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News / Winnipeg

'You can see that there's equality here:' New BBQ helps break barriers in Winnipeg

Community barbecue serves as a cultural exchange between Winnipeg's many ethnic groups.

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LYLE STAFFORD / FOR METRO

Children hula-hoop at the first annual Centennial Grill and Chill community BBQ in Winnipeg on Wednesday, Sept. 7, 2016

By: **Matt Kieltyka** Metro Published on Wed Sep 07 2016

A bustling community barbeque doubled as a cultural exchange for residents of Winnipeg's Centennial neighbourhood Wednesday evening.

The area's first ever Grill and Chill saw hundreds of residents meet over food, cultural performances, face painting and potato sack races outside the Freight House Recreational Centre.

The goal of the event was to celebrate the neighbourhood's diversity and it was success in doing so, judging by the range of races, ethnicities and ages mingling at the festival.

"There are a lot of ethnic groups here," said Metis drummer Alison Dong as she surveyed the crowd. "It's a very diverse community, it can bring some challenges but we can be that bridge to bring both parties together and get aboriginal people to enjoy the beauty of [newcomers'] culture and having them enjoy the beauty of our culture as well."

Debbie Froese, organizer with Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), told Metro the event was created in part to break down negative stereotypes that the neighbourhood's largest populations, Indigenous and newcomers, may have of each other.

"We see a divide sometimes but we need to build relationships and understanding of each other," she said.

Winnipeg resident Urooj Shahan stood in line for her two-year-old son, Yusuf, to have his face painted.



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"You can see that there's equality here," said Shahen, a practicing Muslim. "You don't feel like you're different, you look around and you always feel welcome [in the city]. Yusuf is a little young now but of course I want him to know he lives in a diverse area and that's how he's going to be interacting with each other."

Ojibwe hoop dancer Melvin Starr performed on stage at the event, and said it's vital for him to share his culture with his community.

"It doesn't matter if it's white, yellow, black, or red, everybody should understand each other's culture," he said. "I've been doing this most of my life and it's always an honour for me to let other ethnic groups and cultures know what we do, and why we do these things. They see another side of our people instead of what they see downtown."

The event was organized by IRCOM, Rossbrook House, Health Sciences Centre, Centennial Community Improvement Association, Boys & Girls Clubs of Winnipeg and the Central Neighbourhoods Development Corporation.



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