily market.

In 2002, the project evolved into a Local Development Agency project and involved both public institutions and private partners, and broad community representation.

Using a participatory community model, the project included the participation and empowerment of the “irregular” or unlicensed merchants. This decision was the result of an assessment which showed that while tensions between the licensed and unlicensed vendors were at the root of many of the other social, security and space issues, this group of 300 vendors was a vital part of the local economy.

Results

Through a deliberate process and the engagement of informal and formal leaders (including the Deputy Mayor on Economic Development and the Municipal Police), the Porta Palazzo, Living Not Leaving project succeeded in having “irregular” vendors recognised in the new legal category of “non professionals.” This resulted in these vendors being assigned their own specific space in the market.

Formal legal status —and protection— led to an immediate decrease in the chaos and problems within the market as vendors assumed greater responsibility for their assigned areas.

This in turn resulted in the merchants taking on a greater leadership role, including increased cooperation with the municipal police. Each Saturday a rotating group of merchants took on the role of “Service Operators” to help control the inside of the market by overseeing vendor placement, transit in the areas and payment of public ground and street cleaning tasks.

With the creation of the VIVIBALON association (a collective body created to engage informal leaders from target groups), a formal forum was established to keep vendors and traders (over 200 of them joined the association) up to date on municipal decisions. It also created a common space to share concerns and discuss issues before they escalated. Operated as a nonprofit private-public partnership, the model was innovative by Italian standards; it was the first time that this flexible structure had been used to manage and implement a regeneration project.

Dr. Luisa Avedano, Turin City Council, concluded that the project “demonstrated the need to take time developing a new process step-by-step and the importance of a strong shared interest among stakeholders and commitment from the public institutions to developing participatory approaches.”
The overall result of this initiative was an integrated culture of respect and equity among market vendors and a revitalized quartier one again attracting tourists and visitors from other parts of the city, generating business for merchants, shaping a positive identity for the market, and reconnecting the neighborhood with the urban fabric of Turin.
Connecting Nurses to Healthy Employment

By kturner
September 2, 2010
Health Inclusion

Like many of the best ideas, the Overseas Nurses Network (ONN) was the result of a friendly chat over a cup of tea. Sofi Taylor and Sheila McGeoch, both nurses, were discussing what they could do to promote their union UNISON and in turn, what their union could do to support migrant health workers working in public services. The Overseas Nurses Network (ONN) was the solution.

The simple good idea at the core of this network, is that connecting migrant health workers to their union counterparts for social, professional and moral support can help prevent employer exploitation and eventually, encourage migrant health workers to become involved in campaigns for collective action.

Engaging new workers

ONN founders, Taylor and McGeoch, attributed the low levels of union membership among migrant health workers to cultural differences. For instance, in many of the workers countries of origin, union participation is often considered dangerous. As well, the traditional model of trade union meetings (with formal rules and proceedings) was also identified as a potential barrier.

“We’re dealing with people who may not have previously had the experience of trade unions… as well trade unions may be associated with politics, which is not very good in some of the countries that they come from. Calling it a “family” and “network” has overcome that. Our Chinese nurses call us the ‘association’ because it’s easier to go back and contact their families and say they belong to an “association.” explains Sofi Taylor, co-founder of ONN and member of UNISON’s National Executive Committee (NEC).

Technically the ONN is not a union but a network of workers who may be unionized. Although the ONN receives funding from UNISON and has UNISON members, the ONN retains a degree of autonomy about how it conducts its events and organizes itself.

This means that the ONN can operate with an informal structure and minimal hierarchy in order to create an ambience that is attractive to union-shy members or individuals less accustomed to formal meeting procedures.

Professional opportunities as social spaces

While union membership may be the ultimate objective, the ONN also provides its members with helpful information, networking and social opportunities. Meetings are held three times a year, and include plenty of hot food for dinner and same-day cash reimbursement for travel expenses.

ONN meetings provide members with the chance to expand their social networks beyond their immediate workplace and their ethnic, national or faith community, and likewise spread knowledge across these networks.

“Watching this big Masai lady, who must have been six feet tall, hugging this four foot Filipino lady... That is the whole concept of community integration and breaking it down. We know that people stick within the community that they know and they stick within their workplace. This way we have crossed the two.” says Taylor.

Being part of the network has also provided for opportunities to be active in members’ communities. In the summer of 2008, the ONN with UNISON, Scottish Trades Union Council (STUC) and Migrants' Rights Network (MRN) held a meeting in the Scottish Parliament about migrant workers in Scotland. Thirty-seven members of the ONN came along to relate to Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) how their stories are unique from other workers – the difficulties in obtaining and reapplying for visas, racism and discrimination in the workplace, not having their skills recognized by employers, and starting their lives over in a foreign country. They wanted to make sure that politicians understood that while being migrants, they deserve equal employment rights and conditions.

Success

The ONN has been a success in its approach in addressing the needs of migrant workers. The meetings they started provided an alternative to more formal union meetings, incorporating what migrants wanted – a space for supportive social and professional networking that serves as an introduction to the union. After seven years of operation, the network has grown to 700 members in Scotland and beyond.
Making Their Mark: Unlocking Educational Opportunity for Young Refugees

By ktturner
October 9, 2009

Making Their Mark

The story of this good idea began in 1999 (before the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act had been amended). With protected persons unable to access financial assistance for education, the Maytree Scholarship Program was created to fill this gap. Today the Scholarship Program continues to assist students through a well-conceived programme of support and activities.

Making Their Mark

The Maytree programme is both intensive and participatory. In addition to funding that covers tuition, books, transportation, rent and a living allowance, students receive mentoring and opportunities for skills development. For the past three years scholarship students have also participated in a group community service project for the duration of the school year. Most important, the program creates a peer network that encourages the students to create bonds both with each other and with their new communities.

However, to fully understand the impact of the Maytree Scholarship Program requires meeting the Scholarship Program participants and sharing their journeys from newly arrived young refugees to Toronto to their current roles as Canadian physicians, lawyers, nurses, journalists and philosophers.

Stories like that of Axelle Karera, who at 14 was forced to hide for three months to escape the Rwandan genocide. Seven years later, she arrived in Toronto, hopeful for a chance to rebuild her life but well aware of the obstacles.

"I started to see all the hurdles that stood in my path. As a protected person, I was ineligible for student assistance, and I thought by the time I started working and earning a living, it would be hard to change course," she remembers.

After Axelle enrolled in some English classes, several teachers recognized her potential and encouraged her to find a way to attend university. Axelle began with two philosophy courses and, when these ended, she was keen to learn more but lacked the funding to continue her education. A scholarship from Maytree helped change all that.

Last August, Axelle left Toronto to begin studying for her PhD in philosophy at Pennsylvania State University. Of two hundred applicants, Axelle was one of just seven that were admitted to the doctoral program.

Lasting Change

Without access to student loans, the high costs of post-secondary education was an impediment that increased the vulnerability of these former refugees and stood in the way of realizing their dreams and ambitions. The Scholarship Program was able to help a few of these students annually, however, Maytree recognized that this flaw in the system could only be permanently altered by addressing the underlying social policy and pressing for appropriate changes to existing legislation.

What was needed was the addition of the three words "and protected persons" to the governing legislation. A simple change that a community of partners, a series of campaigns and an ongoing commitment to improve the refugee system took five years to achieve.

The success of the alumni of the Maytree Scholarship program -and the often harrowing adversities that the former refugees had overcome- became part of the case for change. Scholarship students became actively involved in the campaign, travelling to Ottawa to present their stories and successes to parliamentarians.

Uitsile Ndlovu, Maytree Scholarship Student, sums up what the experience meant for her: "[… as someone who came to Canada as a refugee], … it was important for me to recognize that anyone in any position is capable of making a difference in another person’s life. You don’t necessarily have to be at the top of the ladder to lift someone up."

In 2003, the legislative change to allow protected persons to apply for student loans was included in the 2003 federal Budget – and passed to a standing ovation in the Canadian House of Commons.

The Work Continues

Maytree, the scholarship students and a determined community of supporters worked hard to help reduce systemic barriers to refugee access to higher education. To date, Maytree has provided 150 scholarships to protected persons who have settled in Canada and continues to work with its aspiring college and university students and to press for progressive social change.

"In these times of diminishing compassion and hardening attitudes towards refugees worldwide and in Canada, we believe that our scholarship program makes an excellent case for Canada’s continued and improved openness to refugees,” says Judy Broadbent, Vice Chair, Maytree.

In October 2009, the Scholarship program celebrated its tenth year anniversary by publishing Making Their Mark, a compilation of stories about former and current scholarship students, with an essay on the Canadian refugee system by Peter Showler, Director of the Refugee Forum, located at the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa.

The Maytree Scholarship Program began as a local, practical and compassionate response to a flaw in the refugee system and went on to contribute to policy reform that now benefits hundreds of young refugees across Canada, an outstanding example of how a simple good idea can result in powerful social change.

To access the 10-year anniversary report, Making Their Mark, click here.
Women at Work: the KVINFO Mentor Network

By kturner

Employment Inclusion, Living Together, Social Inclusion

Relationships are the foundation for personal and professional success and for newcomers the challenge is often finding the people and establishing the networks that can answer questions and open doors to opportunities at work and in the wider community.

In Copenhagen, the Danish Centre for Information on Women and Gender, or KVINFO, has developed a unique mentoring programme to combat professional and social isolation among immigrant women.

The mentoring programme is considered one of the largest of its kind and began when KVINFO’s director, Elisabeth Møller Jensen had a vision of Denmark as “one big workplace and network of working women.” In 2003, she personally wrote to over 300 professional women across all sectors inviting their participation in a new mentoring program. At the time, the simple idea of matching refugee and immigrant women with their native Danish counterparts was something of an experiment since it was taken for granted that these women had little in common, little contact in their everyday life, and that they would have little interest in cultivating a relationship together.

Today the programme is 4,000 strong and growing. http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/mentoring-that-takes-the-other-out-of-the-picture/

KVINFO’s success owes much to the organization’s inclusive feminist mission as well as its willingness to experiment with a new approach to integrating immigrant women into Danish society. However the rapid success of their Mentoring Programme is also the result of good research and a practical approach to program design. KVINFO modelled their mentoring program on an existing one for skilled immigrants in Toronto and then adapted it in consultation with HR experts from the corporate sector.

The Mentor Network

KVINFO recognized that networks are essential to enhanced career prospects. It is estimated that more than 50% of all job openings in Denmark are filled via personal networks. Through this program, mentees can access their mentor’s professional networks, but also benefit from their overall professional experience.

The KVINFO mentoring programme works by pairing up refugee and immigrant women with firmly established members of Danish society. Potential couples are matched based on the mentees’ education, professional and personal wishes. KVINFO then encourages a mentor/mentee relationship that is based on a modified version of those used by the private sector in the US although the KVINFO approach is firmly anchored in the feminist values of mutual recognition, flat interpersonal power structures and a rigorous commitment to openness and inclusion that reflect the organization’s historical past.

Mentor and mentee meet approximately one a month. Together, the two parties draw up a contract and set specific goals to be accomplished within a fixed period of time, between 6 to 12 months. KVINFO staff actively track the progress of the relationship against the contract's stated goals, stepping in to offer assistance or supplementary resources when needed.

This personalized support can better help the mentee’s transition into work. In addition, the Network offers informal meetings and workshops, in addition to the monthly meetings mentoring partners will already schedule with each other.

As staff member Beatriz Hernández remarks “when the concept of “the other” is taken out of the equation, everybody wins.”

Building on the power of relationships

KVINFO is also expanding beyond the general network matches with a special project to encourage greater political participation among immigrant and ethnic minority Danes. This additional outreach is part of a special project to recognise the 100th anniversary of women’s suffrage in Denmark.

In Copenhagen, while one in ten women is from an ethnic minority group, they only represent one in 55 city elected representatives. Furthermore, only two out of 179 of elected representatives in the Folketinget, the national parliament of Denmark, are from an ethnic minority background.

This mentoring project aims to bolster political participation and strengthen relationships between elected politicians and ethnic minority women up until the municipal elections in November 2009. Mentors have knowledge and experience in political activities, and mentees would either like an insight into political work or are already political engaged.

Similarly, KVINFO began another project in 2007 called, “Role Models through Life History” which is being done in collaboration with the mentor network. The national campaign highlights role models in Danish society and is an exhibition targeted specifically at ethnic minority women in Denmark. It features stories from 17 non-western immigrant women and their experiences in Denmark with the goal of having their stories inspire others to continue to work toward their goals with Danish society.

Success

Founded in 1965, KVINFO’s main service began with its research library, which houses over 20,000 books and journals, political publications on equal opportunities and women’s issues. The year that it was founded, in 1965, was also the year in which a parliamentary commission was established to examine the role of women in modern society with the intention to propose new gender equality legislation.

With the Mentor Network, KVINFO is creating a new cross-cultural economic equality.

Currently the Mentor Network operates in four main offices and has inspired other networks within Denmark as well as in the Norwegian cities of Oslo and Trondheim.

The programme has also received the integration prize for the public labour market by the Ministry of Refugee Immigration and Integration Affairs, an award from a Danish women’s magazine in 2004 and has been highlighted as a positive initiative in integration by the OECD.

In September 2009 KVINFO launched a campaign aimed at male business owners with immigrant backgrounds. The campaign invites these entrepreneurs to support the Mentor Network through sponsorship or small donations; however, a strategic objective is also to increase public support for the participation of immigrant women in the workforce. The campaign represents a unique opportunity for cooperation between an established cultural institution and male business owners from minority communities. The donations will go to the funding of activities of the Mentor Network, including the conference, “Mentoring and Networking women building trust and social capital in our cities” in November 2009.

This Good Idea was identified by the Open Society Foundations’ At Home in Europe project as a good practice promoting inclusion, social cohesion and nondiscrimination. For more on this practice and the At Home in Europe project, read Living Together: Projects Promoting Inclusion in 11 EU Cities (OSF, 2011).
City Mondial: Looking Forward from the Past

By kturner  
September 9, 2009

Economic Inclusion Municipal

How a city presents itself to its residents and visitors is a good reflection of how it sees its past, its present and its future. It is also a good position from which to develop its local business development priorities and tourism strategy.

In addition to classic sites such as the Peace Palace (Vredespaleis in Dutch) and the Mauritshuis museum, visitors to The Hague are also encouraged to experience the contribution and culture of the over 123 nationalities and ethnic groups living within the city. This expanded tourism focus is the result of the City Mondial program.

City Mondial is a multicultural tourist information centre that offers walking tours to introduce visitors (and residents) to Turkish mosques, Hindu temples and the local multicultural markets located within the Hague. The walking tours also go through the diverse neighbourhoods of the city, such as the Schilderswijk, Transvaal and Stationsbuurt – where more than 80% of the population are of non-Dutch ethnic background.

A Deliberate Decision…

The creation of the City Mondial program was part of the Hague’s strategy to use the international character of the city to increase where and how tourism dollars were being spent. Working with local entrepreneurs and businesses, the local government used City Mondial to offer fun opportunities for both residents and tourists to learn more about the different cultures that have settled in the city and simultaneously support more local business development.

City Mondial offers a variety of programs including guided tours through Chinatown or through the Transvaal area to see the Indian goldsmith shops and visit the Ram Mandir Hindu temple. One of the most popular programs is a chef-led visit to the De HaguesMarkt (the biggest market in Europe) to pick out the ingredients for special ethnic dishes to use later in a City Mondial organized cooking class.

Impact…

In addition to creating stronger ties between local government and the different ethnic communities – City Mondial has also brought significant new purchasing power into these areas.

Neighborhoods featured as part of they City Mondial tour offer have received over 200,000 visitors a year and seen a 60% increase in the number of businesses in the area.

The City Mondial program has also encouraged Hague residents to become more involved with their surroundings and promotes engagement and citizenship within the city by helping to foster understanding and bonds between cultures.

Rabin Baldewsingh, Deputy Mayor for Citizenship explained, “This bond should form a bridge between residents with one another and residents with their neighbourhood and the local government.”
Integration in Action

By kturner

Living Together, Refugee Portal, Social Inclusion

In the Danish city of Copenhagen, one in three residents uses a bike for their commute and each day, they cycle over 1.2 million kilometers around the city. In fact, there are actually more bikes in Copenhagen than inhabitants.

Cycling is an intrinsic part of the daily life of the city and one that the local government strongly supports. Copenhagen spends on average DKK 165 per resident a year (equivalent of CD 34) on improving road infrastructure and safety and in 2008, Copenhagen was selected as the best Danish city for cycling.

Copenhagen has also incorporated cycling into the physical planning of the city, and hopes to have 50% of residents cycling to school or work by 2015.

In addition, the city is working to deliberately expand the groups from which they recruit these residents by reaching out to newcomers to make them a part of this movement.

A newcomer’s ability to participate in the popular activities of a city can be pivotal to their comfort and engagement level and learning to ride a bicycle is a skill not taught in all countries.

The Danish Red Cross realized that by providing immigrants with the ability to participate and enjoy a unique aspect of Danish life (Danes cycle more than any other Western population), they would also be helping them to adjust and physically engage in the life of the city.

Danish Red Cross volunteers teach newcomer adults how to cycle, the rules of the road, and how to repair bicycles. The classes are free for immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Most of the participants are older immigrant and refugee women who come from countries where women do not traditionally ride bikes.

The classes are also an opportunity for Danes to share their skills and culture with newcomers and provide a chance for both groups to socialize and share this national past time.

The bike riding classes are popular with newcomer communities since cycling is cheaper than both cars and public transportation and can also help increase employability of newcomers (as certain jobs in the care sector require certification that the applicant can ride a bike).

But most of all, the cycling lessons allow newcomers to develop physical ownership of their city and to move freely and confidently through the streets of Copenhagen along side their neighbours.
Meet Vitaliy Vysotskiy.
Education: A PhD in Applied Mathematics.
Experience: Over ten years as a statistician and researcher.
Immigrated from: Russia.
First job in the US: Part-time attendant at the local laundromat.

Meet Clara Ines Tures.
Education: Degree in Law, Diploma in International Law & Human Rights.
Experience: Three years as an attorney with the Ministry of Education.
Immigrated from: Columbia.
First job in the US: Part time Spanish tutor.

Breaking the cycle

The longer a new immigrant is employed at work unrelated to their professional background, the more difficult it becomes to transition back into a professional track, or the position level their skills deserve.

This spiral of wasted talent is what Upwardly Global is working to prevent. Upwardly Global is a nonprofit organization in New York City that is taking a two-pronged approach to the problem. Upwardly Global works directly with highly skilled immigrants to help them reclaim their careers as well as with employers seeking to leverage the diversity of this new talent pool. Upwardly Global provides both employers and employees with the tools needed to create a more inclusive – and effective- employment market.

The Upwardly Global Approach

Upwardly Global has designed a practical program that enables immigrant professionals in financial services, consulting, engineering, healthcare and business to understand how to adapt and to ultimately succeed at securing a professional job in the United States.

The program is free and involves: advice on writing resume and cover letters, workshops in American such as job search strategies and interviewing skills. Through Upwardly Global, new immigrants also receive introductions to American professionals in their sector so that they can start building their personal networks.

For Vitaliy Vysotskiy, it was these personal relationships that ultimately helped him leave behind his time at the Laundromat and return to his work in applied mathematics. He recalls, “I received tremendous help from Upwardly Global. They gave me a lot of attention: they essentially improved the quality of my professional resume, helped me create cover letters, and gave good training and advice for interviews by meetings, phone and e-mail. My Upwardly Global mentor, Rishi Diwan, introduced me other professionals in my area and according to this acquaintance I found a professional job.” Today Vitaliy is a software engineer with Hyperion Solutions Corporation.

Clara’s success story is similar. Through an informational interview with Diana Otero, an Upwardly Global alumni, (one of the strengths of the Upwardly Global program is their success with encouraging past participants to stay involved through the Alumni Club), Clara began a volunteer assignment with Catholic Charities in San Francisco. This eventually became a paid position as an immigration advocate working with refugees, many from Latin America.

In addition to helping individuals like Clara and Vitaliy, Upwardly Global also works towards systemic change by helping business appreciate the bottom line benefits of a diversified workforce. Upwardly Global provides companies such as JP Morgan Chase, Google and Deloitte with the strategic tools and advice to enable them to not only recruit but also retain highly qualified foreign born talent.

Members of Upwardly Global’s Employer Network receive handpicked candidates relevant to their needs and can also access a database of qualified Jobseekers. Upwardly Global has also developed interactive workshops and an employer tool kit to help them understand how to maximize the unique insight and business potential and value of foreign trained professional. This includes understanding how to contextualise and evaluate resumes with foreign trained education, skills and experience, insight into conducting culturally sensitive interviews.

History

Upwardly Global’s story is as inspiring as that of their candidates. After leaving her full-time job in a national refugee settlement agency, the founder, Jane Leu began Upwardly Global at her kitchen table and with a borrowed laptop. Her vision was to prevent professional immigrants from being trapped by short-term solutions on the margins of mainstream employment.

By 2006, Upwardly Global was serving the entire NY metropolitan area, including the 5 boroughs, New Jersey and Connecticut. Today Upwardly Global has offices in New York, Chicago and San Francisco.
Success

To date, Upwardly Global has coached jobseekers from more than 94 countries and developed ongoing relationships with more than 70 employers.

Upwardly Global's Interactive Cross Cultural Interviewing Tool has received international recognition for its ability to help users recognize how cultural differences can result in misunderstandings and suggests specific behavior to improve how candidates from different cultures are interviewed.

Upwardly Global's dual approach to changing the experience of immigrant professionals has been recognised with numerous awards including: Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, Spelman College, Legacy of Leadership Bridge-Builder Award in 2007, The John F. Kennedy New Frontier Award in 2006, the Manhattan Institute Social Entrepreneur Award in 2004 as well as the HR Symposium, Partners in Innovation Award in 2004. Their success has also been featured in numerous media outlets including CNN News, Business Week and The Wall Street Journal.

Story Update:
Congratulations! Upwardly Global has just been recognized by the Migration Policy Institute as one of the 2010 Winners of the E Pluribus Unum Awards. The E Pluribus Unum Awards were established to recognise initiatives working to strengthen the relationship between native and foreign born Americans in order to create stronger and more supportive communities.
Integration Workshops for Inclusive Cities

By kturner
June 25, 2009
Municipal Welcome-ability

How do we go about creating communities that are cohesive and responsive to the reality of increased immigration? In the city of Kerpen, a group of city managers and community representatives came together to brainstorm that question over a two-day workshop hosted by the Bertelsmann Foundation. Three months later, the city had a comprehensive integration strategy based on Kerpen’s particular population, history and the will of its people.

“It was an open, friendly experience resulting in a great sense of community,” says Annette Seiche, Integration Officer for the City of Kerpen. “It also smoothed the way for further political activity, helped spread accurate information, conveyed a constructive sense of the importance of the work and improved the willingness of politicians to fund it.”

With more than 15 million non-Germans making Germany their home and one in every three school children having non-German roots, turning this perceived challenge into an opportunity to engage a variety of stakeholders and make a difference was seen as essential to Bertelsmann Stiftung, a German-based foundation committed to serving the common good.

With a business mindset and results-based approach, Bertelsmann responded to this challenge with a series of actions that included an innovative integration workshop program designed to help local government and community stakeholders work together to develop strategies that accelerate the integration of immigrants into their new communities.

As Claudia Walther, Program Manager, Integration and Communities, at Bertelsmann Stiftung explains, “It became more and more clear [to us] how important it is to develop strategies and activities together, with migrants, not for migrants.”

Developing a culturally responsive structure

Bertelsmann’s Integration Workshop program was developed in response to the overwhelming level of interest generated by an earlier national competition entitled “Successful integration is no coincidence – Strategies for community policy” that was launched by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the German Ministry of the Interior in 2005.

107 cities made submissions, and three winners were selected: the cities of Stuttgart (large), Solingen (medium) and the district of Hersfeld-Rotenburg (small). Winning communities were able to address integration challenges constructively while recognizing the potential of immigration to contribute to city success. Their integration policies were developed and implemented using an inclusive, participatory process that recognized all stakeholders and promised sustainable outcomes.

The competition resulted in the creation of the practical Demographie-Konkret website, a collection of “best practices” based on successful integration practice and policy in 27 German cities -to which a further 10 international practices have since been added. It also produced a guide to integration policy with “10 recommendations for success,” including the importance of establishing political commitment, securing and activating citizen participation and recognizing cities as employers requiring well-administered HR policies on diversity.

According to Claudia Walther, checking the pulse of the nation was essential “because it showed us that the issue of integration cannot be treated as an isolated matter that only concerns the newcomer. Instead, it must be addressed in a manner that takes all stakeholders into account, including immigrants, civil society organizations, educational institutions and politicians at all levels and in various departments.”

Further analysis determined that practical local solutions were needed for the successful integration of immigrants into German society. The model chosen by Bertelsmann: integration workshops held in local communities, especially those heavily populated by immigrants. Bertelsmann wisely decided that local leadership was also needed of the workshops to be successful. The participation, and not just the commitment, of the local mayor or deputy mayor in the workshop was made a condition of city eligibility.

As Klaus Herzog, Mayor of Aschaffenburg, one of the pilot sites for the workshops, confirmed: “The first step always is that there needs to be mental changes – the consciousness of people needs to change. You need to define fields of action, and you have to develop concrete activities.” Then, Herzog continues, “It is important to have sustainability… and to always evaluate the process. Where are we now, what were we able to reach, what has still to be done.”

Integration Workshops in action

The two-day Integration Workshop program was launched in 2007 with the assistance of three experienced moderators, and then tested in two cities before being offered to local managers and representatives from the following target groups: community-level policymakers in decision-making positions; public administrators at all relevant levels; immigrants and members of immigrant-serving organizations.

On the first day, participants are asked to evaluate the community’s current situation through activities ranging from an assessment of prevailing attitudes towards integration to an evaluation of existing projects and analysis of local data. Questions addressed included: “What does ‘integration’ mean in our community?” and “What do current facts and figures imply regarding population trends, economics and social affairs?”
On the second day, participants were asked to think about the current situation in their city with questions such as, “What is the untapped potential that immigrants have to offer?” and “What might on-the-ground community project management and networking efforts look like?”

Hard-hitting questions and group brainstorming resulted in greater insight and awareness of the situation in Kerpen, one that is informed by the various perspectives of each and every participant. Summing up her workshop experience in Kerpen, Annette Seiche feels that the workshops have helped to break down barriers and as a result, are very effective.

“They brought people and institutions closer together, helped to clear up prejudices and made it possible to see what Kerpen in particular needs to make its integration strategy a success.” In short, the integration workshop was “… an entirely positive experience for everyone.”

For more information on the Bertelsmann Integration Workshop program, visit the Bertelsmann website.
Play It Fair!

By kturner
June 26, 2009

“Now, everyone with curly hair or who wears glasses go to Saturn!”

As these instructions are called out, a group of twenty boys and girls between 6-8 years old race between two cones (one labeled Jupiter and the other Saturn), which are set in a local playing field about 20 meters apart.

As the game winds down and the children collapse in a circle on the grass, Monique, the camp counselor sits down with them and opens up a discussion. She asks questions such as:

- Did any of you end up alone on a planet during the game?
- Did you have a hard time knowing which planet you were supposed to go to?
- How did being stuck between the two make you feel?
- And, What did you end up doing when that happened?

This game, “From Saturn to Jupiter” is designed to promote an understanding of diversity by helping children become aware that while members of a group are all different, they also have many things in common and are fundamentally equal in terms of their human rights

It is just one of the many activities available in Play It Fair! an educational toolkit developed by Equitas, a Canadian NGO working to advance democracy, human development, peace and social justice through its human rights-based programs.

A Focus on the Future

Developed in collaboration with the City of Montreal, the Play It Fair! program is designed for children and youth between the ages of 6-12 years old and is used at summer day camps and after-school activities in several Canadian communities. The program has developed more than 60 games and activities to promote the core human rights values of cooperation, respect, fairness, inclusion, respect for diversity, responsibility and acceptance.

The games and activities in Play It Fair! serve as an early-intervention tool since they help children develop positive and constructive responses to conflict. The toolkit also includes specific training for counsellors and teachers who are brought to Montreal from across Canada to undergo a training session.

The Play It Fair! toolkit was originally developed by Equitas as part of the project “Preventing Racism and Discrimination: Preparing Canadian Children to Engage in a Multicultural Society” undertaken with municipal agencies and community organizations involved in non-formal education programs for children and youth.

Its human-rights approach has been successful because it emphasizes commonality amongst children while teaching respect for difference. This essentially equitable and democratic approach appeals to children's innate desire for fairness and invests in them the values and skills required to help build a more cohesive and equitable society for the future.

Success

According to Frédéric Hareau, Equitas’ Senior Program Officer, the program is effective because it engages children on a level that is age-appropriate while encouraging them to share their feelings during after-game discussions. “The children become much more conscious of difference and sameness and the games reinforce underlying human rights values, which promote a more harmonious society where everyone is respected.”

Some of the most common issues encountered by children include name-calling, bullying and racism, but Hareau believes change is possible.” In one borough of Montreal where the program was used,” he notes, “there was a reported decrease in physical aggression after a year’s use among 6-12 year olds.” Hareau also mentions that the use of racial slurs and absenteeism also became less common among the children.

In Toronto, David Hains, supervisor of community recreation with the City’s Parks, Forestry and Recreation division, is also convinced of the program’s merits. As a result, he’s pleased to see it break ground in Toronto where it has already reached 5,000 children. Last year, the program was implemented at 30 summer camps in Toronto; projections for 2009 are set for 100. And that’s not all….

“By the summer of 2010, we’re hoping to have the program running in all of Toronto’s approximately 130 summer camps in addition to some after-school programs,” Hains explains. “It’s been a great way to teach important life lessons to children and the biggest draw is that it’s done through a variety of fun games, which the children love.”

Play It Fair! has also successfully travelled to other cities across Canada and is now being used by children in Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg and Fredericton, Moncton and Dieppe in New Brunswick. Camp counsellors in all of these cities have confirmed that the games in the Play it Fair! toolkit help to reinforce the importance of having children
respect one another. They always cite a decrease in verbal abuse, violence and intimidation and a marked improvement in team-spirit and participation. By 2008, the Play It Fair! toolkit had been used in over 200 camps and approximately 2,000 instructors and over 40,000 children had been reached.

First Nations post-script

The program is also winning admirers with Canada’s First Nations community. Ma Mawi, a Winnipeg-based organization that works with First Nations families began using Play It Fair! in 2006.

“The program was easy to adapt”, says Sande MacKinnon, a former youth program coordinator who still maintains an affiliation with Ma Mawi. “We stressed the similarities between human rights values and those of our own culture, and the children really liked that.”

“The program’s incredibly effective,” MacKinnon says. “As instructors, we’re not only teaching, but we’re learning ourselves. Children have so much to say and they need to be given back their voices. This program really helps with that.”

Most recently, in May 2009, the success of the Play if Fair! program in Montreal won Equitas the Anne Greenup Prize at this year’s Prix Québécois de la citoyenneté at the National Assembly in Quebec City. The Anne Greenup prize recognizes contributions in the fight against racism by a non-profit organization.
Asylum Dialogues

By kturner
June 18, 2009

Asylum seeking woman: [thinking] She asked a few questions, so I told her about being in detention...
Ticket Inspector: Do we do this in Britain? Do we lock people like you up? And babies?
Asylum seeking woman: Yes, in places like Yarl’s Wood [removal centre].
Ticket Inspector: My God. What did you do again?
Asylum seeking woman: Nothing. I came to Britain to ask for asylum, but I was refused.
Ticket Inspector: I thought prisons were for people who were criminals or something. I'm so, so sorry...

This interchange comes from Asylum Dialogues, performances that show acts of solidarity between British people towards asylum seekers by the theatre company iceandfire. The dialogues incorporate real conversations between three couples, one asylum seeker, and one British citizen and document the positive transformations created by their encounters.

Asylum Dialogues was launched for Refugee Week 2008 in conjunction with a national British charity, Refugee Action. In 2008 the tour included Derby, London, Liverpool and Bristol. This year, the tour is going to seven of the ten British Cities of Sanctuary: Swansea, Norwich, Oxford, Bristol, Sheffield, Leicester, and London. The partnership between IceandFire and Cities of Sanctuary made sense as they both aim to recognize and strengthen the solidarity between British people and asylum seekers. Iceandfire bring Actors for Human Rights, and the Cities of Sanctuary bring the audience.

As a theatre group, their audience can be larger and more diverse than traditional campaigning organizations, potentially reaching members of the public who might be unaware or apathetic to refugee and asylum issues. One audience member of the 2008 tour commented that the performance was, “enlightening, amazing, heart-wrenching, exactly the kind of truth that should be presented on the British stage today.”

Background

Iceandfire is a theatre company that explores human rights stories through performance across four work strands: production, outreach, education and participation. It was established in London in 2003 by playwright Sonja Linden. The outreach arm of iceandfire is their Actors for Human Rights, which was established in 2006 to replicate the success the original Actors for Human Rights in Melbourne, Australia.

It began as a handful of actors, made through contacts of iceandfire. Christine Bacon, co-Artistic Director commented, “Some actors have told us that they had no understanding of what the asylum system was like until the reading… and then they become ambassadors.” Through word of mouth the network has grown to over 400 professional actors and musicians who contribute their skills voluntarily.

Actors for Human Rights’ flagship performance was the Asylum Monologues, which presented testimonies of people’s experiences with the UK asylum system. They were intertwined with public opinion, political statements and statistical fact. An audience member from Oxford remarked on the effect of the performance, “It really brought home just how easy it is to demonise asylum seekers and just how ignorant a lot of people are about the issues, including myself.”

Since June 2006, over 20,000 people have seen the work and 91% of the audience members have said that seeing Asylum Monologues has encouraged them to become more actively involved in asylum and refugee issues. As well, the response from the people who have shared their stories of asylum has been universally positive. Other refugees and asylum seekers have likewise given Actors for Human Rights their encouragement and support, recognizing a bit of their own experience in the stories.

See 13 minute sample video of Asylum Dialogues; click here.
Accommodate Sheffield – Better Together

By Evelyn
June 16, 2009
Living Together Refugees Portal, Spatial Inclusion

Last year Abdikarim and his wife Fawzia were given great news. The Home Office – the UK department responsible for immigration control – wrote to inform them that they and their two young daughters had been given UK refugee status. In the UK, gaining “refugee status” means they have have indefinite leave to remain in the UK and also the right to work (on their previous status as “asylum seekers Abdikarim and Fawzia were not permitted to have any employment). The change in legal status means that their access to state benefits and state supported accommodation would end in 28 days.

Eager to seek employment, Abdikarim and Fawzia were also worried by the reality that they now had less than a month in which to both find employment and save a sufficient amount for a private rental.

In Sheffield, like much of England, the demand for social housing is high with 18,000 households bidding annually for around 3,000 council vacancies. High demand for housing all over England in the context of a housing shortage has meant that there is an affordability crisis in the private property market. The average house price in Sheffield is seven times the average household income, and most of the new housing that has been built is city centre flats rather than family homes. The result is that families are being forced into poor quality or unsuitable housing.

This is especially true for refugees since they often have limited knowledge with regards to finding and acquiring cheap and suitable accommodation and limited savings to put towards upfront costs and fees such as the deposit.

Still recovering from the stress of their flight from Somalia and the difficulties in setting up in the UK, the additional worry of where he would house his family began to take a toll on Abdikarim’s mental and physical health – further eroding his confidence just as he was in the process of applying for jobs.

Addressing the housing needs of refugees

Housing shortages often have a disproportionate impact on refugees, increasing their already fragile social balance. The Housing Associations’ Charitable Trust (hact) is a London based charity that has been attempting to create housing solutions for refugees and migrants for the past 15 years of their 45 years of operation.

Hact aims to develop, test and promote practical housing solutions to improve social inclusion in all segments of society, but also with particular projects aimed at older people and migrants and refugees. As part of the work on refugees, in 2004, Hact launched Accommodate, a programme targeted towards refugees. The aim is to help meet housing demand in refugee communities in five cities in England. Accommodate was a time limited project that helped to facilitate partnerships between refugee community organizations (RCOs), housing associations, local authorities and other voluntary and statutory agencies. Bringing these groups together would then allow a housing action plan to be created that incorporates both the current and projected housing needs of refugees in each partner city. These action plans however were not limited to getting refugees into housing but aimed to promote the wider integration of refugees by including their needs into mainstream thinking and practice in the area of housing policy.

Accommodate Sheffield

Somali Mental Health Project (MAAN) is a refugee community organization (RCO) which has been in operation since 1994 providing free specialist mental health services within the Somali community in Sheffield which can include anything from counseling, interpreting, home visits, to information and assistance on housing, health and social services. Individuals like Abdikarim who are encountering mental health problems, such as from the stresses of seeking asylum, unemployment and khat addiction, can turn to MAAN for help in identifying the right health services, making appointments and being part of conversations with the doctor. As a result of fifteen years of working in the Somali community, MAAN is well known for its ability to successfully offer culturally appropriate services for Somalis.

MAAN, therefore, was a strong contender for hact’s national call for partnerships because of its clear sense of purpose, its connection and reputation in the community, its existing resources, and strong organizational structures. MAAN became the lead partner in Accommodate Sheffield, a partnership that consisted of refugee community organizations, housing associations, health service providers, Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield City Council. The goal of the Sheffield partnership was to build capacity amongst the different partners. Smaller RCOs could learn how to extend their service provision from larger organizations and local mainstream agencies, such as council and health services, could benefit in training and raising awareness on refugee mental health and housing issues. As well, all organizations would work to improve access and quality of services for this group. For example, their Refugee Housing and Well-Being Awareness Day in 2006 had presentations on housing, the private rented sector and mental health promotion. It brought in over 100 attendees.

In addition to increasing the impact of service delivery, the Sheffield-based partnership influenced local and national mental health strategies by raising awareness of refugee issues through their substantial casework. During the partnership, destitution among asylum-seekers became a pressing issue for the partnership organizations to address. In 2006, they had over 400 cases in just the Kurdish community alone. Because these individuals do not qualify for benefits and often receive no support, the partnership made it their duty to ensure they received the appropriate support.

Building agendas based on city need

Accommodate Sheffield was just one of five partnerships that made up the second phase of Accommodate that focused on the delivery of practical services. The first phase saw the creation of ten city partnerships across England, with each partnership developing action plans to reflect the social needs and realities of the given area. Five of the ten partnerships were then given small grants to implement their action plans over a two year period.
Different cities developed housing actions plans that reflected their partnerships interests as well as the needs of the local refugee communities. For example, Accommodate Bolton involved its Somali community in a refugee-led community initiative focused on investing in a number of properties. Accommodate Bradford focused on providing advice to refugees during their ‘transition period’ as described in Abdikarim and Fawzia’s case. As well, refugees and young volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds worked together to refurbish the properties in which participants were to live for the Accommodate Leeds. The Accommodate North West Birmingham partnership sought empowerment through a different means, as there the refugees advocated the needs and aspirations of their communities to housing and regeneration policy makers and practitioners.

The Sheffield partnership built a network of organizations to raise the awareness of the link between refugee mental health and housing with the aim of improving integration. The project was true to the concept of integration, in that the aim was to provide better services to refugee communities, to enable their access to services, and also to influence mainstream services and policies to recognize the presence and needs of refugees. The partnerships enabled participants to learn and build on each other’s expertise while also addressing immediate concerns such as the destitution of refused asylum seekers. Through is partnerships, MAAN has developed beyond its original mission and now extends its services to other refugee communities.

Success

“My children are in school, myself and my wife are both working, which are good indications of the future. God willing, we intend to join the rest of the Sheffield community in developing Sheffield, the United Kingdom and the world at large! God Bless!” — Asylum seeker, hact report ‘Between Nass and a Hard Place’

The success of Accommodate comes from its recognition for the need of cross services delivery – in this case that refugees often face unique mental stresses as a result of their journeys and that assistance with practical issues such as housing can do a great deal to alleviate these pressures. As well, the strong role of partnerships that were also focused on a common aim, was another essential component of their success. All five partnerships were based in different areas of recent refugee migration and provided lessons for the future of refugee and new migrant housing provision. The aims included building better partnerships, pioneering housing and support solutions for refugees, empowering refugee community organizations, and changing policy and practice.
Time Together: Mentoring for Daily Life

By Evelyn
June 26, 2009

Living Together-Refugee Portal, Social Inclusion

Before moving to the UK from Afghanistan Lylla had never used an escalator before, was unfamiliar with the idea of public parks and was understandably overwhelmed by the London tube.

Moving to a new country usually means a mix of anticipation for the possibility of a new life and adventures, as well as anxiety at the host of challenges that it raises. These emotions are experienced even more intensely when you are fleeing to a new country as a refugee.

And often, as with Lylla and the escalator, it is the day to day challenges and unfamiliarities, that tend to be overlooked by many settlement and support services but which can often be even more isolating and difficult for newly arrived refugees.

Time Together, a volunteer refugee mentoring initiative aims to address these often overlooked challenges associated with integration, as well as the practical issues of English language and employment seeking. After Lylla registered with Time Together, she was matched with Laura who helped her use the London Underground for the first time and took her around to the local attractions such as museums. Laura, an English teacher, had decided to become a mentor in response to the negative media portrayal of refugees. With Laura’s support, Lylla soon felt confident to visit local parks and explore the city on her own.

Translating Policy to Practice

The impetus for the Time Together programme emerged from a recommendation from Home Office, the government department in charge of immigration; that mentoring could assist in the integration of refugees in the UK. Evidence showed that a person’s ability to adapt to a new environment is greatly increased by having a patient companion with local knowledge, who takes an interest in the life of a refugee, and who is dedicated to providing support and advice. The recommendation further stated that mentoring and befriending schemes illustrated how integration works as a two-way process – both refugee and host community have a role in the relationship, contributing towards stronger, more socially inclusive communities.

Time Together had identified nine dimensions of integration to highlight in the mentoring process: confidence, English language, employment, education, integration, UK culture, becoming familiar with the local area, volunteering, and access to services. Each of these dimensions may affect people differently, depending on their previous national context, personality, expectations and needs. Broadly, the mentoring process is often about building confidence to access goods and services, and both trying and persevering with new opportunities.

Building Supportive Partnerships

All programme participants undergo a process to ensure that the mentoring match will be positive and sustained. First both potential mentors and mentees undergo training separately depending on their role in the pair, which can cover concepts of integration, refugee issues, and the essentials to mentoring. It is at this stage that people in the programme also become familiar with the mutual commitments of mentors, mentees and the programme coordinator. After training, potential pairs are introduced in a group separately depending on their role in the pair, which can cover concepts of integration, refugee issues, and the essentials to mentoring. So for example, Lylla would have already known that Laura was an English teacher, and Laura would have already known that Lylla wanted to be able to practise English with a patient native speaker. The coordinator’s role in the relationship is important even after the matching stage as they help to keep the pair motivated and committed to the arrangement, support the pair through possible challenges and if necessary, intervene if the pair doesn’t hit it off.

One mentor who underwent the process was empathetic to the aims of the scheme, “I know how much I appreciated it when people in the country I was travelling in took the time to talk to me and welcome me to their country. I wanted to offer the same experience to someone coming to the UK.” With her mentee, she had improved her French language comprehension and learned about African culture and cuisine.

Integration in Action

In an independent assessment of Time Together, the impact of this relationship-based mentoring initiative was found to have a highly positive impact on the integration of refugees. Out of the study sample of thirty mentors and mentees, twenty-two of the mentors had successfully enhanced the integration of their mentees. This was judged through the help and advice they offered on practical matters concerning everyday life in Britain, building and sustaining confidence in their mentees, and contributing to their mentee’s English language improvement. Furthermore, seven of the twenty-two mentors reported life-altering experiences, which often formed the basis of strong, mutually-beneficial friendships.

After three years of running the programme, TimeBank received funding in 2005 from the Home Office and HM Treasury Invest to expand the Time Together programme nationwide. There are now 24 projects running across the UK managed and supported by a central team based at TimeBank, the charity running the Time Together programme, in partnership with local organizations. Since the beginning of the programme seven years ago, over 2,500 refugees have been matched with mentors.
Most evenings on the way home from work, Dewei Lee stops by the library to browse for books or newspapers from his native China or to pick up DVDs and other resources that help him improve his English and his hopes for a better job. Currently studying computer programming and employed part time as a janitor, Dewei can’t afford to spend anything extra on recreational reading material or English classes.

“It’s a very helpful place for the immigrant people,” Dewei said of the library. “I come to use the internet, to read the papers and to attend their classes and to meet other people.”

Public libraries have long played an essential role in the integration and settlement of urban immigrants. As libraries across the United States shape their collections and program offerings to better serve the needs of changing demographics, the Queens Public Library, one of New York City’s three independent library systems serves as a model for how libraries can play a vital role in integrating newcomers to American society.

As early as 1977, the Queens Library system was demonstrating leadership in its positioning of the library as a responsive institution ready to adapt its collections and services to meet the needs of the changing composition of the city borough’s population.

Queens County in New York City is one of the most diverse counties in the United States, with more than 55% of its population speaking a language other than English at home. Residents of the area come from across the globe including China, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, South Asia, Latin America, the Philippines, Korea, Poland, and Ireland.

As newcomers settle and then migrate in and out of the borough, the population demographics are constantly shifting and changing. Keeping the library system responsive to the needs of this evolving community required a proactive and flexible approach. The Queens Public Library collection is regularly updated to ensure that it remains relevant to the changing community. The success that Queens Public Library had had in tapping into the needs of their surrounding community is reflected in their circulation rates.

The library system is the nation’s busiest, circulating more than 23 million books, videos, music and other library items in 70 languages in 2007. In August 2008 the most recently released copy of the “PLD Public Library Statistical Report 2008” showed that the Queens Public Library topped all U.S. public library circulation with over 21,000,000 items lenti, confirming their first place ranking for national circulation levels.

Expanding their offer

The programs at the Queens Public Library also reflect their longstanding commitment to serving this diverse community. The home page is available in six languages and as part of the “New Americans Program” (NAP) launched in 1977, the library regularly holds free lectures and seminars to help new immigrants access information, often in their native languages, on conducting job searches, social services, citizenship as well as parenting classes to help make the transition easier for newly arrived children. It was under the New Americans Program that the Library first began building an international collection of resources based on the demographic study of the populations living near the library system. The program includes a stream of cultural projects such as free readings, concerts and workshops celebrating the literary, performance and folk art from immigrants in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The success of the New Americans program (NAP) remains strong. In 2005 they offered over 73 coping skills programs in 9 languages which attracted 1,300 people and they organized over 84 cultural and arts programs drawing 6,500 participants. Offerings ranged from discussions of workplace rights and of Islam in Spanish, to dance workshops, author visits, and health seminars on obesity.

The library’s ESOL programs were so popular that in 2000 the library created a new Adult Learner Program to oversee the ESOL classes formerly offered through the New Americans Program, as well as family literacy and adult learning center programming. Today, the Queens Public Library ESOL program is the largest library-managed ESOL program in the country. Approximately 100 semester-long free classes are offered per year serving between 2,500 and 3,000 students, taught by paid, professional instructors.

Other project streams have developed around the second language programs based on demand and need. For instance, the Adult Learner Program set up computer labs in early 2005 to teach basic computer skills to ESOL students. Hundreds of students have already taken these free classes. In 2002, a family literacy program was created to offer classes for pre-kindergarten and K-3 aged children and their caregivers at the library. The classes prepare caregivers and children on what to expect in American schools, helps parents understand the educational system here, and teaches them how to be advocates for their children.

Long Standing Success

The Queens Public Library has been a community hub and national leader in immigrant integration over for thirty years. This success is due in part to their consistent focus on the ebbs and flows of immigration in the community they serve. The Library was the first in the US to use a demographer to conduct detailed analyses of the population within its library service areas. This data is used to inform international collection development, design ESOL classes and living skills workshops in multi-languages and to plan cultural events for area newcomers. The demographer also provides accessible reports on Queens population data and posts them to the website for the benefit of the public.

The Library also benefits from its long history and aggressive approach to community relations. In the early years of the New Americans Program, library staff conducted regular and focused outreach into the community to ensure that immigrants were aware of the libraries’ programs and not afraid to use them. As the Queens Public Library programs have grown over time, so too has their impact on the community. For instance, in January 2007 the Library partnered with the Queens Hospital system to help address issues of health literacy in the community with the creation of HealthLinks an initiative designed to improve access to cancer screening and care in under-served communities. The Library has similarly partnered with the Queens Museum and the Queens Health Network to provide on-site ESOL classes. In 2008 Queens Library partnered with the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs to facilitate the process for immigrants wanting to apply for the Diversity Visa Lottery (DV-2010). On a national level, the Queens Library is working with US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the American Library Association on a compilation of library best practices for use around the country to promote immigrant integration. The best practices guide will be issued by USCIS.
Most recently the Queens Library was listed as a 2009 Finalist for the prestigious E Pluribus Unum Prize coordinated by the Migration Policy Institute to recognise the efforts of those who are creating more unified communities by strengthening the relationship between native and foreign born Americans.
A Community Roadmap: the Wegweiser Kommune

By admin2
Uncategorized

How does a city know if their integration efforts are being successful?

While anecdotal evidence and observation is useful, it is often not enough when it comes to planning and implementing policy and programming. For instance, what if a city needs or wants to know the percentage of children with migration backgrounds that are attending the local kindergarten in order to effectively track these numbers and decide whether the existing efforts are successful or if they need to be adapted?

Developing strategically planned and successful integration policies requires up-to-date, accessible data that maps a city’s population to reliable social and economic indicators of well-being. Yet demographic data in this area is often poorly maintained, incomplete, inconsistent or inaccessible. How can city planners and community actors measure their progress or learn from one another without access to standardized data in easy to use formats?

With these concerns and questions in mind, the Bertelsmann Stiftung partnered with the state of North Rhine-Westphalia’s Ministry of Integration (MGFFI) and the GEBIT Institute in Münster to create an on-line database which provides data on community level integration and allows German cities to answer these and other demographic and data related questions.

This project known as, “Wegweiser Kommune” covers approximately 85% of the German population and has become the first ever nationwide resource with data, projections and ideas at the municipal level. The site provides users with current data and facts about immigrant integration as well as analysis of the effects that these demographic developments are having. This data is available for all cities and municipalities in Germany that have 5,000 or more residents.

While the project was intended for municipal policy and management decision makers, it is also an open public resource, freely available to other interested municipal stakeholders and citizens.

The impact of having this data available is significant. It allows for an equitable and objective comparison of municipalities which in turn allows local governments and other actors to assess what policies are working, which need to be changed and as a result of the increased transparency between regions – which ideas or initiatives can and should be duplicated.

About

Wegweiser Kommune is an interactive platform that allows complex contents to be searched and viewed in a variety of media compatible and interactive forms.

Data, studies and ideas on municipal issues such as demographic change, economics and employment, housing, social status and integration can all be interactively displayed and examined from an interdisciplinary perspective.

For instance, a user can choose a municipality and find out the number of foreign students graduates living there that are taking the Abitur (the university entrance qualifications examination) as compared to the total number of graduates. This data can then be compared with data from the district, the state and up to 5 other municipalities. The result of this comparison can indicate whether there is a need for action in that area. A similar approach can also be used to compare data related to “job integration” and “social status.”

If the figures from other cities and districts are better, then best practice examples from those cities can be used for guidance. The result? through the Wegweiser Kommune, hard data can be used to provide key learnings from other cities and to prompt the implementation of improved integration strategies and measures.

The Wegweiser also provides population projections for 2025, individual demographic reports as well as action plans that can be generated dynamically using flexible criteria.

The strength of the Wegweiser Kommune is that the data is defined by consistency, clarity, practicality and relevancy.

Success

Since its launch in 2006, Wegweiser Kommune has received over 1 million visitors. It is considered the key knowledge platform for policy decision makers and strategic planners and recognized as an essential tool in actively supporting sustainable municipal policies –on the cutting edge of modern social knowledge management.

Cities may have always used statistical information as powerful tools for planning and knowledge management, but projects like the Wegweiser Kommune are demonstrating creative ways in which such data can be put to use for social change and competitive advantage. Other cities are also examining how open data initiatives or social mapping exercises can be leveraged to support better integration and social policy.

Harvey Low, from the City of Toronto’s Social Policy and Analysis & Research Section, comments, “We are in the midst of releasing an information portal that will help both municipal government and community sector organizations use data to map critical social indicators to specific questions and issues and will allow us to examine the effectiveness of our social inclusion strategy.” Low also points out that data liberation projects like these also level the playing field and foster collaboration and a more unified multi-sector approach to tackling city issues like poverty.
Imagine coming to a new city, from across the globe, unsure of the local language or customs and with little support from friends or family. A small gesture, a welcoming sign and a reassurance that you are wanted and welcome in this new community could make all the difference.

The "City of Sanctuary" movement is intended to build a culture of municipal hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK and with it dispel the misconceptions around refugees and instead, create an environment of broad based support and understanding for their reality.

In 2007, with the support of the City Council and over 70 other local organisations the City of Sheffield became the UK’s first "City of Sanctuary."

The City of Sanctuary movement compares itself to the idea of a "Fairtrade City." In the latter a wide range of community groups and organisations make a commitment to using and selling fair trade goods. Similarly, in a "City of Sanctuary" a broad range of local organisations, community groups and faith communities, as well as the local government publicly commit to welcoming, supporting and including within the community all those people seeking sanctuary.

Craig Barnett, the City of Sanctuary national coordinator says that the project aims to dispel misconceptions and build a culture of hospitality. "It’s about offering a positive vision of our city as a place of sanctuary," he says.

The Journey to Sanctuary

Since 2005, 96 organisations in Sheffield, including schools, community projects, student groups and faith communities, have made a commitment to welcoming asylum seekers. Their role is to offer friendship and advocacy and invite asylum seekers within their organisations to participate and hold positions of responsibility.

Donna Covey, chief executive of the Refugee Council cites the mix of grassroots support as one of the unique aspects of the Sheffield City of Sanctuary Movement. "It comes from the wider community. These aren’t people who work in the refugee sector or campaigners necessarily. They are just ordinary members of the public who want to provide a place of safety to people who are forced to flee to the UK."

The journey towards becoming a “City of Sanctuary” began when community and faith groups pledged their support to the idea. Over the next two years, the movement grew and Sheffield city council came on board. Supporting organisations agreed on a long-term vision of inclusion for asylum seekers and refugees, set out in a City of Sanctuary Manifesto. These include ambitious goals for the participation of people seeking sanctuary in city life, and their access to essential services and support such as education, healthcare and accommodation.

Gathering wide community support and drawing up an inclusion strategy are two of the main criteria for becoming a City of Sanctuary.

The City of Sheffield estimates that around 1000 asylum seekers are supported in Sheffield by the government’s UK Border Agency, plus up to 1000 who have had their claims refused but who are unable or unwilling to leave the UK – however, it is not possible to estimate how many asylum seekers the project has helped as its purpose is to spread goodwill and change cultures rather than offer direct assistance.

Among the successes visible around Sheffield are signs throughout the city that read, “We welcome asylum seekers and refugees”.

A Growing Movement

Since Sheffield led the way by becoming a City of Sanctuary, the movement has grown across the UK. There are now an increasing number of City of Sanctuary working groups in towns and cities in the UK including Bradford, Bristol, Coventry, Leicester, London, Norwich, Nottingham, Oxford, Sheffield and Swansea.

This national network of groups meets regularly to share learning, supported by a national co-ordinator who is responsible for promoting the movement throughout the UK. The national City of Sanctuary movement has also published a handbook ‘Becoming a City of Sanctuary’, which contains guidance on building a local initiative, and case studies from City of Sanctuary groups around the UK.

For some organisations, the challenge is that unlike other projects, the concept of a City of Sanctuary is not one based on fixed numbers or quantifiable targets, but rather a long-term vision of cultural change.

It is also an idea with global interest. In the United States, approximately 31 cities have designated themselves Sanctuary Cities. For instance, in 1989, San Francisco passed the “City of Refuge” Ordinance (Sanctuary Ordinance) which prohibits City employees from helping Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with immigration investigations or arrests unless such help is required by federal law or warrant. The Ordinance is rooted in the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980’s when churches across the country provided a refuge to Central Americans fleeing civil wars in their countries.

 Mayor Gavin Newsom of the City of San Francisco and Supervisor Tom Ammiano recently re-affirmed this commitment to being a City of Refuge when they launched a public awareness campaign to promote San Francisco’s “sanctuary” policy for undocumented residents and to assure all residents that accessing city services does not make an
individual vulnerable to federal immigration authorities. “As a Sanctuary City, San Francisco has and will continue to provide compassionate services to all immigrants regardless of status,” said Supervisor Ammiano.
Walking School Bus

By Evelyn

May 15, 2009

Municipal, New Gateways, Social Inclusion

Until last year, Rahul’s Dad used to drop him off at school on his way to work each morning. Recently arrived from Bangalore, India, both of Rahul’s parents were uncomfortable with the idea of him walking to school and hadn’t yet had a chance to meet any of their neighbors or his other classmates.

“Going to school is way more fun now!” Rahul enthuses. “Mom is with me, I get to be outside and I see my two best friends before class starts.”

The change is the result of the Walking School Bus (WSB) program. A “Walking School Bus” is a group of children who walk to and from school together supervised by neighborhood adults. Like a real bus, it “travels” at a set time and the children come out to join at stops situated close to where they live.

The Walking School Bus is run by adult volunteers (usually parents) who act as the “drivers” and “coordinators”. For Rahul’s mom, Renu, the program has also provided the opportunity for her to get involved in the local school and meet other parents. “It's been a nice way to start to get to know our new community” she explains. “Now I see other parents and have an opportunity to have a casual chat and find out about the small things that can help Rahul adjust better to his new school environment.”

Established in 1999, there are now over 300 “Walking School Bus” routes operating in neighbourhoods throughout the Auckland region. Each route is coordinated through the local school, with over 1800 volunteers supporting the program city-wide. This means that more than 5,000 students use a Walking School Bus every day.

The Walking School Bus has benefited the students, the parents, the school and the local community. Daily walks provide a chance for children to learn road safety and increase their confidence and independence. Parents and caregivers have a chance to meet and speak which builds a stronger community and sense of investment in and around the school. An increase in the number of students walking has also meant a decrease in the traffic congestion and pollution on the school run. Not surprisingly the local transportation authority has also become an enthusiastic partner of the initiative.

Research from the University of Auckland has confirmed what participants in the Walking School Bus program like Renu and Rahul have experienced first hand: that particularly for new immigrants, this initiative creates community cohesion, provides an opportunity to socialize with other parents and develop a relationship with the school. The research also showed that having this relationship between home, community and school results in better outcomes for students – they tend to do better and as a result and stay in formal schooling for longer.

The success of the Walking School Bus has spread to a number of other jurisdictions and focus areas, for example:

- Waterloo (Canada), where is has been used by a local school board to support leadership initiatives for older students;
- the state of Victoria (Australia), where VicHealth piloted a walking school bus programme as a health promotion initiative in four local council areas that has expanded to include 58 council areas;
- Seattle (US), where the Harborview Medical Center was nationally recognized by the 2007 Foster McGaw Prize for its work with ethnic communities, including its use of a walking school bus programme to promote child safety in inner city neighbourhoods;
- Additionally, recent pediatric health research has evaluated the Seattle programme as an effective strategy for combating child obesity in low-income, urban neighborhoods.
Urban Citizenship and Identity

By kturner
March 5, 2009
Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Political Inclusion

September 2009. It has come to our attention that Dr. Ramadan has been removed from his posts as community adviser to the city of Rotterdam and visiting lecturer on religion at Erasmus University. Regardless of this recent turn of events, Cities of Migration remains impressed with the initiative taken by the City of Rotterdam to co-sponsor an academic appointment with the university to help interpret and implement its integration policies and advance its “urban citizenship” model. — Editor, Cities of Migration, September 3, 2009.

Cities around the world are seeking new ways to create and encourage effective dialogue between cultural communities, new immigrants and the larger community. As part of their efforts, the city of Rotterdam has recruited a high profile and recognized international commentator to draw greater attention to integration issues and foster the sort of proactive discussion that can prevent racial and religious tensions from building. As a platform for this, the municipality of Rotterdam has provided the funding for the creation of the Chair in “Identity and Citizenship” (Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of History and Arts) at Erasmus University. This Chair is part of the city’s commitment to urban citizenship.

On May 11, 2006 the City announced an official commitment to “Urban Citizenship” in reference to their adoption of an integrated framework for all activities in Rotterdam during the 2006-2010 political term – with a focus on the areas on integration, participation, emancipation and citizenship.

Following on this commitment, on January 1 2007, renowned philosopher and theologian Prof. Dr. Tariq Ramadan was appointed as the Visiting Professor in charge of the Chair: “Citizenship and Identity” at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, a position he will hold for a two year tenure. In this role, he will advise the city of Rotterdam within the context of the “Citizenship, Identity and Sense of Belonging Project.”

Ramadan is a Swiss Muslim academic with a focus in Islamic Theology. He has been ranked by Prospect and Foreign Policy as the 8th most influential contemporary intellectuals in the world. He holds an MA in Philosophy and French literature and PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Geneva. In Cairo, he had training in classic Islamic scholarship at Al-Azhar University. He is also a Senior Research Fellow at St. Antony’s College (Oxford), Doshisha University (Kyoto, Japan) and at the Lokahi Foundation (London), as professor of Islamic Studies. He is also the president of the European think tank: European Muslim Network (EMN) in Brussels.

Dr. Ramadan is recognised for his reformist views on Islam, including his emphasis on the difference between religion and culture (which he believes are too often confused) and belief that citizenship and religion are separate concepts.

Urban Citizenship for all Rotterdammers

There are over 1 million Muslims living in the Netherlands and they represent 5.8% of the population and are mostly concentrated in the urban areas such as Rotterdam. The City of Rotterdam hopes that by appointing an international figure to the lead the integration debate it will help to build trust and mutual knowledge between the both Muslims and Non-Muslims. Dr. Ramadan will be working not only at the university but will also bring the debate to schools, mosques and community centres particularly around the issued of education, employment and media and perception.

Ramadan conducted an extensive city tour of Rotterdam in the spring of 2007, asking various groups how to to develop a model of urban citizenship that recognized the contribution of each citizen and could contribute to a collective sense of belonging. Among the programs resulting from this consultation are a series of education initiatives aimed at building bridges between cultural communities.

For example, with Tariq Ramadan’s co-operation, the City of Rotterdam has recently launched the ‘Joining Hands against Forced Marriages’ campaign. The project began as a local initiative led by SPIOR and is aimed primarily at the Muslim community.

The Europe-wide campaign on forced marriage has been launched in other cities, including Brussels, Paris, Madrid, London, Berlin and Bologna. A booklet published by SPIOR about forced marriages has been translated for the purpose of the European campaign into English, German, French, Italian and Spanish and will be distributed in six European countries.
Urban Citizens: Municipal Identification Cards (ID) For Inclusive And Safe Communities

By ktturner
November 18, 2008
Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal, Municipal Welcome-ability, Social Inclusion

The card is not interchangeable with a drivers license or visa. However, what it does is validate its holders as full fledged participants in civil society.

Background

The card In the city of New Haven, between 1990 and 2000 there was a 43 per cent increase in the foreign born population. Currently, there are 127,288 city residents, an estimated 17 percent of whom are foreign born. As with the rest of the state, residents from Latin America constitute the biggest group (38 per cent) of foreign born residents in the city. In addition, in New Haven there are an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 undocumented immigrants, which means that about 10 percent of the city’s population is made up of residents without status.

A Practical Community Need

The rapid increase in the immigrant population in recent years presents the city with a number of challenges and opportunities, particularly as it relates to the undocumented population. These undocumented residents face the traditional obstacles confronted by immigrants (language barriers, cultural differences, barriers to educated attainment and low wage work) as well as additional problems uniquely tied to their lack of status, including difficulty accessing financial institutions, victimization, scams promising citizenship and other areas affecting quality of life.

Fear of authorities often dominates immigrant communities. John Jairo Lugo, president of the local immigrant rights group Unidad Latina en Acción said that lack of documentation deters immigrants from reporting crimes because they frequently become objects of suspicion if they are unable to prove their identities. “Our community has always been a target of attacks,” Lugo said, “but it is difficult to prove your innocence without an English language ID. If you have an encounter with the police department they can detain you for days or months in jail until you can come up with valid identification.”

Liam Brennan of the drafters of the Elm City ID proposal said that immigrants are disproportionately victimized by theft and home invasion, since they are frequently paid in cash but have nowhere to deposit their earning since local banks usually require a drivers license or social security number to set up an account – all documents that cannot be obtained by non-citizens. But Brennan said that many banks have agreed to accept the new municipal ID. With a possession of a bank account and a valid ID, it is hoped that immigrants will be simultaneously, “more likely to report crime and less likely to experience it themselves.”

Nevertheless, one of the challenges of the cards is that immigrants are wary of obtaining one in case it makes them vulnerable to the immigration authorities. It is estimated that one out of every five immigrants will apply for the ID. Immigrants who decide to apply also face intimidation by protesters who are opposed to the program.

Selling the idea

The City of New Haven won broad based support for the municipal ID program by promoting its practical virtues instead of its ideological ones. According to Board of Alderman President Carl Goldfield, the Elm City ID, “is above all a pragmatic policy – and one that benefits the whole city.” He continued, “From a public health and public safety standpoint, it just doesn’t make any sense to have 10,000 members of a community afraid to get medical help or report crime, just because they are undocumented.”

The other tactic that was used was that the creation of the ID cards was positioned as having broad based appeal. In addition to helping to create greater buy in for the initiative, it also would prevent undocumented immigrants from being easily identified by virtue of their cardholder status. Consequently, it was positioned as a useful form of ID for high school students (who have not yet qualified for a drivers license), seniors who may no longer have one and due to its “all in one” status.

Going Forward

Public officials in New York and other major cities are monitoring New Haven’s experiment and cautiously evaluating its suitability for their own communities.

However, Yale Law School Professor Michael Wishnie who is involved with the ID cards, adds that ultimately the municipal ID is only a short-term solution for a problem that demands “a federal fix.” He believes that local debate in cities in like New haven could however eventually generate enough pressure to bring federal law makers back to the table. “The friction that we are seeing here in Connecticut is what will drive people back to their senators to demand comprehensive reform,” Wishnie said. “Until that happens, communities will continue to govern themselves.”

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Twin Streams Project: Common Ground for Environmental Sustainability

By ktturner
May 17, 2009

Civic Inclusion, Municipal, Spatial Inclusion

Streams are the lifeblood our planet and are generally a natural draw to the people who live around or near them. Leveraging this spirit, the vision for Project Twin Streams is “Working together for healthy streams and strong communities: creating a sustainable future.”

Project Twin Streams, is an innovative community initiative that brings together diverse groups around the shared goal of restoring and reclaiming local streams. This multifaceted initiative is successfully overcoming cultural differences and encouraging a sustainable community development approach to urgent and local environmental issues such as storm water management, stream restoration and pollution.

Project Twin Streams is located in Waitakere City, one of seven territorial areas within the Auckland region and home to over 186,444 residents from a range of cultural communities. For instance, 16 per cent of residents identify as “Asian”, 15 per cent as Pacific peoples, 13 per cent as Maori and 10 per cent as “other.” Thirty four per cent were born overseas, and after English, Samoan is the most common language.

Located in the heart of Waitakere City is 56 Km of stream banks that are the focus of Project Twin Streams (key facts and figures). Around the issue of restoring the health of these local waterways, Project Twin Streams builds cross cultural relationships by encouraging local groups to take ownership and responsibility for finding and implementing solutions to the problems facing the water catchment. The result has been a growth in community spirit and connection. As one local resident described, “You get to know your neighbors…you know that you are not alone and that we “awhi and tautoko” [encourage and support] each other here.”

Background
Project Twin Streams is the result of a local council-community partnership created in 2003 as part of the eco-city mandate for Waitakere City. Funding of NZ$39.5 million over a ten year period (from 2003-2012) allowed for the purchase of 100 properties in the 1:100 year flood plain to restore the natural flow of the waterways as well as 56 kilometers of streamside planting to create a natural filter for storm water runoff before it goes into the streams.

In order to engage the local community and build the sense of ownership over these issues, the Waitakere City Council began by contacting existing community groups to engage them in specific activities such as stream restoration, planning eco-sourced native plants, weeding, removing rubbish, and providing habitat for relocated native fauna.

A Cultured Environment
The use of arts to expand and celebrate community building is another unique aspect of Project Twin Streams. For example, six local community groups have collaborated on a sculpture to celebrate the cultural diversity involved in Project Twin Streams. Janet Holt, the Project Twin Streams Arts Coordinator, says that the project has become increasingly exciting and taken on a life of its own: “This is community engagement in its purest form – all of these groups are working together to incorporate their ideas into the overall design.”

The resulting sculpture reflects this diversity. The central pillar of the sculpture is the theme of growth: the growth of nature, people, plants, community and cultures all around the stream. The bottom panel of the sculpture is based on Maori designs, the central pillar on designs from the Croatian community and the large leaves and birds on the top will be decorated in mosaics with Pacific designs.

Success
By creatively engaging a community around a shared physical issue that was literally right in their backyard, Project Twin Streams became a channel to connect local people with their council and their neighbors and a way of encouraging new migrants to build a greater sense of ownership and connection to their new homes.

In 2007, Project Twin Streams received international recognition as a finalist in the International Thiess River Prize and was Highly Commended in the Sustainable Urban Communities Category at the Auckland Regional Council’s Sustainable Environment Awards.

The success of Project Twin Streams also helped to initiate several other projects including the Project Twin Streams Sustainable Household Living demonstration, the Millbrook Edible Garden and also resulted in changes to the management and operation of Vision Waitakere Gardens, a retirement village adjacent to the streams.
Traffic! Advocating for Environmental Health

By Evelyn
March 5, 2009

Living Together

The increased focus on the quality of our physical and natural environment is theoretically open to and for the benefit of everyone. And yet, the reality is that "immigration", "inclusion" and "the environment" are still not often issues that overlap – even though new-comer and low income communities are often the most vulnerable to environmental hazards.

For instance, the Excelsior District in the Southeast area of San Francisco is the only district in the city where the majority of residents are foreign born. The District also has the lowest per capita income in the city ($19,176 USD) and is ground zero for traffic pollution.

Relative to the city at large, this community experiences significantly reduced air quality as a result of pollution from short cut diesel truck routes, diesel buses and a steady stream of toxic dust coming from the freeway and busy through-fares in the neighborhood.

Commercial and industrial trucks regularly travel through the neighborhood and traffic in the Excelsior has been measured as being two to three times higher than in other neighborhoods. The majority of buses that service the neighborhoods are still diesel vehicles as opposed to new hybrid buses.

The result is that Excelsior residents are being disproportionately exposed to environmental health risks and for six years in a row, the neighborhood has had the highest overall number of people hospitalized for asthma.

In 2004, People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights ("PODER"), along with the Chinese Progressive Association and the Environmental Law & Justice Clinic at Golden Gate University, launched the "Immigrant Power for Environmental Health & Justice Initiative" to empower the low-income and immigrant communities in Southeast San Francisco to address their exposure to these environmental hazards.

PODER is a grassroots, environmental justice organization located in the San Francisco’s Mission district but that works with communities throughout the Southeast side of San Francisco in neighborhoods like the Excelsior, Portola, Visitacion Valley, and Bayview Hunters Point. PODER works to organize immigrant families to find local solutions to the issues they collectively face by actively involving them in decision making process.

As a result, the goal of the "Immigrant Power Initiative" program was not to simply advocate for environmental changes on behalf of the afflicted communities but to actually empower them to become their own advocates and through this, improve their access to and participation in health, environmental programs and policy making.

To do this, the "Immigrant Power Initiative" went into the community to train members to use technical devices to monitor pollution. This enabled the community to track pollution levels independent of both city government and outside providers and to have the information to challenge scientific analysis that did not reflect their lived experiences. Education seminars helped the community understand and be able to navigate and lobby the government to bring about change in their communities. Art and other creative activities were also used to communicate important information about environmental health and justice.

Success...

Just as the "Immigrant Power Initiative" was the result of the joint effort between PODER, the Chinese Progressive Association and the Environmental Law & Justice Clinic at Golden Gate University, training members from across the community enabled them to learn about and build alliances across traditional and cultural divides. It also increased the reach and network of community leaders who were now familiar with how to negotiate the political system to change and support an issue that they are all invested in.

It is a long-term effort but their have been regular victories along the way.

For instance, most recently PODER has been working to lobby the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority (MTA) which regulated one of the leading sources of pollution in immigrant neighborhoods – diesel exhaust and matter coming from medium and large sized trucks. Based on both PODER’s own independent research (at one residential intersection in the Excelsior volunteers counted over 107 medium and big trucks passing over the hour period and amounting to 10% of the overall traffic) as well as that of the Public Health Department, the Excelsior District was identified as having over 17 hot spots where diesel pollution is being linked to sickness. Leaders from PODER and the Chinese Progressive Association have been lobbying the MTA Board of Directors and Supervisors to overhaul how the city plans for traffic in their neighborhoods. Community residents testified on the impact that this pollution is having on their health and lives and helped lobby and rally to show their support.

On Monday November 17th, 2008, celebration was in order when the Board of Supervisors of the MTA took its first step to pass a resolution that would require the MTA to plan for health and environmental justice and reduce the diesel pollution in these communities.
To Bean or Not To Bean?

By Evelyn
June 18, 2009
Entrepreneurship Inclusion

If genuine integration is a mutual dynamic between the newly arrived and the local community – then “success” happens when “community” is no longer defined primarily by ethnicity, religion or culture.

As Superior Tofu, a Vancouver based business describes it, “Our heritage is Chinese. Our roots are family and the local community – regardless of ethnic origin.”

In 2007, to celebrate their 25th anniversary, Superior Tofu created the Superior Tofu Community Fund with the help of the Vancouver Foundation. The purpose of the fund was to help them give back this community at large.

To date, this has included donations to the Richmond Hospital, the Children’s Hospital, the Royal Columbian Hospital, Red Cross, United Way and Breast Cancer Foundation. Superior Tofu also sponsors regular community events throughout the City and donates significant amounts of tofu to local schools for their lunch programs.

Founded in 1982, Superior Tofu is the result of three generations of tofu making knowledge. This Vancouver based business now produces a variety of tofu and tofu products from soy desserts, drinks to tofu puffs. They have annual sales in the millions and continue to grow their markets- with a current focus on exporting into China.

For Rita Cheng, the President of Superior Tofu and founder of the Superior Tofu Community Fund, both the business and the ability to now give back to her community is an immigration story that has come full circle.

“I grew up with stories of my grandparents’ tofu store, which they started in Vancouver in the 1940’s. My grandfather made tofu in an old building situated in the outskirts of Chinatown. The small, ground-level rented room served its purpose well. My grandparents lived upstairs in the same building in small living quarters. As an entrepreneur, Grandpa sold and delivered his hand-crafted tofu blocks in big white pails filled with water. He towed his old red wagon daily through the Chinatown streets delivering his tofu orders” reminisces Rita. See video.

The Superior Tofu Community Fund that Rita created operates like a savings account that will grow, and each year, a portion of the income generated will be used by the company to offer grants to non-profits of their choosing. The choice of a community fund was deliberate since, “I wanted to give back on a permanent basis,” explains Rita. A community foundation focuses on addressing all kinds of needs in the local community as well as building legacies in those communities. A community foundation can offer advice to its donors on emerging community needs, innovative projects and opportunities to make a real impact.

Rita admits that the experience of her family have given her a soft spot for issues that relate to new immigrants, but says to open to all projects and charities that need her support. “We’re all here as part of the bigger community of humankind. My goal is to work to improve people’s lives – whatever that may be or whatever they may need – whether it is music lessons, a place to live or whatever.”
The World On Our Doorstep: Short Term Mentoring Opens Doors To Employment

By admin2  
November 19, 2008  
Employment Inclusion

The intellectual property firm of Goudreau Gage Dubuc (GGD) decided to participate in “The World on Our Doorstep” program purely for bottom line business reasons. As a result of strong growth and the need for high skilled labor, in recent years, they have found themselves constantly scrambling to recruit qualified employees.

The World on our Doorstep is a pilot project being hosted by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal. The program is designed to introduce businesses such as GGD to qualified potential candidates from immigrant and ethnic minority communities that they might not come across through their usual recruiting networks.

Unique to the program, is that these introductions are done through “mini-traineeships” lasting no more than one to three days. Unlike other mentoring programs, there is a minimum time commitment and a definitive goal: to recruit the talent they need, within a short window of time and guarantee the future prosperity of their company or business.

Planning For The Future...

In 2008, Quebec will welcome over 45,000 immigrants. Of this number, more than 25,000 will be between the ages of 25 and 40 and have equal to or greater than a college education.

“Within the Greater Montreal area, the net growth of Montreal’s labour force will depend solely on immigration. It is thus imperative that, collectively, we develop the means not only to attract but above all to retain immigrants and that we implement innovative solutions to integrate them quickly and efficiently into the business community,” declared Benoit Lamont, past president and CEO of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal.

With “The World on our Doorstep” the Board of Trade hopes to overcome the cultural differences and limited networks that often prevent businesses from being able to take full advantage of the benefit that these skilled immigrants offer.

Lorraine Simard, the HR Manager for GGD, agrees that the company’s interest in this program is primarily motivated by the dearth of specialized manpower. “It’s tough to find competent people in the niche of intellectual property which requires very specific knowledge. Quebec is small and we regularly have to recruit outside the province.”

How it Works

In order to participate in these professional networking activities, new immigrant participants must have already taken the Adapting to Québec’s world of work training course offered free of charge by the Ministère de l’Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC).

In exchange, for each intern the employer hosts, the Board of Trade offers a free training workshop of their choice from among those on our schedule ($145 value).

Soropiu Coulibaly, a new immigrant who was matched with the intellectual property firm GGD added, “This program introduced me to the workplace and taught me about corporate culture in Canada and helped me build a network of professional contacts.”

The program also provides new immigrants with the opportunity to gain practical snapshots of various industries and companies that they may not have been familiar with. This can be a significant advantage for small to medium sized businesses that might normally be overlooked by skilled job seekers, new to the community.

Goudreau Gage Dubuc is impressed with the World on our Doorstep program, describing it as a useful tool for overcoming the obstacles that new immigrants have, “I think things like difficulty defining your professional profile, the language requirement, being educated outside of North America or lacking professional contacts can work against you when looking for a job in line with your qualifications.”

Success

The World On Our Doorstep program celebrated its first anniversary on October 6, 2008. Isabelle Hudon, former president and CEO of the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal comments: “The World on our Doorstep program enables us to build bridges between foreign talent and local enterprises. These in-house traineeships, lasting between one and three days, give newcomers a better understanding of the Quebec work environment while giving companies a chance to discover qualified resources educated in leading sectors.”

The World On Our Doorstep program is a fruitful collaboration between Greater Montreal’s major network of employers, municipal representatives, and the Quebec Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities, with all parties working together to promote the successful economic integration of immigrant workers. At the moment, the initiative is expected to run until 2010.

For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
The Stuttgart Pact For Integration: the Power of Planning

By kturner
February 25, 2009
Municipal Welcome-ability

Successful integration doesn't just happen, it is the result of thoughtful and strategic planning. While cities around the world increasingly recognize this new reality, the City of Stuttgart, Germany, took the lead early with its top down and comprehensive approach to integration.

In 2005, the Stuttgart City Council adopted the groundbreaking Pact For Integration and instituted a sweeping program of policies and activities aimed at securing Stuttgart’s future as a great international city. Calling successful integration the “glue for social cohesion,” the city anchored its new policy framework in a strong multi-sector coalition that brought together public, private sector, and civil society interests in a shared agenda to realize the goals of:

- participation and equal opportunity for everyone,
- peaceful cohabitation and social cohesion, and
- the capitalization of cultural diversity as a community and economic asset.

Stuttgart, the capital of the federal state Baden-Wuerttemberg, is located in southern Germany. Approximately one third or 40 per cent of the population was born abroad. Residents of Stuttgart are from over 170 nations and speak over 120 languages. This gives Stuttgart one of the largest proportions of migrants among German cities.

In part, Stuttgart’s leadership with its Pact For Integration stemmed from its early recognition that successful integration was necessary to attract and retain migrants as well as the investment of international corporations—and ultimately essential to Stuttgart’s economic prosperity.

Immigrants are particularly important to the demographics of Stuttgart since it faces the challenges of an aging population without an adequate birth replacement rate. Currently, there are no children or adolescents under the age of 18 in 82 percent of households in Stuttgart. Without immigrants, only 10 percent of households in Stuttgart would include children.

As a result, Stuttgart recognises that the effective integration of their immigrant population is essential to augmenting the skilled labour force required to attract industry leaders such as Daimler Chrysler, Porsche, Hewlett-Packard and IBM.

“The new element is that we are no longer merely pursuing a classic integration policy for migrants which classifies foreigners as people with language and other problems, but that we are saying: Stuttgart is an international city, with a 35 to 40 percent migration background, and we need a well mapped-out integration strategy covering the needs of equal opportunities”, explains Gari Pavkovic, Head of the Department for Integration Policy.

Stuttgart city leaders also recognized that to be effective, the strategy had to address long-term goals, requiring the application of system-wide programs and policies across all sectors. A patchwork of uncoordinated integration activities would not work. Hence the Stuttgart Pact for Integration was formulated as an “alliance” for integration within a broad framework comprising many sectors and all age groups—from kindergarten to adult education. By accommodating all these various interest groups, the Stuttgart strategy recognized the value of the city’s potential human capital in all its diversity.

The Stuttgart approach to integration combines leadership with community involvement to create equal opportunities and inclusive, productive communities.

The Pact For Integration...

The Pact for Integration was endorsed by the personal commitment of the Mayor who created the city’s first “Office of Integration Policy” to involve as many different city stakeholders and sectors as possible. The Stuttgart Pact is not merely a declaration of good will but a framework for coordinated strategic action that is being implemented on a daily basis by the city administration, community services, public and private actors and citizens.

The Stuttgart Pact also takes a human resource based approach that is equally directed at newly arrived migrants, established immigrants as well as the native German population in order to emphasize that integration is a two way process involving both migrants and the receiving community.

The Pact is built around eight essential building blocks, or “milestones,” that form the basis of Stuttgart’s integration policy. They include:

1. Education: Stuttgart specifically encourages bilingual and multilingual education and the promotion of German as a second language from a very early age in a child’s life as a way to prevent exclusion later in life. Parents are also offered help in supporting children in their learning process.

2. Sustainable Economic Growth for Community Well Being: Includes a focus on making cultural diversity a valuable factor in economic and cultural development.

3. Equal Rights and Opportunities: Includes cultural accommodations when necessary to achieve the end goals. For instance, Stuttgart supported the creation of separate after school groups for Muslim girls to provide additional tutoring to close gaps in educational outcomes and remove structural barriers to later professional success.

4. Political and Social Participation: Stuttgart is lobbying for the right of all non-Germans to participate in local elections. In the interim, Stuttgart residents without German passports can vote for representatives to an “International Committee,” a local consultative lobby made up of elected migrants, appointed experts and city councilors. This group regularly meets to discuss issues related to the foreign population in Stuttgart.

5. Pluralism and Cultural Diversity: Stuttgart’s city administration provides support to intercultural initiatives, from the arts to sports events, as well as to migrant-led organisations.

6. Mutual Respect and Solidarity: Supports efforts to make young people and others more sensitive to the cultural diversity within their community; including a team of trained mediators on call to intervene in private and public conflicts with “cultural” roots.

7. Participatory Communication: Promotes access to information for all citizens, whether to Stuttgart’s many community newspapers, multilingual broadcast media or access to virtual Internet services. Stuttgart public libraries receive over 1.5 million visitors annually, a third of which are migrants. A virtual library for children is another important tool for lifelong learning and the fight against exclusion.

8. International Cooperation: Stuttgart works closely with co-operating EU institutions and the Council of Europe on numerous projects, as well as providing leadership to initiatives such as the European Network of “Cities for Local Integration Policy” (CLIP).

Success

In 2003, the Stuttgart Pact For Integration gained national and international recognition when the city was awarded the ‘Cities for Peace Prize’ by UNESCO. The following year, the European Council recognised Stuttgart’s approach as the standard for best practice when it adopted the key points of the pact as its official policy on integration.

Similarly, Stuttgart has since become a model for the development of integration strategies in other communities across Europe.

In 2005, both the Bertelsmann Foundation and the German Federal Ministry of the Interior recognised Stuttgart for their approach to integration. In 2006, this initiative was also recognised by the EuroCities network.

Stuttgart is also measuring success in more tangible terms as a result of its multi level and multi sector approach to integration. For instance, Stuttgart has the lowest crime rates of any city in Germany and the lowest unemployment rates for people with migrant background.
For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.

Hier geht es zur Fallstudie auf der Seite Demographie Konkret (Bertelsmann Stiftung): Stuttgart – Stabsstelle für Integration.
The Miracle of Marxloh: Bringing A Community Together Around A New Mosque

By ktturner  
November 18, 2008

Cultural Inclusion Living Together Municipal Spatial Inclusion

The tent next to the mosque in the Marxloh district of Duisburg, (an industrial and mining town in the Ruhr region of Germany), can accommodate over 3,500 people but even this wasn’t big enough for the crowd that turned out on Sunday. On October 26, 2008, the biggest mosque in Germany was opened and it includes a meeting center for the whole district – an unprecedented project in Germany. Thousands of Duisburg citizens had to stand outside to witness this historic day on a giant public viewing screen. The new building sends out a signal in the urban landscape of the Ruhr that migrants, once known as “guest workers”, are no longer guests in the Ruhr but have found a new home here.

In addition to its size (the dome is 23 meters high and the interior can accommodate up to 1,200 worshippers) what distinguishing feature of the new Duisburg mosque from other mosque constructions projects in Germany: is that in Duisburg, there was no virtually no protest against the construction of this religious building.

In contrast, recent mosque buildings projects in both Cologne (just an hour drive away from Duisburg) and Berlin, resulted in fierce local campaigns against the proposed buildings – with far right parties seizing on the issue to stir up anti-Islamic sentiment and the Pro-Cologne Party making opposition to the mosque its main political issue.

The ease with which the mosque in Marxloh was built is due to the collaborative way in which it was planned. Cynics have suggested that in part everything passed off so smoothly in Marxloh because the 34 meter minaret is only half as high as the spire of the Catholic church and that that the Islamic community decided from the start to do without the muezzin call. The designers also forestalled potential criticisms by including plate-glass windows to make the mosque’s inner workings more open and visible.

However, far more important is the simple fact that the people of Marxloh sat down and talked to each other. Zuelfiye Kaykin, head of the Turkish community centre, says that there was no divisive debate there because German politicians, church and community leaders were invited to advise on the project early on. “These are the people that the public trusts. Having them participate in developing the concept and the building is one reason why there wasn’t any loud, public criticism,” she says.

The plans for the mosque included a meeting center and venue for the local people. The community center has a separate entrance from the prayer areas, designed to make non-Muslims feel more comfortable coming in. The mosque also has extra large windows (as suggested by a Catholic priest on the consultative panel) as a detail intended to promote transparency. The entrance hall includes an open arena for dialogue between the Muslim community and followers of different faiths as well as an information centre, an internet café along with a conference and reading halls for both Muslims and non-Muslims.

“The fact that we can all come together to mark the opening is really like the small miracle of Marxloh,” said Elif Saat, chairwoman of the Ditib Turkish-Islamic Union’s education and meeting centre in Marxloh. At a party breaking the daily fast of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Germans and Turks share round tables in a large white tent across the street from the mosque. Banners advertising Mercedes and a national bank hang on either side of a small stage. It is first time local branches of such big German companies have sponsored a Ramadan event there. “In my eyes, it’s sending out a clear signal that they recognize the Turkish potential. They see opportunities here,” she says.

The building already appears to be benefiting the district. As soon as construction work had begun, the newly built residential houses on the other side of the street suddenly became easier to sell, and real estate prices in the area, which is marked by high unemployment and a high share of immigrants, is rising. Of the more than 18,000 people living in Marxloh, more than 6,000 have an immigrant background. Many are second generation immigrants, children of Turkish “guest workers” who were invited to Germany in the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s to overcome labour shortages as Germany performed its economic miracle.

A place for learning and intercultural dialogue

Where Marxloh’s Muslims once had to make do with a disused cafeteria as a place of worship, an internationally acclaimed structure stands. But German and Turkish classes will also be conducted at the mosque, and, ideally, Germans and Turks, Muslims and non-Muslims will congregate there. For this reason, the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the European Union supported the 7 million euro construction with 3.2 million euros for the meeting space. The balance of the building costs were being funded by donations. The Turkish-Islamic Union (DTB) was also involved. Around 600 companies make up the mosque’s community significant employers in a community of 496,000 inhabitants, of which 60,000 are Muslim.

The chairman of the Marxloh mosque, Mehmet Ozay emphasized the unity it represents at the opening ceremony, “I can assure you that this beautiful new mosque is quite safe, it is not a symbol of social division in Germany but a symbol of the benefits of human, religious, cultural and social interaction.” he said.

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
The London Living Wage Campaign

By kturner
November 19, 2008
Financial Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal

Financial Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal

Kasia works ten hours a day cleaning rooms at one of the top destination hotels in the West End of London. Rooms at the posh hotel can cost up to £640 ($1,280) a night and a cup of filter coffee is a £6.50 ($13.00). Kasia is struggling to scrape by in one of the world’s most expensive cities on the national minimum wage of £5.52 per hour.

And that’s before she has National Insurance and tax deducted for her paycheck. Like 94% of migrant workers, Kasia pays tax and national insurance on her pay cheque and doesn’t claim any type of benefits (such as Working Tax Credits, child benefits etc).

Kasia, like many service sector workers – including cleaners, security guards and catering staff experience low pay and difficult, sometimes exploitative working conditions. It is estimated that in the City of London alone, 400,000 people fall into this working poverty trap.

Since November 2005, The London Living Wage campaign has brought together a diverse alliance of active citizens and community leaders from across the city to pressure employers to start paying all their employees a “living wage” and to encourage consumers to support businesses that do.

Led by TELCO, The East London Communities Organisation (now, London Citizens), the coalition included the support of over 80 different groups such as faith groups, schools, student organizations, union branches, resident groups, government, consumers and corporations.

What Is A Living Wage?

The “living wage” is a term used to describe the actual amount a worker needs to be paid her hour (versus the legal minimum wage) in order to provide a decent standard of living for themselves and their families.

In London, the current living wage stands at £7.45 per hour – nearly 35 percent higher than the national minimum wage set by the Government.

As part of the Living Wage campaign, London Citizens launched a report in partnership with UNISON and Queen Mary University called, Making the City Work: Low Paid Employment in London, that looked at the nature and the role of employers as it related to the rise in sub-contract workers in the low paid economy. Subcontracting allows employers and branded companies to cut costs while distancing themselves from the conditions faced by their low paid employees. For example, Margot’s friend Kasia works at a hotel across the street from her where she paid not by the hour but per room – and at a shocking £2.65 per room.

The study also found that of the randomly selected low paid workers an overwhelming 90% were migrants like Margot and Kasia and over half were recent migrants, having come to the UK in the last five years.

KPMG reports that since becoming a Living Wage Employer the turnover of cleaning staff has been reduced by 50%. Moreover, a recent survey found better employment conditions lead to more better motivated workforce. “I used to wake up in the night and feel sick thinking about work” said one cleaner. Now that pay has improved, I feel proud to work in the hospital.”

Over 90% of cleaners, hospitality workers and home care workers interviewed were migrants earning an average of £5.45 an hour – the equivalent of an average salary of £10,200 a year before tax and National Insurance. This is less than half of the national average annual salary (£22,411) and less than one third of average earnings in London (£30,984).

Contrary to the misconception that migrant workers are lone workers, the majority of people interviewed for the study were living with other members of their family – whether partners, parents or children. A third were responsible for dependent children (those under the age of 16) in the UK. A third also had dependants living abroad and two thirds regularly sent money overseas.

The study also found that of the randomly selected low paid workers an overwhelming 90% were migrants like Margot and Kasia and over half were recent migrants, having come to the UK in the last five years.

Everyone Wins…

KPMG reports that since becoming a Living Wage Employer the turnover of cleaning staff has been reduced by 50%. Moreover, a recent survey found better employment conditions lead to more better motivated workforce. “I used to wake up in the night and feel sick thinking about work” said one cleaner. Now that pay has improved, I feel proud to work in the hospital.”

From January 2009 the City of London has committed to ensuring that grants, favors and funding go to only to those organizations that are accredited Living Wage Employers. The Mayor’s office is also working with London Citizens to ensure that London’s hotels and hospitality sector pay a living wage by the 2012 Olympics and that the “Visit London” and other Tourist Guides only endorse hotels and restaurants which are accredited Living Wage employers and sites.

Gaining Support…

The Living Wage Campaign have been successful in their appeal for broad public support for the invisible workers that keep London working but that are rarely seen or appreciated by the public. Helping community members to become effective campaign leaders and spokespersons has been key to London Citizen’s campaign success.

organization provides leadership and media training to develop the skills necessary to run an effective campaign whether supporters are new to community organising or have had many years of experience.

The large and diverse nature of the campaign supporters have made the issue a feature on debates on poverty alleviation and social exclusion and pushed the topic into the recent London's recent Mayoralty race.

Mayor of London Boris Johnson said, "There is too much poverty and deprivation and one way that I can keep an election promise to tackle it is to raise the London Living Wage and step up the commitment to ensure all GLA Group employees and contractors receive at least £7.45 per hour. I want City Hall to lead by example by ensuring its staff can maintain a decent standard of living in one of the most expensive cities in the world. Therefore, I have made it clear to all part of the organization that I expect the Living Wage to be the basic standard."

To date, twenty-seven organization including the Greater London Authority Group have committed to paying a Living Wage as have: the Metropolitan Police Service, Barclays Bank, KPMG and PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

A legacy of the London Living Wage Campaign is the annual Living Wage Employer Award which continues to capture public support for this issue by recognizing what good employers are doing to provide all workers with a decent standard of living.

London Citizens is an independent charity that has been organising for change and social justice for over ten years. They have an impressive campaign record includes recent wins on ethical guarantees for the 2012 Olympics, the Living Wage Campaign, and a searching commission of enquiry into service provision by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at Lunar House (England). London Citizens works with the Citizen Organising Foundation (COF), a registered charity whose mission is to create a network of competent, informed and organised citizens who act responsibly in the public life of their communities and are able to influence, for the common good, decisions which impact on their communities.

For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
The district of Casal da Boba is located in the Amadora municipality in the northwest region of Lisbon. Casal da Boba is made up of about 700 houses. Over 50 per cent of the population is between 10-24 years old and the majority of residents are of Cape Verdean origin. The population of the area is also very marked by unemployment, low income, poor schooling, family instability and very often a lack legal status and documents.

The high crime rate of the area and the concern that these factors would only compound over time led to the creation of a strong public and private partnership, focused on finding some solutions to break the cycle of another generation living in ongoing poverty and exclusion.

The goal of the project was to change the options available for a generation living in this community, to tackle and to prevent the major factor of social exclusion that affects youngsters and instead, provide them with real opportunities.

A partnership with the City of Amadora, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the ACIDI – High commissioner for Integration and Intercultural Dialogue helped to also create an organizational partnership with actors and representatives from local government agencies for education, training, social care and health. The private sector was also heavily involved.

The project shifted the traditional roles and actions of public and private organizations. For instance, teams of facilitators working in tandem with social workers and community volunteers worked the streets speaking to groups of residents. The range of people that became involved in this program included anthropologists, economists, language professions, enterprise managers, hair dressing teachers, musicians, psychologists, animators, violinists as well as librarians and priest.

To achieve the primary goal of changing the opportunities available for a generation of youth in Casal da Boba a series of targeted programs (based on age groups and specific barriers) were created.

This included: a Youth Workshop to combat truancy and school dropouts with study and education support, Get Over It a program to help children with judicial problems by providing direct and personal supervision for each child, For You If You Keep Studying which provides entertaining activities such as basketball, theatre and percussion from within the school as a means of improving attendance; Hairdressing Workshops which helps students that have dropped out of school to train at professional hairdressing salons; More Health Program to provide speech therapy, glasses and dental treatments; A Learn and Play Program that provided young preschool age children with a place to go after school and engaged them in theatre, dance and arts and You Can Be Anything You Want To an initiative that supports teenage mothers.

Others programs included training facilitators to act as bridges between the neighborhood and outside world. Six months after this program was launched facilitators were supervising over 226 cases of high risk children.

Additional programs included a youth orchestra, an equivalency program for 9th graders and a transnational fair (held in conjunction with Rotterdam and Milan) to showcase organizations working in the field.

Success

The success of the program is evident from the numbers that they were able to involve from the community. Since 2005 over 1,000 children and young people have benefited from the project.

The Generation Project has made it possible for children and youths in the neighbourhood to join an orchestra, learn judo, go back to school and get professional qualifications in the areas they prefer – to name just a few examples of the actions aimed at furthering social integration.

In 2007 and 2008 the success of the project resulted in additional funding from the EU's EQUAL initiative.

*For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.*
Sultans of Science

By Evelyn
May 1, 2014
Living Together

Over a thousand years ago, the scientist Al-Zahrani mastered the techniques and tools of surgery. In the 12th century, a Mesopotamian known as Al-Jazari invented a mechanical device that represents history’s first robot. In 9th century Spain, long before the Wright Brothers, Abbas bin Firnas engineered the first flying machine when he strapped wings on his body to make the first recorded human flight.

These names, discoveries and inventions- all of which were made centuries ago at the height of Islamic civilization- have been largely lost to the mainstream modern world. But that is changing. Interactive exhibits like “Sultans of Science: 1,000 years of Knowledge Rediscovered” at the Ontario Science Centre aim to educate the public on the scientific history that they are rarely taught.

Science, like culture, has diverse roots

By promoting awareness and valuing the diverse cultural and historical contributions to modern science, museums and science centres can play inclusive roles in multicultural societies. Indeed, institutional leaders attending the 2011 Science Centre World Congress held in Cape Town, South Africa, resolved to develop programs that promote awareness of the multicultural roots of science and the value of indigenous knowledge systems.

One such effort is currently on show in Canada’s largest city. Enthused by the popular response to the Sultans of Science: 1000 Years of Knowledge Rediscovered exhibition it hosted in 2009, the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto has brought back an enhanced version of it from March 7 to June 7, 2014 — in time to coincide with the opening of the 7th World Congress in Mechelen, Belgium.

It is a step back in time and highlights important advancements and discoveries made by scholars during the Golden Age of Islamic Science and the multicultural roots of modern science and technology. The exhibition centres around nine themes: flight; medical inventions; Islamic astronomy; mathematics, art and architecture; optical science; fine technology; applied hydrology; great explorers; and The House of Wisdom.

“The knowledge displayed in this exhibition is important to everyone in our diverse society,” says Lesley Lewis, CEO of the Ontario Science Centre. “It provides a glimpse into the history of science in a part of the world that our visitors may not be aware was home to great scientific discoveries.”

“Presenting this exhibition clearly demonstrates the science centre’s commitment to reflecting the diversity of the community and visitors to the centre,” Jehad Aliweiwi, a member of the centre’s board of trustees, was quoted as saying when centre first hosted the show.

Aliweiwi, who helped with marketing advice for the show, is a member of Maytree’s DiverseCity onBoard program designed to diversify leadership in the Greater Toronto Region. He says the immigrant perspective he brings on board is valued as the Ontario Science Centre is keen to attract and retain newcomers to its membership and visitor base.

While the exhibition is not political or religious in nature, its role in today’s political climate cannot be dismissed, says Aliweiwi. “There is an intense interest in anything that is Islamic and it is inevitably politicized. Something like this goes beyond the politics and explains to people the richness and the long tradition of education and discovery that existed in this civilization.”

Aliweiwi is convinced this exhibit will be educational and inspirational for the Muslim community as well. “I am hoping some of the kids who come here will say this is where we were, and this is where we can go.” Along with celebrating diversity and promoting scientific discovery and innovation, the centre’s hand-on appeal can be a powerful motivator for students regardless of their cultural background.

Success

It is potential benefits like this that has attracted a leading corporation like the Royal Bank of Canada to be the Sultan of Science’s local presenting sponsor. “We are so pleased to help bring this exhibition to Toronto,” says Imtiaz Seyid, Royal Bank of Canada Vice President, South Asian & Middle Eastern Market. “It’s a unique opportunity to explore and celebrate the diversity that makes our city so great.”

“Appreciating the efforts and contributions of the past will lead us to a more prosperous future,” says Ludo Verheyen, CEO of MTE Studios that developed the exhibit. “We hope that the exhibition encourages fruitful conversation, emphasizes the importance of preserving and transmitting knowledge and fosters further study of the mysteries of science.”

A four-metre replica of a musical boat featuring a mechanical “robot band” is an excellent example of this preservation and transmission. Featuring musicians and crew members that move gracefully, it brings to life early robotics and the ingenious mechanical devices of the time for a new generation of museum goers.

For further reading:

- London: Making Museums A Hub For Integration

Explore the genius of the Sultans of Science
Better Business: Integrating the Chinese Business Community Into the Mainstream

By kturner
November 19, 2008

Employment Inclusion

For most of us, a “Made In Italy” label on our merino wool sweater or designer purse indicates both style and the reassurance that the goods were made under the stringent labor laws of the European Union (EU).

Not always.

In Bologna, the capital city of the Emilia Romagna region in Northern Italy, thousands of Italy’s Chinese immigrants are employed in Italy’s vibrant fashion industry working long hours in factories to produce some of Europe’s most famous clothing and leather goods. The textile industry remains a central part of the region’s economy and in recent years, foreign workers and investors have played an important role in supporting industry growth in an increasingly competitive market.

In the years between 2000 – 2005, there was an annual average increase of 20% in the population of Chinese nationals residing and working in the Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy. Today, Italy is home to the largest population of Chinese immigrants in Europe.

According to 2005 data from the Italian Chamber of Commerce, the region includes 1,100 Chinese owned craft workshops, representing 20% of the companies in the area. These companies employ approximately 9,000 Chinese migrant workers. Over the last 5 years, the emerging Chinese Textile Community (CTC) has had an annual growth rate of 20% to support this booming business. Most of these newcomers to the area operate as sub-contractors for the major Italian firms and labels taking on traditional labour intensive piecework such as sewing. However, a growing number of sub-contractors have emerged in response to the rising demand for flexibility and high production costs of larger local producers.

The Chinese community in the region is close knit and isolated by language and cultural differences, showing poor levels of integration with the Italian community. The lack of social integration amongst these immigrants also makes them vulnerable to employment abuses, irregular business practices are also aggravated by the increasingly fragmented production process of the textile industry and low financial and technical entry barriers. These conditions are particularly true for the Chinese business community in the textiles industry where an estimated one in ten Chinese workers does not have a resident permit.

The biggest difficulty that Spinner faced was gaining access to the workshops and creating a channel of communications with this insular group. To overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, Spinner trained and used Chinese intercultural mediators who went into the different firms to try and gain their trust. The mediators explained that the project was trying to help Chinese integrate into Italy and made it clear what duties but also what opportunities were available in Italy. The Chinese mediators also offered to help the businesses with their documents and Italian law.

In the years between 2000 – 2005, there was an annual average increase of 20% in the population of Chinese nationals residing and working in the Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy. Today, Italy is home to the largest population of Chinese immigrants in Europe.

The Chinese community in the region is close knit and isolated by language and cultural differences, showing poor levels of integration with the Italian community. The lack of social integration amongst these immigrants also makes them vulnerable to employment abuses, irregular business practices are also aggravated by the increasingly fragmented production process of the textile industry and low financial and technical entry barriers. These conditions are particularly true for the Chinese business community in the textiles industry where an estimated one in ten Chinese workers does not have a resident permit.

The biggest difficulty that Spinner faced was gaining access to the workshops and creating a channel of communications with this insular group. To overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, Spinner trained and used Chinese intercultural mediators who went into the different firms to try and gain their trust. The mediators explained that the project was trying to help Chinese integrate into Italy and made it clear what duties but also what opportunities were available in Italy. The Chinese mediators also offered to help the businesses with their documents and Italian law.

Efforts to bring the business practices of the Chinese bosses in line with the Italian labour laws hasn’t been easy and in the interim the perception that Chinese-owned businesses were not complying with Italian laws on working hours, health and safety conditions have led to allegations of unfair competition that have divided the communities.

The Chinese community in the region is close knit and isolated by language and cultural differences, showing poor levels of integration with the Italian community. The lack of social integration amongst these immigrants also makes them vulnerable to employment abuses, irregular business practices are also aggravated by the increasingly fragmented production process of the textile industry and low financial and technical entry barriers. These conditions are particularly true for the Chinese business community in the textiles industry where an estimated one in ten Chinese workers does not have a resident permit.

The biggest difficulty that Spinner faced was gaining access to the workshops and creating a channel of communications with this insular group. To overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, Spinner trained and used Chinese intercultural mediators who went into the different firms to try and gain their trust. The mediators explained that the project was trying to help Chinese integrate into Italy and made it clear what duties but also what opportunities were available in Italy. The Chinese mediators also offered to help the businesses with their documents and Italian law.

Spinner also compiled a bilingual manual in Chinese and Italian that they distributed to as many Chinese businesses as possible. The first of its kind, this manual contains comprehensive guidelines for every aspect of running a business in Italy: from fiscal and contract laws, health and safety, to advice about banking and useful associations.

On site visits to factories, Spinner staff noticed that the factory workers listened to the radio as they worked. To capitalize on this opportunity, they created radio programs for Chinese in Chinese and broadcast on the local stations. Each program was about one theme which was important for working in Italy.

The biggest difficulty that Spinner faced was gaining access to the workshops and creating a channel of communications with this insular group. To overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, Spinner trained and used Chinese intercultural mediators who went into the different firms to try and gain their trust. The mediators explained that the project was trying to help Chinese integrate into Italy and made it clear what duties but also what opportunities were available in Italy. The Chinese mediators also offered to help the businesses with their documents and Italian law.

On site visits to factories, Spinner staff noticed that the factory workers listened to the radio as they worked. To capitalize on this opportunity, they created radio programs for Chinese in Chinese and broadcast on the local stations. Each program was about one theme which was important for working in Italy.

Results

Spinner has set up a network of 87 public and private organizations to support the transition process of the Chinese work shops.

They have also contacted 354 Chinese entrepreneurs (32% in the area), visited 187 businesses (17% of potential beneficiaries), trained 185 Chinese entrepreneurs, delivered 38 consulting services around topics such as; Regularisation in the field of Labor legislation; Town planning; Credit recovery for subcontractors; and Fiscal obligation. In addition, they have trained 53 entrepreneurs on Safety and Security Law (90% finalized with certification).

Spinner was initially funded by the European Social Fund and by the Regione Emilia Romagna for a 30-month period from 2001 – 2003 but had such excellent results that funding was extended to 2006. In 2006, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT and the Dubai Municipality selected the Spinner Project as a “Best practice” initiative for the 2006 Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment (DIABP).

In addition to improved business practice, Spinner has also forged a bridge between the Italian and Chinese community, “Five years ago in Emilia Romagna, people felt afraid,” said Stefano Borsari, Spinner’s economist. said. “There wasn’t any contact between the Chinese community and local institutions or associations.”

For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Youth on Stage: Real People, Real Stories, Real Community

By Evelyn
December 11, 2009
Uncategorized

Having a place to tell your story can be life changing for both the audience and the participants.

This belief has been central to the nationally recognized and award winning work of the Albany Park Theatre Project (APTP).

APTP brings to the stage the lived experience and authentic voice of migrant youth growing up in Chicago.

The Albany Park Theater Project (APTP) is a multi-ethnic, ensemble-based theater company of teens and young adults that creates original performance works based on the actual stories of immigrants living and working in Chicago’s Albany Park neighborhood.

Since its founding in 1997, the APTP has performed over 50 original performances for more than 25,000 people and has shared the life experiences of Mexican indocumentados, Bosnian refugees, Bolivian revolutionaries, persecuted Ukrainian Jews, Palestinian-American Muslims, Persian Sufis, Polish domestics, Vietnamese refugees and other immigrants to the city.

By focusing on the stories of the Albany Park community, the APTP has created performances that tell the stories of people whose lives are impacted by immigration policy, globalization, war, inequalities in public education, poverty, child abuse and neglect, addiction, domestic violence, gang violence, the criminal justice system, prejudice and intolerance as well as neighbourhood growth, change and renewal.

As co-founder Laura Wiley described: “This is what I hope my theatre work does for people: it takes them inside a world they’re curious about but have no real access to; it bears witness to truths that many folks – both government leaders and lay people – try aggressively to distort or ignore....”

Public performances receive rave reviews, the product of a uniquely collaborative and interactive process that involves the entire troupe listening, responding and physically interpreting the raw and often highly emotional stories that the participants share. For example, the 2006 production of Gods Word was the result of a two and year process that began when a APTP student shared a reference to the challenges that she and her 15 brothers and sisters endured at the hands of their father, a religious fanatic.

Education and future success...
The APTP has also created educational programmes that help Albany Park youth access opportunities beyond the inner city neighbourhood—with tangible and dramatic results

As part of their focus on youth development, the APTP offers a free comprehensive college preparation and planning program to help teens translate their artistic success and ambition beyond APTP. Teens begin the formal program with an overview of the different types of colleges and of the application and financial aid process and then receive personalized guidance to address issues, questions and obstacles.

In Chicago, almost half of the students who enter public high school drop out before graduation. By contrast, more than 90% of Albany Park youth involved in APTP programming go on to graduate from high school (or earn a Graduate Equivalency Diploma) and matriculate into post-secondary colleges.

What’s more, follow-up studies show that APTP alumni stay in college and graduate in record numbers compared to their peers. According to the Consortium on Chicago School Research, only 8% of Chicago public high school students will graduate from college within six years after high school. However, APTP ensemble members are 8 times more likely to earn a college degree by the age of 25 than their peers. It is important to note that more than 90% of APTP ensemble members are the first in their families to go to college.

Community building
The Albany Park Theatre is located in a neighborhood of 57,000 people on Chicago’s northwest side, one of the most diverse communities in Chicago and nationally. More than 50% of residents are born outside the United States.

The diversity of the APTP ensemble is indicative of the neighborhood: APTP’s teen artists have traced their roots to Belize, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Ireland, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Mexico, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, Poland, Puerto Rico, Romania, Sweden, the Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. The list goes on.

In 2007, the APTP reached into the larger Chicago community to share its stories and success with new audiences. The theatre company founded the “The $5 Renaissance”, a roving, all ages, performing arts nightspot that brings people together to dance, eat, and move to music from the many cultures of Albany Park and Chicago.

The APTP has received numerous awards including the David Kellum Award and Chicago’s “Community Group of the Year” award. In 2004, APTP was recipient of the “Coming Up Taller Award” from the US President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, established “to recognize and support outstanding arts and humanities program that celebrate the creativity of America’s young people.”
Promoting Healthy Living In Multicultural Communities

By admin2
November 18, 2008
Health Inclusion

Jenipher arrived to Vancouver, British Columbia from a small town in Kenya eleven years ago. Despite the availability of Canada’s universal and free health care system, there were many occasions in which she felt lost when trying to navigate through that system.

Language barriers, a lack of information on how the system actually works, nervousness and confusion about practical access meant that Jenipher, like many new immigrants, had great difficulty actually obtaining the health care resources and services that she needed.

Diversity Health Fair

A 2005 study by Statistics Canada found that while immigrants generally arrive with better health than the Canadian born, as time passes this “healthy immigrant effect” tends to diminish. In part these health problems may be due to the stress of immigration itself which involves finding suitable employment and establishing a new social support network. However, the ability of the newcomer to effectively identify and access preventative care also plays a role in this decline.

To overcome barriers to accessing health care and provide new immigrants with the information they need to take charge of their health and that of their families, AMSSA (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies) developed and launched its first Diversity Health Fair in Vancouver in 2005.

The Diversity Health Fair is a free community event that brings together community health organizations, health care professionals, volunteers and members of diverse ethnic communities to provide health resource information to new immigrants in fun and easy to access ways. The focus of the fair is accessible information. As a result, all exhibitors are required to have interactive health screenings or displays at their booth. All printed information must be available in English and at least two of the selected fair languages: Chinese, French, Korean, Persian, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese. Exhibitors are strongly encouraged to also have booth representatives that can speak one of the selected fair languages and interpreters are available to assist fair participants.

The main goal of the diversity health fairs is to address newcomers’ health information needs by bringing health service providers and new immigrant communities together in a collaborative effort through which both stakeholders obtain mutual benefits.

The event mixes information and preventative care. The program usually includes a multicultural opening ceremony, health screenings, fitness demonstrations, a children activity area and multicultural performances.

Other activities include healthy cooking demonstrations where traditional recipes are revised to be lower in sugar, fat and salt; a “Health Services in Vancouver” workshop provides step by step instructions on how to access basic health services which has been presented in Mandarin, Farsi and Spanish; and a health screening area allows visitors to have their blood pressure and blood sugar tested, learn about accessing dental services and have a fitness assessment.

Success

Over the last eight years, the Vancouver health fair has become the largest one-day health fair in Canada with 3,500 people in attendance. Admittance to the health fair is free and exhibitors includes well-established agencies such as the Canadian Diabetes Association, BC Cancer Agency, Healthy Living Programs, as well as over forty-five other organizations promoting their services in multiple languages.

AMSSA, the organizer of the Vancouver Diversity health fair and supports similar health fairs in different regions of British Columbia. It is a provincial association that strengthens its 70+ agencies which serve immigrants to build culturally inclusive communities, with the knowledge, resources and support they need to fulfill their mandates.

Since 2005, a total of 40 diversity health fairs have been held in the following communities in British Columbia: Vancouver, Abbotsford, Campbell River, Kamloops, Kelowna, Maple Ridge, Nanaimo, Prince George, Surrey, Vernon, Victoria and Terrace.

Revised: July 2012
Interpreting Diversity in Healthcare

By Evelyn
February 7, 2011

Health Inclusion

Whether treating diabetes or providing prenatal education, culturally sensitive materials and mediation can be as important to health care as speaking the patient's language. At Harborview Medical Center, learning the difference is changing health outcomes for Seattle's newest residents.

"Cambodians generally don't think about preventive care," explains Jennifer Huong, a Cambodian cultural mediator who works within the community. "They tend to just go to the hospital when they are sick," she explains about her work with newly arrived Cambodian mothers living in the Seattle, Washington State, area.

As part of Harborview Medical Center's cultural outreach programme, Jennifer discusses topics like thermometer use and when to administer ibuprofen to prevent high fevers in children (and an unnecessary visit to the local emergency room).

Cultural outreach is just one of the programmes that the Harborview Medical Centre has specifically designed to address the changing needs of their patient population.

A Holistic Approach

The service area for Harborview Medical Center in Seattle includes the 1.8 million residents of King County, Washington with an increasing number are recent immigrants to the United States. In 2006, over 20% of the population did not speak English at home.

The population shift prompted Harborview to develop interpreter services in over 80 languages and dialects. In 2009 hospital was able to help non-English speakers during 115,000 patient visits. Additionally, the hospital’s Community House Calls programme sends specially-trained bicultural and bilingual caseworker staff out into the community with a range of services including interpretation, cultural mediation, case management, advocacy, follow-up, assistance in finding English as a second language (ESL) classes and citizenship classes, coordination of patient care, health education and home visits. These mediators work within the community in six different languages: Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and two languages from Ethiopia, Tigrigna and Amharic. Patient information on a variety of medical conditions is also available on site in these languages. Community response to the programme is consistently strong, with Community House Calls caseworkers helping more than 850 clients from across the city’s mix of cultural groups annually.

To make information about culture, language, health, illness and community resources directly accessible to health care providers who see patients from different ethnic groups, Community House Calls also developed a web-based database called EthnoMed designed to be used in clinics by care providers in the few minutes before seeing a patient in clinic. For instance, before seeing a Cambodian patient with asthma, a provider might access the website to learn how the concept of asthma is translated and about common cultural and interpretive issues in the Cambodian community that might complicate asthma management. EthnoMed is an open public resource that can be used by anyone in the community—or across the country.

A Two-way Relationship

Caseworkers like Jennifer who work in target cultural communities also provide feedback to the hospital staff about the norms and traditions of their patients, which in turn helps improve their treatment options.

According to Marine Pierre-Louis, manager of Community House Calls, it is not about imposing Western culture on those from other countries but about finding the best way to make sure the patients' needs are met. “The programme sets up a place where the knowledge of both communities [ours and theirs] intersects. Treatment plans are negotiated so that it’s not just accepted, but welcomed, by community members,” says Pierre-Louise, “and that doesn’t happen unless you know the community.”

For instance, cultural views of “personal independence” can impact treatment suggestions. “Allowing a Somali man with a back pain to stay in bed is a sign of respect,” Pierre Louise says. “The relatives are saying ‘Yes, he’s dependent on us, and to push him to move would be saying we are not respectful.’” The challenge and solution for caregivers
comes from understanding this and then finding a different motivation for healing that brings the family on side to support the proposed treatment.

Success

As Johnese Spisso, R.N., interim executive director of Harborview Medical Center and vice president of medical affairs for the University of Washington describes it, “We need to work with patients, families, communities and other health care providers and agencies to give vulnerable populations the care they need…. We have to reach out and find ways to influence health behaviours.”

Harborview’s dedication to breaking down these cultural barriers is reflected by the $3.7 million they invest annually in the community health promotion and interpreter programme.

In 2007, the Harborview Hospital was recognized for its dedicated approach to community health care by the Foster G. McGaw Prize for Excellence in Community Service. The $100,000 prize is sponsored by the American Hospital Foundation, Baxter International Foundation and the Cardinal Health Foundation. The Foster G. McGaw Prize was created in 1986 to recognize hospitals that have “distinguished themselves through efforts to improve the health and well-being of everyone in their communities.”
Open Mosques against Prejudice

By kturner
December 15, 2009

Cultural Inclusion, Living Together, Municipal

Whether it’s a church, temple, synagogue or mosque, religious institutions present challenges to those who are not part of that particular religious culture.

The unknown, here symbolized by the distinctive architecture of religious buildings, can be intimidating. Whether it is the unfamiliar, or an innate respect for another culture’s sacred spaces, most of us hesitate to enter unfamiliar religious buildings. As a non-member without an open invitation or reason to attend, or who is unfamiliar with the customs or the reception they might receive, most will just stay away. As a result, religious buildings can become barriers to intercultural connection in a community and symbols of division and difference.

In the German city of Rheine, municipal leaders realized that the local Muslim community was becoming increasingly insular and alienated from the larger community. The city instituted its “Open Mosques Against Prejudice Program” with the goal of eliminating prejudice and fear on both sides, and building trust and openness in their place. How? By creating a two-way dialogue between Turkish Muslims, local Christians and the larger community.

Rheine is located on a historical trade route near the German-Netherlands border and has been a destination point for immigrants since early 20th century industrialization. Currently, the largest groups of foreign born residents are from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia. Both these communities are primarily Muslim. The city’s growing immigrant population is typical of Germany as a whole, which has the largest Muslim population in Western Europe after France, and has embraced a modern vision for itself as a “nation of immigrants.”

An Invitation to Participate

The City of Rheine directly approached the mosques in town to persuade the religious leaders to open their buildings and communities to all the residents in the city.

The request was a seemingly simple idea that achieved significant results and success.

With the support of the City, the mosques held “Open House” days for visitors from all parts of the community. Visitors learned the significance of the different religious ceremonies and heard about Islamic beliefs and cultures. In return, the Protestant and Catholic communities invited the Turkish community to participate at Christian church services. So successful was this intercultural exchange that at a couple of instances interreligious worship services were given jointly with the imam and priest.

Success

Opening up the local mosque allowed ordinary prejudices to be broken down built trust between the two communities. The program’s success prompted additional initiatives designed to deepen intercultural communication and strengthen connections between the various religious communities.

Local schools began celebrating Islamic holidays in the classroom, and invited all parents to attend in order to share the learning experience and further extend the integration opportunity. In other instance, a Christian-Islamic peace prayer was jointly organized and celebrated. Several mosques started printing copies of the Friday sermons in German to make their content accessible to the community at large – eliminating unsubstantiated fears about what was being preached within the mosque.

To build on grassroots community efforts, the Mayor’s office instituted a special relationship with the offices of the imams, reaching out to formally welcome and celebrate each new appointment. This inclusive attitude has now moved beyond just the Muslim and Christian communities. Most recently, Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights, is being celebrated in Rheine by the town at large.
Older but not Overlooked

By ktturner

February 11, 2009

Living Together, Social Inclusion

Meelek dreams of returning to Turkey and speaks frequently of her former life there – the foods she ate, the easy socializing in her small town on the Black Sea coast and her extended family that all lived a short walk away. Meelek is in her late seventies and has lived away from Turkey for over 55 years. Financially struggling, it is highly unlikely that she’ll ever make the move back to Turkey that she speaks of so often.

Like many migrant workers of her generation, Meelek and her husband came to Germany in the late 1950’s as “guest workers” to help fill the labour shortages. Their plan was to work for a few years and then return. The German government also viewed the influx of new migrants as temporary and as a result, never created, encouraged or coordinated large scale efforts to help the migrant community settle, adapt and integrate into German society. Even after Meelek and her husband had three children enrolled in the local schools and were good German taxpayers, the expectation lingered that their stay was temporary. This belief was supported by German citizenship law that is largely based on parentage rather than birth or residence – making it difficult for migrant workers and their descendants to obtain citizenship.

Meelek’s experience is representative of a broader German story. Current estimates suggest that there are 700,000 migrants living in Germany who are 60 years or older. By 2010 this number is expected to reach 1.3 million and by 2020 to grow to over 2 million. This makes seniors with an immigrant background the fastest growing population in Germany.

Strong In Numbers – But Overlooked…

Despite their numbers, older migrants in Germany and other countries are too often overlooked by programs, organizations and governments. Neither public debate on immigrant integration nor existing services for workers address the needs of this aging population, focusing instead on young people with an immigrant background and on newcomers requiring language and professional orientation.

Statistically, older migrants experience higher rates of poverty, health problems and housing deficits than the German population at large. As a result, both programs and resources available for older migrants are limited and often fall short of migrant needs. Participation rates are also very low due to poor information, lack of awareness of government and government services and a legacy of mistrust. These challenges are compounded by older migrants who often report a lack of deep attachment to their German homes or community – despite the years spent there.

Stadtteilwerkstatt Dicker Busch has developed a strategy to help address the displacement issues of the ageing foreign born population by encouraging elderly migrants to become more active in their local communities and by also learning more about their needs in order to create programs that are more appealing and reflective of their circumstances.

Participant organizations offering recreational opportunities for this kind of involvement will receive assistance through the program. Activities will be held in schools or daycare centres, providing local places where elderly migrants have an opportunity to meet, share their stories and participate in a range of programs. This well coordinated outreach activity is also an opportunity for Russelsheim institutions to make themselves more sensitive to intercultural matters in order to improve their ability to best reach elderly immigrant needs. The program includes a data collection and monitoring component to gather and analyze information that can be used to take a more strategic approach to community and social services planning – particularly around elderly migrants.

The program also represents an opportunity for elderly migrants to make their experience more accessible to the public. Modeled on a series produced by the “Forum for a Culturally Sensitive Alternlife”, a voluntary organization working in the field of elderly migration and labour, the “Older Migrants Living in the District” will provide the city of Russelsheim with services for the elderly that address their needs and their preferences and a greater confidence about their place in the community.

It is the information gathering process that is one of the hallmarks of this programs success. Relationships with elderly migrants are built through personal contact, and by leveraging the trust of the mediators and institutions in their midst. Based on the relationships that have been built and the direct information that has been gathered the project is now in the midst of shaping the way ahead.

Next, elderly migrants are systematically consulted using qualitative interviews and informed of the existing offering regarding public assistance intended for the elderly in Russelsheim.

This process encourages elderly migrants to become active and assist in the implementation of these program offers. Collaborative efforts with Russelsheim institutions throughout the entire project will help ensure that information is effectively distributed and that intercultural sensitivity is supported.

The project has been fully developed and is scheduled to run from 2007 – 2010. To date, contacts with elderly migrants have been established and their needs fully evaluated. The interconnectedness of the stakeholders has been one of the early successes of the project – as actors, individuals and institutions that previously had little to no contact are working together towards the implementation of these programs. Program implementation is expected to begin in 2010 and will be then be evaluated and adapted mid-year.

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.

Hier geht es zur Fallstudie auf der Seite Demographie Konkret (Bertelsmann Stiftung): Rüsselsheim – Ältere Migranten im Stadtteilleben.
Muslims and Mortgages: American Home Ownership Through Flexible Financing

By admin2
November 19, 2008

Financial Inclusion, Spatial Inclusion

After moving his young family into rental apartments, his in-laws house and then again into a rented condominium, Saiyad saved enough money for a down payment last year and bought his first house in the northwest side of Chicago.

It was a milestone. But what made both Saiyad and his wife Fatima particularly happy is that they were able to purchase the three bedroom split level without compromising their deeply held religious views.

Saiyad and his wife are both observant Muslims and try to follow the Islamic prohibition on paying or receiving interest. They pay their credit card bills in full each month. They have a checking but not a savings account. And when they were ready to buy a home, they sought help from an Islamic cooperative.

Home ownership has long been linked to helping ethnic and immigrant groups feel more invested in their community. Until recently, Muslims who wanted to buy a home had to save hundreds of thousands of dollars to purchase it outright, get loans from family and friends or put aside their religious beliefs and take out a conventional mortgage.

Faith has traditionally never been a strong factor in the mortgage business. However, aware of the country’s changing demographics, some financial services now see the estimated 5-7 million Muslims in the United States as an untapped market with enough in numbers, wealth and sophistication to justify the creation of specialized products.

“There are people making $90,000 to $100,000 a year and living in rental apartments,” said Mushir Khwaja, an Islamic banker with University Bank, a Michigan lender. Census figures show that home ownership rates for Arab residents, most of whom are Muslims remain 7% lower than the overall percentage of homeowners.

With home ownership the dominant path to wealth building, thousands of other observant Muslims trying to move from renting to owning a home face the quandary of how to balance their faith and their finances.

“I always felt bad about purchasing a home on a mortgage,” said Mr. Kindi, 45, who recently bought a home in Chicago. “To a Muslim, it’s haram – it’s not religiously acceptable. It’s the wrong thing to do.”

Prior to 1997, no bank or bank branch in the United States offered formal Islamic financing that was both publicly approved by a U.S. regulatory agency and sanctioned by a board of Islamic scholars, known as a Sharia Board. Instead, American Muslims looking for an alternative to a conventional mortgage could try and turn to self-help groups that pooled money from investors and placed it in a revolving fund that bought homes and leased them to Muslim families.

Over the last few years, several Islam-friendly lending programs have been created by the Chicago Federal Reserve to help solve these problems. Mainstream financial institutions are starting to use financial instruments to offer creative loans that comply with the laws against riba (receiving interest) by creating joint-owner partnerships or charging lease fees in place of interest.

Background...
The Chicago Federal Reserve has identified three types of Islamic loans:

1. In a Murabaha loan the bank buys the house then gradually sells it to the home buyer with an additional profit rate tacked on
2. In an Ijara loan (which is one of the most common) the bank buys the house and leases it to the buyer, who pays off the home, plus market-based rent for living there
3. The third form is called Musharaka and it created a shared equity partnership between bank and buyer to purchase the house and gradually transfer shares of its ownership

Although the differences may seem largely semantic, the loans have the blessing of Islamic scholars and are becoming a popular route for Muslims who want to buy homes. Each of the above options creates a hybrid tenure between rental and ownership. The first option is essentially a staged transfer of ownership, the second is a lease-purchase or something similar to land contract and the third is a more classical shared equity loan (of the type common for affordable housing in the UK).

Borrowers don’t have to be Muslim or religious to qualify for the loan, but banks market these options almost exclusively to Islamic communities, printing Arabic brochures and distributing fliers outside mosques after Friday afternoon prayers.

HSBC Bank of America is positioning itself to really cater to the Muslim home financing market. “Our target market is the second and third generation, educated, middle class Muslims – the Americans who believes in his religious values but at the same time is proud to be an American and wants the American dream of owning a car and a home.” Adds Iqbal Khan, head of global Islamic finance for HSBC.

For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.

Mobilize the Immigrant Vote!

By kturner
November 18, 2008

California is the leading destination for immigrants to the US. The state receives more than 325,000 new arrivals each year and the current immigration population exceeds 9.9 million and represents 27.2 per cent of all residents in the state – making immigrants and visible minority communities a potentially powerful political force.

But how do you mobilize an immigrant population that speaks more than 250 distinct languages? Or often lives and works in geographic and ethnic clusters? And who frequently has very little contact or communications with each other even when their concerns are similar and overlap.

This was the challenge that the Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV) campaign was seeking to overcome: building cross community relationships while addressing the concern and implications of poor voter turnout among these groups.

In the 2000 general election, non-Hispanic White citizens comprised 48% of the state’s population but represented 71% of those who had voted. This meant that for every ten immigrants eligible to vote, approximately six registered but only three actually cast a ballot.

This disparity was a cause of concern. The state of California frequently uses polls to decide major public policy issues and in recent years, California voters have endorsed several initiatives that have been especially harmful to immigrants such as a bailout initiative designed to limit access to social services, health care and public education. In addition, there was a growing awareness that until voter turnout in immigrant groups improved, politicians were not going to be accountable or focused on the issues that affected them.

The MIV 2004 Campaign was the first-ever state-wide electoral campaign specifically focused on developing a multi-ethnic coalition of community based organizations working within immigrant communities and building their capacity to register, educate and mobilize their constituents for electoral participation.

The MIV campaign was led by a collaborative of six immigrant rights and anti-poverty organizations that recognized that elections work is a key strategy in the broader, long term movement for social justice.

MIV successfully supported and connected the efforts of 112 organizations working in 15 diverse ethnic communities, in 17 California counties in order to increase the civic participation of immigrant groups and bring them together around their shared issues and concerns.

The organizations that joined the MIV campaign forged new relationships with other organizations and mobilized over 1,200 community volunteers, and raised awareness about the importance of the vote in the mainstream and ethnic media.

Through the efforts of the 112 organizations that participated in the 2004 MIV Campaign achieved highly impressive results including:

- 20,521 + new voters were registered
- 70,000 + MIV voter rights palm cards were distributed in 7 languages
- 21,655 + MIV immigrant voter guides were distributed in 7 languages
- 10,012 + immigrant community members participated in community based voter education events and activities
- Within the subset of voters contacted by organizations that participated in the MIV, 73% turned out at the polls. 69% of these voters were first times or infrequent voters

These results were replicated in the MIV 2006 campaign. MIV has had tremendous success, engaging immigrants in the nation’s civic process at much higher rates than the average native-born voter. And while the voting rates of immigrants are not proportional to their current population, their overall share of the electorate in recent elections has increased four times as quickly as that of non-immigrant groups. Organizers are hopeful for continued success in the federal US 2008 election.

**Background**

The Partnership for Immigrant Leadership and Action (PILA) formerly known as the Northern Californian Citizenship Project (NCCP) spearheaded the MIV in 2004. The success of the 2004 MIV campaign supported PILA’s theory of social change that views community based organizations as a critical infrastructure for building grassroots leadership and catalyzing civil and political participation in local communities.

For over six years, PILA has supported immigrant civic and political participation through innovative capacity building programs based on linking diverse community organizations together around movement building elections. This is an approach that sees elections as part of a long-term strategy for making change by focusing on building relationships and energizing communities regardless of election outcomes. It particularly focuses on strengthening organizations and communities by increasing visibility, forging new alliances and building a stronger base of community leaders and volunteers.

Since community based organizations can come together to tap existing relationships, trust and ongoing presence in the community, they are uniquely positioned to educate and mobilize the constituents for elections - however many of them lack the skills, support and tools to do it effectively.

For example, about one third of the organizations that joined the MIV would not have done any election work if not for the MIV and 95% say that want to be part of future MIV campaigns.

Based on these experiences and lessons, in 2006 PILA released the MIV toolkit to support organizations across the country in planning and implementing movement building elections with their immigrant communities and led the capacity building component of the statewide 2006 Mobilize the Immigrant Vote Campaign.

During the recent US federal election, the campaign went state-side with the MIV 2008 campaign actively recruiting the participation of immigrant voters across the county. To support the work of its community based partners across California, the Los Angeles-based MIV Collaborative developed essential multilingual voter education materials, conducted electoral basic trainings and media trainings, organized community based issue analysis forums to decide MIC positions for the immigrant voter guides. The impact of the MIV 2008 Campaign on the outcome of the federal election remains to be tabulated – but the influence of the immigrant vote was significant.
On May 20th 2007, readers of the Sunday Washington Post Magazine would have seen an arresting photo of two year old Tomasa Mendez crying in her mothers arms after watching her father being hauled away by US immigration authorities.

When the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) was tipped off about a planned raid on a New Bedford garment factory it was able to activate a newly developed communications strategy and direct the way the media handled the story.

MIRA’s timing was perfect. The story ran in the middle of a heated national debate about reforming US immigration laws.

Was the story and placement a lucky coincidence for those working with and for undocumented workers? Well no. It was all part of MIRA’s carefully thought out communications plan aimed at reframing public debate about immigration.

Sympathetic coverage

Normally, local Massachusetts right wing radio blasts attacks on immigrants, but MIRA was also able to quiet them with a frontal attack," explains MIRA’s communications associate, Shuya Ohno. This time, “We were able to generate the sympathetic frame first.”

Ohno determined to turn things round and in the months leading up to the New Bedford raid he consulted partner organisations and started implementing a strategy for getting MIRA’s voice into the immigration debate.

Starting from the premise that most reporters had no desire to hurt people and would recognise a human story if it was offered to them, Ohno cultivated journalist contacts and tutored community leaders in press etiquette. He made sure he returned every press call and sought out individuals from relevant communities to illustrate the human side of the stories. Key to the strategy was maintaining the trust of the people MIRA served, keeping a clear distinction between larger policy issues and advocacy with sensitivity for the individual.

Ali Noorani the Executive Director of MIRA adds, “I thought of how the Red Cross kept the focus during Hurricane Katrina on individuals and so we kept the focus on individuals and not immigration policy.”

MIRA’s highly coordinated and sophisticated communications strategy shifted the focus of the US immigration debate towards the largely ignored human side of the story. This included the children and families of the estimated 7 million undocumented workers adversely affected by the current laws and 3 year backlog of naturalization applications.

Recognizing that immigrants as well as community groups working with them were often unprepared to lobby effectively to meet their needs, MIRA developed strategies to mobilize both groups to speak with one voice on the issues that matter to them. Media training helped organisers understood how the media operated and was able to provide what reporters wanted. Families were prepared too, and told they didn’t have to answer questions if they didn’t want. Care was taken to maintain the immigrant workers’ dignity and ensure they were not exploited.

This result was an immigrant-led communications plan that drives how a story is developed, what information the public receives and how it shapes their opinion on the issues.

A perfect opportunity

The New Bedford raid presented a perfect opportunity to put MIRA’s communications strategy to the test. The key message was agreed and fed to reporters in mainstream and ethnic media. Community leaders were identified and given talking points. Within hours of the event MIRA was ready to hold a news conference and frame the raid’s impact in its own language.

The arrest by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials of 350 “illegal workers” was immediately redefined as an action against “350 mothers and fathers”. As MIRA looked for a new line for the second day’s coverage, reports started coming in of youngsters separated from their parents turning up at a local church in New Bedford.

So MIRA established a ‘press centre’ at the church and distributed news feeds focussing on the ‘destruction of the immigrant family’.

MIRA’s main aim was to steer public emotion so it would overcome the politics of fear propagated by anti-reformers. Ohno and his colleagues calculated that most people have a sympathetic response to images of mothers and crying babies. So people and personal effects became the focus of MIRA’s message, as executive director Ali Noorani explains: “We had the visual of diapers and food on a big (collection) table. We found a key community leader to do the press conference so that there was local leadership buy-in.”

Sympathetic coverage

As a result of this minute by minute monitoring and directing of activities MIRA coordinated a total of 11 press conferences and four large events in the first 12 days following the raid. Media interest was maintained with a stream of new angles including compelling stories, voices and images to build public support. Articles in the local media were followed up in The New York Times and Washington Post, as well as popular blogs like Huffington Post. MIRA’s own website U-Tube were also used to channel information and attract funds.
Ready access to a growing data bank of individual stories also improved the relationship that MiRA had with their press contacts, "We were transformed from a policy shop to an organizing shop. We became seen as a trusted convener and advocate," says Noorani.

With sympathetic coverage of the affected families and children from media leaders like The New York Times and the Washington Post, MiRA was also able to garner the support of groups such as affluent suburban families who had traditionally not been supportive of their mandate—coverage worth over $175,000 in contributions and the popular support needed to advance immigration reform.
MIMI—With Migrants, For Migrants: Intercultural Health in Germany

By Evelyn
April 15, 2009

Health Inclusion, Living Together, Refugee Portal

Ramazan Sulman was six when he left Istanbul and moved with his family to Hannover, a major city centre in northern Germany. Since Ramazan was able to learn German much faster than his parents, he soon began acting as the family interpreter. Years later, these experiences were what inspired him to develop the idea of an intercultural service network to help bridge the gap that newly arrived immigrants, like his family often experience as they settle into their new homes.

Today, Ramazan Salman is the Executive Managing Director and co-founder of the Ethno-Medical Centre (Ethno-Medizinisches Zentrum – EMZ), the organisation that developed the award winning “MiMi – With Migrants for Migrants” programme (Mit Migranten für Migranten – MiMi).

The MiMi programme recruits, trains and supports individuals from within immigrant communities to become cultural mediators who can help navigate new and different ways of dealing with traditions of health and illness and the body. The goal of the program is to make the German health system more accessible to immigrants, increase their health literacy while simultaneously empowering immigrant communities by prompting their direct participation in the process.

This two way dynamic is one of the unique aspects of MiMi. The programme targets socially integrated immigrants as candidates for intercultural mediator training and then recruits recent immigrants to participate in the community group sessions that are led by MiMi mediators drawn from their own community.

The MiMi approach is based on the belief that migrants are experts in their own causes and that as a community, they have experiences and resources that need to be better leveraged.

“Our Project sees immigrants as an important human resource for the future development of our society. Not only do most of them integrate quite well, but they also provide financial, cultural and social benefits for German society. MiMi promotes both integration and the building of bridges between cultures,” says Ramazan Salman.

Candidates for the mediator training are recruited from local immigrant communities and then provided with over 50 hours of training. Once they are certified, they can begin to plan and conduct information sessions. These sessions are tailored to be culturally sensitive for the particular community and are held in their preferred language. The discussion ranges from understanding and navigating the German health system to community specific health issues.

In co-operation with 80 other health related organisations, MiMi also regularly produces and updates a Health Guide that is available in over 16 languages. This guide provides information on targeted health topics and insight into understanding and navigating the German health system. The goal is to help immigrant communities increase their use of available resources – particularly around preventative care and early check-ups. MiMi regularly monitors and tracks the success of these publications as well as their other program in order to revise components or specific modules as needed. The result is that the content is always being updated and continues to reflect the needs of target communities.

Success...

Developed by the Ethno-Medical Centre, the MiMi programme was launched in 2003 in cooperation with BKK Bundesverband (Federal Association of Company Health Insurance Funds) as a pilot in four cities of the federal states of Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia. It has expanded to 38 cities in Lower Saxony, Hessen, North-Rhine-Westphalia, Brandenburg, Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate, Bavaria, Hamburg, Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein.

An unexpected success of the program has been the ability of MiMi to engage with immigrant women and to help them assume leadership roles in their communities. The majority of the intercultural mediators are women and evaluations of the program show their strong support for the training.

For his innovative and entrepreneurial work in creating MiMi, in 2006, Ramazan Sulman was awarded with the Ashoka Fellowship as Social Entrepreneur of the Year. In December of 2008, he was named Germany’s “Social Entrepreneur” in a competition organized by the Schwab Foundation (specifically Professor Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum in Davos), The Boston Consulting Group and under the patronage of the German Chancellor Dr. Angela Merkel.

[Update November 2015: The prestigious European Health Award has been given to the Ethno-Medical Centre Germany Association in Hannover for its award winning “MiMi – Health with Migrants for Migrants.” Read an excerpt from Executive Managing Director and co-founder Ramazan Salman’s acceptance speech]

This Good Idea was identified by the Open Society Foundations’ At Home in Europe project as a good practice promoting inclusion, social cohesion and nondiscrimination. For more on this practice and the At Home in Europe project, read Living Together: Projects Promoting Inclusion in 11 EU Cities (OSF, 2011)
Meeting, Mediating and Mentoring: The Power of Peer Mentoring

By kturner
February 10, 2009
Uncategorized

Guns and knives. Unemployment and racial tension. Too often these are the only stories being told about the youth in Aston, a borough of Birmingham, located in the Midlands of the UK.

What we don’t hear about, are the incidents happening daily, the small stories about the kids living in these neighborhoods who have decided to try and change their own communities and lives.

In October 2005, as a result of long simmering racial tensions, Lozells the neighboring community to Aston erupted in two days of racial riots between the Afro-Caribbean and Asian community. Petrol bombs and bullets left ten injured and two dead, in addition to thousands in damages to stores and property.

During these disturbances, Asian and Afro-Caribbean youth volunteers from the Voices of Aston group walked the streets together to demonstrate solidarity and to do their part to prevent the ethnic tensions from next door from seeping into Aston.

It worked. The streets of Aston remained peaceful and free of the damage that occurred in surrounding neighbourhoods.

Youth leading youth…

Voices of Aston was set up in 2003 to provide a platform to help “local youths speak for themselves” through programs focused on peer development and mediation. By helping them learn to identify and address solutions within their community and peer groups, the long term goal of the project is to prepare these “disenfranchised” youth to instead play a role as engaged and productive citizens.

Targeted at youth between the ages of 18-24, this peer mediation program was developed around the idea that the people closest to conflict are the ones best placed to find solutions.

Through the Voices of Aston program, young people learn the skills of conflict management, basic mediation training as well as a framework for passing these skills on to their peers. The program also enables participants to learn new personal skills such time management and communication skills; how to work with a diverse group of peers both in age and background.

For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Marketing Multiculturalism: Advertising Campaign for Integration

By Evelyn
March 1, 2009

Role of Media

Whether it’s the launch of a new car, the release of a new movie or an upcoming political campaign advertising in all its forms (print, radio, television and direct marketing) remains the most effective tool to help get a message out and to bring a target audience or consumer base on board.

When the local steel industry began slowing down, the City of Werdohl in the North Rhine-Westphalia region of Germany started observing that the rise in economic tension was leading to increased stress between immigrant groups and the German population. In response, they decided to launch a professional marketing and public relations campaign to address the situation and change people’s views and perceptions.

At over 20%, Werdohl has the highest percentage of foreign born residents in the North Rhine Westphalia region, most of whom have a Turkish background. The Turkish community was particularly impacted by the growing unemployment, with over 38% of the workers laid off from the steel plants being of Turkish background. A consequence of this disproportionate rise in unemployment in the Turkish community was a growing reluctance to integrate with the larger community.

The City Werdohl saw the public relations and marketing campaign as a means to reach out and directly involve the Turkish community in city life and stop the increasing geographic and class segregation that was occurring around Werdohl.

The key message of the campaign was that integration was important and necessary to city life. What made the campaign particularly unique was that the City of Werdohl designed the campaign with the immigrant community and not just about or for them.

Beginning in 2003, the city enlisted in the help of the Institut für interkulturelle Management- und Politikberatung (IMAP, Institute for Intercultural Management and Policy advisory), to develop and implement this campaign.

Together, they worked to build relationships with representatives from the mosques and other community organizations to persuade them to collaborate on the development of the integration campaign. Direct contact and involvement with leaders from the Turkish community resulted in increased contact beyond the immediate community, advancing campaign goals right from the start and shaping both the messages and authenticity of the campaign. By reaching out to women’s groups at mosques, schools and community centers, Turkish women also became involved in the campaign.

The final campaign involved the creation and strategic distribution of flyers, posters and leaflets as well as an email campaign that targeted stakeholders and community members. Corporate sponsors provided funding; schools and other education establishments as well as local businesses all supported the campaign through their newsletters and networks. As a result, the campaign culminated in a series of successful community and neighborhood forums.

The final result was a full professional campaign on the role and necessity of integration that both reflected the concerns of the Turkish and immigrant community while directly reaching out to the larger German community. Among the promotional tactics used were surveys that showed that both immigrants and German born residents felt that it was possible to overcome cultural differences. These results were widely published throughout the city. To move perception away from the problems and instead to focus on the successes, the City of Werdohl began regularly featuring successful integration policies and stories in the main newspapers, radio and television stations. They also prominently featured these positive stories in the Turkish community papers.

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.

"...in looking at the diverse approaches to death in our country, we learn not only about each other but also about ourselves." (Joris de Bres, 2005)

Mariam is a young, Christian Ethiopian refugee, working behind a Wellington shop counter. When her brother in Ethiopia died, she wanted to do what is the cultural norm back home – shave her head as a sign of respect and mourning. But she feared her boss would not understand and she would lose her job. Encouraged by her refugee counsellor to broach the subject with her employer, Mariam was surprised to meet a respectful response. Mariam shaved her head, and her boss agreed that she could wear a beanie or scarf when serving if that made her feel more comfortable.

This story, recorded in Last Words and featured in national publications like the New Zealand Herald, illustrates how communicating with others about cultural values, beliefs and practice is critical to living in an integrated community, especially perhaps in times of grief.

About Last Words

Last Words is a 200 page publication commissioned by the Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand (FDANZ) and published in 2005. Based on a 1987 publication by the Ministry of Health, Last Words recognizes and helps plan for the ways in which different groups in New Zealand approach death. It is intended for those who work with the dying and the bereaved as well as those wanting to care for, support and understand friends, neighbours and colleagues as they approach death or deal with its aftermath.

Endorsed by the New Zealand Race Relations Commissioner, Joris de Bres, the resource "offers insights into the beliefs and practices likely to be important to different groups of New Zealanders – particular foods or remedies, the comfort of familiar prayers and rituals, the presence of wider family and community members, ceremonies to say farewell or to dispose of the physical remains of the deceased."

The handbook describes 32 separate ethnic, cultural and/or religious approaches to death and dying, based on the traditions of the most populous sub-groups in New Zealand. Accounts are largely based on interviews and personal experiences that provide insight rather than definitive statements and these perspectives are written in the context of immigration to New Zealand. However, Last Words is careful to recognise that even among distinct groups, there is great diversity in how death is marked: "Things aren't fixed," says author, Margot Schwass. "You can't fill out a checklist and say, if you're a nurse with a Muslim man dying in bed three, 'I've got to do this, this and this.' It's not going to be as cut-and-dried as that."

Recognition that migration has intersected with culture and religion to create changes in practices is also illustrated. For example, ongoing cultural migration amongst Chinese New Zealanders has revived an old tradition of throwing rice into the grave, "a tradition that had been lost but is being revived by new migrants coming in," says Ms Schwass.

The Impact

To engage with dying and death in a manner that is appropriate and familiar, and respecting of ethnic, cultural and religious beliefs and practices helps to bridge an emotional time. It also acknowledges the relevance of such beliefs and practices in often vastly different spaces from where they originated. Acknowledgement and understanding are often not enough and, as Dr Rod Macleod of the University of Auckland writes, planning, preparation and practice are crucial: "...to get it right we must ask what to do and how to help, ... we must ensure that social and cultural aspects of life and death are identified, embraced and understood by health professionals so that the needs of patients, and their families, are met as they approach death. Planning and preparation will ensure that practitioners understand different cultural perceptions of dying and death and respect patients' belief systems and cultural norms."

Having a wide range of approaches to death and dying documented has resulted in a well-used resource for those working in the caregiving and funeral sectors. As FDANZ President Neil Little of Davis Funerals in Auckland explains, qualifications within the funeral profession are gained post-employment, which means initial training is largely provided within funeral homes. "Many funeral homes put together their own training programs and supplement them with whatever resources are available," he says. "Last Words has provided an invaluable education tool for people coming in to the funeral profession and is an excellent source of knowledge around a number of cultures and faiths. Furthermore it has been of benefit to some of our colleagues in rest homes and private hospitals, as well as funeral celebrants and the clergy. Many FDANZ members provide death education in their communities and this publication has been useful in this area also."
Language from the Law: The Cardiff E.S.O.L. Police Project

By ktturner
November 19, 2008

For the past twenty four years, Police Constable Vince Donovan has been a member of the South Wales Police Service and lived in the city of Cardiff, Wales with his wife and two teenage children. His day to day role, involves providing support and reassurance for victims of racial, homophobic and disability related crimes.

In Cardiff, as elsewhere, limited knowledge of English, local culture and laws, make asylum seekers vulnerable to being categorized as both victim and perpetrator of new and unwelcome incidents by their new communities.

Police Constable Donovan also noticed that many of these individuals had an inherent fear of the police as a result of their past experiences. He heard stories about asylum seekers having been beaten, robbed and even raped by the police in their home countries.

“I felt it was so important to try and remove these fears and change their perceptions. I wanted these individuals to realize that the Police in the UK were friendly and would not pose them any concerns and for them to realize that the Police were there to protect and look after them, recognizing their vulnerabilities starting a totally new life” remembers Police Constable Donovan.

Looking for an opportunity to connect with this community, he approached Susan Morris, Cardiff English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services and together they designed a course to provide asylum seekers with an understanding of their respective rights and responsibilities, while building a relationship of trust with them.

The result was the first police-led ESOL classes for the newcomer community.

The Solution: Police ESOL

Police ESOL is a course that teaches English as it builds relationships between law enforcement officers and the new migrant community. It also focuses on providing students with practical knowledge about law and policing in the UK.

Designed as a series of 10, two-hour sessions, the course includes topics such as “An Introduction to the Police”, “Dealing with an Emergency”, “Child Safety in the UK” and “Driving in the UK.”

Each session is intended to give students confidence in the police, a sense of what they do and an understanding of UK laws, while developing core written and spoken English skills.

When the topic of “the police” was first introduced, students became noticeably quieter and tense. However, ESOL teachers continually emphasized that the police were there to provide students with the information they would need to live comfortably and safely in the UK. Each session also included time for the student to ask direct questions to the police and raise issues of particular concern to them.

“I remember walking into a classroom and seeing some men and women physically shake at my presence in the room. However, after engaging with them through the teaching sessions, I found that I soon had difficulty leaving since I had so many offers food and invites to homes for meals – all as a sign of their appreciation.” recalls Police Officer Donovan.

Building a more direct relationship between the police and the asylum community, would also help reduce the fears that have traditionally prevented racial incidents or domestic violence from being reported. For example, the practical focus of the lessons insured that the asylum seekers would know when and how to use the 999 emergency number as well as other medical and social services.

Success...

Police ESOL is an example of a program that provides new arrivals with useful cultural information, core language skills and actively looks to preempt potential community relationship problems.

The ESOL course was popular with students. Feedback showed that the classes succeeded in strengthening their confidence in the Police, their comfort in the UK and improving their written and spoken English. The women only ESOL classes that were held in primary schools were particularly appreciated.

Cardiff Police now encourage increasing numbers of officers to attend these classes and to share in the outreach experience. Following a successful pilot, the course is now being held at resource centres across the city by ESOL staff in conjunction with community beat officers.

The success of this community policing initiative has been recognized and adapted by other communities. For example, Sheffield College has adopted the course for ESOL students at the community college who might be considering police related career options, adding a work placement and volunteer component to the program. Police in South Yorkshire, England are also actively encouraging ethnic minorities to attend Police ESOL training course.

Police ESOL also prompted the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which is the largest broadcasting corporation in the world to create a citizenship CD and establish a websiteto help ESOL learners and teachers to explore citizenship ideas.

For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Integration Through Education: Toronto’s Second Generation Makes the Grade

By kturner
November 18, 2008

Creating a genuinely inclusive learning environment doesn’t just happen in the ESL classroom, it requires a comprehensive commitment to diversity.

By approaching the issue of diversity as an opportunity, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has gone beyond instructional methods and curriculum to achieve significant results.

In September 2008, the TDSB was awarded the prestigious international Carl Bertelsmann Prize in recognition of its exemplary work in promoting social integration and improving equal learning opportunities at its schools.

According to data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) the TDSB has successfully closed the average achievement gap between second generation students of immigrant origin and their Canadian peers.

Planning for success...

The TDSB governs over 550 schools. In some of these schools, the proportion of “new Canadians” is as high as 80 to 95 percent, with more being enrolled each day. More than 36 percent of these students come from economically disadvantaged families where the income is less than 70 percent of the median income. Over 49.9 percent of Toronto residents were born abroad. For half of them, neither French nor English is their native language.

Yet, the reading competence of students in Toronto tested in grade 9 is as high as the overall reading performance for Ontario, which, with its much lower proportion of immigrants is ranked among the best in the PISA.

This achievement did not come about by accident. The TDSB recognized that systemic change was required, and that it had to start at the top.

To insure an across the board commitment to education equity, the TDSB employed an Executive Officer of Student and Community Equity in August 2005. They remain, the only regional school authority in Canada to do so.

In his role as Executive Officer of Student and Community Equity, Lloyd McKell has provided leadership to the TDSB’s comprehensive and systematic approach to promoting equity and access for all their students. “As the diversity of Toronto’s schools increased, we understood the need to ensure that all students reflecting that diversity, have equitable opportunities to be successful in our schools and that systemic barriers to their achievement are identified and removed” adds Lloyd.

The result is that all stakeholders have a role in promoting integration across the school system as part of a mainstream approach that is reinforced daily and through routine school practice –from the School Board through to principles, teachers, children, parents and migrant associations.

In addition to ensuring the school curricula reflects the diversity of the student body, the TDSB supports efforts to involve parents, neighborhoods and ethnic communities. In locations with a particularly high number of immigrants, integration advisors (settlement workers) at the schools are helping parents with education and other issues concerning integration. The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program is a partnership of settlement agencies and boards of education supported by Canada’s national department of Citizenship and Immigration, now available in schools across Canada.

Other specific actions that the TDSB has implemented to achieve these results include: providing low-achieving students with individual support in the classroom and access to language learning in their student’s native language.

In 2008, the Carl Bertelsmann Prize recognized the success of the TDSB’s efforts to promote more integration as part of a larger challenge to all education and school systems to meet the challenges of migration and demographic change.

“The school system in Toronto shows us what actions we have to take, considering the challenges we are facing from globalization, migration and demographic change,” commented Dr. Johannes Meier, member of the Bertelsmann Foundation Executive Board. “Germany is an immigration country just as Canada, but, regarding the education system in our country, we have not learned the necessary lessons from this reality. In Germany, educational success still depends too much on the social and ethnic background of the students. In that respect, we would do well to take guidance from a country like Canada and a city like Toronto.”

Since awarding the prize to the TDSB, the Bertelsmann Foundation has launched a German initiative called, “Integration through Education” which has invited all students from grades 5 to 12 to enter projects and ideas for improving integration at their schools.

Awarded annually since 1988 the prize is given by the German Bertelsmann Foundation to honour innovative policies addressing key global challenges. In 2008, initiatives from England, Sweden and Switzerland were also short listed.

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.

Hier geht es zur Fallstudie auf der Seite Demographie Konkret (Bertelsmann Stiftung): Toronto – Equitable Schools.
Improving Housing, Empowering Communities: Incorporating Multiculturalism Into Urban Planning

By kturner
February 10, 2009
Municipal: Spatial Inclusion

The housing debate in global city centers has traditionally been about affordability and availability. However, changing demographics are starting to shift the parameters of this discussion. Increasingly, local government authorities must ask themselves whether housing services meet the needs of all immigrant and ethnic minority communities in the city.

Located in the West Yorkshire region of England, Leeds is a diverse city where 11% of the population is made up of a wide range of ethnic communities, including Black Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Irish and Jewish. With European integration and the increasing settlement of asylum seekers, the diversity of the city’s population is expected to increase further.

These coming changes, in addition to the present need, led to the creation of The Leeds Housing Partnership, a public and private partnership of landlords, voluntary housing organization and members of the local authorities.

This group came together around the recognition that housing and housing providers could directly contribute to community cohesion and economic regeneration by actively engaging and considering the needs of ethnic and minority groups during the consultative and strategic planning processes.

As a result and as part of the overall Leeds Housing Strategy of 2005 – 2010, The Leeds Housing Partnership released the, “Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy and Action Plan” which was embedded in the Vision for Leeds Il 2004 – 2010 (which is the master plan that will guide urban development in Leeds in the coming years).

The impact of this plan is that it focuses exclusively on the needs and concerns of local residents specifically from the most disadvantaged (BME) communities.

Background...
Currently, the BME community in Leeds is concentrated in the poorest parts of the city. BME households are more likely to live in poor housing conditions than British White households. Much of the rented accommodations that house the BME population in Leeds is pre-1919 housing stock that is in very poor condition. As a result, this community is more likely to live in overcrowded homes or properties with no central heating, that suffer from damp or that are in need of general repair. For instance, the 2001 Census shows that 38% of BME’s live in dwellings with no central heating and 13% have only partial heating. As a result of extended families, 61% live in houses that are too small to meet the needs of their families.

The Approach...
With the development of a Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Strategy and Action Plan, the BME Housing Strategy will help to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged people and communities and the rest of the city.

A key aspect to achieving the goals outlined in the BME Housing Strategy is to ensure that language and cultural barriers do not restrict the understanding of housing options, access to social housing or the involvement in consultation processes.

As it develops, the BME Housing Strategy and Action proposes to address these key issues by ensuring that housing providers deliver services that are sensitive to both culture and religion. To do this, they are developing profiles of the cultural and faith needs of each community and incorporating these in to the service planning and the design of new homes. The ME Housing Strategy will also look to increase BME staff representation in housing providers at all levels and use outreach activities to recruit more board members from the BME community.

The BME Housing Strategy and Action plan will also improve access to housing services by providing information in a range of formats and community languages. This will help those from new communities to be able to make informed choices on where they want to live. An orientation service to help members of the BME community to integrate into the local community will also be developed.

Newsletters and increased publicity around community events will also be used to increase BME participation in tenant and resident involvement.

Equitable housing that acknowledges problems or needs of specific communities can help create a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities and reinforce the sense that regardless of background, similar opportunities are available for all.

For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Many Canadians view the sport of ice hockey as more than just a national pastime. They see it as an essential aspect of the country’s identity and part of the fabric of Canadian culture. Across Canada, there are leagues for boys, girls, men and women. After school kids play pick up games at skating rinks in their neighborhoods and in the summer, they switch to road or street hockey.

And on Saturday nights, for the past 56 seasons (or since 1952) families and friends gather to watch the game with “Hockey Night In Canada”. The tradition of “Hockey Night In Canada” actually goes back even further, to 1931 when Saturday night radio broadcasts of the game first began.

“Hockey Night In Canada” consistently remains one of the highest rated programs on Canadian television (and is also the worlds oldest sports related television program).

Hockey Reaches Out
On Saturday May 24th 2008 viewers of the National Hockey League (NHL), Stanley Cup finals had the option of watching the nights hockey game in both of Canada’s official languages of English and French – and for the first time ever, in Punjabi!

Joel Darling, director of production, Canada Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Sports, “This is a great opportunity to introduce new audiences to the excitement of the Stanley Cup.” The response was so great, that from this pilot project is has now become a regular feature of the hockey broadcast.

Commentary on the games is done in Punjabi from Calgary by Paraminder Singh, a local Punjabi television host, and Harnarayan Singh, a CBC Reporter. “The community response has been fantastic!” said Parminder Singh. Previously, grandparents and parents were often hesitant about joining their children for the Saturday night game. “A lot of the community was watching the game (ice hockey) but on mute since they didn’t understand what the commentators were saying.”

The Punjabi broadcast is making the game accessible to new audiences and increasing the reach of the CBC’s most valuable franchise. It is also building the fan base and potential ticket revues of the home team, The Toronto Maple Leafs. In addition to the business benefits, Punjabi Night In Canada is providing a way for new immigrants to culturally connect with the mainstream. Hockey fan, Raj Singh emigrated from Delhi three years ago and now works at a small IT manufacturing plant in Mississauga, a suburb of Toronto. For Singh, “Watching and understanding the Saturday night hockey game gives me something in common to talk to my colleagues about on Monday mornings – it makes me feel more at home and a part of the group.”

The last official census found that Punjabi is the fourth most spoken language in Canada after English, French and Chinese.

The success of the Punjabi broadcast has led to CBC deciding to expand out its audience reach even further and so “Hockey Nigh In Canada” is now also being televised in Mandarin.

Jason Wang, who provides the hockey commentary in Mandarin, remembers how, newly arrived from Taipai at the age of 9, he used to watch “Hockey Night In Canada” to improve his English. Now he will be the one helping new Chinese-Canadians improve their knowledge of hockey and become better acquainted with a national pastime. “Its all come full circle,” says the 24 year Vancouver journalist.
After the success of Punjabi Hockey Night in Canada announcers Parminder Singh and Harnarayan Singh will now be calling National Basketball Association (NBA) games for the Toronto Raptors – in Punjabi. As they did with hockey, the two plan to weave in Punjabi phrases and terms to make it colourful and entertaining for all age groups. This strategy has resulted in Punjabi Hockey Night In Canada now entering its second season with a regular audience of about 10,000.

Update #2
[October 20, 2011]

CBC Television has cancelled Punjabi Hockey Night in Canada after failing to find a sponsor to cover the show's production costs.

Update #3
[December 7, 2011]

Punjabi Hockey Night in Canada returns to the air after a campaign by the Punjabi community across Canada and a new sponsor is found. This is the second reprieve the telecast has received.
From Boston’s Back Streets to Mainstream Success

By kturner
February 11, 2009
Entrepreneurship Inclusion Municipal

In a low brown mid size warehouse in Boston’s South End, Amado and his family have a janitorial wholesale supplies company. For the past 15 years, they have provided the commercial equipment and cleaning products needed to maintain the clusters of high-rise office and condos in downtown Boston.

With ten employees, six of whom are part of his extended family, Amado’s business is a small, unglamorous and a behind the scenes operation. But it is also well-managed, highly profitable and through the “Boston Back Streets Program” now being recognized and supported as an essential component of Boston’s social and economic traffic.

The City of Boston is actually recognised as having coined the term “back streets” when they launched the “Boston Back Streets” program to provide a range of land use and business assistance strategies to Boston’s industrial sector. “Backstreet” Businesses are generally defined as small to medium size light industrial or commercial businesses that create products or provide services in manufacturing, wholesale, commercial, logistics, construction and food processing. In contrast, “Mainstreet” offices and retail businesses are those that typically sell previously prepared materials or provide services directly to the consumer. While “Backstreet” businesses complement those on “Mainstreet” they tend to be unknown and overlooked.

Workers in Backstreet jobs are more likely to be racial and ethnic minorities since these businesses create good middle income jobs that are accessible to all levels of education; see Boston Back Streets data tables. On average, Back Street businesses pay salaries that are double what is offered on “Main Street” – making them critical in achieving greater inclusion and equality for newcomers and minority groups in the city.

The City of Boston identified more than 4,000 small and mid-size light industrial and commercial businesses that operate within the city’s boundaries but away from the main areas. Collectively, these “Backstreet” companies generate more than 100,000 jobs (one in five jobs in Boston) and pay over $30 million annually in taxes and represent a key lever to the city’s economic development and success.

The Back Streets Program…

Boston’s “Back Streets Program” was launched in November 2001 by Mayor Thomas Merino when the city’s economic development office identified that profitable and well-established backstreet businesses were leaving the city because they lacked the resources they needed to grow. There were problems of inadequate space, competing land uses, insufficient parking and difficulty navigating through the bureaucracy of City Hall.

Prior to this time, Backstreet Businesses were not formally organized, and had no way to address these obstacles in a unified way and make a case for their needs. In addition, most felt overlooked by “Mainstreet” business organizations and were reluctant to raise their concerns with them.

Boston Mayor Thomas Merino had the foresight to recognize the potential of these immigrant businesses to support the local interests, “The goal of the Back Streets program is to support Boston’s many small and medium-sized industrial and commercial companies by creating the conditions in which they can grow and prosper, and attract new manufacturing and commercial businesses to the city.”

Beyond creating a healthy business environment for these businesses to operate, the Back Streets program leads the way with its recognition that small to mid size business that are primarily immigrant owned are also the nexus at which social and economic interest meet. While social programs form a safety net, they generally tend to offer few opportunities for personal development or genuine career opportunities with livable wages.

Back Streets companies encourage employees to develop career skills, help immigrant adapt by improving language skills, local work experience and servings as a conduit for opportunities for personal development or genuine career opportunities with livable wages.

Specific Sector Support…

The Back Streets Program provides support in four main areas including: real estate, work force, business assistance and resources and partnerships.

Real Estate
Land use and better planning to support Back Street businesses became a primary driver of the program. The City of Boston adopted the goal of no net loss of the industrial space that these businesses require. To protect industrial land from residential or institutional conversion, the City of Boston strengthened the zoning review guidelines. The Back Streets Program also launched a commercial and industrial “site finder” to help growing and new companies find the space that they need to operate successfully. This portal uses internal city resources, as well as information from Boston’s leading commercial and industrial real estate brokers to track and suggest suitable locations for expanding Backstreet businesses; click here for the Industrial Site Finder.

Work Force
The Back Streets Program helps companies find, train and develop workers through a job readiness services such as career centres, English language and job training programs.

Business Assistance
The Back Street Program provides a team of ombudsmen to the Back Street Business community to provide solutions, resources and contacts as they relate to specific business needs. This includes solutions to issues on zoning, permitting and how to navigate City Hall.

Financing and Partnerships
The Back Street Program helps direct resources towards these businesses including low interest rate loans to qualified businesses and tax exempt financing for projects and equipment with costs over $3 million.
Too often new immigrants to New Zealand, much like new immigrants around the world, end up falling into the frustrating cycle of "no New Zealand experience, then no job, no job, then no New Zealand experience." The result is that many skilled new immigrants are unable to gain employment that is reflective of their education and professional backgrounds.

In June 2007, the Committee for Auckland, an alliance of local city leaders, attended a learning exchange in Toronto (Canada) hosted by TRIEC, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. Founded in 2003, TRIEC is internationally recognized for its efforts to help skilled immigrants gain the cultural skills and networks they need to excel in the work force of their new country. TRIEC’s occupation specific immigrant mentoring program, The Mentoring Partnership, has had particularly impressive outcomes, with more than 85% of participants acquiring full time positions in their fields after their internships and making impressive gains in their earning potential (67% higher post-program).

The Toronto city exchange led the Committee for Auckland’s Future Auckland Leaders group to adapt the TRIEC experience for a pilot mentoring program known as the “Skills for Auckland.” Modelled after what they had seen in Toronto, the program was targeted at skilled immigrants and included formal workshops as well as one-to-one guidance in the form of mentoring. The experiment proved successful. Over 50% of the participants in the pilot program went on to secure jobs in their chosen fields.

The success of “Skills for Auckland” resulted in the development of a scaled up version of the pilot project now known as OMEGA (Opportunities for Migrant Employment in Greater Auckland).

OMEGA was officially launched on March 5th 2008 with endorsements from over 30 of the region’s top employers and civil leaders, all of whom are now involved with providing both business leadership and a voice to the issues of underemployment amongst new immigrants to New Zealand.

Currently over one third of Auckland’s 1.4 million residents are foreign born. Facilitating their transition into appropriate employment is viewed as essential for the economic growth and vibrancy of the city.

OMEGA’s work was modeled on best practices from TRIEC but adapted to meet the local conditions and needs of Auckland’s labour market. Like TRIEC, OMEGA helps skilled immigrants find paid internships and matches them with mentors in their professional fields. OMEGA helps interview and screen candidates. The host employers pay the intern’s stipend.

When OMEGA was localizing the TRIEC program, one challenge that they faced was getting business to embrace the concept of a paid internship as a form of recruitment, as well as some challenges stemming from local labour and employment laws.

To participate in OMEGA, applicants must be able to legally work in New Zealand, be a landed immigrant within the last 3 years, have at least 3 years work experience internationally, have achieved at least a bachelor’s level of education, be without paid New Zealand work experience in their particular field and be fluent in English.

Once immigrants have been accepted into the program, Omega matches them with similarly skilled mentors and helps secure paid internships through its network of Founding Employers. Founding Employers then conduct further interviews and select interns based on a competitive recruiting process.

Internships are between 3 and 6 months and are located in the Greater Auckland Region. Corporations involved with OMEGA include: ANZ, New Zealand Post, Air New Zealand, Bank of New Zealand, Vodafone, Genesis Energy, Simpson Grierson and Deloitte.

By adapting the most successful TRIEC practices to jumpstart a locally viable immigrant labour market integration strategy, Justin Treagus, OMEGA Programme Director, says, “We were able to swim as soon as we started. Following the TRIEC model was invaluable in the amount of time and resources we saved. I would say that we were easily able to fast track our program by six months or even a year. We had our site visit in June 2007, officially launched in March 2008 and by April of that year had our first set of mentors.”

By following the TRIEC model, OMEGA was successful from the start. “One story that always sticks with me,” says Justin. “was when we had an Asian man come in to keep his wife company while she learned about the mentor program. He had been trained in India in geographic information systems but for the past five years had been working as a cab driver. As he sat there listening to the program, he decided that he should be part of it. Three days after his first mentor meeting, he had a full time job in his field!”

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Financing Immigrant Futures: The Latino Community Credit Union

By Evelyn  
June 1, 2009  
Financial Inclusion

Banking and financial literacy are essential to successful integration – both for the newcomer and for society at large. North Carolina has more than 500,000 immigrants of Latino origin and is the fastest growing Latin immigrant population in the United States. More than half of this community speaks English poorly and over three-quarters of them do not have bank accounts. In part this is the result of a lack of documentation, an inherent distrust of banks and language issues. The result is that as a community, they are regularly overcharged for services such as loans, cashing a check or obtaining a money order. A lack of banking infrastructure also makes long term financial planning essentially impossible.

The Latino Community Credit Union (LCCU) was founded to address the financial needs and knowledge shortfalls of this growing immigrant community. The first branch of the LCCU was opened in 2000 when it became the first fully bilingual financial institution in the state.

Unlike conventional banks, credit unions are non-profit institutions where members pool their money, are able to vote for the leadership of the institution and share in its ownership. The focus of the LCCU was to provide services to immigrants who had not previously held bank accounts or had been otherwise excluded from the US financial system. As a result, the LCCU does not inquire about member immigration status and accepts all official government issued photo id when someone is seeking to open an account. It also accepts temporary U.S. visas and Matricula Consular identification cards issued by the governments of their home countries.

All of the LCCU’s employees are bicultural and bilingual in English and Spanish. Most are immigrants themselves and are trained to help first time banking customers navigate the system and its requirements. All forms and policies are available in English and Spanish. The LCCU also works in partnership with trusted community organizations such as churches and community centres to market their offer.

To improve the financial literacy of its members, the LCCU has established a financial education program that offers free financial education classes in Spanish and covers essential topics such as how to manage accounts, taxes, how to save money, develop a budget, and how to build credit. As part of their educational materials, they also developed a financial film, "A Guide to Buying a Home – Angélica’s Dreams: An Immigrant Family’s Path to Homeownership". Approximately 2000 people per year now attend these classes that are offered twice a month at each of the five branches as well as at target work sites, churches and local community organizations.

On a more fundamental level, all LCCU employees are trained to educate members on banking basics such as ATM use, filling out withdrawal and deposit slips, and balancing checkbooks. Loan officers similarly instruct members on how to build credit, read a credit report, and correct any errors they identify in the report.

Success

Since its 2000 launch, the LCCU has opened another four branches in Charlotte, Raleigh, Greensboro and Fayetteville. Currently, the LCCU has over 45,000 members and assets of over $35 million. Over ninety-five percent of its members are low income earners and over 75 percent are first time banking users.

The LCCU is now recognized as a national model and consults extensively with other credit unions and activists. The program has won numerous community and best practice awards and most recently, in November 2008, the LCCU was recognized by Business North Carolina for its Returns on Assets.

Most recently the Latino Community Credit Union was listed as a 2009 Finalist for the prestigious E Pluribus Unum Award coordinated by the Migration Policy Institute to recognise the efforts of those who are creating more unified communities by strengthening the relationship between native and foreign born Americans.

Story Update:
After being short listed in 2009 as a Finalist for the E Pluribus Unum Awards, this year, the Latino Community Credit Union was just recognized as one of the four 2010 winners!

Congratulations!
Family Mentoring For Migrants: MEMI

By Evelyn
March 5, 2009
Social Inclusion

The reality of migration is stressful – for both the immigrant and the host communities. Long term residents of a city may feel displaced, threatened and suspicious of the newcomers. When left unaddressed, these emotions become the root cause of social and cultural tension.

Truly successful integration involves practices that allow both groups to adjust and build a genuine relationship. The value of this relationship building is at the heart of the Bremen-based integration program called “Mentoren für Migranten” (memi) or Mentors for Migrants.

German families volunteer to “sponsor” immigrant families as mentors in order to help them get started and adjusted to their new lives. Along the way, both groups have the opportunity to learn about each other and build their relationships.

The Memi program was started by Diana Altun, the 26 year old granddaughter of a Turkish migrant who first came to Germany to work in the local steel mill. The program is built on the idea that genuine social integration comes from mutual acceptance and tolerance between different population groups.

"Most [migrant] families don't want help with concrete kinds of things [e.g. visiting authorities or handling paperwork]. For them, it is all about getting to know someone from their new cultural sphere. The ideal result is friendship between two families. If they simply part ways after a year, then our program has failed in its efforts."

The mentoring project is the only one of its kind in Germany at the moment, although it has received a great deal of interest from other cities and states. The program has had over 131 participants from many different countries of origin and resulted in strong, longterm connections across two generations -both the parents and their children. Diana Altun's fresh idea has turned into a successful project and is now funded by the Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees.

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Dolls and Diversity: Fighting Prejudice with Empathy

By kturner
May 18, 2009

Education Inclusion, Living Together

Racism is a learned behaviour and often, it is learned when children are very young. Children are quick to notice and mimic adult responses to people that are different from themselves in the world around them – whether these differences are physical, social or cultural.

Early childhood educators in Berlin have developed an innovative approach to cultural education for teachers and child care workers working with children as young as two years old. The Kinderwelten program uses story-telling and role-playing to help even the youngest children adapt positively to the ethnic and racial diversity that is increasingly part of their classroom and community.

The Kinderwelten program provides teachers with a wide selection of large friendly “Persona” dolls. Each doll has a unique personality as well as characteristics that are in some way different than the group at large. Each “Persona” doll comes with its own life history that includes a family history, sibling and parent names as well as a number of stories about how they had been treated unfairly, teased or excluded because of their differences. These Persona dolls “visit” the classroom to share their stories with the youngest students. Specially trained teachers use the dolls as tool to open up a discussion about being different, the child’s feelings and responses, and most importantly, to encourage empathy for what the dolls may have experienced as a result of their unfair treatment.

The empathy based approach of the Kinderwelten program makes it unique. By deliberately seeking to cultivate and teach this trait to young students, the Kinderwelten program seeks to overcome the short term focus of other more traditional intercultural educational initiatives. For instance, while programs based around “Africa” or “Asia” week may expose children to new cultures or traditions, they do little to help children understand or relate to the actual experience of people from those cultures that may now be part of their communities.

Success

The Kinderwelten program uses an Anti-Bias approach that originated in California and was adapted for German schools by the International Academy for Innovative Education, Psychology and Economics at the Free University in Berlin. The program was particularly popular with teachers that were looking for ways to bring diversity teaching into the classroom but in a way that would be meaningful and practical for their students.

In 2000, the program was launched as a pilot at four child care facilities in Berlin that had a high percentage of immigrant children, and was soon expanded. In 2004, the Kinderwelten program was recognised by the “Transatlantic Idea Prize” for Integration and Diversity by the Körber Foundation’s Usable program. In 2005, the “Kinderwelten” concept expanded to other cities in Germany, with Stuttgart, Hanover and Jena each opening 12 new pilot programs. The Persona Doll method is now widely used internationally, with programs available in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

In November 2007, the formal project wrapped up with a series of meetings of all regional partners and in 2008 a DVD was produced describing the work done with the experiences of the Persona doll in classrooms across Germany. Today, Berlin-based Kinderwelten has renewed funding from the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the Bernard van Leer Foundation in The Hague. For the next phase of the project (2007 – 2010), Kinderwelten is partnering with daycare centers, primary and special schools to deliver Anti-Bias education incorporating Persona Doll training in after-school programs.

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.

Hier geht es zur Fallstudie auf der Seite Koerber Stiftung: Vorurteilsbewusste Arbeit in Berliner Kindertagesstätten beim Projekt »Kinderwelten«.
Did You Know You Can Vote? Cities and Democracy at Work

By ktturner
February 11, 2009
Municipal, Political Inclusion

Zhara, a part-time hair dresser in her mid twenties recently completed a one day training course in voting education. “I can’t wait to share what I’ve learned with my community!” she enthuses, filled with plans to get her friends to help her arrange for day and evening sessions at their local community centre and mosque. “Once people understand how important it is to vote, I think I’ll have lots of people of all ages interested in attending.”

Zhara's training is part of a campaign launched on behalf of Dublin’s City Council’s Office for Integration. The goal is to raise awareness among the immigrant populations in Dublin of the importance of voting. The campaign also provides information of their legal right to vote in municipal elections before they become Irish citizens and the practical steps on how to actually cast a ballot on Election Day.

Currently, 15% of Dublin’s population is made up of immigrants that come from over 100 different countries. In some neighborhoods, immigrants account for more than 50% of the local population. Despite having the legal right to vote, voter participation among immigrant communities has historically been very low. In the 2007 election, only 8,400 of a potential 75,000 migrants registered to vote. The identified barriers include the very young profile age of these potential voters and a lack of targeted information on how to register and why they should vote. By training young community leaders like Zhara, the City of Dublin hopes to directly reach these communities through trusted community ambassadors. Following the completion of a one-day training course, these trained members will be equipped to a program of voter education sessions in local meeting points from across the city.

Making City Planning A Force For Change

This voting participation program is the result of a city level shift towards an increased commitment to the adoption of a planning and city framework that encourages greater integration.

“Towards Integration: A City Framework” was the first formal outline of Dublin’s migration and settlement partners. Signed in May 29, 2008 it is a multilateral formal commitment, the framework communicates a vision, principles and a strong message of commitment to city level integration state, local government, business and social partners.

Based on the 2006 census, the study behind the framework draws out the pattern of ethnic diversity in Dublin. In the north east inner city with 4 of 10 Electoral Division (ED’s) having an ethnic population of over 50% and a further 3 ED’S having 25% ethnic population. In the south east inner city, there are 2 ED’s that show a majority ethnic population. However there is also a distribution of ethnic population throughout the wider city with 40 ED’s showing an ethnic population of more than 25%.

The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor Eibhlin Byrne has strongly endorsed this campaign, saying, “It is important that all their voices are heard so that together we can create a vibrant city for the 21st century.”

The Migrant Voter Project will be promoted with a focused advertising campaign in migrant communities in tandem with a general awareness campaign, stressing the importance of registering to vote by Nov 1st 2008 deadline. The Migrant Voters Project is stressing the message that all migrants are entitled to vote – regardless of status. In addition to the advertising and migrant voter registration campaign, the steering committee is also committed to establishing forums in 2009 for political engagement agenda by immigrant communities.

Due to increase the reach and success of the campaign, these efforts were also heavily promoted with posters throughout the city and in over 25 languages, including Polish, Lithuanian, Arabic, Chinese and Spanish.

While it is still too early to know the results of this campaign, it is a significant step towards the City of Dublin acting on their formal commitment to integration. Kazik Anhalt, from Poland, who represents the Federation of Polish Organisations, said it is important that from a social inclusion perspective, migrants are informed of their right to vote. “This collaborative approach between the city council and the migrant community is the best way to do it,” said Kazik.
A City Commitment to Integration

The Migrant Voter Project was launched on behalf of Dublin City Council’s Office for Integration as part of the “Declaration on Integration,” a formally signed document involving key leaders of state and city organizations. This Declaration is unique in the Irish context, establishing a pact on integration at city level and a strong message of commitment to the immigrant population of the city of Dublin.

The Declaration commits to promoting, and supporting the integration of the immigrant population within the political, social and economic life of the city. Also signing on to the multilateral Declaration were a variety of government ministries, as well as the Dublin and the Chamber of Commerce and the City Enterprise Board, among others. Each of these pledged to develop a strong integration focus in strategic and business planning and to collaborate in joint measures and actions which contribute to a more open, integrated city and with greater urban prosperity.

As part of their commitment, the City of Dublin will also be establishing a “Migrant Forum” as a channel of communication on migrant issues. The city is also providing support for the development of City Intercultural Centre to provide programs around culture, learning and exchange.

The Declaration took place at the launch of “Towards Integration A City Framework,” a new policy statement on integration for Dublin City published by the Dublin City Development Board which is led by Dublin City Council. As Councillor Sean Kenny, Chairperson Dublin City Development Board acknowledged in reference to the strategic partnership structure for the city, “While management of immigration is a matter for government integration is a responsibility which falls on the city and its network of agencies.”

For Dublin residents like Zhara, these initiatives are already successful. “It’s not just words for a press conference or a treaty that everyone signs and forgets about – I’ve seen the posters in my neighborhood and took part in the voter training, its working on the streets.”
Dealing With Diabetes: The Maslaha Project

By admin2
November 18, 2008

Cultural Inclusion, Health Inclusion, Living Together

The Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in the UK has a disproportionately high level of diabetes. Tower Hamlets, an East End Borough of London, has one of the largest Bangladeshi communities in the UK. It also has the largest Muslim population of any local authority in England or Wales.

The Tower Hamlet Primary Trust (the local government authority) has developed a health pilot that draws on religious guidance to prompt the pre-emptive management of diabetes among this high risk group. The pilot has been launched in partnership with the Maslaha project, a new organisation aimed at helping Muslims deal with the challenges of living and integrating in western society. Maslaha which translates from Arabic as "for the common good" is built around an interactive website that asks "What is Diabetes?", under that larger call to action, Maslaha: Supporting Muslims Facing the Dilemmas of Everyday Life.

In addition to the website Maslaha has produced films in both Sylheti and English that give advice from a religious as well as medical perspective on how to tackle diabetes. Along with clear explanations of what diabetes is and how to recognize it, the site offers information on women and men only exercise classes and diabetes clinics in the area. There is also a recipe section where traditional dishes such as spiced lamb with pita, chicken curry and spicy chick peas with spinach and potatoes are all modified to better reflect the dietary needs of those with diabetes.

The project also specifically addresses issues that might have previously been overlooked by the mainstream medical community but were nevertheless, preventing members of the Muslim community from proactively taking the steps to manage their diabetes. For instance, the site has Islamic scholars advise on the question of whether swimming classes for women in the community also require lifeguards that are Muslim as well as specific advice on how to manage diabetes during the month of Ramadan (when Muslims traditionally fast).

It is hoped that Maslaha’s health strand will also contribute towards providing a greater understanding amongst health care workers about how Islam can touch on all aspects of a Muslims patients life and how they can use this knowledge to gain the confidence of their local Muslim community.

In partnership with Tower Hamlets Primary Care Trust, Maslaha, has provided medical and Islamic information about how to lead a healthier life if you have diabetes. Maslaha is a new organisation established by the Young Foundation; building on the success of the Diabetes in Towers Hamlet pilot, a major new Maslaha Website is being developed with other public service practitioners in education, youth work and adoption.

Update: The revamped website is available here.

This Good Idea was identified by the Open Society Foundations’ At Home in Europe project as a good practice promoting inclusion, social cohesion and nondiscrimination. For more on this practice and the At Home in Europe project, read Living Together: Projects Promoting Inclusion in 11 EU Cities (OSF, 2011).
Ethnic communities often choose to work and live in cluster neighborhoods and as a result frequently have very little contact or communication with each other. Through a strategic use of physical space, SydWestMSI has successfully managed to create a genuine community with a broad range of new immigrants.

SydWestMSI was originally established in 1985 to assist with the settlement needs of recent migrants and refugees in the Blacktown Local Government Area. Since then, SydWestMSI has expanded its services to include community liaison and advocacy, multicultural consultancy and most importantly, it has become the place to convene people from all age groups and from all ethnic communities.

Today, SydWestMSI describes itself as an independent, community-based organization dedicated to the empowerment and unity of people from a broad range of culturally diverse backgrounds. The cultural communities that it is involved with include: Arabic, Sudanese, Bosnian, Sierra Leone, Persian, Liberian, Italian, Croatian, Afghan, Pakistan, Sri Lankan and Indian and many more.

Among the unique and effective ways that SydWestMSI is helping to foster relationships between these communities is through the structure of the Centre’s management committee. SydWestMSI is managed by an elected Committee made up of representatives from each of the ethnic groups who are either involved in the Centre or are living in the Blacktown area.

**A Physical Place…**

However, it is the creative use of their physical space that has enabled SydWestMSI to sit at the centre of a variety of ethnic communities.

For new immigrants, housing space is often limited and renting meeting places can be expensive - as a result, the facilities of SydWestMSI are in great demand.

SydWestMSI helps groups come together and then uses their physical proximity to expand on their involvement with them. For instance, when African seniors in the area had no place to meet their peers or to socialize, SydWestMSI opened their doors to provide them with a meeting area once a week on Friday afternoons. From providing a meeting space, SydWestMSI is now in planning to create a number of programs and activities specifically for them including beading and ornament classes.

Where possible (and when appropriate) SydWestMSI programs look to bring together women from across communities around a shared concern or issue. For example, a multicultural play group gives women from different cultural backgrounds the opportunity to meet, share information and build friendships. Says one participant, “The Centre not only provides help to all new migrants but also helps them to know about this country and its systems. The Centre organizes groups for different communities where you can meet friends, share problems and know that everything is confidential. I was a member of a community group last year. It helped me to make new friends, learn new things and most important to find a job.”

Examples of these programs include Multicultural Health Services that provide information on women’s health for the Sudanese, Pakistani and Afghan women’s groups or special computer classes for Afghan women to help them learn basic online and computer skills in order to help their children with homework. There are classes on parenting between cultures, men’s groups for each cultural community and a Kid’s Gym class that includes participants from Pakistan, India and Nepal. Other classes include employment workshops, guidance on how to start a new business and classes on health and nutrition as well courses on learning about the culture and traditions of daily life in Australia. SydWestMSI also provides resources such as photocopiers, faxes, internet and computers for community groups and services.

SydWestMSI’s multilingual staff offers expertise in areas including health, employment, housing, women’s issues, young people, aged care and crisis management. They also provide consultancy services, including training and advice on delivering culturally appropriate services.

There are cross-cultural programs for young people that include the Weekly Word Jam for newly arrived refugee and migrant young people. This project delivers interactive workshops in digital media, poetry, writing and drama activities, giving the participants a chance to strengthen their English language skills in a fun and safe environment.

Multicultural celebrations are another way that SydWestMSI regularly brings together their growing community. For instance at International Women’s Day, Blacktown held an event with over seventy women from diverse cultural backgrounds in attendance. It included women dressing in traditional attire, performing traditional dance, a guest speaker and shared lunch. Similarly, Harmony Day brought together over 300 people from across the community and was supported by the local Police and Fire department.

**Success…**

SydWestMSI success has led to delegations and groups coming to study the centre accomplishments. For instance, in February 2008 SydWestMSI hosted a Japanese delegation from the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) who came to study the SydWestMSI model, the success of the various programs and the range of groups involved.

*For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.*
Citizens For Citizenship

By Evelyn

December 14, 2009

Civic Inclusion, Living Together, Political Inclusion

Ten years ago when Shiv became a Canadian citizen, it was the final step in what had been a long and emotional journey from leaving his home in Sri Lanka to relocating to Canada.

The ceremony was a moving but formal process, held in a government building and presided over by a citizenship judge who administered the oath of citizenship and then handed him his certificate.

When his brother Ram recently took his citizenship oath, the ceremony was far different. Held on the grounds of the local elementary school, it included numerous people from the community and a spirit of celebration. "It was great since Ram was able to meet and celebrate with people from his new neighbourhood. Everyone had brought food and there was music and people all shared their own stories with him and the other ten people taking their oaths," Shiv describes.

This difference is the work of the Institute For Canadian Citizenship (ICC) and its “Building Citizenship” Program that aims to connect new and established Canadians by encouraging community celebrations around the rites of citizenship. ICC takes a well-established Canadian tradition (and condition) of citizenship and embeds it in the heart of newcomer communities.

Getting Started

Per capita, Canada welcomes more new immigrants than any other country in the world. Over a quarter million immigrants enter Canada annually.

The citizenship ceremony is a unique part of Canadian life. It is also a formal celebration of citizenship instituted by the Government of Canada to welcome new Canadians into the Canadian family and to recognize the acceptance of the rights and responsibilities of membership. A mandatory part of Canada’s citizenship process, Citizenship and Immigration Canada hosts approximately 2,500 citizenship ceremonies across Canada every year.

Community citizenship ceremonies were initiated by the ICC to address the isolation that immigrants often feel within their larger community. To bridge this distance, ICC’s service model actively engages community partners in the delivery of citizenship ceremonies. Planned and hosted by local residents and community groups, each ceremony becomes a unique event that reflects the distinct and frequently diverse culture of that community. The whole community participates in these celebrations of citizenship.

Launched in July 2006, the Building Citizenship program creates a national network of local citizenship committees that organize and host ceremonies which are more personable and reflective of the local community. Groups can host the ceremony in public spaces such as schools, community centres, parks, and libraries. Participants are encouraged to add unique aspects to the ceremonies such as dance or musical performances to make each ceremony special and memorable.

Before the ICC ceremony participants will meet in roundtable discussion groups to talk over what is important to them in terms of citizenship and community. New citizens are also encouraged to join citizenship committees, to share their experience and take part in planning ceremonies for future citizen candidates.

The Building Citizenship program receives funding from the federal government and fund raises to support the staff and resources from the Institute for Canadian citizenship. Organizing committees are asked to take on the cost responsibility for space rentals (if necessary) and refreshment costs, but they are given support and guidance in how to approach elected officials, community groups etc. for donations of these funds.

Looking ahead
Building Citizenship is one of three programs run by the ICC, an organization founded and co-chaired by the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson and John Ralston Saul. The ICC is dedicated to the idea that citizenship is a bond that must be fostered and shared by a community though meaningful connections and being actively engaged.

Other ICC programs include the ‘Cultural Access Pass’ program which offers new citizens (and their children) the chance to visit more than 1,000 museums, galleries, discovery centres, parks, historic sites and monuments across Canada for free for a full year from the time they’re sworn in as a citizen. To date, more than 37,000 new citizens have registered and used their Cultural Access Pass to curate their own Canadian cultural experiences. The ICC continues to grow by leaps and bounds. Its national network of volunteers has increased to over 550, with 26 citizenship committees across Canada. Focused on becoming Canada’s leading non-government voice on citizenship, the ICC continues to develop and expand its programs to connect and engage even more Canadians.
Good Ideas Archive

Changing the Face of Leadership: DiverseCity onBoard

By kturner
February 10, 2009
Civic Inclusion

Putting Diversity to Work

DiverseCity onBoard is an award-winning initiative that seeks to change the face of city leadership by working to ensure that the governance bodies of public agencies, boards and commissions as well as voluntary organizations accurately reflect the diversity of the people who live and work in the Greater Toronto Area.

Launched in 2005, DiverseCity onBoard (formerly known as abcGTA), was created by the Maytree Foundation to bridge the growing gap between the diversity of Toronto’s population and its leaders, and to help connect public institutions to the talent they need for competitive growth and urban prosperity.

Using practical and direct initiatives, DiverseCity OnBoard works to ensure that the governance bodies of public agencies, boards and commissions as well as voluntary organizations reflect the diversity of the people who live and work in the GTA. It does this by identifying qualified pre-screened candidates from visible minorities and immigrant communities for professional appointments on boards and committees.

By professionalizing the appointment process, the program seeks to prevent board tokenism by helping organizations committed to diversity find the best candidates with the right skills – rather than simply people with the right skin color.

DiverseCity onBoard also works to promote board recruitment and appointment processes that are responsive to the needs of the GTA’s diverse population and provide governance training and workshops for members. The website allows boards to scan for potential members and candidates to shop for the best fit for their skills and interests. It has also created a series of publications and tools to help organizations modify their recruiting and retention practices to increase leadership diversity.

In just over five years, DiverseCity onBoard has facilitated the appointment of almost 600 individuals to a variety of public, non-profit and other organizational boards. Over 540 organizations and over 1500 pre-screened candidates from visible minority and immigrant groups are registered on its searchable database.

DiverseCity onBoard candidates are highly skilled and trained professionals including lawyers, doctors, accountants, entrepreneurs, social workers, administrators, and marketers; more than 60 percent have board governance experience; more than 60 percent operate at a senior management level and 70 percent have business experience.

Seeing new immigrants and visible minorities on boards sends a broader message to the community– that they are welcome and valued– while creating a space where all residents can bring new ideas to old problems forward. Moreover, leaders are a powerful symbol of who belongs and who doesn’t. When individuals see someone who looks like them occupying a position of influence, they are more likely to aspire to it, to imagine themselves in that role, feel like they belong, and are connected.

Rewarding Success

Diversity also brings huge opportunities. The problems that we face today – environment, poverty and health – are complex. The leadership we need to address these problems requires creativity, and the skill to reach across boundaries – geographic, religious, ethnic and philosophical – to bring together broad and increasingly diverse constituencies. In recognition of these challenges the annual Maytree Foundation Diversity in Governance Award celebrates public institutions and voluntary organizations that demonstrate making diversity in governance a strategic priority of their organization.

Award recipients are selected based on best practices for recruiting, appointing and engaging board members from diverse communities to achieve their organizational goals. Successful strategies include well-established diversity policies, outreach to diverse communities, measurements and reporting on diversity goals and professional development of board members.

“These awards honor those who understand the value of diversity as a win-win for organizations and communities” — Ratna Omidvar, President, Maytree Foundation.
For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Buntkicktgut! Integration Through Sports

By kturner
November 18, 2008

Living Together, Social Inclusion, Spatial Inclusion

They may not yet share a common language. They come from different cultures and often, as new immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers have had difficult and extremely varied life experiences: but when the whistle blows and the game kicks off, none of this matters.

“Football is the only thing they knew,” says Buntkicktgut co-initiator and project manager, Rudiger Heid. “Precisely because where silence reigns, football is a medium where understanding is possible.”

“Buntkicktgut” (which translates loosely as “colourful football,” or fancy footwork) is the name of the intercultural street football league in Munich. It was founded in 1996 by two social workers at a refugee home, after they began to use street football (the most popular activity among the boys at the home) as a means for identification and integration. Today, the program includes over 150 teams with approximately 1,500 players. The players are a mix of refugees and disadvantaged youth all from a variety ethnic backgrounds. The participants get involved in the program through their housing estates, daycare centres, on the suggestion of school social workers or from just hearing about it on the street. The participants range from 8-21 years and include both males and female players. The game year is divided into a summer and winter season and games are held up to five times a week, as well as on weekend, at venues throughout the city. Two cup events are held annually as well.

One the main differences between Buntkickgut and other sports events, is the continuity of the league and the frequency with which they regularly bring together the various teams. The longevity of league, with players staying on as they move from age group to age group is another key element of what makes it successful. The league creates ties between the youth and the staff and helps socialize the players with regard to the value system of the league. When new teams join, seasoned participants help them to learn the rules. The teams are almost always made up of players from a cross-section of cultural communities.

Street soccer in contrast to club football is also associated with autonomy, self organization and self determination by the youth. The league encourages responsibility by having teams register on their own and organize themselves. To quality for the league, a team must have six players and at least one coach. The kids are also responsible for organising their uniforms (shirts), coming up with a team name and building community support for their games. The teams also commit to playing year round and attending all scheduled games.

One of the primary goals of the project is the prevention of violence. The project concentrates heavily on the peaceful resolution of conflict within an intercultural context (i.e. racist prejudices and intercultural misunderstanding). The participants are taught peaceful strategies for conflict resolution, democratic negotiation and the idea of individual and group participation.

To reinforce these ideas, players can join the League Council. The League Council is democratically made up of youth representatives from individual teams. The league council gets involved when red cards are given to players for physical or verbal incidents, or if players do not fulfill their duties (cleaning up post game) or if changes are made to the team during the season. The attractiveness of the league is so strong that any sanctions are taken very seriously by the players.

Success

The league offers the players recognition and respect and it strengthens their self confidence. The relationship to the staff members is close and friendly. The benefits extend to the audience as well, since game day usually results in a “mixed” crowd that wouldn’t normally meet or speak mingling and talking and cheering for their team.

In 2000, the project received recognition from the City of Munich and was then recognized in 2002 by German President Johannes Rau when it won first prize for successful integration projects. The success of Buntkickgut has led to the idea travelling beyond Germany. For instance, similar projects have been launched in both Switzerland and Austria and are now also being considered for launch by other cities around Europe. In 2006 Buntkickgut became a truly global initiative when they hosted the International Streetfootball League in Munich. Over 56 teams from around the world came to participate in the event. There were teams from India, Pakistan, the USA, Poland, Brazil, the UK, China, Cameroon and many others. The success of the event led to the involvement of the marketing team from the World Cup to make sure the next tournament is even bigger and better.

For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
The Mentoring Partnership (TMP) is a collaboration of community organizations and corporate partners that brings together skilled immigrants and established professionals in occupation-specific mentoring relationships. As of fall 2010, The Mentoring Partnership has matched over 5,200 skilled immigrants with Canadian mentors. The program works with 12 community delivery partners and has had 50 corporate partners come onboard. These relationships achieve impressive results. For instance, based on an evaluation survey completed at the end of 2007, nearly 85 percent of participants who completed the program were now employed in their field of choice. Their average annual income was 67 percent higher than before entering the program and unemployment within this group had decreased by 78 percent.

Olusuen was matched with Karen Rubin, a veteran lawyer at Amex Canada. For the next three months the two women would meet for several hours a week. During that time Karen introduced Olusuen to a network of influential lawyers at large firms across the city, who offered invaluable professional advice and helped her to polish and adapt her resume to make it more enticing to Canadian employers. “Ms. Odunlami oversaw a $4 million budget in her municipal government job in Nigeria. We looked at what she had and how to sell it. I helped her build her self-confidence with the skills that she already had.” adds her mentor Karen. An appreciative Ms. Odunlami continues, “She went on to introduce me to several attorneys. This helped me a lot and increased my network.” Together they worked on various job strategies and tailored Olusuen’s resume so to the Canadian context. They then worked on various interview techniques and conducted a number of mock interviews.

Today Ms. Odunlami is working in Toronto’s financial district and has applied to the University of Ottawa’s specially designed program for lawyers with foreign credentials.

**About TRIEC**

The Mentoring Partnership is a program of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), an organization that is working to remove the barriers that immigrants face when entering the labour market while also helping organizations benefit from the talents and skills that immigrants bring with them. The mentoring approach to labour force integration recognizes that who you know can be as important as what you know when it comes to getting a job. The mentor-mentee relationship is the first link in the development of a professional network that opens doors and changes perceptions about the value of skilled immigrant job applicants.

Relationships in The Mentoring Partnership are based on the idea of committing “one day of your life” to the program, a commitment of at least 24 hours spread out over a four month period. During this time mentors help new immigrants navigate through the job search process by sharing their knowledge and experience. The mentor helps to write a Canadian resume, to prepare their mentee for an interview and offers advice on how to network. They also provide insight into the Canadian workplace and work culture.

To maximize the impact of the relationship, both parties follow an established program that works in the following ways: TRIEC recruits mentors usually through corporate partners while community organizations screen and recruit job-ready skilled immigrants for mentee candidates. Coaches at community partner organizations contact mentors with profiles of proposed mentees based on work and career compatibility, including shared educational backgrounds, similar work experience and common career goals.

Coaches continue to monitor mentee progress for up to three months after the mentoring relationship has officially ended. Mentors and mentees work together for a total of 24 hours over a period of four months. Coaches provide communication and relationship support as necessary. However, the most important aspect of The Mentoring Partnership is really sharing professional networks.

Mentors are welcome from any profession, provided they are employed or self-employed for at least three years. They must demonstrate links to professional associations and other business networks and have a knowledge of current labor market demands, context, trends as well as an appreciation of employment issues related to internationally trained professionals.

**Success Means Adoption**

The success of the Mentoring Partnership has been recognized beyond the city of Toronto and into the outlying regions of the city such as Halton, Peel and York.

Indeed, there are now seven mentoring programs across the country, with two more on the way. By 2007, TRIEC’s success with The Mentoring Partnership and related programs resulted in cities across Canada taking action in their own communities around immigrant employment solutions. In 2007, over 130 representatives from 18 city regions met to share the lessons and experiences that have come out of TRIEC: Today ALLIES is a new national multi-stakeholder initiative established to assist local leaders with immigrant employment strategies based on the TMP model for cities across Canada.

In 2007, the Mentoring Partnership was also honoured with the Canadian Urban Institute “Urban Leadership Award for City Initiatives.”

**International Recognition**

In 2007, a delegation from New Zealand known at the Committee for Auckland came to Toronto to meet with TRIEC and learn more about the Mentoring Partnership. The result was that in March 2008, the group launched OMEGA (Opportunities for Migrant Employment in Greater Auckland) based on the TRIEC model in the hopes of replicating Toronto’s experience with equal success in New Zealand.
For a selection of library resources related to this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.
Bringing People to Jobs: Runways to Work Programme

By kturner
February 10, 2009
Uncategorized

Like most of her neighbors, for years Shivani and her husband Alok endured temporary jobs followed by long periods of complete unemployment. Although they live only 40 miles from Stansted Airport, (which is the third largest airport in the UK as well as the fastest growing), until recently this divide seemed much larger.

Tower Hamlets, the London borough where Shivani and Alok live is located in East London, an area that is highly diverse and that historically, has one of the UK’s highest unemployment rates.

Runways To Work…
Shivani and Alok’s economic and employment situation dramatically improved when the British Airport Authority for Stansted realized that the rural location of the airport would present significant recruitment challenges as Stansted Airport is located on the borders of Essex and Hertfordshire in the London Cambridge Corridor.

The natural recruitment zone for employees (the area immediately around the Airport), seemed an unlikely source of labour. Poor turnout at British Airport Authority recruiting fairs in the Stansted region confirmed that the demographics of the surrounding communities would not be able to meet the labour needs of the rapidly expanding airport.

To address this labour shortage, the British Airport Authority appointed an Employment Strategy Manager to identify, contact and recruit previously untapped labour markets that would fill this need.

The highly diverse, densely populated and underemployed neighborhoods in North and East London offered enormous potential to create new labour markets.

Once this potential labour pool was identified, the British Airport Authority helped establish the North London and Stansted Airport Partnership. In January 2001 this partnership launched, “The Runways to Work Programme”,

A Good Deal for Everyone…
The Runways to Work program was to designed to invest economically deprived and ethnically diverse communities of North and East London with the permanent skills and tools needed to enable them to fill the labour shortage that Stansted Airport was facing and obtain permanent long term employment.

With these definitive goals in mind, the program was structured to be highly practical and results driven. Job skill training was based on actual profiles provided by airport companies and divisions (such as retailing, security and catering) all of which were facing specific needs and projected vacancies. Runway to Work intended to provide their candidates with the skills and experience to apply and secure these jobs by the end of their training sessions.

Potential candidates were recruited through job fairs, recruitment drives and direct outreach through local community centers and neighborhood meeting points such as Jobseekers’ Allowance Centers.

While transportation to the airport from the Haringey/Tottenham area had always been available via the Stansted Express, the cost of the journey had been prohibitive for many community residents – a 1 way adult ticket from Tottenham Hale to Stansted is 14.00 pounds sterling or approximately 21.00USD. To overcome this, the Runways to Work Programme provided employees with a travel card for the first year. This particular initiative proved to be particularly important in contributing to the success of the participants by helping them bridge a traditional hurdle associated with returning to sustained employment.

The Runway to Work Programme strategy went beyond entry level placement and included targets and support to help participants use their new skills to achieve long-term career advancement.

Results…
To date, the Runway to Work Programme has helped over 200 North London residents overcome labour market barriers and numerous businesses located within the area find the trained employees they need.

In June 2002 the project was audited by an independent consultant appointed by the local governing municipal council. The report was extremely positive and established the partnerships as a best practice model for cross sector partnerships.
In 1995 when Lloyds Bank and TSB merged, the new organization Lloyds TSB faced the usual challenges that come with the merger of two large organizations. The actual merger resulted in a financial services organisation with a strong presence in areas with high ethnic minority populations, and the potential for a very diverse customer base.

For instance, Lloyds TSB discovered they now had several branches in East London serving the large Bangladeshi customer base located there. However, managers of local branch offices soon realized that their branches were being underutilized by local residents. Branches in this area also reported an increase in customer misunderstandings and communication difficulties.

Further investigation confirmed that none of these branches actually employed any Bangladeshi residents.

Realising the impact that this situation could have on both their brand and customer satisfaction, Lloyds TSB undertook a program to address the situation. Job advertisements were translated in Bengali and placed with local community groups to attract more Bangladeshi applications. A 13 week work experience program was launched to provide members of the Bangladeshi community with the opportunity to discover whether they wanted to work at Lloyds and to help them develop the skills they would need to apply for a position through the regular hiring procedure. As a result of the program, a number of those who had participated successfully applied and secured jobs with Lloyds TSB.

The Lloyds initiative led to East London branches having over 40% of their employees from ethnic minority communities. The business result? An overwhelming 30% sales increase in this same area during that time. Correspondingly, there has also been a significant decrease in the number of customer complaints. Local line management believes that this is directly the result of having a more diverse workforce and therefore being able to understand the needs of their customers more effectively.

The Business Case:
Traditionally, racial equality was seen as an HR issue but as Lloyds TSB and others are increasingly finding, good racial equality practices can help businesses achieve their key performance targets of: business growth, greater market share and a competitive edge.

UK Government statistics from December 2005 list ethnic minorities as being 8% of the population, with this figure set to double in less than twenty five years.

With the continuing growth of the ethnic minority population as a proportion of the whole population, these customers will become increasingly valuable to businesses. Current purchasing power for ethnic minorities in the UK is exceeds 156 billion pounds sterling after taxes—a number that is also set to increase dramatically.

Ethnic minorities also tend to be highly entrepreneurial (ethnic minority businesses representing 10% of all businesses in the UK) and research has shown that for nearly one third of all firms, it is business to business sales that account for more than 50% of total sales.

An ethnically diverse workforce is better able to recognise the needs and aspirations of different customers and enable businesses to develop products and services suited to a diverse customer base. Businesses that understand the different cultural, religious and often linguistic requirements of their existing and potential customers will be able to secure competitive advantage over those that do not.

After their success with the Bangladeshi community, the Lloyds program was widened to include all sections of the community with well over 100 people having taken part in it—70% of whom have obtained permanent employment with the Bank.

A Good Idea Travels Internally...
Since then according to the UK organization Race for Opportunity (RfO), Lloyds TSB has come a top performer with regards to increased commitment to ethnic minorities in all aspects of business -- and the reasons is, that they have seen the clear business case for having race issues on the boardroom agenda.

"Quite simply, they realize that communities equal profitable customers and potential employees. If you rely on traditional perceptions of who these groups are, you limit your pool of talent and your target market," says Allan Leighton, RfO Chairman.

Lloyds TSB has also expanded this approach to focus on issues of race within its graduate cohort after realizing that in the late nineties, only three percent of graduate intake came from ethnic minorities while 12 percent of people graduating at that time were from these groups,” says Andrew Wakelin, a senior manager equality and diversity for Lloyds TSB.

"Among the most effective changes the bank has made since the late Nineties has been working specifically with minority ethnic graduates and their families to show them that banking is a worthwhile career. We have also made the imagery of our literature far more inclusive and make links with newer universities, where there are higher proportions of ethnic minorities, rather than just concentrating on the traditional ones," says Wakelin.

Along with awareness training across the bank, the initiative means that while in 1997, just three per cent of Lloyds TSB’s graduate intake was from ethnic minorities, that figure grew to 25 per cent this year. "To be honest, we are not doing an awful lot anymore, because once we make those changes, it started becoming business as usual that one in four applications comes from an ethnic minority," says Wakelin.

The success of these initiatives have led Lloyds TSB to seek to duplicate this approach in their international locations by finding ways to recruit from within the local community and broaden their local employee base. For instance, in Dubai, they launched a Management Development Program for Young Emiratis to help give valuable work experience to young UAE nationals.
A Soap Opera For Success: The Grand Cafe Telenovela

By admin2
November 18, 2008
Role of Media

Meet Sylvia, an immigrant woman from Mexico, who has a remarkable talent for repairs and is now trying to start her own “fix it” company. Each week Sylvia and her three friends from China, Vietnam and Haiti all meet at the Grand Cafe to share the struggles and challenges that they face as they try and start up their own micro finance enterprises in the US.

That’s the storyline behind The Grand Cafe an innovative telenovela that will empower low income immigrant women with the training and basic English skills they need to launch their own small enterprises.

Telenovela’s are hugely popular melodramatic television serials originating from Latin America. Based on this format, The Grand Cafe will follow the lives and hearts of four ordinary women while teaching English and basic business skills to immigrant and refugee women flexibly and from the convenience of their own homes.

While the stories on The Grand Cafe belong to working women, the educational content in the Grand Cafe is based on C.E.O. (Creating Economic Opportunity) Women’s highly successful 16 week training program that helps immigrant women develop entrepreneurial skills while they learn English. Each 28 minute episode of The Grand Cafe will teach English, build basic business skills including marketing, legal issues, negotiation skills, finance, public speaking and networking.

Farhana Huq, Founder, C.E.O. Women, said, “The goal is to make the program much more interesting and accessible. The novellas will go straight to DVD first and be distributed to women so they can start the program in the comfort of their homes while accessing teacher resources.”

Unlike other training DVD’s, The Grand Cafe will appeal to women that might otherwise feel intimidated or reluctant to engage in a training program. It will also reach those women who are not able to make it to the classroom because of travel, time or competing work or family commitments -the telenova comes to them. The video episodes are available through a combination of DVD’s, broadcast, and online distribution and includes a companion work book for independent study. With The Grand Cafe, C.E.O. Women hopes to expand the number of women that they are able to reach. Since the DVD can easily be shared, the Grand Cafe lends itself to viral marketing. May Oliveros graduated from the program last year and successfully opened her own beauty salon where she often plays the Grand Cafe on the salon television to inspire her clients.

A Multiplier Effect...

Since 2000, C.E.O. Women has been providing immigrant and refugee women with the tools to achieve economic empowerment, C.E.O. Women’s clients are all women. 94% of them earn low to moderate incomes, (according to HUD and HHS guidelines), 25% percent are single heads of households and 100% of the clients are immigrants or refugees from countries all over the world.[1]

In 2008 alone, C.E.O. Women served over 400 women in the San Francisco Bay area through orientations, training, workshops and consulting services.

With The Grand Cafe, C.E.O. Women hopes to expand the number of women that they reach to well over 1000 in 2009 and duplicate the impressive results achieved with their program so far. For instance, on average, graduates of the 16 week C.E.O. Women program increased their household income by $28,000 while 87% of participants improved their reading and writing in English. Successful program graduates tend to start small independent businesses such as restaurants, catering services, massage therapy services and online retail ventures. One recent graduate adds, “C.E.O Women gave me the confidence and the skills I need to run a successful business and I am proud of what I have accomplished. If you have a dream, CEO Women will help you develop your skills and get you where you need to be to each your goal.”,C.E.O. Women Graduate, Janet Orok, Owner, Lady J Catering

A Preview The Grand Cafe...

Sylvia may be putting in long hours to start her fix it business, but it is not all work at The Grand Cafe. The cafe is operated by a good looking and eligible bachelor, Antonio. One day when Antonio’s espresso machine breaks down, Sylvia is on hand to repair it. Removing the pin from her hair she uses it to fix the machine on the spot – and as her long dark hair tumbles down past her shoulders, her eyes meet Antonio’s and he is soon smitten by the normally shy Sylvia....

For related library resources on this Good Idea, see sidebar at right.

(Statistics are based on C.E.O. Women's 2007 Annual Outcomes Survey).

“School For Mama and Me!”

By kturner
February 10, 2009

Education Inclusion

Six year old Amar and his family recently moved to Frankfurt from Turkey. Amar will be starting school next month and is looking forward to meeting his new friends, teachers and learning German. But Amar won’t be the only one in the family attending the local elementary school next week, "Mom and I are going to school together and we’ll be in the same class" he enthuses. As part of the Mama Lernt Deutsch –Papa auch ("Mama learns German – even Papa") program, his mother, Fatima will be joining him. Not only will Fatima be learning useful language skills to help her adjust to her new life, she will also be taking a big step towards helping Amar succeed academically both in the coming year and in the years ahead.

A child’s academic success has been shown to be strongly influenced by the involvement and collaboration of the parents with the school. Often, parents that are new to a country or uncomfortable in the language are excluded from this participation and as a result, are unable to fully support their children’s education – despite the best of intentions.

To help ensure successful integration into the German school system and to encourage the involvement of new immigrant parents, the city of Frankfurt developed, “Mama learns German – even Papa” program. The program first began in 1997 as a pilot in a Frankfurt suburb with the involvement of eight elementary schools. There are currently about 100 courses in Frankfurt am Main as a result of cooperation between the Frankfurt Office of Multicultural Affairs and the city schools and nurseries.

Through the “Mama Learns German – even Papa” program, immigrant mothers (and fathers) of children in primary schools and kindergartens join their children in the classroom for two mornings a week. The mothers learn German along with their children and receive real insight into the lives that their children will be leading in their new country. The contents of the languages classes are very much focused on the practical – the everyday words and expressions that the mothers need to navigate their new life in Germany and to understand the activities of their children. It also forms the basis for a cooperative relationship between schools and parents. With lessons incorporated into the school day, parents are also relieved of the added burden of costly child care

Success: More than just language
The classroom provides a forum for the mothers to connect and discuss challenges, solutions and find support and friends in an environment that is free from judgment and prejudice.

"The classes taught me enough German so I can confidently find my way around town and in stores, but it also introduced me to other women who understood the challenges that my husband and I were facing with our relocation. After classes, we often sit and share our stories and find solutions together" adds Meera who has been attending the classes for the past year with Mira her five year old daughter.

All the schools that participated in the “Mama learns German – even Papa” program, found that their students had demonstrated a significant improvement in their language and vocabulary skills as a result of the increased use of German in their homes and with their mothers. Improved communication skills also enabled the children to participate more in school and on the playground – making both their education and social integration easier, more successful and more enjoyable.

A Travelling Idea
After the success of the “Mama learns German – even Papa” program, Frankfurt began looking to extend the program into secondary schools, as well as exploring variations on the program to increase its accessibility. The program has also been expanded nationally.

One variation that has been developed is based on an Israeli home visit language program called Hippy – “Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters”. This program provides language training for both preschoolers and parents in the family home - reducing the isolation some new immigrants experience and increasing the ability of parents with more than one child that requires supervision to participate. Mothers are visited once a week by a trainer who also speaks their native language (which helps to mediate cultural barriers) and plays games with them to reinforce vocabulary and local customs as well as to discuss parenting issues such as health and nutrition. The mothers then try to spend at least 15 minutes a day interacting with their children and the material.

Frankfurt has always boasted a highly international population. An estimated 38-40 % of its population is foreign born, collectively representing over 170 countries of origin. This means one in three residents having a non-German passport. Since 1973, when Frankfurt founded Germany’s first “language and training course for foreigners”, the city has focused on the goal of ensuring that immigrants have sufficient German skills to participate equally in civil and social life. Innovative programs such as “Mamas Learn German – even Papa” help ensure that this goal is achieved and promise a generation of children increased success for their academic future.