



Where choices change the lives
of people with an intellectual disability

Winter 2015

Bridging Diversity

Building a culture of diversity and inclusion

Defining Diversity

Diversity is commonly understood in terms of dimensions that include but are not limited to race, age, place of origin, religion, ancestry, Aboriginal status, skin colour, citizenship, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability/ability, marital, parental or family status, same-sex partnership status, creed, language, educational background, literacy level, geographic location, income level, cultural tradition and work experience.

Source: Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition

Have a comment, question or story idea? Contact me!

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Good IDEA

By Ilaneet Goren, Diversity Specialist

One day I was chatting with Eman, our partner at CultureLink which is a settlement agency we collaborate with. I told her about our goal of reaching diverse communities across Toronto to deliver information about intellectual disability and connecting to services. "Why not let our newcomers help?" she asked. My answer was, "Why not!" That was early September. Two months later we held our first official session of the collaborative peer project which we now call **Intellectual Disability Education Ambassadors (IDEA)**.

IDEA's mission is to train a group of newcomers to deliver education sessions about intellectual disability within their cultural communities. The goal is to help reduce misinformation and language barriers experienced by newcomers who want to connect to developmental services. IDEA is part of the multi-year diversity initiative led by Developmental Services Toronto and Community Living Toronto with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The IDEA participants are newcomers with relevant educational and professional backgrounds ranging from medicine and education to translation and social services. There are 9 countries represented in the group. Languages spoken include Farsi, Hindi, Arabic, Spanish, Mandarin, Greek and Bengali, with most participants being multilingual. Knowing about the challenges of immigration and settlement firsthand, they are passionate about making a difference by using their languages and understanding of cultural nuances to bring information to other newcomer families.

With little time to plan, we created a basic training program that covered the definitions and types of intellectual disability, the types of services and supports available for children, adults and families, and tools for doing outreach and presentations in community settings. Our Ambassadors also learned how to use the ConnectABILITY.ca website to help families find information and resources like parent groups. When the training is completed, participants will be paired with Community Living Toronto and DSO-TR staff to deliver education sessions across various geographical areas and cultural communities. Some of them also plan to use their connections to specific ethno-cultural groups and organizations to help our staff build relationships and arrange education sessions. We often hear that diversity breeds innovation, but this project is living proof of it.



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Multicultural Calendar

- Dec 17-24 ♦ Hanukkah (Jewish)
- Dec 21 ♦ Winter Solstice or Yule (Pagan/Wiccan)
- Dec 25 ♦ Christmas (Christian)
- Dec 26-Jan 1 ♦ Kwanzaa (African first-harvest celebration)
- Jan 7 ♦ Christmas (Orthodox)
- Feb 19 ♦ Chinese New Year

Human Rights Observances

- Dec 3 - International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- Dec 6 - National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women
- Dec 10 - International Human Rights Day
- February is Black History Month
www.blackhistorycanada.ca

sprOUT Toronto

Peer group for LGBTQ
people with an intellectual
disability over the age of 18.

Meets every second
Monday of the month
at the 519 Church St.
Community Centre
6 - 8 pm

To register:
416-222-1153 ext. 138



THIS NEWSLETTER AND
OTHER HELPFUL
RESOURCES ARE
AVAILABLE ON
SHAREPOINT

Diversity begins and ends with you

By Joan Piscopo, Individual Support Program, Scarborough Region

I love to go out to eat, or organize pot lucks or do coffee with old and new friends. I began doing this as a student at the University of Waterloo. My program was in Social Development Studies.

I had just moved to a new city and did not know anyone. I said to myself that I need to build "community". There must be other individuals who do not know anyone so I started organizing diversity themed gatherings – "coffee time" – with the International Students on Campus by posting on the bulletin board and encouraging students to come either alone or with a friend. This initiative of mine caught fire and soon I had many groups of different interests all happening around campus. At the end of coffee time, I would set the next date for coffee and again encourage everyone to bring someone they met to the group. At these diversity gatherings, we would sit around and chat about what we had as

common interests, our strengths, our unique challenges, things we have accomplished and what we hope to accomplish, and where we could use some help, for example with a task or learning something. I also held special events to honor accomplishments and birthdays and anniversaries important to the individual.

This diversity gathering activity was highly successful. Many lonely students were able to make friends and enjoyed their studies and leisure time more. Once I graduated, I moved again to another city and I repeated the same dynamics by posting invites in laundromats and grocery store community boards. Groups can be formed for exercising, walking, exploring culture and arts, cooking, to celebrate holidays, to cope with stress, self-help, goal setting and maintenance, and so much more. Community involves people. Diversity is everywhere. Celebrating diversity begins and ends with you.

Diversity Board creates dialogue at North York

By Krystal Tse, Administrative Coordinator, North York Region

Every so often I see one of our program members from the North York Employment Training Services come into the office to check on our Diversity Board to find out what celebrations are happening that month. He would look at the board and then discuss the different celebrations with the staff; the most recent discussion was on Diwali.

I realized the man was anxiously awaiting the celebration of Chinese New Year as he was starting to prepare for it and wanted to know what date the holiday would fall on in 2015. Since we recently received the new multicultural celebrations poster package from the Bridging Diversity Committee, I was able to show him that Chinese New Year is on February 19th. He was very happy that the poster even included the phrase "Gung hei fat choi," a traditional Chinese greeting wishing a happy and prosperous New Year. The man started a conversation with me and other staff

members about the Chinese zodiac, wondering what animal will symbolize next year. In that conversation he learned that it will be the year of the sheep. I'm glad our Diversity Board is generating interest and spurring conversations among our diverse staff and program participants.

