



Alberta Home Visitation
Network Association

Vol. 10 Issue 2

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Message from the Provincial Director

Diversity: A journey in growth and relationship

By Lavonne Roloff

This issue of *Connections* has caused me to think about diversity and how it has impacted my life. Certainly, there are daily new events that remind us how different we are and how we choose to treat one another. We live in a country with many cultures and people from other lands (in many ways we are all newcomers or settlers to this land). We all come with different perspectives and viewpoints on what makes this world a good place to live -- a place to raise our children so that they will be happy and safe. We hope they will grow to be contributing members of society with good values and good citizenship.

When we appreciate one another's differences we learn about ourselves as well as others. After I graduated from university, I travelled in Europe and found that people were interested in knowing about Canada. They wanted to understand where we lived - Did we live in an igloo? Did we have snow all year long? Did we live in a province that was totally flat? They asked questions because they were curious and they wanted to understand how we were different as well as how we were the same. What did we do for celebrations? What did our parents think about us travelling so far away from home? Some people were helpful and made an effort to connect. We remember their kindness and caring. One couple we met in Italy invited us to their home in Scotland. Connections with others are important in today's world, too, even though there are different realities.

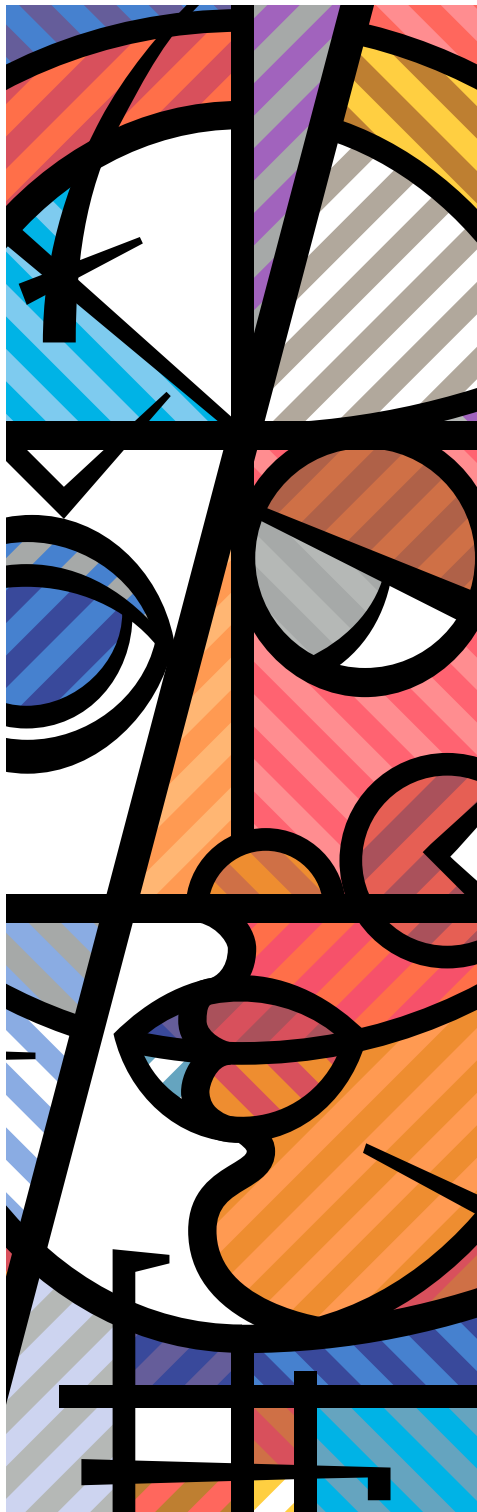
Technology has impacted our lives and informs us about the world. It has given us an understanding of other countries and more awareness of how others are living, some in circumstances that are not great. And in some respects, the world is a much smaller place than we thought. In travelling across Canada as a member of a national board, I realized that while each province has its own unique perspective, we are all connected by our nationality and our desire to be in relationship with one another. There must be something that keeps us connected. What do you think it is?

This past year AHNVA provided training in diversity for our home visitation programs. We all encounter diversity in our lives whether it is through our nationality, gender, age or other characteristics. Even within our own nuclear families we have a culture that is unique to our own family, hence the challenges with in-laws in some cases. It isn't always easy recognizing and appreciating our differences; however, in my experience, it has enriched my life. I have grown in my understanding of others and myself. I encourage you to explore the relationships in your life and cherish the wisdom they provide and the opportunities for growth. ■

Lavonne Roloff is the provincial director of the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association (AHNVA).

Cultural Competence and Transformative Learning

By Sinela Jurkova



In our globally diverse world, we have people from a variety of cultures with different values and beliefs in every realm of life. Often, interacting across cultural diversity causes misunderstanding and conflict that reflects negatively on our relationships and communication. Therefore, we need a context within which we can learn more about each other and practice our intercultural communication skills, our cultural awareness and competence.

Cultural competence

Cultural competence is a learning process of revising meaning and perspective that involves practices, actions and experiences (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 1994). Individuals adopt values, beliefs and assumptions from their family, community and culture. Thus, the dominant cultures become a natural way of thinking and acting. When individuals recognize these beliefs are not in their best interest, or conflict with their meaning perspective, they enter into a transformative learning process (Cranton and Taylor, 2012) and move forward to different stages of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) or Milton Bennett's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1993).

Cultural competence is generally related to four dimensions:

- Knowledge
- Attitudes
- Skills
- Behaviours

Bennett (2008, p. 16) defines intercultural competence as "a set of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts." Hiller and Wozniak (2009) link intercultural competence to a tolerance for ambiguity, behavioural flexibility, communicative

awareness, knowledge discovery, respect for others and empathy. Each of these dimensions has a cognitive, emotional/attitudinal and behavioural dimension.

Bennett (1993) builds the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) that includes six stages: three of these stages are **ethnocentric** (denial, defense and minimization) and three are **ethnorelative** (acceptance, adaptation and integration).

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the concept that the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality. To be ethnocentric means that you make life choices, and act, based on the assumption that your worldview is superior.

Ethnorelativism

Ethnorelativism, in contrast, assumes that cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that behaviour can only be understood within a cultural context.

According to Bennett, the state of ethnorelativism implies neither an ethical agreement with all difference, nor a rejection of a preference for one worldview over another. As we become more interculturally sensitive and forge intercultural communication skills, we are able to move through the ethnocentric stages and progress toward more ethnorelativist stages.

Changing one's worldview is an important moment in acquiring cultural competence. The process is not always comfortable and might be painful, especially when we go to deeply held values, beliefs and assumptions. But, at the same time, the change "holds great promise for transformative learning" (Lawrence and Cranton, 2009, p. 317).

Transformative journey to develop cultural awareness and competence

Using an imaginative photographic technique as a creative approach, Lawrence and Cranton share personal stories and pictures through their photo-experience to examine assumptions and explain the transformative journey. Their approach is relevant to the process of developing cultural awareness and competence.

Photographic techniques

When we use just one lens to "photograph" a new culture, we may tend toward stereotyping,

labeling or even discrimination, an ethnocentric view (Bennett, 1993). To aid in transforming from an ethnocentric view to one that is ethnorelativistic, Lawrence and Cranton (2009) suggest going beyond the first way of seeing the image, using photographic techniques such as the following:

- looking and thinking sideways
- blurring the subject out of focus
- over- or under-exposing the shot

When we perceive individuals from the perspective of a particular race, ethnicity or sexual or religious orientation, we dismiss their personal uniqueness. Taking an unconventional, imaginative view is helpful, therefore, in looking at how we perceive ourselves and position ourselves among “the others.” How do we accept and integrate the other? When we integrate our perspectives, we undergo a **transformative experience** (Lawrence and Cranton, 2009).

During the cultural-competence workshops offered by Calgary Catholic Immigration Society Diversity Services, participants discuss the process of developing this capacity. It is achieved both on an individual level and through social interaction, shared experience, storytelling and art activities and community engagement, with respect and recognition. Tapping into different ways of learning this program develops self-awareness, and it sparks creating an integrative and inclusive environment. ■

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Sinela Jurkova, MA is the cultural diversity services coordinator with Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS).



Using a Gender-Based Analysis Tool

By Kelly Buckley

In a climate where it's more important than ever to ensure value and outcomes, it's important that service providers and policy makers use the most effective tools – those that raise awareness about gender differences and diversity, such as Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+).

GBA+ is an analytical tool used to assess the impacts of policies, programs or initiatives on diverse groups of women, men, girls and boys, taking into account other points of diversity, such as age, education, language, geography, culture and income. When the actual needs of specific populations are taken into account, the odds of achieving desired outcomes are significantly increased.*

The United Nations and the Government of Canada have been using GBA+ for the last twenty-five years to help policy makers and program developers account for diversity among all groups. A number of provinces and territories also use GBA+ when they are designing programs and policies. Many organizations in Alberta also use GBA+ as part of their service delivery and program evaluation.

In addition to policies and programs, GBA+ can be used to

- create stronger business cases
- make better decisions
- achieve stronger results

Specifically for government, the benefits of GBA+ are to produce the most efficient and effective social and economic results in the best interest of all Albertans.

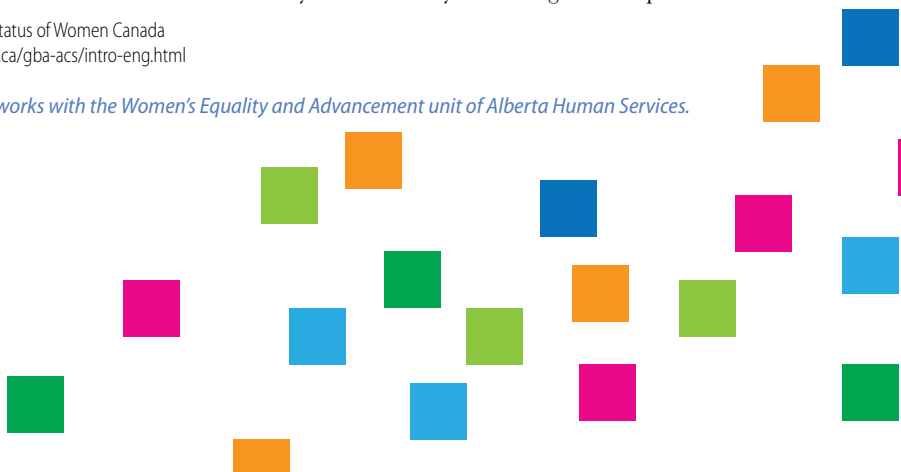
Get Certified in GBA+

You can learn more about GBA+ and become certified through the Status of Women Canada's free, online training program at www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/gba-acsgbacourse-coursacs-eng.html. The online training includes seven modules that each take 10-30 minutes to complete. Once you have completed the training, you'll receive a certificate.

GBA+ is important to your work. No matter in what area of public policy you're involved, everything you do on behalf of Albertans can be enhanced by using this tool. Integrating GBA+ into your work will help achieve goals with better outcomes. Apply this new lens as you develop or review policies, programs and other initiatives. Share what you learn with your colleagues and spread the word. ■

*adapted from Status of Women Canada
www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/gba-acsgba-intro-eng.html

Kelly Buckley works with the Women's Equality and Advancement unit of Alberta Human Services.





Diversity: What Does It Really Mean?

By Beth Broad

Have you ever heard someone say, “Oh, diversity. I’ve already taken that workshop. It’s all about people being different.”

Does that sound like a case of cultural blindness to you? I began to think of all the diversity lessons that I have learned over the years. Most of them were from families willing to share their personal, heartfelt stories. Many of those home visits became the foundation of my true understanding, where I was the listener and the learner, not the expert, and not arriving with assumptions and preconceived ideas of how a family should look and act. Building strength-based relationships takes time and patience, which is sometimes difficult, but using the family-centered approach will help us to develop goals that are a true reflection of their strengths and their needs.

Here’s what some home visitors say diversity means to them:

- Instead of always referring and sending families to community programs, I decided to attend a few to see how effective they were in reducing isolation. It taught me that although there were language challenges, most mothers are longing to share their stories and experiences with other moms. Parenting is universal in that parents want to do what’s best for their children. The smiles were evidence that being together was beneficial on so many levels.

- I had an opportunity to travel to Africa some years ago and was a little embarrassed at how little I knew about African culture and traditions after working with these families for many years in my own country. Suddenly it all made sense when I saw them singing and dancing and laughing together in their brightly coloured clothing. It changed the way I approached my practice. There are some aspects that I still do not understand, but now that’s okay. We’ll learn together.
- As I gained more skills in the practice of home visitation, it occurred to me that diversity is not only about different cultures and countries with many languages. I had the opportunity to work with a military family and learned that their way of life is a unique culture. Their strengths, beliefs and needs are not the same as other families with whom I had previously worked. I needed to dig deep and question my own belief system. I had to ask some of my colleagues for their advice and was surprised at the help they could offer me to support this family in a genuine strength-based way.
- One of the more unique experiences I have had is working with same-sex couples. I was so naïve that I didn’t even have any assumptions. This family taught me how many similarities parents have. These parents loved their baby as much as any family I’d seen. They had hopes and dreams and had the same worries that all first time parents have. But they also have unique challenges in facing fears of homophobia that can

result in oppression, marginalization and discrimination, including family rejection.

There is diversity in adoption, surrogate parenthood, kinship care, in-vitro parenting, single mothers or fathers, adolescent parents, religious cultures, blended families, senior care, raising children in poverty and/or homelessness, family violence and inclusive child care. The list continues to grow.

As home visitors, where do we evolve into a culture that embraces differences and sees them as strengths rather than deficits? We can start with our own workplace, our agencies and our families. It is important to embed diversity into our policy planning and into our leadership teams. This sends a clear message to staff that creates a balanced and equal workplace.

So go ahead and celebrate your teams’ diversity. Bring back the potluck, create a newsletter that features a staff member or contribute to a lunch and learn. Create a library that contains information to assist home visitors. Start a diversity book club. Invite speakers to your staff meetings or share success stories with your colleagues or a board member that can explain how diversity policies are created.

Whatever you choose, I challenge you to share, talk, listen and learn. Be curious. And ask yourself: What does diversity really mean to me?

■
Beth Broad is supervisor of Healthy Families program at Children’s Cottage in Calgary.

Diversity of Perception

By Jennifer Houle-Famakinde



The way we hear, see and feel things is determined by our perceptions. Perception is shaped on an individual level based on experiences that mould our understanding of the world and environments within which we live, work and interact.

“Perception (from the Latin perceptio, percipio) is the organization, identification and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environment. [1] “

Just as infants’ brains are constantly growing and changing and being shaped through new, amazing experiences with each day, the adult brain also continues changing, depending upon repetitive and new experiences. The process of neurodevelopment and the plasticity of the brain in neuroscience can help us to better understand this phenomenon.

But what happens when our experiences are limited?

Take for example a home visitor who may have grown up and been raised her entire life in a financially stable, Anglo-Saxon home in suburbia. This individual has had a number of interesting and valuable interactions and experiences that have shaped her view of the world. She has gained knowledge about life, family and culture from her upbringing and perhaps from an institutional educational setting, like a college or university.

In an urban centre, she may be expected to work and support an urban Aboriginal family who might have recently moved from the reserve to the city and may have always lived in financial poverty. The home visitor may have very limited or no experience with Aboriginal families. She may have never been into the home of an Aboriginal family, never experienced a ceremony like a sweat lodge or smudge. There could be many ways that the first experience with Aboriginal family roles and structure can be completely foreign to home visitors who have never had experiences out of their own cultural understandings of the world.

Having a diversity of experiences shapes our view of the world and illustrates why it is necessary to examine “diversity.” Is diversity, as typically used in professional practice, reflective of the dominant culture, language and perspective? Or, is it honoured and highlighted from the perspective of inclusion of differentness?

The diverse meaning of family

When we think about “diversity” from the perspective of home visitation, it is important to remember “family” encompasses varied meanings depending upon the perspective of the person. Culturalization from the Western perspective most often understands “family” as a mother, father and two children (and maybe a household pet). In many other cultures, however, the term “family” is inclusive of more than just the nuclear family, and may include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and even non-blood relations considered “family.”

“Diversity” and the quest by professionals to highlight it can come across at times as less about respect and more about trying to compartmentalize all the “other” groups that differ from, or challenge the beliefs, values and perspectives of, the mainstream dominant culture.

Labeling a group as “diverse” can carry meaning correlating to differences. For example, grouping Aboriginal peoples into the “diversity” category is to the detriment of our constant striving for Indigenous sovereignty and actualization of the inherent Indigenous rights to land, culture and freedom in our homeland, Turtle Island.

It is fair to say we live in a society that comprises many rich and vibrant cultures. When we choose to work in the helping field, it is for the sake of finding the common good in people, and most importantly, to help individuals examine from within their own perspectives what will support each family to thrive.

Understanding how our own perceptions and perspectives of the world come into play in all interactions will not only empower us to do better work with families and communities, but will also expand our minds and push us out of our comfort zones.

With this in mind, I leave you with my final thoughts. Think about how you view the world. Think about the experiences of others. It’s not our role to impose our beliefs and values on the families we work with, but, moreover, to awaken the humanness within all of us. Be kind, be patient and most of all do no harm as we go about “doing good.” ■

Jennifer Houle-Famakinde is the development manager with the Métis Calgary Family Services.

Diversity: A Parent's Perspective

By Jennie Lewin

When my daughter Vienna was born, I spent a lot of time staring at her tiny perfect face with her slightly slanted eyes. I had a lot of time to stare at her because she was held in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for a full month. Vienna was born with Down syndrome and a serious heart defect. As I sat there, I reflected on what her future would be like — what her gifts and talents might be, as well as her challenges and differences. My greatest desire was that people would accept her and see her as I did — beautiful and wonderfully made. I wanted her to have all the opportunities possible to live like a typical child. I wanted her to have birthday parties with friends, go to school with her peers and take art and dance classes, all the same things that I did with her older sister.

Fast forward to today

I look through the window of the school gymnasium door. In one corner, some boys are playing with hoops. In another, the teacher is showing children how to play a game of catch.

Over by the stage, two little girls are walking hand-in-hand towards a group of friends. In another circle, children roll a ball to each other. One of the girls sits close to another, my daughter, and when the ball rolls over she takes my daughter's hand and helps her roll the ball.

Nearby a woman stands watching the girls with a large smile on her face. When she sees me, she motions to my daughter as her friend once again takes my daughter's hand in hers and helps her roll the ball away. Then I hear my daughter laugh.

This is the vision I had for my daughter those years ago when I held her in my arms as a newborn — that she would do all the things the other children are doing. Today I see her being included in activities with her friends. I see her friends naturally involving her and finding meaningful ways for her to participate. I see her participating in dance, art and all our family events. Mostly I see my daughter as being happy.

Shaping family views to embrace diversity

How did we get to this place of embracing diversity? I had two strong influences shape how our family views our daughter and our hopes for how the rest of the world would see her.

Early intervention was the first influence. Aid workers with Alberta Health Services walked alongside us the first three years of Vienna's life. My worker often visited me at home or in the hospital, showing me different ways that we could play with Vienna. Early intervention connected me to play partnerships in our community where Vienna and I felt accepted, and most importantly had fun.

Once Vienna became a preschooler, we chose the GRIT (Getting Ready for Inclusion Today, Edmonton) program to continue our journey of inclusion. GRIT offers a family-centred community program of learning through play. With GRIT's support, Vienna attended community groups and our local preschool and was a vibrant member of our community kindergarten. GRIT gave us the confidence and skills to show others how to respect and value Vienna as an amazing individual.

I can say that our family's journey has been one of learning to embrace diversity. Through creating a vision for our family and honouring that vision, we began to see the power of positive relationships and the richness of celebrating our daughter's uniqueness. Now we see the value of diversity everywhere in our community. And for this, I can say thank you. ■

For more reading, visit these links:

www.disabilityisnatural.com

(Disability is Natural)

www.child-encyclopedia.com

(Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development)

www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca

(Alberta Health Services)

www.programs.alberta.ca/

(Raising Children – Government of Alberta)

<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>

(Centre on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning)

www.gritprogram.com

(Getting Ready for Inclusion Today)

Jennie Lewin is a parent who participated in the Getting Ready for Inclusion Today (GRIT) program in Edmonton.

The author Jennie Lewin with her two daughters Vienna and Sapphira.



Understanding the Issues of Immigrant Men in Canada

By Leo Campos Aldunez

Some time ago, I had the fortune of leading a project called Health and Wellness for Immigrant Men. It was housed at the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-operative and supported by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women. It was grounded in the principles of participatory learning and education. Over a period of months, immigrant and refugee men from various communities engaged actively in an intentional process of participatory and transformative learning related to their shared struggles with the following:

- non-recognition of professional credentials from their home country
- lack of meaningful and gainful employment opportunities in Canada
- lack of culturally relevant support for immigrant men in relation to social/economic integration
- active citizen participation
- gender issues

The framework

This initiative is based on a growing concern about the challenges faced by immigrant men as they move from a familiar world to a new land in which their cultural and masculine identities become clouded, questioned and/or in direct conflict with the law and well-established standards in our country. Many immigrant couples experience not only the intense demands of adjusting to a new set of cultural values and norms, but also an acute sense of isolation, loneliness and family conflicts. In short, the couple's relationship and the relationship between them and their children, is under ongoing stress. This can create an unhealthy, and in many instances abusive pattern of violence, recrimination and eventually, family breakdown.

Objectives of the program

- articulate key issues and barriers affecting the health and well-being of immigrant men
- build the collective capacity of immigrant men to advocate for positive action to address their issues
- demonstrate ways by which immigrant men exercise their leadership and community mobilization skills to improve their health and well-being

During this time, immigrant men explored common issues and critically analyzed the contributing factors affecting their well-being.

The doing

The Health and Wellness Project for Immigrant Men provided the following:

- a safe and friendly meeting place for immigrant men
- time for self-discovery and awareness
- access to community resources
- a better understanding of family violence/family law
- a referral to treatment and counseling on family matters when required

The conversations and workshops covered a broad range of content: healthy masculinity, healthy relationships, arts and creativity, family law, cross-cultural parenting and prevention of family violence.

Participants

Participants were immigrant and refugee men from over 21 countries with a variety of trades and professional backgrounds. Despite their diverse ethnic, academic and employment history, strikingly common circumstances, struggles and learning needs were revealed in the process, such as the desire to deal with core economic and social integrating issues, including the following:

- recognition of their foreign qualification
- securing meaningful employment that maximizes the use of their knowledge and skills
- gaining further education/academic development
- accessing increased funding for language learning
- addressing essential settlement concerns around housing, health and finances

Secondary priorities were 'soft' learning issues,

including the following:

- health
- relationships
- general well-being
- life skills

The findings indicate there are significant common issues encountered by immigrant and refugee men. And, there is a desire for co-creation of solutions and relevant actions through an action learning process. Such services driven and required by immigrant men are not currently available in Edmonton.

The next journey

The Health and Wellness for Immigrant Men project created critical learning and potential momentum among immigrant and refugee men to address their unique struggles and needs. It became clear that recognition of their academic background and work experience in their country of origin is of primary significance. The desire for a network for collective learning and action remains. This sentiment was captured on a documentary I produced in 2008 entitled MACHOS: Journeys of Self-Discovery With Immigrant Men.

Our values

While progress has been made, much remains to be done. A new critical scan and review of the challenges and obstacles would be beneficial. In addition, active engagement with professional associations, academic institutions such as NAIT/SAIT and NorQuest College and government departments, including Employment and Social Development Canada, and Alberta Human Services and Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour should become part of the action to explore and improve funding for living expenses, language learning and enhanced employment training opportunities.

Work on developing healthy relationships, awareness about domestic violence, understanding gender issues, parenting and healthy masculinity should also be given special attention. And last, but not least, there should be more meaningful opportunities for rich and deep social and cultural integration into Canadian society through active citizenship and volunteerism. ■

Leo Campos Aldunez www.tcng.ca is a poet, cultural worker, interpreter/translator, adult educator and multilingual social media professional based in Edmonton. He can be reached at leocampos@gmail.com (or) at 780.474.6058.

connections

Coming up

The next issue of Connections will focus on **Supervision and Parent Coaching**. If you would like to submit an article or resource for this topic, please contact the AHVNA office by October 29, 2015.

Hearing from you

Connections is published two times per year by the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association. We welcome comments, questions and feedback on this newsletter. Please direct any comments to Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA Provincial Director, by phone at 780.429.4787 or by email to info@ahvna.org.

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Reaching the Isolated by Knocking on Doors

By Darlene Gage

What is the point of using home visiting as a social service technique, especially in this day and age of instant information access? Why not simply put our resources into educating clients to use the Internet to get access to training, information and support? This would certainly be a much lower cost option for all agencies and service providers, wouldn't it?

Those in the helping professions know intuitively that there are just too many people who would fall through the cracks, whose isolation, low literacy, language or low income would simply make it impossible for them to use technology in the ways we would like. These are the families who are often not reached by traditional centre-based services, where people must already be at a certain level of literacy, confidence and language skills to access services.

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngster (HIPPY) Canada, like many organizations, wants to reach the most isolated people in Canada. We choose home visiting as our tool to accomplish this, because we know from experience that we **need to go to them**.

Creating real diversity, for us, means doing the hard work of actually creating diversity. We don't wait for them to find us. Instead, we

- knock on doors
- target social housing developments
- go to the low-income neighbourhoods where immigrant families settle
- go directly to First Nations reserves
- find people in their homes

These are the families who are least likely to search out, or even trust, a professional social service agency representative, for lots of reasons. Our home visitors are not professionals. They

are current and former parents in the program, whom we hire to work with the parents and train in the HIPPY method for preparing their children for success in school.

When a HIPPY home visitor shows up at your door to recruit you, chances are she will be a neighbour you recognize, or at least someone who feels familiar for other reasons – she may speak your language, come from a similar culture, and seem to understand how you might be feeling having a stranger knocking on your door and inviting you to become your child's first and best teacher.

It is this kind of connection and trust that makes HIPPY work and creates diversity:

- Mothers working with mothers
- Mothers going out and finding other mothers
- Mothers taking a role in their communities where once they might have been too isolated to take a bus or join a meeting

We also use more traditional recruitment methods: referrals from schools and service workers, announcements at meetings, flyers and posters, social media, etc. We find lots of families that way. But we know deep down that if we truly want to reach the most vulnerable in our communities, we need to do the hard work. Knocking on doors is not easy. It takes courage and the ability to stay positive in the face of many closed doors and unsmiling faces. HIPPY home visitors work hard to support each other and keep pushing to make this program welcoming and inclusive. They do it for the children and the families because they know they are making a real difference. ■

Submitted by Darlene Gage, HIPPY Canada National Training Coordinator. Contact Darlene by e-mail at dgage@hippycanada.ca or phone at 604.428.3254

For more information about how you can start a HIPPY program in your community, visit hippycanada.ca.



Alberta Home Visitation Network Association

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