

Civic Participation for Immigrants in Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga

Over 130 immigrants participated in a one-day conference on June 11, 2011 at the Peel District School Board (PDSB) to explore ways to increase civic participation in our community. The day was abuzz with lively conversations including panel discussion, keynote address, and workshop sessions on civic participation and opportunities in municipalities, hospitals, political and electoral institutions, schools and school boards, Peel regional police, non-profit organizations, community development agencies and foundations.

While Uzma Shakir, Director of Diversity, Equity and Human Rights of the City of Toronto was the keynote speaker, a three-member panel – Rajesh Venkataraman, Board of Directors, United Way of Peel; Kathy Zhao, Past President of Mississauga Mandarin Association; Sharon Bailey, Volunteer of Living Arts Centre, Mississauga — shared their immigrant experiences with the participants.

Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) under its Community Builders grant, PNSG organized this event in partnership with Peel District School Board, the Social Planning Council of Peel, United Way of Peel and the Regional Municipality of Peel. The purpose of the conference was to increase awareness and understanding about civic participation including:

- encourage immigrants to participate in the civic life of Peel
- identify systemic barriers and ways to address them
- promote participation and volunteering opportunities available in the Peel Region

Highlights of the Participants' Feedback

Overall the participants found the conference informative and satisfactory.

Below is a brief summary of the participants' feedback organized as per the order of the evaluation questions:

1) List one idea that you like about the Civic Participation presented today?

The participants liked the information presented in the conference. They found the information very useful and informative. They also found the quality of the information very high e.g. the quality of the resources and information provided by the speakers and panel. They also thought the conference opened up avenues and opportunities for the participants.

Participant Feedback from the Conference on Civic Participation

Some of the comments include:

- “The many community areas covered and the wealth of information provided.”
- “This event opened up avenues of participation for me who has been around for just a couple of months.”
- “Information and perspective shared were great.”

“That everyone has the ability to make a change. That we give to the community and the community should now give back as both groups benefit.”

2) List one idea that will help improve Civic Participation in our community?

The participants suggested more awareness, information dissemination and workshops/ seminars about Civic Participation. Some of the comments included:

- “More forums like this encouraging the community to be involved.”
- “Place advertisements in ethnic newspapers.”
- “More information about groups/ opportunities to get involved in.”

“Volunteers can act as mentors for potential volunteers. Not only volunteering in a place but in special projects.”

3) What issues/concerns would you like PNSG to consider in planning Civic Participation activities/events in future?

Some of the participants suggested providing childcare facilities in future events and making the events family friendly. Some other comments include:

- “Needs people who have decision making power to be in the panel.”
- “Facilitate the participation of newcomers.”
- “Listen to newcomer concerns. Let more newcomers know about the events, educate them.”

Participant Feedback from the Conference on Civic Participation

4) Any other comment related to Civic Participation or the event?

The participants suggested more events such as this to get more newcomer engaged. Overall, they found the event informative and well-organized.

“It’s a good idea that we should have a volunteer fair”

Concerns:

Although the participants were very positive about the event, there were concerns related to potential employment and the hardship/potential bias related to volunteering. Some of the comments include:

- “The presentation was very good but at the end of the volunteering neither brings food on the table nor is bills paid.”
- “Any guarantee that screening an application for volunteering would be fair and has no bias relative to nationality?”
- “What’s next after volunteering?”
- “Unfortunately, I felt that to get a volunteer opportunity is harder than getting a job, because sometimes we have to commit for 3 months or so. The system must be reviewed.”
- “Remove barriers for participation.”