

## **Help enlisted to fight discrimination**

By Susan Zielinski - Red Deer Advocate  
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Central Alberta Refugee Effort says there is a way local businesses can help fight discrimination.

A new program Safe Harbour: Respect for All encourages agencies and businesses to help employees or customers facing harassment by providing support like offering for them to sit down in a quiet place, have a glass of water, offer a list of local support services, or use the phone.

It could mean lending support to an immigrant who was called a terrorist in the street, a youth who was bullied at a nearby park, a gay or lesbian denied service, an aboriginal shopper ignored by sales staff, or someone in a wheelchair facing obstacles into a building.

Jan Underwood, CARE community educator, said it's like a Block Parent or Neighbourhood Watch program. Participating organizations will display a Safe Harbour decal in their window to let people know where they can go for help.

"I think it gives the message of inclusiveness both for customers coming into the company or the organization, and also for the employees working in that establishment," said Underwood at a Safe Harbour information session on Monday at Red Deer Public Library that attracted 15 representatives from local organizations.

Another session happens today from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at CARE. For information, call CARE at 403-346-8818.

The Safe Harbour program, developed five years ago in British Columbia to promote diversity, is now being introduced into Alberta through the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers.

Preparing employees to provide equitable treatment to customers and fellow employees is another part of the program.

Underwood said many organizations may think they are accessible and equitable, but thick accents or language problems aren't always addressed with patience and understanding.

"Sometimes we don't realize how simple (the solutions) are like slowing down, really listening, asking someone to repeat something, getting feedback from a person. If people just learn a few ideas about how to communicate with people of a different culture, it can help during an interaction."

For more information about the program, which is not connected to Central Alberta's Safe Harbour Society for Health and Housing, go to [www.safeharbour.ca](http://www.safeharbour.ca)