

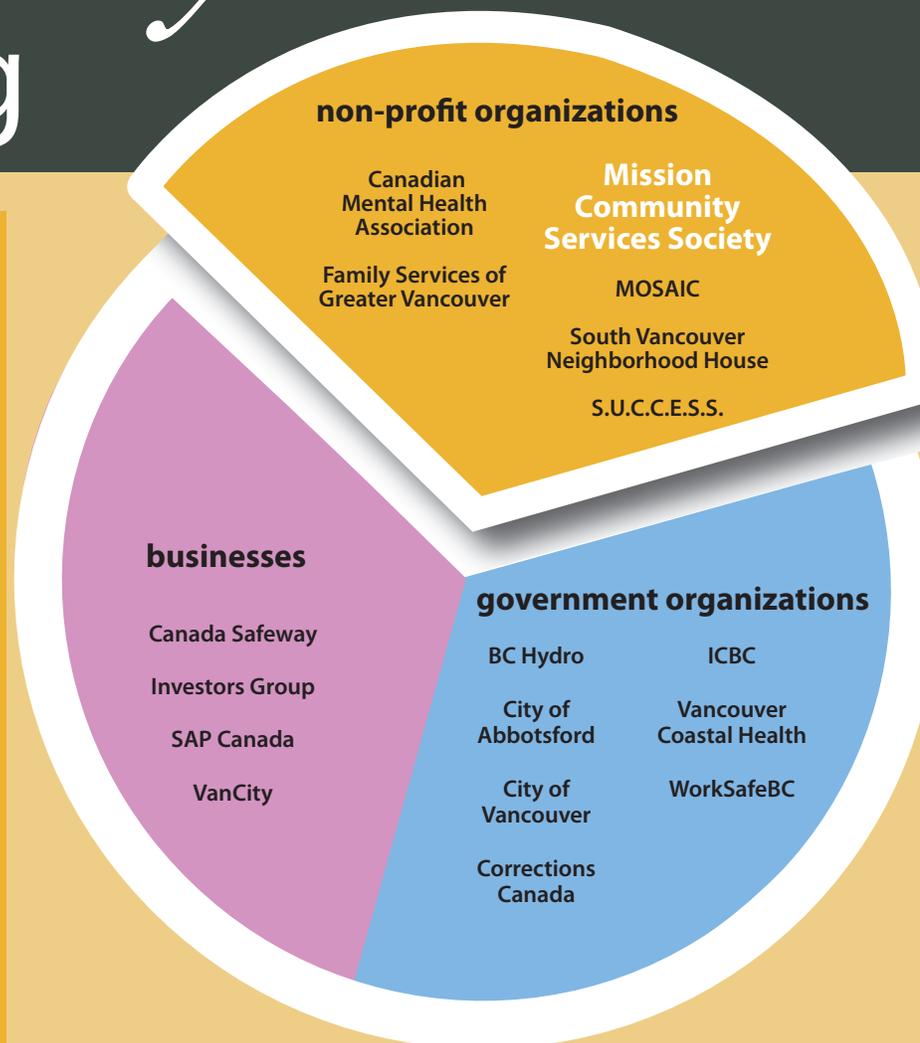
diversity is working

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.



MISSION *Community Services Society*

Mission Community Services Society is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1972. It is now the largest provider of social services in Mission and offers a broad range of services to individuals in need.

Mission Community Services Society

About Mission Community Services Society

Founded in 1972, Mission Community Services Society (MCSS) is now the largest provider of social services in Mission. MCSS provides a spectrum of services to individuals in need, such as: young or new parents; youth in crisis; immigrants; seniors; individuals with mental illness; low income individuals; people coping with addiction; and displaced individuals. MCSS believes in enriching the lives of residents of Mission through outreach and activity programs.

MCSS's Diversity Mandate

The mission and goal of MCSS is to identify and respond the needs of individuals, families and the community. As the community has become increasingly diverse, MCSS has adapted as an organization to address the needs of an increasingly diverse clientele. A few years ago, MCSS's management team decided that diversity had to be an intentional organizational goal. At first, the focus was on client-centred services, but the focus was later expanded to consider diversity throughout the organization.

Because of the marginalized populations that MCSS often serves, the organization uses a very broad definition of diversity which considers diversity in terms of different socio-economic backgrounds and education, as well as considering other traditional dimensions of diversity such as culture, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, and Aboriginal status.



Photography by: Gerhard von Rosen

MCSS's Diversity Initiatives

Staff Training and the Safe Harbour Program

As a first step, the organization undertook a diversity awareness campaign within the organization. The internal campaign drew attention to diversity and challenged staff to think about how they treat each other and treat clients. This has been followed up with a number of different staff training opportunities. For example, staff members are required to participate in annual competency training, which includes a focus on cultural competency.

In addition, many of the staff training opportunities around diversity and anti-discrimination have arisen from MCSS's involvement in the Safe Harbour – Respect for All program, since MCSS is both a Safe Harbour location and a Safe Harbour organizer.

As a Safe Harbour Location, MCSS offers an immediate and temporary safe refuge location for individuals experiencing mistreatment or discrimination. One (1) of the requirements that MCSS had to fulfill in order to become a Safe Harbour location was mandatory staff training, which prepared staff to respond to discrimination situations. Also, the three (3) main commitments that MCSS, as well as all other Safe Harbour locations, need to make include:

1. provide equitable training for all;
2. create an immediate safe place; and,
3. prepare the employees and worksites for Respect for All.

As a Safe Harbour organizer, MCSS has also taken a lead role on expanding the Safe Harbour program to businesses and worksites throughout Mission. As part of this initiative, MCSS offers the following free training opportunities to its community partners:

- information sessions, workshops on cultural and immigrant issues;
- workshops, forums, trainings, and seminars on anti-racism.



Mission Community Services Society

Often MCSS staff members benefit internally from the training and learning opportunities that are offered throughout the community as part of the Safe Harbour program. As stated by Kusum Soni, MCSS's Safe Harbour coordinator: "Whatever we do outside in the community, we share internally." For instance, MCSS hosts monthly Respect for All Chai Time learning events where both staff and community members are invited to come enjoy chai tea and samosas as well as learn about respect and diversity. For example, past events include a respect for seniors' session, a cross-racial companionship session, a respect for women session, and a respect for children and youth session.

Aside from the Safe Harbour program, MCSS managers keep their eye out for other diversity training opportunities that help to prepare MCSS to serve its diverse clientele. For instance, as part of MCSS's housing program, staff are sent to get training from Shelternet, which teaches how to respectfully work with homeless people and marginalized populations.

In addition, MCSS promotes cross-cultural understanding by supporting the organization of various ethno-cultural events both within the organization and in the broader community. For instance, when MCSS had a practicum student from Taiwan, he was encouraged to organize a Chinese New Year celebration within the organization. In addition, MCSS recently worked in collaboration with twenty (20) other community organizations to plan a Diwali celebration which was attended by over one thousand (1,000) people in Mission.

Recruitment

While MCSS does not have a formal diversity recruitment strategy or quotas, the organization does consider diversity to be an asset when hiring, and values diversity in terms of life experiences, education levels, and socio-economic backgrounds.

In addition, the organization naturally attracts diverse candidates as a result of its mandate and work in the community. For example, MCSS's Human Resources department partners with pre-employment programs such as CARE (Career Assistance and Resources for Employment) and Triangle Community Resources.

As part of these partnerships, MCSS provides individuals with pre-employment training, resume building and life skills training. In addition, MCSS's settlement services program only has one employee, and relies upon twenty (20) volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds in order to communicate with and serve a diverse clientele. Moreover, MCSS frequently provides work experience opportunities for students from the University of the Fraser Valley which has a diverse student body. When job opportunities come up, MCSS encourages people who have done work experience or volunteered with MCSS to apply. In addition, the settlement services program often introduces MCSS to multi-talented immigrants, who are also encouraged to apply when job opportunities arise.

As part of the recruiting process for paid staff and volunteers, MCSS makes it clear that diversity is an important part of the philosophy of the organization and works to ensure that it hires people who will embrace the values of the organization, and contribute to fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for MCSS's staff and clientele.

The Results

As a result of MCSS's diversity initiatives, a culture of diversity has been embedded throughout the organization from the senior leadership level, to entry level staff, to volunteers. This has positioned the organization well to attract talented staff members from diverse backgrounds and has created a welcoming and inclusive environment for staff, volunteers and MCSS's clientele.

MCSS has also been tremendously successful in promoting dialogue and discussion about diversity and anti-discrimination throughout the community as a result of its role as a Safe Harbour organizer. Through this program, MCSS has successfully recruited 50 organizations across Mission to sign on to be Safe Harbour locations, and staff members from all of those organizations are required to participate in Safe Harbour's diversity and anti-discrimination training.



Mission Community Services Society

Advice For Others

When asked if MCSS has any advice for other organizations considering undertaking similar work, the following advice was offered:

- It helps when management and the Board of Directors are on board.
- From the beginning of someone being hired at the organization, we work to ensure that candidates are a good fit and understand the philosophy of the organization, and value diversity.
- Diversity is a fluid expanding thing that you never fully achieve; it is a value that you are working towards.

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