COALITION ON RICHER DIVERSITY (CORD)

A Newfoundland & Labrador Diversity & Immigration Umbrella Organization

DIVERSITY FALL EVENT

CONFERENCE REPORT

SEPTEMBER 29TH & 30TH, 2007

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INTRODUCTION

"Excellent advance organization of presentation information and materials, identification of major topics, good leadership/ facilitation at the workshop." – Conference Participant

Conference Summary

The Steering Committee for the Coalition on Richer Diversity (CORD) hosted its inaugural meeting on September 29th and 30th, 2007 at Memorial University in St. John's. The focus was on strengthening partnerships between immigrants and long time residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, and between immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs), in order to better identify and address diversity issues present in Newfoundland and Labrador. Following shortly after the province announced its new immigration policy, it was anticipated that the formation of such a diverse coalition would be timely and provide significant direction in addressing a myriad of immigration concerns in the province.

The aim of the newly created Coalition on Richer Diversity is to bring together organizations and groups that work with immigrants to collaborate, to offer networking opportunities, and to help them grow into more aware and diversity-sensitive organizations. The focus is not to start over, but to cooperate with existing organizations, agencies and individuals. By coming together, we can create more opportunities, assess needs, further develop services and ease the pressures on the system. Through research, education, outreach, advocacy, and mediation, the Coalition will work to identify what is being done, who is doing it, what needs to be done, and who can do it.

Conference Participants

Participants were invited from all over the province to take part in a number of stimulating activities and working sessions that were intended to create a unified vision of the coalition's purpose, set a mandate, and draft its structure. Over seventy participants met to explore new ways to serve immigrants in the province. Ideas were presented and potential solutions to common challenges facing immigrants, as well as the community at large, were discussed.

Conference Format

> *"This conference had more heart than any other conference I have ever attended, and I have been to a lot of conferences." – Conference Participant*

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was the approach used throughout these meetings. AI is a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future that fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation or an organization. In so doing, it enhances a system's capacity for change. The basic idea of AI is to build organizations around what works, rather than trying to fix what doesn't.

This approach enabled the participants to remain positive and dream about how they would want a Coalition such as this to operate. It enhanced group cohesion and fostered a respectful environment. As one participant explained, "In order to create change, you need to be motivated

to create change. By focusing on the negative it is more difficult to become inspired to take action. This workshop was successful in remaining positive and inspiring people for the cause."

The meeting opened with a play that depicted the struggles facing a family new to Canada. The rest of the conference consisted of guest speakers, general meetings and small group discussions. Lunch was provided on both days and Saturday evening featured a mixer with beverages, food and entertainment.

Conference Themes

The topics addressed and outlined below include: education, health, employment, support/ retention, outreach, and community building.

GROUP A – EDUCATION

Facilitator: Barbara Burnaby

Saturday, September 29, 2007

Introduction:
- Overview
- Address material covered in the June 2007 focus groups
- Break
- Appreciative Inquiry exercise
- Brainstorming ideas for the new organization

Needs from the June Focus Group findings

- Provide education on intercultural living to public, immigrants, policy makers and immigrant serving agencies
- Provide public awareness activities through newsletter, website, media and public events
- Assess ESL needs & improving ESL resources
- Provide cultural sensitivity (diversity) training
- Deal with learning disabilities
- Tutoring immigrant children
- After school homework clubs, peer tutoring
- Expand adult ESL services (long term)
- Help parents understand the school system
- Reassess overlapping services (ESL, Adult Basic Education)
- Provide more complete information for internationally trained professionals before they enter Canada
- Educate newcomers & long-term residents about general culture (more than song and dance and food- use of space, time, etc.)

Points in education workshop to help achieve needs from focus group

- Teachers for ESL children want more time for their own students- and more teachers for students who do not get to see ESL teachers often
- Research proposal into the percentages of children who graduate and who do not
- Groups to write proposals to the government, who are not ESL teachers- they do not have the time as they are seeing to their present ESL students
- Meet with all ethnic organizations in NL and determine how they want to operate, provide information on what they can do
- Use of the election and candidates to shed light on these needs
- More media coverage
- Formal ESL testing
- Keep pressure on the government and the Department of Immigration regarding proposals (i.e. requests for more ESL teachers)
- Lobby for an ESL training center funded by the government
- More resources for immigrants about to arrive/ just arriving

- Settlement workers from more long-lasting immigrant organizations

Visions of how NLDIUO should operate

- Embracing and inclusive so that **everyone** knows about the new organization
- As a map of Canada with the whole rainbow
- As a one-stop-shop Google link to all imaginable information on immigration
- As a pool of water; a pool of resources, flowing together and knowing about itself

What is the top priority of education in NL?

-Not enough ESL time for children
-Little quality time for ESL teachers to do their jobs (advocating for more funding/ keep pressure)
-ESL teachers overwhelmed with work
-Results in youth dropping out
-Research on drop out vs. graduate numbers
-Question candidates
-Play the election to our advantage
-Draw attention (use the media)
-Show the benefits
-Different approach to adult ESL funding
-Specialized ESL training for specific skills
-ESL teaching opportunity (to help with paying student loan)

We need to change attitudes:

-Teacher's attitudes (take the umbrella to the teachers union to change the attitudes)
-People seeking help
-People capable of providing help

We need policy changes:

-Governments need to get on board in order to create positive policy changes

GROUP A – EDUCATION

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Proposed Initiative:

English as a Second Language (ESL

K-12

CHANGE ATTITUDES

Teaching Professionals

Workshops

Individual schools, unions, media, etc.

Run a student group for community service

Seeking/ Providing help

Provincial Strategies

Research

Advocate (For more culturally relevant materials)

Networking

‘ ESL program”

Policy Change

Make the cause popular

Use the elections

Media

Politicians

Possibility Statement: Teach all and all will learn.

GROUP B –EMPLOYMENT (joined with Group F due to low numbers)

GROUP C – Health

Facilitator: Kaberi Sarma-Debnath

Saturday, September 29, 2007

AIMS OF THE DISCUSSION:

1) Accessibility (Accessing needs and developing services)
2) Creating opportunities
3) Retention of Immigrants
4) Ease pressure on the system

ISSUES ADDRESSED:

ACCESSIBILITY

-Lack of information
-Newcomers do not know where to go to look for services
-Health care professionals need to be aware of immigrant values/ culture

LANGUAGE

-Treating somebody with interpreters is not enough. Family members may not want to tell all of the points to an interpreter. Confidentiality issues. Power issues.
-If you do not speak English it can be difficult to find the hospital
-It is difficult to introduce the new health care system to newcomers
-Immigrants often fins it difficult to get help from local residents
Health professionals need a basic understanding of the language or the body language used in different cultures (i.e. in some cultures people do not make eye contact)

VALUES

-Different values in home country than in Canada (such as disciplining children)
-Misunderstanding sometimes comes between the family and the social worker when Canadian child managing/ parenting practices are imposed on the immigrant family
-Health Providers need to be aware of the issues facing immigrants and the immigration process in order to be more sensitive and to dispel negative stereotypes.
-The health professional need to know how to approach the newcomers (i.e. not to embarrass them)

WAITLIST

-Shortage (health professionals ready and able to work but facing many roadblocks to certification)
-System needs to be able to accommodate foreign trained doctors and nurses (barriers to obtain work need to be reduced)

Suggestion: -develop a service program to help the health professionals to navigate the system. (I.e. sometimes there may be a small gap to pass the physician exams) We need to reduce some of the strict criteria health professionals need to go through to obtain work in their field

PASTORAL CARE/ NURSING HOME PLACEMENT

-More staff needed to help seniors
-More personal care home placements for immigrants
-More immigrant staff representation
Nursing home/ home care needs to provide services to people from diverse backgrounds
-The client/ professionals will not feel as lonely is they see some staff from diverse groups

END OF LIFE CARE

-It is very important to believe and value other people's values
-Need to be aware of these values
-I.e. burial is different in different cultures

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

-Some traditional medicine is helpful in providing care
-Any newcomer who comes in a new country to accept new medicine who were used to traditional medicine
-I.e., grandmothers as midwives in some cultures
-The traditional Chinese medicine in addition to other health care services

WISH LIST

1) The development of one place/ centre in NL that would have the staff/ specialty training to help all service providers in serving immigrants in the province
2) Add some/more courses in diversity within medicine, nursing and social work departments. Immigrant related courses in school, college and university
3) We need professional interpreters in the system who are adequately trained in cultural sensitivity
4) We need to develop a team for newcomers in the health care system including physicians, community developer, social worker, lawyer, etc. (need to develop a specific community centre)
5) We can do more in St. John's. We need to be more aware/ knowledgeable about immigrants and the issues they face in our province

GROUP C – HEALTH

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Discussion:

-68% of Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans cannot follow medical instruction, medication
-We need a medical advocate for all (Proper access to healthcare for minorities/ address cultural barriers/ look at how welcoming the community is for retention)

Proposed Initiatives:

Hiring a **Professional support persons** who are experienced and familiar with immigrants and who can GO WITH THEM direct them to the proper places/ departments (i.e. emergency, etc.)
-To protect this vulnerable group

•

Staff Advocate for Immigrant Groups in the Health Care system (with considerable knowledge about culturally competent services and sufficient cross cultural training)

•

To get the professionals/ medical service providers together to offer **culturally competent services**

•

Thorough **Pastoral Care.** We can lobby for this position in Health Care to navigate the system

•

Offer **cross-cultural training to the staffs and volunteers** in the health care system. (Training packages need to include cultural competency training- the Coalition can help the Volunteer Coordinator develop this

•

Presentations on the importance of diversity in health care (cross cultural, diversity training)

Immigrant/ Newcomers Support Team in the Hospital:

Eastern Health

•

Team

•

•	•	•	•	•
Pastoral care	Social Workers	Doctors/ Family physicians	Nurses	Volunteer Coordinator (Eastern Health)

Possibility Statements:

Forming culturally competent, comprehensive health support services for newcomers and immigrants. We need more outreaching, understanding at the community level and a unity of confidence and services enabling diversity among all.

Lobbying for the staff position of advocates from immigrants group in health care with the help of pastoral care and more volunteer training in cultural competency.

GROUP D – OUTREACH– RESEARCH- BE A RESOURCE

Facilitator: Yamuna Kutty

Saturday, September 29, 2007

GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

ESL
– Need more classroom time
- Need more discipline in class
- Separate the students who speak the same language
- Teachers should talk slower
- No continuing program for adults

Discrepancy between males and females:

English Classes- The English training offered at present is for both males and females.
It was brought up that this can be problematic for women.

Males seem to be the ones who go to class everyday while, any domestic emergency keeps the women away from their daily class.

It is possible that the attitude of women not needing as much education still prevails.
Isolation:

This is another problem that women face. Thrown into a new culture, not knowing any one, not knowing the language, no transportation to get to places, family left back home, not much knowledge of finances, dominant males, lack of confidence to venture out, to approach any one, depression etc. are but a few causes for isolation. There needs to be a greater understanding that isolation is caused through all of the above issues and also that women can take steps to combat some of the problems. Approach organizations that can help them to break this vicious circle.

What is needed:

-A mentoring program for students

- A central database of program/ activities offered in different communities

- A community services line

- More conversation classes

GROUP D – OUTREACH- RESEARCH- BE A RESOURCE

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Proposed Initiative:

Diversity Database Newfoundland & Labrador (DDNL)
-An electronic (and hard copy) information clearinghouse of activities and programs happening in Newfoundland & Labrador.

Possibility Statement:

We now know where to go, what to do and what is happening in our communities in Newfoundland & Labrador.

GROUP E – SUPPORT-MEDIATION-RETENTION-CULTURE

Facilitator: Jose Rivera

Saturday, September 29, 2007

GROUP DISCUSSIONS/ IDEAS

1) Design a common website and Welcome kit (expand on the MWONL booklet)
2) Welcome wagon for newcomers (with a radio station)
3) Support immigrant women and pre-school children
4) Survey of data and services (Quantitative/ qualitative), media
5) Children can act as a bridge to adults to encourage the local population to embrace newcomers
6) Celebrate diversity (through festivals, musicals, playgroups, and food-tasting shows. Schools celebrate a week of individual cultures (photos, music, food, clothing, faiths, etc.) For example: the MWONL international food and craft fair that will take place at the holiday inn on November 4, 2007

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY RESPONSES

1. A)
- Fill gaps between groups
- Linking immigrants to other structures
- A group of people and organizations working together
- Information sharing as an effective tool of action
- Wanting to know and work with newcomers
- Opportunity to do some meaningful volunteer work
- Creating a safe place to come to

1. b)
- Educating citizens on available resources
- Openness/ awareness necessary to promote diversity and empower newcomers
- A group of organizations works better than just one

2. a)
- Strong passion for justice
- Helping newcomers establish themselves in the community
- Enjoys making new friends
- Works with passion
- Excited about problem-solving

2. b)
- Cooperation
- Respect for one another's agenda
- Good communication between groups
- Openness/ transparency/ proactively
- Helping eliminate barriers
- Government should take part in the organization
- Newcomers should have a voice
- Needs need to be looked after

3. - The group should assist in the community (integration/ more funding for newcomers to find employment/ address the integrity/ transparency/ hope that the organization develops into a big body/ hope it is realistic)
   - If this does not work it would affect the well being of newcomers

4. - More housing
   - Less isolation
   - Foreign credential recognition
   - Love and harmony
   - Resource sharing between groups
   - No other organization to replace this umbrella group (this work is important)
   - JOBS!!
   - In the year 2012: there is a 4 story building for the umbrella group and everyone knows about the umbrella group, closer working relationship with the government, etc.

GROUP E – SUPPORT-MEDIATION-RETENTION-CULTURE

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Proposed Initiative:

Develop and plan a community FAIR that promotes all aspects of culture.

Possibility Statement:

We are a strong umbrella organization to enrich Newfoundland Diversity, making connections, creating possibilities and celebrating successes.

GROUP F: COMMUNITY & BRIDGE BUILDING (Merged with WORK- EMPLOYMENT)

Facilitators: Fred Eckert-Maret & John Kamara

Saturday, September 29, 2007

Discussion Topics

1. Welcoming community/ Community services available

YM/YWCA
- Previously a service provider (employment, exercise, etc.)
- Overwhelmed by big influx of newcomers
- Can we revive this?

College of the North Atlantic (CONA)
- Pottery/ ESL/ other classes- offered to Bulgarian refugee claimants

SENIORS:
- Often acting in isolation

Newcomers to Canada/ Newcomers to Newfoundland

2. Networking with faith communities
- An option for newcomers
- Creation of a lobby group
- Working with various communities
  e.g. Eve Robert's interfaith group (a unifying event)

3. Volunteerism for Immigrants
- Advantages of networking with members of the community
- Job/career related
- Volunteering is useful
- Experience (work/ resume building)
- Larger organizations may be interested in opening their doors to newcomers (i.e. Healthcare corp.)

Appreciative Inquiry Responses:

1)
- Having cultural events (an exchange between newcomers and long term residents/ raise comfort level in community)
- Cultural exchange on a regular basis
- Breaking stereotypes
- Using Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) for newly arrived newcomers to address the barriers they face

- Arrived Newcomers to address barriers they face.

2) - Welcoming Newcomers to the community (open door model)
- Need for government support in finding employment
- Systemic barriers (bureaucratic, political, etc.)
- Partnerships between NGO's and government

3) - Prepping commercial ventures, in order to increase NGO funding
- Providing newcomers with employment information, resume building, interview training, etc.
- Special needs of newcomers (more personal one-on-one assistance in finding meaningful employment

GROUP F: COMMUNITY & BRIDGE BUILDING (EMPLOYMENT)

Sunday, September 30, 2007

Discussions continued:

1) Welcoming community
2) Networking/ Integration
3) Volunteerism
4) Employment

- Welcome wagon
- Find out interest from newcomers
- Find out interest in skills
- Civic participation
- Learning opportunities (language and skills)
- Safe haven
- Awareness training
- Social clubs (international)
- Skills assessment

Proposed Initiative:

-Assess, develop and support newcomers skills and connect them to job opportunities.
-Apprenticeship and mentoring

Possibility Statement:

By discovering the strengths of newcomers, Newfoundland and Labrador society is enriched and everyone benefits.

Conclusion

New name suggested for the Coalition

The name, COALITION ON RICHER DIVERSITY (CORD) was suggested by Steering Committee member Fred Eckert-Maret, and subsequently accepted as a new working name for the Coalition.

Impressions

"The fact that we actually looked at workable ideas and reasonable outcomes. We came up with practical solutions that can be accomplished to facilitate immediate change." –Conference Participant

The discussions held throughout this conference helped the Steering Committee gain a clearer picture of what needs to be done and what an umbrella organization should look like. The participants were enthusiastic and excited to have an open forum to voice their concerns. They were able to discuss relevant issues and mention their own experiences. The organization, topic selection and facilitators were commended in the evaluations submitted by conference participants. The importance of collaboration was strongly emphasized.

"I hope the findings about what needs to be done can be referred to organizations and individual members since as an Umbrella organization, the Coalition's role should be more coordinating and fostering rather than delivering services directly."
– Conference Participant

The main criticism was that the meetings were too long and that it is difficult to have participants, who for the most part work Monday to Friday, give up their weekends. Some participants also raised the concern for representation and awareness of diversity issues in rural Newfoundland. Higher attendance was also suggested as was increasing the involvement of members from existing organizations and explaining to groups that the aim of the Umbrella organization is to network and coordinate not compete with them to provide services and programs.

These criticisms and the need to develop mutual awareness, cooperation and respect geared plans for another conference in the near future.

Next Steps

"We really touched on all the important themes. Now the main thing is the get down to organize and form the structure." – Conference Participant

Participants identified a need for and expressed interest in the formation of issue groups. As such, working groups are being formed to begin work on the issues raised from this first meeting. An email mailing list will also be developed as a means to communicate relevant information, activities and programs to interested individuals and organizations.

It was suggested at the conference that the Coalition should meet again with mainstream organizations (government and public agencies) and minority group community representatives to explain its mandate in relation to the work of other agencies. As such, **CORD is now planning a workshop for the middle of January 2008** to meet with the relevant stakeholders to gain further direction in order to create its mandate.

> *"It would be shame, after all the energy invested in this project this very intense weekend not to have this take on life and prosper and grow." – Conference Participant*

EVENT INVITATION:

COALITION FOR DIVERSITY

Newfoundland & Labrador Diversity and Immigration Umbrella Organization (NLDIUO)

Do you enjoy working with like-minded people sharing common interests, have a passion for promoting diversity and believe in social justice? Perhaps you like to affect change, better understand your community, create and work on solutions or like to bring people together for a common cause. If you find yourself nodding with agreement, then being part of a diversity and immigrant umbrella organization may be for you. Not sure what that entails? Why not come to our 2-day event and find out!!!

The Steering Committee of NLDIUO is extending an invitation to you and your organization to be part of the inaugural meeting on **Saturday & Sunday September 29th & 30th at MUN.**

We are expecting a large number of attendees from all over the province for this event and have planned a number of stimulating activities and working sessions, which are intended to create a unified vision of the coalition's purpose, set a mandate and draft its structure. We hope for your participation. Please extend it to you colleagues and others that you might think can benefit and/or contribute to help us shape a solution.

Attached you'll find the event's agenda. Copy it and post it around, please.

NLDIUO values:	
⅊ education,	⅊ collaboration,
⅊ cultural sensitivity,	⅊ networking opportunities,
⅊ transparency	⅊ finding solutions,

Please direct your response to Jose Rivera by e-mail to joserivera@canada.com by Friday, September 21, 2007. Please let us know if you plan to attend part or all of this event to better accommodate your needs.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee

Barbara Burnaby
Veeresh Gadag
John Kamara
Jose Rivera
Fred Eckert-Maret
Telisha Harrison-Green
Lloydetta Quaicoe
Mona Wall

Postal address: 30 Stabb Court, St. John's, NL, A1B 3C9

Evaluation Form

Please complete this questionnaire and submit it to the registration desk at the end of the event or to your discussion group facilitator. All responses will remain anonymous. Your input is greatly appreciated!

1. What did you like most about the workshop?

2. What could be improved?

3. What themes would you suggest that were not covered?

4. Other comments:

Thank you

COALITION FOR DIVERSITY
Newfoundland and Labrador Diversity and Immigration Umbrella Organization (NLDIUO)

Evaluation Responses

1. What did you like most about the workshop?

-The energy, the commitment of participants, the sharing, openness.
-The various ideas and issues that were brought up and presented.
-Everything about it. It was really good. I met different kinds of people. They were nice and I'd love to do this again.
-The topics were very well selected.
-Meeting new people and exploring new ideas.
-The fact that we actually looked at workable ideas and reasonable outcomes. We came up with practical solutions that can be accomplished to facilitate immediate change.
-In order to create change, you need to be motivated to create change. By focusing on the negative it is more difficult to become inspired to take action. This workshop was successful in remaining positive and inspiring people for the cause.
-A good step to move on.
-So many perspectives, all of them heard and considered, including my own. I didn't think I'd have any kind of relevance here, but as a future ESL teacher in Korea I do.
-Working together as one so that we can benefit from each other.
-The experience.
-Meeting with people from all over the world-to have solutions to problems that are facing us.
-The cooperation.
-Genuine openness to ideas of participant
-Excellent launch with a very moving play.
-In getting together (even though we were a small group) we had a good goal so people really worked well to achieve success.
-Very impressed with detailed construction of the workshop, certainly lots of material to carry this project to fruition by keeping it going.
-Excellent advance organization of presentation information and materials, identification of major topics. Good leadership/ facilitation at workshop.

2. What could be improved?

-We did as best we could, but seating like a circle could have been better, some of us were looking at each other's backs.
-Include all NGO's in such important events by extending to them formal invitations to this organizations workshops, meetings, etc.
-We need more people from different countries.
-Higher attendance for both days.
-Comfort of participants! The noise level in St. David's was awful and the seating Sunday afternoon in the basement room was VERY uncomfortable.
-Need more participants especially reps from established minority communities, especially from institutions, health, education, social work, government (provincial immigration), ANC.
-Get this organization registered.

-Less long. Two days takes a lot out of people.
-Having it shorter (but perhaps it was needed)
-Helping people to learn and to love.
-English, friendship.
-Moe feedback from immigrants regarding intermingling with citizens or their newly adopted country. We need encouragement too and we do not want to appear to be inquisitive or too forward (or bold)- we really do want to be a welcoming community.
-Unity and understanding and also helping each other to find jobs to support our children within the community.
-Perhaps more visibility to the realities of exiting organizations and how to incorporate them into the Coalition and enable them to develop mutual awareness, respect and cooperation.

3. What themes would you suggest that were not covered?

-The role of agencies such as Canadian Heritage, ACOA in supporting the Coalition in the future
-How the Coalition can let other NGO groups know that it is an umbrella group and not their competitor.
-I don't know because I loved everything about it.
-All well covered.
-Integration into the real working community of NL- outside of sheltered environments.
-Existing services – gaps in services (concerned about overlap especially with ANC services.
-St. John's area vs. situation elsewhere in NL (greater isolation)
-Every topic was covered.
-Help with language.
-Recreation for the young people
-To uncover our strength in helping each other with love.
-Dilemmas regarding newly arrived seniors, isolation and inclusiveness into society, language barriers regarding seniors and socializing.
-Who should be involved under the umbrella?
-Who was involved (MWONL, ANC, Immigration department, provincial government, etc.? Who is resistant? Why? What can be done about this?
-We really touched on all the important themes. Now the main thing is the get down to organize and form the structure.

4. Other comments?

-People's expectations on both sides need to be reasonable.
-The conference in general has been good. A lot of ideas have been pointed out and discussed. The Coalition for Diversity should get a mandate, get registered and try to implement the information collected through the workshop and conference and a lot more. I commend all the organizers. Good job!
-Very well organized.
- Coalition will, in time, need to meet with mainstream organizations (government and public agencies) and minority community representatives to explain its mandate in relation to the work of other agencies, to gain the support of other organizations/agencies for the mandate of the NLDIUO.
-Wish great success to this organization.

-Getting the word out about your organization is important; I had no idea of these issues until this conference.
-Work hard.
-There was so much energy and interest in the project.
-Wonderful and well directed facilitation.
-A very fine effort including the efforts and contributions of many people young and old and from many different sectors.
-I hope the findings about what needs to be done can be referred to organizations and individual members since as an *Umbrella* organization, the Coalition's role should be more coordinating and fostering rather than delivering services directly.
-Working with the young volunteers- who became a part of the general group.
- It would be shame, after all the energy invested in this project this very intense weekend not to have this take on life and prosper and grow.

Availability Form

Please complete this availability form and submit it to the registration desk at the end of the event or to your discussion group facilitator.

Name_____

Email address_____

Telephone number(s)_____

I am interested in volunteering with this organization and am available (please choose one):

At least three hours a month_____
At least three hours a week_____
To help with events when available_____
Other_____

I would be interested in being a member of a working group (Yes or No)_____

I would like to be added to a future listserv (Yes or No)_____

My topics of interest include_____
_____
_____

Particular skills that I could bring to this organization include_____
_____
_____

Other comments/ information_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you

COALITION FOR DIVERSITY
Newfoundland and Labrador Diversity and Immigration Umbrella Organization (NLDIUO)

Keynote Speech for the Coalition for Diversity Conference
September 29, Engineering Lecture Theatre, MUN

[Song: Bless the Light]

Good morning.

I want to share a story with you that begins with a 9-year old child in Brussels, Belgium in the year 1940. One spring day, the child's father learns that within hours, the Nazis would be storming into the city. With waves of fear gripping him, the father hunches over the kitchen table with his wife, and together they quickly plan a daring escape. The child's mother weeps as she tries desperately to stuff her family's every dear possession into a wicker picnic basket. They leave their home, and run to the train, which brings them across the border into France. There, they spend the next few weeks hiding in bushes, stealing eggs to sustain themselves, eventually making their way to Portugal as World War II *explodes*.

After many more months of running and hiding, staying days or sometimes just hours ahead of the Nazis, they discover relatives who live in Canada, the few relatives they had left who had *not* perished in the war. This little family in exile, this little Jewish family who had lost so many aunts and uncles and cousins to the ovens in the concentration camps, finally crosses the ocean to their precious freedom.

The little boy in this story is my father, and his parents are my grandparents. They made it out alive, but many did not. Dozens of members of *our family alone* were exterminated in the Holocaust.

They were persecuted and perished simply because they were different – they did not fit some idealized or standardized human model. Since I was not there, I can only create stories in my imagination about what it might have been like in those dark times, not only for Jews, but for all the unwanted and terrorized people of that time, those who didn't fit the "ideal" because they were different.

The story I told you took place in the 1940s. Now, almost 70 years have passed, and what can we say has changed?

As some of you know all too well, we still live in an era of intense conflicts and massive institutional failures. We are still confronted regularly with mounting evidence of the great harm we do to one another. We are numbed by the news of ongoing genocides, ethnic hatred, and acts of violence and neglect committed daily in the world. Feeling secure in our little self-protective groups, we hurt and humiliate each other, treating human beings in non-human ways. Even with all the technology available to us, or perhaps because of it, we are more fragmented and isolated from one another than ever before. Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes this experience as a "radical brokenness".

Once, we knew how to be together. We knew how to act for the good of the whole. Many cultural traditions have a master story to explain why human life is so hard, why there is so much hurting and suffering. And the stories always seem to be the same – at some point early in our human origins; we forgot that we were all connected. We broke apart, we separated from each other. We even fragmented within ourselves, putting body, heart, mind, and spirit *way* out of alignment. From these master stories we learn that the possibility for healing emerges when we finally remember our interconnectedness and interdependence – our original unity - and when we are able to gather and begin to reconnect the scattered fragments of our humanity.

I believe that there are very few among us who consciously want to follow a path of separation, or to contribute to more fragmentation, hatred, and aggression. The American poet Longfellow wrote that "if we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each person's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all animosity." If we are going to re-weave a world of wholeness, compassion and peace rather than a world of disintegration and animosity, then we are going to need new ways to address and understand our diversity and differentness.

My beloved teacher, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, tells about how we are all needed on this planet - every single one of us - and that diversity is a necessary and healthy thing. He says that if humankind were to be compared to a single body, then if we were to take all the organs of that body and homogenize them - make them the same - the body would die. A healthy body needs strong bones and marrow, a good heart and a good circulation system. All the parts are different, one from the other, all the parts are needed, and all the parts are important. Each of us, each culture, each religion, each unique group of us – each is a vital organ within the larger organism of the planet.

Unfortunately, very few people in their childhood have been taught how to relate to others who are different from them. And none of us comes into the world with a little bag of instructions about how to make contact with diverse others. We do the best we can with what we have learned.

And so, where *do* we find the courage to work towards real change? The answer is found in the word courage itself, which comes from the French word *coeur*, meaning heart. *We develop courage for those things that speak to the heart.* Our courage grows for things that affect us deeply, things that open our hearts. Once our heart is engaged, it becomes easier to be brave. It becomes easier to speak out about things that matter.

The emerging future requires the will of people to act from the heart, from a place of deep caring for humanity. We cannot depend on government, business, or civil society alone. The old social structure is crumbling, and what is emerging from the rubble is a new form of presence and power that is growing through small groups and networks of people. It's a different quality of connection, a different way of being present with one another from the heart.

When people connect from the heart, from a meaningful place of compassion, openness and wisdom, they move beyond patterns of the past. They step into their real power.

And there is no power equal to a community discovering what it truly cares about.

We have among us this weekend a group of people who are passionately and actively engaged in this discovery. These are our conference organizers, people who believe with every ounce of their being that they themselves must be the change they wish to see in the world.

[I would like to ask the Steering Committee members to stand and wave so we can see you. Thank you.]

These integral visionaries are training themselves for leadership by changing themselves. They are learning together and enhancing their skills in group development, community development, and organization development; networking and conflict resolution; and *dialogue that practically reaches the depth of communion.*

Their dream is to create a provincial organization - *a conscious community* – that will recognize and honour diversity, that will educate and inspire, and that will offer hope and heart, particularly to immigrants and refugees. They envision an organization that will be based on widespread participatory action and the harnessing of diverse individual and collective wisdom and experience. This group holds dear the values of appreciation, inclusion, sharing, and relationship-building.

These are not just buzzwords that I am using. I have had the blessing of serving this group as a consultant over the past few months, and I have seen them live these values, struggles and all.

I know that they believe that even one person can make a difference. They believe in the importance of not just talking about making a difference, but also in taking action. I know they are discovering their own leadership abilities, and sometimes they are surprising themselves with their capacity to inspire people. I believe they really understand *in their bones* what it means to provide a safe and welcoming space, to hear a kind word, to hold a hand, to touch deeply, to be included, to have one's voice heard, to feel valued, wanted, and supported.

They not only appreciate diversity – they model it, they cherish it, and they *celebrate* it. They are good at listening, and as you can see, they are *very* good at mobilizing. And I know, also from first-hand experience, that they are *very - good - cooks*!

Large and lasting change doesn't begin from a leader announcing a new plan, although sometimes I know it looks like that. Change begins much earlier, rumbling up from deep inside a system, when a few people notice something they will no longer tolerate, and when they share a dream of what is possible. As they talk together, as relationships grow, *through their differences* a deep wisdom emerges as they get more and more connected with each other. They soon learn that as they talk about and act on things that matter to them, the whole picture starts to shift.

There's even a good scientific explanation for this, because this is how all life works. As separate ideas or entities become connected to each other, life surprises us with emergence – the sudden appearance of new capacity and intelligence that can only exist because of the connections. I continue to believe this is a basic principle of life.

When each of us takes responsibility to align with and support others who are doing the same good work, ultimately, if enough diverse people join in, the world begins to change.

I want to leave you with one more story. This one is a story about two men who are separately lost in a forest. They had been lost for several days and had no sense of the right way to get out. Suddenly one of them sees the other walking towards him. A great joy arose in the first man; finally, there would be someone to show him the correct way out. When they came to each other, the first man said, “Traveler, tell me. What is the best way to go? I have been lost in the forest for many days.” The second man answered, "I cannot tell you what is the proper way. I am also lost. However, one thing I can tell you. The way I have been going you should not go. It is NOT the correct way. Come, together we will choose a new way."

And so in that spirit, I would like to offer a prayer to this community.

Dear Creator, in all the diverse ways we relate to You,
We praise You.
We praise and bless all Your ways.

Thank You so much for giving us life, and for sustaining us through our struggles so that we can reach this amazing moment.
What a blessing it is to be alive!

In You, Source of Life, all love begins and ends.
Your universal love transcends all our differences and dividedness.

Teach us how to see each other with brand new eyes.
Help us to remember that we all drink from one water
We all breathe from one air
We walk on one earth
And we live under one sky.

May our trust in You and in each other
lead us to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly on this earth.

May You Who makes peace in the ultimate reaches of the universe
teach us to make peace within ourselves,
between each other,
and among all living beings.

Dear Creator, may we offer a renewed World to You,
with infinite gratitude and thanksgiving.

Amen.