

An Untapped Labour Source

How CIWA Can Help Your Business Thrive



CIWA
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Calgary's population is almost 25%¹ foreign born, which is 5% more than the national average². According to the 2011 Canadian census, immigration will account for more than 80% of Canada's overall population growth by 2031³. Calgary's population growth is projected to decrease from 1.5% in 2012 to 1.1% by 2021⁴. However, from 2007-2017 employment demand in Calgary will continue to grow significantly at a compound annual growth rate of 3%, which is the addition of 244,000 new jobs⁵. Meeting the growing labour needs by tapping into non-traditional labour sources in Calgary is essential to our city's continued economic prosperity. The purpose of this publication is to provide employers with practical knowledge about a viable and relatively untapped labour source in Calgary that can help meet the labour shortages that many are facing and will face as the economy improves.

At Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA), we serve a unique and diverse group of immigrant and refugee women. These women have limited or interrupted education in their home countries. They typically have 0-12 years of schooling. As a result, the biggest barrier these women face is the lack of English language and literacy skills. They often have lots of life experience and wisdom but possess varying degrees of education, learning foundations, language proficiency, employment skills and literacy skills. For many years, services have been in place to help these women develop their language and literacy skills but little attention was paid to training them to be successful in the workplace. CIWA has pioneered the development of adaptive and innovative programs and services that help these women gain the literacy, workplace and essential skills required to thrive in the Calgary labour force.

This publication will provide information about CIWA services, the benefits and challenges of employing immigrant and refugee women with limited or interrupted education and provide the perspectives of our clients and employer partners. We have also included tips and resources for the successful integration of a diverse and inclusive workforce into an organization.

ABOUT CIWA

CIWA is a non-profit organization that was established in 1982 to support the integration of immigrant and refugee women, girls and their families in Calgary. During its 30-year history, CIWA has helped over 60,000 immigrant women transition to life in Calgary.

CIWA has five core service areas:

- Settlement and Integration Services provide for the immediate basic needs of clients as well as support for women dealing with family violence and abuse
- Language Training and Childcare Services provide language and literacy classes to help clients achieve proficiency in English
- Employment Services offer counseling, workshops and bridge to work training programs for women looking for meaningful employment
- Volunteer Program provides an opportunity for immigrant women to participate in various aspects of the agency; through volunteering, immigrant women are empowered with skills and experiences that will benefit them in their job search
- Family Services provide support for parents and families adjusting to a new culture and life in Canada

A VIABLE AND RELATIVELY UNTAPPED LABOUR SOURCE

One of CIWA's most vulnerable client groups are immigrant and refugee women who have limited or interrupted education in their home countries and face multiple barriers. They are women who have life experience and wisdom but varying degrees of education, English language, employment and literacy skills. They often come from impoverished or war torn countries and societies that do not believe in equal opportunities for men and women. Some of the countries these women come from are:

- Colombia
- Eritrea
- Iraq
- Pakistan
- Afghanistan
- Somalia
- Ethiopia
- Sudan
- Burma (Myanmar)

In order to understand what it means to have limited or interrupted education and low literacy skills, we have provided a summary of literacy and essential skills below. We have also included a list of barriers that these women may face in the workplace.

UNDERSTANDING LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS

According to UNESCO, 796 million adults aged 15 years or older (17% of all adults worldwide) lack basic reading and writing skills; 64% of them are women. The lowest literacy rates are observed in sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia. In the following countries, adult literacy rates are below 50% of the population: Benin, Burkina, Chad, Ethiopia, Faso, Gambia, Guinea, Haiti, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

However, studies have shown that low literacy rates are not only a Third World problem. According to Statistics Canada, 4 out of 10 adults age 16 to 65 (9 million Canadians) struggle with low literacy⁶. This statistic was determined by including not only the ability to read and write but also the comprehension and application of information. Ultimately, the lack of literacy within a population means that a country is not as competitive and successful on a global scale. TD Bank Financial Group projected that raising the literacy of Canadians with inadequate reading skills to an adequate level would have an economic payoff that is close to \$80 billion. Even a 1% improvement in literacy rates nationally would boost Canada's economy by \$32 billion⁷.

There are multiple forms of literacy and definitions of literacy. According to the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, there are four main types of literacy learners⁸:

- Pre-literate learners come from oral cultures where there is no written form of their language
- Non-literate learners come from societies that have a language with a written form, but the learners do not read or write; this would describe an individual who grew up in a remote rural area, with no school available and did not need to read and write until coming to Canada

- Semi-literate learners have had some formal education in their native language, but not enough to become literate; this type of learner is able to read and write but the education process was interrupted many times
- Non-Roman alphabet learners are a combination of a non-Roman alphabet learner and any of the types listed above; they have some literacy skills in their first language and may be able to apply the strategies used to learn their first language to learn English

Closely tied with literacy is the concept of workplace essential skills. According to the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, literacy is traditionally defined as having the following skills:

1. Reading
2. Writing
3. Document Use
4. Numeracy

Essential skills encompass the above as well as the following five skills:

1. Computer Use
2. Thinking
3. Oral Communication
4. Working with Others
5. Continuous learning⁹

Essential skills are used as a framework to understand the tasks required to do well in any given occupation. It provides a structure to measure employee training needs and learning gaps. As employers look more into non-traditional labour groups to meet their labour demands, they need to include essential skills and literacy training into their workplace training programs. To do this, employers need to align the literacy and essential skills required for a position to the employee's skills. Based on the skills gap that employees have, employers can customize their training to the needs of their employees. There are many resources and tools available for employers to help them train non-traditional labour groups. The resources section of this publication has a list of some of the information and resources available.

Essentially, having an education provides a foundation for more learning. However, the lack of education or having experienced an interrupted education does not mean that the person is unable to learn. It means that the way the person learns is different. Therefore, for people with literacy issues to do well in the workplace, teachers and employers should use instructional and training methods that match the needs of low literacy learners. In the Tips for Employers section (page 18), we have provided a few tips for training employees with multiple barriers.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

The barriers to employment faced by immigrant and refugee women with limited or interrupted education are many and go beyond English language and basic literacy. Some of the barriers include:

- Lack of work experience in their home country
Many women were not allowed to work and stayed at home to care for their children and the family.
- Lack of understanding of workplace expectations and Canadian business culture
Canadian business culture comes with spoken and unspoken demands of behaviour and attitude, which may be very different from other cultures.
- Limited soft skills or differing perceptions regarding hours of work, timeliness, following and understanding rules and interacting with coworkers and supervisors
- Lack of a supportive community and isolation
Many are single parents, which increases the challenges they face. They struggle with:
 - Regular and ongoing stress related to the limited or lack of income and the inability to pay bills and provide for their families
 - Juggling inflexible or demanding work schedules with daycare, after school care and the needs of family; making childcare arrangements can be very complex without a thorough understanding of how to find childcare and/or before or after school care
 - Not having the resources to pay for daycare at the commencement of employment
- Being restricted from employment due to hiring processes
Interviews over the phone or in person are intimidating for most; employers who are not familiar with cross cultural communication and do not understand the language barriers faced by these women will often overlook them as a viable labour source.
Many employers invest in psychometric assessments, pre-employment testing or questionnaires that are dependent on cultural understanding and/or higher levels of literacy and English than are required for the job.
- Employment environments that do not take into consideration their specific language and literacy needs in hiring, training and ongoing communication
Some employers assume prior knowledge and understanding of a job or task but it may be a completely new experience.

Each woman has unique skill sets, learning styles and life experiences. Each one views the world in a different way than a person with higher levels of literacy. However, with the proper support, training and understanding work environment these women can and do thrive in the Canadian workplace.

HOW CIWA HELPS

Our employment programs help immigrant women with multiple barriers gain employment skills and provide a supportive network. We serve women with 12 years of education or less who are permanent residents, refugees and Canadian citizens with language and cultural barriers. We provide them with:

- Job skills training
- English language training
- Individual employment counselling
- Resume writing support
- Job application support
- Interview preparation support
- Job search support
- Post-employment support

CIWA has developed programming that meets the unique employment and learning needs of these vulnerable women by providing training in the following areas:

- Commercial and institutional cleaning
- Kitchen help
- WHMIS certification
- Food safety
- First Aid and CPR
- Basic computer use
- English workplace vocabulary and occupational specific terminology
- Retail which includes customer service and numeracy skills
- Childcare

Our training provides them with the foundational literacy and workplace essential skills to secure employment in the following positions:

- Cleaner
- Housekeeper
- Kitchen Helper
- Food Preparation
- Production
- Dishwasher
- Retail Associate
- Early Childhood Education Assistant

All of our training programs and services address the unique learning needs of immigrant and refugee women who have limited or interrupted education in their home countries.

In addition, CIWA works closely with employer partners to ensure that the right candidates are recommended and that training programs incorporate the feedback provided by our partners. Most importantly, we aim to provide employers with the knowledge, information and support required to hire, train and integrate these women into their workforce. This is accomplished through:

- Site visits and regular communication to provide support, suggestions and if needed mediation
- Opportunities to host clients for unpaid or paid work experience placements
- Audits of training practices and materials to ensure they are low literacy friendly
- Workplace training to meet the unique learning and literacy needs of workers*
- Providing materials related to essential skills, English language and literacy*

* services available at a fee

BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING IMMIGRANT WOMEN WITH MULTIPLE BARRIERS

The challenges faced by immigrant and refugee women are substantial and should not be overlooked. However, each woman we serve at CIWA has her own unique strengths, knowledge, skills and capacity for success. As you will read in the stories of the women we have helped along with their employers, there are many benefits to hiring them. Some of the benefits include:

- They are a largely untapped talent source that is already in Calgary; there is no need to go through the arduous and expensive process of recruiting temporary foreign workers
- They bring a wealth of life experience, knowledge and a willingness to work
- They have been pre-screened and trained in workplace skills at CIWA
- They are considered valued employees and are often admired for their work ethic
- They often become very loyal employees who are grateful for the employment opportunity; employers who take the time to know their names and stories build a sense of acceptance and belonging for these women

In addition, employers benefit from:

- The support of CIWA staff when needed in workplace integration
- Providing employment opportunities that support the integration of newcomers, which enable these women to meet their families' needs and positively contribute to society
- Changes made to hiring, training and employee communication processes within a company, which not only support the integration of these unique employees but strengthen support for all employees
- Connecting to their family, friends and communities, which may help fill additional labour needs while decreasing recruitment costs
- Creating a unique culturally diverse workplace that reflects Calgary's demographics and customer demographics

EMPLOYER AND CLIENT STORIES

The best way to understand the successes and challenges faced by immigrant and refugee women is through their own words and experiences. In the following pages, we have provided a snapshot of the opinions and perspectives of successfully employed immigrant and refugee women with limited or interrupted education and that of their employers. Our clients provide information about their lives, challenges and successes in integrating into the Canadian workplace. The employers provide insights into their experiences working with these women and share tips on how to train them and create diverse and inclusive workplaces.

The employers featured were gracious in providing their time, words of wisdom and unique perspective on including immigrant and refugee women with limited or interrupted education into their businesses. CIWA would like to thank all of the employers who work with us to find meaningful and viable employment for our clients.



ALEM

It does not take long after meeting Alem to recognize her patient and tenacious spirit. Alem was born in Ethiopia. After finishing high school, she decided to move to Johannesburg. In Ethiopia, it was hard to find employment and meet basic needs such as food. The crime rate in Ethiopia was also very high. Johannesburg was a little safer and it provided more employment opportunities. While in Johannesburg, Alem started a business buying and selling clothing in the markets. She sold all types of clothing for men, women and children. It was hard running a business. If she did not make a sale, she could not provide for her family. There was also a lot of corruption and the organized crime group demanded a cut of her earnings.

It was in Johannesburg that Alem met and married her husband and gave birth to their daughter, now 10 years old. After immigrating to Canada in 2005, her husband found employment as a forklift driver and Alem took English classes at YWCA for three months before trying her hand at working in a meat packing plant. Alem wanted to go back into retail and sent out many resumes but never received any response. In January 2012, Alem enrolled in CIWA's Retail Training Program. The program helped her learn practical workplace, and job search skills as well as improve her English skills. Most importantly, the program provided her with a work experience placement at Goodwill Industries of Alberta. When Alem started, she learned how to classify donations, fold, hang and properly store merchandise and interact with customers.

Heather Cook, Alem's manager, explained that Alem was a very good fit with Goodwill Industries. During Alem's work placement, she never missed a day, had a very positive attitude, got along with all of her coworkers and was well prepared for the job. Furthermore, she demonstrated a true desire to learn and succeed.

After her work experience, Alem was fortunate to receive a job offer. She loves helping the customers, although sometimes she feels that her English is not quite strong enough. Alem uses every opportunity to learn and improve her English. She hopes to stay with Goodwill Industries and learn more about operations, including how to be a cashier. Fortunately, Goodwill is passionate about providing learning opportunities for their staff through job shadowing and cross training. Alem is happy that her employment provides a steady income and, unlike running a business, security.

GOODWILL INDUSTRIES OF ALBERTA: FAY WISTED & HEATHER COOK

Goodwill Industries of Alberta is a social enterprise that provides individuals with disabilities and barriers the opportunity for employment and on the job skills development. With over 500 employees in Alberta, they continuously make a social impact and positive change in the lives of their employees.

Fay Wisted is the Director South Region, Store Operations and Heather Cook is the Acting Store Manager. Both Fay and Heather, who came from a corporate background, required a shift in thinking to embrace an organization where people, not money, are the bottom line. Goodwill Industries sparked their passion for helping people while utilizing their business and management skills.



Fay and Heather credit the success of their store and employees, like Alem, with their organization's mission and ability to adapt training to the learning needs of their staff while providing ongoing communication and feedback. They acknowledge that more time is needed initially to train staff that have multiple barriers, which means a greater investment. The benefit is that they become very dedicated staff members. During training, new employees work with at least two staff members to see how tasks can be completed from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, employees are cross-trained in all positions within operations.

Heather encourages all employers to consider hiring people with disabilities or multiple barriers; "They are qualified for much more than the public perceptions of people with disabilities are". Heather explained that you can hire them for a variety of positions and once the skills are learned the tasks are performed well.

For Goodwill Industries, hiring from a variety of cultures and experiences means that the organization gains vast perspective. Challenges arise occasionally with communications but they use every possible tool at their disposal to work them out. Fay feels that what makes an organization inclusive is to expect honesty and respect. Equality means everyone is treated the same. That can be a challenge, "You may want to help those that you think need more help but they need the opportunity to learn so it's important to step back and let individuals go through their trials and errors."

JIN



Jin was born in China in the Wuhan province. She enjoyed her life in China spending time working and with her family. In particular, she liked caring for her parents. She and her son immigrated to Canada in 2005 to be with her husband. After a year of improving her English skills at Bow Valley College, Jin secured employment at a fast food restaurant. Working at the restaurant was tiring and very fast paced. She worked there for four years before welcoming her daughter into her life. As Jin approached the end of her maternity leave, she decided that she wanted a different job but lacked confidence in her English and job skills. Furthermore, she found herself with the added stress of caring for her two children on her own.

Jin learned about the Retail Training Program at CIWA and decided to apply. At CIWA, Jin had classmates from all around the world and she felt lucky to have the opportunity to make new friends. Her work experience placement was at Sunterra Market. It helped her learn how a market was run and she excelled in her work. Consequently, Sunterra offered her a position at the end of her work experience placement. Julia Featherstone, the HR and Operations Administrator, felt that Jin was efficient, reliable and integrated well with the culture of the market. Sunterra Market has strict policies around recipes and food preparation so when Jin came onboard, extra attention was required to connect her with other team members that could provide translation or help her learn the recipes. Within this supportive environment, Jin's confidence grew and she continues to excel in the workplace.

Jin likes her coworkers and supervisors at Sunterra. In China, she never wanted to get her bosses attention or ask questions but at Sunterra, she feels comfortable talking to them and asking questions if she needs help. Sunterra prides themselves on their ability to integrate the skills, abilities and suggestions of all of their employees. In fact, their famous butter chicken recipe comes from one of their employees who felt her recipe was better than the original.

Although adjusting to Canada was hard, Jin has grown to appreciate her life in Calgary. Jin loves the clean air and how well people are treated and valued. She would like to learn more about working in the bakery at Sunterra and also has dreams of working with children someday.

SUNTERRA MARKET: JULIA FEATHERSTONE

Julia Featherstone is the Human Resources and Operations Administrator for Sunterra Market. She is responsible for 700 employees in Sunterra's 11 locations across Alberta. Julia emigrated from Australia two years ago and even though she had confidence in her skills and experience it took her seven months to secure a position in her field of expertise. Naturally, she is empathetic to newcomers who find themselves in similarly disheartening positions.

Sunterra Market hosted both Jin and another client from CIWA for a work experience placement. They were pleased with both ladies' realistic expectations of the workplace and focused their internal training on food preparation.



Julia makes an effort to connect with many immigrant-serving agencies for recruitment needs and would advise other employers to do so. She cautions, though, that employers need to make sure it is a good fit for their organization. There needs to be clear communication and buy in from the top when bringing on a staff member with multiple barriers. In particular, she suggests having training and orientation for team leaders who will be working directly with barriered employees, ensuring that open communication exists and cultural diversities are respected and celebrated. Sometimes there are differences and negative views towards people from other backgrounds so it is important to be sensitive to cultural experiences while balancing the needs and pace of the workplace.

One challenge Julia has come across is that many immigrant women are the primary caregivers of their children and it can be hard for them to find suitable childcare. With Jin, Julia was able to temporarily change her shift to the afternoon, which gave Jin the time to make appropriate childcare arrangements. It is important for employers to be sensitive to these types of barriers during the recruitment process.

Julia feels that diversity and inclusion in the workplace add strength to their corporate culture and has proven to help with employee retention. The senior management team members are from diverse backgrounds and each market has its own unique cultural make-up, which creates a strong sense of community.

ASIA



Asia was born in Sudan. Before finishing school, Asia was married at 17 years of age and within one year was a mother to the first of her six children. In 2004, Asia, her husband and three of her children fled Darfur and went to Cairo. It took them two years to secure passage to Canada as refugees. In Cairo, Asia pleaded with the government to get her three remaining children out of Sudan. Years later, she has yet to be reunited with her three oldest children.

As a proud Canadian, Asia loves that she is able to work and contribute to her family's well-being, something she never would have dreamed of in Sudan. She loves the sense of security Canada provides. She often walks alone early in the morning and has no concerns for her safety, a luxury she has not experienced since childhood. Asia feels free to be herself in Canada. She doesn't feel judged by how she dresses or what she says. She feels she is treated very well.

When Asia first entered the workplace, she had very limited English and difficulty maintaining employment. Asia took English classes through Columbia College but still worries about her English skills and sometimes feels she cannot express herself well.

Through CIWA, Asia received training in kitchen help, housekeeping and workplace safety. CIWA helped Asia find employment with Best Service Pro. Best felt Asia was a natural fit with the company. She is a great employee and takes pride in her work. Moreover, they benefitted from Asia referring her family and community members to Best for employment. Asia is grateful for the support she received through CIWA, "They teach me things I didn't know about the job and now I am doing my job". Asia will proudly tell anyone that she wants to do her job perfectly.

Asia would like to continue to improve her English. She is currently saving money to take more classes. Now that her children are grown, her dream is to work with children in a daycare. She would also like to find a way to help the many orphans in Sudan.

BEST SERVICE PROS: TODD GREGORY

Just under two years ago, Todd, the Alberta Operations Manager for Best Service Pros, found himself with a new contract and in need of 30 new employees within 45 days. He used the traditional way of hiring and also reached out to immigrant serving agencies. “It’s been a really good partnership. CIWA is good at supporting their clients and there is a good balance of feedback and being able to help out.”

With over 250 employees, Todd estimates that he found around 60 to 70 employees through CIWA. He likes that when CIWA clients are referred to him they continue to receive support through CIWA if required. In addition, CIWA clients have a better base of knowledge about the position and expectations of the job.

Todd advises employers to proceed with caution when hiring from untapped labour sources, “You are not going to get a plug and play employee every time. There is an investment that needs to go into their training.” One way is to show them the right and wrong way to do a task and explain why. Todd noted that often his employees’ English is better than they think and it can be a confidence issue – so he remains open to different types of communication and training. “If you are open to that you get some great staff that consistently exceed our expectations but we have to be creative in the way we train and communicate.”

On occasion, Todd comes across instances of prejudices amongst employees. To deal with this, the leadership team spends time talking through issues with the group and has a zero tolerance harassment policy. Todd does not believe in moving employees around to avoid conflict caused by intolerance; they have to work through their issues or they need to find other employment.

Todd is consistently impressed with the work ethic that he sees in immigrant employees. He estimates that 80% of his employees have two jobs and work very hard to support their families. Best business is cleaning but they believe in creating opportunities for their employees. In fact, one of the clients Todd hired through CIWA has been promoted to a supervisory position.



TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

TIPS FOR RECRUITING AND HIRING

- Look at the essential skills and necessary English language level to do the job. See if there are ways to simplify process or the position to make it more accessible.
- Connect with CIWA. We can source out potential employees based on your specific skills criteria. If there are skills missing from the CIWA applicant pool, we can incorporate your feedback into our training programs.
- Be open-minded when reviewing resumes; a lack of experience does not mean a lack of skill or the ability to learn.
- Allow resumes to be dropped off in person or via email. Complex online application systems may deter qualified applicants.
- Avoid the use of pre-employment testing such as psychometric questionnaires. Pre-employment testing may disqualify applicants who do not understand the cultural nuances or they may be unable to answer due to limited literacy.
- Avoid telephone interviews. Speaking on the phone is often very stressful for people with limited English.
- Be patient and empathetic when listening to someone who may not be confident in their English skills or may speak in broken sentences.
- Review your interview questions and omit those that are not essential to the position. Re-phrase questions into plain English.
- Allow new employees to take employment contracts home to review with family members or to CIWA to review with their job coach. This ensures that they fully understand details of the employment contract before signing.
- Create a plain language addendum to HR documents so they are easier to read and comprehend.
- Consider adjusting a new employee's schedule initially (reduced or flexible hours) to give her time to make appropriate childcare arrangements.

TIPS FOR TRAINING

- Take extra time initially to train. Consider the employee an investment – time invested initially will pay off as they become loyal employees.
- Review your training process and consider whether it is intimidating or welcoming – consider the amount of text and documentation versus the use of interactive strategies in the training.
- Have the new hire job shadow a capable employee as he or she completes daily tasks. If possible, the employee should speak the same language or be competent in plain English.
- Show employees how to do the tasks while telling them how to do it. The right and wrong way should be demonstrated. Showing them the incorrect way reinforces why a task is done a specific way.
- Assign a workplace mentor. The mentor can be another employee who is approachable and acts as the “go-to” person for questions and clarifications about the job, tasks, and workplace culture.
- Invite a job coach from CIWA to come to the workplace and assist in the demonstration of complex tasks or communication (such as company safety policies, etc.)
- Get to know your new employee. Introduce the new employee to the entire team. Employees who feel a sense of belonging are more likely to stay.
- Convert workplace documents into plain language and whenever possible include photos. During training, include hands on instruction and practice completing essential workplace documents.
- Ensure that all supervisors, trainers and mentors are aware of the unique needs of the employee.
- When considering ongoing training programs for staff, consider organizing English language and essential skills training.
- Train your trainers, supervisors and managers in plain language use, diversity and inclusion and, when appropriate, cross-cultural communication.

TIPS FOR FOSTERING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

- Identify a company culture and commit to it at a senior management level. A company's mission and values should be reflected at all levels of operations. Put an action plan in place with tangible strategies and attainable goals to make the workplace more inclusive.
- Ensure human resource policies reflect the mission, vision and culture of the company. A standard policy that encourages diversity and inclusion is a zero tolerance harassment policy. Consider non-punitive policies to deal with conflicts that arise from people having different points of views and backgrounds.
- Establish an ongoing, open and respectful dialogue on diversity and inclusion. Get feedback from employees for ideas on how to make daily business and operations more inclusive for employees and customers.
- Create an internal champion of diversity and inclusion. The champion can provide suggestions for improvement within the company, organize activities that increase awareness about diversity, and mentor others.
- Treat everyone equally without consideration for age, race, culture, physical ability, appearance, education or religious background. To create cohesion within a team, focus on the skills and abilities that people bring, not differences.
- Discourage cliques or other exclusive groups. Design policies and practices that encourage and reward people who work together.
- Arrange for diversity training and/or cross cultural communication training for the leadership team and staff by a skilled facilitator/ organization.
- Write staff memos and communications in plain language. Take the time to explain important policies and procedures to staff verbally while showing them, in writing and with pictures.
- Re-think work schedules where possible to accommodate the unique needs of mothers, religion and culture.

PLAIN LANGUAGE TIPS AND EXAMPLES

Plain language means writing in a clear and precise way. It does not mean to talk down or dummy down the content of your message. Plain language appeals to a large cross section of people by providing the most simplified messaging. Employees who understand written direction and essential workplace documents will have less confusion on the job. They will need less clarification, make fewer mistakes and will likely feel less frustration.

Plain Language includes:

- Writing style: use a positive tone and choose references employees will understand
- Format: use design elements that help employees move through the information easily
- Organization: employees can easily find the information they need in the document
- Text choice: choose words that the employee will easily understand

Some of the basic tips for creating plain language documents are:

- Use a simple sentence structure (subject, verb and object)
- Use a personal, conversational and direct tone; do not use passive voice
- Present information in a logical and precise order
- Avoid the use of acronyms and abbreviations
- Avoid the use of technical terms or jargon; when technical terms are necessary explain them at the level understood by your employees
- Avoid long and complex words and sentences; omit surplus words and use simple wording on a consistent basis
- Use short paragraph made of 4-5 sentences; when possible, simplify paragraphs by using bullets (i.e. for instructions or processes)
- Use pictures with real people and objects
- Use a large easy to read font (11pt or 12pt) and limit the number of fonts used in a document to one or two
- Include plenty of white space

Example of Passive and Active Voice:

Passive: Your business is sincerely appreciated!

Active: We sincerely appreciate your business!

- Use clear headings for information and tables, bold or underline headings and titles and refrain from using all caps
- Left justify text (avoid right justification and centering) and avoid hyphenation of words at the end of a line
- Use text boxes to highlight key points

Examples of plain language in workplace documents:

Original Message	Plain Language Message
<p>While employed by the Company, you agree to work on a full-time basis exclusively for the Company and agree that you shall not, while you are employed by the Company, be employed or engaged in any capacity, in promoting, undertaking or carrying on any other business that competes with the Company or interferes or could reasonably interfere with your duties to the Company without our prior written permission.</p>	<p>While working for our company you are not allowed to do the following, without our written permission:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be employed or involved with a company that competes with ours • be employed with another company that interferes with your ability to work full time with us
<p>As the applicant, it is a requirement that you provide a mailing address and quote the job number when an application for employment is submitted.</p>	<p>You need to give us a mailing address and include the job number when you apply for a job.</p>
<p>Whenever medical attention is required for a work related injury, the employee will report to the person holding a Survival First Aid certificate when practicable and if applicable. If necessary, the employee will then report to the NEAREST medical facility to ensure prompt attention to, and the least possible aggravation to his/her injury. Following this, if fit to do so, the employee will report back to his supervisor, advising of his status and the name of the attending physician.</p>	<p>When you need medical help, go to an employee who holds a Survival First Aid Certificate. If you need more care, go to the nearest medical centre.</p> <p>If you are unable to return to work, report the injury to your supervisor, and give your supervisor the name of the doctor who treated you.</p>

Check out the resources section of this publication for links to plain language resources available on the internet. CIWA has staff trained on plain language and can provide assistance with the conversion of key documents into plain language.*

*Available as a fee for service

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Alberta Human Rights Commission

<http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/>

- Diversity Planning Tools
http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/diversity/diversity_planning_tools.asp
- Tips on How to Make a Difference
http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/education/help_make_a_difference/tips.asp
- Welcoming and Inclusive Communities and Workplaces:
http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/diversity/human_rights_fund_reports/diversity_resources_Alberta/wic.asp

Alberta Employment and Immigration

Employing a Diverse Workforce: Making It Work

<http://alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/employdiverse.pdf>

Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education

Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace (free online course)

<http://eae.alberta.ca/apps/fqr/fqr/course/>

City of Calgary

www.calgary.ca

- Creating Inclusive Communities
<http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Pages/Publications-guides-and-directories/Creating-Inclusive-Communities.aspx>
- Cultural Diversity Resources
<http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Recreation/Pages/Arts-and-culture/Cultural-resources.aspx>

Diversity in the Workplace

<http://diversityintheworkplace.ca/wordpress/>

Variety of resources, articles, links and tools available.

Ethno Racial People with Disabilities Coalition of Ontario

Building Inclusive Communities for Ethno Racial People with Disabilities Project: Building Inclusive Communities Tips Tool

http://www.whiwh.com/BIC_tips.pdf

Hireimmigrants.ca
Maytree Foundation

- Diversity, Equity and Accommodation
<http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/manage-diversity/diversity-equity-accommodation/>
- E-learning courses
<http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/resources-tools/elearning/>
Includes free courses on cross cultural communication, inclusive hiring practices, diversity management, etc.
- Managing Diversity in the Workplace
<http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/manage-diversity/>

Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition

Inclusive Community Organizations a Tool Kit

<http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/inclusive-community-organizations-a-tool-kit>

Volunteer Alberta

Intersections

<http://volunteeralberta.ab.ca/intersections>

Provides suggestions and information for organizations on multiculturalism and building diverse and inclusive communities (for non-profits and staff but applicable to organizations).

LITERACY AND WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

ABC Life Literacy Canada

http://abclifeliteracy.ca/workplace_literacy_facts

Learn about workplace literacy facts, statistics and the benefits of investing in workplace training programs.

Canadian Literacy and Learning Network

<http://www.literacy.ca/>

Literacy Alberta

<http://www.literacyalberta.ca/>

- Essential Skills Training Audit
<http://literacyalberta.ca/item/essential-skills-training-audit>
- Opening Doors: Literacy Audit Tool kit
<http://literacyalberta.ca/item/opening-doors-literacy-audit-tool-kit>
Opening Doors will help your organization identify potential barriers the public may face when accessing your services.

Living Literacy: A Literacy Framework for Alberta's Next Generation Economy

Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education

<http://eae.alberta.ca/media/219400/living%20literacy.pdf>

Office of Literacy and Essential Skills: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/>

- Essential Skills Profiles
<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/profiles/profiles.shtml>
http://www10.hrsdc.gc.ca/es/english/all_profiles.aspx
- Tools and Resources for Literacy and Essential Skills in the Workplace
http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/tools_resources/tools.shtml

PLAIN LANGUAGE

CLAD Online Thesaurus - Clear Language and Design

East End Literacy, Toronto, ON

www.eastendliteracy.on.ca/ClearLanguageAndDesign/thesaurus/

Clear Language at Work

www.clearlanguageatwork.com

- Handbooks and Online Learning
<http://clearlanguageatwork.com/handbooks-online-learning/>
- Clear Writing Principles Checklist
http://clearlanguageatwork.com/documents/Clear_Writing_Principles_Checklist.pdf
- Plain Language Thesaurus
<http://clearlanguageatwork.com/complimentary-resources/plain-english-thesaurus/>

Dictionary of Plain Language

Duncan Kent & Associates, Vancouver, BC

www.techcommunicators.com/pdfs/style-diction.pdf

Plain English at a Glance

Plain Language Action Network – Plain English Network, US

www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/quickreference/glance.cfm

Plain Language Network:

www.plainlanguagenetwork.org

- Plain Train: Plain Language Online Training Program
Janet Dean and Cheryl Stephens
www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/plaintrain/index.html

EMPLOYER AND WORKPLACE TOOLS AND INFORMATION

Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education: Useful Publications and Statistics

<http://eae.alberta.ca/labour-and-immigration/overview-of-immigration/publications-and-statistics.aspx>

- Employer's Guide: Occupational Health and Safety Act
http://eae.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_li009.pdf

Alberta Learning Information Services (ALIS): Publications and Tip Sheets

<http://alis.alberta.ca/ep/careershop/main.html>

- How to Find and Keep Valued Employees
<http://alis.alberta.ca/ep/eps/tips/tips.html?EK=3309>
- Employer's Guide to Employment Rules
<http://alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/EmployersGuide.pdf>
- Employing a Diverse Workforce: Making It Work
<http://alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/employdiverse.pdf>
- Finders & Keepers: Recruitment and Retention Strategies
<http://alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/FindersKeepers.pdf>
- Occupational Health and Safety Tool Kit for Small Businesses
<http://eae.alberta.ca/documents/OHS-Tool-Kit-Small-Business.pdf>
- Skills By Design: Strategies for Employee Development
<http://alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/SkillsDesign.pdf>
- Your Rights and Responsibilities in the Workplace
<http://alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/rightresponse.pdf>

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<http://www.liveincalgary.com/overview/calgary-facts/demographics>
- ² Statistics Canada. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-003-x/2007001/figures/4129888-eng.htm>
- ³ National Post <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/02/08/canada-census-2011-immigrants-and-newcomers-drive-population-growth/>
- ⁴ Calgary Economic Development: Calgary's Historic and Forecast Population.
<http://www.liveincalgary.com/overview/calgary-facts/demographics/historic-and-forecast-population>
- ⁵ Calgary Economic Development: Calgary Employment Demand Forecast 2007-2017.
www.calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com/sites/default/files/pdf/research/reports/workforce/Calgary_Employment_Demand_Forecast_2007_2017_Final_Report.pdf
- ⁶ Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) Survey, Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, (2005). Literacy is often measured on a prose and document literacy scale of 1 to 5. Level 3, equivalent to high school completion, is the desired threshold for coping with the rapidly changing skill demands of a knowledge-based economy and society (International Survey of Reading Skills (ISRS), 2005).
- ⁷ Literacy Matters: A Call for Action. TD Financial Group.
<http://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/td-economics-special-literacy0907.pdf>
- ⁸ Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL For Literacy Learners, page II
- ⁹ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada: Office of Literacy and Essential Skills
<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/definitions/definitions.shtml>

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