

# Local News

*The women will talk about their personal experience of farming; about what draws them to it and keeps them going, but also about its challenges and the issues that affect their daily lives.*

## Actions Interculturelles offering free online programming

By Gordon Lambie

With the extension of the lockdown and the tightening of restrictions, Sherbrooke-based cross-cultural action organization Actions Interculturelles is engaging in a range of free activities online and, in a very limited way, in person to continue its work of promoting cultural diversity.

"We're really in a good position to give (people) a hand," said Jacqueline Belleau Regional Director for the Estrie Region and Quebec with Actions Interculturelles, explaining that the organization just hired a new fully bilingual employee to help specifically with its youth employment program. "We want to make sure our employment programs are as easy to access for anglophones as francophones," she said, acknowledging that language barriers can often stand in the way of a skilled labourer finding their place with an employer they are otherwise well suited to.

Through a mandate from Emploi Quebec, Actions Interculturelles offer s free, personalized support in French and English to help people 30 and

under to find a place in the job market. This, according to Belleau, can be a matter of finding resources to improve language skills or an opportunity to workshop resumes, but also includes a 20-30 week paid job placement where the organization works with both employee and employer to try to ensure a good fit.

"It is very personalized," she said, explaining that the program is based around attention to the youth's skills and abilities and involves direct consultation along the way, and adding that it has adapted will to the realities of the pandemic, with group training sessions possible online and one on one meetings still possible under certain conditions.

On the other end of life, Belleau said that Actions Interculturelles has been able to adapt the program of "intercultural conversation cafés" for seniors that were being developed with Grace Village in Lennoxville to a digital format.

"These are so good," the regional director said. "It's all about trying to exchange between youth and seniors."

Belleau explained that the exchange pairs up a youth from the organization's

"Dialogue-+" anti-racism program with groups in senior's homes for exchanges that cross generational and cultural divides. "It breaks up some of the monotony and isolation," she added, explaining that topics cover broad areas of interest from traditional practices in other cultures to language skills.

The regional director also highlighted the "Defi oser avancer" mentoring and workshop services on skill and leadership development for immigrant, First Nations and Canadian women who want to take on new challenges, laughing as she noted that it was her involvement in this program that led her to take on her current job in the first place.

"It is one of my favourite projects," she said, stressing the focus of empowering women across all walks of life and throughout the country. "It is all about empowering women."

In this case Belleau said that a baseline level of French is important because the activities do take place unilingually, but she described the tone of the activities as an immensely supportive immersion environment.

For those intimidated by the idea of

accessing any or all of these resources on the computer, Actions Interculturelles has an answer for that too. The PING! Internet training project, Belleau said, is very popular and offers assistance from the most basic level of computer operations to more advanced concepts like fact-checking online sources.

The only hiccup in the accessibility of this program for English speaking seniors is that the bilingual resource person associated with the program is working out of Ottawa, meaning that anyone looking to take advantage needs to have at least some comfort interacting online already.

"These are things that can be hard to explain over the phone," Belleau said

In light of the challenges around getting in contact at the moment, the regional director said that anyone looking to reach out about any of the programs of Actions Interculturelles can call her directly at [873-662-2334](tel:873-662-2334).

The organization also just launched a new website, [aide.org](http://aide.org), with more information on all of its programs, although Belleau said that most information is not yet available there in English.