



Multicultural Environmental Education Program
VICTORIA IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CENTRE SOCIETY

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Center is Caring for People, and Caring for the Planet with their Multicultural Environmental Education Program

It's not everyday that one wins free organic groceries for six months. But for two families, it made a big difference in getting settled and feeling at home in Canada. **The Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Center Society's** (VIRCS) Eco-Friendly Prizes, was an initiative that gave newcomer families access to products and services that not only met their basic settlement needs, but also allowed them to invest in environmentally sustainable lifestyle choices.

Eco-Friendly Prizes, developed by the VIRCS' **Multicultural Environmental Education Program** (MEEP) and launched in January of 2009 was possible through a unique partnership with the Great Rebate Eco-Challenge (GREC). GREC, a grassroots, fund of \$100 British Columbia Climate Action Dividends pooled for a good cause in the community, donated nearly \$2000 to the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre in cash and prizes to help newcomer families invest in climate action. In addition to organic food delivery, other prizes included a fully-equipped bicycle with helmet, lock and lights, a backyard composter, non-toxic cleaning products, energy-efficient light bulbs and baby products such as reusable diapers and organic baby clothing. Each prize came with a free educational workshop related to the prize.

MEEP Project Coordinator, Gagan Leekha was thrilled with the partnership with GREC. "Newcomers face many barriers such as challenges with employment, housing, transportation and community participation. This initiative is unique in that it aims

to help newcomers overcome these barriers with sustainability in mind.”

The Multicultural Environmental Education Program brings together and supports the multicultural community in making sustainable choices for a healthy planet. Since January 2008, the program has engaged over 1000 newcomers and new Canadians through educational workshops and outings.

As the first immigrant and settlement agency to incorporate environmental education into its settlement services, MEEP focuses on building community, sharing information and resources, and creating strong partnerships with other organizations interested in working with multicultural populations.

MEEP's latest initiative, **Green is for Everyone**, is an educational campaign that includes:

- Multilingual action tips resource available online and in print;
- Multilingual eco-tips for the radio produced in partnership with local community radio; and
- Diversity awareness training workshops for environmental non-governmental organizations.

"Many newcomers are concerned about climate change and want to take action but do not have access to resources in their language or are simply not sure where to start," says Communications Coordinator Rosalyn Cua. Our *Green is for Everyone* campaign is one step in making resources more accessible to a wider audience.

For action tips, workshop schedule, newsletter and more, visit their website at www.vircs.bc.ca/environment/main.php.

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