



The Ellen Street Shout

Summer 2012

IRCOM
INC.
Immigrant and Refugee
Community Organization of Manitoba

IRCOM's Asset Building Program Spreads

"My name is Hubert. I am 19 years old and a grade 12 student. We came to Canada in April 2010 as a family of 8. We couldn't find a big house that can accommodate all of us; so I started living with my brother. It was very hard to live alone and to learn how to cook."

Living on your own involves more challenges than just cooking. The additional responsibilities of caring for your own space, paying for your own expenses, and managing your own time all come with a bit of a shock. On top of this, like all newcomers to Canada, Hubert faced challenges integrating into a new culture which has its own way of doing things, including making financial decisions.

In September 2010, IRCOM opened a new area of programming to help ease this transition into a new financial worldview: Asset Building. Partnering with SEED Winnipeg Inc., the United Way of Winnipeg, Assiniboine Credit Union, and the Province of Manitoba, it is a program designed to help newcomers learn to navigate the complex web of financial processes and institutions. The program provides money management training and one-on-one support to newcomers as they learn how to save money.

"My involvement in the Asset Building Program was very important to learn more about my new responsibilities of budgeting and money management," Hubert continues. "From the training I learned a lot of things: how to work with others, supporting others, sharing ideas and learning from others, pros and cons of credit, tracking expenses and income, budgeting and sticking to a budget, etc. I always remind my family to do budgeting. With the help of the program I bought a new couch!"



In the years since IRCOM first introduced Asset Building to its list of available programs, it has expanded to include the Individual Development Account (IDA) Program. This program is designed for larger goals over a longer term (two years as opposed to six months). It's aim is to help save for larger, one-time expenses.

An eager participant, Hubert is using the IDA to help him with tuition costs as he prepares to begin post-secondary education. "Now I am part of the IDA program which will help me reach my dream goal - being an Electrical Engineer. I will be ready to cash out by September 2012 when I will likely start my post secondary education."

IRCOM's Asset Building Program has helped a total of 88 participants through its Saving Circle program and 15 participants in the Individual Development Program. As word of the program is spreading in the newcomer community, an increase in the number of applicants has made the selection process more difficult for program coordinators.

IRCOM would like to thank the United Way of Winnipeg, the Province of Manitoba, SEED Winnipeg Inc. and Assiniboine Credit Union for their generous support of IRCOM's Asset Building Program.



ABP has helped a total of 103 participants!

Can't stop volunteering!

Inspired by her grandparents' story, young Winnipegger devotes her time to helping newcomer kids

By Vanessa Kornelsen

If ever there was an award for Most Enthusiastic Volunteer, Victoria Weir would probably win it. Victoria began volunteering at IRCOM when she was 16, the youngest age allowed, and has been at it ever since. Thinking it would be too difficult to continue volunteering once she began university, she tried to stop at the beginning of this year. But, like many retirees these days, she failed at quitting.

"I missed it too much," she says. After a month away, she quit her job so she could return to IRCOM. "It feels like family. I've volunteered in other places, but they just don't have the same warmth. There's not a lot of distance between staff and volunteers and office support."

Victoria volunteers with the After School children's program once a week for arts and crafts. Over the years she has been with IRCOM, she has seen about 100 kids cycle through the program. "I like to see them blossom," she says, noting that new kids often come to program quiet and shy. By the time they move out of IRCOM, they are seasoned veterans of program, always excited and ready to go.

"Everyone always knows when I've been to IRCOM. I leave here happy for days afterwards!" Cheerful and friendly, Victoria says that messy art projects are always fun. She recalls one day when the kids were working with glitter. "They all had glitter on their heads, in their hair. It stayed there for days!" she laughs.

When asked why she chose IRCOM, Victoria talks about the story of her grandparents. Arriving in Canada in 1956 from Hungary, they lived at the train station until they found a family to sponsor them. She says that hearing their story makes her aware of what it's like to come with nothing, and the supports and programs IRCOM offers are important.

"Volunteering at IRCOM has given me a new direction for school and my career," she says. Victoria is currently in her second year of a commerce degree at the University of Manitoba, where she plans her class schedule around her commitment to IRCOM. She is planning to go on to study family social sciences in social development and family economic health, and hopes one day to work for an organization such as SEED, in a program similar to IRCOM's Asset Building program.

"What drives places like IRCOM is completely different than business. It's about people and relationships," she explains. "It's so worth it; I love it. It's only a couple hours every time. I'm not planning on leaving anytime soon, until they make me leave."

Volunteers in Action



WHO ARE YOU?

With Talatu Shokpeka

Tell me about yourself.

Hmm. OK. What can I say? What part of myself? Professional? Personal?

Let's try a different track. What do you do when you're not at IRCOM?

I like to sew. I like to watch movies. I like to chat with my kids, bug them. I have four kids, two boys, two girls.

What do you do when you ARE at IRCOM?

At IRCOM, well, that's the fun part of my life. I'm in the Community Resource office. We work with tenants, provide programming, do drop in

meetings, do advocacy, provide workshops and community meetings.

What was your first impression of IRCOM?

When I came to IRCOM I felt it was a very relaxed place. It was very relaxing to talk to the kids, the tenants. Sometimes it doesn't feel like work. You know you are adding value to people's lives just by talking to them.

Is there anything else you want the IRCOM community to know about you?

I like music. I like dancing. I like to learn about different cultures, how they do things, how they see things. I like to see and look for the similarities between cultures. I admire creativity in people.

Can you give an example of someone you admire?

You know, I like to go to the program room and look at all the walls, at all the things the kids produce and look at what they do, what they think they're doing, and what I see from what they have done.

After years of late night studying and difficulty balancing schedules a family achieves their dreams

A few years ago, Birinda and Nyamvura arrived in Canada with their three young sons. They spoke French and were prepared to apply themselves to perfecting the English language, but could not have anticipated either the challenges they would face in their journey towards a Canadian education, or the pride and joy to be experienced upon its completion.

“For me, when I heard about coming to Canada, I said, ‘This can be my chance to go back to school, to University,’ because I didn’t get that chance back home because of the war,” Nyamvura says. A happy smile animates her face as she recalls her dreams, now becoming reality. “So I said, if I get there, the first thing I have to do is get that piece of paper of education. I have to study, at least do something for school before I start working.”

But getting that piece of paper was not easy. With three children in the home and both parents studying full-time, Birinda and Nyamvura quickly realized how difficult the next few years of their lives would be. But they refused to let the challenges stop them. Birinda speaks plainly about the kinds of excuses potential students can use to back out of completing their education.

“Especially people who are parents. They always say, ‘Oh, it’s difficult, you know, I have kids. It’s very hard.’ But what do you do?” Birinda says, leaning forward earnestly. “You need to do something. You won’t stay home because it’s difficult. Even when you go outside what are you planning to do? When you have no education, no job, it’s difficult. So which one is easier? You need to do something. There is nothing that’s easy. Even being in life when you are jobless, one year, two years, three years, five years... I don’t think I would be happy about that kind of life.”

Balancing home life and school is a challenge for any student. Trying to raise three healthy kids only makes the barrier larger. “He has his schedule and I have my schedule,” explains Nyamvura as she discusses what it was

like making sure the children got to and from daycare on time. “That part was not easy, it was very difficult for us.”

“The key is just being organized. And the kids, of course, they were being patient and they were being good to us. They understood the situation. They understood that, ‘Oh, our parents are going to school,’ so they knew what was going on. The sharing the responsibility was also good. One person could not do it. You can’t study at the same time doing the responsibility that you have at home and with your family. It’s just trying to balance, and that’s how we helped one another.”

Nyamvura also cites IRCOM’s After School Program as a big help in her own education. When her schedule allowed her to get the boys home early enough, she would send them to program, giving herself two full hours to finish the assignments she had due the next day. IRCOM also provides a safe place financially for students, with its rent-geared-to-income policy allowing the family to depend on student loans for everything.

“People who live in this house, I think the three years, it can be good for them to do something towards education because, one, it’s in the centre of the city where you can access the buses without any problem, and two, the conditions of the building,” explains Birinda. “They are good for someone who cannot afford to pay much money. So

that’s a good time for you to do something. By the time you leave this place, I think outside things will change. Things won’t be the same as they were today. So it’s a good time to do something so that you don’t regret when you are outside, you know, ‘I wish I knew, I could have done this when I was at IRCOM House,’ but it is too late because you can’t retake it.”

Birinda and Nyamvura are scheduled to leave IRCOM in December 2012, six months after Nyamvura completes her diploma in Early Childhood Education and two months after Birinda receives his degree in the field of education. Both have been studying at the Université de Saint-Boniface. Their journey through school has been an inspiration to other newcomers, and IRCOM wishes them all the best as they move on to their next successes.

“I can say,” concludes Nyamvura, “if you have good cooperation inside the house, you can plan for anything.”



Eager to address gaps in programming, IRCOM's Community Resource Specialist Angela Dooley has stepped up to offer weekly programming for parents with very young children.



programming, including training for Wiggle, Giggle and Munch (another Communities 4 Families initiative) as well as Nobody's Perfect, a Canada wide parent-child program developed by Health Canada.

IRCOM's first round of *Uzazi Pamoja* has taken place in a relaxing, informal setting. When participants arrive, there are already toys on the floor waiting to be played with. Moms sit on the floor with their children and they play together and interact with each other. There is always a healthy snack offered, and then an art project.

"The basic point behind it is to give connections from parent to child, and create strong bonds," Angie explains. "Everyone's favourite part is always the art project of the week."

Though the first session saw lower attendance than hoped for, Angie is not discouraged. "The whole intent was to start something for parents with young kids, to get things going. We're building a base for future programs."

Angie plans to build on this base with a series of summer outings, possibly including the new Children's Garden at Assiniboine Park, the St. Norbert Farmer's Market, Folk Festival, and visits to a farm, a beach, and various water parks in the area. Structured programming will begin again in October, when the weather starts to turn and parents begin searching for fun indoor activities to keep their children busy.

Uniting Parents and Children

By Vanessa Kornelsen

Uzazi Pamoja is a Swahili phrase that translates to "Parenting Together". It is also the title of an intergenerational program IRCOM has been offering to parents and their preschool children this winter. Created in partnership with Communities 4 Families, *Uzazi Pamoja* focuses on providing parents with space to discuss literacy, healthy eating, safety and parenting.

"It's a learning process for me," says IRCOM's Community Resource Specialist Angela Dooley. Since offering *Uzazi Pamoja* at IRCOM, Angie has attended several training workshops to help her improve the quality of IRCOM's family

April 18, 2012 was a proud day for IRCOM. On that day, IRCOM's first indoor soccer team won the Championship trophy after a hard-fought season that culminated in an 8 game winning streak. The team began as an outdoor team in the spring of 2011, but the weather turned colder before the boys were ready to stop playing.

"I think what's really cool about this team is that at the beginning, no one had ever played together. They were used to individual football, the give-and-go was a foreign concept. By the end of the season, we were schooling the



other teams," says after school program worker Alex Garcia.

"The first time I saw a coach was at IRCOM," explains Om Prakesh, a player who recently came to Canada from Nepal. "It was much different. Back home, we just knew we had to score with the ball. I had to learn positions and how to pass the ball around." Om Prakesh is one of five players from the victorious IRCOM team to be recruited to a Portage Trail Premier team.



There have been so many staff changes that Ellie can hardly keep them all straight! **Dorota Blumczynska** went on maternity leave in late March and now has a beautiful baby girl, Kala! Ellie is excited to welcome **Abdikheir Ahmed** back to fill in as Executive Director until Dorota returns. **Bennet Hailegiorgis** is filling in for **Fitsum Getahun's** maternity leave as the Asset Building Program Coordinator. Fitsum also had a baby girl, Mahlet. In other baby news, ASP's **Muuxi Adam** had a baby boy, Salahaddin. Other new staff include **Elesio Lasuba** as the Administrative Assistant and Bookkeeper, **Nadiah Sidik** as the Administrative Assistant for Housing, **Gabrielle Huggins** as an ASP Assistant, **Thomas Gerezhghier** as ASP Educational Assistant, and **Aiman Syed** as the new NLI Foundations teacher. NLI's much-beloved teacher **Manuel Zuniga** has added NLI Program Assistant to his resume. Ellie is finally celebrating three full staff in her Community Resource office with the addition of **Talatu Shokpeka** as Community Program Manager and **Richard Boli** as Community Resource Specialist. Ellie loves having new faces around the office! Welcome here, everyone!



The Plug Help us welcome new Canadians



EXPERIENCE PAINLESS GIVING:
By donating to IRCOM online at www.canadahelps.org (type "IRCOM" in the search box). Please consider signing up for a monthly donation via MasterCard or Visa (even a few dollars a month makes a difference). To donate by cheque call our office at **943-8765**



SHOUT IT OUT: Subscribe by emailing editor Erin Anderson at erina@ircom.ca