



*Des communautés plus fortes au Canada  
Strengthening Canada's Communities*

## **Experiences of Immigrant and Refugee Social Enterprise in Canada – Case Studies**

Case Studies from the report on the first phase research findings of the  
Immigrant Settlement and Integration through Social Enterprise  
Initiative (ISISE)

Full report (including case studies) available as a separate document

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and  
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## Appendix E - Case Studies

### *Profile: EthniCity Catering*

EthniCity Catering is a not-for-profit social enterprise in Calgary that provides temporary part-time employment to newcomers - primarily women - who encountered barriers to employment due to a lack of Canadian work experience, limited language proficiency, and restricted access to childcare. Established by immigrants, EthniCity provides catering and workplace skills training to their employees, who are originally from Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Central/South America, and Africa.

EthniCity Catering is not incorporated as a separate business but is currently run as a program of Calgary's Centre for Newcomers. The program began as a spin-off from the Centre's Collective Kitchen Program; immigrant women gathered to cook, shared their stories, and learned from one another's experience about the settlement process in Canada.

Since its inception in 1997, EthniCity's business revenue has increased by an impressive 2,400%. EthniCity currently employs 5.5 people fulltime and uses about ten volunteers.

Linh Bui, EthniCity Coordinator, explained that operating as a business within a not-for-profit environment is a challenge. It takes a great deal of time to build capacity and business skills to deal with the range of issues that arise in daily operation. To address such issues, they recruit and employ very committed and passionate staff who strive toward the shared goal of helping newcomers attain gainful employment experience, as well as adequate references for their next employment opportunity.

EthniCity has supportive management and financial and accounting functions provided by their parent organization, without which, Linh says, they wouldn't have been able to develop as they have. Other enterprises also identify administrative overhead burdens as a problem and the "program" model is one effective way of meeting this challenge in the early years. Linh also cites their landlord and customers as supportive partners. She finds that having a social mission attached to the business makes a difference in marketing their products and services.

A series of formal and informal settlement supports are provided, such as training in Canadian culture and life skills, education and training supports, along with language and housing supports. EthniCity also provides peer support, social networking, and friendship building.

As EthniCity makes plans to scale up their operation they have reviewed conditions that need to be in place to accomplish this. These include improving their existing facility, increasing capital investment, obtaining advice from a marketing expert, additional business skills training, and more independence in operating the social enterprise.

### *Profile: Immigrant Integration Farming Worker Co-op (IIFC)*

Established in 2008, the Immigrant Integration Farming Worker Co-op (IIFC) is located in Winnipeg. It strives to maximize immigrants' and refugees' participation in community economic and social development by working with the environment through local and tropical organic vegetable production and compost production. These activities provide Canadian culture and life skills supports along with entrepreneurial skills development, all of which assist with the settlement and integration process in the Canadian society.

IIFC works with newcomers from most regions. The staff serves their clientele in over fifteen languages, primarily those dialects spoken in Africa. As a new co-operative, so far they work on a volunteer basis and have over one hundred

people participating in activities such as urban farming, healthy food and nutrition workshops, and informed economical shopping, through which over twenty-five newcomer families are served. In the year since its inception, IIFC has doubled the number of newcomers served.

Securing revenue is a main issue of concern. This is addressed to some extent by the receipt of in-kind support and individuals' contributions, and is mitigated by co-operative members' motivation and the level of understanding and interaction that exist among the participants. The lack of access to skills training opportunities is another major challenge. IIFC can seek people with skills in particular areas to assist, however they feel it would be easier and less time consuming if such opportunities were available in a more straightforward manner.

Receiving management skills support from social enterprise development organizations has been effective for IIFC, and this is reflected in the additional conditions for success they describe - constant motivation for staff, volunteers and all involved, encouraging an environment of persistent determination, and a sincere willingness to help newcomer communities.

IIFC has a specific development plan, the required staff and volunteers to do the work, and they have identified the necessary conditions that should be in place for this development to happen, such as securing paid positions and having information sessions and workshops for members and participants to share knowledge and to build consensus about the path forward.

#### *Profile: ANAK Filipina & Books*

ANAK Filipina & Books is a printing and publishing house in Manitoba that provides gainful employment for newcomers. Established in 2009, ANAK offers a supportive avenue for local ethnic artists and writers, along with cross-cultural educational resources and community development programming, all of which are offered in both English and Philipino.

They offer many settlement supports, both formally and informally. These include language training, assistance-acquiring business and networking skills, and education supports. In addition, ANAK also provides employment for marginalized immigrant youth and seniors.

As a newly created social enterprise, ANAK is currently shaping the process and framework through which it will offer its services. As such, it is establishing records, and does not yet have actual data regarding categorization of staff (such as number of members who are immigrants) and annual operating costs. They are encountering start-up challenges such as the costs of shipping ethnic books, availability of dedicated time (e.g. time to devote to business plan development, in addition to full-time work, family, and community duties), and initial capital costs.

ANAK highlights community support as a condition for its success in addressing these and other challenges. They draw on partnerships to share resources, approaches, and lessons learned. They also solve problems as an organization through dialogue and discussion.

Success will be defined once fully in operation and will be measured by the strength of financial goals, the level of employment offered, training and skills development offered, and consumer sales.

ANAK has a detailed plan in place to develop. In order to scale up their social enterprise, they would need to secure capital and have a great deal of dedicated staff time available. They would also like to have a larger network of community supports in place. They do, however, currently have enough volunteers to achieve this.

### *Profile: SewFair*

Established in 2007, SewFair offers Muslim newcomer women in Manitoba a safe and culturally sensitive environment to learn a new skill, sewing, that on completion would give them an opportunity to build a home-based business, qualify for positions in this industry, or join the social enterprise SewFair. Not only do they learn a skill that could provide some financial independence, they increase their self-confidence. In many cases, their experience with SewFair is the first time the women are paid for their work. The program helps break the social isolation most participants feel, as many of them do not feel comfortable leaving their homes to work or train in the mainstream community. They meet women with the same challenges as themselves and create a community to support each other.

The program also has an English Language Learners (ELL) component. The women are taught how to make clothing, conference bags, and table linens. SewFair is in its formative years but is already taking on small contracts and is hoping to create a niche market, as clients are requesting the use of organic fabrics, such as bamboo.

SewFair strongly believes in building the capacity of immigrant leadership and enhancing community economic development knowledge. They also emphasize community partnerships as integral to achieving their objectives.

SewFair currently has two employees and plans to have about ten immigrant women working with them. Though they do not yet have a specific plan to scale up their social enterprise, they do have an objective to grow in size and integrate the volunteers needed to support this.

### *Profile: EcoEquitable*

Located in Ottawa, EcoEquitable, a for-profit co-operative, is a social enterprise that creates employment for immigrant women using their existing seamstress skills to make a range of trendy totes from locally donated textile refuse. The staff can communicate in a range of languages, such as French, Spanish, Punjabi, and Italian, so they are able to serve women from many different nations. They focus on sewing contracts and repairs, production and sale of recycled items, diverting textile refuse from local businesses, organizations, and individual community members away from local landfills, and educating the community about the numerous benefits of textile recycling as a part of sustainable living.

EcoEquitable has encountered operational challenges including securing adequate funding, recruiting and retaining competent staff, building capacity and strengthening governance, aligning processes with mission, values, and vision, elaborating a strategic plan and implementing programming.

EcoEquitable has identified conditions of success it employs to address these challenges. They find it is beneficial to build partnerships, strengthen networks, and evaluate and optimize processes, such as benchmarks and best practices. They also engage in program training to build capacity and believe in organic growth and participatory involvement of staff and volunteers.

Being visible, connected to the community, and confirmed in what they do underlines their philosophy.

They have the objective to grow, along with a specific plan to develop. For this to happen, EcoEquitable has identified conditions to meet: adequate financial resources support, human resources, and technical and equipment resources, along with training and scientific expertise would have to be addressed. Logistics support and network and partnerships strengthening would also have to be in place.