



Humjoli (Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society)

<http://pics.bc.ca/>

PROGRAM PROFILE: OVERVIEW

June 2017

Type of Program	Education, Recreation and Creative Arts Programs
Organization	Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society (PICS)
Community Served	Surrey
Program Goal	Reduce social isolation among South Asian women and connect them with community resources
Services Provided	Social group, Peer support, Connection with community resources
Target Population:	South Asian Women 55+
Staffing	Committee of 9 volunteers, Staff support
Program Strengths	Supportive peer group environment, Outreach to isolated South Asian women, Strong ownership of group by members



Pictures from the Diwali Gala organized by Humjoli [Courtesy of PICS]

Program Description

Humjoli, which loosely translates to ‘peer fellowship’ in Punjabi, is a social group initiative targeting older South Asian women to reduce social isolation and connect seniors with community resources. The group is run through the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society (PICS) in Surrey, an organization which provides services to immigrants, seniors, farm workers, women and youth. The program runs weekly (for 2 hours) and provides opportunities for group members to socialize, participate in group activities, receive peer support and connect with community resources. The group is for women over the age of 55, though the majority of members are 65+.

Humjoli runs on a small budget of approximately \$8,000 a year. PICS provides space and staff support for the program, including one staff member who is assigned to support the group (helping to organize events and activities). Humjoli is a drop-in group that fundraises and charges a small drop-in fee (\$2/week) to cover its budget. A committee of nine volunteers from Humjoli is responsible for organizing the group’s activities each week. Most of these volunteers have significant volunteering experience in the community and with other organizations. Volunteers receive an orientation to the program and attend a generic volunteer training run by the City of Surrey. The group activities include things like music, meditation, exercises, peer sharing, educational talks, and refreshments. The committee also arranges special events and trips to places that have included Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, and Harrison Hot Springs. For many participants it was their first time visiting these places. Humjoli recently put on a Diwali Fundraising Gala which had over 300 attendees and included dance performances and a seniors’ fashion show. The Gala raised money for the new complex care home being built by PICS.

Impact

Humjoli helps to decrease social isolation by providing social activities, social support and an opportunity to make contributions to the community. The group empowers participants and encourages them to develop and share their talents such as poetry and singing. There are about 100 different women who attend the group, with approximately 30 attending the group each week. The women actively help to organize and coordinate the group’s activities. The group supports participants to stay physically, mentally and socially active, and helps to connect them with community resources such as HandyDart and Better at Home.

Participants express great appreciation for this group. Some of their comments:

“I love the music and having a captive audience.”

“I like coming here even when I don’t say anything. It makes me happy”

“Like food for the soul.”

“I’ve come to the group since it opened and never miss it.”

“It’s nice to get together. We’re so happy to see each other.”

Strengths and Challenges

Though the program only began in April 2015, Humjoli has been able to successfully outreach to isolated South Asian women and create an environment of mutual support and community. The program gives the participants ownership over the group and its activities, and supports the women to make significant contributions to the group and the wider community. The leadership and commitment of the volunteers and staff has made it possible for the group to organize large scale events (e.g., 300 attendees at the Diwali gala) and trips (e.g., harbour cruise with 60 attendees).

Humjoli is a social group initiative of the Better at Home program run by PICS. While Humjoli goes beyond the scope of the seven core areas of Better at Home services and so cannot be reported back as an official Better at Home outcome, PICS sees the value Humjoli brings to its participants and is committed to supporting it. Participants have very positive feedback about the staff member who assists with the group, which shows the importance of this relationship to the success of the group. Humjoli is starting to outgrow the space provided by PICS. In response, the City of Surrey has offered a larger space, however, the group decided not to move to the city space as it would necessitate moving to a new location and the members would need to pay a membership fee to the recreation facility to access it. Currently the members do pay a group drop-in fee, but all of this fee goes directly into the recreational activities of Humjoli. PICS is also hoping to offer a men's group in the future, if they can find available space and resources to run the program.

Transportation can be a major barrier for seniors attempting to access programs, particularly if they are low-income and particularly in suburban areas with inadequate public transit, such as Surrey. To prevent this from being a barrier, some PICS volunteers and participants carpool those needing transportation, providing 15-20 women with rides to Humjoli each week. Improved access to transportation services in Surrey would help more seniors to access programs and services in their local communities.