

Helping immigrants to success in Norway



From opening of Norwegian Center for Multicultural Value Creation in January 2006. From left: State Secretary, Department of Trade and Industry, Mr. Frode Berge, Canada's Ambassador, Ms. Jillian Stirk, and the Project Leader for the Center, Zahra Moini.

An initiative by the government and local municipality in Norway is helping the immigrants to succeed in building their own businesses and creating jobs of their own. The unemployment rate among immigrants in Norway is 3 times as high as the total rate of unemployment, with a 2005 figure of about 10%. To balance the unemployment level and to take advantage of the competence, skills and entrepreneurial spirit that immigrants represent, the Norwegian Center for Multicultural Value Creation was established as a 14-month long pilot project in the Drammen region. This national pilot project opened its doors officially in January 2006 and became a reality with financing from the Norwegian government, the local municipalities, and contribution from 27 public and private sector organizations.

Norwegian Center for Multicultural Value Creation is helping the so-called “non-western”, first and second-generation immigrants to start their businesses by providing advisory services, coaching and training in business establishment. The center is unique in its approach in assisting the professional immigrants, and has received extensive and positive attention and support nationwide among the immigrant organizations, government institutions, private organizations and the media. The result of such attention has been that a large number of immigrants have contacted the center and are frequent users of the services provided.

The users approaching the center are relatively diverse. “We have all types of people – from university professors and top researchers to people with no higher education”, says the Center Leader, Zahra Moini, who herself is an immigrant from Iran, with high-level education within ICT and Business Management, and extensive experience from venture startups and Innovation Management. The users come from different corners of the world – so far, 20 countries all from Africa, Asia, South America and former Soviet Union are represented. The business ideas that the immigrant entrepreneurs have come up with are also quite diverse. These range from

establishment of high-tech production facilities to advisory services, service provision, finance, online shops, retail, and dancing lessons.

The diversity of the users and the ideas has necessitated creation of “custom-made” training and advisory services. This way, the center distinguishes itself from other job-creation and business-establishment centers. Through individual advisory and coaching services and network groups a “safe” environment is created for the users to develop their ideas, establish their businesses and network with others of similar or complementary interest. There are also plans to start an “entrepreneur café” where the users can meet and interact with each other.

The training program is based on e-learning combined with class meetings, where the users can access a wealth of information available on Internet on business start-up, financial issues, laws and taxation, etc. A major part of the training program is concentrated on the “soft issues” such as personal development and cultural understanding, using methods derived from the modern co-active coaching techniques.

‘So far, we have positive experience from the training and the advisory services we have provided and the users seem to be satisfied and keep on using the Center’s services. Already we have had few business start-ups with top-motivated entrepreneurs. We are optimistic that we can get close to our ambitious vision (“a multicultural value creating Norway”)', concludes Zahra Moini.