

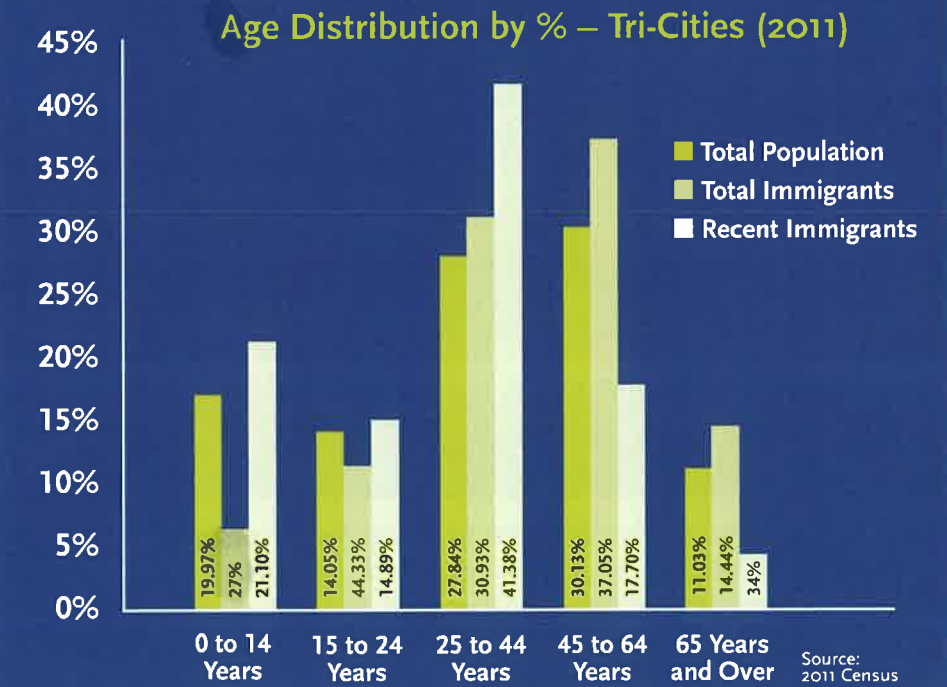
statistics. Immigration brings a much younger demographic to what is otherwise a rapidly aging Canadian society. In the Tri-Cities, for example, only 10.5 percent of immigrants were 45 or older at date of immigration. However, among recent immigrants (since January 1, 2006) that number rises to 16.9%, due in large part to family sponsorships of parents and grandparents. Meanwhile, the foreign-born population as a whole has been increasing by about 2,000 people a year, and in 2014 amounts to about 40% of the Tri-Cities population. Among those more than 80,000 people, there are several thousand seniors, even give the younger demographics of immigrants.

Seventy-eight-year-old Akram Mohammadi definitely qualifies as one of those several thousand, regardless of how young she might look. The Iranian immigrant who arrived in 2006 to join her son and his family is an enthusiastic member of the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Persian group, which has more than 150 participants. (Between 2006 and 2011 Iran accounted for more than 10% of immigrants to the Tri-Cities.) She's proud of the new laptop her son bought her once she started taking computer lessons, and insists on using her newly acquired English during a conversation. She ends it by complimenting what she believes to be Canada's commendable treatment of seniors like her, as evidenced by the Persian S.U.C.C.E.S.S. group—and she wants us to know that it's money well spent. "By making people like me happier," she says, "we'll stay healthier, and cost everyone less money."

IMMIGRANT SENIORS: OFTEN HIDDEN BUT A SIGNIFICANT PRESENCE

The immigrant population is younger than the Tri-Cities population as a whole, which tends to camouflage the presence of seniors. Meanwhile, an earlier generation of immigrants, from the 1960s through 1980s, has achieved or is currently reaching seniors status.

Tri-Cities Age Distribution: Total population, Immigrants, Newcomers



THE TRI-CITIES WELCOMING COMMUNITIES PROJECT

As one of Canada's leading centres for the settlement of recent immigrants, the Tri-Cities of Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody have embarked on an initiative to ease and enhance newcomers' experiences while making the region a more welcoming and inclusive community. Initiated by S.U.C.C.E.S.S. a diverse group of community leaders and stakeholders are working together as an active Advisory to develop, implement and oversee all elements of the Tri-Cities Welcoming Communities Project.

MEET OUR ADVISORY MEMBERS

- ACT 2 Child & Family Services
 - City of Coquitlam
 - City of Coquitlam, RCMP
 - City of Port Coquitlam
 - City of Port Moody
 - Coquitlam Public Library
 - Douglas College Douglas College, The Training Group
 - Fraser Valley Regional Library
 - ISSofBC
 - Ministry of Children & Family Development
 - Port Moody Public Library
 - S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
 - School District No. 43 (Coquitlam)
 - SHARE Society
 - Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce
 - Tri-Cities Seniors Planning Table
 - Vancity West Coast Family Centres Society
- Project Coordinators
PEERs Employment & Education Resources

TCWC

TRI-CITIES WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

INSIDE



OUR HOME, OUR STORIES

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

Written by Jim Sutherland
Photographs by Paul Joseph

NEXT ISSUE

Skilled Immigrants and the Tri-Cities Labour Market

INSET PHOTO: LISA KWAN HAS LIVED MUCH OF HER LIFE IN CANADA. AND WHAT A LIFE.

THE CASE OF THE OLDER NEWCOMER

IMMIGRANT SENIORS FALL THROUGH A LOT OF CRACKS, BUT THE CRACKS ARE BEGINNING TO BE FILLED.

Lisa Kwan has had a life that's typical of a Chinese immigrant. In the late 1950s she fled the fear and famine of the Great Leap Forward, escaping first to Hong Kong. In 1960 she and her late husband immigrated to Canada, landing in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, where they operated a corner store.

While raising three children there, Kwan took secretarial and accounting classes, which she parlayed into 20 years working as a bank teller. Then, after the kids went off to university, she and her husband moved to Medicine Hat, Alberta, where they ran a restaurant. So yes, Kwan's life has been typical—typical in the sense that every immigrant's story is unique.



Richmond also have chapters). Last year she took over as chair of a group that meets every week and counts more than 200 members.

For the past decade or so Kwan has been exploring another typically atypical existence, that of an immigrant senior. In 2000 a daughter who'd moved to the coast beckoned her to come live here and help take care of the grandkids. By 2006, with her English-language proficiency, professional credentials and outgoing nature, she'd become secretary of the Coquitlam chapter of a S.U.C.C.E.S.S. seniors group (Vancouver and

At a recent meeting about 75 of them, ranging in age from about 60 to 90, were crowded into a room at the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. offices at Coquitlam's Henderson Mall. This was a mostly social affair, with a few words by a speaker from the United Way, which helps fund the group, and a modicum of club business to discuss. But this is definitely not a group that simply gathers. Computer and English classes are offered, as well as workshops dealing with health and welfare. Outings are a common feature, and there are tai chi and Chinese line dancing groups. "We are a whole bunch of happy people," Kwan says.

continued on page 2

IN BRIEF

RECENT CHANGES TO FAMILY CLASS IMMIGRATION

Canada has historically emphasized the economic value of immigration and preferred skilled immigrants of working age. For example, while as many as two-thirds of Canadian immigrants are economic class, compared to less than one-quarter family class (the remainder being refugee and humanitarian), in the U.S. those proportions are roughly reversed, with family class immigrants easily in the majority. In B.C. and the Tri-Cities, economic class immigrants make up an even larger proportion of total immigrants than in the rest of Canada.

Regardless, concerns have grown about the cost of family reunification, since parents and grandparents are likely to be beyond working age and unlikely to be fluent in English or French, leaving them poor candidates to join the workforce. Meanwhile, due to their age, they can be costly to the health care system.

Yet, understandably, many immigrants wish to be reunited with their close relatives. By late 2010 there was a backlog of 160,000 applications to sponsor family members, and in 2011 the federal government introduced measures to reduce this, including an increase in intake and a new visitor visa to allow extended visits by family members, but also a temporary freeze on new applications.

In May 2013 the government announced new plans, including continuing high intake levels and a limited lifting of the freeze. At the same time new measures seek to shift more of the potential costs of family reunification onto sponsors, who must now demonstrate stronger proof of a higher income and undertake to support the family member for 20 years, instead of 10. Full details are available at www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/sponsor/index.asp

That certainly does seem to be the case today at Henderson Place, but it's not universally true of immigrant seniors, many of whom have to deal with issues that set them apart

from both native-born seniors and from other immigrants. For one thing, immigrant seniors, especially newcomers, have significantly lower incomes than native-born seniors. Most have not worked long enough to accrue significant Canada Pension Plan contributions, and many have not lived in Canada the 10 years required to gain eligibility for Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement payments. Meanwhile, seniors are less likely to be fluent in English than other newcomers, making it more difficult for them to find work. This lack of fluency, combined with a reliance on public transit, complicates almost every aspect of life, from shopping and recreation through banking and healthcare. A large proportion live with their families, which does provide a measure of support, but of-

ten entails childcare responsibilities and can lead to feelings of isolation, especially when everyone else is away at work or school. And paradoxically, despite all of this, immigrant

seniors have historically received less attention from service providers than most other groups.

This last element is slowly beginning to change, however. In the Tri-Cities immigrant seniors can take advantage of services such as Share Family & Community Resources Society's Better At Home program, which provides services such as housekeeping, grocery shopping and transportation. The Society employs staff and volunteers fluent in several different languages. The goal of Better At Home is to make it possible for seniors to stay longer in their own homes.

Meanwhile, the popularity and effectiveness of the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Chinese-language seniors group (founded way back in 1991) led the United Way to help fund pilot projects for similarly organized

Immigrant seniors, especially newcomers, have significantly lower incomes than native-born seniors. Most have not worked long enough to accrue significant Canada Pension Plan contributions, and many have not lived in Canada the 10 years required to gain eligibility for Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement payments.

AKRAM MOHAMMADI'S LIFE HAS CHANGED IMMEASURABLY SINCE MOVING FROM IRAN TO CANADA TO LIVE WITH A SON.



FOR YOUNG JOON CHUNG A KOREAN-LANGUAGE SENIORS GROUP OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET PEOPLE AND LEARN ABOUT CANADA WHILE IMPROVING HIS ENGLISH.

Korean and Persian groups, which count almost 300 participants between them despite launching just last year.

Young Joon Chung, who is a regular at the Korean group, is another one of those typically atypical seniors. His wife and kids emigrated to Coquitlam almost 20 years ago after she visited here during a career as a pianist and instantly decided that this is where she wished to live. He remained in Korea, where he taught environmental sciences at a technical college, until retiring four years ago. He allows that coming to Canada with limited English-language skills has been a little difficult, even for someone like him with strong family connections and no need to work. He discovered the Korean-language S.U.C.C.E.S.S. group through a settlement services worker, and has become one of its most active participants, partly because he wants to find out as much about his new home as he can, but partly too because the English classes offered through the group are so valuable to him.

She's proud of the new laptop her son bought her once she started taking computer lessons, and insists on using her newly acquired English during a conversation.

Jackie Hong, one of the Project Coordinators for the group, has first-hand knowledge of what many of the seniors are going through. She arrived in Canada as a teenager and had troubles of her own, but feels that it was much more difficult for her parents. She says that the group's English and computer classes are incredibly popular,

and often oversubscribed. And despite attracting 130 participants over a space of a few weeks, the group, she suspects, has reached the attention of only about half of those who would be interested in joining.

Kelly Ng, Chief Operating Officer of S.U.C.C.E.S.S., has an even more direct insight: his own mother-in-law moved from Hong Kong to join his family at their home in the Tri-Cities, which, with its primarily suburban form can be a lonelier place than many other parts of the Lower Mainland, he feels. "If you go to a mall, you will notice a lot of seniors sitting alone, hoping that someone will speak to them. I think that as a group seniors receive less attention than others. Over the past five years we've been able to offer them a bit more, but it isn't enough."

Ng's and Hong's sense that there are a lot of immigrant seniors who aren't being reached by existing programs is borne out by

continued on page 4