



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Small Cheques Add Up to Big Impact: Victoria Residents Help Newcomer Families Invest in Climate Action

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA – Less than 10 days ago, the world watched as President Obama delivered a history-making inaugural speech that infused hope to a people and planet in crisis. Obama made hope the focus his campaign and proved that any contribution, however small, can add up to a make big difference. That is exactly what a group of Victoria residents did with their \$100 Climate Action Dividend cheques. They pooled their money to form The Great Rebate Eco-Challenge (GREC) and donated the funds to the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society's Multicultural Environmental Education Program to help newcomers get a head start in climate action.

VIRCS' Multicultural Environmental Education Program (MEEP) is a unique initiative that helps newcomers to make sustainable choices as they adapt to their new lives in Victoria. "Climate change affects everyone, so we want newcomers to understand their role in making a positive impact on the environment," says Carlos Gaete, Executive Director of VIRCS. MEEP Program Coordinator Gagan Leekha is thrilled about the partnership with GREC. "Newcomers face many barriers such as challenges with language, employment, housing, transportation and community participation. Our program is unique in that it helps newcomers overcome these barriers with sustainability in mind."

GREC raised nearly \$2000 from individual and in-kind donations. The money went towards eco-friendly prizes that meet newcomers' basic settlement needs and that also support their commitment to positive action. Seven families are the lucky recipients of a new bicycle (with helmet, lights and lock), free organic food delivery for six months, and healthy backyard, healthy home and healthy baby packages. Each prize comes with a free educational workshop from the program's community partners, including *The Good Planet Company*, *The Mothering Touch* and the *Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre*.

"Our clients demonstrated a genuine need as well as a commitment to climate action," says MEEP Communications Coordinator Rosalyn Cua, who emphasized the importance of individual actions. "GREC was a small group of individuals who set an example and inspired seven families, and these seven families can inspire even more people. At this stage we can no longer simply rely on government or policies for change. Each individual action, however small, counts. We think it's important to recognize and remove barriers to action – and, like President Obama, spread the message of hope and responsibility for our planet."

The prizes will be awarded at a special community event on January 29, 2009 from 4:00 – 6:00 pm at the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society. The Centre is located on the Third Floor of 637 Bay Street (on Government Street).

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About the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS)

VIRCS is a non-profit organization founded in Victoria, BC, Canada, in 1989 by three former refugees. Our mission is to assist in the settlement and adjustment of immigrants and refugees in Canada and to provide services designed to increase the newcomer's participation in Canadian society by assisting the newcomer to overcome barriers.

Our multicultural staff served 3,000 immigrants, refugees, new Canadian citizens, and visible minorities from all over the world in 2008. We provide our clients with Employment Counseling, Settlement Services, English Language Training, Youth Groups, Volunteer Opportunities and Environmental Education to help them integrate into life in Canada.

For more information visit: www.vircs.bc.ca



About our Multicultural Environmental Education Program (MEEP)

The goal of MEEP is to engage the multicultural community and to inspire environmental action through the sharing of ideas and resources. We envision our multicultural family at VIRCS to be informed about sustainable choices here in Canada and to take collective action that supports a healthy environment for future generations.

The Multicultural Environmental Education Program is generously funded by Environment Canada's EcoAction Community Funding Program, Vancouver Foundation, Victoria Foundation, Catherine Donnelly Foundation and the City of Victoria.



About The Great Rebate Eco-Challenge (GREC)

GREC was formed by a group of citizens in Victoria in the Spring of 2008 after the Province of BC announced that each British Columbian would receive a \$100 Climate Action Dividend in the mail to invest in reducing their carbon usage. Members of GREC decided to pool their money and to donate it to families in the form of prizes that would give them a head start in reducing their personal greenhouse gas consumption. A few months later, the group decided to partner with the Multicultural Environmental Education Program with Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Center Society (VIRCS) to help newcomer families invest in climate action.

For more information, visit: www.thegreatrebateecochallenge.blogspot.com