

NEWS LOCAL**LGBTQ immigrants' needs unmet: report**

By Stefania Seccia, 24 hours
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Local residents cross a rainbow-painted crosswalk in Vancouver. (Andy Clark, Reuters)

A pilot project to understand the LGBTQ experience for newcomers — with the bonus of providing support services — has lost its funding.

MOSAIC's I Belong project in Burnaby and New Westminster was funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

But as the funding has ended, its two paid positions — project facilitator and coordinator — have gone with it, leaving the organization relying on volunteers until it can find the money, according to Darae Lee, MOSAIC Settlement and Family Services manager.

"We developed connections to LGBTQ newcomers and the community, grassroots groups and individuals," she said. "The biggest success I'd say we created was an initiative to work as a team, as a community.

"We created an awareness."

In January, a community dialogue brought together 80 participants from the LGBTQ community, service providers and settlement organizations to draw out recommendations on how sexual minority newcomers can overcome the diverse challenges faced at personal, community, institutional and government levels.

The recently released report from that dialogue draws on the unique barriers of LGBTQ newcomers to the Lower Mainland — and the lack of adequate resources and services, awareness, and gaps in government, funding and policies.

The report states the significant challenges in housing, employment and transportation shared by the LGBTQ immigrants' stories, and recommended 18 fixes — such as providing access to services for everyone including refugees and non-status immigrants, drop requirements of documents to identify one's gender, and a strategy for safe housing and employment, among others.

Lee said MOSAIC said to continue staffing the program would have a \$70,000 annual cost.

"We planted a seed and now it's up to all of us to grow it," she said.