

Celebrate our differences

BY ZOHREH EBRAHIMI

ACCEPTANCE of individuals — regardless of their gender, race, culture — and the sense of unity with others in society, transcending boundaries, is how I define the word “diversity.”

As an international student, when I came to Thunder Bay I was very anxious and imagined difficult circumstances for myself. I was worried about how to rent a house on my own and how to handle the initial tasks after migration. I felt a great sense of loneliness and the fear of being isolated from my familiar surroundings, wondering if I would be accepted in the new community.

A few days after my arrival, my professor invited me to a cafe on campus and showed me around the university in great detail. Two days later, he invited me to a potluck gathering at his home. I met other students — Africans, Chinese, Indians, and others. Seeing people in similar situations who were comfortable and open, I let go of my defensive stance and immersed myself in the joy of this cultural diversity.

It was there that I realized that assimilating into a new society is incredibly rewarding and a beautiful tapestry, a place where you, as a human being, are respected regardless of your race, skin colour, or ethnicity. That gathering represented a simple meaning of diversity to me, a place where I felt a sense of unity with others.

In Canada, due to its welcoming nature towards immigrants, diversity is easily experienced. However, in Thunder Bay, being a small city, Lakehead University and Confederation College has increased this cultural diversity, equality, and inclusivity quite significantly and recently. The interactions be-



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

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.

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tween the residents and international students has created a delightful experience for immigrants.

The academic environment is one of the places where this diversity is seen more than anywhere else. The Lakehead University residence is like a global village that introduces you to a world of different cultures, norms and beliefs. As someone studying social justice, whenever I interact with different people in the city, I ask myself: How do they perceive Thunder Bay? Have they ever witnessed discriminatory or racist behaviour? More than 95 per cent of the responses have been negative, with people sharing their positive experiences in the city. This data collection serves as a qualitative research method for me to gain a better understanding of the emerging community.

When I listen to the local CBC radio, the guests on the shows speak English with different accents, which is

fascinating for me, and it gives me a greater sense of acceptance and inclusivity. I have always found it interesting to note what Canadians think about the presence of immigrants — especially in a small city like Thunder Bay, as the presence of immigrants in larger cities such as Toronto and Montreal is much more commonplace. Therefore, I ask my Canadian friends about this topic, and the common response is that the city has become more vibrant and dynamic with the presence of immigrants.

International restaurants and cultural events have brought the city to life, and even the economy of the city has become more efficient. I believe that diversity manifests its impact in all dimensions, and it is the most beautiful concept for me as an immigrant, with a sense of effectiveness and the influence of acceptance in the new community.

In a world that thrives on diversity, embracing and celebrating our differences is not just a choice; it is a necessity. By valuing and respecting everyone’s unique contributions, we create a society that is enriched, harmonious and resilient. Let us embrace diversity as a cornerstone of our collective progress, fostering a world where everyone feels seen, heard, and included. Together, we can create a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

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