

diversity is working

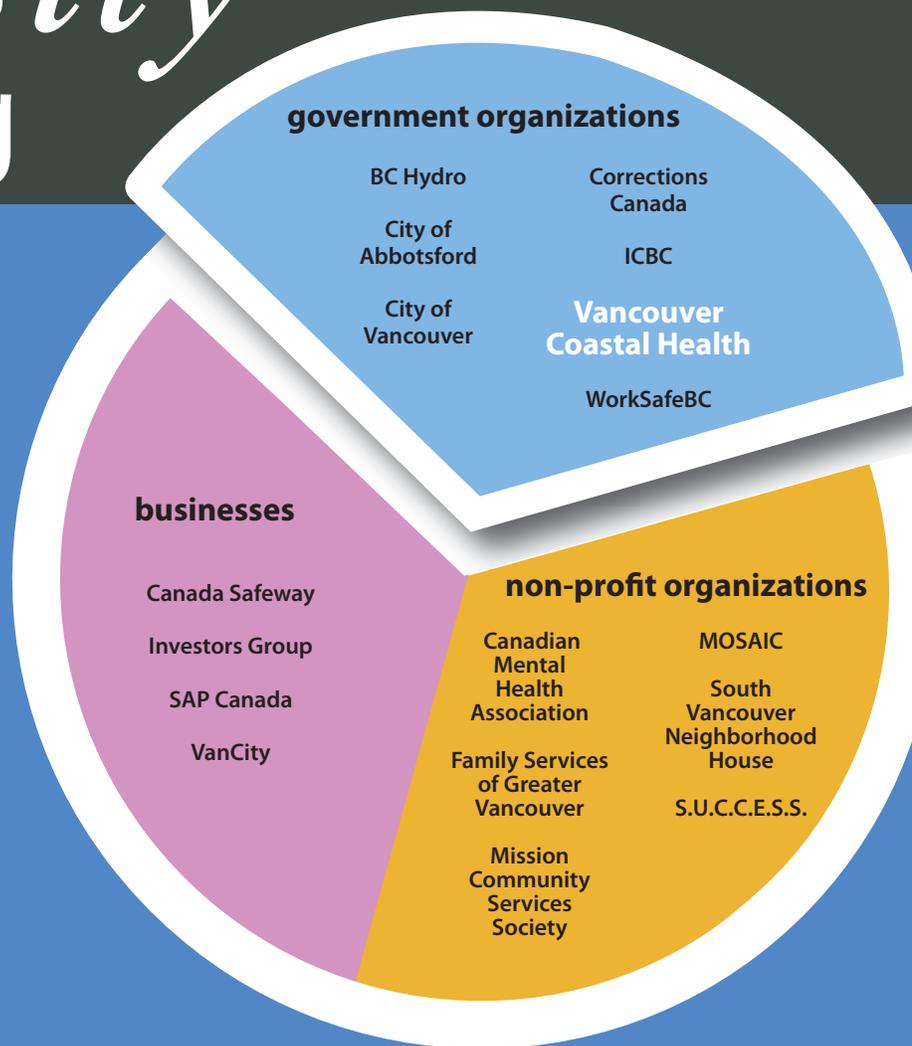
SPARC BC's *Diversity is Working* project provides seventeen (17) case studies of Lower Mainland organizations that have taken steps to make their workplaces more welcoming and inclusive for employees with diverse backgrounds. The purpose of the case studies is to celebrate successes in workplace diversity by highlighting best practices.

The set of case studies includes examples from organizations with small Human Resources departments to larger organizations with large Human Resources departments and designated diversity managers. The case studies are also drawn from a range of different sectors including businesses, non-profit organizations and government institutions. Some of the organizations being profiled have been implementing diversity and employment equity initiatives for decades while others have started to look at diversity in recent years.

Because of the diverse range of organizations being profiled, there are relevant best practices for any organization that is working to make their workplace more welcoming and inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds. Refer to the adjacent diagram for a list of participating organizations.

The following pieces of information are provided in each organization's case study:

- diversity business case or mandate for diversity;
- diversity initiatives and results; and,
- advice for other organizations considering undertaking similar work.



Vancouver Coastal Health
Promoting wellness. Ensuring care.

Vancouver Coastal Health delivers health care services to more than one million BC residents living in Vancouver, Vancouver's North Shore, Richmond, the Sea-to-Sky Highway, the Sunshine Coast, Bella Bella, Bella Coola, the Central Coast and surrounding areas.



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About Vancouver Coastal Health

Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) delivers health care services to more than one million BC residents living in Vancouver, Vancouver's North Shore, Richmond, the Sea-to-Sky Highway, the Sunshine Coast, Bella Bella, Bella Coola, the Central Coast and the surrounding areas. While many of the services are offered in the thirteen (13) hospitals that VCH operates, VCH also offers a number of other services including: Primary care, community-based residential and home care, mental health, addiction services, public health, hospital care, and research.

Vancouver Coastal Health's Business Case for Diversity

In 2005, Vancouver Coastal Health was doing workforce planning at a time when there was an international shortage of nurses. This prompted Vancouver Coastal Health to think creatively about how the organization could respond to this labour shortage and meet the health care needs of local residents. At the same time, Vancouver Coastal Health recognized that internationally educated health professionals were an underutilized talent pool in BC since many were not obtaining jobs within the health care system. In response to this opportunity, Vancouver Coastal Health developed a proposal for a project that could support the transition of internationally educated nurses (IENs) into the Canadian health care system. They partnered with Kwantlen Polytechnic University, the BC's Nurses Union and Providence Health Care to support the nurses.

Vancouver Coastal Health's (VCH) Training Programs for Internationally Educated Health Professionals

A fourteen (14) week program was designed to help IENs effectively transition into the Canadian health care system. The training consisted of two (2) components. The first component was focused on a review of clinical nursing skills such as assessments, and clinical decision-making. The second component was focused on their transition to the unit they were hired into along with the application of reviewed knowledge and skills.

As part of the intake process for this transition program, nurses were hired into units by the unit manager and were paid while they participated the transition program. At the beginning of the training process, VCH conducted an assessment to determine whether VCH could successfully support the IEN's transition in fourteen (14) weeks. During the first six (6) weeks, the nurses participated in the training program outside of their units.

This provided the new hires with a safe environment to learn and ask questions without feeling embarrassed in front of future colleagues. During the final eight (8) weeks, the IENs received training while on their units, and received feedback from colleagues and supervisors.

The IEN Transition Program together with other projects and research findings, drew attention to the communication challenges that internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) faced when working in the Canadian health care system. VCH, in partnership with the Fraser Health Authority (FHA) and Providence Health Care (PHC), led the development of a series of courses to address these issues. The first, *Professional Communication for IEHPs*, was designed for pre-licensed health professionals to improve their level of communication proficiency in a simulated healthcare context and in the workplace. A second course, *Communicating at Work for Licensed IEHPs*, was conceived for licensed health professionals who still found communication a challenge in a clinical setting. Building upon findings from the first two (2) courses, *Professional Communication: Supporting IEHPs Communication in Practice Settings for Supervisors* and *Supporting IEHPs Communication in Practice for Managers* were developed to enable supervisory staff to deal with workplace communication issues effectively.

Professional Communication for IEHPs was piloted in 2008/9 at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) with funding from the federal and provincial governments. The fifteen (15) week, four (4) hour per week course focused on communication skills pertaining to real clinical situations and was directed at a range of health professions. Though *Professional Communication for IEHPs* filled a language training gap for pre-licensed IEHPs, research also indicated that working IEHPs still encountered communication obstacles. Accent, mispronunciation, problems communicating on the telephone and reluctance to share concerns or contribute to team discussions were all examples of communication barriers identified in a needs assessment completed in 2009. Also, an IEHP's exposure to stressful situations as well as encountering or reacting to urgent, emergency clinical situations that arise in the workplace can impact the ability of IEHPs to communicate effectively with other team members whether by telephone or in person. Such situations can potentially impact patient safety.



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In response, a shorter program was adapted from the pre-licensure course for licensed, employed professionals. *Communicating at Work: A Skills Development Course for Licensed IEHPs* was piloted in 2009/10. The twelve (12) week, four (4) hours per week course was targeted to a mix of IEHPs from the nursing and occupational therapy professions, with the resulting majority of participants being RNs.

A number of challenges were identified in relation to the capacity of managers and supervisors when providing ongoing support, and in particular providing ongoing feedback to reinforce the learning goals of the *Communicating at Work for Licensed IEHP* participants. The needs assessment revealed that managers and supervisors did not feel comfortable or able to give feedback to IEHPs regarding their communication challenges. Recognizing that IEHPs need ongoing support to improve their communication, another course was created to build the capacity of supervisors from VCH, PHC and FHA to diagnose and resolve IEHP communication challenges. *Professional Communication: Supporting IEHPs Communication in Practice Settings for Supervisors* was piloted in 2011 and targeted RNs, LPNs, Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists.

Managers were initially included in the supervisors' course, but since they were not directly involved with front line health professionals, a more suitable one-day course was adapted for them. *The Supporting IEHPs Communication in Practice for Managers* course is designed to help managers to develop strategies to provide ongoing support to supervisors to build the communication skills of IEHPs in the workplace.

As part of this initiative, VCH staff members have also participated on information panels where they have shared information with IEHPs on what steps they need to take in order to practice their health profession in Canada. This work was primarily done through the recruiting department.

The pilot project funding for these courses has ended. *Professional Communication for IEHPs* is being offered by Kwantlen Polytechnic University until August 2012 at no cost to participants. It was also acquired by the Mount Royal University Languages Institute and adapted for use in an Albertan context. *Communicating at Work for Licensed IEHPs* is being offered through BCNU to IERNs with full back-up support. BCNU has adapted the curriculum to a six (6) week, one (1) day per week course. In addition, discussions are underway to offer the courses in other areas of BC.

The Results

Improved Communication Skills

Exit assessments for the pre-licensure and post licensure communication courses resulted in strong improvements in communication skills. Participants were evaluated at the beginning and the end of the pre-licensure course using the *Institutional Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses*. Participants showed marked improvement, the majority advancing by one or more levels in all categories.

In addition, at the end of the post-licensure course, the instructors reviewed the film clips of the role rehearsals with the Standardized Patient from Week three (3) and compared them to the film clips in Weeks eleven (11) and twelve (12) to assess each participant in relation to the Professional Presence criteria. By the latter weeks, the majority of participants had effectively demonstrated Professional Presence in almost all categories as “spontaneous/natural.” When participants were contacted between eight (8) and twenty-one (21) months after the end of the course, they reported that they had continued to apply the learning from the course and that the majority of the participants stated that they were definitely more confident and comfortable with communication, and that their confidence was growing. They were more confident with their co-workers, their patients, their patients’ family members and with their own families. They were more prepared to speak, better able to speak up, voice questions, to send clearer messages, and to avoid miscommunication.

Based on end-of-course feedback, the participants in the supervisors’ course reported that they had increased awareness about their own communication styles and had improved their ability to effectively use communicate strategies such as chunking, Ask-tell-Ask, pausing, signposting, and listening. All of the participants commented that the course had increased their confidence using communication strategies and giving feedback to IEHPs.

Overall Benefits for Vancouver Coastal Health

As a result of the IEN Transition Program, the organizers have received a lot of positive feedback from supervisors and managers on how successful the participating IENs have been in the workplace. The unit managers also report being more willing to hire internationally trained medical professionals now that they know there are some supports in place to help with the transition. Managers and supervisors have also witnessed very positive changes in the communication skills of their staff and report that these staff are much more comfortable interacting with patients and families.



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Once the training program became more well known, VCH started to receive a rapid influx of applicants which helped to address the labour shortage. Since the economic downturn in 2008, VCH has continued to receive a large number of applicants, but has a smaller number of positions to fill. Nevertheless, current workforce planning suggests that labour shortages will return as more health professionals retire, and this program will help VCH address this future challenge.

Vancouver Coastal Health's Advice for Other Organizations

When asked if VCH has any advice for other organizations considering implementing a similar diversity initiative, the following advice was offered:

- Think about investment. If you put in the investment, do the work to bridge the gaps, support your staff, you will have loyal employees.
- It's exciting to see internationally educated persons in our supervisor trainings and rising through the ranks.
- IEHPs can be very successful and absolutely augment your staffing. With diverse patient populations, diverse nursing staff also assist in meeting the needs of patients and families.

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