

HALIFAX/DARTMOUTH, NOVA SCOTIA

"So this is a place by the people, for the people."

Participant, Dartmouth Family Centre, Halifax/Dartmouth

Nova Scotia's population is decreasing due in part to low birth rates, low immigration and high levels of emigration to the western provinces. The provincial government recently developed a strategy to attract and retain immigrants. Nova Scotia immigrants come from countries around the globe including China, Jordan, Syria, Colombia, Mexico and Saudi Arabia. Community-based organizations have noted that the top three languages spoken by immigrants in the communities of Halifax and Dartmouth are Arabic, Spanish and Mandarin followed by Russian, Urdu, Japanese, Punjabi, Hindi, Didinga and Igbo. Under the *Welcome Here* project, the **Dartmouth Family Centre**¹ and **Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association**² developed a partnership to reach and serve newcomers in their communities by conducting focus groups, offering parenting and cooking workshops, translating program materials and hosting a community celebration.

Activities

The project team:

- gathered statistics about newcomer families
- conducted two focus groups with newcomers
- visited a settlement agency
- attended a tea hosted by the Muslim Families Association
- conducted a one-day training for family resource centre staff to help raise awareness of issues immigrants face
- hosted a Ramadan celebration for Muslim and non-Muslim community members
- held a parenting workshop series called *Parenting Across Cultures*
- translated forms, brochures and signs into Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin. Some documentation was also translated into French and Mi'kmaq
- bought books, dictionaries and materials in various languages
- held language workshops
- partnered with an ESL school in the community
- hosted the first of monthly gatherings for parents (this was the idea of parents who participated in workshop series)
- held two cooking workshops on Mexican and Syrian foods that allowed participants to share their food and culture

Project Results

- More newcomer families accessed the centre and participated in programs
- Children became at ease in the family resource centre and felt comfortable playing independently of their parents
- Canadian-born and newcomer children developed friendships
- Canadian-born and newcomer parents came together to learn about culture and parenting around the world (Parenting Across Cultures monthly workshop)
- Participants challenged stereotypes and became more confident about asking questions
- Newcomer participants felt that they belonged at the family resource centre
- Newcomers offered their time and skills to the family resource centre
- Participant initiatives were accepted and valued by staff
- Staff felt more confident interacting with and relating to newcomers
- Staff became more aware of newcomer needs and considered those experiences in their programming discussions
- Staff became more conscious of own cultural biases, identities and attitudes towards others
- Diversity and inclusion received more recognition and attention in program planning
- Staff increased their awareness of partner services
- Staff were proud of their progress towards inclusiveness

Successes & Challenges

Successes

- The collaborations among community partners were positive
- The project team built their understanding of organizational roles and their partners' work in supporting newcomer integration
- The project teams developed respect for their different types of expertise
- The project helped newcomers to build a network of support and to reduce their isolation (i.e. they met new people and found resources in the community)
- The project team and program participants gained an appreciation of the importance of celebrating diversity

Challenges

- The project team found that getting to know people and building trust (within the team and with participants) is a process and takes time
- The funds to support translation and interpretation will be fully spent when the project ends. Community partners are looking for new funds that the whole project team can use

Longer-term impacts

- A new program has been created to facilitate cultural understanding
- The project team expects new participants and ideas to come from the program
- The collaborations between the project team members will continue. This includes outreach to various newcomer communities and work with other community-based organizations

¹ Dartmouth Family Centre - www.dartmouthfamilycentre.com

² Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA) - www.misa.ns.ca