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(as of January 2014)

AMSSA is an association of Member Agencies providing immigrant settlement and multicultural services in communities throughout BC.

Our Vision
A just and equitable society in which everyone benefits from social and economic inclusion.

Our Mission
AMSSA facilitates collaborative leadership, knowledge exchange and stakeholder engagement to support member agencies that serve immigrants and build culturally inclusive communities.

Our Values
Inclusiveness • Integrity • Mutual Respect
Equity • Diversity • Collaboration

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Despite the fact that regular church attendance in Canada is declining, most people in Canada still identify themselves as Christian. However, immigration is steadily contributing to a diversification of religious faith. According to the last census, the Canadian population identified 102 different religious affiliations.

Canada’s increasing religious diversity means that more and more we are being exposed to people from different cultures and faiths. For that reason, this edition of Cultures West is devoted to perspectives, projects and partnerships that promote an understanding of the role of faith in our lives and in our communities.

The feature story showcases a storytelling project where Jews, Hindus and Muslims share stories of how they live their faith. You’ll be inspired by the personal reflections of three of the storytellers.

All across BC community groups and agencies are working alongside various levels of government to provide opportunities for bridging the faith divide. There’s Richmond’s Highway to Heaven, where leaders from more than 20 faith groups work together on issues of mutual interest. Read how Burnaby develops interfaith community projects to build understanding and respect between people of faith, and how an interfaith festival unites faith groups and youth in Prince George.

In Powell River an interfaith network invites neighbours to learn more about each other’s beliefs and traditions. And finally an innovative community project in Victoria breaks down barriers between the police and immigrant communities.

In another story we recognize that youth often struggle with identity and belonging. We highlight projects that support youth from different backgrounds in exploring their spiritual, religious and secular beliefs. And, with religious diversity increasing at the office, so do the pitfalls. We share some insights on creating a faith-friendly workplace.

Cultures West Magazine would not be complete without our regular departments. Give your mind a work out on religious diversity with the Mind Buster Quiz, and learn about the work that AMSSA agencies are doing on the front line in Member Achievements. Post Script is our final story which takes a second look at the previous Cultures West theme of Immigrant and Refugee Housing Challenges.

For many years AMSSA has produced and distributed a popular Multifaith Calendar. Now Cultures West is creating a bigger conversation on the topic of interfaith bridging. We hope that our stories inform as well as encourage an understanding of religious diversity that extends beyond our pages.

Jean McRae
President
Richmond’s Highway to Heaven

Balwant Sanghera

Richmond resident Balwant Sanghera is a strong advocate of multiculturalism and intercultural harmony. This retired School Psychologist and Community Activist was coordinator of RMCS’ Interfaith Bridging Project. He has been recognized with a number of honours including Queen’s Golden and Diamond Jubilee Medals and Order of British Columbia. Mr. Sanghera was voted as one of Top 25 Canadian Immigrants in 2010.

Canada is a blessed country. It is one of the best, if not the best, country in the world. At times, Canadians become overly critical about our own country. In this process we tend to focus more on the negatives rather than the positives this nation of 35 million people has to offer.

Certainly, like any other country in the world we do have problems too. There is always room for improvement especially when governments are concerned. However, in the overall scheme of things, Canada is far better than many other countries. We have a very high standard of living. Canadians are ahead of many other countries with respect to the environment and sustainability. Our landscape—lakes, rivers, mountains and lush green vegetation are the envy of many. Canada has an abundance of resources of every kind. It is a stable, democratic and relatively safe country. Our educational system, banking/financial industry and health care are second to none.

Canadians are very well respected worldwide for their caring attitude, gentle manners and humility. Our concept of multiculturalism is a great model for others to follow. More than 200 diverse communities representing every corner of the world call Canada their home. Despite their differing beliefs and traditions they live in peace and harmony. Take Richmond BC, for example. This Child of the Fraser is a great model of mutual respect and understanding. Its very own Highway to Heaven has become world famous. More than 20 places of worship representing a variety of faiths adorn No. 5 Road, which has become a major tourist attraction for young and old alike.

A few years ago, our Highway to Heaven made the short list of CBC’s Wonders of Canada. It has become one of the most visited places in Richmond. India Cultural Centre of Canada (Gurdwara Nanak Niwas) took the lead to bring representatives of these places of worship together. As a result of these...
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Hindu religion and its basic principles. As an added bonus, the group was treated to words of wisdom by Jai Bhagwan Sharma (Swami Chakradhariji) founder acharya, or religious instructor, of Vedic Cultural Centre. Similarly, visits to the Lingyen Mountain Temple, the Jewish Synagogue and Christian places of worship were equally educational and enlightening. Every place of worship was welcoming and accommodating. The managements of each went out of their way to make the visits informative and pleasant. In addition to learning about a variety of major religions of the world, the participants in this project widened their horizons. They gained more awareness and appreciation not only about these faiths but also many other things. The visit to the Lingyen Mountain Temple is an example.

After listening to an impressive talk about Buddhism, the participants were welcomed to the Dining Hall for lunch. Before serving lunch, the organizers stressed that everyone in the Dining Hall is expected to be quiet at all times. If they needed something they should signal the volunteers who would assist them. Before lunch ended, the volunteers asked each of their guests to rinse the bowls and drink. At the same time they emphasized that Buddhists value food so much that they don't want even one morsel of food to go to waste. This was quite an eye opener and an excellent lesson for the guests. This is just one of the many instances that greatly impacted the participants.

Initiatives like these go a long way in removing the artificial barriers and in bringing people closer together. They show us that despite our individual differences and beliefs we can respect and appreciate each other. This is what makes Canada such a beautiful, inclusive and welcoming place to live in.
1. According to one Canadian census, how many different religious affiliations did Canadians identify?
   a. 20
   b. 85
   c. 102
   d. 136

2. In Canada, efforts at interfaith dialogue first emerged after which event?
   a. The Holocaust
   b. The end of Aboriginal residential schools
   c. Genocide in Rwanda
   d. Ethnic cleansing in Serbia
   e. 9/11

3. Which of the following are not attributes of a faith–friendly workplace?
   a. Acknowledges the role of faith in employees’ lives.
   b. Seeks to follow all relevant laws related to this subject.
   c. Proactively welcomes and perceives business benefit in appropriate manifestations of faith at work.
   d. Views their faith tenets as central to their business model and purpose.
   e. Seeks to be respectful and welcoming of all faiths traditions.

4. The separation of Church and State in Canada means that federal, provincial and municipal governments cannot support or fund religious activities.
   a. True
   b. False

5. Which of the following is not one of the top five faith groups in BC?
   a. Catholic Christianity
   b. Protestant Christianity
   c. Sikhism
   d. Islam
   e. Buddhism

6. Some of the official holidays and celebrations in BC are based on religious observances.
   a. True
   b. False

7. What percentage of British Columbians do not belong to any religion or faith?
   a. 15%
   b. 25%
   c. 35%
   d. 45%

8. Which Canadian document guarantees that Canadian citizens can have freedom of thought, belief, conscience and religion?
   a. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
   b. The Constitution Act
   c. The Charter of Religious Freedom

See page 22 for answers
Building
the bridge,
strengthening
the bridge,
crossing
the bridge

Jan Taylor

Burnaby is one of Canada’s most
richly diverse cities. With over
50% of residents born outside
of Canada, Burnaby’s strong
multicultural character is on display
everywhere. Through public services,
community agencies, businesses, and the
arts, Burnaby welcomes and celebrates
people from around the world. This
diversity is also evident in Burnaby’s faith
communities with followers of all major
faiths making their home and worshiping
in this community.

With a mandate “to empower people
working in immigrant and refugee services
to share resources, identify service gaps,
and more fully support new immigrants
and refugees,” the Burnaby Intercultural
Planning Table (BIPT) has undertaken
a series of interfaith projects. The goal of
the Burnaby Interfaith Projects is to build
understanding and respect between people
of faith and to work towards a cohesive
society where all faiths are respected and
diversity is valued and celebrated.

The first project — Building Inter-
Faith Bridges — examined the role that
faith plays in the lives of immigrants and
refugees. It also looked at whether they had
experienced any discrimination because of
their faith. The survey results were released
at a community forum where participants
were invited to suggest next steps for
interfaith engagement in Burnaby.

Input from that forum was used to
develop a second project — Strengthening
Inter-Faith Bridges. In this project, four
community dialogues and a forum created
opportunities for people of different faiths
to meet, learn about each other, and
overcome negative stereotypes based on
false perceptions.

Jan Taylor co-ordinates the
Burnaby Inter-Faith Project
on behalf of the Burnaby
Intercultural Planning Table.

As one participant described it, the
forums and dialogues allowed them to
“work towards mutual understanding as
a fundamental issue for the twenty-first
century. While we celebrate the unique
characteristics of different people and
cultures, we have to create solidarity on
the level of our common humanity. The
participants were keen to learn about each
others’ faith and practices; it created a
place for people to dialogue, to be curious
and to develop this sense of our common
humanity.”

Inspired by these projects, the projects’
community advisory group (12 members
from Burnaby’s faith communities,
public and community service agencies,
and advocacy organizations) decided to
continue interfaith action in Burnaby. Their
activities included a tour of faith centres
and outreach to the broader community
through participation at community events.
The third BIPT interfaith project focuses
on these activities, along with developing a
strategic interfaith action plan and related
communication materials.

We are beginning to cross the
bridge built through the hard work and
momentum of the earlier projects. Our
goal now is to establish a network for
ongoing interfaith work in Burnaby that
will help to make Burnaby one of the most
welcoming and inclusive communities in
the country. As we move forward a vibrant,
cohesive core group of community activists
is leading the way.

Between 2010 and 2013, BIPT has spon-
sored three highly successful interfaith projects.
These projects, funded by EmbraceBC, have
been a catalyst for the recent growth and
development of an interfaith network in
Burnaby. For more information about the
Burnaby Inter-Faith Projects, please visit
www.bipt.ca or contact jantaylor@shaw.ca
Powell River is all about diversity! The interfaith network is connecting with the broad community in new and exciting ways. As the Coordinator of the Interfaith Project, I find that creating something tangible with the community allows for opportunities to explore our diversity and celebrate our differences, and our likenesses.

In 2012, together with the interfaith network, I organized the first-ever Interfaith Fair: Believe It or Not . . . . The day-long event brought together 24 faith and spiritual groups that are part of the community’s fabric including Christianity, Judaism, Wiccan beliefs, Taoism, local First Nation spirituality, and Atheism. More than 500 community members participated in learning about their neighbours’ beliefs and traditions.

As part of the fair, the network designed and created an interfaith quilt with symbols of each faith and philosophy.

In 2013, the interfaith network was asked to participate in Mapping the Heart of Powell River, a community mapping project. What could an “interfaith community map” look like and how could it represent diverse perspectives? A “places and spaces” map was ruled out because in a small town, many groups don’t have a meeting place such as a church but meet wherever they can, often in someone’s home.

Recognizing that the quilt created for the fair did not allow for expression from each of the belief groups, an interfaith phrase map was created. Every group in the network provided a phrase to represent the essence of their beliefs. Phrases were matched to the quilt square that each group had personally created, connecting the symbol to the faith or philosophy.

Alfred Muma, artist and member of the interfaith network, volunteered to design the map. The first attempt to create an image that represented all groups was not considered to be inclusive, as the word “God” was in a central position, and this conflicted with belief systems that are not God-related.

Alfred designed a second map, the Believe It or Not . . . . map: symbols and phrases for each contributing faith/belief are connected within the whole. The sun is the focal point with each phrase radiating from the centre. The perspective is that although each phrase is specific to one belief, diversity creates the whole.

The Interfaith projects are under the umbrella of the Powell River Employment Program (PREP) Society. Using a community development approach, PREP has served the community since 1984. Powell River Diversity Initiative (PRDI) was formed in 2005 under PREP and has initiated outreach projects that celebrate diversity, inclusion and respect for all, and have the common goal of building and maintaining a vibrant, healthy community where all feel accepted and have opportunities to contribute to the community’s well-being.

Interfaith work continues in Powell River: watch for an interfaith flash mob at the local mall, and a faith crawl open to the community.

Interfaith projects have received funding from the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia through EmbraceBC.

Evangeline MacDonald is the Coordinator of interfaith projects at Powell River Diversity Initiative (PRDI).
The Interfaith Bridging Project at Prince George’s Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society started in September 2012 as part of a year-long provincially funded project aimed at creating understanding between faith groups. Early successes included the Project Launching Event and the Women Only Discussion Café.

When I joined the project in June 2013 it was a challenge to ensure that the Interfaith Festival was also going to be successful since it would be taking place in six months. There were high expectations because relationships were already established between the interfaith committee and faith groups. I thought that I could best contribute by reaching out to ethno-cultural communities, particularly my own religious women’s group.

The Interfaith Festival was a free event, where representatives from a variety of religions including Bahá’í, Christian, Hindu, Māori, Muslim and Sikh made short presentations on the tenets of their beliefs. The feedback that we gathered through an evaluation café and at the end of the event was very positive.

The existing relationships and partnerships between different faith and ethnic groups helped to make the festival the most successful event under the Interfaith Bridging Project. There are many reasons why the Interfaith Festival was so successful:

• We advertised the event through different media sources and so it attracted a lot of media attention. We also put up posters in public places such as swimming pools, the public library, and downtown areas.

• Our executive director and coordinator visited religious centres to invite different faith groups. The coordinator personally invited elected officials and dignitaries early in the process.

• The interfaith team wanted more families to participate so we were strategic and invited youth coordinators
to collaborate with us. The youth hosted a workshop for younger kids at the same time and at the same place but in a different room. This attracted a large number of families because it was so convenient.

• We saw the participants asking lots of questions after the presentations. Our team strongly believes that the event was a great opportunity to create understanding and awareness in a friendly environment.

• After the event was over, some of the participants emailed the coordinator to find out how to get in touch with members of other faith groups. They were contacting each other so that they could have their own events together. We see this as another sign of better relationships.

The Interfaith Festival was so successful:

• Collaboration with the UNBC Chaplaincy is another reason for this project’s success. UNBC is a great source for attracting and involving youth from different faiths and ethnic groups.

• Families were drawn by the idea of having refreshments together as a family. This allowed them to meet many different participants.

• As a result of the previous Interfaith Project a large number of youth participated in the meetings which helped us to plan new youth activities.

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Riffat Shahnawaz is a Program Facilitator at IMSS Prince George and organized the Interfaith Festival which took place in October 2013.
Breaking barriers between the police and the immigrant community

Lina de Guevara

In 1976, I arrived in Victoria BC as an immigrant from Chile. Since then, I have been learning about the complexities of cultural understanding. As an Applied Theatre practitioner, I have dedicated most of my professional work to opening avenues of communication between different groups and cultures.

There have been great advances in regards to the positive integration of immigrants from diverse backgrounds into Canadian society. Their participation in all aspects of their new society has improved substantially, and examples of blatant discrimination are less frequent. But there are still many opportunities for misunderstandings, prejudice, suspicion, resentment, and other negative feelings arising from ignorance about other customs, faiths and cultures. Achieving intercultural understanding is a complex task, and I believe it will be an ongoing process for a long time. In doing research for the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) project called Police and the Immigrant Community, we encountered instances where the lack of awareness still exists and makes relationships difficult and tense.

Police and immigrants usually meet in moments of crisis, and it's important for law enforcement officers in a position of power to be sensitive to certain cultural aspects and religious practices. For example, in many faiths, religious structures are woven into daily life. There are specific requirements regarding prayer rituals: location, timing, a need for purification before prayer, strict dietary restrictions, etc. People often organize their days around their faiths. If these requirements are ignored, situations might be aggravated.

In many cultures, rites of passage are considered very important and are strongly tied to their faith. Birth, coming of age, marriage, death—all the significant moments in a persons’ life are occasions for religious celebration that may seem strange and might not be respected or even considered offensive. For instance, in some cultures, bodies are prepared for burial in ways that are completely different from the ones used here, and might be considered peculiar, cause confusion or even be mistaken as criminal tampering. Being informed in depth about faith and cultural practices, and accommodating them, would go a long way towards softening confrontations and bringing about peaceful resolutions to conflicts.

Sensitivity is also needed when dealing with traditional family structures. Members of immigrant families are sometimes protected, disciplined, addressed, and encouraged in ways that may be different from what's traditional in Canada.

It's important for the Canadian police to be aware of the extent to which many immigrants fear them, because they come from countries with repressive regimes where the police have been known to torture and murder. I came to Canada from Chile at the time when we had a severely repressive military government, and when I encountered a policeman here, my fear was intense. No matter that my mind told me “it is different here,” my reaction was visceral: all I wanted was to get away from the uniform in front of me. The extent of the damage caused by life in an oppressive country shouldn't be underestimated. Careful acknowledgement of the facts is needed, and thoughtful strategies should be devised to cope with this reality. There are also countries where it is normal to bribe policemen. This can lead to awkwardness and huge misunderstandings. However, these experiences should not be generalized as they do not happen in all countries where immigrants come from, and care should be taken not to prejudice.

In the recent Police and Immigrant Community project with partners ICA and the Saanich Police, we heard real stories from immigrants and police involving many of these issues. As we worked with the stories through transformational theatre techniques, we saw the power of communication and awareness to create understanding. Throughout the project with the police, we found enormous goodwill, openness, and talent on their part. I'm certain that much progress can be made.

The situation improves further when immigrants themselves take an active role in creating an atmosphere of positive understanding. When we come to live in this country it's wise for us to learn about Canada and the existing traditions, customs, and history of the country. We have to learn about Canadian laws, laws that protect us all. It's also important to pay attention to this country’s prevalent standards and values. For example, corporal punishment of children, although acceptable in some cultures, is not accepted here and is illegal. Therefore it can have serious consequences for the family.

It is necessary for all cultures that live together in Canada to examine their own traditional background and consider which practices they want to keep, and which should be left behind because they do not conform to the customs and laws of the new society. Some are practices that are not life affirming in our home countries, and in many cases were so oppressive that they made us abandon the homeland in the first place. One of our deeper challenges is to find out how to open ourselves to the new culture without losing our own—what to retain and what to reject from the rich cultural baggage we bring with us.
INTERLACED:
Living Our Faith Through Stories
was a truly collaborative community project.
And it worked! This is something that is never
certain when taking on an 18 month community
project with several partners who have never
worked together in an artistic capacity.

The objective of the project was to bring
together participants from the Hindu,
Muslim and Jewish faith groups to learn
and develop skills in the art of storytelling,
promote understanding and build relationships
across faith groups, share stories in a public
performance, and create a book of faith stories.

Paulina Grainger is the Arts & Outreach Coordinator at Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria.

Photos by Ilya Stavitsky
The project got off the ground in September 2012, and over the next 10 months the three faith communities shared personal stories that answered the question “How do you live your faith?” We wanted to explore how religion impacted their daily and community life. We were well aware that religious discourse of any kind can be divisive, so to avoid politicizing the process in any manner, it was important that the stories were personal ones. To make sure that everyone felt comfortable and safe, we held the first three workshops—Everybody is a Storyteller, The Art of Storytelling and Gathering the Stories—in each community separately. Then each community was invited to attend the same workshops in their own place of worship. It was only after these were completed (nine in total) that each faith group, in turn, hosted a Sharing Our Stories workshop to which the other two groups were invited and all their stories were shared.

The workshops took place under the experienced guidance of storytelling facilitators Lina de Guevara (Theatre Practitioner and Artistic Director) and Jennifer Ferris (Storyteller and President of Storytellers of Canada-Conteurs du Canada). Community stories were drawn from a variety of themes. Among them were birth, death, migration, work, marriage, children, sacred objects, repair of the world, belonging, fate, personal and community identity, kindness, courage, hospitality and the stories of our names.

We heard well over 100 stories that inspired and entertained us. The faith groups chose ten of them to represent their faith communities and after several rehearsals and personal coaching sessions, the stories were interlaced into a 90 minute storytelling performance that was staged at the Belfry Theatre in the summer of 2013. It turned out to be a warm interfaith community event with food, stories and music that delighted many.

Another eight stories were selected and published in a book of faith stories and in the coming year we hope to record more of them and make them available online and on radio.

I think I can say, on behalf of the creative team, that this turned out to be a wonderful experience. It was gratifying to watch community members, who in the beginning were hesitant to speak before a crowd, quickly grow in confidence and skill as storytellers and performers. Participants learned about each other’s faiths, made new friendships across cultures and religions, and together they were able to create and share what their faith means to them and how it manifests itself in their lives and community. As Lina de Guevara, the storytelling facilitator, aptly put it:

“We feel enormously rewarded by being allowed to share a glimpse of these religious communities of whom we knew little or nothing about. Any preconceptions we might have had were disproved, and our spirits opened to other understandings of the universe. Its complexity and beauty was once more revealed, thanks to the generosity of these three communities who shared their beliefs openly and trustingly, and thanks to the wonderful instrument of storytelling, which allows expression to all human beings.”

INTERLACED was funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia through EmbraceBC. Partners on the project were the Kolot Mayim Reform Synagogue, the Ismaili Jamatkhana of Victoria and the Victoria Hindu Temple in Saanich.

“What an evening it was – an enchanting journey through our past, through our fate, through many cultures and traditions and through melodious music!!”

“Thank you for an amazingly moving performance!”

“This was an accessible joyful event that fully engaged the audience and built respect and connection across the group.”

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Interviews with storytellers who share how their faith influences their life

For Ali Hemani, the INTERLACED storytelling project was an amazing concept that allowed young and old participants alike to share their faith stories in a wonderful way. “It was a treasure trove of cultural heritage and stories that take you to that time and place.”

The youngest of five children, Ali was born in Uganda and came to Canada at the age of eight. He and his family are Ismaili Muslims, who follow what he describes as “a more esoteric view of Islam and not just a literal interpretation of the Holy Quran.” Ismaili Muslims believe fundamentally that each person should pursue an inner search and so Ali incorporates the tradition of meditation and consecration in his daily life. Also central to the Ismaili faith is coming together as a community at the local Jamatkhana, their prayer space. Ali recalls that some 40 years ago, the Ismaili community in Victoria consisted of four families. Everyone worked, there were conflicting schedules and no community space to meet. So, instead of meeting on traditional Friday evening they met on Sundays at each other’s homes. Even today the Hemani family continues to accommodate a hectic Canadian lifestyle with competing activities. While they do make time for daily prayers at home, they typically attend Jamatkhana only two or three times a week.

Another adaptation for the family – their teenage son attends a Catholic school. With all the labeling and stereotyping about Muslims and potential peer pressure, the experience generates a fair deal of questions and consequently family conversations around their faith. Ultimately Ali and his wife’s goal is to make their son identified with being Muslim. And Ali encourages those of other faiths to “take the time to learn a bit more about your culture and faith. Be informed and be proud of it and share it.”

“I didn’t know people in the Muslim community, or people in the Hindu community and it’s been a pleasure getting to know them,” says Shirley Langer regarding her participation in INTERLACED. “It was wonderful and what a great opportunity under these particular circumstances to meet these people.”

Shirley’s parents were European Jews who moved to Canada, settling in Ontario where Shirley was born. While growing up she chose not to identify closely with the traditional observances of Judaism, but has always considered herself a Jewish person. “I’m what would be called a humanist Jew or a cultural Jew,” she explains. That means that she doesn’t keep a kosher home, or observe the High Holy Days or observe the Sabbath. It also means that Shirley operates with a philosophy. “Faith is not a major part of my life. What is major to me is how I practice my humanity, my evangelism, my attempting to leave the word a better place. That is the broad philosophy that is meaningful to me.”

It’s a philosophy based on eliminating differences and emphasizing commonalities, while accepting origins, races, colour and all the things that make us identify as people. It also forms the guiding principles with which Shirley and her husband raised their four children, all of whom are now adults and non-practicing Jews.

And while Shirley avoids religious exchanges that proselytize she will defend her Jewish heritage. “You don’t have to be religious to try and influence people and enlighten people. I would never shun that responsibility or pretend that anti-Semitic remarks are OK or don’t affect me just because I’m not an observant Jew.”

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Karima Ramji enjoyed the experience of working with people from other faiths on the unique storytelling project. She reveals “What it did for me was it gelled the notion of one humanity; that, at the end of the day, we really are one humanity.”

As an Ismaili Muslim woman, her beliefs work well with the pluralistic nature of our country where diversity is encouraged, respected and accepted. “That’s what I love about Canada,” Karima says. “You can practice your faith and not be marginalized because of it.”

Education is one of Islam’s core values; the purpose of education is not merely to serve oneself or one’s family; it’s to serve community, country and beyond. Born in Uganda, Karima grew up in a small village in Kenya and came to Canada after high school to complete her education. Back home there were strong community connections and the sense that a community that prays together stays together. That tradition has continued for the Ramji household as they are active in community service and volunteerism. Karima and her husband have served as community leaders over the years and therefore her two children grew up as “communal babies” where going to Jamatkhana (prayer house) was an integral part of their routine. And while the children still understand why community worship is important, today the family has to make more of an effort to ensure that other activities don’t creep into prayer time.

Karima tries to be an ambassador of her faith and strongly believes in the power of leading by example and engaging in dialogue about her faith. “Faith is a central part of my life, and I wouldn’t have it any other way!”

Editor’s note: We did attempt to speak with someone from the Hindu community, but unfortunately experienced scheduling conflicts.

Holy Qur’an-e Shariff (Surah 4, Ayat 1):

O mankind!
Be careful of your duty to your Lord
Who created you from a single soul
and from it created its mate
and from them twain hath spread abroad
a multitude of men and women
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PeaceBuilders uses the principles of co-operation, respect, fairness, inclusion, respect for diversity, responsibility and acceptance. The train-the-trainer model helps adults become aware and responsive role-models who will support children to contribute to creating a just and equitable society. The toolkit uses fun experiential learning activities to strengthen cultural competencies and conflict engagement skills. PeaceBuilders promotes successful, competent, and engaged individuals within multicultural communities in British Columbia and throughout Canada.

Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS)
The Multicultural Speaker Series

Stereotypes, racist comments and negative headlines in media about various ethnicities and countries can result in immigrants being viewed through a single lens. The Multicultural Speaker Series was a partnership between Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society and the City of Nanaimo, aimed at widening the lens through which we view other countries and immigrants in Nanaimo, many of whom are our neighbours.

Open to the public, this free speaker series took place over four Wednesday nights in October. Each attracted close to 100 guests who listened to a pair of guest speakers from different parts of the world as they shared personal information and experiences about their home lives, cultures and countries of origin. The paired speakers were from Canada (Aboriginal) and Egypt, China and Somalia, Ethiopia and Columbia, Iraq and Israel. It was an inspiring opportunity for the speakers to compare their lifestyles and cultural norms. What was most interesting was not their differences, but some of the striking similarities.

In our follow-up survey, 85% of respondents indicated that after attending the event, they intended to become more involved in efforts to address discrimination and racism.
As British Columbia becomes more diverse, the demand for continually evolving models of inclusivity also rises. Multicultural services ultimately strive for communities that are totally inclusive and mutually supportive of everyone. We do this by facilitating inter-cultural learning and community building. Abbotsford Community Services (ACS), in partnership with a local interfaith committee called Bridges of Faith, decided to develop fresh models of inclusivity for 2014 to engage isolated groups. Despite Abbotsford’s status as the third most diverse city in Canada and as the “buckle of the Bible Belt” in the Fraser Valley, its many faith communities are quite isolated from each other. So, Bridges of Faith celebrated World Interfaith Harmony Week in Abbotsford by coordinating three tours of places of worship, a unique dialogue event, and two more social events.

Bridges of Faith found that visiting each other’s places of worship offered community members the opportunity to learn about different groups in an environment where the hosts felt safe and comfortable to share. Between 25 and 55 participants visited each place of worship: a large Mennonite Brethren church (Northview), a Sikh Temple (Khalsa Diwan), and a First Nations longhouse (Sto:lo).

Another unique model of inclusivity was tried at the Abbotsford 2014 Interfaith Dialogue. After hearing keynote speaker Walter Paetkau and panelists speak on the topics of gender and interfaith differences, the 125 participants were asked to choose their own topics for small group discussions, and then to sign up for the topics of their choice. Since those who signed up for the same topic had similar interests and ideas, people of very diverse backgrounds realized that they had things in common with the others at their table.
Religious diversity is the top unresolved issues for multiculturalism in Canada according to a 2010 study commissioned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. To address this issue, the Inspirit Foundation was founded in 2012, with a focus on supporting young people of different spiritual, religious and secular backgrounds in building a more inclusive and pluralist Canada.

The foundation fulfills this mission through its Pluralism Grants' two streams - National Impact and Community Impact. The National Impact program supports initiatives such as media projects, cross-cultural dialogues, research, and publications. Recent projects under this granting stream include Divine Interventions and the Be the Change Dialogue.

Divine Interventions feature more than 30 screenings and discussions of provocative and powerful documentaries that explore the intersection between spirituality and social justice. These events took place across Canada thanks to a partnership with Cinema Politica and the Documentary Organization of Canada (DOC). Inspirit also collaborated with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) and a group of young leaders from British Columbia to host the Be the Change Dialogue, a cross-cultural panel on the intergenerational impacts of human rights abuses such as the residential schools. The dialogue took place in Vancouver during the TRC's British Columbia National Event in September 2013. Thousands of young people participated in the dialogue, which was viewed online by people in more than 60 countries.

Inspirits other granting stream, the Community Impact program, is a pilot program that supports projects that bring together young adults of different backgrounds and beliefs to work toward a common goal at the community level. Since the pilot was launched in 2012, 30 organizations nationwide have been awarded a total of $500,000 in grants. These grants are for projects where thousands of young people in urban and rural communities learn about diversity of beliefs and engage with difference through arts and media initiatives. They mobilize action on shared causes such as water conservation, poverty reduction, social justice, and relationship building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

These grants are for projects where thousands of young people in urban and rural communities learn about diversity of beliefs and engage with difference through arts and media initiatives.
British Columbia youth team up for pluralism

Currently, young people in British Columbia are teaming up to embrace difference and to effect positive change to their communities through five projects supported by Inspirit’s Community Impact program. The local organizations leading these projects are Abbotsford Community Services, Fraser Basin Council Society, Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, Powell River Diversity Initiative Society, and Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara Association. Here is a snapshot of those projects.

**Project Connection - Abbotsford Community Services, Abbotsford**
Young people learn about each other's faith backgrounds and co-create events to raise awareness of and celebrate the plurality of beliefs in the community. *Project partners:* Bahá’ís of Abbotsford; Abbotsford Atheist, Skeptic, and Humanist group; The Reach Gallery Museum.

**Diversity Project - Fraser Basin Council Society, Williams Lake**
Working with five rural communities, young people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds engage in dialogues to share experiences, learn from one another and develop leadership skills. *Project partners:* BC Rural Network; Columbia Basin Trust; Williams Lake Indian Band.

**Change Makers - Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, Vancouver**
Young leaders from the Metro Vancouver area participate in a nine-month program combining leadership training, personal and professional development, and a joint social action project. *Project partners:* The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs Pacific Region (CIJA-PR); Reconciliation Canada; South Arm United Church.

**Dream Catcher - Powell River Diversity Initiative Society, Powell River**
This summer more than 50 youth from British Columbia will take part in a residential camp that will include team-building activities, dialogues and a workshop led by First Nations communities on the theme of spirituality. *Project partners:* The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award British Columbia & Yukon; Coast Mountain Academy; Leadership Ecology Adventure Program (LEAP); School District No. 47.

**Through Our Eyes: Changing the Canadian Lens - Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara Association, Lower Mainland**
Young adults from different backgrounds and beliefs learn about the legacy of aboriginal residential schools, receive training on facilitating cross-cultural dialogues, and collaborate to create videos about reconciliation. *Project partners:* World Sikh Organization; Reconciliation Canada; BC Muslim Association; Cross Roads United Church; Church of Scientology of Vancouver; BC Humanist Association; Canadian Unitarian Council.

How to apply for grants
This spring, Inspirit will accept applications for the third cycle of the Community Impact program. Grants of up to $25,000 will be available to registered charitable organizations and First Nations bands across Canada. More information on the application process and deadline is available at www.inspiritfoundation.org.

Sharing lessons learned
Inspirit’s work in fostering pluralism among young people is in its early stages. By collaborating with grantees, the foundation plans to share early insights from its pilot Community Impact program in spring 2014. You can get program updates by signing up to the foundation mailing list at www.inspiritfoundation.org or via Twitter @InspirFdn and Facebook.com/InspirFdn.
I would like to begin by thanking our hosts at AMSSA, as well as the representatives of the Coast Salish peoples, who spoke just a moment ago. I am particularly grateful to the representatives of our First Nations. I want to address and thank them directly. Not only did you welcome us to your unceded traditional territory, but you also provided us with insights about a few important aspects of your cultural traditions that relate directly to the theme of today’s symposium.

I mention this, because it seems to me that too often at public gatherings, when First Nations representatives are invited to open formal proceedings, our First Nations hosts are acknowledged respectfully and then sent off with our thanks, while “the rest of us” get on with the serious business of the conference, workshop, or ceremonies. I believe if our public events are important enough to begin an acknowledgment of the fact that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of a particular First Nation, then in addition to the important and appropriate rituals of welcome by First Nations representatives, we ought to be able to say that the event itself – not only formally, but the content as well, from the conceptual stage to its implementation – is the product of diverse collaboration, which in this case includes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. In other words, “we” needs to include all of us. As a result of AMSSA’s genuine commitment to inclusion in designing the Inclusion Café program, our deliberations today will proceed not only after a formal acknowledgement of diversity; they will be informed by the observations shared by our Coast Salish hosts regarding the subject at hand.

This inclusion exemplifies a critical issue that I believe is insufficiently addressed in many discussions of inclusion, multiculturalism, interculturalism, and the like. I believe that we need to move well beyond merely accommodating diversity in the workplace, school, or community, and that we need to speak about both accommodating and engaging diversity. Genuinely engaging diversity is not easy, but the benefits of doing so effectively are tremendous in terms of innovation, productivity, motivation, well-being, equity, compassion, and other metrics by which we might hope to characterize our workplaces. And I am convinced that if we can engage diversity more effectively, accommodating diversity will become easier.

It is important to acknowledge that diversity is more complicated than it might seem. Diversity within a culture or community is as important as diversity between cultures and communities. Likewise, it is important to recognize that people are not confined to a single community or culture. To varying

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**Dr. Robert Daum** is Founding Director of Iona Pacific Inter-religious Centre on the UBC Campus, as well as Advisor to the Vice-President Students Office at UBC. This article was adapted from his keynote address at AMSSA’s Inclusion Café on Interfaith Inclusion held at the Vancouver Public Library on February 27, 2014.
degrees, all of us inhabit multiple cultures and diverse kinds of cultures. I said “diverse kinds of cultures” rather than merely “diverse cultures,” because I think that it is important to broaden our notion of what we mean by cultures and what we mean by differences. It also is important that we not arbitrarily assign a hierarchy of values to differences among people in the workplace. That means, all differences matter, whether they are associated with religions, cultures, physical abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and so on. Otherwise, we might find ourselves distracted by conflicts over the legitimacy or relative importance of differences between our employees and colleagues. And differences that might seem unimportant or less important to one manager or one employee might be terribly important to another employee. If differences can be reasonably accommodated, then they should be.

In other words, I might consider physical ability to be a difference, but someone else might consider physical ability or disability to be a difference shared by people whose differences constitute a culture or a subculture. Having once been the only apparent hearing person in a theatre otherwise packed with deaf movie-goers who were engaged in vibrant conversation that I could not follow, I was reminded of the elasticity of the category of culture. One person might consider a certain kind of head-covering as a cultural difference, and someone else might consider it as a religious difference. If my workplace is prepared to accommodate religious, but not cultural differences, these distinctions matter. Usually, the differences between these different aspects of our identities are small enough that we can reconcile them, in the same way that we learn to balance who we are at work and who we are at home. Sometimes, reconciling these differences in the workplace is challenging, especially when they mean different things to different people, like head-coverings that might straddle a range of categories: cultural, religious, social, and so on. Accommodating differences in the workplace should entail a combination of clear policies consistent with the law and clearly articulated principles, which are developed and reviewed by the broadest mix of members of the workplace community. These principles should include accessibility, equity, and the like. Cases would be examined in the context of these policies and principles, so that the workplace culture can evolve creatively and fairly in accommodating changing understandings of diversity.

Opening up the range of what we mean by culture and what we mean by diversity will enable us to expand the breadth and the depth of what we mean by inclusion. But doing so will also enable us to engage the hidden human value in the richness of our diversity. Engaging diversity both within and between cultures and communities is not only the polite thing to do. I believe that engaging our differences enables us to discover what we share in common, and that it helps us to discover together what we could not have learned on our own. This requires that we go beyond mere tolerance and acceptance of differences. We don’t have to agree on everything to be able to live together, although we do need to share some basic values as citizens. And we certainly don’t have to agree on everything to be able to learn together. To the contrary: there is great value in learning together with people who see the world or a particular subject very differently, so long as we can do so in a way that enables us genuinely to learn from and with each other. The author Scott Page, in his landmark book The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies (Princeton, 2007), cites a great deal of research that demonstrates that there is a very important and positive relationship between diversity and innovation. This research identifies the value added by engaging effectively diverse individuals and groups in organizations, companies, schools, and communities. This is value added of all kinds: human well-being, innovative ideas, improved productivity and profitability, wider social benefits of various kinds. The research shows that leveraging diversity is not only good for the “bottom line” of an enterprise (whether not for profit or for profit), but that it is also good for the creative output of a group and for the “social” bottom line.

Finally, I believe that we need to move beyond merely celebrating our differences through multiculturalism while underestimating the complexity of engendering social integration without erasing differences. And while it is vital that we learn to communicate and understand each other better across cultures, all aspects of our diversity intersect not in self-contained cultures that need to relate to each other, but rather in our bodies. That means, diversity in the workplace and school should be evaluated in terms of how it is experienced at the individual level and at the collective level. Diversity affects the bodies of individual persons within the organization, and it has an impact on the collective levels of teams, units, departments, or enterprises. I believe that we ought to work toward engaging differences, leveraging differences, mobilizing our differences as catalysts for innovation and for social wellbeing. For this, we need to aspire to become transcultural citizens.
ANSWERS

1. According to one Canadian census, how many different religious affiliations did Canadians identify?
   c. 102

2. In Canada, efforts at interfaith dialogue first emerged after which event?
   a. The Holocaust

3. Which of the following are not attributes of a faith–friendly workplace?
   d. Views their faith tenets as central to their business model and purpose.

4. The separation of Church and State in Canada means that federal, provincial and municipal governments cannot support or fund religious activities.
   b. False

5. Which of the following is not one of the top five faith groups in BC?
   d. Islam

6. Some of the official holidays and celebrations in BC are based on religious observances.
   a. True

7. What percentage of British Columbians do not belong to any religion or faith?
   c. 35%

8. Which Canadian document guarantees that Canadian citizens can have freedom of thought, belief, conscience and religion?
   b. The Constitution Act
Summary
The scarcity of research on the housing experiences of immigrants and minorities in the outer suburbs prevents a full understanding of (a) why certain immigrant groups are more successful than others in locating appropriate housing in a suitable or comfortable neighbourhood, and (b) the factors that facilitate or prevent this phenomenon in the outer suburbs of our metropolitan areas. This paper addresses this gap by evaluating the housing experiences and coping strategies of new immigrants in the outer suburbs of Vancouver (Richmond and Surrey).

Importance
While immigrants continue to arrive in Canada’s traditional metropolitan gateway areas, recent data from the Canadian Census has sparked significant interest in immigrant dispersal to new destinations outside major urban centres, especially the suburbs. Rapid population growth and concentration of immigrants and minorities in the suburbs has led to an increasing demand for affordable rental housing.

Research Findings
The evidence indicates that this new group of immigrants faces numerous difficulties (e.g. high rents, overcrowding, poor quality housing) in the rental housing market. Most immigrants were spending more than 50% of their monthly household income on housing, putting them at risk of homelessness. The study’s findings suggest that the housing crisis affecting Surrey and Richmond – a limited supply of affordable rental housing and high living costs for many new immigrants – make these two cities a unique and challenging region of Vancouver in which to settle.

Implications
This exploratory study points out the need for more comparative studies on the housing experiences and coping strategies of recent immigrants in the suburbs of major Canadian cities. Funding from all levels of government (federal, provincial, and local) to stimulate the creation of both for-profit and non-profit housing is urgently needed. The shortage of appropriate housing services and programs is also a major gap in the settlement services in the region.

You can read the full report under Resources on the AMSSA website at www.amssa.org (in the AMSSA Research Database)
PROVINCIAL
BC Human Rights Coalition (BCHRC)
BC Teachers Federation – Social Justice Program (BCTF - SJP)
Canadian Cancer Society
Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) - BC Division
ELSA Net
Legal Services Society of BC (LSS)
SCOUTS Canada
Social Planning & Research Council of BC (SPARC)
Society for Intercultural Education, Training & Research (SIETAR BC)
Tenant’s Resource & Advisory Council (TRAC)
The Association of BC Teachers of English as an Additional Language (BC TEAL)
The People’s Law School: Public Legal Education Society
Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre

NORTH
Fort St. John Literacy Society
Immigrant & Multicultural Services Society (IMSS)
Multicultural Heritage Society of Prince George
North Coast Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society (NCIMSS)
Skeena Diversity Society
Terrace & District Multicultural Association (TDMA)

VANCOUVER ISLAND
Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS)
Communica: Dialogue and Resolution Services Society
Community Adult Learning and Literacy Society (CALLS)
Cowichan Intercultural Society (CIS)
Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA)
Literacy Central Vancouver Island
Multicultural & Immigrant Services Association of North Vancouver Island (MISA)
Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS)

FRASER VALLEY
Abbotsford Community Services (ACS)
Chilliwack Community Services (CCS)
DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society (DCRS)
Langley Community Services Society (LCSS)
Mission Community Services Society (MCSS)
Options Community Services Society
Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society (PICS)
Umoja Operation
Compassion Society

INTERIOR
Kamloops Immigrant Society (KIS)
Kamloops Multicultural Society
Kelowna Community Resources Society (KCRS)
Nelson Community Services Centre (NCSC)
Shuswap Settlement Services Society
South Okanagan Immigrant and Community Services (SOICS)
Vernon & District Immigrant Services Society (VDISS)

LOWER MAINLAND
Association of Neighbourhood Houses British Columbia (ANHBC)
Burnaby Family Life Institute
CHIMHO Crisis Services
Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH)
Family Education and Support Centre
Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV)

FAMILY SERVICES OF THE NORTH SHORE
Family Services of the North Shore (FSNS)

IMMIGRANT SERVICES SOCIETY OF BC (ISSofBC)

INLAND REFUGEE SOCIETY OF BC (IRS)

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE AGENCY (JFSA)

KIWASSA NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES ASSOCIATION

LITTLE MOUNTAIN NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE SOCIETY (LMNHS)

MULTILINGUAL ORIENTATION SERVICE ASSOCIATION FOR IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES (MOSAIC)

MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE (MPNH)

MULTICULTURAL HELPING HOUSE SOCIETY (MHHS)

MULTIFAITH ACTION SOCIETY (MAS)

NORTH SHORE MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY (NSMS)

PACIFIC COMMUNITY RESOURCES SOCIETY (PCRS)

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SETTLEMENT ORIENTATION SERVICES (SOS)

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S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

SUPPORTING WOMEN’S ALTERNATIVE NETWORK (SWAN)

VANCOUVER & LOWER MAINLAND MULTICULTURAL FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES (VLMFSS)

VANCOUVER ASSOCIATION FOR SURVIVORS OF TORTURE (VAST)

VANCOUVER MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY (VMS)

WESTCOAST FAMILY CENTRES SOCIETY (WFC)

YMCA OF GREATER VANCOUR BE

YWCA METRO VANCOUR BE

MEMBERS
January 2014