



COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING SOUTH ASIANS (CASSA)

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WALK THE TALK

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE & WELCOMING COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2008

Greetings from Executive Director

I am pleased to introduce to you the Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI) at CASSA, a project for immigrants to voice and address their concerns around inclusion, access and equity within their municipalities. CASSA is a social justice umbrella organization working with Ontario's diverse South Asian Communities.

CASSA's Mission:

- To facilitate the economic, social, political and cultural empowerment of South Asians by serving as a resource for information, research, mobilization, coordination and leadership on social justice issues affecting our communities.
- To create social change by building alliances and working collaboratively with those who share a vision of empowering all communities to participate in defining Canada's future.

CASSA's Vision:

We envision and strive for a Canada free of all forms of discrimination in which all communities are free from marginalization and are fully empowered to participate in defining Canada's political, economic, social and cultural future.

In 2008, CASSA is celebrating its 20th year anniversary in promoting social justice. We have relaunched our website to enhance our communication with you. I welcome you to visit us online at www.cassa.on.ca.

Thank you for your ongoing support as a partner, member, and as an engaged participant in the work CASSA does to address systemic and community-wide issues.

Sincerely,

Neethan Shan
Executive Director

The Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI) by Lele Truong, Project Coordinator

WCI is a new project at CASSA funded by the Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism Program for 3 years. This concept of this project has been developed based on PROMPT's (Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades) research paper titled "*Smart Settlement: Current Dispersion Policies and a community engagement model for Sustainable Immigrant Settlement in Ontario's Smaller Communities.*" PROMPT was a project of CASSA. The basic premise of this research paper is that "immigrants should be considered partners in sustainable settlement and community building."

Key sustainable immigrant settlement building blocks

1) Leadership Capital - the presence of local champions to promote recruitment or attraction and ensure - through coordinated efforts of governing institutions - the effective inclusion and integration of immigrants into community-building efforts.

2) Social Capital - the mobilizing of community networks, public and private, to connect newcomers and enable sharing and fusing of divergent knowledge and skills assets.

3) Human Capital - the support of local educational and training institutions to enhance the community stock of human capital through proactive accreditation and complementary training to immigrants, where needed.

In recognition of the challenges and initiatives on effective immigrant settlement and integration, CASSA has undertaken the role as a catalyst for systemic change in integration. The notion of a creating a welcoming community is to engage visible minorities as partners in the community-building process.

Main objectives of WCI:

- To engage immigrants and municipalities as partners in building more inclusive and welcoming communities.
- To develop sustainable strategies that would facilitate the economic and social integration of newcomers.

Ultimately, it is the goal of this project to assist visible minority communities overcoming barriers to equitable access in public institutions.

Meeting with community leaders and settlement stakeholders

CASSA has been proactively meeting with community stakeholders and will continue to engage different stakeholders in various communities across Ontario. In the last quarter, CASSA conducted 30 meetings including teleconference calls with community leaders, advocates, City Council, immigrant settlement agencies, networks and coalitions to introduce the WCI project, learn about each community, get connected to other community members, and promote the community roundtable meetings.

Community Roundtable Meetings

The purpose of the Community Roundtable Meeting is to engage various community stakeholders on a dialogue around immigrant integration and civic engagement. Some of the thought provoking questions include:

- What are the needs of access, equity and inclusion in your community?
- What are the challenges facing immigrants in the context of integration and civic participation?
- How do municipalities and public institutions respond to the growing presence of racially diverse communities?

From March to June 2008, CASSA has conducted a community roundtable meeting at the Town of Markham, City of Vaughan and Brampton. These meetings were well attended with representation from the municipality, City Council, settlement services, school board trustees, community members and ethno-cultural groups.

Selected priorities to move forward

At the initial community meetings we have identified the following priorities related to access, equity and inclusion.

- Access to public space & information
- Access to meaningful employment
- Capacity building
- Civic engagement
- Fuller access to language based programs & services
- Human diversity in the school curriculum
- Meaningful volunteer opportunities
- Poverty reduction
- Immigrant youth engagement (leadership development & initiatives)

CASSA is the process of conducting roundtable meetings with individual residents on the issues of access, equity and inclusion in their communities.

Research on Issues affecting Internationally-trained Tradespeople

CASSA is seeking a consultant to develop and implement a research strategy on skilled trades in Ontario with the focus on employment and training areas for internationally-trained tradespeople.

Research objectives:

- To identify the barriers in employment and training within Ontario's trades sector.
- To reduce the institutional barriers facing international tradespeople.

The long-term objective of this research study on skilled trades is to examine ways to ensure that a community has the capacity to build an inclusive workforce and society. The application deadline is July 3, 2008. Please visit our website for the Request for Proposal.

Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, Bill 124

The Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, known as Bill 124 became law in March 2007. The Act aimed at ensuring Ontario regulators to provide a fair, transparent and timely registration process to internationally trained professionals in 35 professions.

In April 2008, CASSA was invited to attend a progress update meeting on Bill 124 with the Fairness Commissioner, Dr. Jean Augustine. The Office of Fairness Commissioner (www.fairnesscommissioner.ca) is in the process of publishing its first annual report and results on the registration practices of Ontario's 35 regulated professions. We look forward to receiving and reviewing the study results.

Upcoming meetings and conference

Vaughan Post Community Meeting Discussion. July 7, 2008 6:00-8:00 pm

Vaughan Welcome Centre Immigrant Services, 9100 Jane Street, Units 56-67 (at Rutherford, beside Vaughan Mills Mall)

Markham Post Community Meeting

July 9, 2008, 6:00-8:00 pm

Milliken Mills Library, Meeting Room
7600 Kennedy Rd., Unit 1, Markham, ON

Brampton Post Community Meeting

July 17, 2008, 6:00-8:00 pm

The Brampton Civic Centre, 150 Central Park Drive, Brampton. Lower Level - Library meeting room

If you are interested in attending the meeting, you must RSVP to Lele Truong (lele@cassa.on.ca).

Fall 2008 Conference: Creating an Inclusive and Welcoming Community

CASSA is hosting a conference on community engagement initiative to:

- Raise awareness of the needs for inclusion, equity and access in GTA's visible minority communities.
- Provide an opportunity for participants from the Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI) to share their experiences and learnings in building inclusive communities.
- Disseminate the project outcomes and progress with both participants and non-participants.
- Showcase best practices in building inclusive communities.

For more information about the WCI project or sign up for this e-Newsletter, please contact

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