

City Recognized for Role in Helping Professional Immigrants Make the Transition Receives IEC-BC Leadership Award

VANCOUVER, BC - Vancouver City Manager Dr. Penny Ballem recalls the impact on the city's leadership team as they heard the stories of the first new Canadians that City staff had mentored through the IEC-BC's MentorConnect program.

"About 10 city staff volunteered to mentor that first year and they came, with their mentees, to talk to senior staff," says Ballem who was an IEC-BC board member for five years.

"It was extremely powerful. We were shocked at how hard it is for people who arrive here. We realized how much we could help, by buffing up their CVs and putting new immigrants in touch with people."

A supporter of IEC-BC since the 2008 Metro Vancouver Leaders' Summit on Immigrant Employment where IEC-BC was launched, the City of Vancouver was also the first employer to partner in IEC-BC's mentoring program. The City's commitment to immigrant integration was honoured at the IEC-BC inaugural leadership awards event on April 9. This event recognized the contributions of 13 individuals and organizations helping skilled new Canadians integrate in BC workplaces.

Ballem said the mentoring program has been transformational for city staff. "We're a big, diverse, colourful organization with 10,000 staff," she says. "I really wanted to do this project in areas such as finance and engineering."

One of the first to volunteer as a mentor was Peter Judd, the city's chief engineer, whom IEC-BC also recognized with a Leadership Award.

"Peter took this on with so much enthusiasm," says Ballem. "He has a huge portfolio but he never gave it a second thought. He never said 'I'm too busy'. He's a great role model." Word of the mentoring program spread through the City and more and more people stepped up to volunteer as mentors.

"This program has been really good for staff," she says. "We're a diverse employer and very proud of that. You can't get better exposure than working with someone from a different background. You can always learn more about other parts of the world and different histories.

"We've been moved to tears by the stories of what people go through when they arrive in Canada and the impact we've been able to have. I tell my friends in other municipalities, 'you should do this'."

The City was also the first to partner in IEC-BC's Connector program in which job-ready immigrants are connected with people in their industry to help build professional networks.



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Funded by the Government of Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Province of BC, IEC-BC is a provincial non-government organization that stimulates the integration of skilled immigrant talent into the province's workforce by fostering solutions, building connections and being a champion to help employers attract and retain skilled immigrant talent.

To learn more about the IEC-BC Leadership Recognition awards visit <http://iecbc.ca/2015-leadership-awards>