

## Responses from Feb 16 2017 CPN Diversity Seminar #12 – Global Café Tables

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### Question #1

How can our community better welcome and integrate refugees and immigrants (newcomers) from Syria and other Middle Eastern cultures?

#### Responses:

- Demonstrate flexibility and resourcefulness in finding communication tools
- Be open-minded
- Listen
- Smile when greeting
- Make a sincere effort to learn about the diversity within Middle Eastern cultures
- Recognize skills and experience of newcomers
- Asset-based focus for integration
- Organizations must be willing to admit when they have 'got it wrong' or are heading in the wrong direction
- More honest about circumstances (e.g. Job market, competing with Canadians for jobs, minimum wage not doable in Victoria, one year or longer for newcomers to transition, burdensome transition process)
- Seek feedback from newcomers directly/ask newcomers directly what they need → **Times mentioned: 2**
- Provide first steps to employment
- Respect privacy/confidentiality of newcomers
- Do not stereotype → **Times mentioned: 2**
- Acknowledge individual responsibility to be welcoming, and seek to personally counter stereotypes
- Trauma Informed Training → **Times mentioned: 3**
- Transportation/bus passes/\$/driving lessons

- Banking assistance
- “First wave” of newcomers helping subsequent arrivals
- Awareness of the Canadian culture of ‘individuality’ versus ‘familial’ basis of newcomer cultures
- Use the Mosque as a resource for learning and understanding; for having events → **Times mentioned: 2**
- Open house events at Mosque with food and entertainment from Muslim countries → **Times mentioned: 2**
- Receive and share information about systems and services such as healthcare
- Education: pass on information about religious and cultural sensitivity
- Provide more comprehensive ESL tools
- Help/support the emotional transition (e.g. individual counseling) → **Times mentioned: 2**
- Find courage to ask questions in a respectful way to increase knowledge
- Develop a step-by-step process
- Develop a set of best practices for cultural inclusion in the workplace
- Have meetings in the park while children play; consider other public spaces and easy scheduling times
- Facebook or in-person groups to share information
- Financial and other kinds of sponsorship
- Promote activities that welcome newcomers (and learn how to do this)
- Give newcomers time to find their way and acclimatize – this requires support, flexibility, understanding, and patience  
→ **Times mentioned: 2**
- Recreational opportunities for *all* ages (adults carry many settlement burdens)
- Recreation and Community Centres should invite newcomers for informal social gatherings (e.g. tea) to connect people of various comfort levels, practice communication skills, share stories, etc.
- Break stereotypes through face-to-face information such as inviting panelists (such as the Imam) to speak (e.g. at James Bay New Horizons)
- Free/low admission/by donation programs (e.g. At Art Gallery, in the Masjid Al-Iman)
- Reduce feeling of fear among newcomers
- Hold mixers, workshops, and seminars such as this one for community members, organizations, and businesses to educate, foster an interest in the subject, build connections, and share information
- Have a library for newcomers (materials in Middle Eastern languages such as Arabic)
- Enhance communication channels
  - Share information and insights with other service providers
  - ICA and VIRCS to share information (e.g. about social and recreational programs and opportunities)

- Build communication bridges with the Ismaili faith community; Masjid Al-Iman Sunni community
- Reduce communication barriers by:
  - Offering ESL courses and other language supports, even past one year
  - Incorporating Middle Eastern languages in promotional, informative, and educational materials (e.g. documents, signs, website, brochures) → **Times mentioned: 4**
  - Use interpreters
- Offer courses in:
  - Canadian culture for newcomers
  - Middle Eastern cultures for Canadians

## Question #2

What does my organization need to know more about newcomers from Syria/Middle Eastern cultures in order to be able to better welcome them?

Responses:

- Dietary needs and preferences → **Times mentioned: 2**
- Religion
  - Practices
  - Secularism
  - Prayer rooms/Friday prayers
- Intimate connection for many newcomers between religion, culture, identity, and life
- Diversity within Middle Eastern cultures
- Similarities and differences between Middle Eastern cultures
- Cultural backgrounds and experiences
- Cultural nuances
- The importance of the Mosque as a resource for learning and understanding
- How to promote activities that welcome newcomers
- Gender roles (how to interact, etc.)
- Knowing skills/background of newcomers to match them to jobs and fast-track credential transference
- Difference between welcoming Middle Eastern versus other cultures...Is there a difference?
- How/when/where/why different organizations offer services, programs, and supports → **Times mentioned: 2**
- *All* factors in newcomer well-being, including housing, food, culture, education, health, and employment
- Speak with and get to know individuals to understand their own perspectives instead of using the charity lens → **Times mentioned: 2**
- Knowing what questions are appropriate to ask newcomers (e.g. How many kids do you have? Where do you work?)
- Information from other organizations about what has worked and what has not

### Question #3

a) What is one action my organization can take to better reach out to and engage with Middle Eastern newcomers?

Responses:

- Invite newcomers to study groups of the many educational institutions in Victoria
- Increasing outreach via Mosque at neutral/community locations
- “pop-up” happening with food and entertainment
- Tours and orientations (e.g. in stations, workplaces)
- Initiate or increase number of education sessions that reach newcomers of different age groups to build trust and increase knowledge (e.g. Police department)
- Bring everyone together to break bread
- Establish gender-specific groups or support groups
- Find courage to ask questions in a respectful way to increase knowledge
- Welcome celebration for immigrants and refugees
- Workshops (e.g. food, entrepreneur, business)
- Provide a safe space to meet
- Community dinners
- Use the Mosque as a resource for learning and understanding; for having events
- *Here! Magazine* would like more stories and is happy to promote events
- Promote and engage in existing events, such as:
  - Community dinners at Fairfield Gonzales Community Centre
  - International Women’s Day event (March 11 2017, 1:30-4pm, Cook Street Village Activity Centre)
  - Free tickets available (e.g. Belfry Theatre)
  - Art Gallery events
- Invite refugee speakers
- Community outreach
- Organize/promote/attend events involving food and social networking → **Times mentioned: 3**
- Effective communication within organizational staff regarding changes (e.g. religious, cultural)
- Develop a Diversity Committee
- Organize job fairs
- Trauma Informed Training

- Choose to learn and embrace religious practices
- One-on-one mentorship programs (to build relationships, knowledge, etc.)
- Reciprocating learning
- Do not be afraid to talk about these issues
- Strategic planning around short and long-term needs

**b) Who could our organization work with to better achieve this?**

Responses:

- Experts (e.g. ICA)
- VIRCS
- Here! Magazine
- Police
- Local cultural groups or immigrant societies
- Police Victim Services
- Interpreters
- Camosun College, University of Victoria
- Victoria Native Friendship Centre
- The Mosque
- Downtown Bus Association could partner with organizations like the Mosque and VanCity to promote outreach, etc.

**\*\*\*One group made the important comment that investing in these ideas benefits *both* newcomers and Canadians.**