Case Study 2 - Summer Daycamp for Syrian Refugee Children

What impressed me the most about the Summer Daycamp, was how a whole community came together and solved a problem of such complexity through collaboration and creative solutions. This is clearly a community that values its cultural diversity, as indicated by the number of volunteers involved in the event. Through this event, I believe that the Intercultural Society's objectives have definitely been met. Two of them in particular have made me think of what we can do more to address these issues in a LINC context; these objectives are, "to promote cultural awareness and appreciation" and "to facilitate public awareness and education of common issues across cultures". When the LINC program is delivered by an organization that doesn't provide any other settlement related services however, this can be a real challenge and creative solutions have to be found.

In our organization, for example, we often use guest speakers and field trips activities as opportunities to bring cultural awareness to the community. Our resource teachers organize these events after initial consultation with the instructors. Some examples would be, the annual Move for Health Day that we host in collaboration with Burnaby Parks and Recreation, the annual Neighbourhood Clean up in which we help the Community School in our area run the event, Saturday Biking Classes, and, recently, a Summer Gardening Club.

We have also developed a partnership with the BCIT Nursing Program; nursing students come and deliver Health education to our students, and these events benefit both organizations; quite often, the presentations turn into real social events during which nursing students and LINC students exchange personal stories and cultural information. This can also be an opportunity to collect information about community needs assessment that the nursing students can take back to the institution and share. In each case, a lot of language learning takes place, but not only; as I have already mentioned, cultural learning takes place on both sides, and this contributes to the development of cultural sensitivity.

As far as language is concerned, pre, during and post activities with clear language learning outcomes are prepared by instructors, and they are CLB aligned. Some are
actually PBLA (Portfolio-Based Language Assessment) skill-building and using activities or even assessments, which fulfills our LINC instruction requirements. Students can also be asked to reflect on their experience in a way that raises their awareness of the value of these events and also enhances their cultural learning. The events are promoted through our school and Twitter accounts, and, this way, we reach a larger audience. It’s also a chance to highlight our students’ community engagement and build positive self-image, which is essential to personal quality of life. We also use Twitter to inform our students about recreation resources and services, especially since lack of information is reportedly one of the barriers to recreation and physical activity.

Reflecting back on the Summer Daycamp for Syrian Refugees, I see another huge accomplishment: the social networking that took place, in part because of the volunteers involved. Developing social networks is essential for breaking isolation, fostering feelings of inclusion and creating a sense of belonging. This is especially important in the case of newcomer populations facing multiple challenges. These social networks continue to benefit everybody involved, long after the event takes place. Having such a large number of volunteers take part in the event can only increase the chances of promoting cultural awareness in the community, as they will share what they have learned with people in their own networks. This has inspired me to consider ways in which we could have more volunteers in our LINC classes. Some avenues to explore would be collaborations with post secondary institutions and volunteer organizations in the area. (For example, they could help run some of our events, which would create opportunities for interaction; OR we could have a "cultural exchange" session, where volunteers teach LINC students something about Canadian culture in exchange for information about other cultures)

Hopefully, the Summer Daycamp will inspire others to find innovative ways to support newcomers’ integration, which is largely dependent on creating an environment of mutual respect and willingness to learn from and understand each other.

_Augusta Avram - LINC Instructor_