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IBRAHIMA DIALLO

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*He was the first SFM Chair  
from Africa.  
He served from 2006 to 2011.*

photo: Marta Guerrero

"When I arrived from Senegal in 1984, my situation was special because I was joining my Franco-Manitoban wife, Lise, and my daughter Anna Binta. So I already had a Franco-Manitoban family who had told me a lot about Manitoba and Francophones in minority communities. I was aware of this

and I knew where to go. But the other Francophones who arrived before the Accueil francophone was created, they had to fend for themselves or go for help in an Anglophone structure that was disconnected from the Francophone community. It was very difficult without mastering English.

# Better reception

## TO BETTER RETAIN NEWCOMERS

BY CAMILLE HARPER

**T**wo years after taking the lead in opening up by adopting the *Shared Framework*, the community realized that the institutional and organizational structures were not adequate to optimally welcome a large number of Francophone immigrants.

Bintou Sacko, Director of the Accueil francophone since 2005, says: "In the early 2000s, the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface (CUSB, now the Université de Saint-Boniface) was conducting international student recruitment campaigns and we received a wave of Moroccans. That made us realize that there was a need for a structure to welcome them."

In 2003, Rolande Kirouac was the first manager of the Accueil francophone: "It was a really interesting challenge because we were creating something brand new. We had to create the structure, the documentation, align the funding, everything."

"We couldn't deliberately recruit waves of Francophone immigrants and then not welcome and integrate them properly afterwards!"

While the task at hand was great, Rolande Kirouac emphasizes the support of the community: "Immediately, there was a lot of interest in working with us, even among English speakers. The community was very happy to see that services and processes were in place for people who would be arriving in Manitoba. We also had the support of the provincial and federal governments."

Bintou Sacko adds: "The Accueil francophone was set up following a community consultation, so the community wanted this structure. The only challenge was to ensure that this project achieved its objectives."

One of the first projects of the manager, who worked on her own until 2007, was to create a pamphlet bringing together all the services scattered throughout the community that could be useful to newcomers.

She also set up a system to pick up newcomers at the airport and accompany them through the administrative process. Bintou Sacko explains: "The programs at the Accueil francophone were established as numbers and agreements increased."

"Reception and settlement were the first priorities, followed by longer-term follow-up. We then created a network of volunteers because it was a social project, so community involvement was essential. Our transitional housing, refugee resettlement and pre-departure programs were established more recently."

Rolande Kirouac notes that "it was a whole new language that was developing; for the first time, newcomers were identified as a specific clientele to be served within our community." ▶

The language element is extremely strong when you drop everything to go elsewhere. With the Accueil francophone, set up by the SFM, Francophone newcomers were able to connect directly to the community in a language they understood. It was reassuring for them. And for the Franco-Manitoban

community as well, it was important to have the Accueil, so that it wouldn't lose interest in all these newcomers and would become aware of the advantages of having them here. It was essential that the connection be made as soon as they arrived."