

Website for foreign brides aims to educate newcomers on legal rights

EDMON ROTEA
News Staff

A joint effort between the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension, the Legal Resource Centre, the Alberta Law Foundation, and the Changing Together organization launched a website last month to help educate foreign brides and immigrant women about marital relationships and the law in Canada.

The website, www.lawforforeignbrides.ca, covers a gamut of topics, from issues to consider before marriage, the immigration process, living in Canada, child issues, Canadian law, and topics concerning marital breakdown—and all in easy-to-understand English.

The initial idea for the website was conceived and developed by Changing Together, a non-profit agency that helps immigrant women.

"We saw the need for legal information based on our experiences in helping the foreign brides in the past few years," said San San Sy, who served previously as chair for Changing Together during the website's initial development. "Three years ago, we experienced an increase in foreign brides coming to Changing Together for assistance."

Besides overseas relationships and traditional arranged-marriage practices, Sy commented that many foreign brides coming to Canada also meet their future spouses online via chat rooms and Internet match-making agencies. The website can be accessed from anywhere, and it

doesn't require its users to register to view the site's contents, allowing individuals to access the information anonymously.

"We came up with the idea of using the Web as the venue to develop and present legal information from the perspective of the foreign brides, as there are brides who met their spouses [online]," Sy said. Changing Together also conducted focus groups and interviews with foreign brides and other agencies in determining the site's content—especially from the context and perspective of a foreign bride herself.

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SAN SAN SY

FORMER CHAIR OF CHANGING TOGETHER

Such an effort required monetary sponsorship from the Alberta Law Foundation, which provided a grant for website development. The website's content was then developed by the Legal Resource Centre, a public legal education program that's

supported by the U of A's Faculty of Extension.

"One of the goals of the legal studies unit in the Faculty of Extension is to give people in the community access to legal information, including immigrants and marginalized groups," said Dr Katy Campbell, the interim dean of the Faculty of Extension. Campbell explained that the website is also a means for the faculty, in association with the Legal Resource Centre, to engage in community partnerships in the areas of research and social action.

"The programs and projects of the Legal Resource Centre focus on creating accessible, plain-language information about the law for the public. Our role was to design and create the website and check the content for legal accuracy," said Diane Rhyason, the Legal Resource Centre's executive director.

For now, the goal of the website is to provide legal information in plain English. It's yet to be determined whether the website's content will be translated to other languages due to the nature of translating law and the costs associated with such a task.

"We know that to have Canadian law written in different languages is more than just translation. Translation without context is very misleading," Sy said, citing recent statistics that 80 per cent of immigrants have some form of English language capabilities. "Our experience also indicates that many women tend to turn to other women for help in solving problems and [other] issues."



MIKE OTTO

IDLE WISHES HUB Mall resident Kurt Cameron wants the U of A to start being stricter about its anti-idling regulations.

Idling on campus sparks debate

IDLING • CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Despite signs warning drivers of fines for idling that surround the air intake vents that service HUB and the Business building, Cameron noted that he's never seen anyone ticketed. Even in extreme cases where he witnessed people idling there for hours at a time, he said no fines have been handed down.

As a result, he said he's taken it upon himself to go talk to idling drivers and the University administration to try and remedy the situation. But despite his efforts, he said both parties have just asked him to stop bothering them.

"I guess I can say that the issue itself has been a concern, but also the way the University has dealt with it has been a concern," Cameron said. "You know, we've been taught about critical thinking and 'whatsoever things are true,' and yet when that's applied to the University, they're not so keen on it."

However, Don Hickey, University Vice-President (Facilities & Operations), rejects the notion that the University is doing nothing to deal with the issue.

"We've done the [air quality] testing and tested both on the exterior and also within the residence units and found everything well within limits."

DON HICKEY

U OF A VP (FACILITIES & OPERATIONS)

Apart from signs around the air intake vents, he points to progress in building awareness among

University staff about idling, as well as putting reminder stickers in University vehicles, among other things.

"We've done the [air quality] testing and tested both on the exterior and also within the residence units and found everything well within limits," Hickey explained.

Despite these measures, Cameron claims he's still smelling car exhaust in his apartment and seeing cars sit and idle right beside air intake fans. As a result, he's pushing for a bylaw with some teeth so that people with complaints like his can call bylaw officers with their concerns.

"Simply telling people it would be nice to turn off your car and do something positive for the environment just isn't having a big enough effect," Cameron explained. "There needs to be some sort of follow-up consequence, otherwise people just say 'I'm not doing this.'"



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