**WELCOMING COMMUNITIES - PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE**

Introduction

Manitoba is recognized as a multicultural society with an ethno-culturally diverse population which acknowledges demographic realities. This makes the cities in this province a composition of complex urban centres. Representations of diverse populations in the demographic structure of Manitoba have been expanding consistently (Distasio & Kaufman, 2015). Undoubtedly, we in an age of increasing migration - from the 2016 census results, Manitoba was the third fastest growing province between 2011 and 2016, following Alberta and Saskatchewan. Further to this, Statistics Canada indicated that while in the early 2000s 2.5% of all new Canadians became Manitobans, that proportion has increased to 5 - 6% in recent years (CBC, 2017).

The implications are differences in socio-economic status, different communities and neighbourhoods, different levels of access to opportunities embedded in racial and ethnic status as well as the undeniable social exclusion and pressure that newcomers, immigrants and Indigenous population deal with on a regular basis.

Shelters and their purpose for their community

Organizational change is essential for shelters to meet the growing and changing needs of the communities they serve. Adopting a change-oriented (Zohar and Hofmann, 2012) culture is key to overcoming some of the barriers faced by clients when accessing services, help refocus obligations to ensure inclusion and equality in service delivery. Nonetheless, this idea of change is often meet with hindrances creating unsuccessful and stressful workplace environment both for shelters and their employees.

A major component of realigning the goals of shelters to meet the needs of the diverse populations they serve is embracing the multicultural norms, learning and implementing the best ways to respect and work to meet the needs of indigenous groups, immigrants, newcomers, persons with disabilities and from various religious orientations. Such a change in no doubt will be a journey for shelters as integrating and adjusting to new cultural and ethnic norms requires much flexibility, respect, tolerance and understanding.

Having a basic understanding of why there are ongoing problems with some relational aspects and client service delivery for indigenous groups, immigrants, newcomers, persons with disabilities or and from various religious orientations because of existing negative stereotypes/ misrepresentations, racism and inequality is only a first step towards changing attitudes, behaviors and organizational commitment by shelter employers and employees (Ghorayshi, 2010).

*Who makes up my community?*

| **DEMOGRAPY[[1]](#footnote-1)** | **TOTAL[[2]](#footnote-2)** | **MALE** | **FEMALE** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Gender** | 13,304 | - | - |
| **Sexual orientation** | - | - | - |
| **Age** | | | |
| 0 to 14 years | 2,600 | 1,305 | 1,295 |
| 15 to 29 years | 2,520 | 1,295 | 1,225 |
| 30 to 44 years | 2,185 | 1,055 | 1,140 |
| 45 to 64 years | 3,495 | 1,690 | 1,815 |
| 65 years and over | 2,490 | 1,025 | 1,465 |
| 85 years and over | 445 | 125 | 320 |
| **Relationship status** | | | |
| Married | 4,480 | 2,245 | 2,235 |
| Living common law | 1,045 | 515 | 530 |
| Never married | 3,270 | 1,740 | 1,530 |
| Separated | 325 | 140 | 185 |
| Divorced | 695 | 245 | 450 |
| Widowed | 890 | 175 | 715 |
| **Disability** | - | - | - |
| **Continent of origin[[3]](#footnote-3)** | | | |
| Americas | 120 | 60 | 60 |
| Europe | 275 | 130 | 145 |
| Africa | 25 | 30 | 0 |
| Asia | 390 | 185 | 205 |
| **Aboriginal self-identification[[4]](#footnote-4)** | 12,765 | 6,085 | 6,680 |
| **Immigrants**[[5]](#footnote-5) | 815 | 405 | 405 |
| **Citizenship**  Canadian citizens[[6]](#footnote-6) : Not Canadian citizens[[7]](#footnote-7) | 12,765  12,185 : 575 | 6,085 | 6,680 |
| **Religion[[8]](#footnote-8) *\*****based on NHS (2011)* | | | |
| Christian | 8,225 | 3,770 | 4,460 |
| Hindu | 30 | 0 | 0 |
| Jewish | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Muslim | 60 | 35 | 25 |
| Sikh | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Traditional (Aboriginal) Spirituality | 210 | 90 | 115 |
| Other religions | 45 | 25 | 15 |
| No religious affiliation | 3,825 | 1,970 | 1,855 |
| **Visible minority[[9]](#footnote-9)** | | | |
| South Asian | 205 | 105 | 100 |
| Chinese | 15 | 15 | 0 |
| Black | 70 | 45 | 20 |
| Filipino | 240 | 115 | 125 |
| Latin American | 35 | 15 | 15 |
| Arab | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Southeast Asian | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| West Asian | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Korean | 45 | 20 | 25 |
| Japanese | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Visible minority, n.i.e[[10]](#footnote-10). | 10 | 10 | 0 |
| Multiple visible minorities | 0 | 0 | 10 |

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population - Portage la Prairie, CY [Census subdivision]; Statistics Canada. 2013, Portage la Prairie, CY, Manitoba (Code 4609029)

Staying informed on narratives of immigration are important for shelters as settler communities like Portage la Prairie involves welcoming immigrants, then integrating them into the fabric of the community. At the same time, not forgetting the indigenous population who are part of the community (Bauder, 2011). According to the Western University Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (CREVAWC) (2012), Gender-Based Violence (GBV) exists in communities regardless of whether it is rural or urban - both often are faced with problems and complex challenges when it comes to fully meeting the needs of their clients.

Reflecting on the roles of shelters in serving clients, one may wonder whether it has been more of an ongoing intolerance towards marginalized groups which now more than ever is becoming more visible and to an extent, openly discussed through various channels. There is also the need to acknowledge that embracing and adopting a new workplace culture change is challenging and somewhat different both for employers and employees who may be used to how things have worked in the past and thereby, new processes are seen as increasing their work burden (Gover, Halinski & Duxbury, 2016; Schein, 2004).

From Schein’s (2004) perspective, institutions (for this purpose shelters).culture includes but not limited to norms, values and underlying assumptions that drive the day-to-day behavior and operations of the institution. Such underlying assumptions become evident and manifest in the workplace through values that drive the way employees act at work or even how they do their work either consciously and unconsciously (Schein, 2004).

To an extent, it should not be surprising that some marginalized groups are mobilizing themselves to run their own shelters which will meet their needs while ensuring the safety and dignity of those who will access their resources (Government of Canada. 2020; CBC, 2021; Wildes, 2022) - this in no way is a failure or lack of existence of shelters in the various Manitoba cities but rather, the extent to which inclusive practices, language barriers, multicultural needs and religious practices of clients are not recognized when they access shelters. Groups are voicing out some of the barriers and challenges they face when accessing shelters such that it reinforces the need for shelters to do more either through partnerships and or programs.

Reflecting on intersectionality - How does this apply to those working in shelters?

Theorists have provided arguments that racism and inequalities should be studied by looking at a number of factors such as gender, class, race, location, sexuality, culture, ethnicity, and ability in order to provide a holistic analysis (Collins, 1993; Walby 2009). Rather than studying these concepts on their own, we need to link them. Proponents of this way of examining social relations shed light on the fact that intersecting oppressions do not act independently of each other and as such, must be examined under several factors as well as categories (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2002). What this means is that in examining social inequalities for instance, it is necessary to bring in factors such as race, class, gender, sexual and religious orientation, ethnicity, culture among others and what roles they play within specific social contexts to produce inequality.

Intersectionality therefore is a perspective which helps to understand the relationships among multiple systems of oppression, dimensions of discrimination, the organization of social relationships, and subject formations (McCall, 2005) - this theory therefore indicates that individuals are constantly in positions where there is an interaction of diverse social factors as well as categories. Hence, Crenshaw (1989) encourages the examination of how different systems of inequalities intersect and effect groups of women in different ways. This sheds light on inequalities ingrained in social institutions and relationships - racism, sexism, homophobia and religion which often do not act independently of each other thereby serving as multiple forms of discrimination (Knudsen, 2006).

Collins (1990:42) asserts that “Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity”. As such, an analysis shaped from an intersection perspective serves as a gateway into the inequalities that comes with certain identities. Again, it draws attention to what gender inequality and discrimination means to different groups, how they are affected by it, the diverse ways it has been expressed in the past and in contemporary societies. In particular, Brenner (2014) asserts that theorizing from an intersectional perspective considers the social forces and institutionalized power relations that exist in a society - these structures shape women’s experiences and in turn, are shaped by women.

In line with shelters adopting an intersectionality framework, Baca Zinn and Thorton Dill (1996) suggest that communities (in this case shelters) can move away from the “false universalism embedded in the concept of ‘woman’”. They identify five basic assertions common to intersectional approaches:

(a) conceptualization of gender and race as structures and not simply individual traits

(b) the rejection of a prior assumption that women constitute a unified category

(c) the existence of interlocking systems of inequality and oppression

(d) the recognition of the interplay of social structure and human agency

(e) local analyses to understand interlocking inequalities

For the various marginalized groups living in Manitoba’s cities, an intersectional approach helps reveal the various types of lived experiences and their social realities accessing shelters (Collins, 1990).

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1. Based on 2016 Census subdivision: *Census subdivision (CSD*) is the general term for municipalities (as determined by provincial/territorial legislation) or areas treated as municipal equivalents for statistical purposes (e.g., Indian reserves, Indian settlements and unorganized territories). Municipal status is defined by laws in effect in each province and territory in Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Numbers have been rounded up. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Total - Selected places of birth for the immigrant population in private households - 25% sample data. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 'Aboriginal identity' includes persons who are First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or those who are Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada) and/or those who have membership in a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 'Immigrants' includes persons who are, or who have ever been, landed immigrants or permanent residents. Such persons have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this category. In the 2016 Census of Population, 'Immigrants' includes immigrants who landed in Canada on or prior to May 10, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 'Canadian citizens' includes persons who are citizens of Canada only and persons who are citizens of Canada and at least one other country. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 'Not Canadian citizens' includes persons who are not citizens of Canada. They may be citizens of one or more other countries. Persons who are stateless are included in this category. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. NHS 2011 data: Religion is not limited to formal membership in a religious organization or group. *NHS was a supplementary (voluntary) survey to the 2011 census which replaced the long-form census.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Visible minority refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the *Employment Equity Act* and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

   For more information on the Visible minority variable, including information on its classification, the questions from which it is derived, data quality and its comparability with other sources of data, please refer to the [*Visible Minority and Population Group Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016*](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/006/98-500-x2016006-eng.cfm). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The abbreviation 'n.i.e.' means 'not included elsewhere.' Includes persons with a write-in response such as 'Guyanese,' 'West Indian,' 'Tibetan,' 'Polynesian,' 'Pacific Islander,' etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)