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Housing, jobs a hurdle for New Westminster immigrants

By Michael Mui, 24 Hours Vancouver
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Cost of living and language barriers are among the top difficulties faced by new immigrants in New Westminster. (CARMINE MARINELLI/ 24 HOURS)

Getting a job and a roof are the toughest challenges for immigrants arriving in New Westminster, according to a city report, particularly as the vast majority of the newcomers don't speak English as a first language.

The results from a survey of 224 new immigrants and refugees released this week found 70% of respondents found it difficult to get employment or training in the Royal City. Furthermore, 52.5% had difficulties obtaining housing, particularly when seeking two-and-three bedroom homes, where the average monthly rent ranged from \$1,074 to \$1,301.

Approximately one-in-three residents of New West are considered immigrants — primarily from the Philippines, China and India.

Coun. Jaimie McEvoy said Thursday the first step to fix those problems is changing how residents, potential employers and city staff react and treat immigrants who don't speak English.

"It means people will have to learn how to be welcoming when and where there still isn't a language connection," he said. "Even if it's just as simple as being able to hand someone a leaflet to let them know where they should be going."

As part of its efforts, the city has — along with Citizenship and Immigration Canada — funded \$850,000 to settlement and social service organizations to help.

Roja Bagheri, a MOSAIC settlement worker, said the data collection is an important step as it shows the city's trying to learn more about its immigrant population.

Her organization, along with the New West library, regularly hosts seminars to help newcomers find jobs and housing.

"We have workshops on resume building, interview skills, how to represent yourself, how to brand yourself," she said, adding MOSAIC provides help in applying for social housing.

"We believe that through education, knowledge, that's how newcomers feel much more empowered, much more included."

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