

Woven Cultures

Alfred Bessawa of Cameroon, Jabbar Lawani of Benin and Khairunnisa Intiar of Indonesia had been inspired to make New Brunswick more inclusive for some time. So, in late 2017, they started a project called Woven Cultures.

The co-founders developed this diversity workshop for children and youth in hopes of helping them to observe, understand and appreciate the diversity around them and to discuss ways to be more inclusive in their communities.

The goal is for all children – regardless of their cultural identity – to accept and be proud of who they are and to understand that everyone has a cultural story to tell in the multicultural mosaic that is Canada and in the global society.

As immigrants, the Woven Cultures' team wanted to promote how cultural diversity and inclusion make a positive impact in our community. They wanted to show that we are richer because of our differences and that our differences make us “awesome.” They worked with local teachers, local multicultural associations and diversity champions for guidance and feedback on how to reach intended audiences with their project and on how to pilot the initiative. Today, they continue to work with these partners.

After the founders began workshops in some Moncton classrooms, Kieutri Aulia of Indonesia joined the team and the project was expanded. Workshops were soon taking place not only in classrooms but also at multicultural events as far away as the Restigouche area and most recently at Afro Fest in Dieppe.

They have also presented to teachers from across New Brunswick, thanks to an invitation from NouLAB, New Brunswick's social and economic development lab.

The team has also brought their program to block parties in Moncton's Parkton neighbourhood hosted by Erika Cantu, United Way's Diversity Champion. As well, the team works closely with Le CAFi and the Boys and Girls Club of Moncton. Woven Cultures also collaborated with Katimavik volunteers to hold awareness-raising events like a community dance in the park.

While children and youth are the focus of the Woven Cultures initiative, the team also hopes to reach parents through their children. In addition to helping international students, adult immigrants and locals connect, the team is also working to expand its programming to facilitate dialogue between them. One of the team's first efforts to do this is by creating video content to address misunderstandings that may happen from different cultural behaviours.

While Woven Cultures is currently taking a regional approach with their educational workshops and collaboration with individuals, schools and organizations, the team realizes their potential reach is much greater. Beyond the workshops and other events, team members are serving as ambassadors of diversity on a daily basis wherever they go, sharing a message of peace and harmony. As youth educators and newcomers, the team is always seeking to understand diverse perspectives and create a sense of belonging for all.

We applaud Woven Cultures for creating a more inclusive and peaceful community through intercultural dialogue and advocacy. Many thanks to the Woven Cultures team for encouraging the important discussion about respect, harmony and peace. Thanks, as well, for showing how everyone can play a part in a more inclusive and equitable community. This outstanding initiative and the continued work of Woven Cultures will result in positive change in our community for many generations to come!