

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES CULTURE CHATS WRITING PROGRAM



Culture CHATS
BC Association

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Culture Chats BC Association organized online writing workshops from May 2020 to August 2020 for newcomers to develop language skills and build community connections. The Culture Chats Writing Group continues to meet virtually and attend various community events online. We would like to thank the participants Lei Lu, Tasnim Al Shabi, Tanya Kan, Allyssa Marie Dolino, Fatima Zain, Fatima Haidari, Julia Druzhinina, Rachel Torres, Eda Erhan for their contribution to this booklet. The funding and support of IRCC is gratefully acknowledged.

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A COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE

I moved to Canada three years ago, a lot of things have happened since and very many great moments are deeply recorded in my memory. One of the most exciting moments I experienced was last year in June 2019.

I was invited to the Burnaby multicultural festival last summer. I was so excited. I love such kind of events because I can make new friends there and I am able to learn a lot about different cultures. Of course the real reason that I was excited was for the “dance show” that we had planned with my two partners who are my LINC school classmates.



One classmate from Syria had taught us a traditional Syrian dance, and another guy was from Eritrea. We had spent several days practicing in our classroom before we joined the festival. We were dressed in our version of traditional Syrian costume, white shirt, dark pants and a red waist band, hand in hand, laughing, jumping. We were enjoying ourselves and had a great time together. This was my first time as a dancer on public platform, it felt really incredible, it was fantastic. I felt proud.

By Lei Lu

EDMONDS CITY FAIR & CLASSIC CAR SHOW

The first time I went for the Edmonds City Fair & Classic Car Show was in July 2017. I had just arrived in Canada a couple of months before that. I did volunteer with the Save on food stall at this event for four hours. I started at 8:00 am until 12:00pm. The weather was cool at first then it became hot, but didn't matter because it was the first experience for me to be a volunteer and attending an interesting event like this. Trying to communicate with people was hard to me because my English was not good.



I was assigned to help with the spinning wheel and every time they spun the wheel I would give a gift to the people. That encouraged me to speak to people. After I finished my work I went to watch the shows. There were many fabulous classic old cars and also amazing new cars. I enjoyed watching the dance shows very much.

In addition to all of that there was a fruit and vegetables organic small market. Many organizations such as BC hydro, City of Burnaby, MOSAIC BC and Vancouver Foundation hosted a stall at this event to provide information. They gave information about their services and also had giveaways for everyone.

After this exciting experience, my family and I didn't want to miss the event and we kept going back every year. This year the event was cancelled because of the pandemic. I hope next year everything will be better.

By Tasnim Al Shabi



★ Volunteers devoted almost 2.07 billion hours to their volunteer activities: a volume of work that is equivalent to just under 1.1 million full-time job

MULTICULTURALISM in the COMMUNITY CENTRE

I receive emails daily from the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (the Community Center) about their various programs, training courses, and sessions. Before the quarantine, I often visited the Community Centre to attend their programs. I also volunteered with the Women's Peer Group.



When I came to Canada, this Centre was the first place where I could meet people and even make some friends. I remember my first time when I attended the Women's Peer Group session there. About 20 women were sitting in a circle. When they started the introduction of themselves, it was mind-boggling. I think the World map of countries was there, Honduras, Kenya, the Philippines, Sudan, China, Mexico, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Fiji, Malaysia, UK, Nepal, Bangladesh. I thought, "Welcome to Canada!" This is what multiculturalism looks like.



Since the creation of the Women's Peer Group, many women got help from the Group Facilitators and from each other in this group. This help was in the form of different educational courses, counselling, recreational activities, donations, internships, and not least volunteering opportunities.

The peer group was further valuable because of its multicultural participants. Multiculturalism dilutes and dissipates the divisiveness of ignorance. It is important because it encourages dialogue, often between radically different cultures that have radically different perspectives."



To me this was a special experience emphasizing inclusiveness because in the process of supporting and helping people, especially, from different cultural backgrounds, or in the process of giving and receiving, everyone is included, and this encourages dialogues, and it makes the system work even better.

By Tanya Kan

★ Many Canadians become involved in volunteering because people they know are doing it.

METRO VANCOUVER COMMUNITY

Metro Vancouver community is diverse community that enables each culture to interrelate. Statistic shows every year the immigrants increases.

POPULATION and IMMIGRATION TRENDS: VANCOUVER

IMMIGRATION TRENDS (2001 - 2016)

	VANCOUVER			METRO VANCOUVER		
	Total Population*	Number	Immigrants** % of Total Population	Total Population*	Number	Immigrants** % of Total Population
2016	631.486	262.765	42.5%	2.463.431	989.540	40.8%
2011	603.502	258.750	43.8%	2.313.328	913.310	40.0%
2006	578.041	260.760	45.1%	2.116.581	831.265	39.6%
2016	545.671	247.635	45.4%	1.986.965	738.555	37.5%

*Data Source: Census Data (100% data)

**Data Source: Census / NHS data (25% sample data)

It shows how open the city is to immigrants and their families coming here. People welcome you and share their culture. One of the ways people tend to share their culture is by sharing food. It is the easiest way. On one occasion during work I had someone offer me food. At first, I was terrified as I'm not sure but then I could not refuse when the person offered me food. And that is how I got my first Samosa.



Other than food people can interrelate to cultures and discover similarities through shared common experiences. I joined the Canada day celebration three years ago; I had the fun seeing the parade. It was a feast for the eyes but more than that a way to experience how amazing each one is.

And let's get back to the food story. It was night that time and I felt anxious as the person called out to me. He was a shuttle driver. I was at the door of the shuttle bus when the guy greeted me and gave me a samosa. It was funny because it was still hot, and he also offered me a napkin.



Like the samosa I have been taking in many an experience and it is up to the receiver to gladly take it like I did or not. After all Canada is a free country.

By Allyssa Marie Dolino

★ 10% of volunteers accounted for 53% of all volunteer hours given to non-profit and charitable organizations. They dedicated more than 390 hours to their volunteer activities, the equivalent of at least 10 weeks in a full-time job.

LEARNING ABOUT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

When I was in the Building Bridges Program, I heard a story from an indigenous lady which touched my heart. I was unaware of the injustice they had suffered before and did not realise what they had gone through. She portrayed and painted a picture about her life that stayed for a long time in our minds.

She said, "I am a lawyer and I was born in Yukon, and our people's children were taken by the government to boarding schools. When I was born, my mom was afraid I would be taken as well. When the children grew up, they would think low of their parents who couldn't speak the language well and felt that they were illiterate. When I was born, they hid me and nurtured me with care. They taught me about all the injustice that has been happening with us. We were the ones who came to this land first but still somehow, we were being controlled by outsiders. Then we realized,



it was only us that had to take a step and stop this. We fought with the government and after a while, got most of our basic human rights. We now have a separate card for us, which gives us some privileges from the rest."



She brought a doll with her, which was a symbol of her culture and rich history. She gave us great information about her history and made us realize that once, basic human rights were not that common amongst everyone and many were deprived of it. I learnt a lot and it was a new experience for me talking to an Aboriginal person for the first time. The event also made me realize that we should be thankful for them for sharing their stories with us and teaching us valuable lessons.

By Fatima Zain

★ 12 % of people aged 15 and over did volunteer work for sports and recreation organizations and 12% for non-profit organizations providing social services; 10% devoted their time and energy to associations engaged in education and research, another 9% to religious organizations, and 6% to those supporting health issues.

VOLUNTEERING with the FIRST NATIONS

I am volunteering for my Eco Action program which requires 120 volunteering hours.
I am volunteering with a First Nation couple who have farms and a garden. It is off grid farms.

ecoACTION ENVIRONMENT CANADA

I learned about harvesting food and medicine. Making jam and jelly. Everything they do is pretty much traditional with some modern aspects. Canning and jarring fish and how to preserve them in traditional and healthy ways. I started volunteering with them from August 14th until August 23th. It has been a great experience to learn from them about there culture and tradition and to share about my culture too.

They gave me place to stay and provide me food while I am here. We made crab apple jelly, pickle, and jarred fish. I tried deer meat, turkey eggs, and all healthy and organic foods.



By Fatima Haidari

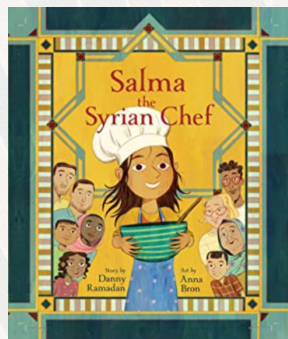
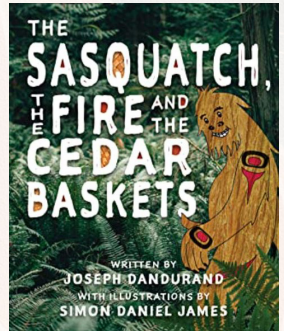


★ SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA REPORT (2010) BY MIREILLE VÉZINA AND SUSAN CROMPTON

BELONGING

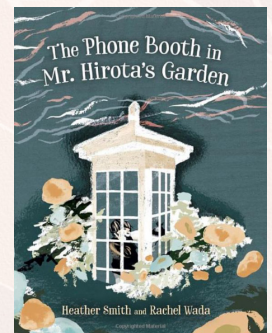
During the “Belonging” workshop, organized by Word Vancouver, I got to know wonderful writers who presented their children’s books. The storytellers were truly able to embrace, analyze and present their social and cultural background and their idea of belonging to the audience.

First one was Joseph A. Danduran, first nation storyteller, poet and playwright with his book “The Sasquatch, the Fire and the Cedar Baskets”. One could truly feel the authenticity and cultural background of the author through the eyes of the main character – Sasquatch, the spirit of the great cedar forest. Learning more about his adventures truly involved a reader into the magical world of the wonders of the nature which makes this story so unique.



The second book was presented by Syrian-Canadian writer, Danny Ramadan, who is also a public speaker and LGBTQ-refugee activist. His story called “Salma, the Syrian Chief”. Danny believes that “there are so many different life experiences and moments that deserve to be told”. The reader could really see it through his story about a Syrian refugee girl who wanted to cook a Syrian meal for her mother to make her less sad about being away from her home country. The book is full of funny moments, interesting and very touching.

The third author who presented was Heather Smith with her book “The phone booth in Mr. Hirota’s garden.” The story is about a boy Makio who lost his father because of the tsunami. Seeing the boy’s anger and struggle with death of his father, his neighbor, Mr. Hirota started a project of building a phone booth in the garden to let people talk with the souls of their lost ones and express their grief. The book is based on a true story of the wind phone in Otsuchi, Japan, so this is an authentic life experience beautifully reframed and presented by the writer.



In conclusion, I wanted to express my deepest gratitude to Word Vancouver Festival for this opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic. This workshop became a very inspiring experience for me. Canada is a multicultural country, so colorful, beautiful and also very special.

By Julia Druzhinina

MY EXPERIENCE AS PROJECT LEADER

Since I moved to Vancouver, I joined various community projects and events. In the beginning, it was not clear to me why I was doing that. My home country does not have the same opportunities. Over time I came to realize that community projects and events play a huge role in social well being and mental health. I strongly agree with the Canada Public Health Agency that the term public health includes not only preventing disease and injuries but also promoting good physical and mental health. Now that I recognized how important each of those projects were to connect me to this "land", I began to lead some community events, and this is what I want to share with you.



In the Summer of 2019, we started the Marpole Neighbourhood Basketball Group. I say "we" because I ran it with my husband and my son. My son was 10 years at that time, and he did not like basketball. We chose basketball because it was the only option close to our home. We have a half basketball court close to our home. We moved to this neighbourhood in March of 2019 and this project was our way to get in touch with our neighbours.

Every two weeks during July and August, we got together with old and new friends and played basketball as a family. Kids and parents played basketball together. I always ask myself why Vancouver does not have an activity for families to do together. Why the communities centers do not have many more of these types of activities? I need to exercise myself and it is the same for my son and my husband, but I never found a sport weekly activity in the whole Vancouver city that we could do together. So, I empowered myself and set out to initiate this activity. I used to tell my son **"when we can not find what we want, it is time to build it"**.

...

Following this pattern, as we could not run the Marpole Basketball this year because of the Covid restriction, we started a butterfly garden. In March of 2020, we started the Marpole Butterfly Garden. We named it this way because it is the first butterfly garden in the Marpole area. I need to confess to you that my son was the most excited family member to run this project. He drew his plan and started to join the Suzuki Foundation workshops wishing to be a Butterfly Ranger. You can not imagine how



happy he was when the ranger certificate and T-shirt arrived at our home. For sure, it took a lot of work - we found a place, we motivated our neighbours, we picked up soil from the city landfill (sometimes under the rain), we cut the grass, we bought the plants, we planted and watered them over the summer. But we got a lot - we make new friends, and we spend the spring and the summer connected with people through the garden.

Lately I realized that not all my neighbours and community members know how to access and use the online library. This really stayed with me. I felt that families especially with young children would benefit so much from getting online library access during the winter, especially considering all the Covid restrictions. I love to read and I am a big fan of BC libraries. For me, the library is more than a place where we can get books. My son started to learn guitar with an instrument from Vancouver Public Library (VPL). He also got a big hand from the library when he started to read; for many years he joined the Reading Buddies. I decided to lead a online conversation about online library resources. And, to my surprise, on the same day that I set it up on evenbrite, 42 people registered. I hope this short description of my personal experience inspires you to join and/or lead a community project. Would you like to try it? So, go ahead, and try. It is fun! I am sure that you will have to do a lot of work, but it will feel worth it. Communities events and projects are an amazing opportunity to be connected with people, keeping them (and you) healthier.

* A huge thank you to Vancouver Foundation and Kitsilano Neighbourhood House for the Small Neighbourhood Grant that I received in 2019 and 2020. A big thank you also to Vancouver City for running events and programs over the year. Thank you to Vancouver Public Library for keeping inspiring me. And, thank you to Cultural Chats, to support me to write down and share those experiences.

By Rachel Torres



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www.culturechats.org