

Analysis of the first batch of organizations has been completed, and a second set of volunteers (trained, in part, by the first) was busy visiting a new batch of organizations in November and December. A final report will be released in early 2014. Lagueux promises that there will be some revelations.

Back at the coffee shop Wang, Qiu and Zhu are talking about their roles in the project. All now count fellow newcomers from places like India and the Middle East among their friends, and all feel they have an understanding of how the organizations they researched could better serve immigrants.

In fact, says Lagueux, virtually every organization analyzed in the first batch shone for the quality of interpersonal relations, and most spaces too received passing marks, if not always emphatically. Reviewers almost always understood the signage and felt safe and secure, but also felt on occasion that the premises reflected a design or business philosophy that was foreign to them. They were not shy when it came to fingering businesses and organizations that did not seem to understand the needs and desires of immigrants.

Speaking of which, the conversation in the coffee shop has turned to a particular retail chain that each of the three visited. "They were so nice," says Zhu, "but it was so expensive." "And so empty," says Wang, to laughs from the other two.

# TRI-CITIES POPULATION BY THE NUMBERS

Why should companies and organizations pay attention to newcomers? Because they represent the future of the Tri-Cities.

Total population 2006: <b>194,764</b>	Total population 2011: <b>213,675</b>
Immigrant population 2006: <b>67,550</b>	Immigrant population 2011: <b>78,850</b>
Change in immigrant population, 2006-2011: <b>+11,300</b>	Change, non-immigrant population, 2006-2011: <b>+7,611</b>
Immigrants as a percentage of total population, 2006: <b>34.7%</b>	Immigrants as a percentage of total population, 2011: <b>36.9%</b>

## WHERE DO TRI-CITIES IMMIGRANTS COME FROM?

Almost everywhere. The top 10 source countries based on place of birth, 2011:

China	11.45%	Taiwan	3.97%
South Korea	10.88%	India	3.27%
Iran	8.09%	United States	2.59%
Hong Kong SAR	7.83%	Romania	2.33%
Philippines	6.87%		
United Kingdom	6.76%	(Others account for 35.96%.)	



# TCWC

TRI-CITIES WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

## HOW WELCOMING ARE THE TRI-CITIES?

ARE COMPANIES AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS PUTTING THEIR BEST FORWARD TO NEWCOMERS? A PROJECT STAFFED BY IMMIGRANT VOLUNTEERS AIMS TO FIND OUT.

Thomas Wang, Rachel Qiu and Andrew Zhu are sitting in a coffee shop near Coquitlam Centre, talking about their new lives, which include, among many other things, bears. Qiu and Zhu have each been in Canada for less than a year, while Wang has been bouncing back and forth between Canada and China for almost a decade.

All three have a bear sighting under their belts, even if none of these has been particularly close—they've been the happy kind of bear encounters that inspire awe rather than terror.

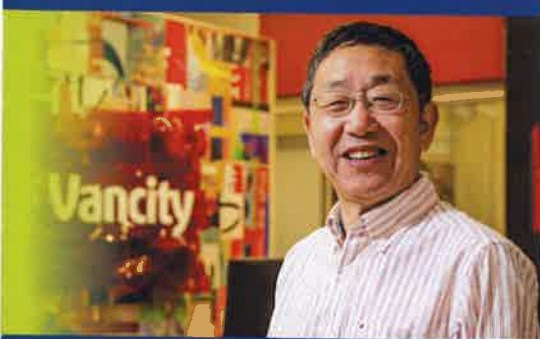
lot. Meanwhile, Wang, a financial advisor, Qiu, a lawyer, and Zhu, an educator, also appreciate the insight they've gained into Canadian ways, and how well, or poorly, such ways are being adapted to the needs of immigrants. In the process they've learned a little about the art and science behind customer service, commercial design and organizational behaviour, and they've come to understand a little about the business models of some of their research targets. Perhaps most importantly, they hope and believe that their assessments will lead to changes and refinements that will make their own lives and those of fellow newcomers easier.

The three also have another thing in common. Earlier in the year each applied to become a volunteer in a program called Welcoming Spaces and was subsequently accepted. In the several months since, they participated in a training program, then fanned out with other volunteers to assess how effectively a host of Tri-Cities businesses and organizations interface with immigrants. The experience has been a revelation, the three agree. For one thing, their participation helped ease the feelings of isolation and alienation that can often be a newcomer's

Wang, Qiu and Zhu say the decision to devote several days of their own time to a program like Welcoming Spaces wasn't difficult. After



### INSIDE



### OUR HOME, OUR STORIES

This is the third in a series of information packages prepared by the Tri-Cities Welcoming Communities Project.

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### NEXT ISSUE

Immigrant Seniors in the Tri-Cities



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## IN BRIEF



## THE TRI-CITIES WELCOMING COMMUNITIES PROJECT

The Welcoming Spaces program is just one of several elements within the Tri-Cities Welcoming Communities Project, which seeks to make the Tri-Cities more receptive to the needs of newcomers.

### Among the initiatives:

A Workplace Integration program addresses problematic gaps in understanding between newcomers and potential employers. The goal? To grow the capacity of workplaces to be more welcoming, so that newcomers can settle more quickly and in turn contribute more to the local economy.

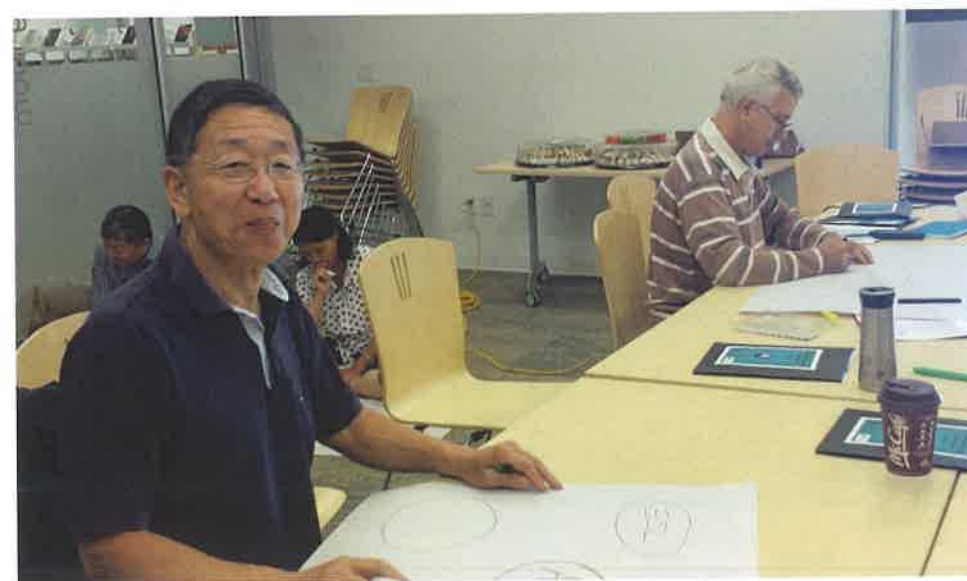
The Tri-Cities Service Map will provide a comprehensive, community-based database, representing and highlighting the services and supports of the Tri-City area as a whole community, rather than three separate municipalities.

And Our Home, Our Stories raises awareness using communication vehicles such as this newsletter. Our communities have become much more dynamic and cosmopolitan. It's exciting to know who lives here. Previous editions of the newsletter looked at North Road's burgeoning Korean district and Coquitlam's Bhutanese refugees. Find them at [tcwcp.successbc.ca](http://tcwcp.successbc.ca).

all, for many people volunteerism is playing a bigger role than ever before. Statistics Canada has collected data on volunteerism only since 2004 but in that time the proportion of Canadians who volunteer has risen from 45% to 47%. In 2010, 13.3 million Canadians over the age of 15 contributed more than two billion hours of their time, the equivalent of 1.1 million full-time jobs.

But realistically, can newcomers to the country be expected to follow the same trend? In fact, they seem to be doing so, says Martin Wyant, Chief Executive Officer of Share Family & Community Services, which supports vulnerable individuals and families in the Tri-Cities. "Every year we benefit from 45,000 to 50,000 volunteer hours," he says, adding that an estimated one-third of those hours come from immigrants, roughly proportionate to their share of the Tri-Cities population. In the case of programs such as New Beginnings, which supports the young children of government-assisted refugees, the proportion would be even higher, he believes.

### ANDREW ZHU WITH OTHER IMMIGRANT VOLUNTEERS.



When it comes to the Welcoming Spaces project, the proportion of volunteers who are immigrants is easy to calculate: 100%. That's because the project was specifically designed for newcomer volunteers, a recognition of the district's rapidly changing face. In recent years the Tri-Cities immigrant population has grown more quickly than almost anywhere else in Canada. In fact, between 2006 and 2011, the Tri-Cities population increased by some 19,000 to 214,000. Of the 19,000 increase, 11,000 are immigrants. As of 2011, immigrants account for 37% of the total population of the Tri-Cities.

**Some of the organizations approached were eager to participate, while others were more reluctant, and a few decided not to become involved. Among those who opted in are Translink, ICBC, the RCMP, libraries, schools and retail operations.**

But how welcoming are the Tri-Cities to these newcomers? That's the question the Welcoming Spaces project was designed to answer. Research has shown that easing newcomers into a society is a process that goes well beyond providing the appropriate settlement services. It's strongly influenced by how welcoming people, organizations and physical spaces not only are, but are seen to be. And further research had shown that the best way to analyze this is through the eyes of newcomers.



RACHEL QIU, ANDREW ZHU AND THOMAS WANG.

Lois Taylor, who leads the project, describes how it works. An initial 30 volunteers were trained to assess a total of 18 companies and organizations. About 150 people applied for the 30 volunteer positions involved in the first stage.

The responsibility for selecting the volunteers fell to project coordinator Myhra Lagueux, who looked for a range of backgrounds and chose people of differing ages, ethnicities, occupations and lengths of time in Canada. "I also looked for people with self-confidence," she says, a necessity given the "secret-shopper" type role they would be playing.

The businesses and organizations to be assessed were selected based on newcomers' needs. "The places you would have to use," says Lagueux. "Community centres, libraries, transit, shopping, accommodation." Some of the organizations she approached were eager to participate, while others were more

**Wang, Qiu and Zhu now count fellow newcomers from places like India and the Middle East among their friends, and all feel they have an understanding of how the organizations they researched could better serve immigrants.**

reluctant, and a few decided not to become involved. Among those who opted in are Translink, Fraser Health, the RCMP, libraries, schools and retail operations.

The volunteers approached each organization anonymously, employing a specific, highly detailed toolkit. "One third had to do with the spaces themselves," says Lagueux. This encompassed such concerns as signage and accessibility, but also less concrete details that nevertheless contributed to impressions of inclusivity. Another third could be summed up as interpersonal relationships. "Not mere customer service," clarifies Lagueux. "More to do with the quality of the information received, and the way that an encounter coloured the experience." Finally, each volunteer had to engage the organization in a process of some sort. "With the RCMP, for example, they completed a criminal record check necessary to volunteer at a school," she says.