

VICTORIA IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE CENTRE SOCIETY

## 2013/14 Annual Report



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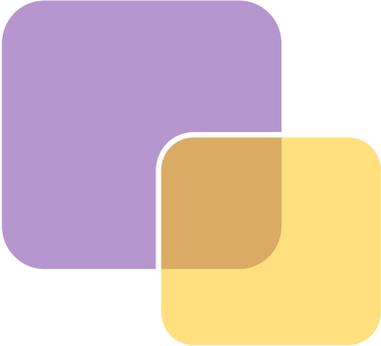
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## **VIRCS's Mission Statement**

**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.**

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# **VIRCS's 2013/2014 Board of Directors**

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**Aaron Hall – Vice President**

**Anselme Hategekimana –Treasurer**

**Catherine Kamau - Secretary**

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

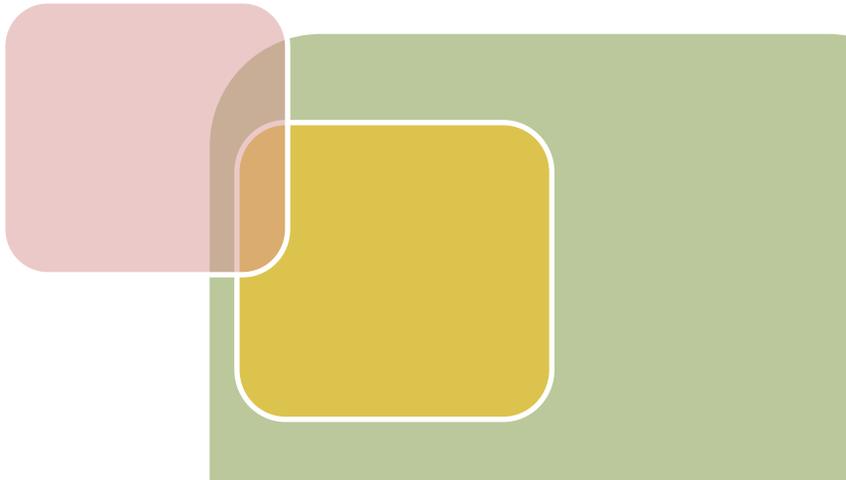
**Ayodeji Kuponiy- Director-at-large**

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

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

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

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



# Special Thanks to Our Funders and Donors

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Victoria READ Society  
Mr Viet Tran  
Volunteer Victoria

**Thanks also to the many individuals and  
Volunteers who made significant personal  
contributions to our society**

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## President's Report

Nancy Hum



### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Hello, my name is Nancy Hum, President of the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society, or VIRCS, as it is commonly and affectionately known. It is my great pleasure to personally welcome each and every person here tonight. Each individual who walked through this door contributes and supports VIRCS, and the vital work that we do in the community, so I thank all who took the time and effort to come.

Did you know that we have been serving over 3,000 clients a year for the past 25 years? The AGM marks the Silver Anniversary of VIRCS. Twenty-five years ago three

refugees, Viet, Hereity, and Carlos founded VIRCS, with the following mandate: "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." Twenty-five years later, we are still following the mandate and the vision brought forth by our founders, and hopes to continue to do so for many more years. Our programs run the gamut and range from an onsite Daycare Centre for our clients, and everything in between, including ESL, Housing, Settlement, Employment, Counselling, Legal Aid, Citizenship 101, the Vulnerable Immigrant Population Program (VIPP), many training and community workshops and activities, and of course our stellar Youth programs Enable and Youth Strides Camp.

This last year has been a difficult and challenging one for VIRCS, but I want to focus on the strengths and the positives. Our slate of programs is ongoing, plus we have added Paragon English Testing to our repertoire. Our VIPP and Citizenship 101 programs were both pilot programs and were both a huge success, with wonderful outcomes. Our Third Multicultural Health and Food Diversity Fair, held recently in September was a resounding success. An enormous amount of items were generously donated to us by a local businessman. This enabled us to have a fundraiser to sell these items over two weekends. The funds from that venture went directly to our Emergency Refugee Fund, which allows us to provide further care. Staff, board members and volunteers were present for that event, as well as several other multicultural events such as the Mexican Fiesta and the ICCA's Mela Event. VIRCS was also represented at City Hall as Mayor Dean Fortin raised a flag and gave a proclamation for National Refugee Week, and VIRCS participated in those events. Our puppet program is a big hit with students at various schools in the community. Also, for the second year, as your president, I have been asked by United Way, who funds our youth programs, to represent VIRCS as a speaker at various agencies and businesses in the community. I focused my talk this year on youth and the importance and impact of programs designed for youth.

In Victoria, everyone has a story. I'd like to share the stories of two shy, silent, and isolated youth, clients of VIRCS, transformed into happy, productive, engaging individuals. I tell their stories because youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. Aisha, a 20 years old East African, arrived in Canada, alone and afraid, after many years as a refugee. Her parents were accused of being politically active, were imprisoned and tortured. Their sacrifice helped Aisha to escape the country and a forced marriage. She came with little English or knowledge of Canada, but with hopes of starting a new life here. Aisha was enrolled in VIPP, and through continuous support and advocacy, ESL training and

counselling has now embarked on her new life. She is now working, in transitional housing, has improved her English, and is working on her strengths and skills to establish her own identity and overcome barriers.

Harry came to VIRCS through the Enable Program, and began attending the drop-in homework club and youth activity night, very sporadically and for short periods in the beginning. He had no friends, little English, a heavy school load, but hated school. He felt isolated with no trust in others or confidence in himself. The staff continuously connected with him in giving lots of support and encouragement. After four months he made friends at VIRCS and at school, attended regularly and turned into a happy, smiling, confident Harry. September 2012 marked a life changing time for Harry when he was reunited with his father and little brother who were able to come to Canada. I am proud to say that Harry was a recipient of a United Way Youth Now Award.

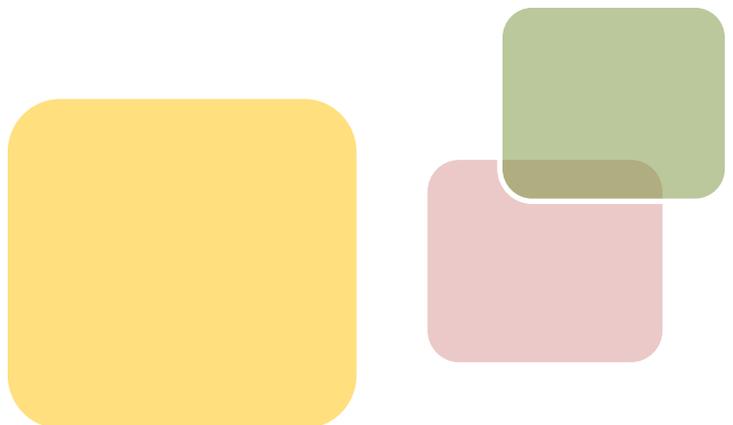
When a person, young or otherwise, has been traumatized, and they arrive in a new country alone, afraid, and unable to communicate, or fend for themselves, you just want to wrap a blanket around them for warmth, comfort and support. VIRCS does this as the name indicates in our Newcomer Wraparound Support Program. These are just two examples of the many people who are helped by VIRCS and other agencies in the community. We are part of a network of organizations and programs that are working together to see that:

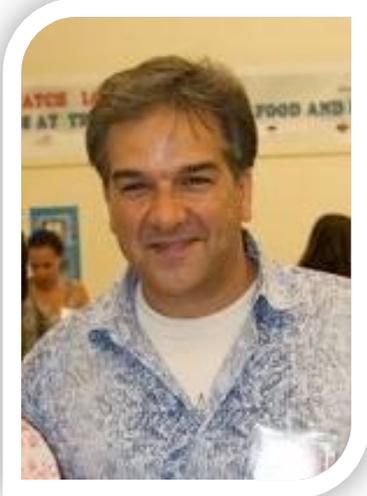
- Kids get the support they need to succeed at school;
- People find pathways out of poverty;
- People have access to the supports they need when they need them.

In the past years, I have come to know and work with the extraordinary staff, many of the volunteers, members of the Board, and our wonderful and creative Executive Director, David Lau. It has been my pleasure and privilege to be involved in this unique and compassionate agency. I look forward to the next year as we meet the challenges and stride forward with a full complement of dedicated and enthusiastic board members, working together in continuing to follow our mandate.

Thank You.

Nancy Hum VIRCS Board President





## **Executive Director's Report David Lau**

Dear Friends of VIRCS:

2014 has been another year of changes and VIRCS has weathered many challenging situations yet remains the most cheerful and optimistic place in Victoria and, a very good place to be.

Those inclined to history will know that last year that the BC newcomer Settlement Sector was re-assigned to the federal government. For VIRCS this was a bumpy ride with some wins and some losses. A significant set of proposals was, on one hand, accepted as compliant and then, for no known reason was refused for negotiation. As this was the agency blue-print for the next two years, it served as quite an unwelcomed and unfair blow.

VIRCS also took some losses to staff. Our dear colleague Meghan Wankel, Director of Settlement left for the harsh and unaccommodating climes of Toronto. We were sad and wished her well. Balancing this, Leanne Gislason stepped forward to direct Settlement programming. Leanne is a formidable force who now leads the settlement forward. Nice work Leanne! Anna Chpilevaia also left for the even harsher climate of Calgary. We need some more temperate Canadian cities where our staff flee for hiatus. In contrast, Sophia has left temporarily for Texas (harsh climate) and Emily left to create a beautiful baby. Emily is wiser and is still in Victoria and hopes to return soon. Shoring up EPBC and Skills Connect is a VIRCS "old-hand", Jennifer Almeida. Jennifer started her 2014 service by pulling together our very successful Food and Health Fair. VIRCS has long-term loyal supporters – thanks for the help Jennifer. Danny Tes' title is now Manager of Enable Program. Under Danny's leadership Enable continues to innovate and provide absolutely sold youth programming. Our contract with CIC for the Citizenship pilot is complete. Alvaro, Keri, Pam and Rhiannon provided 100% success rate creating a remarkable citizenship training tool that VIRCS will continue to promote. Despite Pam Devito's very busy schedule our Volunteer Program runs at full strength and is continually offering the most unique volunteer experiences in Victoria. Yiura, Junnian and Fanny, VIRCS' inspirational administrative team, continue to keep everything on the rails.

This year we began a wholly new and interesting relationship with Paragon Testing from UBC. We now deliver the federal CELPIP tests needed by newcomers for CIC applications. Skills Connect was re-affirmed until 2016 and NWSP until 2015! Hurray! We have once again expressed our optimism by knuckling down to write other truly unique proposals for 2015. More to come.

This last year has taught me that an often overlooked leadership skill is faith. Faith that there will be a next step. Faith that friends will appear when they are needed. Faith to take risks for a cause worthy of personal sacrifice. Faith to abandon pride and accept the guidance offered by those who share a vision.

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 2014. I do not think they fully realize how much I enjoy their company and appreciate their contributions.

This year I want to thank founders Viet, Hereity and Carlos for offering advice and support. Their life work 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



VIRCS volunteer program's service goal is to support our staff in administering programs and delivering quality services to our clients, their families and the community. The services accessible through our volunteer program help people address settlement barriers, adapt to life in Greater Victoria and access community resources. Our volunteers' caring, respectful and service orientated attitude married with their willingness to share their expertise and experience with others, creates an inclusive and welcoming place.

As in previous years, this year's 256 volunteers are people with diverse professional and educational backgrounds, languages, experiences and reasons for volunteering. Over 70% of our volunteers are immigrants or newcomers themselves; able to provide first hand knowledge of what services and support can help people overcome their barriers. Other volunteers are able to support people in participating more fully in their new community by sharing their local knowledge or helping people understand Canadian organizations.

VIRCS 2013/2014 volunteers were local residents, community members, university and community college practicum students, international students, interns and youth from 22 countries, investing 12,964 hours of their time and expertise. The year marked an increase of requests from previous years from University of Victoria, Royal Roads and Victoria's community college students to complete a volunteer internship or practicum at the Centre.

Volunteers' activities included ESL classroom and conversation assistance, academic tutoring, Enable's children and youth activities support, NWSP workshop assistance and facilitation, Citizenship 101 group facilitation and study support, VIRCS administrative support and special project management. Our volunteers' time and expertise enabled VIRCS and its volunteer program to: talk to and educate people about VIRCS' programs and services through 7 community outreach events; implement community engagement projects such as VIRCS Human Library and the Multicultural Health and Food Fair; file over 100 people's taxes through the 2013 Community Volunteer Income Tax Program; and, provide free legal information to over 140 people.

To all our volunteers both past and present –

Thank you for your caring presence and invaluable contribution to our mission.

**Newcomer Wraparound Support Program  
Leanne Gislason, Settlement Director**

The Newcomer Wraparound Support Program (NWSP) continues to be a robust, well-loved program for newcomers experiencing overwhelming or complex barriers towards settlement and integration in Greater Victoria. Our NWSP team includes a Program Manager, an Intake Coordinator, two Adult/Families Case Managers, and one Youth Case Manager who together offered holistic, “wraparound” services to more than 300 clients this year. Our goal is to provide client-centred support through individual, family, and group services designed to increase client stability and overall life satisfaction.

Our client-centered case management model means staff work closely with clients to complete a thorough needs assessment to develop service goals and a plan of action to achieve them while also supporting the development of essential skills related to life in Canada and creating a strong relationship built in mutual respect.

Positive changes that our team notice in their clients after being in the program include increased confidence in accessing mainstream programs on their own, decreased social isolation, becoming employed, resolving crises within family, and independence in seeking out their own opportunities for a bright future.

The NWSP has established effective partnerships and inter-agency connections across Greater Victoria. These strong working relationships enable us to increase community support for newcomers. Through the delivery of workshops on inter-cultural communication, our NWSP staff orientates other frontline workers on the unique needs of this client group which helps to decrease the cultural barriers

That prevent newcomers from participating in mainstream services.

Through opening agency doors to other organizations to co-facilitate group information sessions, we have created new inter-agency friendships and have minimized the feelings of intimidation our clients may feel towards some organizations, such as the police, by inviting them into the safe space of the center. The NWSP program also benefits greatly from the strength of other VIRCS programs, since our holistic client support means we use internal supports to help clients become employed, to teach them about citizenship, and to give them a welcoming and inviting space to bring their children.

Our NWSP group sessions continue to be vibrant, safe spaces for newcomers to connect with one another and discuss relevant topics. Groups offered this year include those specifically designed for youth, men, women, and seniors. Diverse topics include those that are designed to increase skills, such as our





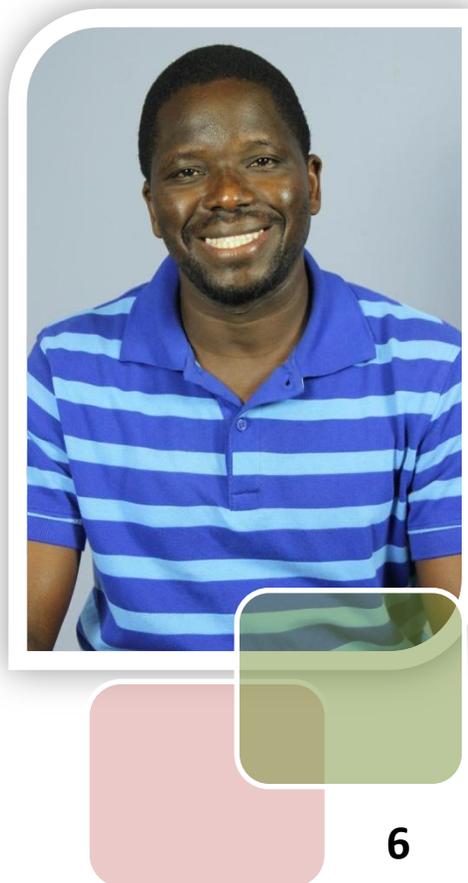
bike safety course, computer classes, and employment classes; acupuncture, yoga, tai chi and healthy cooking classes to increase knowledge of healthy living in Victoria; field trips on the bus to various local, free resources to encourage newcomers to enjoy the diverse beauty of their new home; and support groups to teach coping skills and help clients to build informal support networks.

This year was marked by a change from provincial funding through the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, Immigrant Integration Branch to federal funding through Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). While this shift in funding created many ripple effects felt across the program from eligibility criteria, funding allowances for various activities, and reporting procedures, our service to NWSP clients did not slow down.

A by-product of the change from provincial to federal funding was the creation of a new class of VIRCS client: the ineligible settlement client. This unfortunate category applies to anyone who does not fit within the CIC funding criteria, such as those in Canada on work or student visas, refugee claimants, and naturalized citizens. Through

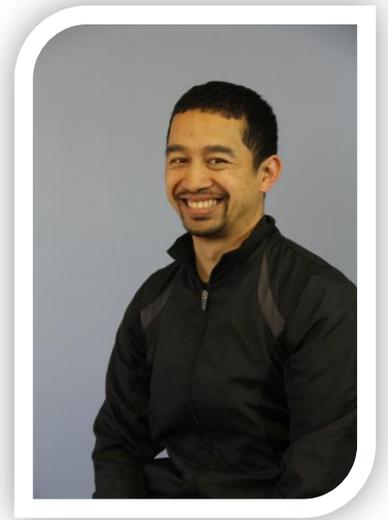
support from volunteers, our program still makes time to sit with these “ineligible” folks to hear their story, provide helpful referrals and brief information about life in Victoria. This past year, the majority of requests for services from this new client group have been for help with employment, education, legalities related to immigration, and mental health support. The outreach work done by the NWSP team has made impressive changes at the local, provincial, and national level. Locally, we sit on several committees and advocacy based working groups to ensure that the needs that our clients express are adequately represented to and understood by local leaders. Provincially, we are part of an alliance designed to ensure the needs of our clients are accurately understood by funders. Nationally, members of the NWSP team represented our approach to client care and advocacy through presentations at both the 2014 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences and the 2014 Canadian Council of Refugees Spring Consultation.

The Newcomer Wraparound Support Program and team have much to look forward to in the next year. Some of our upcoming projects include a literacy class for youth, a cooking class for seniors, a support group for men, and an art therapy class for women. Our team will continue our strong advocacy support for newcomer issues by representing our clients in local advocacy working groups, a publication in an academic research journal, and presentations at two upcoming national conferences. Most of all, we look forward to working alongside our clients as they work hard to make Victoria feel like home.



## Enable Program

### Danny Tes, Program Manager



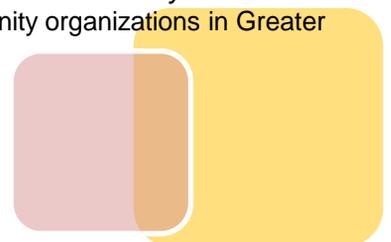
2013-2014 was another great year for the Enable Program! It served over 200 newcomer children, youth and their families for those between the ages of 6 - 25. The goal of the program is to provide settlement and adjustment services to aid our clients' transition to Canadian life in the Greater Victoria region. Our activities and services focus on providing academic, social and emotional support both in and out of school. We offer a weekly Homework Club, one-on-one tutor matches, weekly Youth Activity Night, in-school Art Therapy Program, an afterschool Sparks Children Program, a Youth Life Skills program and Youth Strides Summer Camp.

Our greatest strength with young people is the way we nurture positive changes in their sense of identity to increase a sense of belonging in their community among their peers, family, school and Canadian society as a whole.

A significant highlight of the Enable Program this past year is the addition of a new pilot project called **Young Immigrant Life Skill Training Program (YILTP)**, funded until March 2015 by the United Way of Greater Victoria. With its roots in the successful *VIRCS I Plan It Program* that ran from 2009 -2012, YILTP consists of a 12-week series of interactive life skills training workshops (2.5 hours in length) that will be delivered 3 times annually, helping over 45 newcomer youth to build the requisite capacity and skills to successfully settle into new lives in Canada. Life skills workshops topics include: career planning; healthy relationships; communication; team work; leadership; interpersonal communication; goal setting/planning; financial literacy/management; multiculturalism; culture shock; and coping strategies/stress management. These workshops provide tangible and transferable skills to enable personal needs fulfillment, along with creating positive impacts among participants' families, schools and employment endeavours.

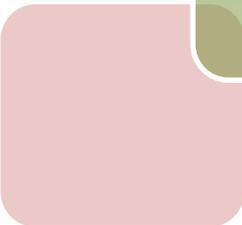
As we have been for the past two years, Enable continues to be enrolled in the *Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)* Initiative through the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, funded by Horner Foundation. The YPQA is a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth program and identify staff training needs. Through this process Enable staff continues to assess the quality of programming, develop strategic plans for development, and deliver staff training targeted to identified needs and gaps. The Enable program has been recognized for excellence in the quality of our youth programs and dedication to continuous staff growth and development.

Enable continues to expand and collaborate with other organizations. In 2013, we formed a national partnership with Equitas - International Centre for Human Rights Education, which is a non-profit organization that works for the advancement of equality, social justice and respect for human dignity in Canada through the *Play it Fair!* program. *Play It Fair!* provides a toolkit containing interactive, age appropriate activities that reinforce the fundamental values and principles of human dignity and equality that are set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The toolkit provides a starting point for children to discuss issues in their lives and work together to find ways to promote inclusion, respect, fairness, acceptance and cooperation. While the Enable program used the *Play it Fair!* tool kit since 2010, we are now contributing to the training of other local community organizations in Greater Victoria.



Another strong community supporter for Enable is the Sail and Life Training Society (SALTS). For the past two years SALTS has sponsored two \$1,600 scholarships for two Enable youth to attend a summer sailing voyage. The selected youth, aged 13 to 25, get to take a ten day trip sailing trip around Vancouver Island aboard a tall ships. On the trip, they learn to sail and experience interpersonal development as they test themselves in this new environment. The Enable program is sincerely grateful to the SALTS program for offering this substantial gift to our young clients.

The Enable Program has continued to grow and sustain its core programming with various support of community partners, supporters, donors as well as funders. We would like to acknowledge the BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch, the United Way of Greater Victoria, The Victoria Foundation, TELUS Community Board, Coast Capital Savings, Island Savings, True Sport Foundation and Children's Health Foundation. Also, we would like to thank all the volunteers, practicum students, contract partners and staff who made 2013-2014 another great year for the Enable Program. Thank You!



## English as a Second Language

Jennifer Rawlinson

For more than 16 years, VIRCS has offered a comprehensive English language training program. Our programs doors have opened opportunities for thousands of newcomers and citizens, who are seeking to improve their English language skills and increase their chances of gaining meaningful employment or continuing their studies in their chosen fields. Language training is crucial to the success of many of our clients here at VIRCS. Integration and a sense of community belonging are possible with improved English skills

During 2014, our ESL classes have steadily grown; comprised equally of domestic and international students. Since January 2014, we have registered 70 students. However, as our program is a flexible, continuous enrolment program, we have averaged approximately 15-20 students on most class days. Our first class, Beginners, is offered 9 am to 11 am on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. In this class, students are introduced to basic grammar structure and literacy skills. The focus of our beginners' class is communication, which is facilitated through comprehensive, communicative activities as well as one to one conversation with one of our wonderful ESL classroom volunteers. Our intermediate/advanced class is offered 11 am to 1 pm Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. This class is typically larger than the beginner class, and focuses on academic as well as communicative skills. Students in this class also benefit from the help of volunteers and guest speakers to give them a more authentic English experience.

Permanent residents and Canadian citizens are given priority seating as well as a subsidized tuition fee. We also welcome international visitors and students, and while their fees are reasonable by industry standards, they more accurately reflect the true cost of delivery of the program. This two tiered fee system allows us to deliver a program, which is affordable to more students who are interested in studying English As A Second Language.

In addition to our ESL classes, VIRCS also offers short-term programs for youth, workshops for professionals and a successful weekly conversation club. In collaboration with our Volunteer Coordinator, we have also established a program for conversation partners, which primarily assists students who are registered in one of our ESL classes.



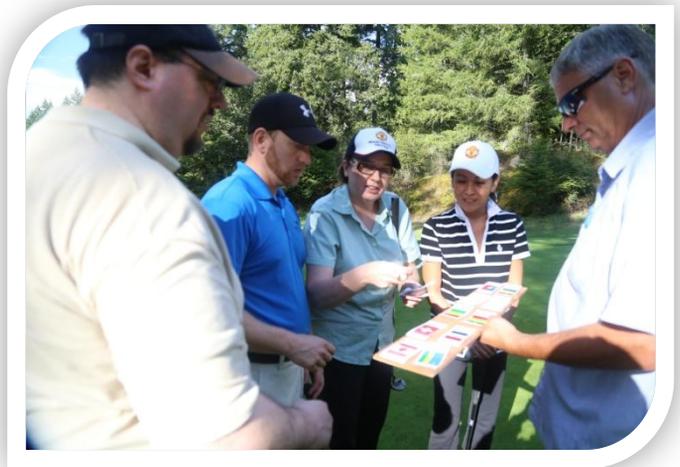
Our classes are partially funded by the BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch, while tuition fees cover the remainder of the costs. Our program is currently investigating the possibility of partnerships with other organizations as well as other funding opportunities, so that we may deliver more ESL programs, which will reflect the diverse, and complex needs of newcomers in our community.

The ESL program at VIRCS is as exciting and diverse as its students. Our program welcomes students from all countries and we embrace our diversity with compassion and understanding. Our success as a program has been possible due to many factors; funding through BC Gaming, a positive, welcoming environment at VIRCS, our dynamic and well trained volunteers and our incredible students, each who comes to our class with their own experiences to share and dreams to fulfill

We anticipate another successful year in 2015 and hope to expand our program so that we may offer English language training to our expanding and changing community.

### **Skills Connect Jennifer Almeida**

The Skills Connect for Immigrant Program is currently being delivered at VIRCS for the 6th year. The program has assisted close to 700 newcomers since it started in 2009. 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). We recently were informed that our contract though ASPECT has been extended to 2016! This is amazing news.



Promoted primarily by word-of-mouth and written accolades from clients; there has been tremendous demand and extra intakes were granted by the funder, ASPECT resulting in an extra 30 clients accessing this very valuable program. The Skills Connect team is comprised of experienced Case Managers: Ms Caroline Yeend and Ms Amarjit Bhalla while it is being managed by Program Manager Jennifer Almeida.

The Skills Connect program is specifically targeted to highly educated and trained career professionals, with a higher levels of English language competency. 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 2013, the program provided one-on-one career counselling and planning to over 120 newcomers. Close to 85% of our clients were able to find suitable employment in our region.

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 to be carried out.

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 the past five years and has allowed, on average, approximately 36 highly skilled newcomers to experience a comprehensive selection process for a 90-day paid internship with local Federal Government departments which was extended for an additional 90 days resulting in a six-months of valuable federal government skills.

**EPBC Program – 2013/14**  
**Jennifer Almeida on behalf of Emily Zhong**

EPBC is currently being delivered through Employment Services Centres (ESC) located in 73 catchment areas that span the province. VIRCS is very fortunate to be sub-contracted by the amazing teams at Worklink Employment Society for Westshore region and Beacon Community Services for Sidney/North Saanich region. They sustain our abilities and support our clients. On behalf of our clients, we are grateful for their efforts and continual professionalism. We would like to serve Victoria and Saanich but currently the geographic catchment systems of the provincial government reduce service options for newcomers in those regions.

The ever-evolving new Integrated Case Management (ICM) software has created an administratively heavy system which has been proven to limit participation of vulnerable clients like ours. Nonetheless, staff have been able to maintain a warm and friendly atmosphere which has always been the signature of VIRCS!

The program features a monthly “Job Search Club” under new EPBC program requirement and policy guidelines. Clients successfully completed the intense 10-day workshop for immigrant job seekers. These workshops help them improve 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.

In 2013/2014 the EPBC program staff performed with commitment, hard work and dedication. They have always placed client’s needs first despite many challenges posed by the service delivery model. With a shortage of employment delivery options in the southern island, our model has evidenced a real faith in our Employment Program staff and a hearty participation with the excellent workshops that assist them in their career searches.

*ps. Several weeks ago Emily had a beautiful baby girl - we look forward to her rejoining us soon.*

## **Citizenship 101 ([www.citizenship101.ca](http://www.citizenship101.ca))**

### **Alvaro Moreno**

Citizenship 101 was launched in January, 2013 as 2-year pilot project funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. In July 2014, the project completed the research and development of a 10-session curriculum designed to help Permanent Residents prepare for the Canadian citizenship test, and to promote active citizenship values.

In Victoria, BC, five series of Citizenship 101 workshops were successfully completed between January, 2013 and July, 2014. The last 3 series were held at a very accessible and welcoming venue: the Community Room of the downtown library, thanks to a partnership with the Greater Victoria Public Library. The diversity of our participants provided a very rich learning environment: 142 registered participants representing 35 different countries of origin. To date, 30 of our participants have taken the official citizenship test. All of them passed, twelve of them with a mark of 100%.

In various cities across BC, twelve agencies participated in the outreach component of the project. They received an orientation and training on how to deliver Citizenship 101 in their communities. Seven of these agencies offered one series of Citizenship 101 workshops during the spring of 2014, and three have continued offering the program as a recurring series throughout the year.

Back in Victoria, self assessment reports and workshop evaluations showed that participants' sense of belonging increased as they learn more about Canada's history, government, political system, etc. Also, reflection feedback indicated that participants have gained a better understanding of what "active citizenship" means to them.

Volunteer mentors and small group facilitators provided invaluable feedback in improving the mentorship program. This is a positive reflection of our volunteers' engagement in understanding newcomers' needs and contributions, and their interest in supporting newcomers' settlement. Thank you, Pam Devito for building and coordinating our strong base of volunteers! Keri and I could not have done it without you. We are also grateful with the contribution of Rhiannon Snaith, Master of Adult Education Co-op student, and Jessica Silva, practicum student, for their contribution to our project.

Most importantly, we are grateful for the funding provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada for this pilot project a reality.

In addition, we are exceptionally grateful for the support and enthusiasm of all the staff and volunteers at VIRCS. Now that funding is coming to an end, we are preparing to move the project into a new stage, by drafting a social enterprise model. This will help make the project viable and affordable, as a continued benefit to our newcomer clients.

Stay tuned!

**Citizenship 101 Program team**  
**Manager: Alvaro Moreno MSc;**  
**Curriculum Coordinator: Keri Greenidge MBA; Volunteer**  
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