

**NEW PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT DEMYSTIFIES
HOMELESSNESS AND RAISES AWARENESS WITHIN
NEWCOMER COMMUNITY
AVAILABLE IN 12 LANGUAGES**

Toronto – “Don’t Close the Door, It Could Be You” – a new 30 second public service announcement produced by COSTI Immigrant Services is designed to change the perception and attitudes toward the homeless population, enhance awareness within ethnocultural communities, and to engage the general public to participate in practical solutions to homelessness. The public service announcement was funded by the Government of Canada’s Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), administered by the City of Toronto.

“The most common misperception in our City is that the homeless are adults standing in street corners with cups in hand, but in reality, the fastest growing segment of homeless are children and families,” says Mario J. Calla, COSTI’s Executive Director. “As Toronto becomes more expensive to live in, the safety net for at-risk individuals and families is getting thinner and thinner. We hope these ads will encourage people to view the homeless problem in a new way.”

COSTI believes that the community at large can make a difference – landlords by renting and facilitating access without barriers to affordable housing, neighbours – by welcoming newcomers, and tenants – by becoming involved in their communities.

Designed to draw attention to the issue of homelessness within newcomer groups, with a specific focus on their experiences, the public service announcement is available in twelve languages: Arabic, Cantonese, English, Farsi, French, Hindi, Italian, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish, Tamil, and Urdu. The aim of the campaign is to demystify the homeless population by educating and conducting outreach to ethnocultural communities and newcomer groups in a clear, linguistically, and culturally appropriate manner.

New immigrants face many of the risk factors for homelessness simply due to the resettlement process. They may struggle with issues such as isolation, loss of financial and social status, loss of family and community support and post traumatic stress as a result of their pre- and post-migration experiences. In 2005, over 10,000 people accessed COSTI’s housing services – many were in desperate need of decent, affordable housing. COSTI’s housing services provide a vital lifeline to individuals and families facing the ever-growing issues of homelessness and eviction. Without safe, secure, affordable housing, people too often remain trapped in a cycle of poverty. Our housing help services help them to take a major step towards self-reliance.



Background

COSTI Immigrant Services is a community-based multicultural agency providing employment, educational, and social services to new Canadians and individuals in need of assistance. Since 1952, COSTI has been helping those in need, assisting newcomer professionals and tradespersons and all individuals looking for employment, providing hope to refugee families, protecting women and children, strengthening families, combating racism and discrimination, and assisting all those who function at a disadvantage in society. With a staff of over 200 people, speaking more than 60 languages, COSTI strives to ensure that all individuals, regardless of language, cultural, or financial barriers, are given the opportunity to use their existing skills, learn new ones, and participate in all aspects of Canadian life. COSTI presently provides support to over 49,000 individuals annually.

COSTI's Housing Help Centre works with individuals and families, assisting them in breaking free of the shelter system by overcoming barriers to securing safe, affordable, and adequate housing.

Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI): The Government of Canada launched the National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) in December 1999 to support communities' efforts to help homeless persons and those at risk of becoming homeless. As part of the NHI, the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) program, administered by partnering municipalities, is continuing to make a difference by encouraging the development of flexible, community-driven solutions to help alleviate homelessness and support those who are at risk of homelessness. The City of Toronto's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division administers the SCPI program throughout the city as per *The Community Plan for the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative in Toronto, 2003-2006*, which was developed in consultation with the community.

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