



Highlighting Rural Researchers

November 2024 | Issue 11

Katrina Casulla

Brandon Local Immigration Partnership Coordinator

GETTING TO KNOW KATRINA CASULLA

Katrina Casulla is the Coordinator of the [Brandon Local Immigration Partnership](#) (BLIP), based in Brandon, Manitoba. BLIP is a project of the [Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation](#) (BNRC) – a local non-profit aimed at supporting community. Katrina's personal connection to rural life runs deep, with her family first settling in Oakburn, Manitoba after arriving in Canada from the Philippines. Katrina first moved to Brandon, Manitoba in 2011, as she wanted to expand her opportunities - starting with advancing her education while still remaining close to family and friends. This move allowed for personal and professional growth, as she began to take on roles within the field of immigration and newcomer services.

RESEARCH AND EXPERIENCE

Katrina's early life and education instilled a strong sense of community which has continued to influence her career. From her high school days, through university, Katrina actively participated in community-based initiatives, such as youth advisory councils, and taking on local leadership roles that allowed her to engage with diverse groups. Initially, Katrina was interested in pursuing a career in law, obtaining a degree in Business Administration with a specialization in Legal Management from Ateneo de Naga University in the Philippines. When she came to Brandon, she pursued a 4-year Arts degree, which turned into a double major in Sociology Crime and Community. she pursued a degree in Arts which turned to a double major: 4-year Arts major in Sociology Crime and Community and 3-year Arts in Psychology with specialization in Gender in International Perspective. This path broadened her perspectives on community issues and cultural diversity. After completing her studies, Katrina was interested in continuing in a career field where she could work with diverse communities and promote equity. This resulted in her enrollment at Università degli Studi di Padova (University of Padova) in Italy, in the Human Rights and Multi-level Governance Graduate Studies Program. This also paved way for Katrina to be granted a Swiss Mobility Program Scholarship by the Swiss Government to attend Université de Genève (University of Geneva) in Switzerland. There she took courses in International Organizations and Politics. These studies provided her with valuable insights and practical skills, especially in understanding complex social issues, and how these issues affect immigrants in Canada.

Soon after completing her studies, Katrina achieved positions where she was able to work with immigrants and newcomers. One of her earliest roles includes conducting work at Westman Immigrant Services (WIS), where she was the Employment Facilitator assisting immigrants in securing meaningful employment. In her many roles at WIS, she provided newcomers with guidance on navigating local resources, and helped them to establish stable lives within the

WHAT'S MORE

- *We are currently celebrating Katrina's first full year as the BLIP Coordinator*
- *Katrina is a previous intern for the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland*
- *During her time at WIS, Katrina held five different positions and roles*



**Rural Development Institute
Brandon University
270-18th Street,
Brandon, MB R7A 6A9**





Through the initiatives of this program, [we can be the] one to connect partnerships, and see what we can do together

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BLIP is a Project of the BNRC,
with funding and support provided by:



BNRC

BRANDON
NEIGHBOURHOOD
RENEWAL
CORPORATION

community. Her experience as a newcomer herself allowed her to empathize deeply with the challenges faced by those she engaged in these positions. Her work at WIS reinforced her desire to directly provide services for immigrants, and build programs that foster community cohesion. As these interests grew, Katrina decided to pursue the position as the BLIP Coordinator, where she began to explore how we can better serve immigrants and newcomers in their transition to Brandon, Manitoba.

ONGOING RESEARCH AND CURRENT PROJECTS

Katrina is spearheading and facilitating several major projects designed to address the evolving needs of immigrant and newcomer communities. One of her primary initiatives was to support the continuing development of the Immigrant Advisory Table (IAT) – originally launched in 2020. Following some organizational changes, Katrina restructured the program to ensure it accurately represented the lived experiences of immigrants and newcomers. She has worked diligently to bring together individuals with relevant settlement experience, ensuring that the IAT reflects diverse perspectives.

As well, she has worked to organize and facilitate the first Welcome Week hosted here in Brandon. This week-long event was designed to ensure immigrants and newcomers were able to better understand the resources within community – covering topics such as social integration, finances, and much more. As resources for immigrants and newcomers in Manitoba are urban-focused (predominantly showcasing resources from Winnipeg), Katrina worked to consolidate relevant data for those in Brandon, and other rural spaces. Through these endeavours, she has also consolidated relevant information to populate the BLIP Welcome Page with comprehensive information to consider before arriving in Brandon. This page is tailored specifically to address the unique aspects of Brandon, offering practical information on housing, employment, education, and local culture. Through these initiatives, Katrina has created resources that empower newcomers and support their successful integration into Brandon's social fabric.

Alongside these initiatives and events, Katrina is leading a [data-driven project](#) in collaboration with the [Rural Development Institute](#). This project is aimed at evaluating whether or not the existing services in Brandon are meeting the needs of immigrants and newcomers. As research on immigration in Manitoba is limited, this project poses an opportunity to identify crucial gaps in services by conducting focus group conversations, and shedding light on the lived experience of others. Katrina aims to foster the importance of evidence-based improvements in local immigrant services. This data collection will be critical – not only for service providers, but for policymakers who are in positions to give shape to programs impacting community. Katrina believes that aligning services with the genuine needs of newcomers is essential for long-term community growth and integration.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Katrina's dedication to supporting immigrants and newcomers reflects her deep commitment to community development and social equity. Her extensive background, both academically and professionally, has equipped her with a unique blend of skills that she applies to her work at BLIP. Her work continues to build bridges between service providers and newcomers, fostering a collaborative approach that is essential for a thriving and inclusive community. With her proactive vision and passion for equitable community development, Katrina is poised to make a lasting impact on Brandon's immigrant support landscape.

