

About the Saskatoon Open Door Society

The Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS) has been a non-profit settlement service provider in Saskatoon since 1981.

SODS provides support for the settlement and integration of Newcomers in the community through a wide range of programming in the area of: Settlement and Family Support (SFS), Language Training (LTU), Employment Training (ETU), and Settlement and Community Support Services (SCSS).

To enhance and support the sense of community, SODS develops and facilitates connections between the Newcomer and the Host communities more specifically connecting with First Nations and Métis cultures through a wide range of partnership programs and integrated activities, promoting cross-cultural awareness.

Abstract

It is estimated that between 2019 and 2021, Canada will accept more than 1,000,000 immigrants and refugees. Stats Canada estimates that by 2036, one-third of the Canadian population could be immigrants. (Source: The Canadian Press, January 25, 2017)

Saskatoon is experiencing a steady rise in immigration and a number of refugees settling in the city. Although these newcomers bring many skills and unique perspectives with them, they often face immense challenges in navigating and integrating into their new culture. Challenges often include language barriers, loss of ethnic and cultural identity, lack of family and community network support, lack of familiarity and experiences with their new communities, and feelings of exclusion. There is a need for leadership at the adult as well as the youth level.

In response, the Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS) has developed a series of Leadership Programs for both newcomer adults and youth. These programs aim to provide newcomers with a continuum of opportunities to develop leadership skills and experience, and to be valuable collaborators in creating a welcoming, inclusive community.

Adult Leadership Programs

Background:

To better understand the leadership needs of the adult newcomer population, the Saskatoon Open Door Society conducted two research projects titled "Strategies for Leadership in a Diversity Environment" and "Civic Engagement through Leadership." The findings of these research projects identified three main issues facing immigrants in their new communities.

- There currently exists limited diversity experience within the Saskatoon community.
 - There is a lack of resources designated to assist immigrants in taking a more active leadership role in their communities.
 - There is limited support for newcomers who want to become more engaged in the community and have a voice in decisions that are made.
- In response to these identified issues, SODS created the Leadership and Community Engagement (LACE) program.

★ L.A.C.E. - Leadership and Community Engagement

About the Program:

- Over the course of six months, the Leadership and Community Engagement (LACE) program meets to engage newcomer adults in a leadership development program.
- In these sessions, community educators and professionals cover topics such as community leadership, Indigenous leadership, public speaking, conflict resolution, community mapping, and leadership etiquette to provide newcomer adults with a well-rounded leadership training.
- These meetings also include several community leaders who share their personal experiences in leadership and offer mentorship support.
- At the completion of the first term of LACE, 14 participants graduated from the program, becoming the first alumni group, and now represent the newcomer population in a variety of community-based initiatives in Saskatoon.

Outcome:

- 1. Enhanced life skills.**
 - Development and practice leadership skills.
 - Increased knowledge from educational sessions.
 - Increased self-confidence.
 - Enhanced oral presentation skills.
- 2. Development of community-networking skills.**
 - Networking with a variety of leaders in the community.
 - Enhanced awareness of community organizations.
- 3. Development and enhancement of cultural awareness**
 - Knowledge of cultural etiquette.
 - Deepened understanding of multicultural experiences.



Youth Leadership Programs

Background:

Newcomer youth are often caught between the two worlds of their culture of origin and their new host culture. This leads to feelings of being alienated and excluded in their new schools and communities. These feelings contribute to being vulnerable to several negative interactions such as bullying, gangs, and xenophobia.

In response, the Saskatoon Open Door Society has created a series of Youth Leadership programs aimed to enhance the academic, social, and cultural growth of newcomer students, which will support their integration into their schools, the larger community and help them to reach their fullest potential.

★ Creating Youth Culture

About the Program:

- The CYC program is a leadership training program, which was created to address race relation issues among school aged children and youth.
- This program trains youth to facilitate workshops to their peers and takes the approach that the best leaders and teachers regarding diversity, acceptance, and cultural differences are newcomer youth themselves.
- These experientially based presentations, which the youth developed, are primarily about cultural bridging, race relations, racial bullying, negotiating differences and intercultural connections and are facilitated in elementary schools in Saskatoon.

★ Peer Leadership

About the Program:

- The Peer Leadership training program aims to provide a platform for high school students to enhance their leadership abilities and become role models within their schools and school communities.
- The peer leaders are responsible for being a warm and welcoming first contact for recent newcomer families in school, who are new to the Canadian education system.
- They provide various supports for new students during orientation and throughout the school year as needed.
- As well, they act as a liaison between school and the new family by providing language and cultural connections for the student and family.

Outcomes:

- 1. Enhanced social networks**
 - Improved sense of belonging within the community
 - Promotion of integration within school systems
 - Development of healthy peer relationships
- 2. Increased youth engagement in the newcomer community**
 - Increased engagement in the education system
- 3. Improved official language skills in newcomer youth**
- 4. Enhanced life skills**
 - Improved self-esteem and confidence
 - Enhanced skills and experiences in the areas of effective communication, public speaking skills, cross-cultural awareness, teamwork and group based skills
- 5. Community activities have encouraged connections with the community and newcomer and other youth.**
 - Increased number of participants who continue to volunteer in their community
 - Encourages youth to act as ambassadors, stakeholders and a positive force within their communities.



★ Annual "Voice of Youth" Summit

About the Program:

- The Annual Youth Summit Planning Committee is responsible for the preparation and facilitation of our annual "Voice of Youth" Summit, where the voices of youth are heard by adult stakeholders such as municipal, provincial and federal elected officials and representatives to create a dialog for change in our communities.
- During these conference-planning sessions, the youth leaders identify several key discussion points that they would like our conference to focus on. The youth leaders are involved in the planning process in regards to the format of the conference, which topics will be addressed, stakeholders and community representatives to invite for each topic, etc.

★ Youth Leadership Initiative

About the Program:

- The Youth Leadership Initiative is designed to engage newcomers, and other youth such as First Nations, Métis and Canadian youth in their communities through civic engagement.
- The purpose of the Youth Community Stakeholder Committee is to identify one or two of the issues from the Youth Summit and follow its progression throughout the year.
- The goal of this program is to engage youth to be a part of the solution of the challenges identified in the annual youth summit.
- This inclusive program seeks to motivate, empower, and promote engagement in their communities through taking a leadership role in the development and facilitation of community based programming.

