



RRLIP COMMUNITY FORUM REPORT - 2021

FORUM DATE:	FORUM TITLE:	REPORT PREPARED BY:
February 24 th , 2021	Cultural Bridging	RRLIP Staff

PURPOSE OF FORUM

Each year, the Regina Region Local Immigration Partnership (RRLIP) hosts a community forum. The purpose of each forum is to provide project updates and bring together stakeholders and community to discuss barriers and challenges as they relate to newcomer settlement and integration, and to identify solutions. The forum topic was determined through RRLIP-convened tables, community groups and those who work with newcomers, who identified that **cultural bridging was an important, ongoing challenge**. RRLIP partnered with interested individuals and organizations to plan and facilitate the Forum, as they provided ideas, suggestions, resources, and expertise. Partners included: the Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan (MCoS); Regina Public Library; Regina Police Service; Immigrant Advisory Table members; City of Regina, and numerous individuals, all contributing important insights and intercultural connections. In recognition of Canada's official languages, the forum agenda and *Culture as an Iceberg* resource were translated into French.

FORUM GOALS

- Learn about other cultures and share about your own culture.
- Dispel myths and misconceptions and discuss the impact of common stereotypes.
- Provide feedback and share ideas about how to improve intercultural understanding in Regina.

FORUM FORMAT (1:30 P.M. - 3:30 P.M. VIA ZOOM)

This year, because of the COVID-19 restrictions, the Forum was hosted virtually on Regina Public Library's Zoom platform.

- Welcome and RRLIP Project Update
- Kahoots Quiz (highlighting common stereotypes)
- Culture as an Iceberg presentation (MCoS) followed by discussion in pairs
- Guest Speakers: Aaron Tootosis (Indigenous Ancestry); Nour Baraban (Syrian Refugee, Muslim); Chilombo Mwela (Immigrant, African Ancestry) sharing about history, stereotypes, and racism they've experienced
- Breakout Group Activity – reacting to the speaker stories, sharing racism experiences
- Recap of Breakout Room ideas and a Challenge: What has affected you today? How did you feel when you heard the stories? What will you do differently as a result of this Forum?
- Breakout Room Activity – Ideas to address stereotypes and racism in Regina
- Sharing ideas about what you will do because of attending the Forum (via chat box)
- Thank you

WHO ATTENDED?

70 participants attended the community forum. They included:

- **Immigrant-serving agencies, other support agencies/organizations, and individual community members interested in cultural bridging and sharing local solutions to the challenges presented.**
- Regina Public Library
 - Services d'accueil et d'inclusion francophone-SK
 - City of Regina
 - Regina Police Service
 - Islamic Association of Saskatchewan
 - Tapestry Family Services
 - Regina Immigrant Women Centre
 - Salvation Army
 - Refugee Sponsorship Training Program
 - Coptic Orthodox Church
 - Regina Fire and Protective Services
 - Knox Metropolitan Church
 - RRLIP Immigrant Advisory Table Members
 - Regina Public Schools
 - Regina Food Bank
 - Regina Open Door Society
 - University of Regina
 - Ukrainian Canadian Congress
 - Mennonite Central Committee
 - Multicultural Society of Saskatchewan
 - International Women of Saskatoon
 - Islamic Circle of North America – Regina Branch
 - Namarind Housing
 - Catholic Family Services
 - Community Associations
 - Regina Treaty/Status Indian Services
 - Nature Regina
 - **And other organizations and individual community members...**

KAHOOTS QUIZ (HIGHLIGHTING COMMON STEREOTYPES)

Attendees were invited to participate in a quiz that included common stereotypes about Muslims, Indigenous and people of African descent. The activity was intended to increase awareness about common stereotypes and their negative impact.

CULTURE AS AN ICEBERG ILLUSTRATION AND PAIR DISCUSSION

MCoS addressed the topic of Culture as an Iceberg in a short presentation to the attendees, followed by pair discussion about finding similarities in cultures.

The presentation included information about:

- Visible Cultural Expressions (such as food, clothing, music, dance, popular culture) are only 10% of culture – the surface that everyone can see.
- 90% of a culture lies beneath the surface, and cannot be seen, but is the basis of what is visible.

Hidden Areas of Culture include:

- Beliefs and Values (world view, concept of humans in relation to the world, religious beliefs and practices, ideas about modesty, concepts of time, understand past and future, fairness and justice, cooperation vs. competition, relationships with animals, virtues, sin, death).
- Relationships and Roles (gender roles, ideas about leadership, decision-making models, friendships, designation of status based in positing, dating and courtship practices, marriage, notions of child-rearing and how children behave in places of worship, courtesy and manners, elders, adolescents, dependents, age).

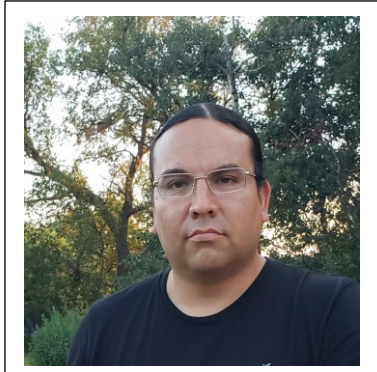
- Attitudes and Norms (what we expect of ourselves and others, authority, power, cleanliness, modesty, beauty, rules, expectations).
- Language and Communication – Verbal and Non-verbal (facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, personal space, touching, body language, conversational patterns in different social situations, handling and displaying of emotion, tone of voice).

In order to make this resource more accessible to the community, working group members:

- Developed a set of accompanying instructions to the Iceberg Illustration, to facilitate its use as a teaching tool in different community situations (small groups, classrooms, cultural presentations, etc.).
- Arranged translation for the illustration and instructions into applicable languages for the community of Regina - Arabic, Cree, English, French, Mandarin, Swahili, Tagalog, Tigrinya, and Urdu.
- Promoted the translated resource in the community.

MCoS is willing to present this, and other cultural/anti-racism information, to any interested organization or group in Saskatchewan. Contact MCoS for more information mcos@mcos.ca

GUEST SPEAKERS

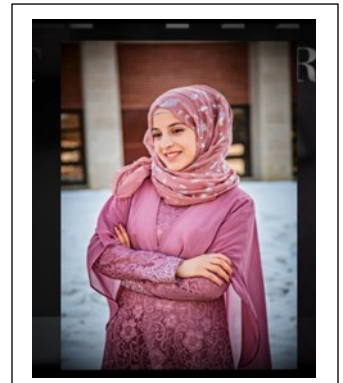


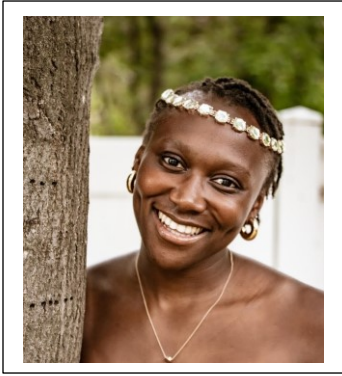
Indigenous leader **Aaron Tootoosis**, shared his insights about some of the misconceptions surrounding treaties. His grandparents were part of the Treaty Process. Unfortunately, the treaties have not been honoured in Canada, causing much harm to the Indigenous way of life through a loss of culture, language and traditions. Systemic and overt racism have been a part of Aaron's life, but he is seeing growing numbers of non-Indigenous Canadians learning more about history and working to understand the past, so the future can be changed. Only recently has attention been focused on the situation that has faced Indigenous peoples for many years, and much work is still required to increase knowledge and understanding.

Nour Baradan shared her experience as a refugee from Syria, and now as a young Muslim woman living in Regina. She highlighted some of the difficulties she faced in school because of coming to a new country and knowing nothing about it. Refugees leave their country because they have to flee, not because they want to move. As someone who wears a hijab, she has sometimes faced racist comments, and knows that often people who look like her are feared, because of common stereotypes and misconceptions.

Now in University, she emphasized her desire to serve the community, the importance of being open and willing to share and learn, to learn about different cultures and overcome the stereotypes and racist thoughts about those who are different. She hopes to help build bridges between cultures.

Nour shared a poem that she wrote, which expresses some of the challenges confronting refugees.





Chilombo Mwela came to Canada from Zambia, Africa, as a young immigrant child with her parents. She had never experienced being the 'only one' who looked like her, rather than being just 'one of everyone' who looked like her. Chilombo shared her thoughts about learning that black skin is seen differently than white skin, and that here in Canada, she is seen by her skin colour first. She gave a powerful illustration about fear from a recent experience – fear that doing a good deed would be looked upon as attempting to commit a crime because of the colour of her skin. Chilombo is passionate about making a difference and wants to help overcome the stereotypes and racism that many face, by being active in the community. She hopes to be involved in many more events that provide opportunities for mutual respect, understanding and relationship-building. She stressed the idea that we are all human and need to look at our common humanity.

BREAKOUT ROOM ACTIVITY - SPEAKER STORIES, SHARING PERSONAL RACISM EXPERIENCES

Working Group members facilitated a Breakout Room Activity meant to encourage thoughtful discussion about the speaker stories, and provide an opportunity to share racism examples experienced by breakout room participants.

Discussion examples included:

- People who wear various traditional clothing (e.g. Hijabs or turbans) are discriminated against at their workplace (e.g. assigned only to work at the back of the store, not able to work at the front counter, etc.). Things are changing now, as we see many immigrants wearing traditional clothing in many different roles in the community. However, immigrants must still work extra hard to prove that they are competent.
- Most immigrants face difficulty in finding a job relevant to their previous experience/career because of their language skill. Often employers in Canada do not recognize immigrants' education and work experiences. In some cases, immigrants have to gain a Canadian degree in order to get a better job.
- First Nations and people of color are often followed by security persons in stores and stopped while driving.
- Information about Residential Schools is very impactful and needs to be known. It was surprising to hear that a lot of their mistreatment occurred not that long ago.
- It is important to teach children to be kind to each other and to introduce them to people of different cultures at an early age.
- There is a great need to create more opportunities to bring people together to learn from one another and create change together.

GROUP ACTIVITY - RECAP OF BREAKOUT ROOM IDEAS AND A CHALLENGE

A brief recap of the Breakout Room sessions was provided.

Points included:

- Racial profiling is still very real.
- Newcomers have had to work hard to live a better life in Canada and this is also true for Indigenous people.
- The stereotype that suggests refugees do not want to work because they receive money from the government is false, as refugees work hard to put food on the table.
- We need education and discussion about Indigenous people and newcomers, because it is only when we learn about each other, that we find the commonality.
- It is important to ask people questions about things you don't understand, for better understanding and bridging (rather than making assumptions and pre-judging).

The attendees were then asked to take a moment to think about what they had heard in the speaker stories and group discussions, to come up with ideas about how to make a difference in Regina – both personally and within the societal system. These questions were posed:

What has affected you today?

How did you feel when you heard the stories?

What will you do differently as a result of this Forum?

Answers included:

- Hearing about what the guest speakers went through made me understand more about others and feel more empathy toward other cultures.
- It is important to be more open to other cultures, by interacting more, and spreading awareness among children.
- As a parent, it is important to listen to my children about their experiences.
- Do not remain silent/ignore when you witness/hear something that is unjust.
- Be open and understanding and openly communicate. Always stand for the truth.

Ideas for making things better in Regina included:

- Continue events like this and create a strong push for people in leadership to learn and accept that racism is deeply rooted in our systems and then address it!
- Create more opportunities for people to experience each other's cultures. Education is one thing but hearing stories and experiencing people shows everyone's "humanness" and allows more connection.
- Hold 'Celebration of Cultures' events which showcase many cultures to bring awareness, seeing and talking with other people to bring community together.
- Create opportunities for intensive conversation with Reconciliation Ambassadors – conversations over weeks, looking at opportunities with newcomers.
- Engage the media in sharing accurate, culturally rich stories and more cultural content on radio/television.
- Mentoring programs (newcomer/first nations) would be helpful.
- More cultural connection programs are needed (e.g. community kitchens; shared food; learning about other cultures, etc.).

Forum attendees were asked to share ideas (via the chatbox) about what they will do personally, as a result of attending the event and learning from each other.

Answers included:

I will...

- Find ways to reach folks who do not think similarly to me.
- Try to make changes, rather than talking; be more proactive.
- Focus more on directing my own children into learning more about other cultures to be more accepting of differences while they are small! It starts at home too.
- When working with someone of a different culture who wants to do things differently from the existing standard methods, spend some time gently questioning and figuring out a way that works for both of us.
- Continue to dispel stereotypes thru education not only in schools but on a one-to-one basis, also to do my best to counter negative comments on social media.
- Need to work harder to make everyone know they are welcome and in a safe place with me.
- Be willing to have difficult but respectful conversations when opportunity arises.

“Thank you very much for organizing and presenting this very informative and important forum.”

Forum Attendee Comment

EVENT EVALUATION

Participants were asked to complete a brief survey of the event, sent the following day.

Q1: Attending the Cultural Bridging Forum was a positive experience for me.

91.67% of respondents agreed with this statement.

Q2. I learned new information from the Cultural Bridging Forum:

54.17% of respondents learned a lot!

37.50% of respondents learned a little.

Q3. Attending this Forum has helped me...

- See similarities between cultures.
- Understand how stereotypes can negatively affect others.
- Be more understanding of other cultures.
- Become interested in interacting with people from other cultures.
- All of the above.

79.17% of respondents answered all of the above.

Q4. Did you have the opportunity to discuss and share your views?

83.3% of respondents answered yes.

Q5: I would like to attend future cultural bridging events.

79.17% of respondents answered yes.

Q6: Did the Forum inspire/encourage you to pursue future learning/reading on this issue?

66.7% of respondents answered yes.

Q7: Additional Comments (anything else you'd like to share with us about your experience at the Forum).

Examples included:

- I loved hearing the personal stories. The speakers were very moving. Thanks so much.
- The organizers did an awesome job. It was well done.
- It was a lot packed in. It was all very good but felt rushed at times. I would like more depth to less topics.
- Very well organized event. Thank you to all those who worked to put it together.
- Need more time for the discussions; they were so good.
- It was a great experience. The session was very informative.
- Very well planned and organized forum. More of the same type are encouraged.
- So educational and inspiring. Thanks!
- I loved the positive energy and the willingness to participate.
- It gave a deep insight about how such stereo types and discrimination can hamper the future of someone.
- The guest speakers were motivational, and I was inspired by all. It was a wonderful experience.

“Thanks for organizing this great forum. I got lots of chances to know different people and different cultures. Hopefully, I can join more forums like this and make efforts to build a beautiful Regina.”

Forum Attendee Comment

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE INFORMATION GAINED FROM THE COMMUNITY FORUM

Forum participants will receive the report through email. The report will also be shared widely with the broader community through inclusion on the RRLIP project blog, project newsletters, RRLIP website and in meetings with stakeholders. Ongoing events and organized conversations will be planned to utilize the information gleaned from this event.

Original Poem Recited by Nour Al Baradan

Being Human

You are human
Your mind produces every
Thought, action, memory, feeling and experience of the world
You create your life

We can give and receive help
Say kind words or keep silence
Let our abilities flourish
Achieve our dreams

We can all be selfish and refuse to help
Grow angry thoughts that lead to angry actions
Squander our abilities and let them go to waste
Lose sight of our dreams

Our world has inspiring people, they understand what life is
They let go of sadness, anger, and ugliness
They encourage success, happiness, and creativity

Our world has hateful people, they misunderstand what life is
They hang on to fear, blame, and impatience
They discourage peace, love, and joy

Don't hate hateful people
Some event will occur and change them
Offer advice, kindness, and compassion

One thing connects us
We are all born human and we will all die human
Humans first.
Humans last.

Never blame anyone in your life
Good people give you happiness
Bad people give you experience
Both give you memories

Culture as an Iceberg Original Illustration – available [here](#).

Culture as an Iceberg Revised Illustration with Facilitator Instructions:

Arabic: bit.ly/2nvynkg

Cree: bit.ly/12nvynkg

English: bit.ly/2o0kbqx

French: bit.ly/3bz8pop

Mandarin: bit.ly/3khkqu3

Swahili: bit.ly/3uulnyu

Tagalog: bit.ly/3ut1ovf

Tigrinya: bit.ly/3amxrz0

Urdu: illustration: bit.ly/2p92bvl

Urdu Facilitator instructions: bit.ly/3ppu0d8



PowerPoint Presentation from Aaron Tootosis: [Treaties and Identity – Why Should I Care?](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES DISCUSSED AT FORUM

MCoS Multifaith Calendar: <https://mcos.ca/resources/calendar/>

Books recommended in groups or presentations:

- *How to be Anti-Racist* – Ibrahim X. Kendi
- *White Fragility* – Robin DiAngelo
- *The Skin We're In* – Desmond Cole
- *No Surrender: The Land Remains Indigenous* - Sheldon Krasowski
<https://www.reginalibrary.ca/search/2681146>

Information Available from Regina Public Library:

Let's Talk about Racism <https://www.reginalibrary.ca/blog/rpl-blog/lets-talk-about-racism>

Reconciliation Resources <https://www.reginalibrary.ca/services/reconciliation>

Newcomer Resources <https://www.reginalibrary.ca/services/newcomers>

Black History Month <https://www.reginalibrary.ca/blog/rpl-blog/rpl-celebrating-black-history-month>

Black Lives Matter Education <https://www.reginalibrary.ca/blog/rpl-blog/black-lives-matter-education>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The RRLIP is a community initiative that...

- **Convenes** a multi-sector Council, diverse Immigrant Advisory Table and Working Groups to support the community's settlement and integration priorities
- **Strengthens** the local capacity to integrate newcomers
- **Increases knowledge** about newcomer needs, strengths and local strategies for support
- **Promotes** welcoming attitudes and increases the full participation of newcomers in the Regina community

The RRLIP project is very grateful for the **collaborative partnership with all the Working Group members**, including Multicultural Council of Saskatchewan (MCoS), City of Regina, RRLIP's Immigrant Advisory Table, Regina Police Service, and other interested individuals. This collaborative effort created an opportunity for important personal and community dialogue around the topic of cultural bridging.

Many thanks to all **forum participants**, who discussed the topic openly and honestly, and offered viable solutions to enhanced cultural bridging in our community.

Thank you to the **RRLIPs project partners – Regina Open Door Society** and **Regina Human Services Partnership**. Also, thank you to the **project/event funders**, for without their support, this forum would not have been possible – **Canadian Heritage** and **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada**.



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