

## Opening doors for new Canadians

### Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Society benefits all of us



Founded in November of 1989 by three former refugees, the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society has been helping immigrants, refugees, new Canadian citizens and visible minorities settle and adapt to their new lives in Greater Victoria for more than 20 years.

The programs and services available at the Centre are broad in scope and purpose.

Services for newcomers include settlement and adjustment assistance so clients can become independent and contributing members of the community. English as a Second Language classes for adult immigrants, refugees and international visitors are also offered.

The Employment Transitions and Coaching Program offers help with finding work or skills training. Clients receive assistance with job searches, accessing federal programs and services and one-on-one guidance. The year-long Skills Connect Project helps clients find work in their professional field that matches their education, skills and experience.

By matching adult newcomers with established community members, the Centre's Cultural Bridging Host Project offers an opportunity for friendship and support. This helps to bridge the gap between cultures and provides the basis for fostering friendships, multicultural understanding and networking opportunities.

The Victoria Foundation recently made a grant to the Centre's Multicultural Environmental Education Program, a unique project that provides educational opportunities to new immigrants in order to provide a better understanding and awareness of the environment.

The Multicultural Environmental Education Program's mission is to bring together and support newcomers and

the wider multi-cultural community in making sustainable choices for a healthy planet.

The Centre realized that many newcomers were concerned about climate change but had little or no access to information or resources to help them understand their role in making a positive impact on the environment. The program connects newcomers with the Centre's community partners – organizations specializing in health and the environment – that provide education and support in various areas of sustainable living.

As a pioneer in multicultural environmental education, the Centre has successfully built partnerships with local charitable environmental organizations, eco-friendly businesses, funders and most importantly engaged Victoria's multicultural community in environmental education and action.

Some of the activities and learnings to date include: educational workshops and outings, an office cooling party with Sierra Club BC and a canoe trip to Elk Lake with ESL students and CRD Parks.

Last year, the Centre achieved a new goal by successfully holding a Zero Waste Open House. Leading by example, from event preparation to clean-up, the Centre reduced the amount of waste produced at its open house and recycled or composted 100 per cent of what was possible!

In carrying out these exciting programs many benefits have been realized not only by the Centre's clients, but by fellow organizations and the wider Victoria community.

Financial support of the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Society is key to its on-going success. Find out more about helping to ease the path for international newcomers to Victoria by calling 250-361-9433 or visiting [www.vircs.bc.ca](http://www.vircs.bc.ca).



The Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society's Multicultural Environmental Education Program offers educational opportunities for new immigrants to learn more about the environment.

Since 1936, the Victoria Foundation's permanent endowment has had the power to connect people who care with causes that matter. If you wish to make a difference in your community – one that has lasting impact, start here. Call Sandra Richardson, CEO for information at 250.381.5532. [www.victoriafoundation.bc.ca](http://www.victoriafoundation.bc.ca)



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