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**askatchewan
settlement
stories**

Advice for Frontline Settlement Workers

Community Member Spotlights

Member Organization Profile

The Best Thing about Living in Rural SK



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Mabuhay!

I am thrilled to introduce you to the inaugural edition of SAISIA's new bi-annual magazine, *Saskatchewan Settlement Stories*! The SAISIA team have put in a lot of effort to create a publication that is both informative and inspiring.

Our goal with this magazine is to offer a fresh perspective on the Settlement Sector here in our province, and to provide platform for these amazing stories to be heard. We aim to give you a taste of diversity in our province and challenge you to actively participate in helping the newcomers in Saskatchewan and welcome them with open arms to our communities.

As we embark on this journey together, I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to you, our readers, and to the contributors for your support and enthusiasm. Without you, this project would not be possible.

We hope that you enjoy this first edition of *Saskatchewan Settlement Stories* and that it sparks your curiosity and will to learn more about the Settlement Sector here in Saskatchewan. Please feel free to share your feedback with us, as we are always striving to improve and grow.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting new adventure, and we look forward to sharing more editions with you in the future.

Warmly,

Gelrene Sanfuego
Language and Communications Coordinator

COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING THE SECTOR

I bring you greetings from Treaty 2, Treaty 4, Treaty 5, Treaty 6, Treaty 8 and Treaty 10 territory, the traditional gathering land of 74 Indigenous Peoples and homeland of the Métis nation.

As I reflect on the evolution of SAISIA, from its humble start in 1987 to where we are today, I remain grateful to the amazing people who have contributed to the successes recorded by the organization over the years – board, leaders and staff. The road has not been easy, I know, and I expect that there are still some bumps along the way as we strive to maintain and build on our status as an umbrella, but I see this umbrella staying strong and withstanding the volatilities that are inevitable in immigration and settlement.

I am confident in the future of SAISIA because of the commitment of our board and membership and their staying true to the mission and vision of the agency. I must reiterate that we are who we are because of our membership's support. We are who we are because of the commitment of the many organizations – urban and rural, Anglophone and Francophone -- that remain dedicated to supporting the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees not just in our province, but in all of Canada.

In the neighbourhoods, towns and cities where frontline workers serve, some of them newcomers to Canada themselves, there are many stories of how our communities have embraced them and their clients. Through this newsletter, we hope to share those stories and celebrate the impact of our work throughout the province.

We will continue to monitor trends and emerging issues, and with the support of our funders – Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) -- we will respond to them.

This first edition of *Saskatchewan Settlement Stories* is a call to action, and the action required is simple. Share your stories so others can be inspired by them, because as you do so, you will be contributing to the creation of an inclusive and welcoming Saskatchewan, where everyone, irrespective of their length of stay in this country, has a sense that they have come home.

Kirandeep Bhullar
President, SAISIA Board of Directors



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Welcome to the first edition of Saskatchewan Settlement Stories! We are excited to bring you stories and insights from frontline workers in the sector and their clients in rural and urban Saskatchewan.

The settlement sector is a vital part of our province's mosaic and is integral to the growth and development of Saskatchewan now and in the future. Workers at all levels are dedicated to serving newcomers and refugees as they settle into their new homes and communities. The sector has seen many changes over the years, and will continue to evolve as we face new challenges and opportunities.

In this bi-annual magazine, you will read about the experiences of settlement workers, volunteers, and newcomers themselves as they navigate life in their new country. You will learn about the successes and challenges of settlement programs and services across Saskatchewan, and you will gain insights into the broader issues affecting our sector.

It goes without saying that I am thrilled to be a part of this project. In my time in the sector, I have seen firsthand the incredible impact that settlement workers have on the lives of newcomers. I believe that by sharing our stories and experiences, we can build an even stronger and innovative sector.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to this magazine – thank you for sharing your stories, personal and professional. Your voices are essential to this conversation, and we are honoured to be able to amplify them. I am also grateful to the team at SAISIA for their zeal in seeing this through and their commitment to keep it going.

Finally, I want to thank our readers for taking the time to engage with us and the sector through this magazine. I hope that you will find it informative, thought-provoking, and inspiring. We know that being a newcomer and helping newcomers in their integration journey has its challenges, but we also have much to celebrate. Our goal is to make this a place for celebration!

Thank you for joining us in this experience. We look forward to continuing the conversation in future editions of Saskatchewan Settlement Stories.

Michael Afenfia
Executive Director of SAISIA



THE BEST THING ABOUT LIVING IN RURAL SASKATCHEWAN

We sat down with Bula Ghosh to hear about what she loves about settling in rural Saskatchewan.



1. It's Very Relaxing

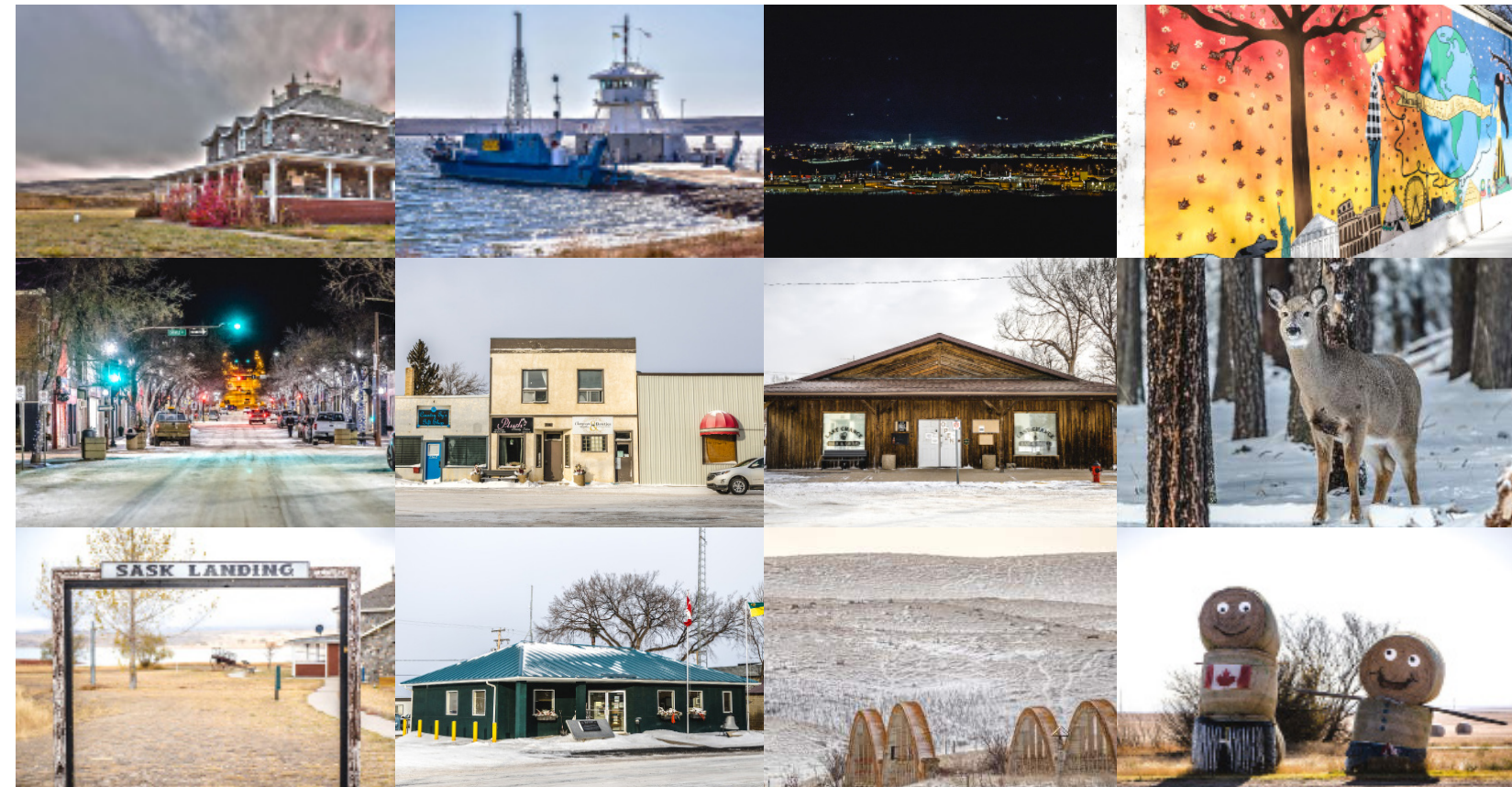
I come from a big city. But initially, I thought it would be very quiet and not that interesting. What I found, is life in rural Saskatchewan can be very relaxing. If you like that peaceful environment, it is perfect for you.

2. It's Time-Saving

It is also time-saving. Your life is not caught up in a jam, traffic jam, which can be very, very time-consuming and frustrating. Transport is not a big issue, I can walk from one end of the city to the other if I need to because I'm not so dependent on a vehicle, if I don't have a driver's licence, that is a good part of it.

3. Community Comes First

I think it feels a little warmer and more welcoming. Life can become that you know each other, you know, the people around, the familiar faces, not so many strange faces around. We have more opportunities to be involved in our community. You can get to know people around you more and also be involved in the community because they have fewer people to draw on, so, as a volunteer, you can also contribute to your community more easily.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS SPOTLIGHT

Jide Kassim

Question: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Answer: Hi. My name is Jide Kassim and I work with Prairie Skies Integration Network. My position is Administration and Communications Coordinator. So, basically, I'm in charge of everything connected to our communications and I'm the first point of contact for Prairie Skies. You know, within the community.

Question: You're a newcomer yourself, and I would imagine that you probably had a different job or a different career before coming to Canada. How did you end up working in settlement?

Answer: I used to be an IT consultant. And up until I got to Canada, I was still that. When we got to Moose Jaw, I was looking for a job in IT. I wasn't getting anything, you know, I got one in Saskatchewan Polytech and got an interview. But that was about it for more than two years and searching for an IT job. So eventually, I got a Sales Consultant role with Shaw. It was good. I loved it. So I did it for two years. And after that, I saw the job posting with Prairie Skies. And I saw what was entailed – I had not directly had a major communications position in the past, but it was what I'd done in some of my previous work and I thought, This looks very interesting. And when I got to know more about Prairie Skies, I saw that this is a passion for me because we would love to help, myself and my wife. As a family, we love to help people come in, advise them, and get them settled in Canada. Working in settlements would afford me that, it would help me to know more, and then also help other people. So I applied for the position and got it and here we are today. And that's one of the reasons why we're still living in Moose Jaw.

Question: Can you share your Immigration Story?

Answer: My wife came in as a student. I came in as a Work Permit holder and it wasn't so easy and straightforward. It was tough, at some points, where we felt that we didn't know what was going to happen because we had to keep renewing our permits. And then it got to a point that our permits were even refused. If not for the help that was given to us, we probably wouldn't be here today. To cut the long story short we got nominated. And then we did PR, and we got that with a bit of support from different people, because the support is very key.

Question: What is your advice for people who want to start a career in settlement?

Answer: Be compassionate about helping people. You need to have compassion and be able to encourage compassion about helping other people within the community. No matter the kind of position I'm in, I see in myself that I like to help people. For example, there's someone coming in next month. And we help them to secure accommodation, even though finding housing for students



– she is a student – is so difficult right now. We prepared so many things for her that she's going to come in and have a soft landing. That's a very key thing, not necessarily with funds or anything but with advice. So they should be compassionate about people. You don't know when might come a time that you're going to need help yourself in other areas, not necessarily settlement.

Edith Montesclaros Spotlight

“The first time I came here, it was so quiet,” says Edith Montesclaros about her rural Saskatchewan home. “And not a scary quiet, either. But the peaceful and safe type of quiet you can't find in a city.”

Edith Montesclaros is the Executive Director of the East Central Newcomer Welcome Centre, a not-for-profit organization in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. The Centre helps foster a sense of community for refugees, newcomers, and immigrants in the east central region of the province. Founded in 2018, the Centre has a nine-member team and offers a variety of settlement and integration services, including school division partnerships that facilitate smooth transitions into Canadian classrooms and local immigration partnerships that identify and dismantle barriers for newcomers.

In January, Edith won the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal for her settlement and integration work within the province. “To be recognized as a pillar in my community,” she says, “is extremely exciting and rewarding.” Edith finds passion in helping people go from seeing their new space as unfamiliar to viewing it as a home. Because she is an immigrant herself, she especially welcomes the chance to show newcomers what she enjoys most about rural Saskatchewan. Having

grown up in the Philippines' Metro Manila, with its population of 13 million, Edith loves the lack of congestion and abundance of friendly neighbours in her town of five thousand, Melville, Saskatchewan.



Moving to a brand-new country is hard. To ease the process of resettling, Edith advises newcomers to keep an open mind and adjust their expectations, particularly when it comes to securing a job. Many expect to obtain the same kind of work they had in their old home, which can result in anxiety and disappointment. To combat this, Edith says to think critically about what skills you can offer and be patient if, and most likely when, new employers do not immediately recognize them. There are multiple ways you can apply your talents, so don't give up if things do not go as planned right off the bat. Your skills will shine with a new light from your experiences as immigrants, Edith assures them. You just have to keep an open mind.

The East Central Newcomer Welcome Centre offers community activities like snow shoeing and skiing in the winter months, and you can check out their past and upcoming events here. What inspires Edith the most about the Centre is its staff, who are always looking for opportunities to make newcomers' experiences the best they can be.

Thank you, Edith and your team, for integrating people into their new homes in rural Saskatchewan.



Icasiana de Gala

Stalks of durum wheat bend in the breeze. Endless fields stretch into the distance — a golden blend of prairie and sky. It is hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. The vastness of the land is what Icasiana de Gala, Executive Director of the Southwest Newcomer Welcome Centre, finds the most inspiring about her home in Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

The Southwest Newcomer Welcome Centre, founded in 2007, is a not-for-profit organization that helps clients settle into their new communities. Through services such as language programs and employment support, Icasiana and her eleven-member team guide newcomers through the challenging process of resettling. They dedicate their careers to cheering on the province's newcomers. The Centre provides its clients with ongoing mentorship that begins from the very first day of their arrival.

Icasiana recently won the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal, awarded to those who have made significant contributions to their province, for her 13 years of settlement and integration work. She notes that having passion for her field is a reward in itself, but she also states that winning the medal has given her personal validation and brought pride to her family and all the people who see her as a representative of the Philippines.

When Icasiana moved to Saskatchewan, she found it difficult to accept a new culture without abandoning the one from which she came. To reconcile this, she made sure to find a Filipino community while simultaneously integrating into the local community. Icasiana recalls that she had to remember that the longtime residents were not Others and that they all belonged to the same small town. The cultural diversity, she notes, enriches our community.

What makes the resettling process especially difficult, Icasiana says, is that migrants are often so focused on when they will be going back to their old homes that they are unable to accept their new ones. A way to settle is choosing a few qualities that you love about the new area. For Icasiana, it is how small-town life means no traffic, no hurry. One of the most important ways to settle, though, she maintains, is through community engagement. “Even if there is a language barrier or you’re afraid of stepping out of your comfort zone,” she says, “engaging with your new community through events or volunteering will help you feel a part of that collective.”

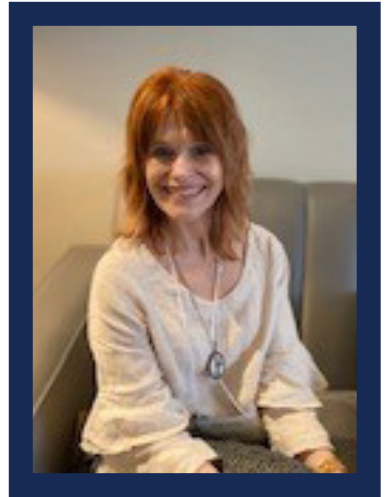
The Southwest Newcomer Welcome Centre has two such events on the horizon. The Annual Career Expo takes place on February 28 and will connect job seekers with employers over a resume review session and a dinner. Then, on March 21, Welcome to My Table will bring the community together through different cultural cuisines.

Thank you, Icasiana De Gala, for your dedication to the people who are making rural Saskatchewan their new home.



ADVICE FOR FRONTLINE SETTLEMENT WORKERS

Janine Hart, Executive Director of The Humboldt Regional Newcomer Centre or HRNC has been working on the frontline of settlement services in rural Saskatchewan for over 10 years. Her advice for those working in newcomer settlement, especially in rural communities, includes increasing community capacity, maintaining boundaries on the job, and celebrating success stories.



When assessing community capacity for successful settlement, Janine considers many factors. Are the local schools “able to support and enable these children to become successful from where they’re at to where they want to go?” she asks. Since smaller communities already struggle to access specialized educational resources, depending on community size and location, ensuring that local schools are able to bridge educational gaps is imperative. She then asks, “Do we have capacity around housing? And when I say housing, I mean housing that can really make somebody feel like ‘This is where I could feel at home, I want to build my home here.’ And is that housing affordable?” Equally important, are there employment opportunities that not only support newcomers with low-level English but match their out-of-Canada work experience to the point where they can transfer skills, while also considering the effects on their mental health? Finally, Janine questions overall community capacity: “Do they really want people in their communities from a place of love? Or do they really, truthfully, just want people to be a piece of the economy? And if it’s the latter, then we need to remove ourselves. But if it’s the first, then we need to think, Okay, how can we support these individuals that are coming?”

Asking these tough questions is the first of many hurdles for frontline settlement workers, especially considering the challenges of navigating federal, provincial, and municipal bureaucracies. In helping others to navigate this complex system, frontline workers sometimes end up being asked to solve problems that are actually, or should be, the responsibility of other institutions. Janine encourages those on the frontline to determine, “You know what, this is not my responsibility. This is the Ministry of Education’s responsibility. This is the Ministry of Health’s responsibility. So it’s about having confidence, and I think that’s something a lot of support workers feel that they’re not able to verbalize.” Ultimately, as with all support work, maintaining boundaries is also imperative.

Most notably, Janine encourages us to celebrate our wins, both big and small. She recalls one of her many success stories, in which the HRNC settled a family in very rural Saskatchewan. “There’s no grocery store. We have no cabs, we have zero transportation when they arrive,” she remembers. “Dad was the skilled worker. So he was the ideal immigrant for the SINP program. And mom was very, very low-level English, in fact, zero English. And their two children also had zero English.” Cut to today, when the mother has returned to school, their daughter is studying Education at the University of Saskatchewan, and their son is working in a job where he feels successful. “They always say that, when they arrived, they knew that the people who were wrapping their arms around them would make them feel like they wanted to stay in this part of the community.” And that is ultimately why Janine Hart does the important work that she does. She is in the business of building



community. To learn more about Janine and her team's work, you can visit the Humboldt Regional Newcomer Settlement Centre website at www.thehrnc.com.

SASKATCHEWAN INTERCULTURAL ASSOCIATION - MEMBER ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Jess Hamm knows that “When you can find connection and find value in the differences, that’s when you have really strong bonds and understanding between people.” Jess is the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association; she and her team focus on strengthening that connection and highlighting that value throughout our province. The SIA’s mission is to promote intercultural understanding and the retention of cultural identity and language so as to fully include Newcomers and Indigenous peoples in Canadian society, through education, employment, language, and social programming. “Culture is part of our identity; it makes us who we are. It’s about our values and traditions,” says Jess. “Culture is an essential part of connecting and making meaningful relationships with others.”



But interculturalism and multiculturalism are two distinct things – a distinction important to Jess and her staff. “Multiculturalism is ‘Let’s bring everybody into the same space from different cultures.’ So, it’s making sure there is representation. It’s not ensuring that there’s harmony, acceptance, and understanding between those cultures,” she explains. “Interculturalism is ensuring that different cultures are represented in the same space, but there’s a deeper understanding of values across cultures – sharing ideas and traditions.” Her point is that multiculturalism is the first step upon which interculturalism is built. It’s not enough to have diversity, and SIA’s goal is to move beyond this first step: “I want there to be understanding. I want there to be acceptance and not just tolerance.”

This is why SIA is such an important resource for Saskatchewan’s settlement sector. SIA provides important English language programs as well as employment programs that directly impact

successful settlement. Because it’s about learning not only how to blend into the Canadian culture, but also how to work with and understand people from diverse backgrounds while maintaining your own traditions and cultural values. “I think the hard part in the settlement process is making sure that people don’t lose their culture or feel pressured to give up their culture to take on another one. And that balance of feeling integrated and welcome, while maintaining who they are and where they come from, and what culture is important to them,” Jess adds.

For example, in their English Language Programs, SIA includes sessions on Indigenous education and ways of knowing, but also ensures that each class is diverse to begin with. This way, participants have an opportunity to know, interact with, and understand each other’s culture. “We make sure that there are opportunities for clients to learn what’s typical or what’s traditional in Canada and understand where the context comes from, because a lot of things in Canada come from other places. They were brought over by immigrants, and then they’ve hung around, traditions that are even connected to religion that are not actually religious anymore,” Jess observes. “There’s a lot of people who celebrate Christmas here who are completely not religious and don’t follow Christianity, which is hard for a Newcomer to understand.”

SIA’s employment programs focus largely on celebrating diversity within work culture. “You may have Indigenous people in your workplace, you might have people from all over the world that are all going to have to find ways to work together and communicate,” Jess notes. These programs also provide a safe space for participants to ask questions that could be considered offensive in a workplace, such as, “How come you do that in your country, but we don’t do that in mine?” Understanding these differences leads to settlement success.

SIA’s Intercultural Gatherings reach out to participants who haven’t accessed any services before and showcase the music, art, and food of different cultures at captivating events. In their Cultural Exchange program, newcomers are paired with people who’ve lived in Canada for at least two years. “We’ve seen huge, incredible relationships built. The newcomer is getting resources and inside information, a friend and a support person who cares about their success and gives them the inside scoop to help make the transition easier,” Jess says.

Another program, the Corporate Culture Club, was started in late 2020 to target HR and management in businesses and organizations and offer them sessions on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), anti-racism, Indigenous history and education. The overall goal is to motivate policy change, and with more than 40 companies participating, things are off to a great start. Jess explains, “We try to give them tools and resources to push others in their company to make lasting change.” Changing policy is slow work that requires having the right people in the room, people who are eager to engineer a systemic change, not only in their workplace but in the broader community.

At the end of the day, “It’s all about building community,” remarks Jess. “We’re here to make a difference in people’s lives.” Whether they are combatting culture shock for newcomers or building cultural and relational bridges within our community, the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association provides vital services across Saskatchewan. To learn more about the SIA and their programs, please visit their website at www.saskintercultural.org/.



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