

Fostering community and developing networks: Intercultural service learning



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Project Partners

ActionDignity
Filipinos Rising for Inclusion and Equity to Nurture Democracy (FRIENDS)

Funder



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Project Background

Fostering community and developing networks: Intercultural service learning is a two-year project funded by the Government of Alberta. In partnership with Action Dignity, this project aims to explore new ways to bring together skilled immigrants and community organizations.

Project newsletters will report on progress and share updates. The next newsletter will also present key concepts and highlight how this work fosters a symbiotic relationship between newcomers and community organizations.

Project Update

The first half of this project has seen the development of the Intercultural Service Learning course, which was piloted in Winter 2023. Throughout and following the delivery of the first pilot, a co-creation team of learners and community organization representatives has met regularly to review findings and share perspectives about Service Learning.

Pilot 1:

An initial cohort of 8 learners actively engaged in classroom learning activities, Service Learning placements, and critical reflection. Seven of them also participated in co-creation.

The learners enrolled in a 15-week full time course to improve language skills and intercultural awareness. They also engaged in group Service Learning activities like Small Acts of Kindness, in which the class went into the community at Bow Valley College and the area nearby to present people with affirming messages and small gifts. The class also volunteered as a group at the Drop-In Centre and gathered donations for the Good Neighbour store. During the last part of the course, the learners had their individual Service Learning placements in two community organizations doing various tasks, while continuing to receive training and support in class.



Through these activities, the learners not only improved their English proficiency, but also had the chance to connect with their classmates, instructors, and the organization employees they worked with. Additionally, they learned more about how to effectively integrate into the Canadian workplace and building their professional network.

As developmental evaluation is used in this project, learner feedback was collected during pilot 1, and some revisions will be made to the program accordingly for pilot 2, which will take place in Fall 2024.

The Benefits of Intercultural Service Learning

By Helena Shoraj

This structured Service Learning program for professional and skilled immigrants is designed to provide opportunities for newcomers to make community connections and gain experience in Canadian workplaces, all while improving language and intercultural communication. Learner participants benefit from the following:

Community Connection: Service Learning brings newcomers together with the broader community by providing information and access to different resources. In many cases, they would otherwise be unable to connect to these resources due to limited English language proficiency, local knowledge, and connections.

Workplace Experience: AAISA (2021) underscores the importance of labour market integration through internships, practicums, and job placements for immigrants, coupled with training for both newcomers and employers, mentorship, and one-on-one coaching. As such, Service Learning is structured to connect newcomers to meaningful placements in a variety of workplaces.

Language Skills Development: Bow Valley College newcomer learners with professional, vocational, or educational skills will improve their language proficiency, giving them a better chance to succeed in Alberta's workplaces.

Intercultural Communication Skills: Research (Deeb & Bauder, 2015) shows that learning and employing intercultural communication skills helped professionally skilled newcomers realize their economic potential and move into better paid and managerial positions. This component of the course helps learners understand and integrate better into their Service Learning placements and Albertan society as a whole.



Project Partner – ActionDignity

ActionDignity is a Calgary non-profit organization that has a long-standing relationship with the Applied Research Team in the School of Global Access at Bow Valley College. Their mission, to create transformational changes in the community and society by collaborating with racialized, ethnocultural and equity seeking groups aligns well with this project. ActionDignity aspires to bring to life their vision of a Calgary society that is just and equitable for all by respecting diversity, social justice, equity, collaboration, democratic participation, and active citizenship. ActionDignity is actively engaged in Service Learning placements and co-creation, where they share valuable insights through the lens of their community organization.

References

- Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA). (2021). *ASIP stakeholder engagement report*. <https://aaisa.ca/research/asip-stakeholder-engagement-report/>
- Deeb, S., & Bauder, H. (2015). Breaking through the glass ceiling: Intercultural communication and the career experiences of skilled immigrant managers. In *Migrant Capital* (pp. 48-63). Palgrave Macmillan.