

Award winning Diversity Call Centre to expand

The success of the Diversity Call Centre in meeting the needs of immigrants in the Calgary and Area region has brought the project widespread recognition and will see the centre expand.

Earlier this year, the partners in this groundbreaking project won a Pulse of Social Work Award in the Interdisciplinary Group category and last fall the centre was profiled in an article in the respected publication Child Welfare, Journal of the Child Welfare League of America.

An estimated 200,000 immigrants of various cultures and ethnic backgrounds now call the Calgary region home with about 10,000 newcomers arriving each year. Many of these newcomers lack natural supports such as extended family and friends at the same time as they struggle with cultural, language and economic challenges in a strange city and country.

In 2001, Calgary and Area Child and Family Services Authority joined with several immigrant-serving and child-serving agencies to develop guidelines and protocols to direct staff working with diverse cultures. The Diversity Call Centre was one of the first outcomes from this partnership. The goal is that by addressing cross-cultural issues to provide services and supports early on it may prevent the need for more intrusive intervention later.

The Diversity Call Centre, located at Calgary Catholic Immigration Society and staffed by one person funded by the CFSA, provides CFSA staff with a telephone contact for timely information about an immigrant or refugee family. The centre serves three primary functions:

- Allows caseworkers to speak directly with staff from immigrant-serving agencies who have had previous contact with the families;
- Provides general cultural information such as differences in child rearing practice; and
- Helps workers make culturally-appropriate referrals to other community services.

The immigrant-serving agencies provide cultural expertise, consultation and information on such things as housing, legal assistance, settlement issues and support groups for newcomers.

Researchers at the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work evaluated the centre and found that no other child welfare agency had initiated a similar project. The researchers concluded that it is a unique project "that may stand alone in the area of liaison between child welfare and immigrant serving agencies as a strategy to provide child welfare workers with relevant information with which to make more informed decisions in child welfare investigations and referrals for services to enhance family functioning."

In addition to the Call Centre, the partnership has also resulted in more cultural competency training of staff from the CFSA, immigrant-serving agencies and child serving organizations. The CFSA provides funding for services to the immigrant population including early childhood development programming, in-home support to families as well as interpretive services.

"Through better understanding of the needs and issues facing families from diverse cultures and improved communication between the CFSA and immigrant serving agencies we are all better able to serve the children, youth and families in our community," says Bev Fournier, Executive Manager.

Diversity Call Centre Partners

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