



abbotsford
building
connections

connecting cultures
building communities

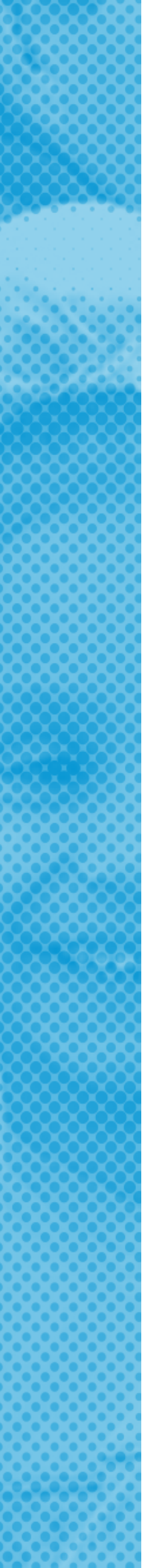


Emergent Practices in Diversity and Inclusion



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Executive Summary

Abbotsford Building Connections: Emergent Practices in Diversity & Inclusion chronicles the work of the City of Abbotsford and its partners, Abbotsford Community Services, Abbotsford School District, the University of the Fraser Valley Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies to build interfaith and intercultural connections and opportunities in the Abbotsford community. Receiving the award for 'Outstanding Community Outreach,' by the Fraser Valley Cultural Diversity Awards in 2012, the Abbotsford Building Connections is a step in the right direction for the municipal government to take a strong leadership role in managing and cultivating the diversity of Abbotsford. With learning derived from the community twinning approach, practitioners, governments, diversity leaders and champions can benefit from key insights of twinning to bridge community divides at the local level.



Background

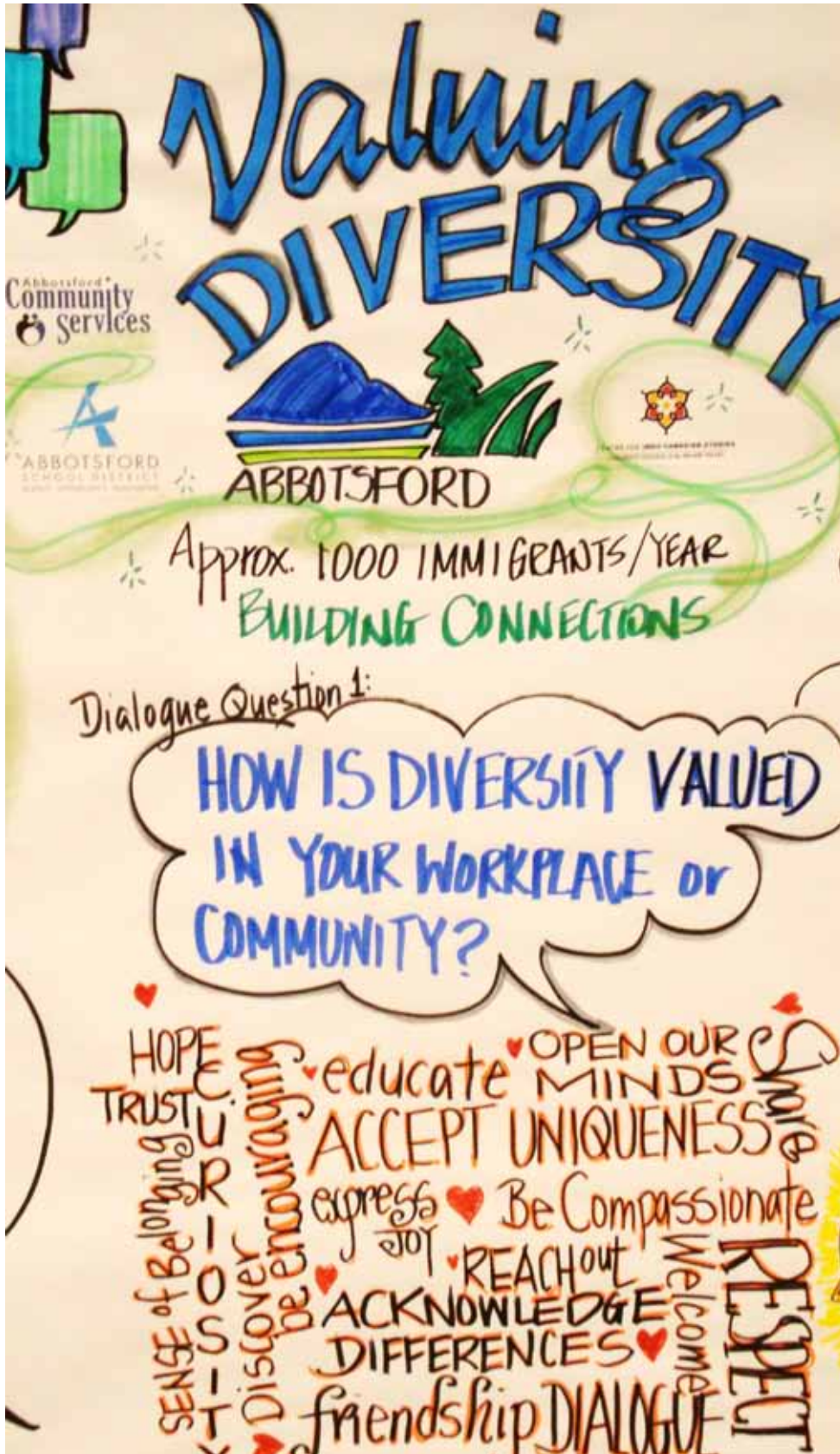
Being the third most diverse community in Canada is an advantage and a challenge. The City of Abbotsford is particularly positioned to be challenged by the diversities and richness of its people, coming from all over the world, and deciding to live in the most fertile region of British Columbia, the Fraser Valley. Abbotsford is traditionally the home of the Stó:lo nations and the early Sikh pioneers settled in the area in the early 1900s and the Mennonites in the early 1930s. Abbotsford became more populated with the recent waves of immigration of family class, refugees and skilled workers in the 1990's and present. In 2012, Abbotsford has a population of 140,235.

There are immediate and compelling reasons to become more intentional with the growing diversity of Abbotsford and its impact in terms of social cohesion, equal opportunities, and quality of life of residents. Recent incidents point to increased social isolation and disconnections amongst and between the diverse groups and the mainstream population in Abbotsford. There are critical social issues that are besetting a growing community such as homelessness, addictions, mental health issues, criminality, and growing poverty right in the midst of the proliferation of significant number of churches and religious organizations in the community. There are multiple solitudes in faiths and although they are plentiful, this has not been transcended to heed the call for overall societal unity and cooperation. The City of Abbotsford and its community partner agencies have collaborated together to find solutions to these challenges.

In 2009, the City of Abbotsford was invited by Citizenship and Immigration Canada to submit a grant proposal related to diversity and inclusion with the goal to increase social integration in the community of Abbotsford. Through the early stages of application development, staff worked with the Diversity Working Group within the Abbotsford Social Development Advisory Committee. The Working Group had representation from the University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford School District and Abbotsford Community Services; who become key implementation partners.

In 2010, the City of Abbotsford received the grant worth \$434,596 to implement the Abbotsford Building Connections Project from 2010 to 2013 with the aim of building intercultural and interfaith connections through community-wide twinning activities and intercultural programming offered at neighbourhood hubs in order to reduce racism and discrimination. The grant enabled the City of Abbotsford to hire a Diversity

Coordinator to implement the project and to be managed by the Parks, Recreation and Culture Department.





Project Objectives

The goals and objectives of Abbotsford Building Connections is for the City of Abbotsford to be more culturally integrated and for there to be increased intercultural and interfaith connections at both the community and neighborhood-level.

Project Objectives:

- Students and their families learn about the importance of differences and diversity in Abbotsford.
- Business Associations engage in joint intercultural events that promote working together and address the cultural divide in Abbotsford.
- Leaders from Faith Communities come together and engage in joint interfaith events.
- Business and Faith leaders develop an increased awareness of diversity, the intercultural/interfaith challenges in our community and the importance of embracing diversity, where strategies are developed / aimed at bridging and connecting the cultural and faith communities in Abbotsford.
- Business and Faith leaders in Abbotsford develop an understanding and appreciation of the diversity in the City of Abbotsford, are able to find their role in promoting and responding to diversity and have a deeper understanding and respect for different cultures and beliefs.
- Residents from a variety of ethnic/cultural groups participate together in intercultural recreation, literacy and arts programming at intercultural hubs located in the Townline/Clearbrook neighbourhood.
- Abbotsford residents from a variety of ethnic/cultural groups participate in intercultural and interfaith diversity workshops at the intercultural hubs.
- Abbotsford residents develop the knowledge and capacity to access existing municipal services and programming offered at each of the intercultural hubs.
- At-risk youth participate in youth mentoring program where they are paired with young adult mentors who facilitate practical learning experience and skill development.

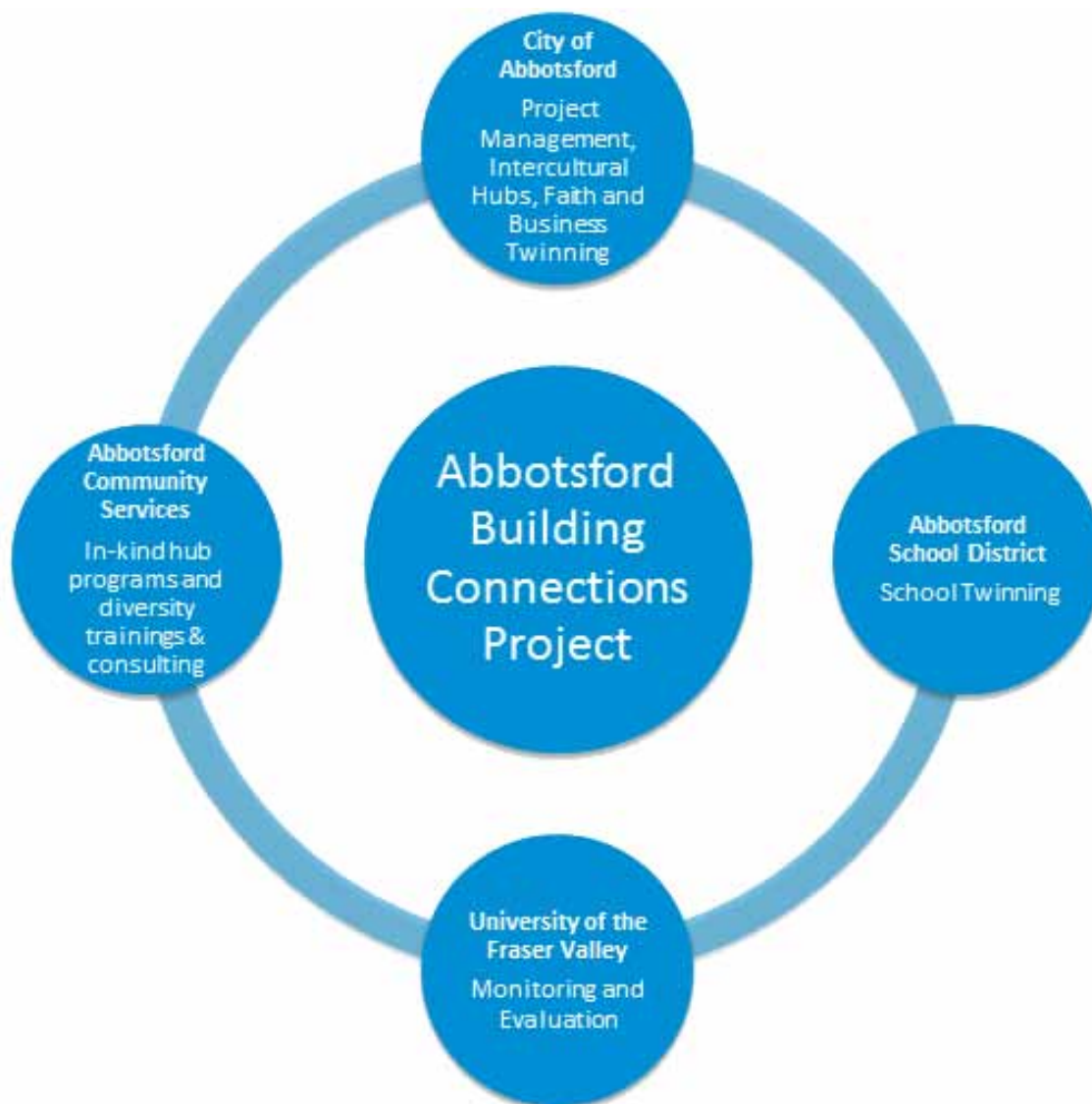


Partnership Model That Works

At the 2011 Strategic Planning Meeting with the partners, the partnership model is cited as one of the strengths of the ABC Project. There is an explicit understanding that a collaborative strategy is required to meet the growing demands to the project.

With the discipline imposed by project management, the model becomes self-regulating and self-generating; it has become a platform for information-sharing, knowledge generation, environment assessments, and a conduit for future projects to be conceptualized and implemented.

The four major partners provided considerable investments in finances, staff time, and administrative support that demonstrated their commitment to diversity in the present and future. The partners engage in spirited, candid, and collaborative dialogue at meetings which results in good problem solving techniques and idea generation. There is interdependence and confidence that outcomes are far better when there is consensus and consultation with all partners. Partners are accountable to one another leveraging the resources and strengths in the group to minimize the risks and challenges that come with the project.



Abbotsford Community Services

As the largest service provider in the community on immigration integration and multiculturalism, the Abbotsford Community Services (ACS) complemented the project by providing in-kind intercultural hub programs and new programs that took place at the Matsqui Recreation Centre, including the Youth Mentoring Program which is targeted to at-risk youth. They also led the implementation of the Diversity Networking Series aimed for businesses and organizational leaders to understand the role of diversity in growing their enterprises.

Manpreet Grewal, Manager, Multicultural and Immigration Integration Services of the Abbotsford Community Services led the team composed of Alison Gutrath, Danica Denomme, and Danielle Nazarewich of the Diversity Education and Resources Services (DEARS) Office.

Abbotsford School District #34

The Abbotsford School District is the public education system for the City of Abbotsford with 47 schools ranging from elementary, middle and secondary levels. The Abbotsford School District contributed to twinning schools programs with 4 elementary schools involved led by teachers, parent advisory councils and their principals and administrators.

Represented and led by Andrea Senft, Manager, Community Development for Abbotsford School District, the Abbotsford School District championed the twinning of schools from East to West Abbotsford and closed the gap in intercultural understanding of students and their families/caregivers.



The University of the Fraser Valley

The University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), one of the distinguished public universities in BC was responsible for the facilitation for various intercultural/ interfaith workshops and meetings with the businesses and the faith communities of Abbotsford in order to pursue the twinnings, interfaith dialogues, and the joint community projects and activities with faiths and businesses.

Led by Satwinder Bains, Director of the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies and researcher Catherine Dawson, the team led the design, development and implementation of participatory evaluation processes

City of Abbotsford

The City of Abbotsford is the main implementing agency with delegated responsibility of project management to the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department. The City was in charge of the development of new programs at intercultural hubs, the faith twinnings, and the day-to-day project management and support.

In 2010, City Council approved the Diversity Policy that sets a framework of commitment to being an inclusive and accessible community for all. The most involved City departments are Parks, Recreation and Culture Department, Marketing and Communications, Economic Development and Planning Department, Human Resources Department, Office of the City Manager, and Office of the Mayor and Council.

Med Manzanal, Diversity Coordinator and Rebecca Roberts, Manager, Matsqui Recreation Centre and Diversity Project lead the implementation and management of the project.





Success and Achievements

Twinning Model Explained

The twinning approach is derived from the UK model where two contrasting institutions/communities are brought together to foster familiarity of the diversity of their environments and the kind of intercultural competencies and skills that is required to cultivate integration in their communities.

In the British Council's Guide to School Twinning, the tips that work for UK schools in partnership with schools in other countries to be successful is outlined. At the Bradford School Linking Project, the aim of this twinning is to increase childrens' knowledge and understanding about the diverse nature of Bradford's communities and creates a platform for interaction that encourages children, their families and careers to develop good relationships and respect the difference between people.

In the United Kingdom, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion published a report entitled 'Our Shared Future' which provided a vision for shared future through sharing of practical tools and strategies that can be applied at the local, grassroots level.

Whilst this model has been generously applied to the ABC Project, it is adapted to the local context and refined as the project moved along the implementation phase. Ultimately lessons learned can be shared with other community groups and agencies that will be interested to use the twinning model as it had benefited Abbotsford.

Strengths

- Twinning usually facilitated by third party organizations that are also involved and invested into the process will have an enriched impact to the needs and issues that are being addressed (i.e. increased familiarity with culture and lifestyles, perspectives, opinions, and outlooks, decreased prejudice, increased opportunities to learn and respect differences, etc.) within the program.
- Twinning can be designed in such a way that comparable organizations are made to connect at a level where it is best supported. For example, school twinning between elementary schools in East Abbotsford with West Abbotsford can be administered through Abbotsford School District and sometimes with the external support of the City of Abbotsford when public facilities are needed.

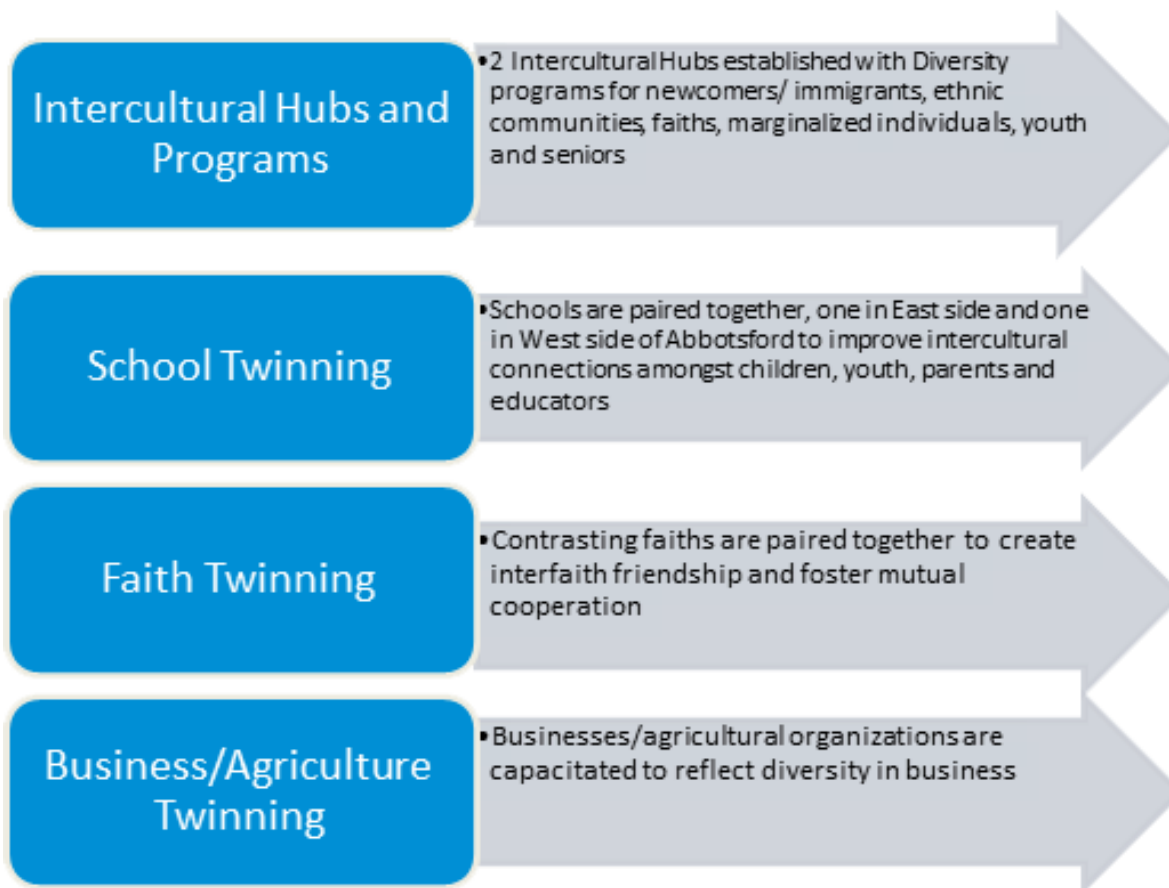
- Twinning is incremental steps to integration with safety as the number one consideration to be in place. Groups and institutions coming together must feel safe, included, and accepted and this starts with the program design and planning. Rather than being the 'target/recipient' of the intervention, organizations to be partnered must be 100% engaged in the process and that their participation in designing, planning, implementing and evaluating increases engagement in the long run. One to three interactions do not translate to overnight friendship. It takes time to build up capacity to empower organizations to take these interactions to a more purposeful and meaningful level relative to their agenda and interests.

Weaknesses

- Twinning as being an incremental approach to integration takes time to unfold to measure considerable impact on a longer time horizon. Organizations in charge of the projects on twinning must define immediate outcomes that will be measured at the end of the program and be confident about reporting initial results with the view to having the twinning approach to be replicable in other settings.
 - Twinning is set with institutions and their formal executives. Without the supporting infrastructure of institutions, old patterns of thinking and stereotypes about the 'other' could lead to a more entrenched position. Teachers and administrators in schools should be trained on intercultural education to be able to support their students in understanding complexities of diversity. When institutions are fraught with bureaucracy, opportunities can be missed or passed for more pressing priorities requiring funding, attention and time. Personality-based initiatives although are important and valuable additions may prove to be counterproductive to the agenda of sustainability of these relationships.
1. Faith twinning is not as accepted with the faith groups particularly the exclusivist religions. According to the more exclusivist faiths, the concept of being 'twinned' as diverse faiths implicitly assumed that there is a commonality and comparability between faiths, therefore losing their own uniqueness and distinctions.

There is a recommendation to change the wording used to something acceptable. Beyond the words, it is important to recognize where the tensions of the faiths are and the increasing need to bridge these faith divides regardless of the words to be used. If challenged on the wording, the twinning proponents can explain the intentions of the approach and let the participants decide on its merits.

There are 2 twinings that were implemented extensively: the school twinning and the faith twinning. On the business side, the Diversity Networking Series is implemented through the facilitation of Abbotsford Community Services DEARS Office.



School Twinning: Bridging the East and West Abbotsford schools

Four schools, specifically Clearbrook Elementary School, Sandy Hill Elementary School, Dave Kandal Elementary School, and Dr. Thomas Swift Elementary School participated in the school twinning program. Over one thousand students with parents, caregivers, and school administrators developed intercultural skills necessary to build a formative understanding of a community free of racism, discrimination, and 'othering' due to visible and invisible differences in society. The pen-paling, visiting cultural/heritage sites in the community, and sharing cultural celebrations with their pen pals created a sense of familiarity with the diversity in Abbotsford. Schools in East and West Abbotsford were partnered together to create friendships among students. This was the first time this type of program has been used in Canada before there is the Canadian-wide school twinning initiatives administered by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

The program has bridged the cultural gaps that are present in our community. Cultures and traditions were connected through students' learning, personal interaction, and relationship building with their Pen Pals. It has allowed students to learn from their peers, and it helps to eliminate misconceptions about cultural and religious differences in a comfortable way. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to ask questions, examine their own assumptions and ideas, and reflect on respecting and valuing differences. The facilitated interactions encourage the values of respect/openness/equality and celebrate diversity.

Twinned classes have participated in various activities such as:

- Exchanges of pictures and friendship bracelets
- Weekly correspondence through E-Mail and Skype
- Shared Calendar
- Potluck lunches with foods from around the world

"The thing that I've learned about friendship is that if you're from a different school, you can still be friends."

- Jaskirat

"I've learned that friendship is an important thing to have. It is wonderful thing to be friends."

- Sarina

"I have learned so much about friendship - that friendship means that you should be nice, kind, helpful, and that when you're sad, your friends cheer you up."

- Gurpinder

- A trip to Sikh Temple where the children celebrated Vaisakhi. For many of the children, this was their first trip to the temple and the first opportunity to celebrate a South Asian holiday.
- A trip to Vancouver to celebrate Chinese New Year
- Diwali celebration at Clearbrook Elementary School, painting clay lamps
- Play time out on the playground with twin buddies
- All Canadian Day (Canadiana)
- Wrap up Celebration video (at www.abcdiversity.ca/Twinning-of-Schools)
- Attended an Abbotsford Heat game

Celebrate Pen Pal Day at Abbotsford Exhibition Park

Over 1000 students and parents/caregivers celebrated “PenPal Day” at the Abbotsford Exhibition Park (AEP) on May 11, 2011 as a culminating activity of the pilot twinning between Clearbrook Elementary School and Sandy Hill Elementary Schools. Throughout the day, pen pals participated in a flash mob and played together celebrating their newfound friendship. There is also the school’s visit to the Sikh Temple as part of the intercultural immersion to the West side of Abbotsford.



“I learned that you just shouldn’t make friends with people in your school. You would make friends with all nice and not mean kids”

- Harvir



Cultures and traditions were connected through students’ learning, personal interaction, and relationship building with their Pen Pals.

Principals and teachers expressed that children, especially having met their pen pal, gained insight into the lives of others and into the places that children of those schools value. For example, as a result of a mapping exercise, children at the schools stated they enjoyed activities at the Sikh Temple, and children stated they enjoyed activities at the District/School as a whole, while creating a legacy and giving long-lasting energy to the project.

There were some immediate issues with convincing parents at the school of the value of a Temple visit. In the future, a pre-meeting with parents might address this concern before it becomes a problem. It was felt that the barriers of language, culture and economics can be overcome, although there is work to be done across all three areas. One main example is that students from Punjabi speaking homes are taken care of at home in infancy whereas in other areas children are in structured daycare environments where they practice their letters and their English; a little catch up is required in kindergarten (now full days). However, the Principal believes the evidence that children pick up and excel exists. Economic barriers are more difficult he states, as the school catchment area now has a marked increase in basement suites and transient populations. The cost of transportation (bus rentals) as well as organizing sufficient parent volunteers is considered to be an on-going challenge.

Vaisakhi Celebration brought the two Middle Schools together

On April 13, 2012, the ABC project supported the Vaisakhi Celebration between Clayburn Middle School and Eugene Reimer School. This is a teacher-led initiative from a Grade 4 teacher from Clayburn, Mr. Jasbir Singh and Mr. Jatinder Brar, Grade 4 teacher from Reimer stemming from a series of discussions with partners from the faith twinning activities. The event brought together and educated 180 Clayburn students, teachers and parents to learn about Vaisakhi and the Punjabi culture and 600 Reimer students including teachers and their parents to celebrate with their guests.



Faith Twinning: Being Intentional About Interfaith Relations

Four faith twinnings have been developed during the project which aims to break down the silos surrounding the faith communities and counter discrimination and prejudice on the basis of faith and belief through mutual education and learning.

Nexus Church and Khalsa Diwan Society and 5and2 Ministries: Serving the Poor together

Nexus Church, an “emerging church” Model and Khalsa Diwan Society, the Society that manages the Gur Sikh Temple, the oldest Sikh Temple in North America, National Heritage Site forged the first faith twinning in the history of the Abbotsford community. Going above and beyond simple friendship, Nexus Church and Khalsa Diwan Society established early on a much more active form of cooperation through social action ventures. Feeding the hungry and marginalized with the help of 5and2 Ministries practiced the very notion of love and compassion that these faith communities have for the community and the whole City.

Nexus Church and Khalsa Diwan Society, Gur Sikh Temple twinned together in two separate events on April 3, 2011 with Sikh members attending Nexus service and May 1, 2011 with Nexus members attending Sikh service. They launched the “Feeding the Multitudes” program on March 18, 2012 in partnership with the 5and2 Ministries, a humanitarian Christian organization that is looking after street-engaged individuals in the community. Due to resource constraints, Nexus Church discontinued with the program. However, the Khalsa Diwan Society and 5and2 Ministries maintained the feeding program from October 2012 to March 2013 with regular 35-50 individuals and families in need every second Wednesday of each month at Jubilee Park, downtown Abbotsford. With the turn to warmer season,



more individuals and families that come to the site due to improved weather situation. This faith twinning will be continuing on a monthly basis subject to the state of resources of the Gurdwara and the 5and2 Ministries.

More than being good neighbours: Gurdwara Sahib Khalgidhar Darbar Society and The Church of Jesus Christ's Latter Day Saints (LDS)

The tour exchange between the Gurdwara Sahib Khalgidhar Darbar Society and The Church of Jesus Christ's Latter Day Saints (LDS) on April 15, 2012 gathered 100 members of LDS and 80 members of the Gurdwara to learn about Mormonism and Sikhism and become good friends and neighbours. The event signaled another important milestone in the relationship of the two faith organizations on the West side of Abbotsford. The Press Release of the event can be found at www.abcdiversity.ca/News.

For 2 consecutive years, both faith communities participated in a BC Thanksgiving Food Drive with about 10,000 lbs of food donation collected for the Abbotsford Food Bank. Abbotsford Food Bank and The Church of Jesus Christ's Latter Day Saints (LDS) exhibited twice in the biggest Nagar Kirtan Parade every September of the year in Abbotsford.

Earlier the Abbotsford Stake recalled the time when the Gurdwara is being built in the community. There was considerable opposition from the community. The Abbotsford Stake supported it wholeheartedly and encourage its establishment.

*Tonight is about embracing
two cultures as one, and about
accepting diversity, openness,
truth, and honesty"*

*-Jasbir Singh, Khalsa
Diwan Society*

*I have the same wishes for my
daughters: to love God, to be
good people, to serve others"*

– Peg Peters, Nexus Church

Tripling the twinning impact: Dorjechang Buddhist Centre, Baha'i Assembly of Abbotsford and the Gurdwara Baba Banda Bahadar Society

The first twinning exercise between Dorjechang Buddhist Centre, Baha'i Assembly of Abbotsford, and the Gurdwara Baba Banda Bahadar Society took place in March 2012 where the Gurdwara welcomed the Dorjechang and Baha'i members to an orientation of Sikhisms and Sikh world views and partaking at the langar (community kitchen).

Dorjechang and Bahai communities hosted the second and third faith twinning events. The Dorjechang Buddhist service welcomed the Sikhs and Baha'is to the Centre which consisted of a tour of the Centre, a meditation exercise, and a reflection on "Compassion" by Gen Kelsang Sanden, the Spiritual Director of the Centre.

The Bahai service consisted of a vegetarian meal, a reading of Bahauallah's teaching on "Joy and Sorrow" and reflection on its meanings in contemporary time. With less participation from the two faith communities, the Baha'i community has invited them again for their February 15 Devotional Meeting "Materialism Vs. Spirituality" and received 3 members for the Buddhist Centre. At this time, the Gurdwara Baba Banda Singh Bahadar Society can no longer sustain their participation in the program due to resource constraints. It is determined that the twinning is now focused between Dorjechang and Bahai communities.

The twinning between Bahai and Buddhist Centre continues on an informal basis when schedules would match and that there are members that can be deployed to regular Bahai devotionals on Saturdays and other special events.



Interfaith Dialogue: Pursuing difficult conversations together

The ABC Project and UFV Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies conducted an Interfaith Dialogue on March 11, 2012 at the University of the Fraser Valley Abbotsford Campus with the theme “Sacred Texts and Religious Expressions” gathering 7 speakers from 6 faith traditions namely Buddhism, Bahai, Christianity (Mennonite & Latter-day Saints), Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism with a roomful of 50 participants. Discussions centered on the sacred texts, devotional and spritiual expressions and the basic tenets of each faith tradition. A subtopic on proselytization and how it is impacting interfaith harmony is discussed. Outcomes of the Dialogue includes a call to each faith to have Open Houses where tours of other faiths are facilitated and offer from two faith traditions to continue the dialogue at a seminal level amongst the attendees.

One of the issues that came to light was the refusal of some church groups to not be involved in the ABC Project because of their faith belief conflict with the rules of engagement (no proselytization). This will continue to be addressed by ABC partners (UFV and ACS) into the future with implementation already underway with constructive dialogue and action. Intercultural and interfaith engagement building personal relationships, intense dialogues, interfaith events and activities, food sharing, trust building, exchange of philosophies and ideologies without infringement, community development and exchanges across faith borders (intergenerational) is on-going on the larger scale.

Outcomes of the Dialogue includes a call to each faith to have Open Houses where visits/tours of other faiths are facilitated and offer from two faith traditions to continue the dialogue at a seminal level amongst the attendees.



Diversity Networking Series: Get your business ready!

The Diversity Networking Series: Get your business ready! is a six-session program designed for business and organizational leaders to enhance their businesses for Abbotsford's increasing cultural diversity. The program is tailor-made for leaders to network and share best practices in marketing and outreach to our multi-ethnic and diverse community and interface with industry champions. The series featured 6 key topics: Diversity Demographics, Innovation & Prosperity, Hiring for Diversity, Media & Marketing, Organizational Development, and a culminating showcase event: Valuing Diversity in Business. The series runs over an eight week period from September 13th to November 14th, 2012. Each 2.5 hour session offers an opportunity for learning and networking.

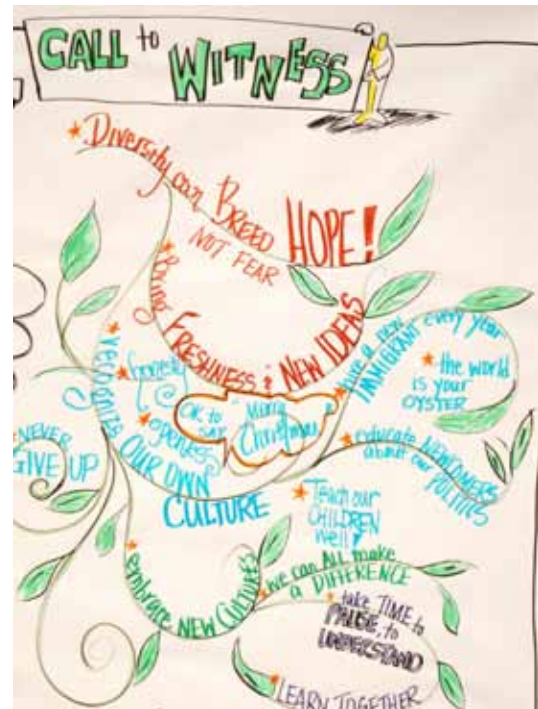
56 immigrant professionals as well as business and organizational leaders of Abbotsford attended the Final Showcase Valuing Diversity in Business: Final Showcase Event. During the moderated dialogue, individuals drew from their experiences and created new ideas about how to make the Fraser Valley more inclusive. "I felt included here for the first time," stated Roberto de la Cruz, a recent newcomer to Abbotsford who is an engineering professional.

Modeled after Stó:lo traditional First Nations teaching, witnesses were called to share what moved their heart and mind during the dialogue and all throughout the sessions. There was a resounding cry and hope that the Fraser Valley would become increasingly inclusive of people with diverse abilities, socio-economic status and education levels, and in turn benefit both socially and economically from the full integration of all citizens.



More commitment to leadership in the area of diversity has been displayed by the organizations that attended the sessions. For example, The Abbotsford Fire Rescue Service will be preparing to offer a Fire-Fighter pre-employment program to Métis students.

The project team assessed the initial impact this program had on the business environment and marketplace climate of Abbotsford is preliminary. The next logical step is to bridge awareness and learning into concrete action points for small and medium employers to be able to hire and retain immigrant professionals and demonstrate its business value. Investing in these areas will lead towards sustaining the gains made with the business community and creating champions within the sector.



Intercultural Hubs: A Gathering Space for Diversity

The lack of gathering spaces for people to congregate, share, and forge friendships at the community level has been a concern for years amongst community leaders. The establishment of two Intercultural Hubs in Abbotsford is a step in the right direction using existing civic facilities to meet community programming needs of neighbourhoods.

In February 2011, the ABC project through the City of Abbotsford's leadership opened up the Matsqui Recreation Centre as the first Intercultural Hub of Abbotsford. Being a recreation facility in the West of Abbotsford community, it is a perfect fit to receive hundreds of residents daily for fitness, pool, and recreation programs, including diversity programs and activities provided in-kind by Abbotsford Community Services.



Following this development, another concrete step for the ABC project is to offer free use of hub space to ethno-cultural communities and groups for their activities and events that are related to the goals of increased inclusive, intercultural and interfaith opportunities for all. Ethno-cultural and diverse communities such as Mobilizing Independent Rural African Initiatives (MIRADI), Fraser Valley Youth Society, South Sudanese Humanitarian Society and other associations have used this space on a regular basis.

Their participation increased the opportunities for their groups to access City's services and programs, grants and other benefits and increased capacity to become more integrated into the mainstream social life of the community with new partners and allies from community members and residents. In the long run, these opportunities will strengthen their organizational capacities to address their needs as ethno-cultural groups negotiating for their rights and entitlements within the broader community.

In December 2012, Abbotsford School District's opened up the Eugene Reimer Middle School as the second Intercultural Hub in West Abbotsford. The Abbotsford School District also opened up a community garden to support the Hub in its engagement with the residents and neighbourhoods in the area. It is a model for other schools to be community spaces for diversity, multiculturalism, and engaged citizenship.

The Eugene Reimer hub programs reached out to Abbotsford Visitors on extended stay needing English as Second Language (ESL) support on a regular basis. It also reached out to the South Asian Seniors/grandparents at the West Abbotsford who are greatly in need of opportunities for socializing and learning about Canadian lifestyle and healthy living. The programs begin to address the scant services and attention to these sectors in Abbotsford community programming.

"A third place is a social space that incorporates elements of a library, bookstore, gallery and meeting place. It is an alternative notion of a cultural centre. A public space to go and think and be creative in downtime. It is a place for inspiration. It is a place for all cultures to merge and share their stories"

- Imagine Abbotsford, 2008



It is a model for other schools to be community spaces for diversity, multiculturalism, and engaged citizenship.

Public Engagement and Outreach

In 2012, the ABC Project won the 'Best in Community Outreach' Award for its outstanding work on community outreach and engagement. The ABC Project marketing and collaterals reflected diversity and inclusion with a major outreach to diverse communities in 6 languages (Punjabi, Chinese, German, Korean, Spanish & French) via marketing collaterals such as a website, flyers, posters, and banners.

The slogan "Connecting Cultures, Building Communities" and the call to action "Lets Talk" encouraged authentic conversations and connections to bridge the silos and isolation experienced by some in our community. The project Website featured 7 prominent diversity champions from the community that serve as inspiration and offer solutions to many diversity challenges facing Abbotsford.

The project collaterals have been distributed throughout the City, they continue to be available at the recreation facilities, and community partners. Outreach to all residents have been made during major community events (i.e. Diwali 2011, Sikh Temple Centennial celebration 2011, Abbyfest 2011, Vaisakhi 2011, Agrifair 2011, Nagar Kirtan 2011 and 2012 and oral presentations to relevant agencies inviting dialogue, support, and engagement.



With an effective brand, the outreach work for the project significantly increased the pool of volunteers dedicated to this initiative and brought attention to the diversity agenda within the socio-political environment of the City.



Summary of Emergent Practices

The Twinning approach in schools and faith communities, diversity leadership for businesses and the establishment of Intercultural Hubs are important positive developments in the multiculturalism of the City of Abbotsford.

In communities such as Abbotsford where the urban/rural, new/old neighbourhoods, secular/religious, and other contradictions coexist in a fragile state, this initiative is needed to close the gap caused by the demographic and geographic divide and socio-cultural dynamics between immigrant communities and residents and begin to explore the prospect towards a shared future.

The leadership of the municipal government in proactively providing management to this growing diversity is a strong indicator for the appreciation and understanding of its contribution to economic and social development of the Abbotsford society.

It is important to recognize that there are many breakthroughs and significant milestones that this project achieved. Many 'firsts' include:

- This is the first time that the City of Abbotsford has held and managed a diversity project with a full time Diversity Coordinator position. While other larger municipalities in the province and all over Canada has invested in their role as municipal leaders in immigrant integration and social cohesion, the City of Abbotsford as the municipal government and employer of choice is just beginning to strategically position itself in the fore front of diversity management and leadership. While duty-bound to showcase commitment and innovation to this project, it is only worthwhile to recognize the simultaneous internal learning processes in the City's internal corporation that is taking place.
- This is the first time that ethno-cultural communities are given free use of MRC Intercultural Hub for their programs and events that are related to building intercultural and interfaith connections. Immigrant groups from Swahili-speaking communities, South Sudanese, Latinos used the intercultural hub space to launch their activities and programs in Abbotsford. Accessing the MRC hub space also provided opportunities to access recreation and community programs that are at low costs or free.



- The City of Abbotsford organized the first Aboriginal Day celebration in 2012 with the support and cooperation of various First Nations communities and organizations, increased the outreach to the First Nations communities with regard to cross-cultural agenda and brought First Nations into the multicultural priorities of the City of Abbotsford.
- Adapting the twinning model proved to be a significant learning curve for the project implementers. It was an assured approach to start learning from the success of the UK model but with adaptation was made to suit to the contexts of Abbotsford community.
 - This is also the first time that schools in East and West Abbotsford are twinned together to explore opportunities for building friendship and familiarity with the cultural and religious diversities of Abbotsford. The indirect impact to parents and caregivers cannot be discounted in terms of increased understanding of the importance of intercultural skills for their children and positive reinforcements to be nurtured at home.
 - This is the first time that some of the deeper interactions between faith communities have been cultivated because of the faith twinning program and despite the resistance from within and external to these institutions, a critical mass of support swelled consistently at various times.
 - This is also the first time that business communities have participated in the diversity training and awareness-building program that have provided best practices in the areas of hiring for diversity, media, marketing and communications, organizational development, and economic equity and prosperity. Earlier efforts were futile to convince local enterprises to become social and economic integrators of the newcomer immigrants in Abbotsford through business integration.



Constraints and Persistent Challenges

While Abbotsford is just beginning to see the expanded role of non-traditional immigrant-serving organizations such as the City of Abbotsford in creating opportunities towards greater integration of newcomer immigrants, it is most beneficial when diversity is considered as an investment for sustainability, a long-term outcome for future generations to enjoy and share together.

- There is considerable acknowledgement and commitment to Abbotsford's diversity as demonstrated when City Council passed the 2010 Diversity Policy but this commitment to diversity has yet to be transformed into an actual set of programs or services benefiting residents on an on-going basis and mainstreaming diversity perspectives in all of the vital corporate functions of the municipal government.
- Integration is a two-way street. New immigrants to be successful in their new life need support from the community to adapt well while the community needs education and skills development to be inclusive and welcoming neighbours and citizens. The newcomers and the community residents are equally obligated to adapt to one another as a prerequisite for living harmoniously. This integration is an on-going call to action, both a process and an outcome.
- Most of the minority faiths in Abbotsford have overwhelmingly supported the faith twinning and interfaith dialogues despite the lack of participation from the Christian organizations. This limited operationalization of the program has challenged the mainstreaming of the interfaith work in addressing issues regarding misunderstanding/misinformation between faiths and issues of prejudice, racism and discrimination in general with the broader community.
- The businesses are being made aware of their role in immigration and settlement of new immigrants especially in the area of recruiting skilled immigrants in our community. While majority has not felt the same business imperative as businesses in larger centres, Abbotsford's growing enterprises will require a stronger emphasis, support, and attention from the leading business networks and the municipal government to guide the way forward.
- The spatial segregation between East and West Abbotsford residents is also marked by socio-economic inequities related to disparities in income and economic opportunities, family size, educational attainment, access to information, services, and programs,



It is most beneficial when diversity is considered as an investment for sustainability, a long-term outcome for future generations to enjoy and share together.

voice, representation and leadership in governance and decision-making processes at the municipal and neighborhood levels and frequent encounters noted underlying by religious and racial tensions and indifference. While short-term settlement choices were made, the long-term implications of this segregation are counterproductive to societal goals. It is imperative that the City takes a leadership role in creating city urban spaces that are designed for mixed uses which are vital to forging informal connections at the functional everyday level where residents shop, play, enjoy art, and create communities or mini-hubs in various sections of the city.

For smaller communities that are interested to adapt the Twinning model, here are some of lessons learned:

- It is important that parameters and scope of twinning are defined from the beginning. This will vary depending on what type of institutions/organizations will be involved in the program, the duration of the program, and would be useful to identify some exit strategies at the onset of the program.
- Because this is an institutional approach, executives and leaders of the organization involved should be challenged take it further in the next future interactions and create activities based on their existing needs and priorities rather than just 'wants or good-to do.' This will let the program sustain and regenerate itself being more internalized within which will be benefited from the loosening role of the project holders and mediators.
- When starting out from scratch, it is essential to build support about twinning from the rest of the constituencies in the community. Leaders and gatekeepers are less reluctant to be part of initiatives that they fully understood to be important and relevant in their current context. Welcome inquiries and critical voices, they may have.
- In due time, the project agency can move from a facilitator to a consolidator-consolidating gains and encouraging partners to move beyond words of solidarity to acting out compassion through local projects that supports the needs of their neighbourhoods.

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General Recommendations

The role of municipal government as a facilitator and connector for existing services and programs to be accessible, inclusive, and equitable for newcomer immigrants cannot be overemphasized. There is a trend towards a more coordinated approach to immigration, settlement and integration at the local grassroots level where community expertise and knowledge abound. Harnessing these assets for quicker and impactful efforts will yield more dividends. Successful integration and retention of diverse work force and cultural animators will support the on-going economic development initiatives of the businesses and the municipal government in the long run.

1. The City of Abbotsford on behalf of the community signs on to the UNESCO Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination and involve all the existing networks and coalitions to continue the work on building inclusive communities free from xenophobia, racism, and discrimination at all levels of the community. Joining this community of practice in a way recognizes the many pioneering work in the community with regard to anti-racism work in recent decades.
2. That the City of Abbotsford continue to document best practices in the area of municipal leadership and integration and showcase what is possible within the mandate of local municipality with the collaboration and partnership from the immigrant-serving organizational and ethno-cultural groups.
3. That the City of Abbotsford and community partners increase support to the growing numbers of ethno-cultural communities in both formal and informal groupings in terms of access to services and programs, active citizenship and engagement, and neighbourhood/community leadership capacity-building whenever possible. Groups have emerged from the last five years will require further support towards organizational development in order to successfully serve their constituencies' needs in a collective manner, articulating and negotiating for their groups' interests and contributions with the broader public and with the municipal government.
4. The potential for young people to be catalyst for social cohesion can never be highlighted enough. Young people can bridge the linguistic, generational, and cultural divides between new immigrants and the mainstream residents in Abbotsford. Future programming should focus on more intentional twinning between youths in newcomer immigrant families and Canadian-born youths.
5. Nowadays, there are opportunities for organizations and agencies working on multiculturalism, diversity, and integration and interfaith to meet regularly to share, dialogue, and learn from the experiences on the ground, to evaluate practices and

secure knowledge of the trends and situations that will be useful for grants, policy making, and further development of services and programs. A one-stop-shop for information coming from all immigrant serving organizations in Abbotsford will be beneficial. There is also the trend towards building a network of networks, composed of community services organizations and a broader agencies and service providers related to health, education, civic empowerment, economic development, community safety, labour sector, transportation, housing, that have strong implications to present and future immigration and settlement outcomes for new immigrants to Abbotsford.

Conclusion

The City of Abbotsford is facing countless possibilities and opportunities to manage its growing diversity challenges of being a multi-faith, multicultural, and multigenerational community. Despite its initial uncertainty in the venture to articulate and define its diversity and multiculturalism agenda at the City level, the Abbotsford Building Connections Project is no doubt a timely and much needed City-wide intervention supported by strong community partnership and of countless volunteer individuals, organizations, and community groups. The City agency has amplified diversity and inclusion in the mainstream spaces leading to increased public attention to the needs of ethno-cultural communities and increased services and programs towards integration and cross-cultural harmony.

The community of Abbotsford has been well served by the ABC Project. Many arenas and spheres of influence have enhanced their diversity quotient and others have started to build it. Impact to the average person/child in the City is felt directly as well as intangible benefits through messaging and statements of claim made by the various partner groups. One of the most significant impacts of ABC Project has been the partnership model for delivery and evaluation. Four agencies came together to build a community response to diversity bringing unique strengths and assets to the table in a completely collaborative and co-operative manner with shared goals and common objectives. The partners also provided critical and timely feedback to the City through the Diversity Coordinator to develop a robust program with far-reaching impact. The three year Project has seen growth in response in many sectors and has been able to identify areas of resistance for future work.

The Abbotsford community has a long way to go to embrace diversity for its fullest positive potential.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following individuals who have supported, advocated for and implemented ABC project with the partners from 2010 to 2013.

- Abbotsford Community Services
- Manpreet Grewal
- Alison Gutrath
- Danica Denommessimme
- Danielle Nazarewich
- Kam Aujla
- Coby Piazza
- Donna Lo
- Rimple Mohindra
- Dorra Arriola
- Albino Nyuol
- Houshang Deghan
- Ranni-Sangha Tollman
- Dardane Shushka
- Joo Namgung
- Vivian Jin
- Hien Phan
- Swinder Singh
- Gurcharan Dhillon

Abbotsford School District

- Andrea Senft
- Harry Edwards
- Joanne Neveaux
- Lorraine Santos
- Janice McKay
- May Chan
- Reg Gabriel
- Ryan Colbert
- Dave Stephen
- Jasbir Singh
- Jatinder Singh Brar
- Kanta Naik
- John Sutherland

University of the Fraser Valley Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies

- Satwinder Bains
- Catherine Dawson
- Sharanjit Sharma

City of Abbotsford

- Mayor and Council
- City Manager's Office
- Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department
- Health Abbotsford
- Community Development
- Volunteerism
- Arts & Heritage
- Marketing and Communications Department
- Economic Development & Planning Services
- Human Resources Department
- Strategic Planning and Business Improvement
- Engineering and Regional Utilities
- Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, Abbotsford Social Development Advisory Committee

Former City staff:

- Don Luymes
- Grace Stein
- Karen Sinclair
- Steve Kellock
- Monica Affleck
- The late Mark Taylor

City staff:

- Rebecca Roberts
- Heidi Enns
- Reuben Koole
- Jenny Kump
- Linda Arnoldussen
- Denise Rubner
- Lana Humeinik
- Colleen Birnie
- Colleen Spitzig
- Tracy Boudreau
- Danielle Millin
- Karen Steinebach
- James Arden
- Jenny Thornton
- Sheila Porlier
- Barb Roberts
- Chrissy Borseth

- Yue Chi-Cheng
- Navi Khatar
- Sue Federspiel
- Dino Tsembelis
- Paul Brar

ABC Project Volunteers

- Joy McGill
- Preet Dhaliwal
- Trevor Kavanagh
- Claire Jensen
- Jacqueline Klassen
- Firouzeh Bahraini
- Liz Henderson
- Bonnie Hanson
- Eric Kuo
- Shu-Chen Su
- Poonam Mehta
- Meeta Kaur
- Patricia Dominguez
- Pidiong Laigo
- Dominic Polioti
- Chitose Schaal
- Amol Chahal
- Isha Bode
- Atul Sriram
- Bukky Oladeji
- Harleen Jandu
- Adona Hamto
- Susan Bright
- Adrian Bontuyan
- Yashreet Kumedan
- Anas Najim
- Sol Suyamin
- Baraa Saffaa
- Vince Dimaano
- Mohammed Najim
- Gaurav Raikhy
- Bushra Al-Wahab
- Balwinder Dosanjh
- Simran Dosanjh
- Geena Dhaliwal
- Kalisa Jackson
- Navdeep Sidhu
- Sharukh Khan
- Manjot Gill

- Kriti Minakshi
- Elena Giuchici
- Amar Sriram
- Crystal Kellosalmi
- Brittney Kellosalmi
- Gurdeep Sidhu
- Dixi Reeve
- Anureet Grewal
- Nitu Mankatala
- Kristopher Eriksen
- Teresa Gerena

We would like to thank the following organizations for supporting the activities and programs of ABC Project:

- Aboriginal Access Services, UFV
- Abbotsford Airport
- Abbotsford Dance Center
- Abbotsford Downtown Business Association
- Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee
- Abbotsford Filipino Community
- Abbotsford Fire Rescue
- Abbotsford Food Bank
- Abbotsford Islamic Centre
- Abbotsford Police Department
- Abbotsford Works
- Abbyfest Interfaith Dialogue
- Abbotsford News
- Abbotsford Police Department
- Abbotsford Tourism
- Abbotsford Youth Commission
- Agrifair
- Baha'i Assembly of Abbotsford
- Bakerview Ecodairy
- BC Blueberry Council
- Big Brothers, Big Sisters
- Canaccord Wealth Management
- Canadian Cancer Society
- Canadian Institute for the Blind (CNIB)
- CIVL 101.7 FM Radio
- Click Media Works (Rick Rake)
- Communications Department, UFV
- Communitas

- Community Futures
- Correctional Institute
- Cycle Fusion Dance Group
- Cycling for Diversity
- Dasmesh Punjabi School
- Dorjechang Buddhist Center
- Employers' Advisers Office
- Employment Mentor's Program, Abbotsford Community Services
- ESL for Living and Working, Abbotsford School District
- Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society
- Fraser Valley Conservancy Society
- Fraser Valley Human Dignity Coalition
- Fraser Valley Regional Library-Clearbrook
- Fraser Valley Ukrainian Society
- Fraser Valley Women's Institute
- Fraser Valley Indo-Canadian Business Association
- Gateways Learning Centre
- Gladwin Language Centre
- Gladwin United Church
- Gurdwara Baba Banda Singh Bahadar Society
- Gurdwara Sahib Kalgidhar Darbar Society
- International Students Program, UFV
- Investors Group
- Japanese Language School
- Japanese Nihongo Center
- Kerhoff Technologies
- Khalsa Diwan Society/Gur Sikh Temple
- Korean Business Association
- Langley Association for Community Living
- Latino Association/Claudia Diaz
- McDonalds
- Mexican Folklore Dance Group
- MIRADI- Mobilizing Independent Rural African Development Initiatives
- Mission/Abbotsford Times
- MSA Museum Society
- MRC Seniors AOAP Branch # 69
- Multifaith Chaplaincy, Abbotsford Regional Hospital
- Nexus Church
- Paradigm Ministries
- Peace Lutheran Church
- Prospera Credit Union
- Political Science Department, UFV
- Punjabi Patrika
- Punjabi Culture Club of Abbotsford
- Race and Anti-racism Network, UFV
- Rosstown Farms and Natural Foods
- Sada Virsa Sada Gaurav Bhangra Club Abbotsford
- Safeway Abbotsford
- Settlement Workers in Schools (S.W.I.S.)
- Sevenoaks Shopping Centre
- Simply Organic Marketing
- Spiritual Care Unit, Abbotsford Regional Hospital
- SuccessBC
- Sumas First Nation
- The 5and2 Ministries
- The Church of Jesus Christ's Latter Day Saints, Abbotsford Stake
- The Reach Gallery Museum
- Tribaleyez Dance
- The Fae Bellydance
- Uzume Taiko Drumming Group
- UFV International
- Vanderpool Food Group
- Volunteer Abbotsford
- Youth Buddy Program, Abbotsford Community Services

Materials Developed

Videos

- School Twinning: Pen Pal day with flashmob
<http://www.abcdiversity.ca/Twinning-of-Schools>
- Nexus twin with Sikhs
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ-5QUuAPCM>
- Feeding the Multitudes: Khalsa Diwan Society, Nexus Church & 5and2 Ministries
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpbdL6_7WGY
- Faith twinning: Bahais, Buddhists, Sikhs
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EANM72QzOpk>

Materials

- School Twinning Activities Guide for Teachers
- Faith Twinning Parameters of Engagement
- Diversity Networking Series 6 Session Modules and Information Kits for Participants
- Cultural Cuisine for Connections Recipes
- International Games Hand-outs for Trainers & Groups
 - Run, jump, Throw and Multicultural Games/Equipments
- Intercultural Hub Application Process
- Intercultural Hub Mural 'Shared Moon' Artistic Rendition
- Youth Mentoring Program brochure & curriculum
- Directory of Ethno-Cultural Associations in Abbotsford
- ABC project website and 51 blogs
- Leaflets in 7 languages; brochures of various programs and activities
- 12 Quarter Reports and Final Public Report: Emergent Practices
- Diversity Surveys for City of Abbotsford Staff
- Final Evaluation Report

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Credits

Author: Med R. Manzanal

Editorial & Design: Marketing and Communications Department

Original Photography: Abbotsford Building Connections Project

Published by

City of Abbotsford

Parks, Recreation and Culture
32315 South Fraser Way
Abbotsford, V2T 1W7

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The Abbotsford Building Connections Project was made possible by funding through the Government of Canada Citizenship and Immigration Canada Multiculturalism Program.



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Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada

The Abbotsford Building Connections Project was generously supported by the City of Abbotsford, Abbotsford Community Services, Abbotsford School District, and the University of the Fraser Valley Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies.