



COMMUNITY SUMMARY REPORT

ASIAN CANADIAN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Red Deer and Surrounding Areas

OVERVIEW

This document serves as the community report of the Asian Canadian Intercultural Dialogue in Red Deer and Area that took place on January 18, 2025, 2pm to 5pm, at the Northside Community Centre YMCA. It covers key event details including the project's background and rationale, the speakers and panel of community leaders, the organizations that were represented and highlights of the panel's storytelling session and the dialogue with community.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The path to settlement for newcomers and the full and meaningful integration of racialized Canadians can be an arduous and challenging journey. Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipino Canadians make up a substantial part of the workforce in food and health service sectors as essential workers, providing support to Canadians during challenging times. Yet, they and other immigrant communities have been blamed, scapegoated, and mistreated during the pandemic and in social issues such as employment and housing crisis. Their contributions, participation, and resilience – whether recent or historical – are largely unrecognized.

Through the power of conversation and storytelling, Asian Canadian Intercultural Dialogues were organized in key locations across Alberta (Edmonton, Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Calgary) to increase knowledge and understanding about East and Southeast Asian Communities (centered on Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese), provide a safe space to connect and network with fellow community members and inspiring leaders, as well as discuss next steps for greater and collective impact towards advancing inclusion and equity in Alberta. With the theme No Canada Without Me, the dialogue enhances the importance and value of everyone who consider Alberta and Canada their home.

ACCT Foundation demonstrates its commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by engaging Indigenous Elders from Siksika Nation, Tsuut'ina Nation, and Bears paw First Nation— to begin the project in a meaningful way. The project's panel of speakers and community leaders from the East and Southeast Asian communities, gathered in a 3-hour sharing of culture, history, and purpose with the Indigenous elders. A land acknowledgement also marks the beginning of each dialogue, giving recognition to those who were here before us, encouraging our communities to start integrating Truth and Reconciliation in their projects as organizations and in their settlement and integration as Asian Canadians in Treaty 6, 7 and 8. As we acknowledge the land, we called upon our collective culture and traditions to work together, build relationships, have deeper and meaningful collaborations across cultures and generations to create an inclusive space for everyone who consider Alberta and Canada their home.

This project is funded by the Government of Alberta's Ethnocultural and Anti-Racism Grant Programs and presented by ACCT Foundation and ACT2END Racism Network. The Asian Canadian Intercultural Dialogue in Red Deer and surrounding areas is supported by the Philippine Canadian Association of Red Deer & District, the City of Red Deer, and the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

SUMMARY

Participation

Approximately 35 participants attended the Red Deer Dialogue from the Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indian communities, immigrant serving organizations, cultural associations, businesses, service providers and non-profit organizations from Red Deer, Olds, Central, Blackfalds, Banff, Canmore, Rocky Mountain House, and Penhold. Organizations represented are:

1. Buddhist Temple of Southern Alberta
2. Care for Newcomers
3. City of Red Deer
4. Edmonton Japanese Community Association
5. Kentwood Alliance Church
6. MTG Health Care Academy
7. Multicultural Health Brokers
8. Philippine Canadian Association of Red Deer & District
9. Red Deer Cultural Heritage Society (RDCHS)
10. Red Deer Judo
11. Red Deer RCMP



The dialogue was facilitated by a panel of community leaders from Calgary and Red Deer:

1. Anna Ko | President, [Calgary Korean Women's Association](#)
2. Anne-Marie Pham | Founder, [Calgary Vietnamese Youth Association](#)
3. Cesar Cala | Chair, [Filipinos Rising](#) (FRIENDS)
4. Jae Shim | Founder & Owner, [Shim Law](#) | Advocate for Multiculturalism & Inclusion
5. Ken Richardson | Director, [Calgary Japanese Community Association](#)
6. Kevin Higa | Treasurer, [Edmonton Japanese Community Association](#)
7. Kevin Okabe | Executive Director, [National Association of Japanese Canadians](#)
8. Lawrence Lee | Councillor, [City of Red Deer](#)
9. Marichu Antonio | Adviser, [Association of Filipino Canadian Community Leaders in Rural AB](#)
10. Nieva Rosales, President | [Philippine Canadian Association of Red Deer & District](#)
11. Patti Pon | CEO, [Calgary Arts Development](#)
12. Teresa Woo-Paw | Chair, [ACCT Foundation](#)



L-R Standing: Kevin Higa, Cesar Cala, Kevin Okabe, Ken Richardson, Jim Shae

L-R Sitting: Patti Pon, Marichu Antonio, Anna Ko, Teresa Woo-Paw, Nieva Rosales, Anne-Marie Pham

Dialogue Highlights

INTRODUCTION

The Mayor of the City of Red Deer, Ken Johnston, and Hon. Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Health and MLA for Red Deer-North opened the program and the community dialogue offering messages of inspiration and their continued commitment of support. Teresa Woo-Paw, chair of ACCT Foundation, delivered the background and rationale of the project.

PANEL STORYTELLING SESSION

The storytelling of the panel of community leaders focused on the histories and leadership journeys of East and Southeast Asians in Alberta and Canada, which included challenges like the Chinese head tax, Japanese internment, Vietnamese refugee struggles, professional restrictions for Filipinos, and Korean gender barrier. Together with their leadership and community building approach, Asian Canadians responded to these challenges with remarkable resilience, cultural values, and creativity, underpinned by a strong sense of community. This was exemplified through cross-cultural collaboration, professional mentorship, settlement support, unified efforts to combat anti-Asian racism, and the development of support networks to overcome systemic barriers.

Cultural values also shape how the different Asian groups build community and respond to challenges. Cesar Cala mentioned the Filipino concept of bayanihan, which embodies being a hero for one another, while Ken Richardson referred to the Japanese Kaizen principle, which focuses on making incremental improvements to become a little better with each step.

Asian Canadian communities in Alberta are urged to leverage their growing presence in cities to influence policies and systems. Patti Pon highlights the power of unity and the importance of active presence and participation in elections, legislative roles, positions in boards of mainstream organizations like the YMCA, and collaboration with institutions like the RCMP, to make a difference.

The panel of community leaders conclude their session by emphasizing that the true power of these stories lies on the preservation of history, intercultural collaboration, innovative support systems, civic and political leadership development, and sustainable community building. As Teresa Woo-Paw said, “my hope is for our communities to continue to break grounds, to break the bamboo ceilings because when we do, we can open doors for others.”

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

The Community Dialogue continued with panel speakers facilitating smaller groups, providing participants the opportunity to share their stories and experiences. While guide questions were offered to steer the discussions, participants were encouraged to engage and share in an organic and natural manner. With community leaders fluent in their first languages, participants were offered to share their stories in the language they prefer.



Community members shared their personal and community struggles and successes that mostly reflected the panel speakers’ stories and presentations. Groups imparted intergenerational issues, racism and discrimination in public places, schools and work settings, gender barriers, and language and

professional challenges. They also shared their thoughts about living in Red Deer and how they initiated and organized groups and projects to address these issues.

Red Deer and Surrounding Areas

Natural attractions, trails, mountains, and lakes are popular reasons why the community members enjoy living in Red Deer. They also find Red Deer safe, quiet, and welcoming, appreciating the small, close-knit community and noting that it provides everything one needs. Being situated between Edmonton and Calgary adds to its convenience and appeal.

They also appreciate and recognize the growing cultural diversity the city has to offer which is reflected in the increasing ethnic businesses and food options. Filipinos shared that there seemed to be an increase in job opportunities in frontline work such as restaurants, healthcare, and dental industries and that the cost of living in Red Deer is more affordable compared to bigger cities in Alberta.



Current Initiatives

The Asian Canadian community in Red Deer recognizes the importance of community building, youth engagement and settlement support through the following initiatives.

1. Cultural Festivals

Appreciation of culture and traditions are recognized during heritage months and annual cultural celebrations such as Filipino Heritage Month, Asian Heritage Month, and Lunar New.

2. Youth Engagement

Initiatives to engage the youth are part of the focus of settlement agencies and the Filipino, Korean and Chinese communities through sports, fashion, workshops, robotics, coding, math, and first language learning.

3. Asian Canadian Organizations

There are associations and groups that are already formally and informally organized engaging their respective community members on newcomer settlement, youth, and business. These organizations provide essential informal support and resources that is critical to settlement and fostering a sense of community. The Chinese businesses have formed an informal network and

connections to support each other, while the Korean community supports their newcomer members. The increasing number of Filipino organizations, each specializing in areas like sports, business, youth, and culture, reflects the expanding Filipino population in Red Deer.

4. Settlement Support

Newcomer support is present through the work of Care for Newcomers, other settlement agencies, and informal support systems provided by the different Asian communities. Catholic Social Services also provide settlement support for adult newcomers

5. Institutional Support

Red Deer's RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) are taking active steps in engaging community to address issues such as racism and discrimination while the City of Red Deer is committed to enhance the growing diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusion and aims to foster equitable access to services and facilities.



Community Issues and Challenges

The community highlighted shared challenges, including intergenerational conflicts, experiences of discrimination, the erosion of cultural identity, and the pressing need for cultural preservation. They also identified the need for funding support and accessible community spaces as priorities for the Asian Canadian communities.

1. Intergenerational Issues.

A prominent issue highlighted during the table discussions is intergenerational conflict within families and communities. These challenges often stem from differences in generational dynamics (such as between parents and children), age (older and younger individuals), and immigrant status (those who moved to Canada compared to those born in Canada).

Younger generations perceive the world differently, heavily influenced by social media, gaming, and the internet—experiences that older generations did not encounter during their upbringing. Family tensions can arise when parents express concerns about preserving their children's

cultural identity, while children focus on adapting to and navigating life in Canadian society as best as they can.

2. Access to Space.

Physical space plays a vital role in fostering community, particularly within Asian communities where collective activities are central to daily life. Members of these communities have emphasized the need for spaces where they can gather, learn, celebrate, engage in sports, and build a sense of belonging. Some have shared experiences of attempting to collaborate with institutions, only to face rejection, neglect, or bureaucratic obstacles.

3. Funding for Programs

The Asian Canadian community in Red Deer and the surrounding area offers various programs, including settlement support for newcomers, youth engagement activities (such as sports, robotics, and coding), language learning in both English and their first languages, and cultural celebrations. Community members are eager to sustain and expand these initiatives, as well as bring their plans to fruition. However, achieving this vision relies heavily on institutional support and access to funding opportunities.

4. Discrimination

Participants in the community dialogue shared experiences of microaggressions, discrimination, and racism in environments where they should feel safe and protected, such as schools, workplaces, public spaces, and institutional systems. These issues became increasingly common during the pandemic. For instance, a temporary foreign worker revealed being dismissed due to insufficient English-speaking skills, despite having passed the IELTS exam—a prerequisite to validate English proficiency before immigrating to Canada. Another community member recounted being subjected to additional questioning at a bank compared to other customers.

Restrictive positive stereotypes, such as the belief that Asians are hardworking or do not complain, further limit access to resources and support. Additionally, policies like the Temporary Foreign Workers Program create conditions that enable employers to exploit workers.

Addressing both individual microaggressions and systemic racism was emphasized as a crucial step forward.



5. Cultural Preservation

Festivals showcasing traditional arts, dances, and music have long been a part of the Asian Canadian communities in Red Deer. These cultural events celebrate and highlight Asian heritage, inviting both their own community members and others to participate. The Korean and Japanese communities, in particular, aim to foster greater appreciation of their culture by capitalizing on the rising global popularity of K-pop (Korean pop music), K-drama (Korean drama series), Anime (Japanese animation), and Martial Arts.

However, preserving culture presents a challenge when first languages are not actively used or practiced, cultural traditions are followed less frequently, and, in the case of the Japanese community, intermarriages contribute to a gradual reduction in familial lineage over generations.

6. Cultural Identity

Immigrants and Canadian-born individuals of Asian descent often face challenges with their cultural identity. These struggles manifest in feelings of limited or no belonging (feeling neither fully Canadian nor Asian), misidentification (being mistaken for another Asian ethnicity), the absence of stereotypical Asian physical attributes (appearing more white than Asian), and the inability to self-identify or select multiple ethnicities on forms and surveys, as noted by members of the Japanese community. These experiences contribute to mental health issues, diminished self-esteem, and a sense of exclusion from any community.

History plays a vital role in cultural identity, particularly in the context of the Japanese internment. One participant shared that their family was urged to assimilate to avoid being sent to internment camps. This pressure resulted in intermarriages and the gradual erosion of cultural traditions.

7. Participation and Collaboration

The lack of participation and cross-cultural collaboration emerged as a key issue during the group dialogues. While the Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Chinese, and Vietnamese communities organized their own groups and associations, there is minimal or no collaboration across these communities. The Filipino and Chinese communities have notable representation in Red Deer and area while the Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese have limited organization and participation.

Low participation from these communities could be attributed to the demands of daily life, low interest and prioritization, and the transient nature of their stay in Canada (e.g., Koreans often relocate for business and typically remain for up to five years).

Although the Asian Canadian population continues to grow, community members still perceive a lack of visibility. This is reflected in the growing presence of the Filipino community in Red Deer, with numerous organized groups, but there is a noticeable underrepresentation in positions of power and leadership.

8. Support from Institutions and Service Providers

While the city and other services provide support for mental health, funding, and programming, the community believes that more culturally tailored and inclusive support is needed to promote equity and better serve Asian Canadian communities. There is a prevailing sense that their voices and calls for assistance are not adequately heard or addressed.

9. Job Security

Although some community members feel that there are more job opportunities in Red Deer, others feel that job security is equally important. The inconsistencies in the guidelines and provisions of immigration policies and programs, such as the Temporary Foreign Worker and International Student programs, contribute to instability in living and working conditions in Alberta.

10. Language

Language barrier and communication is a prevalent challenge across communities. While programs such as ESL (English as a Second Language) and the first language sessions initiated by the respective Asian organizations are offered, there is a lack of interpreters and translators to address this challenge.

Areas for Action

The following themes have emerged as areas of action from the community dialogue in Red Deer and surrounding areas: cultural preservation, intergenerational initiatives, and intercultural collaboration towards transforming systemic barriers, achieving equitable representation, ensuring cultural vitality, and building sustainable community infrastructure. These can be achieved through the following actions:

1. Network and Community

Building meaningful connections to sustain and promote Asian Canadian businesses and professionals. Asian Canadians in Red Deer have prominent businesses which has the potential to organize or collaborate to increase presence and profits of the sector. Leveraging on existing business organizations, networks, and professional mentorship programs from some of the Asian communities will be beneficial.

2. Intergenerational Initiatives

Informative sessions on historical contexts and activities such as intergenerational dialogues within each and across Asian communities will help in understanding the deeper issues of intergenerational and family conflicts. These initiatives will identify corresponding action points and collaborative measures that will also address challenges in cultural identity and preservation.

3. Build the Asian Canadian Community in Red Deer and Area

Collaborative approaches emerge as crucial for future success. Cross-cultural coalition building enhances collective impact while resource sharing maximizes community benefit. United

advocacy strengthens community voice, and joint programming creates opportunities for shared learning and growth. The work of building community support continues, shaped by both current needs and future vision. As one leader reflects: "We need to find ways in which we could work together and identify some of those key places and points of cooperation."

Fostering intercultural collaboration within the Asian Canadian community can be done through building directories, facilitating mentorship, entrepreneurship, and skill-sharing development programs, and joint advocacy efforts to address shared challenges on space and funding, as well as addressing systemic issues of racism and discrimination.

4. Cultural Preservation

Building on existing activities and programs such as cultural celebrations, first language learning sessions, and the appreciation of popular trends like K-pop and Anime, while introducing more intentional and intercultural initiatives to highlight the histories of the Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Korean communities in Alberta and Canada, can serve as a meaningful step toward cultural preservation. Additionally, communities are encouraged to give importance to documentation of history, development, and contributions of their individual communities and create pathways to sustain and effectively use these records.

5. Youth Engagement

The community places great value on its youth, recognizing their potential to be future leaders who will preserve and uphold their culture and heritage while being guided away from harmful influences. Existing initiatives within the Chinese, Filipino and other Asian communities offer opportunities for expansion and innovation in youth programs. Intercultural youth activities will build knowledge and capacity of Asian Canadian youth at the same time strengthen the community as a whole. Moreover, harnessing the youth's interest in social justice and equity will foster collaborative actions to address long-standing issues of racism and discrimination.

6. Capacity Building

Capacity and knowledge building on leadership, access to funding, professional development, civic participation, systems and policy change engagement, networking, multiculturalism and multicultural communication, and community building is a key step in addressing the challenges that the Asian Canadians in Red Deer are facing. Cross cultural sharing of skills, knowledge, and programming will be beneficial for the whole community.

7. Representation

The Asian Canadian community has the potential to increase their individual and community voice not only through intercultural collaboration but also through authentic representation and participation in institutional programs, events, and activities. Community members are encouraged to participate in sessions on policies, planning and development, and community building programs initiated by the City of Red Deer, the Alberta government, and other institutions such as the RCMP, Alberta Health, and school boards.

8. Institutional Support

The Intercultural Dialogue in Red Deer extended beyond Asian Canadian communities, with notable participation from service providers, institutions, government representatives, and support services, all aiming to better understand the community's needs. While the dialogue clearly emphasized the importance of accessible spaces and program funding, institutional organizations and service providers should remain actively engaged by attending both individual and joint community events to stay attuned to the evolving needs of the community.

FEEDBACK

The dialogue received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, with many expressing enthusiasm for more intercultural, collaborative programs and events. Participants appreciated learning about the other Asian communities as well as the stories of community leaders. Participants also recommended inviting more Asian communities and allotting more time for community table discussions as points of improvement for future similar events.

ATTACHMENTS

- Background Paper on the History, Contributions, and Participation of Asian Canadians in Alberta (focused on Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese communities)
- Project Background Slides presented by Teresa Woo-Paw
- Community Slides by panel speakers
- Note: Full audio recording of the dialogue will be available on the ACCT Foundation website and social media platforms.

CONTACT

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