Settlement worker program is success for Library, CCSYR

A new pilot project for newcomers to Canada has proven to be a huge success for the Aurora Public Library (APL) and Catholic Community Services of York Region (CCSYR).

Launched last month, the Settlement Worker at APL program sees a counsellor from CCSYR stationed in the Library's Living Room space once a month to answer questions on careers, employment, housing, health care, education, transit, and more in multiple languages.

In communities like Aurora without an official Welcome Centre, newcomers previously had the option of going to like centres in Newmarket and Richmond Hill ? but libraries like APL are often the first starting point for new Canadians looking for answers.

The Settlement Worker at APL program was designed to help new residents get these answers and, following significant uptake in July, is set to continue well into the fall.

?Sometimes people come to the Library because they don't know where to go to get the information,? says CCSYR settlement worker Sara Meghdadpour. ?As we are providing services for newcomers, many don't know much about the system and the biggest barrier is language. When we advertise that different languages are available, they're more comfortable to go and talk to the person who is speaking their own language.

?I speak English and Farsi and the community is growing in Aurora. It helped them to come in and they wanted to know how they can find job, how they can rent a house, the roles for being tenants and landlords and?how they can find English classes and assess their level of language. Many other things bring them in; they don't even know how to open a bank account, which banks they can go to. Many of them are not even familiar with online searching and they get help to find the way.?

Seeing this unfold was ?very rewarding? for Claudia Olguin, Manager of Community-Led Initiatives for the APL.

?For this kind of program, it doesn't matter if you're helping one client or fifty, as long as you help one person establish themselves in Canada, find a new job, find a house, or whatever their needs are, that's enough,? she says. ?It gives us the energy to continue with this work. Even if you help just one person you're making a difference in a family and sometimes, with these families, you're making a big difference in the community.

?It's very rewarding when you see them months later and their English has improved, or they found a job or a career because a lot of them who come here arrive and their credentials are not recognized, they have to go back to school, but when you see them again and see that they have succeeded, that's the best reward these types of jobs give back.?

Given the success of the program from the outset, the Aurora Public Library is looking to continue and grow the program well into the future.

The next two sessions will take place beginning at 1.30 p.m., on Thursday, August 18 and Thursday, September 15. Programming will change to a different monthly rotation beginning on Tuesday, October 18, from 1 ? 4.30 p.m. All sessions will take place in the Library Living Room.

?Helping people has always been my passion,? says Sarah. ?I was always trying to update myself with new information and [when I can make a difference] I feel happy and that trust is very important. When you're providing services you can build that trust and it is a very important first step we can make with people. I can't explain how happy and glad I am to be in this field!?

Adds Ms. Olguin: ?Having a Settlement Worker for APL is connecting with newcomers and directing them to settlement information and referrals they need to successfully integrate into their new communities. All are welcome for this drop-in program.

We hope to see them there and if they have any questions I can also help them learn more about the Library and how different systems work.?

For more information on the program and future initiatives, contact Claudia Olguin at COlguin@aurorapl.ca.

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