Somalia is a country in crisis. Thousands are fleeing the famine, drought, and political upheaval of their homeland, seeking refuge here on Canada's west coast. The arrival of the Somalis is challenging immigrant serving agencies to recognize and meet the needs of African newcomers. It also marks a change in Vancouver's ethnic fabric - the emergence of a growing Black community."

In his research Noel is discovering that in many ways Somali newcomers are similar to other refugees. They are in need of English language training, job search programs and counselling to help them heal the emotional and psychological scars they carry from their homeland. These needs could be met initially by an impartial immigrant serving agency, says Noel. Cultural and tribal traditions unique to Black Africans and Afro-Caribbeans, however, create special needs which would best be served in the long-term by an agency created by and for Black immigrants, he believes. For instance, Noel estimates that 90% of Somalis are not ready for the ESL classes they've been placed in at community colleges and recommends that a specific language assessment process be established for them. Noel would also like to see the formation of a housing cooperative for Black Canadians - not to ghettoize the group, but to allow them to create living situations in harmony with their concepts of extended family and community living.

Noel believes the arrival of the Somalis is just the beginning of African Canadians establishing roots in B.C. Already the infrastructure for a strong and healthy community is emerging. A Somali restaurant and recreational centre is expected to open in the near future. Somalis women, many of whom are trained health-care professionals, are preparing to establish daycare centres for their children so they can return to work. It is predicted that many Somalis, attracted to the warmer climate and majestic beauty of Vancouver, will be inviting family members living in the East to join them here. British Columbians need to be prepared for the arrival of more Afro-Canadians, says Noel. Racial problems exist here for Blacks that don't exist back east because many British Columbians don't understand who these people are. For example, many Somali immigrants have trouble finding housing due to racism. The solution Noel proposes is a race awareness campaign that reaches all sectors of society.

As Somali refugees become established, they add a new dimension to the rich multicultural community we are a part of. With the arrival of the Somalis, we are witnessing the emergence of a growing Black community on the west coast. The results of MOSAIC's needs assessment should make clear how immigrant services can best act as midwives in this process.

HOPE FOR SOMALI REFUGEES

By Oona McOuat

Vancouver's MOSAIC Fall 1992
Executive Director's Message

By Michael Murphy

This will be my first opportunity as the new Executive Director of MOSAIC to contribute to the Newsletter.

As MOSAIC grows and develops, we are constantly challenged to respond to changing community needs so that our programs and services are directed to real areas of need. We do this in a number of different ways, all of which contribute to the critical mass of information that we need in order to make informed judgements about where to put our resources. We have always enjoyed a close relationship with the people we serve, and generally have found a high level of awareness about emerging issues produced by changing immigration and refugee patterns.

To provide us with important and current information about different immigrant groups, we have undertaken needs assessments surveys in the Vietnamese, Portuguese and Somali communities. The results of these surveys will help us plan future programs and services, and help us make decisions about where we should be concentrating our energies to ensure that newcomers to Vancouver and the Lower Mainland are able to get established as soon as possible in their new community.

1992 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Elected as Board of Directors for 1992-1993

Executive
Fiona Begg - President
Trevor Peach - Vice-President
Nuralla Jeraj - Treasurer
Vera Rosenbluth - Secretary

Members
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Raminder Dosanjh
Soma Ganesan
Jongmann Kim
Carolyn Lew
Griff Lewis
Carolyn McCool
Hernan Mendoza
Marta Torres
Robyn Woodward

Presented
MOSAIC's HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

To Mr. Valmond Romilly, a Vancouver based lawyer, for his pioneering work in the African-Canadian community. He is founder of the Vancouver branch of the Harambee Centres Canada, whose purpose is to provide legal aid and employment, youth and family counselling to the black community.

Dr. Kes Chetty Scholarship Award

To Ms. Aracely Cecibel Martinez, a 19-year-old woman from Guatemala, who is pursuing a career in education. Last November, the scholarship fund was established in honour of the late retired doctor, who volunteered much of his time to MOSAIC.

Service Awards

To Celia Brookfield, Ellena Yang, Gosia Kawecki and Nasser Amiri for their dedicated service to MOSAIC, and also Outstanding Contribution Award to Rogers's Vancouver East Neighbourhood Television.

The Vancouver MOSAIC is a non-profit newsletter published by MOSAIC, the Multilingual Orientation Services Association for Immigrant Communities. Although the Vancouver MOSAIC is distributed for free, donations to help cover production and mailing costs will be gratefully accepted. Organizations and individuals will be put on our mailing list upon request. Submissions are welcome and will be reviewed before publication. We are not responsible for returning submissions. Views expressed in the Vancouver MOSAIC are not necessarily those of MOSAIC. The Vancouver MOSAIC material may be reproduced with acknowledgement. Send submissions c/o MOSAIC, 1522 Commercial Dr., Vancouver, B.C., V5L 3Y2, Phone: (604) 254-0244, Fax: (604) 254-2321.

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Community Outreach Program

MOSAIC's Community Outreach Program has grown by leaps and bounds since its formation about two years ago. The program, under Co-ordinator Gosia Kawecki, recently tackled two projects - needs of the Vietnamese and Portuguese communities and workshops that will speak on multicultural issues. Oona McOuat discusses such activities.

Time and time again, MOSAIC staff have been called upon to share their knowledge and understanding of ethnic specific issues with the public.

In response to a new trend in organizational cross-cultural awareness, MOSAIC is planning to create several workshop modules with topics that will address issues of cross-cultural and race relations. Staff will be trained to develop the skills needed to conduct these sessions.

"More and more organizations know they have to change their present attitudes and organizational structure to live up to the idea of multiculturalism we now have in British Columbia," says Gosia Kawecki of MOSAIC's Community Outreach Program.

Marking this trend, the United Way has recently launched the Agency Access Development Project, a 3 year program designed to help member organizations become more responsive to the changing demographics of our society. Cross-cultural training by MOSAIC staff may be a crucial part of the program.

A recent report from the Ministry of Social Services, Multiculturalism - Towards a Cultural Competence, validates the timeliness of MOSAIC's decision to professionalize our ability to assist government and corporations in providing culturally sensitive and effective services to all Canadians. The report stresses the importance of educating social service workers to assist newcomers in a culturally competent manner. MOSAIC's proposed training program consists of a 3-level instructional package. Level I would consist of 3 workshops designed for the general public with topics like Canadian Multiculturalism, Developing Intercultural Awareness and Dealing with Racism. Level II is made up of 5 workshops designed especially for front-line public and private sector employees wanting in-depth cross-cultural knowledge to help them on the job. Topics include Child Rearing Practices, Dealing with Family Crisis Situations and the Role of Women in the Family and Society. The third level would consist of workshops designed in response to specific needs and requests as well as presentations geared towards helping agencies' staff make their services more accessible to ethnic and cultural minorities.

MOSAIC's Community Outreach recently conducted two needs assessment studies on the issues and concerns affecting the Vietnamese and Portuguese communities.

The expertise and concern of community workers and leaders were voiced through advisory groups who identified and prioritized key issues. Once surveys were designed, both groups helped researcher Meh Najak, who was hired to design the methodology, to recruit respondents.

She discovered that determining community needs of one group varied from another. While Vietnamese respondents were easily located through word of mouth and their direct association with community organizations, interested participants who identified themselves as members of the Portuguese community were harder to find.

According to Kawecki, conducting formal needs assessments is an important way to learn about immigrant groups. Those making good use of existing services and programs could benefit simply from community workers, who are sensitive to their needs, getting together to compare notes. For new communities, however, getting direct feedback from clients about their concerns is extremely valuable. It is often difficult to reach a cross-section of more established communities, who are more widely dispersed, to identify their problems and concerns, such as the Portuguese community.

Cultural sensitivity is the key to successfully conducting needs assessments. "People who work with the community know what the problems are and want to do something about them," says Kawecki. "This study will be a confirmation for them that they're on the right track."

Results of the studies, now being analyzed, will help us map out future directions, insuring our programs and services continue to be relevant and accessible to newcomers.
From Russia To MOSAIC With Love

By Oona McOuat

There are always fresh flowers on the desk of MOSAIC's Russian bilingual counsellor, Marina Yelchinko, gifts of thanks from the growing number of refugee claimants who come to her for assistance. The historic dismantling of the Soviet Union last year marked a large increase in the number of Russian and Ukrainian clients seeking help from MOSAIC.

"It is a real mess," says Marina, "a huge struggle to redefine who belongs where. There is no order, no law, and nationalistic tensions in every republic run high due to food shortages."

In Estonia and Latvia only nationals or those who came there before 1940 are allowed to remain citizens. No one wants any extra mouths to feed. As a result, some Russians now find themselves without a country, cast into a no-person's land of social and economic upheaval.

Yelchinko says Russian refugees have been getting off planes in Gander, Newfoundland and jumping ship in record numbers because they want a safe place to live where they can work and build a future.

Two years ago Alla Polakov came to Canada with her husband and two children from the Ukraine. When anti-semitism and economic instability became too much for them, they decided to leave the country they love to create something better. One of the first people they met was Marina Yelchinko.

"We were really saved," says Polakov, "We were strangers but she was the person who thought about our future and helped us start our lives again. We are so grateful."

Upon the recommendation made by Yelchinko, Polakov immediately enrolled in ESL classes to gain the language skills she needed to resume her career as a pianoteacher. Polakov's husband, a surgeon in the Soviet Union, was encouraged to apply for a position as a medical researcher at UBC where he still works. Their eldest child was enrolled in Talmud Torah Hebrew school in Vancouver. With Yelchinko's assistance, Polakov sponsored her parents to come and live with her family. They arrived in Canada last week.

"Living in Russia has become just awful, especially for older people," says Polakov. "The situation is dangerous and I don't think it's over."

Yelchinko also sees a grim near future for her homeland.

"There is a huge power struggle in play and before it becomes any better I think it will get much worse," she says, "These people are used to being under a dictatorship and they can't learn democracy overnight."

Alla Polakov hopes her compatriots will one day know peace. "We come from a beautiful country, but we couldn't live there. I wish people at home could be happy like they are here. I wish Russia to be happy."
The NORSTAR Shines Brightly On Commercial Drive

By Mel Buenaventura

The telecommunication system Meridian NORSTAR came to the attention of MOSAIC's management and board after studying the results of a survey indicating that an adequate system was necessary to better service incoming callers.

Prior to the arrival of NORSTAR, there had been many problems including as many as 1700 calls a week not getting through and the difficulties of taking hand written messages for counsellors from non-English speaking immigrants and refugees.

Now, after two years of discussions and financial planning by MOSAIC's ruling body, the phone system has arrived and improved communications between clients and counsellors.

For instance, more incoming lines mean more calls can be received. Also, NORSTAR's voice messaging feature STARTALK has lightened the workload of the receptionists, as clients can simply leave a message - in their language - after being transferred to the staff member's message mailbox. This has eliminated misinterpreted messages and stress for receptionists who are expected to keep track of incoming calls while clients are arriving. Still more advantages include the direct paging of staff members, being able to access one's message mailbox from home, the reduction of message slips and the ease of leaving messages from one staff member to another.

The benefit of having the NORSTAR with the STARTALK component is immeasurable. However, one thing is certain, the online telephone assistance that our newly arrived Canadian friends need can now be provided more efficiently.
Despite a stubborn recession in the Canadian economy, MOSAIC's Job Finding Club continues to exceed its target by finding its students employment.

This 3-week, highly intensive job finding program is open to immigrant and refugee men and women who have been living in Canada for under three years, with preference given to those under one year. Other eligibility criteria include being able to work in Canada legally and having an Upper Intermediate- to Advanced-level English ability.

JFC focuses on, for example, assessing skills, preparing resumes and covering letters, establishing job leads and practice contacting employers, which are all in a workshop setting. Another vital part of the program is provided by guest speakers, such as representatives from the B.C. Ministry of Labour, B.C. Transit and Canada Employment Centre. Representatives from the Ministry of Labour speak about labour standards in B.C. Brenda Cowie-Hanssen, JFC co-ordinator, states that the speakers inform the student of their rights as an employee in B.C. This way, the students are aware that if they are improperly treated by an employer, then they can file a formal complaint to receive the necessary corrective actions.

The group structure of the workshop is ideal for the students, encouraging mutual support and building friendship with each other. As a result, each participant makes new friends, builds self-confidence and, most importantly, does not feel isolated and lost in his or her new country.

This program unfailingly prepares newly arrived immigrants to adapt themselves to the Canadian labour market, and thus, become a productive part of British Columbia.

SUPPORT MOSAIC - ATTEND OUR UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS!

You can help us in our efforts to raise public awareness of our activities and much needed funds for our programs by attending any or all of our upcoming events. Eat, drink, dance, meet new friends and receive a tax receipt for a portion of your revelry! Be a friend to MOSAIC by attending, bringing a friend and/or volunteering to help. Call Deborah Bennett at 254-0244 to reserve tickets or for further information.

* INTERPRETATION & TRANSLATION DINNER
Find out how comprehensive our services are, meet our translators and interpreters & enjoy a great meal! Thursday, November 19, 6:30 p.m.
Centre Culturel de Francophone
1551 W. 7th Avenue $25

* LATIN DANCE PARTY
Take a break from mid-winters bleakness and learn to salsa, samba, or cumbia to the sounds of a hot live band. Saturday, January 30, 8:00 p.m.
Maritime Labour Centre $12

* KOREAN DINNER & KARAOKE NIGHT
Feast on delicious food, and then join us in singing the night away. Saturday, February 27, 6:30 p.m.
Korean Community Centre $20

* HUMAN RIGHTS DINNER
Celebrate the International Day for the Elimination Racism and honour the 1993 recipient of our annual Human Rights Award. Sunday, March 21, 6:30 p.m.
Granville Island Room $45
A BIG THANK YOU

To all of the individuals, organizations, businesses and foundations whose financial generosity this year has made it possible for MOSAIC to provide essential services to new immigrants and refugees to our community. We also greatly appreciate the continued support of our board of directors, volunteers and members, not listed here.

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