

Multicultural in every way

BY LEEMA FARHA

AS WE wrap up 2022, it is a time for reflection. Thunder Bay Multicultural Association (TBMA) celebrated its 50th anniversary in September. It was a very tranquil evening with founding members and funders who reminisced about their journey with TBMA and in helping immigrants to Canada from all over the world. TBMA had started with a small grant from Secretary of State Canada.

Let me start with a brief history and the transition that TBMA has gone through. I am sharing an excerpt from one of the founding members that was presented at the 50th anniversary.

“In the spring of 1972, a group of ethnocultural leaders were called together to discuss a proposal that would help new immigrants to our city. Two university students had just received a grant to help immigrants with interpretation and translation, as well as orientation to the city. The group quickly agreed to form an association called the Thunder Bay Council of Ethnic Organizations in order to assist the development of the first program. Fortunately, prime minister Pierre Trudeau had promoted multiculturalism as a new socio-cultural policy for Canadians and our community embraced this new idea as the vehicle to promote cultural diversity and equity. This allowed us to transition from a restrictive mandate to a more inclusive and broader mission, thus becoming TBMA.”

Today, in this anniversary year, I would like to highlight the services Thunder Bay Multicultural Association provides. I have heard that there were times when government funding cutbacks limited the programming, but that did not prevent them from helping immigrants. The vigilant staff members, many of whom have lived the immigrant or refugee experience, went on helping immigrants with all their power and heart. Such is the face and strength of TBMA, where I work. I will now try to elaborate on our work.

Let's introduce the departments that we have.

There are the Refugee Assistant Program workers who help newcomers who arrive as gov-



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The Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Respect Advisory Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

TBMA marks half-century of building bridges between cultures

ernment-assisted refugees. Settlement workers help new arrivals with all the integration and orientation services from permanent residence applications, health card, family doctor, housing, transportation, and beyond — everything a newcomer might need, and all the information they require to integrate in Canada.

TBMA also provides language assessment and language classes, essential for newcomers to become participants in the economy and society. Once they reach a certain language level, our employment co-ordinator helps them find jobs. Then there is the interpretation and translation department where clients requiring translation and interpreter services are helped without any delay.

The youth and volunteer coordinators develop programming for mentorship, tutoring, recreation, orientation and peer assistance.

They invite youth and volunteers to participate in different events like Folklore Festival, which is one of the biggest events TBMA hosts in Thunder Bay. This past weekend our youth learned how to curl. None of them had ever thrown a curling rock or swept the ice before.

We don't do everything here in our office. We want newcomers to get to know the services

of their chosen city. Clients are referred to other organizations in Thunder Bay and the staff members follow up to make sure connections are made. We have many partnerships with multiple service provider organizations. With their assistance and understanding, clients receive the help they require. TBMA is very lucky to have such partners working in collaboration.

This is in snapshot of the services provided by TBMA and many other organizations working with immigrants who are funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

So, what makes TBMA special? Let me share a quote from a speaker at the 50th anniversary: “TBMA has put Thunder Bay on the map of Canada.” It was in 2014 that TBMA was funded for the Resettlement Assistance Program, and since then we have been receiving a steady stream of immigrants and refugees from all parts of the world.

Clients become like family, our partner organizations and many businesses and employers go the extra mile to help TBMA clients succeed in Thunder Bay. Some of our employers not only hire newcomers but provide flexible hours so the clients can continue learning language at school. This community works together to welcome newcomers to our city by the lake.

An example I would give is of clients who had left Thunder Bay and call back to say: “We want to come back, the access to services with no waiting list and the friendly client/worker relationship is the best.” We have had several clients return to Thunder Bay to say the grass is not greener anywhere else. Clients' success in Canada as newcomers, is our success.

I just know that as an immigrant, this is the place I feel privileged to be working, a very noble way of helping other immigrants and also connecting with such wonderful community members in Thunder Bay.

Leema Farha is a Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada (LINC) co-ordinator at Thunder Bay Multicultural Association and a long-time resident of Thunder Bay. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.