



# The Source

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**MOSAIC Settlement Services has long worked to help refugees and immigrants overcome social and material obstacles during their settlement in Canadian society. The organization now aims to take its commitment to promoting greater and more equal access to employment resources a step further, by implementing a settlement program to identify the needs of LGBTQ newcomers.**

Khim Tan and Roja Bagheri, who are spearheading the initiative, note that the stigmatization the LGBTQ community faces compounds the challenges that all newcomers must deal with.

one of my clients," explains Bagheri, who has taken note of the great disparity in social resources in Vancouver, particularly in certain ethnic communities.

Bagheri explains that after traumatic experiences in Iran, her client, a self-identified transsexual woman, hoped to become a part of Vancouver's Iranian community. Instead, she was turned away.

Bagheri admits that while Vancouver is, on the whole, a multicultural and open community, newcomers, especially LGBTQ newcomer, are not always free to be themselves.

"If [LGBTQ newcomers] do not feel welcome in their primary community, it will be very difficult to foster a more general feel-

next course of action will be to implement a social mentoring program that would call upon current LGBTQ community members help facilitate a newcomer's interactions with the community.

When asked about the fate of the project after the short-term funding period, Tan was adamant about pursuing this program through the other channels of MOSAIC.

"We are hoping to cause a ripple effect," says Tan.

Bagheri and Tan are optimistic about the future of the project, but recognize that achieving their long-term aims will require engagement by all parties involved.

"MOSAIC plays a strong role in preparing newcomers for the challenges of the workforce. That said, we are also hoping to see a comprehensive community effort on the part of employers," says Tan.

One proposed way of motivating changes at the institutional level is to make companies aware of the potential for stigmatization in current hiring practices.

## Future plans

Tan and Bagheri are very clear that launching this project into its second phase will ultimately depend on whether they can empower members of the community to be agents of change. Their goal is to be the catalyst for stories of personal achievement that trump previous memories of discrimination.

"We are hoping to inspire LGBTQ newcomers to tell their stories, and help create a sense of safety in our community for those who have may have undergone traumatic experiences," says Tan.



▲ Khim Tan (in sunglasses) mans a MOSAIC booth at a community event.

"They are minorities within minorities; their disadvantage is amplified," explains Tan.

## Vancouver's communities and social stigmas

Funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), this six-month pilot project is in its early stages, beginning with a careful assessment of the needs of LGBTQ newcomers in the Metro Vancouver area.

"This project was inspired by

ing of acceptance," says Bagheri.

Tan adds that the pilot project has been commissioned and instituted because there is a perceived need for it in the Vancouver community.

"Canadians are still in the process of becoming accepting of diversity," says Tan.

About a week into the program, MOSAIC's coordinators are beginning to see a need for their services in the Burnaby and New Westminster districts. Their

For more information about the MOSAIC Settlement Program for LGBTQ Newcomers, or want to get involved, contact Roja Bagheri at 604-522-3722 (ext: 155)