



## Circulating VLIP updates and information as we finalize the direction of our Strategic Priority Working Groups.

This newsletter connects service providers and VLIP members with information on the status of the Partnership, while promoting community resources, events and initiatives that support the creation of a welcoming and inclusive Vancouver.

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### VLIP UPDATES

## Strategic Priority Working Groups are Here

We ended 2022 with some highly anticipated news – the announcement of our Strategic Priority Working Groups!



We decided upon a total of **7 Strategic Priority Working Groups**, split between the 4 Strategic Priority Areas:

- Cross-Sectoral Collaboration Emerging/Underrepresented Communities
- Equity Related Work
- Digital Hub
- Community of Practice
- Employment Solutions
- Research & Development
- Influence Policy Change

The purpose of each Strategic Priority Working Group (SPWG) is to support the vision and work of the VLIP. SPWG are comprised of VLIP Co-Managers, VLIP Council, and Members-at-Large.

If you are interested in learning more about the work the VLIP Strategic Priority Groups are doing, [reach out](#) to us directly.

Membership is required to participate in these working groups - but - it's never too late to join the Partnership. We do accept applications on an ongoing basis.

Council applications and more information found [here](#)

## End of Year Party

In addition to announcing the Strategic Priority Working Groups (SPWGs) we sent off 2022 in style! – with a huge celebration at Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House.



*Figure 1 - Elder Lorelai opens the event.*



*Figure 2 - A view of the VLIP Appreciation Party from the back of the party room.*



*Figure 3 - IAT Members receive their Certificates of Appreciation.*

On Thursday, February 15, 2022, Members of the Vancouver Local Immigration Partnership got together for the first time in-person since the partnership first reconvened last February. We hosted a hybrid Year-End Party/Member Appreciation Party at Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, and had over 25 attendees show up, despite the frosty weather.

We had snacks, and cake, a progress report, a guest presentation, and a celebration ceremony for our participants of our Storytelling Series, and Immigrant Advisory Table.



*Figure 4 - Guest Speaker Logan shares his story with the group*



*Figure 5 - A group photo of everyone at the event*

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

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### Stories of Migration: From Afghanistan to Canada – One Man’s Journey

By: A.A.



*Figure 6 - Shah Do-Shamshira Mosque, Kabul*

My name is A.A.

I was born and raised in Kabul, the beautiful capital of an ancient land locked country, Afghanistan.

For as far as I can remember, Afghanistan has been fighting off invaders and trying to maintain independence and peace. After decades of war and USSR invasion and to pursue those civil wars in the country during the Presidency of Hamid Karzai, we were given an opportunity to get quality education once again.

## My Background

As a young man I enjoyed physical activities such as swimming, badminton, hunting, fishing, volleyball, and body building. I didn't know that these hobbies would build in me physical and mental strength to endure what was to come.

I was an A student all through my university years, and because of my interest and good grades my parents and everyone around me wanted me to study medicine, but I wanted to help the Afghans in my own way.

I wanted to study criminal law and understand Human Rights and help my people get back to their historic glory and reach their full potential. I wanted to work in Foreign Affairs to help the world see Afghanistan as it truly was.

When I completed High School, I went to study Law and Political science in university, and then went on to get a master's in Criminal law and Criminology.



Figure 7 - American International School (AIS) in Kabul



Figure 8 - Senior English Class at AIS

## Supporting the Human Rights of the Afghans

Way before completing my masters, I started working for different organizations supporting the Human Rights of the Afghans.

I worked as Human Rights Field Monitoring team leader, then moved on to the position of Monitoring and Investigating assistant and Officer, and later I became part of Monitoring & Evaluation Unit of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), before shifting to a Child Rights Protection Officer. Soon, I was promoted to Project Manager for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law training programs. The Afghanistan Independent Human

Rights Commission (AIHRI) was a national constitutional organization, but its donors were from different countries, including

During my service with the AIHRC, the chairperson of the organization went to the US with the president of Afghanistan for a meeting and on her return, she encouraged all staff working in the organization to apply for immigration to either the US, Canada, Germany, or any other country where we may have family or friends. She told to HR to give all the staff the IRCC email addresses.

## The Journey to Canada Begins

I chose to apply for immigration to Canada for myself, my wife, our four children, my mother, and my younger brother. The application was among the first to be accepted by IRCC and the immigration process began.

## Growing Unrest with the Taliban

In the meantime, the Taliban once again started gaining control of Afghanistan.

In 2021, when they overtook Kabul, our organization was among the first to be forcefully shut down.

All staff went into hiding and I received a written threat to my life. My family and I went into hiding, leaving our home and staying with family and friends in different cities. This went on for months. Taliban presence was everywhere.

Although the Taliban had announced a general amnesty, some reports indicated covert assassinations. And it could even be heard that the Taliban were using biometric devices to identify individuals.

During those months in hiding, we were living on money that was sent by my uncle who lived in Germany. I had to stay off the streets often. My family members would go and shop for food and necessities of life.

## Getting to the Gates

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, I received confirmation from IRCC to leave Afghanistan for Canada.

I, along with my wife, children, brother and my mother went to Kabul airport but we couldn't reach the gates. With thousands of people trying to leave the country, we couldn't even get close to the gates. We decided to come back the next day and returned to where we were hiding.

We received instructions from IRCC to get to the airport from the East Gate by way of the Baran Hotel.

The east side of the airport was surrounded by a big moat that worked as security line between the airport and the city, this side was not used for entry to the airport during any time and

anyone wanting to get to the airport from this part of the city would have to go through the moat that was filled with muddy, dirty water.

My family and I tried two more times to get to the gate by way of the moat, the second time, we could not find the Canadian soldiers, and the third time, my son slipped and fell in the moat. I pulled him out just in time, but we couldn't make it to the gates on time again. My son is traumatized by the whole event and still has a fear of airports.

The next day, we decided that I would go by myself, and if I make it inside the gates I would call the rest of the family to join me. With this intent I headed to the East side of Kabul airport. When I reached there, I received an email from IRCC asking us to leave the area immediately as there was a threat of an attack from ISIS: ISIS had found out that the East side was being used for rescuing the people and they planned an attack.

I ran to the safety of the place we were living and later heard that hundreds of innocent children and soldiers had died in those bomb blasts. It was a sad sight and one of the saddest days of my life. The memory of that horrific day brings me unbearable pain and tears.

After this incident, in August 2021, the rescue was stopped for a few months. We had to stay in hiding while waiting to get instructions from IRCC.

Finally in December 2021, we received an email from IRCC asking us to leave and go to Islamabad, Pakistan. We needed to get visas to land in Pakistan, and had to pay 20 times the regular fee in US Dollars to get tickets for a family of 8 people. After 4 months in hiding we went, once again, to Kabul airport on Dec 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021, and left for Pakistan. We stayed in Pakistan for a month and on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, we left to come to Canada.

## Present Day

My journey in life may have been that of constant struggle but I am happy where I am at now. I am doing what I always wanted to do, serving the Afghans and all those newcomers who have faced similar circumstances as me and have arrived in Canada looking to find peace and success.

I work as Newcomer Afghan Settlement Worker and support the Temporary Foreign Workers at South Vancouver Neighborhood House. I am hopeful that the love and pride which I carry in my heart for my people will give me direction and the painful memories of our struggle will help me stay grounded and ever ready to support those in need.

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If you would like to join the Partnership, it's never too late! We accept membership applications on an ongoing basis. Council applications and more information found [here](#).



This portion of our newsletter highlights the community behind the Partnership. From program offerings, to news and events, check out all the things our Partners have to offer in the VLIP Community Corner.

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## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS & SERVICES

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Check out these new program updates from:

- [PIRS](#)
- [South Vancouver Neighbourhood House](#)

### PIRS

#### WINTER 2023 PROGRAMS TERM AT PIRS

As the winter term begins, we have a variety of exciting initiatives and opportunities in the works! We are pleased to introduce some of our new projects, as well as share the opportunities to join our long-standing programs.

#### PIRS PROGRAMS UPDATES AT A GLANCE



[Pathways to Childcare Careers](#) program welcomed its second cohort of participants on **January 3rd** after the first cohort's remarkable success.



**Ukrainian Women Support Circle** opened its virtual doors to participants on **January 16th**.

Check out the [program flyer](#) for more information.





[Building Bridges](#) program is ready to welcome the new cohort of participants starting on **February 23rd!**

View our [program flyer](#) for more information about the program and how to register.

To see all our offerings for this term, please click [here](#)

## BUILDING A CHILDCARE SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN PROJECT



The [Childcare Leadership Group](#) has made significant efforts over the past year to raise awareness about the systemic barriers present in the childcare sector and propose solutions based on inclusion,

accessibility, gender equity, and anti-racism. Recently, the group released an infographic that offers a snapshot of the realities of immigrant and refugee women in the childcare sector.

To access the infographic and learn more, please click [here](#).

## NEW PROJECTS TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUITY AND AMPLIFY VOICES OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN



Canada has started creating a comprehensive food policy only recently to ensure food security among the most vulnerable populations.

**The Immigrant Women Food Policy Group (IWFPG)** at PIRS is exploring how to integrate immigrant and refugee women's perspectives and voices into this national policy. In collaboration with the Kwantlen Polytechnic University's research team, the Group consisting of 11 women is running in full swing and is currently brainstorming ideas and issues to be shared and discussed at the Stakeholders' Meetings between March and May, 2023.

The Group members will facilitate five meetings to engage with key food policy stakeholders in Metro Vancouver and contribute their shares to make the national policy more inclusive and equitable.

**Period poverty** affects individuals who menstruate, including women and girls, globally. However, there is a lack of effective solutions to address this issue. In December 2022, PIRS became one of the organizations funded by the United Way BC to carry out a pilot project to advance period equity. We are

honored to amplify the voices of immigrant and refugee women in this important work and will share more updates when they become available. In the meantime, please check out the [Period Promise](#) campaign by the United Way BC and the [Period Promise Research Project Final Report](#).

Last but not least, we are excited to announce that PIRS has joined Canada's [50 - 30 Challenge](#). As of December 5th, we are now one of the 1,818 Challenge Participants pledging to increase the representation and inclusion of equity-deserving groups in leadership positions. Along with signing up for the Challenge, PIRS has also signed an agreement with the [Women's Economic Council \(WEC\)](#). They are one of five Ecosystem Partners funded to co-create unique 50 - 30 activities for Challenge Participants, as they adjust and adapt to building more equitable and diverse organizations, especially at the leadership level. We encourage everyone to check out the Challenge and its tools by visiting: [Canada.ca/50-30-challenge](#).

**For more information about our programs click [here](#)**