

# 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:

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



## South Vancouver Neighborhood House

South Vancouver Neighborhood House is a non-profit organization that offers locally-based services and programs to South Vancouver residents. This includes programs targeted at children, youth, adults, families, seniors.

# South Vancouver Neighborhood House



## About South Vancouver Neighborhood House (SVNH)

The South Vancouver Neighborhood House (SVNH) is a member unit of the Association of Neighborhood Houses of BC (ANH). ANH is a nonprofit society operating in the Province of British Columbia with a history reaching back to 1894. SVNH has existed as a member of ANH in its present location since 1977.

A neighborhood house is a private social service agency offering activities and services designed to meet the needs of the particular area of the city in which it is located. ANH's mandate is to seek to develop harmonious relationships among community groups of different cultures, economic, religious and social backgrounds. Programs and services are determined by conditions within each community and by the needs and interests of the people living in the community.



## SVNH's Business Case for Diversity

All neighborhood houses, including SVNH, operate on a “place-based model” where the whole mission of the organization is to reflect the local community and respond to the diversity within the local community. The intention is to create an environment within that neighborhood house that is welcoming for anyone who comes through the door.

SVNH serves the broader area of Southeast Vancouver, which is a very diverse community; as a result, it is necessary for the organization to create a diverse, welcoming, and inclusive workforce within SVNH. It is necessary for staff to be able to build a connection with diverse groups including new immigrants, which often requires staff to have first-hand experience of diverse cultures, and the ability to speak more than one language. For example, a few of the programs that SVNH offers that benefit from diversity include:

- Preschool and learning programs;
- Settlement services;
- Family support;
- Seniors programs;
- Youth programs; and,
- Community development projects.

## SVNH's Diversity Initiatives

SVNH's diversity initiatives are part and parcel of its work, because diversity is embedded into the overall organizational mandate and mission. For instance, SVNH's Mission Statement, states: “Our challenge is to work with communities to develop innovative programs and services that meet the changing needs of a diverse population.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. South Vancouver Neighborhood House. *About Us-Mission Statement*. Accessed on March 29th, 2012 at: <http://www.southvan.org/about-us/mission-statement/>



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Thus, SVHN's commitment to diversity is embedded in all areas of its operations and work. SVHN uses an internal and external approach to its diversity and inclusion work, by acknowledging that it needs to foster a welcoming and inclusive community, both within the workplace as well as out in the community. It is assumed that if you can support staff in learning how to interact with one another in a welcoming and inclusive way, they will be able to take that knowledge and skills out in the community. This is imperative, since SVNH's staff are "ambassadors" in the community, who need to be able to promote SVNH as a welcoming and inclusive space for all community members.

According to SVNH's Executive Director, this commitment is something that SVNH has to "attend to everyday" because each staff member comes to SVNH with their own set of beliefs and values, and it is not always easy for people to understand how to work alongside someone who is vastly different from they are. To reinforce the organizational commitment and inclusion, the organization has developed the following Statement of Diversity:

*We are children, youth, adults and seniors of all races, all religions, all cultures, all abilities, and all economic levels.*

*We speak many languages.*

*We are men and women of all sexual orientations.*

*We value diversity.*

*We endeavor to reflect the diversity of our neighborhoods in our membership, our Boards of Management, our volunteers and our staff.*

*We respect all our neighbours.*

*We expect that all who come to our Houses, all those who provide or receive our services will extend the same respect to all those they meet here.*

*Therefore, we will act to promote the inclusion of all in our Association and in our community.<sup>2</sup>*

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2. South Vancouver Neighborhood House. *Our Commitment to Diversity*. Accessed March 29th, 2012 at: <http://www.southvan.org/about-us/mission-statement/>



### *Staff training*

In addition to making an explicit commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive organization, SVNH also regularly provides diversity training to its staff. Annually the organization offers new training opportunities to deepen staff's understanding of diversity. Some past staff training opportunities include: holding a Safe Harbour training session, working with The Hastings Institute, providing training on working in cross cultural contexts, inviting Vancouver Native Health to come in and teach staff about the wheel of similarity, and inviting Qmunity to come in and provide training around including members of the lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual community.

In addition, SVNH's community development coordinator has formed Building Welcoming & Inclusive Neighbourhoods team with representatives across networks of organizations and residents groups. This group intentionally discusses how to imbed community development and welcoming and inclusive practices within various programs and other initiatives that SVNH is involved in. By working as a team to look at various programs and initiatives through a diversity and inclusion lens, participating staff have been able to increase their awareness and understanding. SVNH has developed a "Diversity Health Checklist" which they can use to assess whether programs, hiring and retention practices are diverse and inclusive, etc.

As a Safe Harbour community organizer, SVNH also has the capacity offer diversity training opportunities to external organizations within Vancouver. As part of the Safe Harbour program, SVNH offers training on topics such as providing safe harbour for those experiencing discrimination, developing intercultural competency, and creating welcoming and inclusive workplaces.

### *Recruitment*

SVNH is an equal opportunity employer which welcomes qualified candidates from all backgrounds. Some skills and experience that are considered assets during the hiring process include:

- the ability to speak a second language;
- recent volunteer experience with SVNH;
- experience living in the neighborhood that SVNH serves.



# South Vancouver Neighborhood House

Because SVNH tends to hire locally and the surrounding community is very diverse, the individuals hired tend to represent the diversity within the neighborhood. In addition, the priority that is given to candidates who speak multiple languages (especially those languages not already spoken by current staff) tends to encourage diversity in hiring.

## *Leadership development*

SVNH encourages staff to develop their leadership skills by sending staff to take leadership courses at Vancouver Community College and supporting them in pursuing other professional development opportunities that are available in the community. This prepares staff to move into leadership positions within the organization as they become available.

## **SVNH's Results**

As a result of SVNH's commitment to diversity, the Executive Director has noticed that there is a lot more "consciousness" around considering how to make clients feel more welcome and included. As the community has evolved, the diversity within the organization has evolved to reflect the changing community. SVNH has noticed that increasingly diverse groups are participating in community events. For instance, events such as a Chinese New Year potluck attract a broad range of community members, and not just the Chinese community. Now that SVNH has an explicit external commitment to diversity through initiatives such as the Building Welcoming and Inclusive Neighborhoods Project, a number of new partnership and project opportunities have emerged in the area of diversity.



## SVNH's Advice for Other Organizations

When asked if SVNH has any advice for other organizations considering implementing similar initiatives, the following advice was provided:

- It is good to have someone on staff that can look through all the policies, programs and practices through a diversity and inclusion lens.
- It is important to provide training to staff and board around diversity and anti-discrimination and give people a platform to learn.
- It is important to have a commitment from senior leadership including the Board of Directors.
- Diversity training opportunities are available in the community (e.g. the Safe Harbour program).
- The commitment to diversity should be very visible within the organization and be reflected as a priority within vision and mission statements.
- Organize events which encourage the mixing of staff of different cultures and ages (e.g. staff potlucks). This helps to build better intercultural relations within the staff team.

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