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Welcoming and Inclusive Communities

Lakeland Inclusion Project Regional Workshop:
Full Report
September 24, 2013



BACKGROUND

The Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) initiative is a partnership between the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and the Alberta Human Rights Commission to create communities with positive reputations, where diversity adds to the social and economic vibrancy of the community and the quality of life enjoyed by all residents. The WIC initiative supports municipalities that have joined the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CMARD).

Through its work on WIC, the AUMA noted that municipalities are particularly challenged by issues related to immigration. As a result, the AUMA partnered with Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education to deliver the Come Together Alberta (CTA) initiative. The CTA initiative works under the umbrella of WIC with a specific focus on providing resources to support strategies for the attraction, retention and integration of newcomers.

Municipal governments function at the most practical level and are most involved in the lives of their residents. They are an ideal place to develop policies, programs and strategies and take meaningful action towards eliminating racism and discrimination.

Through its WIC and CTA initiatives, the AUMA has been working with a number of communities around the province to plan four regional workshops built on topics identified by host municipalities.

On September 24, 2013, AUMA partnered with the Lakeland Inclusion Project – a collaboration between Cold Lake and District FCSS, Bonnyville FCSS and Lac La Biche FCSS – to deliver the second of these free workshops entitled ***Richness and Diversity in Our Community*** in the City of Cold Lake. AUMA took part in the morning session of the Lakeland Inclusion Project’s regional conference and provided a keynote speaker. Participants discussed growing diversity and the promise of greater richness in the community, culture and prosperity. In addition, participants also worked on identifying barriers to the inclusion of newcomers and developing responses.

The workshop was well attended with 40 participants representing various community sectors (see the Evaluation section of this report for details).



OPENING REMARKS

Opening remarks were delivered by Mayor Craig Copeland. Mayor Copeland spoke to the growing diversity in the Lakeland region and Cold Lake in particular, citing the example of a local elementary school. The school currently has five different languages spoken by students and needs to consider how this will affect teachers and the way programs are taught.

The JV Driver Project – a company that provides industrial construction services to the Oil and Gas, Energy, Petrochemical, Forestry and Mining sectors – has brought 1,100 workers to the City of Cold Lake and surrounding area with 95% of these workers coming from outside Cold Lake. The oilfield has changed who is hired, with the majority being out-of-town workers from neighbouring provinces. The company also employs over 125 Americans, primarily iron workers from St. Louis. As a result of this large project, and because those employed by the company receive cost of living allowance in addition to regular salaries, the cost of living in Cold Lake as a whole has increased severely. This has led to residents constructing additional bedrooms to generate rental income. The city has been trying to incentivize developers to come into the community to build rental properties. Nothing has been developed in Cold Lake since 2008.

The project is expected to wrap up in November/December, 2014. Cold Lake could see a max exodus out of the city at this time.

UPDATES

The Lakeland Inclusion Project has been a year-long initiative that focuses on integration and the creation of culturally, socially and economically inclusive environments. The project consists of eight activities that were broken down and overseen by the regional coordinator.

The community of Bonnyville has revived its past WIC committee and added more members. It has identified expectations of the committee, upcoming activities to be involved in and discussed further expansion of the committee.

In June, 2013, the community held a Victim Services Community Awareness barbeque at the RCMP detachment in Bonnyville, which was attended by approximately 250 people. The WIC committee had a booth and was giving out handouts and information on what to do in Bonnyville, information on getting to know your neighbours through block parties, information on schools in Bonnyville and campgrounds, and received feedback and suggestions from the community on how they can better welcome newcomers. The committee took part in a similar event that same month to celebrate National Aboriginal Day.

On September 30, 2013, Ian Hill facilitated activities related to youth and the business sector. In the morning, Ian went to three high schools in Bonnyville with the goal of encouraging students to follow their dreams and discuss how the school can be more welcoming of new classmates. In the afternoon, Ian visited business and industry leaders to look at how businesses can help newcomers and how diverse stakeholder groups can align towards a common goal. Finally, in the evening Ian spoke to the community at large about commonality. Student Union presidents from local high schools were invited to attend this portion of the day as well.



The Town of Bonnyville has partnered with Alberta HUB, the Cold Lake Chamber of Commerce, L’association de tous les francophones de l’Alberta (L’ACFA), Community Futures and local schools.

Lac La Biche has created a “Welcome” binder. The binder is cost effective as it is easy to update with new information, but not very easy to distribute (many businesses do not want a stack of binders for distribution). As a result, the Town is planning on re-launching the “Welcome” package in the media; this time in the form of a pamphlet that is much more practical and easier to distribute.

The Town is hoping to partner with the Lac La Biche and District Chamber of Commerce and Community Futures on this project. They believe that the project would not only have more credibility by having the backing of the chamber, but that this would also encourage local businesses to get involved in distributing the “Welcome” package.

Newcomers to the Town have identified the need for more entertainment options in the community, as they are struggling to have a social life which makes it hard to meet new people.

Discrimination exists as an undercurrent in the community, but this could fester into something larger. To prevent this from happening, the community would like to host more race and culture workshops.

KEYNOTE

The keynote speaker was Din Ladak of Ladak Consulting, a firm that specializes in high quality training and development for the not-for-profit sector. Din also served as the Chief Executive Officer of Immigrant Services Calgary from 2008 to 2013.

Din defined diversity as creating the conditions for pluralism to flourish. Diversity is a state of mind whereas pluralism is a state of being. Pluralism spans multiple dimensions and represents equality of opportunity, appreciation of differences, openness to change and allows for the retention of cultural, linguistic and religious heritage. Mentorship programs thrive in such accepting environments.

Participants identified a number of barriers to diversity and strategies to overcome them:

Barrier	Strategy
One’s own attitudes and baggage.	Recognize the existence of one’s own attitudes and baggage and express a desire to want to change.
Learned behaviours and upbringing.	Education.
Fear (false evidence appearing real).	Provide support and an enabling climate. Face the issue and discuss openly.
Change (people tend to be scared of it).	Educate and build confidence about the positive attributes of change.

The phrase “Canadian work experience” has gained enormous popularity since 2003. Canadian work experience is the biggest barrier for immigrants trying to enter professions in their field of education. Employers portray it as a commodity that immigrants have to gain. In the absence of any reasonable justification, employers use Canadian work experience as a criterion for exclusion. This is a drag on Canada’s economy as it creates a smaller labour pool and diminishes Canada’s capacity for innovation.

Din pointed to a number of interesting statistics, including that 60% of Nobel Prize winners have an immigrant background and that it costs corporations \$170,000 per new hire to train and coach new staff. This includes advertising for the position, covering for the person who has left the position in question, productivity lost and the first six months of wages.

Work placement programs, which bring immigrants into direct contact with workplaces related to their professional qualifications, are the key mechanism for facilitating workforce integration. The exchange of services in employee mentorship programs for newcomers happens between mentor and mentee. Businesses have to know what the mentor has to gain from the mentee and vice versa.

The learning approach for employee mentorship programs includes the exchanging of services and expertise between employers and newcomers. Newcomer interns offer their expertise and services to an employer for 4 – 12 weeks and, in exchange, the employers offer Canadian work experience, work and career related mentorship, an opportunity to expand their professional networks and a professional reference to interns.

MAPLE 2.0 – Mentorship in Action is a national project that brings together employers with internationally educated professionals (IEPs) through internship placements to create employment opportunities for new immigrants, and help employers enhance their intercultural understanding. MAPLE 2.0 is currently offered in three cities: Ottawa, Vancouver and Calgary.

The project provides employers with access to a rich pool of highly talented and qualified professionals. Both mentors and mentees receive free cultural competency training and continued one-on-one cultural competency support throughout the duration of the partnership. The internship placements allow employers to see how the participants fit into their company and allow them to get to know potential future employees. In addition to gaining Canadian work experience, the partnerships provide mentees with an opportunity to expand the network of contacts in their professional fields and acquire Canadian references.

The MAPLE project has been highly successful. MAPLE Phase 1 placed 50 interns and partnered with 30 companies in two years. MAPLE 2.0 started in August, 2012. To date, they have a total of 22 internship placements with 12 different companies.

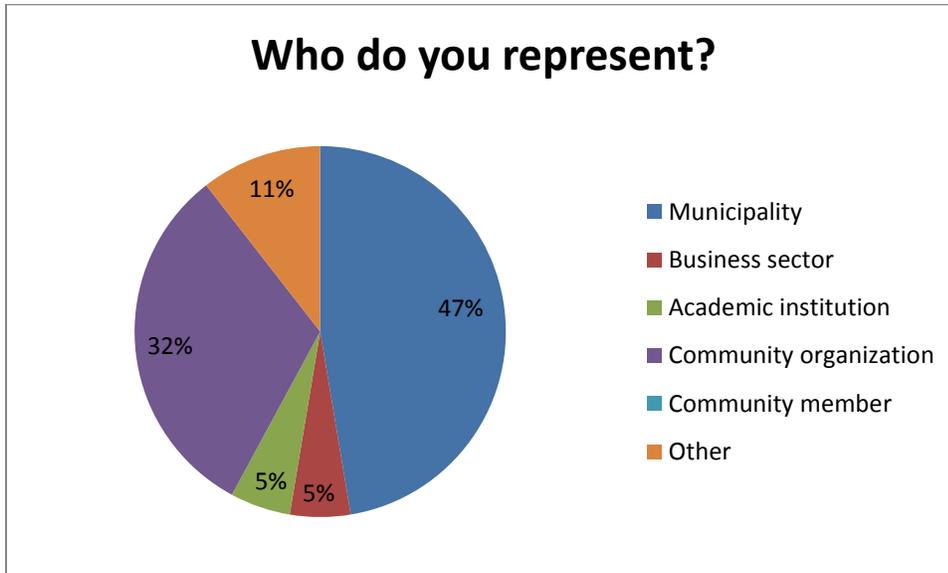
Funding for mentorship programs is available through Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) for pre-employment screening.

**NOTE: Remarks by presenters are their own personal thoughts and are not necessarily shared by the AUMA. The WIC team was not present for the afternoon session.*

EVALUATION

After the session, participants were asked to complete an evaluation survey to gather feedback and basic participant information. Out of 40 participants, 19 responded to the survey (response rate of 48%). The following summarizes the results of the survey.

Participants came from various sectors. The workshop had representation from 6 different municipalities.



What did you appreciate most about this session?



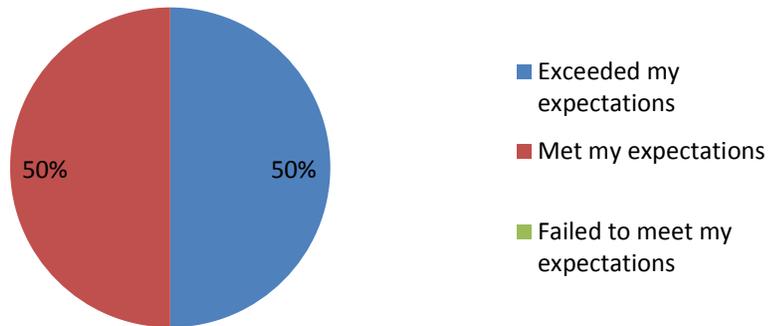
How will this session contribute to your own Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) and/or Come Together Alberta (CTA) work?



Any suggestions for how we could improve future sessions?

- Other speakers like Din.
- Move on promoting foreign people into community with the local population as a whole.
- No, I enjoyed this conference very much. Very engaging.
- Not really, this was good.
- Perhaps more involvement from actual newcomers.
- Have the members speak about ideas that could make their community more welcoming.

Overall, how well did this session meet your expectations?



Comments:

- Had hoped for more people.
- Keep up the good work.
- Good blend of activities.
- Good location, good food.
- Great guest speaker, motivational and dynamic.

Anything else you would like to share with us?

- Maybe information on some things on the communities that newcomers may not know about.
- Appreciated having the interactive session after lunch, made people stay in tune and connected.
- It was not boring.
- Keep up the good work.
- It was a very good day – nice to see the initiatives first hand.
- Book is cute, but I wonder how effective it will be.



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