

The latest story in our SMART Fund series

## Immigrant Families Learn English and Make Friends at Community Kitchens



**“I have too little family, and I get to make new friendships and improve my skills.”**

**– Group Participant**

Family Services of Greater Vancouver (FSGV) runs community kitchens in Richmond to help families, mostly newcomers to Canada, meet other people, build social support networks, and develop language skills, with support from our VCH SMART Fund\*. Groups meet at community centres and churches to cook together anywhere from weekly to once or twice a month.

“Sharing food has universal appeal,” says Elaine Shearer, Program Manager of Community Education Development Services for FSGV in Richmond. “Making meals together is an easy and fun way for people to meet new friends and learn basic language skills. Our cooking club participants share recipes from their country of origin, and begin new friendships that last outside the group. “As people start to feel safer, we learn

more about them. For example, they ask about work and housing options, what schools are like here, how to get their kids to eat properly, or relationship issues. Our program coordinator and volunteers tailor education to each group, with information on nutrition, budgeting, and how to access health and social services. These groups can reduce isolation, and help people integrate into their new community, which can be challenging for newcomers.”

Part of the community kitchen program involves more intensive language classes for immigrant and refugee mothers and preschool children who face many challenges settling in Canada. These groups meet for ten weekly sessions to cook, practice English and learn more about life in Canada. Speakers discuss topics relevant to the group, such as the

importance of immunizations. Recent sessions have been held for Chinese, Persian and African immigrants.

To make the program more accessible to isolated families, a preschool program is offered while the mothers meet, where children learn to cooperate and do activities together during circle times, similar to the circles they’ll encounter in school here. Without this type of experience the transition to school in Canada can be difficult, especially if there are language barriers.

For information call 604-279-7100 and ask for Community Kitchens.

*\*Vancouver Coastal Health’s SMART Fund supports innovative, cost-effective initiatives that promote and improve health. SMART projects build community capacities, skills and assets to help communities manage their health needs.*

## current

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