

WelcomeBC assists immigrants with new life

The Province will invest \$43 million over the next two years as part of its WelcomeBC initiative, which we announced this summer. The WelcomeBC brand unites B.C.'s comprehensive settlement and integration initiatives under a single umbrella. More than 42,000 immigrants made B.C. their home in 2006.

WelcomeBC is aimed at supporting welcoming and inclusive communities that ease the transition to living in B.C. for immigrants. The \$43 million is part of \$71.5 million in new federal commitments to expand settlement services and \$1.573 million for anti-racism and multiculturalism services



WelcomeBC, which Premier Gordon Campbell (second from left) and I unveiled June 13, will help immigrants moving to British Columbia access settlement and integration initiatives so they are better able to adapt to life in their new communities. S.U.C.C.E.S.S. chief executive officer Tung Chan and Brenda Lohrenz of ELSA Net attended the announcement of \$43 million over two years to expand immigration and settlement services. Planning for an additional \$28.5 million in services over the next two years is also underway.

The Province will direct \$9 million of the funding, over two years, into cutting wait lists for adult English as a second language courses and \$12 million over two years for level four and five English language services for adults (ELSA). Another \$2 million is earmarked for level four and five ELSA courses for immigrants either just entering or already in the labour market.

Information and settlement services to help immigrants adjust to living in B.C. will be increased by \$8 million over two years. The funding will go to services such as health care access, employment and recreation services. The Province will spend another \$1.6 million for improved information and outreach services for immigrants facing multiple barriers, including refugees.

New settlement workers will assist immigrant students in schools in the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley and Greater Victoria, an \$11 million investment over two years.

The expanded services under WelcomeBC are aimed at supporting new immigrants to settle successfully in our province and support communities to be more welcoming and inclusive, helping B.C. to be the best place on earth today and into the future.

Immigrants have options in obtaining legal aid

Immigrants who need help understanding how to obtain legal aid or their rights in family disputes can turn to a variety of websites and community agencies for help.

The BC Newcomers' Guide has a chapter dedicated to legal issues. The guide is located online at: www.ag.gov.bc.ca/immigration/sam/newcomers_guide.htm

If learning about the legal system from a book isn't what you're looking for, basic information and referrals to other agencies specializing in legal issues are available through settlement workers funded under the Ministry of Attorney General's B.C. settlement and adaptation program. A list of settlement workers by community is located at: www.ag.gov.bc.ca/immigration/sam/bcsap.htm

The provincial justice services branch also funds the People's Law School. The service educates the public on the law, legal processes and institutions. Immigrant and non-English speaking communities are assisted to understand their legal rights and responsibilities and how to obtain assistance. The school can be contacted at: www.publiclegaled.bc.ca

Thanks to these programs and others, offered through the provincial government, immigrants with legal problems can find answers to their questions.



Addressing crime and safety in B.C. is a priority for provincial government

Government will promote early solutions and faster justice to deal with local crime concerns.

As I told crime and safety conferences organized in Abbotsford by the chamber of commerce and in Coquitlam through my colleagues, MLAs Iain Black and Harry Bloy, the Province will focus on reforms that to help ease local crime concerns.

Through initiatives such as justice reform, the youth gang violence project and community court, we are taking action. But we need communities to become a part of the solution. Government cannot act alone.

Crime prevention is as much about concerned community members and business people as it is about government's response. We must all play a role if we are going to effectively reduce crime, increase safety and renew pride and confidence within our communities.

Public service acts on climate change



The 2007 throne speech made it clear: B.C. must act on climate change and we must do it now. Ministries across the provincial government have sprung into action to generate ideas and processes that will see this government become a carbon neutral organization by 2012.

Some of the simplest ideas to conserve energy are already being put into effect. Turning off computer monitors, printers and cell phone chargers when not in use can be of great help in reaching the Province's energy conservation goals.

Other ideas from staff include everything from placing CO₂-eating plants in every office to reduce building emissions to encouraging the establishment of electric commuter train systems in the Capital region.

Ministries are also looking to cost-effective measures to reduce electricity demand. Using energy-efficient light bulbs and giving each office and work space its own light switch, so employees can turn off the lights when they leave work, are a just a few of the retrofitting ideas government is considering.

The BC Energy Plan states new provincial public sector buildings will be required to integrate the highest values for greenhouse gas emission reductions, water conservation and other environmental targets to achieve certified standards. The government's push to create change for the greener goes beyond the boundaries of office spaces.

In my ministry, court services is getting involved in innovative ways. Electronic filing of civil court documents in several registries is now in place, with plans to expand this service provincewide in a matter of months. In addition, lawyers and the public can now conduct an electronic search of B.C. civil court files. All of these initiatives cut down the need for commuting to and from courthouses and reduce the need for paper.



Downtown community court connects with the community

Three public forums in April on Vancouver's downtown community court met with positive response from downtown residents, business people, police and city officials.

The court, a collaboration between the judiciary, police, court services, defence lawyers and health and social service agencies, will take a problem-solving approach to crime.

It will work with the community to develop solutions that respond to crime in the downtown core. Emphasis will be on assisting offenders with addictions and/or mental illness or who are homeless.

Justice system professionals and community workers were on hand at the April forums to discuss the role of a community court in responding to the root causes of repeat offenders' crimes. The court will direct offenders to community services and impose community or jail sentences where appropriate.

Additional forums were held with various social agencies and other organizations who will be involved in the day-to-day operation of the court.

The court will be located at 222 Main St., with a separate entrance on Gore St., and is anticipated to open in 2008.

For information, visit the ministry website at: www.gov.bc.ca/ag

Nation's highest court upholds legal services tax

Lawyers holding outstanding legal services taxes in trust pending a May Supreme Court of Canada decision on the tax's constitutionality will be asked to forward the proceeds to government. The May 25 decision, in **British Columbia (Attorney General) v. Christie**, 2007 SCC 21, found charging PST (provincial services tax) on legal services is not unconstitutional.

Lawyers were required to withhold the tax on certain types of legal services until the court's decision was announced. Low-income clients are not required to pay the tax.

Government has provided instructions on how to remit this PST:

www.sbr.gov.bc.ca/ctb/notices/Notice_to_Lawyers_June_2007.pdf

For more details, log on to the Law Society of British Columbia website at:

www.lawsociety.bc.ca

Legal service society and ministry partner to provide better access to justice

The Ministry of Attorney General and B.C.'s Legal Services Society (LSS) have been partnering on justice reform.

The recently opened Nanaimo family justice services centre is leading the way on making the province's justice system easier to navigate. Civil justice hubs are also being considered.

Heidi Mason, director of public legal information and applications for LSS, informs me the society has been working with the Ministry of Attorney General on research and development towards civil justice hubs. The civil hub was a recommendation of the civil justice reform working group. The family justice reform working group came up with the concept of the family justice hub.

Yet another example of the partnership between LSS and the ministry is the Supreme Court Self-Help Information Centre. Located in the Vancouver, this innovative project provides legal information, education and referral services to people who represent themselves in civil actions. LSS put together the website for that project and a number of LSS managers were involved in the program launch.

I was pleased to recognize LSS publishing staff with an award for their part in the website.

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Lawyers write the book on public law

Two Ministry of Attorney General lawyers, Karen Horsman and Gareth Morley, have "written the book" on government liability law and practice.

Horsman and Morley collaborated with legal scholars and practitioners from across the country on the practitioner-oriented resource. The handbook sheds light on some common, but often very difficult, legal and procedural issues common in government practice.

It is both a scholarly work of legal history and a practical guide to suing and defending civil matters against the Crown. As many others who have seen it have noted, it is a "must read" for those who practice public law.

With public practice rapidly evolving, I can report that Horsman and Morley are already working on their first updates.

Recent appointments

Stephen Harrison has been appointed to the bench of the Provincial Court in Kamloops after practicing law for 22 years as a Crown counsel in Vancouver and Kamloops.

S. David Frankel has been appointed to the Province's highest court, the B.C. Court of Appeal. He replaces Madam Justice Mary Southin (Vancouver), who retired.