

Name change better reflects mandate

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By Lorne Stelmach

A regional service helping immigrants settle into the Morden and Winkler region is simplifying things.

South Central Settlement and Employment Services is changing its name to South Central Immigration Services to better reflect its mandate.

The name will make it easier to understand what kinds of services it provides, say directors, while also bringing it in line with other services around the province that just use immigration services in their names.

"The thought was that I think it was more confusing to immigrants," said executive director Laurie Sawatzky. "I think this makes it more clear to newcomers and the community at large as well."

REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

South Central Immigration Services is part of Regional Connections, which provides settlement, employment and language training services, classrooms, a computer lab and a teachers' resource library to help newcomers to settle, work and raise a family in the region.

It operates from a main office in Winkler with satellite offices in Morden and Altona, and there are 11 staff members between the three offices.

In addition to immigration services, its programs include English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes delivered on a part-time and full-time basis by Pembina Valley Language Education for Adults (PVLEA). And the English at Work program delivers on-site language training specifically designed for learners at a particular workplace.

The aim of the immigration services is to help immigrants to settle, integrate and participate in their new community.

That can present a broad range of responsibilities, noted Sawatzky, but some of the areas where they assist include:

- Learning about life in south central Manitoba and Canada in general.
- Understanding and accessing health care, education, banking, legal, shopping and housing services.
- Finding community services such as doctors, dentists and schools.
- Finding English as an Additional Language training classes.
- Getting important documents like a Manitoba Health Card, a Social Insurance Card, Child Tax Benefits, travel documents, citizenship documents, and a Permanent Resident Card
- Finding interpreters and other language services.

South Central Immigration Services is guided by a board of directors and is sponsored by the federal and provincial governments in partnership with the Winkler and District Chamber of Commerce.

NO LESS A NEED

These services have been increasingly in demand across the region, given the level of growth in the Morden and Winkler region. And much of that growth has been driven by immigration, so it has in turn driven an expansion of the services being offered in the area.

Although there is some belief that the record levels of immigration to Manitoba have been decreasing, Sawatzky said they have seen no less need for their range of services.

"We're not really seeing a huge slowdown," she said, adding however that some immigrants are likely having more difficulty finding jobs in the region.

In fact, they are seeing a further increase in the range of services they are offering with the addition of citizenship classes.

The six week classes are for immigrants who qualify and have already applied to become Canadian citizens. One was offered in Winkler this spring with the final class next week, and a session is expected to be made available in Morden this fall.

NEW FACE IN TOWN

Meanwhile, their clients will now be seeing a new face in the branch office at 200 - 379 Stephen St. in Morden.

Sally Marsolais recently joined the office as a settlement worker and will be able to offer services in low and high German as well as English.

For more information, call the Morden office at 822-4387, or contact Regional Connections at 2 - 295 Perry Street in Winkler at 325-4059 or by e-mail to info@regionalconnections.ca.

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