



Vital Conversations 2010 Listen – Learn – Talk – Connect

Held on: April 30th 2010

How can we work collectively to create a more welcoming Calgary for new Canadians?

ROUND ONE: CURRENT SITUATION....

1: What stories and experiences can you share that show how Calgary currently creates a welcoming environment for new Canadians?

- People in Calgary are generally very polite and help with directions, and are fairly patient even if you are still learning English. They also smile (more than Vancouver and Toronto), are peaceful, and say thank you a lot, which shows their appreciation and acknowledgement of others.
- Some neighbours were very welcoming, and gave away enough pots and pans to fill one person's kitchen, and offered ideas about how to find work.
- There are many community organizations that have banded together to make communities more welcoming. For example the Hindu Society of Calgary and the Nepalese Community Society agreed to start to work together on cultural events, while the Sunnyside/Hilhurst neighbourhoods collected items such as clothes, furniture, sports equipment and toys to give to newcomers.
- Stampede Breakfasts (a long standing Calgary tradition) being adopted and hosted by ethnocultural and immigrant communities on a grand scale, such as the Ismaili community hosting the 2nd largest breakfast in the city.
- Stampede organization adopted new strategies to have greater involvement of ethnocultural communities.
- Community-driven Municipal Immigration Policy
- Resources for Newcomers
 - Centre for Newcomers
 - YMCA Achievement program – YMAP – assisting with employment and helping students apply for scholarships
 - Settlement offices
 - Host program – matches new families with Canadian families to adjust to Calgary
 - Agencies that encourage stronger neighbourhood partnerships, such as The Calgary Foundation's Stepping Stones grants



- Ethnicity Catering
- Free English Education Classes
- Immigrants of Distinction Awards
- CBE and Calgary Catholic School
- Freedom of Speech
- Interpretation services at the airport
- Abundance of schools, workplaces, libraries, nonprofit organizations
- Teacher took care of new student who came to Canada without parents – helped with school, connecting with programs etc.
- Cultural events and parades
 - Globalfest
- Worldskills Competition
- City of Calgary's 211 and 311
- Networking Opportunities / Neighbourliness
 - Community support networks, immigrants helping each other
 - Welcome parties
 - Sense of being part of a world family
 - Neighbours helping each other move-in
 - Making connections and personal relationships with friendly, approachable Calgarians

2: What stories and experiences can you share that show some of the difficulties new Canadians face in getting settled in Calgary?

- Language barriers
 - Lack of interpretive services at the airport
- Accreditation
 - Professionals need to start from scratch
 - Process is too long
- Managing expectations
 - Difference between dreams and reality
 - Disillusioned dream
 - Difference between reality and myth
 - High expectations upon arrival
- Cultural Barriers
 - Sense of direction and time
 - Religious barriers – hard to date and make new friends
 - Different behaviours can be interpreted as negative (ie not making eye contact, shaking hands)
- Getting set up / The basics
 - Doctor, utility bills, transportation – everything is different, need explanations
 - Getting a job

- Transportation – how to use, transfer, hard to move between communities (only goes downtown)
- Dealing with change / adjusting
 - Finding the opportunity to expose yourself
 - Sense of loneliness, isolation
 - Letting go of old life
 - Lack of emotional support – low self-esteem, need encouragement
 - Families must live together to afford a place
- Students may need to stay in school longer (beyond 19), public money needed to support them
- Income support programs – not working well – without an advocate, newcomers have no voice or clear understanding
- Information for immigrants is inconsistent or incorrect
- Multiculturalism can be an issue if communities don't integrate
- Hearing through media that people of colour are “visible minorities”
- People of color are perceived as forever an immigrant, “When do I start calling myself a Canadian?”
- Accents are not readily accepted in Canada, and this is an issue. Do we really need to have “Accent Reduction” workshops?

One powerful Story:

One participant arrived 35 years ago with a BSc in nursing. Arriving pregnant and with only \$7 in her pocket, she was told by every employer, to which she applied, that she could not work without Canadian experience. She was even turned down by many of the survival jobs she applied for.

Finally, she found a cleaning job which she worked for 6 weeks. Despite working long, hard hours, and as thoroughly and quickly as she could, her supervisor informed her that she was not meeting her quotas and would be laid off. She was given no second chance.

Being the only income earner in the household, she could not face her husband to tell him she had lost her job. With no way to pay for rent and food, and to support her child, she became depressed and considered taking her own life.

Her life hit a low that winter. During a cold day in December she slipped on the ice while holding her baby, and they both hit the ground hard. While trying to catch her, her husband also slipped, and the family lay - mother, father and infant - on the frozen surface, legs outstretched, in agony and unable to move.

While things gradually did improve in the years following, that first experience of finding no help and so many doors closed in her face has left its scars more than 3 decades later.



ROUND TWO: POSSIBLE FUTURES....

3: What future possibilities for creating a more welcoming Calgary have the power to make a big difference? What are some of the most inspiring ideas?

- Increase sense of community
 - BBQ's
 - Neighbourhood parties
 - Networking
 - Combat isolation by reaching out to communities, creating a community, meeting neighbours at churches, community centres etc.
 - Promote more conversations among English speakers in all communities
 - Extend warmth to strangers
 - Help newcomers adapt by being a resource
- Education
 - Offer services to Calgarians to help them understand immigrant's contributions to Canada
 - Recommend that people take entry-level English before arriving
 - Entry into public school should be based on grade level, not age
 - More education for general public about immigrants and refugees
- Employment
 - Equal opportunities in the workplace
 - Career fairs, resume writing
 - Create more businesses that employ immigrants (such as Ethnicity Catering)
 - Learn from professional immigrants who are here and established
 - Easier entry into accreditation programs
 - Make international credentials recognition easier and more available
 - More work should be done around credentials and helping employers to recognize international work experience
 - There should be more preparation available to newcomers looking for work, such as cultural competency in the workplace, realistic expectations and qualifications, and listings of professions that are needed and the equivalent credentials for those professions
- Orientation upon arrival to show realities in Canada
 - Interpretation services at the airport
 - Create a 'one stop shop' at the airport to give information about what's available
 - More languages in airport – not just French and English

- Create a check list
- Improved health care
 - Interpretation services for doctor's appointments
- Family hosting programs / families adopting immigrant families to help set them up
- Increase awareness, promotion and accessibility of service providers and the City of Calgary
- Financial support for newcomers who want to upgrade their qualifications
- Male support groups for newcomers
- Communication and collaboration between immigrant serving agencies and government – let's talk together
- Adjust restrictions for low-income bus passes, allowing newcomers to get one within first year of moving to Calgary
- Media: more balanced and fair recording of life in Calgary (ie. news about NE is depicted unfairly)
 - Build good relationships with the media. When connections are made between media people and immigrant individuals or immigrant communities, media people are affected by this and it influences how they report about immigrants

ROUND THREE: PERSONAL ACTION....

4. What key things might you do to further support creating a more welcoming Calgary?

- Adopt a newcomer
- Be a resource
- Become a tutor
- Be an advocate
- Defend people
- Be open, kind, empathetic, talk to people
- Network
- Talk with your neighbours
- Be a 'busybody' – don't just keep to yourself
- Learn about new opportunities by asking questions
- Value diversity and encourage communication
- Knock on doors – open up to people, invite them in - share
- Reach out – share your story
- Instead of waiting for the government, try to help people find employment by sharing networks, exploring the skills they have, and connecting them to employment service agencies.
- Give information about settlement topics to newcomers, such as information about health topics, Social Insurance Number, driving, crossing the street, and many others.



- Form partnerships - as a result of this meeting, the Hindu Society of Calgary and the Nepalese Community Society agreed to start to work together on cultural events and supporting newcomers in both their communities.
- Report the offender to higher authorities - only 70% of social crimes are reported, cooperate with police
- Promote immigrant success stories to promote the perception.

Top ideas?

- City/Municipal programs could provide welcome orientation for new immigrants, to assist with getting SIN, Health Card, learning Canadian laws, tenancy laws, English resource classes
- Make a simulated immigrant experience for people to see what it's like to 'live' in a totally different community
- Have a folk festival that celebrates different cultures
- Provide counselors for women's issues and abuse in native languages
- Create an agency with a panel of lawyers and professional mentors to speed up accreditation process
- Place students by ability level, not age
- Break the borders between cultures
- Build trust and respect each other
- Promote social justice