

VICTORIA IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE CENTRE SOCIETY

## 2012/13 Annual Report



637 Bay St., 3rd Floor  
Victoria, BC V8T 5L2

Tel: (250) 361-9433 | Fax: (250) 361-1914  
Email: [info@vircs.bc.ca](mailto:info@vircs.bc.ca)

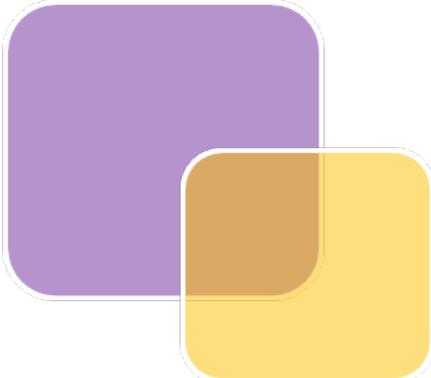
“

## VIRCS's Mission Statement

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.

”





# VIRCS's 2012/2013 Board of Directors

**Elvira Lopez – President**

**Nancy Hum – Acting President**

**Anselme Hategekimana – Co-Treasurer**

**Melanie Murray – Co-Treasurer**

**Catherine Kamau - Secretary**

**Miguel Espinosa – Director-at-large**

**Aaron Hall - Director-at-large**

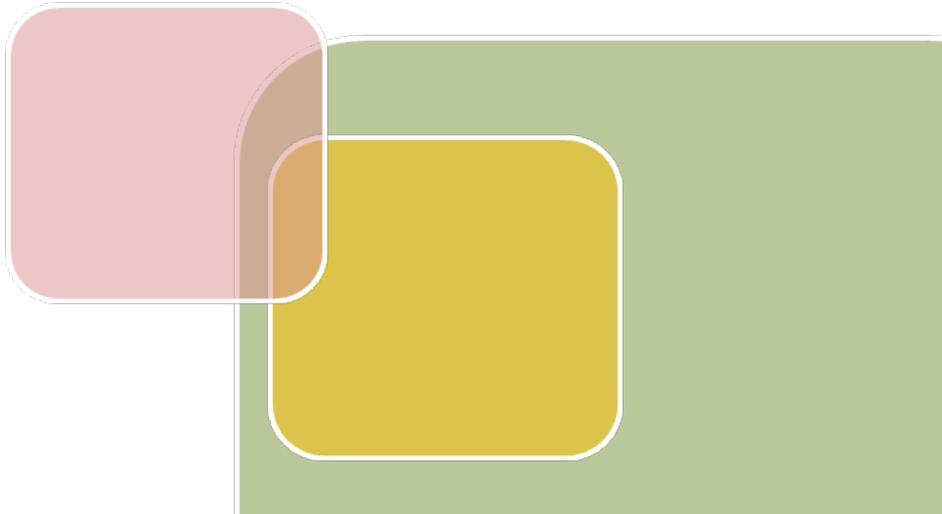
**Marie Morrison - Director-at-large**

**Zachy Olorunjowon - Director-at-large**

**David Turner - Director-at-large**

**Yu Jun (David) Wang - Director-at-large**

**Tsehaye Haile Woldemenkeros - Director-at-large**



# Special Thanks to Our Funders and Donors

## ASPECT

*Citizenship and Immigration Canada  
Victoria Chinese Seniors Association  
CDI College  
Ministry of Social Development and Minister  
Responsible for Multiculturalism  
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
Royal Bank Uptown branch  
Vancouver Island Health Authority  
Island Savings  
Steven Nash Fitness World & Sports Club  
Island Farms  
Provincial Employees Community Fund  
Tomley's Market  
Canadian Cancer Society  
Country Grocer  
Saanich District of Saanich  
Galliano Conservancy Association  
Victoria Society of Chinese Performing Arts  
Viva Mexico Dance Society  
Government of BC Provincial Employees  
Community Fund  
WorkLink Employment Society  
Beacon Community Services  
The Ministry of Social Development and Social  
Innovation  
Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training,  
Immigrant Integration Branch  
Together Against Poverty Society  
District of Saanich  
Blanshard Community Centre  
Community Microlending Society*

*United Way Greater Victoria  
Sprott Shaw College  
Volunteer Victoria  
Costal Capital Savings  
University of Victoria  
City of Victoria  
Telus  
India Canada Cultural Association  
La Societe Francophone de Victoria  
Sara Spencer Foundation  
Horner Foundation  
Roberto Alberto  
Mrs Hereity Hadgu  
Ms. Lorraine Murray  
Dominic Butcher  
Dallas Gislason  
Leslie McGarry, Native Friendship Centre Liaison  
Gerald Pash, Citizenship Judge  
Murray Rankin, MP for Victoria  
Victoria READ Society  
South Island Dispute Resolution Centre  
Sonya Boya  
Mr Viet Tran  
Daniel Reeve  
Grace Stubblefield  
Mohsin Abbas  
Vessela Kostova  
Ross Flower  
John L. Fryer  
Emilia Rivas  
Diana Smith  
Charlayne Thornton-Joe, City Councillor*

Thanks also to the many individuals who  
made personal contributions to our  
society

# Table of Contents

President's Report-----	1
Executive Director's Report-----	3
Volunteer Program-----	4
Settlement Program-----	5
Enable Program-----	6
English as a Second Language -----	8
Skills Connect -----	9
Citizenship 101-----	10
EPBC-----	11



## President's Report Nancy Hum

Hello everyone: My name is Nancy Hum, President of VIRCS. On behalf of the Board of Directors, it gives me great pleasure to welcome each and every person who came out tonight for our AGM. I have derived a great deal of satisfaction and happiness in serving VIRCS, first as a director, then as Vice President and then President.

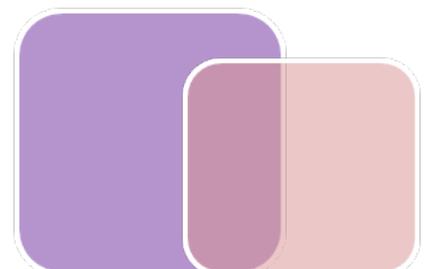
Does anyone remember that classic song by John Lennon, Imagine? If so, run the words through your mind. Now, imagine you are a stranger in a strange land. Imagine all the feelings and emotions that are flowing

through you: panic but excitement, hope but anxiety, stress but anticipation. You left behind family, friends, support, a livelihood, culture, language, familiar foods, everything that defined who you were and your place in the world. You arrive traumatized and now have to reinvent yourself, sometimes in a hostile environment. The Phoenix is a mythical bird that rises from the ashes to start a new life. It is a symbol of hope, rebirth, growth and change. At VIRCS we passionately believe every person can grow and change, and should have the opportunity to do so. It is our fervent hope that we may help in that process. The clients who come through our doors arrive with that hope of rebirth in a new land. Our mandate 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."

This AGM marks the Silver Anniversary of VIRCS. 25 years ago, three refugees, Viet, Hereity, and Carlos, founded VIRCS. That was their mandate and vision. Today we are still providing this community with quality services, and remain true to their focus.

This past year has been an exciting, stabilizing and energizing one. Like that energizing bunny, we keep going and going and going. Allow me to share a few of the highlights:

- Produced our first Newsletter, called DestiNations in April
- Had an extremely well-attended Open House in April
- Opened our drop-in daycare for clients
- Gave 5 new laptops to youth in our I Plan It Program
- Had a youth volunteer nominated for the United Way Youth Council Award
- Had one youth sponsored for a 10 day Tall Ship training
- Held 3 successful meetings at 3 different libraries to celebrate International Refugee Day. There were guest speakers and films and lively discussions. It was the only Refugee Day events registered by B.C. and were cited on the UNHR website.
- Held our 2nd Annual Multicultural Food and Health Fair
- Our employment programs are going very strongly, as are our Enable Youth programmes and camps
- Our two newest programs, Vulnerable Immigrant Population Program (VIPP) and Citizenship 101 are enormously successful and well attended.
- New software was created, a navigation/case manager website which will allow clients to register for programs online



Our ED and managers have worked tirelessly for very long days for 2,5 months sequestered in a room to draft three massive proposals in a tight deadline. The good news is that all three have been deemed eligible and we await rounds of negotiations in November

Finally, the piece de resistance--VIRCS has established an annual scholarship of \$25,000 to sponsor refugees/immigrants seeking help with education leading to professional qualifications. This scholarship is in memory and honour of two outstanding immigrant/refugees from Ethiopia, Dr. Elias Cheboud and Dr. Abebe Teklu. Both suffered tremendous hardships and had to obtain credentials all over again in Canada up to PHD level. They both achieved this task, but shortly after died prematurely, Dr. Teklu only in January. In their honour and to fulfill their dream, 4 students from Addis Ababa University and University for Peace, arrived in Victoria on September 17th. They will be here until December at U Vic.

Our work is expanding, our staff will be expanding to fit the new programs. As you can see, VIRCS is not only surviving, but is positively thriving. I am very proud of VIRCS, and of the work that has been done to help our clients. I am proud of the excellent and professional staff. I have worked with a great board of directors and a wonderful and visionary ED, and our many volunteers. VIRCS is a very special and unique place, and is home to many dedicated people who are passionate about their work and committed to the clients we serve. And it is home to many of our clients who return home to VIRCS as volunteers. I am proud to be a part of all this, and feel honoured to be able to share that pride with our members tonight.

Several months ago I took part in Temple Emmanuel's 150th anniversary. A Rabbi read this prayer, which really touched me. I asked him to end me a copy and he gave me his. I would like to share it with you.

#### A Prayer for Our Country

Our God, and God of our ancestors, in Whose image all people are created: receive with compassion our prayer on behalf of our country, its government, its leaders and its people.

Bless the rich tapestry of our Canadian diversity, the many strands of race and creed, of culture and language, that we may know the blessing of unity through diversity. May all the peoples of our country learn and teach the ways of their ancestors and share them proudly. May we honour with humility those who first dwelled on this land and learn from them the sacredness of earth and sky and water. Compassionate One: Teach your way of compassion. Bless and preserve the caring spirit of our country and the institutions that translate spirit into action. May "none ever be too many" and may we never turn away any peoples seeking refuge in our land of plenty. Banish hatred and despair and cynicism that peace and harmony may flourish among us. May our country be an influence for good within the family of nations, a voice of conscience and a leader in seeking peace and pursuing it.

And let us say: Amen

Nancy Hum  
VIRCS President



## **Executive Director's Report**

### **David Lau**

Dear Friends of VIRCS:

Eventful. 2013 has been a very eventful year in the life of VIRCS. In literal terms we held many events that were full of exuberance and celebration. From a programming standpoint, VIRCS has passed through some very difficult months and we have seen remarkable results from Sophia's and Emily's teams under the guidance of Sukhmeet Grewal. Skills Connect is outperforming every standard set by our contract. EPBC has absolutely flown and we need our funders to reassess ways that we can serve more clients; despite the problematic database that many other agencies blame for failure. Likewise our Settlement Services are offering a highly valuable VIPP program.

We have had good news as well. Both the Skills Connect and VIPP programs will be extended into 2014 and hopefully beyond. We needed this and I am personally grateful to the provincial and federal governments who were able to come to an understanding which allows us to continue these excellent services. Our Youth Programs continue to develop exciting opportunities for our younger clients with their particular needs and interests. VIRCS' Administrative staff are continue to develop clever ways to ensure VIRCS runs upon stable tracks.

Our staff went through a most trying time in 2013. Just as we were pulling our team back together the federal government decided to repatriate all settlement services in BC. On the Richter scale, this was a 9.0 event. It required staff management to pull together and re-invent all our services so they fit the federal government's orientation and requirements. We were fortunate to have the support of AMSSA, our umbrella organization currently under Lynn Moran's brilliant leadership. Our wonderful partner, Sprott-Shaw College loaned us a large room where we worked very intensely for three months. Our goal was to develop proposals that; utilize VIRCS' strengths, that identify growing gaps in services and, that partner or in the least harmonize with other local/regional services. We submitted three interconnected proposals ahead of schedule. As we negotiate we will discover what programs we will be able to rollout for 2014. We held out our hands to many organizations and largely got wonderful support on what will be very interesting services. I owe thanks to the optimism and significant intellects of Meghan Wankel, Sukhmeet Grewal, Viet Tran and Anna Chpilevaia. Let's hope the federal government will take extra care with our sector and not require us to do this for at least another two decades.

VIRCS' steadfast Board of Directors has facilitated all these efforts. I am thankful for their patient, committed and flexible oversight in all issues of governance and support they extended to me in 2013.

2014 will be a year of outreach and growth as VIRCS develops new partnerships and seeks new clients in new locales.

The vision of founders Viet, Hereity and Carlos remains the constant goal we continually walk towards. VIRCS is still here. We remain because much work needs to be accomplished in providing the best services we can to each newcomer who walks through our door; and, we have the heart to do that work.

## **VIRCS Volunteer Program**

### **Pam Devito**

Our volunteer program enhances VIRCS capacity to implement client-centred programs by providing volunteer services that contribute to the success of VIRCS mission.

The purpose of VIRCS volunteer program is to support the Centre's administrative functions and its programs; its primary goal is to provide community members, established residents, and newcomers with opportunities to participate in a meaningful way. A secondary goal is to promote the benefits of engaging as a volunteer at VIRCS to a broader base of local agencies / institutions, associations and businesses in addition to immigrant communities and the general public.



### **2012 Program Outcomes**

Through 2012's community recruitment events and word-of-mouth referrals, the volunteer program assessed and placed 267 volunteers according to their interests and expertise, in 6 program areas. While this is a decrease in total number of volunteers placed from the previous year (473 volunteers in 2011), the volunteer group profile continued to diversify along language, professional / educational background and areas of study characteristics.

An emerging trend in 2012 was an increase in requests from local college and university programs to place students in practicum / internship situations at VIRCS.

What are the 2012 highlights for the volunteer program?

- actively participated in 13 Community Outreach Events
- implemented 2012 Community Volunteer Income Tax Program
- supervised 5 practicum placements from local colleges and universities
- provided free immigration and family law consultations to clients / public

### **Our Volunteers**

Because of their commitment of time and expertise, our volunteers create daily experiences within VIRCS that personify the volunteer programs values of respect, inclusion, and collaborative action as well as amplifies the benefits of volunteerism and its ripple effect.

Who were our volunteers in 2012?

- 12 dedicated Board members and
- 267 skilled volunteers from
- 23 countries engaged and investing
- 13,526 hours of their time and expertise in
- 6 VIRCS program areas and
- 5 community projects

We celebrate the gifts each and every volunteer has brought to VIRCS but more importantly we appreciate their valuable participation in helping us fulfill our mission. Thank you!

## Settlement Team Update 2013 Meghan Wankel

Since October 2012 the VIRCS' Settlement Team has done an exceptional job implementing the provincially-funded Vulnerable Immigrant Populations Program, which is now referred to as the "Newcomer Wraparound Support Program (NWSP)." The NWSP offers a notably new approach to providing settlement services to newcomers facing overwhelming or complex barriers to settlement in Greater Victoria.



The predominant service approach utilized by our case managers is "Wraparound," which is characterized by a client-centred, strengths-based holistic support methodology that works effectively with immigrants and refugees facing significant integration barriers.

The process of NWSP development has been very exciting. The creative and dynamic programming we offered throughout 2012 reflected the individual desires and needs identified by participants themselves, while enabling participants to become independent and active members of their communities. Within the NWSP, one Program Coordinator, one Intake Coordinator, three Adult Wraparound Case Managers and one Youth Wraparound Case Manager continued to provide crucial holistic individualized case management for newcomer participants. Throughout the year staff continued to surpass targets established by the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, Immigrant Integration Branch.

VIRCS' successfully provided and expanded group workshops and sessions for specialized cohorts (youth, parents, women, men and seniors) on the following topics: cooking, psycho-social health, housing, poverty reduction, employment, computer skills, literacy and numeracy, legal advocacy, conflict management and mediation, yoga, moxabustion, acupuncture, family well-being, arts and culture, and life skills (including First Aid, WHMIS and FoodSafe accreditation). Over 100 clients benefited from fun-filled recreational and cultural field trips to Galliano Island (60 and Haliburton Farms). VIRCS' partnerships with key service delivery partners across Greater Victoria strengthened throughout 2012 through joint collaboration in providing optimal service delivery.

VIRCS' 2012 Multicultural Food Fair at CDI College was a resounding success, with more than 600 people in attendance! The fair featured over 30 interactive gastronomic, musical, cultural and health demonstrations and non-profit agencies. The fair effectively promoted mental and physical health, food security, local food sources and nutrition, while assisting newcomers in developing familiarity with Canadian food products and customs.

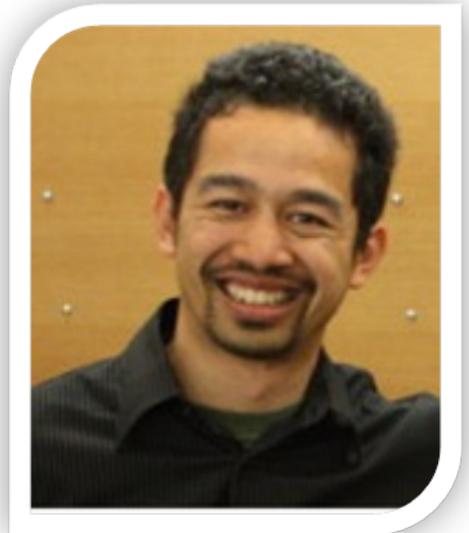
Over 80 children and families attended VIRCS' annual Children's Winter Celebration. Along with providing a pleasurable venue to integrate and participate in our exhilarating holiday festivity, the celebration featured delicious child-friendly food, arts and crafts, music, 50 give-away prizes, gift bags and a visit from Santa. VIRCS' Law Clinic expanded throughout 2012. On a weekly basis, three highly experienced lawyers continued to provide hundreds of VIRCS' clients with free 30-minute consultations, conveying information and advice on immigration matters and family law issues.

2012 also brought the development of VIRCS' licensed and beautifully designed child-minding space, which was completed with the assistance of generous volunteer supporters. VIRCS' provisions for high-quality child-minding services ensure that registered program participants can benefit from VIRCS' programming with greater ease.

## Enable Program Danny Tes /Anna Chpilevaia

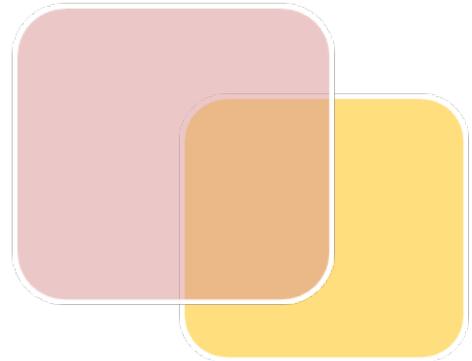


2012/13 was a year filled with new faces and successes for the Enable Program for Children and Youth, which offers programming and services to an average of 300 immigrant children, youth and families annually. Our goal is to assist and support newcomer children and youth to settle into their new community by providing programs that are designed to address their emotional, academic and social adjustment needs. The Enable Program Coordinator and support staff



continued to work closely with the clients' entire families to ensure they received adequate care and assistance. All services offered through the Enable Program were created in direct response to the needs identified by young newcomers and their families, as program staff continued to gather and respond to feedback. Enable services in 2012/13 included:

- Weekly Homework Club,
- One-on-One Tutoring Matches,
- Weekly Youth Activity Nights,
- Sparks,
- Adjustment Support Groups and,
- Youth Strides, our annual week-long summer camp.



Homework Club is a weekly service that runs throughout the academic year, from September to June. The program assists students with their academic integration into their new schools through individualized tutoring and homework help. Homework Club helps students aged 6-25 who are experiencing difficulties at any educational level with any subject matter. This service enhances students' scholastic performances, self-esteem and self-confidence. Homework Club participants meet weekly with qualified volunteer tutors. One-on-one tutoring is also offered for clients who desire more individualized approaches. Participants build friendships with peers, which reduces social isolation and strengthens their support networks in Greater Victoria.

Youth Activity Night provides a weekly opportunity that assembles participants aged 12-20 to unite in a safe space for fun and educational activities. The program runs throughout the academic year from September to June. Youth Activity Night enables newcomer youth to be themselves, make new friends and connect with their local communities. Activities mix arts and sports and include workshops, field trips and guest speakers who address issues such as diversity, conflict management, the environment and healthy ways of dealing with discrimination. As in previous years, participants continued to report an increase in confidence, sense of belonging and leadership skills, which are fundamental towards building positive changes within their families, schools and wider communities.

Both the Sparks program and the Adjustment Support Groups work in collaboration with the SWIS (Settlement Workers in Schools) to locate Elementary Schools with the highest concentration of newcomer children and offer two 10-week programs throughout the school year. The Sparks program for children uses games, art, stories and sports to help children practice their English, learn about Canadian culture and make friends. Lesson plans revolve around subjects of self-esteem, self-expression, healthy relationships and multiculturalism. The Adjustment Support Groups are facilitated by a certified therapist and provide a safe space for children to express themselves and process their feelings about their immigration process.

Youth Strides 2013 had 17 youth participants and 5 volunteer youth leaders. This year's camp was focused on creating a sense of belonging for newcomer youth. This was achieved by providing youth with engagement, empowerment and leadership opportunities. Youth used experiential learning approaches, such as storytelling, creating writing, music, drama, and dance, to explore various issues related to immigrating to Canada. These tactics engaged youth from diverse age groups, linguistic abilities and personal capabilities. Newcomer youth received training opportunities to build leadership skills that were then utilized in the supportive environment of camp. The training focused on teaching youth new tools for self-expression while engaging them in activities designed to foster trust and strengthen group dynamics, as well as life skills workshops provided by staff, youth leaders and guest facilitators. For many newcomers, camp is a life changing experience as they adjust to being in a new country. The camp alleviated the financial, cultural and linguistic barriers by creating an accessible outdoors experience. The camp provided a safe space for newcomer youth to process feelings of isolation, alienation and culture shock. Furthermore, the camp acted as gateway to other Enable Programs, to further assist youth in their emotional, social and academic adjustment and integration into Canadian society. Getting to know oneself, making new friends and gaining confidence are integral to becoming an active individual in society. The camp experience assisted youth in making positive changes in their communities every day in various ways.

The Enable Program has continued to grow and sustain its core programming with support from its community partners, supporters and funders. We would like to acknowledge the BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch, the United Way of Greater Victoria, Telus Community Board, Coast Capital Savings, the City of Victoria, The Horner Foundation and the Victoria Foundation. We would also like to thank all the volunteers, practicum students, contract partners and staff who made 2012 a great year for the Enable Program. Thank You!



## English as a Second Language

### Alexis and Kris ESL teachers

To complement our numerous services, we at VIRCS have been offering ESL classes to newcomers and immigrants for more than 15 years, during which time our staff have helped thousands of newcomers and Canadian citizens returning to school to upgrade their language skills. There have been changes over the years in the scheduling and focus of the classes, but the need for these classes remains unchanged. Language training provides an essential service for new Immigrants looking to further their career goals and find a greater sense of belonging and independence within Canadian society.

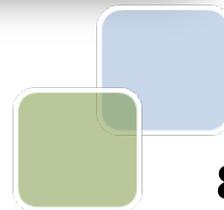
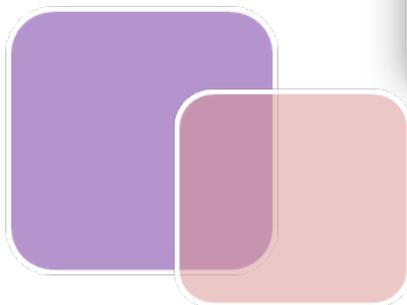
In **2013** we offered General English classes at two levels: beginner and intermediate. These classes ran Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 8:30-10:30 for beginners and 10:30-12:30 for clients with higher communication skills. The focus of the classes was communication. We give priority to immigrants and Canadian citizens for affordable lessons, but we also welcome international students to our sessions at a slightly higher fee-for-service basis. The General English classes are partially funded by the BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch, but participants also pay a small fee as a contribution to the program, with international students at a higher rate and permanent residents at a considerably lower rate. The other courses have been funded under various programs and participants channeled through our other branches. VIRCS ESL also assists with on-demand test preparation courses (IELTS), pronunciation workshops, a summer English language class for youth, writing workshops for working professionals and a conversation club open to all

Our participants are encouraged to engage in person-to-person interaction and friendship building in our small and friendly classes. Our teachers are qualified and experienced language facilitators, who fully understand the difficulties immigrants face and help clients overcome their inhibitions to speak and build strong language skills. Some major topics covered in our classes include transportation, health, relationships and everyday situations. In our English classes, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation topics are presented and consolidated through reading, writing, listening and speaking activities.

Volunteers contribute to all of the ESL programs at VIRCS. Our enthusiastic volunteers assist the teachers and clients in many ways. They provide one-on-one interaction, listening and speaking opportunities during courses, workshops and other sessions. They bring their own local experience and expertise in various fields. Some of these volunteers are educators themselves and help with marking homework and facilitating small group discussions. The English language training program wouldn't be the same without our dedicated team of volunteers, and our clients really appreciate the help they get from them.

Our clients come from all over the world and represent all walks of life. All of them have one goal in common: to learn English in order to enjoy greater personal and professional fulfillment. It is our hope to

continue to provide relevant, accessible, and pedagogically sound English language training into 2014 and beyond. At present, we are particularly optimistic about the future as in addition to the support of the BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch further funding has recently been proposed. We anticipate this funding will be used to strengthen and expand our existing programming in order to better meet our clients' English language needs while striving to locate new students who have difficulty accessing traditional classroom-based courses.



## Skills Connect Program – 2012/3 Sophia Sorensen Proctor

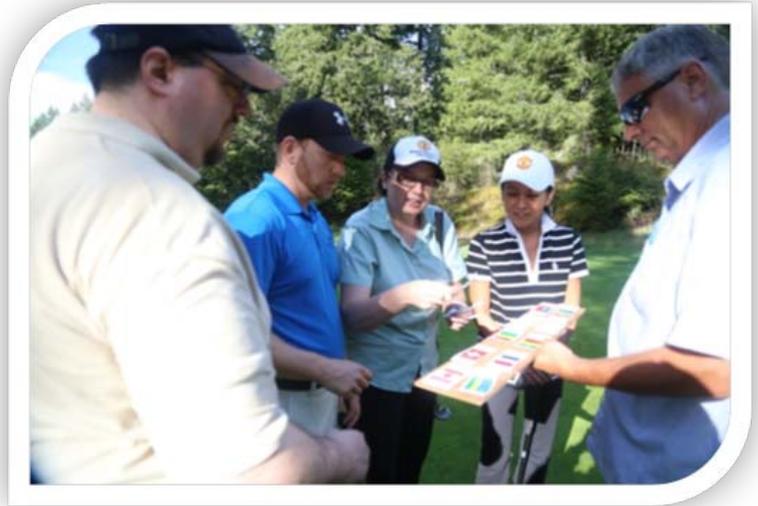
The Skills Connect for Immigrant Program is currently being delivered at VIRCS for the 5th year. The program has assisted over 500 newcomers since it started in 2009 and with the commitment of staff and valuable support from a number of volunteers-mentors; VIRCS was able to successfully meet all contractual targets set up with the program's prime contractor - ASPECT (Association of Service Providers for Employability and Training). This tremendous success has led to the extension of the Skills Connect contract to the spring of 2015. Promoted primarily by word-of-mouth, the program continued to experience tremendous demand, and at the end of 2012, was repositioned to start the next year in a strong position. The Skills Connect team, comprised of experienced Case Managers: Caroline Yeend; Amarjit Bhalla and; led by Program Manager Sophia Sorensen Proctor who took control and re-organized service delivery in summer/early fall of 2012.

The Skills Connect program is specifically targeted to highly educated and trained career professionals, which a high level of English language competency. Clients in 'Stream A' have an Canadian Language Benchmark in excess of 6, and the vast majority of our clients have post-secondary credentials, including Bachelor and Master's degrees, and in some cases, doctoral degrees. The program has a substantial lifespan, and clients can access support services and training funds for up to 12 months.

In 2012, the program provided one-on-one career counselling and planning to over 130 newcomers, 81 % of whom were able to find suitable employment in our region. In August 2011 and again in November 2012, the program was subjected to a professional audit by representatives of the Ministry responsible, and they communicated great satisfaction with the overall practices and outcomes of VIRCS' team.

From a financial perspective, the Skills Connect program annually delivers approximately half a million dollars worth of services to registered skilled immigrants, including pre-employment counselling, assistance finding jobs, resumes and cover letter writing, workplace orientation, workshops, mentoring, skills upgrading, professional membership affiliation, credentials assessment, among others. This program is a cornerstone of VIRCS, which produces revenue, and offers a critical subsidy which enables many of the other VIRCS' programs which have been affected due to funding cuts.

Our partnership with Canada Immigration and Citizenship under the Federal Internship for Newcomers Program is another highlight of Skills Connect program. This partnership has continued for past four years and has allowed, on average, approximately 30 highly skilled newcomers to experience a comprehensive selection process for 90-day paid internship with local Federal Government departments. VIRCS is the only community organization responsible for pre-screening candidates, which are then referred to the federal government for further consideration. The Department of National Defence has been a key community partner in this initiative, and has hired pre-screened and job ready, skilled clients for several years. This year, five applicants are known to have received job offers from various federal departments.



## Citizenship 101 Alvaro Moreno

Launched in January 2013 with funding from by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Citizenship 101 was designed to help Permanent Residents prepare for the Canadian citizenship test and to promote good citizenship values. This program is managed by myself, Kerri Greenidge is the Program Coordinator and Pam Devito coordinates Citizenship 101 Mentors.

The three series of ten training sessions were completed successfully between January and September 2013. More than 20 countries of origin were represented among the 86 registered participants, such as China, Mexico, Philippines, Iran, USA, and Russia. Overall, most participants were female – 71%. The most common age group has been 35-44 years old.

To date, five of our participants have taken the official Canadian citizenship test. All of them passed, one with a mark of 100%.

Volunteer mentors and small group facilitators provided invaluable support to participants. Their commitment reflects an understanding of newcomers' needs and contribution to our community. Thank you to Pam Devito for an amazing volunteer coordination!

Guest speakers and guided tours of local sites of relevance have been popular components. Five guest speakers were invited to help cover different topics and we are grateful for their contribution to the project. Thank you to Murray Rankin, MP for Victoria, citizenship Judge Gerald Pash, Native Friendship Centre Liaison Leslie McGarry, Lawyer Roberto Alberto, Camosun College Instructor Daniel Reeve, Geographer Grace Stubblefield, and Greater Victoria Development Agency Economist Dallas Gislason. We are in the process of finalizing our Citizenship 101 Facilitators' and Participants' Handbooks, and we are planning the second stage of the project, which includes the outreach activities to other agencies across the province. Arrangements are being made at this time for a train-the-trainer workshop in Kamloops, BC, with the participation of 5 agencies.

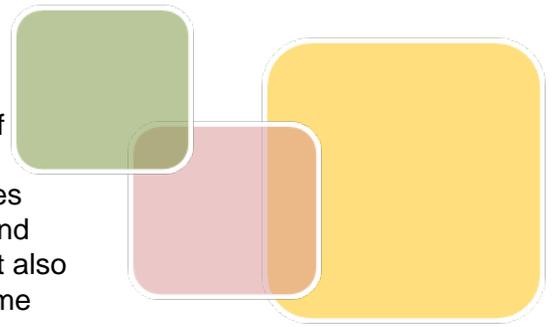
To learn more about this exciting project, we invite you to visit our webpage at [www.citizenship101.ca](http://www.citizenship101.ca), which has become the main contact source for the project. You will find videos, photos, discussion topics and other resources available not only for newcomers, but for all Canadians interested in good citizenship.



## EPBC Program Annual Report – 2012/13

### Emily Zhong

As of April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 the new one-stop shop Employment Program of British Columbia (EPBC) came into form. It replaced Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) employment programs and services under which VIRCS offered the successful Employment Transition and Coaching Program (ETCP) for Immigrants in Greater Victoria. With it also came cost cutting challenges for VIRCS, which resulted in unwelcome layoff notices.



The new program is currently being delivered through Employment Services Centres (ESC) located in 73 catchment areas that span the Province. Through this new program, VIRCS has been sub-contracted by Worklink Employment Society for West shore ESC and Beacon Community Services for Sidney ESC. Saanich and Victoria areas are currently being served through GT Hiring Solutions. EPBC program staffs have experienced extreme challenges; most significantly: program data entry. The province's database is very complex, unpredictable and demanding through the new Integrated Case Management (ICM) software. Despite this major challenge, the EPBC program has managed considerable successes.

In 2012, VIRCS new EPBC program served over 300 Immigrants for their initial employment assessments. 105 clients received Case3 Managed Employment services through VIRCS and over 200 clients were referred to other Employment Service Centres because of the highly restrictive contract mandate. 65 clients, found meaningful employment and another 10 have completed their Case Managed Services and are in a follow-up stage of case management. Three clients applied and were accepted for Skills Training program, and one client received wage subsidy program referral.

Over 400 clients attended VIRCS monthly "Job Search Club", created under new EPBC program requirement and policy guidelines. It is an intense 10-day workshop for immigrant job seekers helping them improves their job readiness skills and increase their labour market attachment. The topics covered during these workshops included: creating/updating resumes, cover letters, identifying and accessing transferable skills, Myers Briggs self-assessment, career exploration and career cruising, dressing for success, general labour market information and job search techniques, networking, contacting employers, finding jobs using social networking websites, and interviewing skills. In addition, VIRCS designed specific workshop topics for our immigrant and newcomer job seekers, such as: workplace, business communication skills, effective communication and problem solving within the workplace and accepting, starting and maintaining employment.

To help our clients effectively navigate the highly competitive labour market, VIRCS provided free workshops for clients to network with local employers. Six "Employer Visit" sessions helped 87 immigrant job seekers obtain inside information about job prospects and hiring practices at 10 local businesses and organizations. HR Representatives from businesses including VIHA, University of Victoria, BC Ferries, Thrifty Foods, Department of National Defence, Home Depot, Safeway, Wal-Mart, Fairmont Empress Hotel, Sunrise Seniors Living and BC Transit. VIRCS gratefully acknowledges the funding contributed by the Government of British Columbia and Federal Government of Canada of our Employment Program. The Society also appreciates the valuable support and the positive working relationship with local employers and other community partners.

I wish to thank our caring EPBC program staff for their dedication, hard work, and excellent services provided to our clients. I would also like to express my respect for immigrant job seekers for their strong commitment and continued trust in our Employment Program. Together we have worked towards the achievement of the program goals and successful employment outcomes for our clients.

We are exceedingly optimistic about 2013 and the challenges and opportunities that will occur as we enter a relationship with the federal government via CIC and, as we continue to develop new relationship with employment contracting agencies.