



2014 Welcoming Ottawa Week Launch Reception

Monday, June 23rd, 2014
Jean Pigott Place, City Hall

Speaking Notes by WOW Co-Chairs Sarah Onyango and Louisa Taylor

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It gives us great pleasure to address you today, at the Launch of 2014 Welcoming Ottawa Week, and to kick start together the wonderful activities that are scheduled this week.

WOW is about celebrating who we are as Ottawans and presenting our best selves: our beautiful city, the rich diversity of our people, and the many expressions of our identities and histories to each other, whether we arrived 8 generations ago, or just 8 days.

During WOW Ottawans will connect culturally through arts, entertainment, and music; socially through sports and recreation activities; and intellectually through learning events, town hall discussions, and documentary screenings.

Through the wonderful 35 events planned, Welcoming Ottawa Week presents bridging platforms for all of us to meet people whom we might not encounter in our typical lives, while having fun and experiencing new tastes, reflecting on new ways of doing things, or being exposed to different vantage points on issues that affect our lives, such as health literacy, seniors' quality of life, planning for inclusivity in public organizations, and youth development.

The significance of this connectivity is twofold: on one hand, it is clear to us how, if sustained, this real engagement of diversity will over time help to build a stronger civic identity to which we all belong; a uniquely Ottawa culture that is vibrant and inclusive.

On the other hand, WOW will showcase our thriving diversity, which in turn will help us to continue attracting new immigrants.

We are honored to have been asked to chair the 2014 Welcoming Ottawa Week. And we are pleased to contribute as we collectively build on the success of the inaugural WOW to bring the spirit of a welcoming city to even more residents of Ottawa in 2014.

As co-chairs of WOW, it's extremely gratifying to help create less distance, more engagement – less fear, more friendships.

New this year to the WOW activities is the WOW Ambassador Awards and the *Faces & Stories of a Welcoming City Exhibition* which will run throughout WOW, here at City Hall.

We are excited about these new features of WOW, designed to concretize and amplify the impact of the Welcoming Ottawa Week. Stories have a unique power in conveying complex meaning and thus helping us create shared understanding.

So we asked immigrants to tell us their stories of interaction with Ottawans - of any background and immigration status - who have been particularly welcoming, who reached out to help them feel at home in the city.

Immigrants responded, sending us moving accounts of Ottawans who have shown respect, generosity, and hospitality. They told us how these seemingly ordinary encounters with ordinary Ottawans were in fact extraordinary, easing immigrants' experiences of loss resulting from separation from loved ones and loved places, self-doubt in the face of many rejections in their searches for suitable employment, and feelings of loneliness that comes when joining a new community.

We learned that welcoming attitudes go a long way in facilitating the settlement and integration journey of immigrants. Welcoming Ottawans are true integration agents and we are grateful to them.

Remarkably though, we have also learned that Welcoming Attitudes also enrich the Ottawans who practice them. It is a real two-way street of give and take and mutual benefit between individuals, which however benefit our whole community.

The term ***Welcoming Ottawa Ambassadors*** is very befitting to these wonderful individuals whom we are very pleased to recognize today. Immigrants form their first impressions of our city through the people they meet in their neighborhoods, workplaces, schools and service centres. Thus WOW ambassadors are real, albeit unrecognized representatives of our City.

Well, we would like to change that today!! We would like to shed light and celebrate Ottawa's Welcoming Ambassadors. And, what is more, we would like to learn from them.

So what distinguishes WOW Ambassadors?

From our interviews with them and the immigrants who nominated them, we distilled five welcoming qualities that we can all put to test during WOW and endeavor to adopt as personal practices in our daily interaction with new immigrants. And they are:

- 1. Genuine Respect:** openness, positive curiosity, and knowledge of, or interest to learn about, immigrants' countries of origin
- 2. Inter-Cultural Bridging:** tips to help immigrants understand cultural nuances and the local way of life
- 3. Hospitality:** engaging and welcoming immigrants and their families into Ambassadors' families
- 4. Opening Doors to Community:** linking immigrants to networks, social clubs, professional associations, study groups, civic action and leadership initiatives.

5. Friendship & Generosity of Spirit: listening, understanding challenges, problem solving, reassuring that difficulties will pass.

We would like to invite Mayor Watson to join us to unveil the Exhibit, where you will learn more from the WOW ambassadors and the bonds of lasting friendships formed with immigrants at *The Faces & Stories of a Welcoming City* exhibition.

UNVEILING of the Photo Exhibition @ 8:12 a.m.

We are doing well at the institutional level to settle and integrate immigrants. We invest in a multitude of vital programs to help newcomers succeed in finding their way into the community. The key institutions of our community – that is the OLIP partners - have a shared vision and common directions (the Ottawa Immigration Strategy); and there is a real momentum of progress in multiple sectors in removing the persistent challenges immigrants encounter in their settlement and integration journey. We applaud this work!

Allow us however like to stress that equally important is the need to celebrate and promote welcoming attitudes towards newcomers by all Ottawans of all walks of life. The informal, almost intangible journey to feeling at home, to knowing, as one of the nominators put it, that you are “invited to become part of a larger whole.” This informal process evolves through welcoming moments, through support and engagement with your neighbour, your co-worker, your new friends, your fellow students.

Even though the newcomer is the person who has traveled the furthest, the Ottawans they encounter experience welcome, too. A Canadian landlady teaches a foreign student how to cook, Canadian style, and gains a new son in the process. A newcomer from India paints her new friend’s hands with henna, and opens her eyes to an art form whose roots stretch back across continents and thousands of years.

Gradually the welcoming process becomes a state of mind, and both sides realize it has happened: their idea of home has changed forever, become broader, more inclusive, more dynamic, more confident. For a welcoming city is a city whose citizens know they belong. Citizens who belong thrive, and so do their communities.

Both WOW Ambassadors and their nominators found this sense of connection, in some cases by chance, in others by deliberately seeking it out.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if more people could experience those connections, whether by signing up to guide a newcomer through the early months of settlement, stepping up to chat to a new face in the office, or stepping out of their comfort zone to try new food, dance or literature?

That's what Welcoming Ottawa Week is all about: many opportunities for Ottawans new and old to meet, to share, to connect.

More than 30 ways and opportunities to peel back our Canadian reserve or newcomer hesitation and say everyone is welcome here, so dive in! Watch this film, discuss this book, try this dance, play a little soccer and make some friends. Every WOW day is a wonderful discovery.

During WOW, you will be able to catch not one film screening but two, courtesy of the Ottawa Public Library.

The more cerebral among us are looking forward to reflecting on the history of Ottawa's progress on equity through a workshop lead by Yumi Kotani, manager of the Equity Project.

Newcomer Information Centre's multicultural celebration will present activities like henna painting, calligraphy, tea ceremony, arts and crafts, music, dance performances by a Middle Eastern Troupe and a parade of national dresses.

With the FIFA World Cup in full swing, WOW 2014 will capture some of that fever with a soccer matches as its finale, featuring several multicultural teams competing for the [Community Cup](#) on June 28.

It all starts right today! right after this launch and at City Hall, you can attend an interactive presentation and a book launch on health literacy.

Tonight at the Ottawa Public Library you can catch a screening of Cricket and the Meaning of Life, with a discussion moderated by Chelby Diagle.

You can attend the MASC (Multicultural Arts in Schools and Communities) cabaret where diverse artists will be bringing their talents to the microphone.

On Tuesday, there will be an open planning session for collaboration in the arts organized by CPAMO (Cultural Pluralism Movement in Ontario), and an art exhibition by immigrant women curated by Immigrant Women Services Organization.

There is also a guided walking tour by Indigenous Walks, providing us all with an opportunity to reflect on how we are all newcomers living on land of the Algonquin peoples. This tour will guide us through Indigenous social, political, cultural and artistic spaces: from the totem pole in [Confederation Park](#) to the Three Watchmen sculpture near [Major's Hill Park](#). We will get to know Ottawa like we have never known it before!

An evening of inspiring newcomer success stories will showcase the strategies successful newcomers have used to secure employment in Canada. Do not miss this opportunity if you are an immigrant looking for a job or an employer looking to tap into immigrants' talent.

Sports fans can join an open discussion on sport as the city works to develop an inclusive sports strategy.

That's just the first two days!

As the week progresses, we'll have a book launch on managing workplace diversity, diversity by Silvio Gravel, the Staff Sergeant and based on the learning

from the diversity change project that received the 2007 International Association of Chiefs of Police Civil Rights Award.

A tour of Parliament Hill designed specifically for immigrants, and a food tour of Chinatown.

We'll enjoy the launch of the city's exciting new portal mapping Ottawa's cultural assets, followed by another film screening, a slide show on Chinese immigration to the capital.

A classical music concert and a multicultural story time session at the public library will grace the 2014 WOW and capture our imagination.

There's even a public lecture by renowned Australian migration expert Graeme Hugo – only a few tickets left to that, so get yours now!

It all wraps up with a bang on Saturday at the 10th annual Community Cup, where there is so much happening: a lively soccer tournament featuring teams that showcase Ottawa's diversity, a health fair, and multiple recreation activities for the whole family. The WOW photo exhibit will make an appearance there, too.

Here are some of our partners to tell you more about their events in their own words.

Social Media:

Hashtag: #2014WOW, #2014WOWEvent,
#2014WOWAmbassador, #Ottawa, #OLIP-PLIO

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