

FEATURE STORY:



Diversity in Leadership, Saskatoon Open Door Society

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The Diversity in Leadership Program is an umbrella program for Leadership and Community Engagement (LACE) and Community Leadership Training (CLT). Our primary participants are newcomer immigrants who have lived in Saskatoon for under three years. As the program is now being conducted online, we are reaching out to newcomers in other parts of the province as well. The program benefits not only the participants but the communities in which they live, work and make their contributions.

CLT consists of eight monthly training sessions organized by our Community Connections team. Topics vary from session to session, all touching on aspects of community leadership. While providing participants with networking opportunities, these programs explore the dynamics of organizing social events, coordinating recruitment and meetings for cultural associations, organizing local community associations, membership of boards or committees, and even running for positions. Participants also learn how to become more engaged in community activities and how to advocate for the immigrant community.

LACE was initially a monthly session but has since evolved into a weekly class held on Zoom, owing to COVID-19 restrictions. Some participants were not initially conversant with Zoom but they have all become proficient over time, and this has been another success of the program. LACE offers newcomer immigrants and refugees the required training, tools and skill sets to become leaders or actively engage in community affairs. LACE offers an in-depth look at various aspects of leadership and provides hands-on exercises and assignments to further enhance the skills taught by facilitators. Participants may be unsure of the local cultural protocols or which avenues are open to them. LACE provides them with practical skills for a Saskatchewan context, so that they can navigate cultural protocols and norms.

Of the first 14 LACE participants, two are now sitting on the boards of settlement agencies in Saskatoon. The Multicultural Leadership Council, which was formed by LACE alumni, is actively involved with three departments of the City of Saskatoon for diverse representation in decision-making related to the City's sustainability projects. The outcome has been both inspiring and a testament to the strength of our newcomers' desire to impact the community in a positive way.

LACE and CLT both position participants to take up leadership roles in the community. Through these programs, participants stay active, engaged and connected. As participants build on the leadership skills and competencies they have brought with them from their past experiences and countries, they come to value these skills more highly, for both themselves and the community.

In conclusion, both programs promote diversity while seeking to increase the participation of newcomers in leadership roles in the community. As more newcomers call Saskatoon and Saskatchewan home, this is indeed a step toward building more inclusive communities.

