

**Adjusting to Life in Brookline:
A Community Program for International Newcomers**

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This paper discusses a community-based program in Brookline, Massachusetts, which grew out of a recognized need to help international newcomers in the process of adjusting to a new community and a new society. Through building crucial partnerships with the Brookline school system and other community leaders, the creators of this program have been able to reach and serve many new international residents, representing over 30 countries and five continents during the past three years. The paper outlines the program curricula that consists of twelve sessions and covers an array of topics from understanding cultural differences, dealing with cross-cultural challenges, raising bilingual children to parenting in America and understanding American schools. Lastly, the paper discusses the impact of the program in helping international newcomers to be aware of the challenges of an international transition, learn about American culture, and get to know other people who are experiencing similar adjustment difficulties. Finally, a vision of the future that calls for creating cross-cultural leaders, building local networks of support, and establishing community partnerships in creating programs similar to the Adjusting to Life in Brookline Program to support international newcomers is offered.

Introduction

In today's trend toward globalization, international companies, educational institutions, military services, and governments around the world are relying more and more on employees and their families to live and work in a foreign country. Whether such a foreign assignment is six months to a year or longer, having the opportunity to work and live abroad can be both a daunting and very exciting prospect for expatriates and their families.

When moving to a foreign country, expatriates have opportunities for learning about other cultures, for challenging themselves in new ways and for living more adventurous lives. Along with those new opportunities, however, comes a whole host of dilemmas, such as learning the cultural values and social norms of the host country, learning a foreign language, navigating through governmental bureaucracies, managing the logistics of daily living, making new friends, and being far away from one's family and social network (Copeland, 2009). These dilemmas naturally occur in the process of making such a daring commitment to relocate internationally. They cannot be avoided.

International companies have recognized the importance of offering cross-cultural training to employees and their accompanying families when they relocate to other countries (Corporate Leadership Council, June, 2002; Corporate Leadership Council, April 2002). These training sessions help the employee and his/her family to quickly and smoothly adjust to a new place, thus resulting in a higher efficiency and productivity of the transferred employee. Some universities also offer similar training sessions to international students and fellows arriving from overseas, so that they can effectively complete a degree or a specific training program. However, individuals and families arriving in a new country often have to navigate the challenges of the new culture with little support. Families who move to a new community in a new country often have different perceptions of social and cultural events in their new host country that can cause misunderstanding and can interfere with their personal adjustment. Additionally, the inability to make one's perceptions understood also affect interpersonal relations with host nationals resulting in isolation and different degrees of stress.

Brookline, Massachusetts, is a community just west of Boston that receives individuals and families from all over the world every year because of its proximity to many renowned universities and hospitals. Most the people arriving in Brookline from all over the world come to work or study and, therefore, are considered as "people in international transition." Their expectation is that, after staying for a couple of years and accomplishing certain personal goals of professional training, they will go back to their home countries. Whether they end up going back home or staying in the US, they face issues of accommodating to cultural differences. In spite of the fact that Brookline is an open community that welcomes people from different cultural backgrounds, it lacks an organized system to help individuals and families adjust to the new community.

At present, the kindergarten to 12th grade English Language Learners (ELL) program in the Brookline Public Schools has had over 490 international students, speaking 32 different languages, from approximately 250 families during this past school year. These numbers only take into account children enrolled in the ELL program, suggesting that the number of foreign students and families in town is higher. During the first months after arriving in a new country, families can feel overwhelmed when setting up their new home and starting their family life in a different culture. Brookline schools have attempted to ease foreign students transition challenges by developing an individualized approach for each school. For example, one elementary school hosts students from Spanish-speaking countries and for many years has organized a series of meetings to help the new families in their adjustment, offering many practical tips and giving the new families the opportunity to meet each other and to create a support network. ELL teachers, however, are often overwhelmed by the amount of work; furthermore, the implementation of these meetings is typically beyond the scope of their responsibilities.

Many individuals arriving in Brookline attend the English classes provided by the Brookline Adult Education program. For many years, several committed individuals in this program have been interested in providing help to these international students in the transitioning process, but

the town of Brookline has lacked an appropriate program to provide the assistance needed by people transitioning to a new culture.

The Adjusting to Life in Brookline Program grew out of such a need in the community and was designed and developed by community members living in the town of Brookline. This unique program seeks to foster and build community connection for new international families moving and adjusting to life in the town of Brookline. Many of these families have children in the Brookline school district and many do not. The program is open to all international newcomers who are new to Brookline.

Quite simply, the purpose of the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program is to help international newcomers in the process of adjusting to a new society and transitioning into their new community. The program is unique in the fact that it provides a safe place where newcomers can share their experiences, ask questions, and receive information in an environment of mutual respect. More importantly, the program utilizes intercultural training sessions to help newcomers overcome signs of cultural shock by building confidence and helping them to adjust to their new community more easily. This allows them to rapidly become productive members of the community.

Background

The Adjusting to Life in Brookline Program was born and grew from the interest of two people who experienced first-hand the difficulty of moving from one country to another and who discovered that it was just as hard to return to their home country after having been abroad for several years as it was to adjust to life in a new country.

Liliana Busconi, Ph.D., is a scientist and a college professor, native of Argentina, who moved to Brookline in 1990 with her husband and two children to do her post-doctoral training at Harvard Medical School. After six years, she went back to her home country, but she and her family returned to Brookline in 2001. Andrew L. Miser, Ph.D., is a developmental psychologist, professional coach, and educator with 35 years of experience working with individuals, families, teams and organizations. Andy moved to The Netherlands with his family, where they stayed from 2002 to 2006. During this time, he launched his international coaching and consulting business.

As a consequence of her international moves, Liliana became very interested in the challenges of adapting to a new society and returning to one's home country. This interest led her to take a course to be trained on cross-cultural challenges. She was familiar with the Brookline school system and the support that English Language Learners (ELL) teachers offer to new families. At the beginning of the school year, ELL teachers organize meetings to allow new families to meet each other. In these meetings, teachers offer many practical tips necessary for the settling process, but they do not address specifically the challenges of living in a new country.

In 2008, Liliana created a new cross-cultural program, Adjusting to Life in Brookline, targeted to international families with children in the Brookline public school system. She envisioned this as an opportunity to help new families who were now in the position in which she found herself: an international newcomer adjusting to life in Brookline. From the very beginning, Liliana had the strong support of the Program Coordinator of ELL in the Brookline school system. The first year was a trial and error experience, organizing meetings with international parents in different

schools at different times in the day and trying different ways to disseminate the information about those meetings. The results were variable: sometimes, a few participants attended, other times, nobody showed up. However, every time there were participants, they reiterate the importance of those meeting in discussing the challenges of their international move in a safe and supportive environment.

After the initial year of Adjusting to Life in Brookline, Liliana met Andy at the Boston Chapter of Families in Global Transition. They had had similar experiences (living abroad and returning to their home country), shared similar interests (being passionate about intercultural training), and had different backgrounds (one is an expatriate and the other is a native US citizen) that complemented each other in reaching out to the international community. Andy brought to the program not only his passion about providing cross-cultural training but also his expertise in coaching expatriate couples and their families.

The experience gained in the first year was essential to the growth and development of the program. The second year of the program started with the participation of a many more international participants and their response was very positive from the beginning. There were several important changes: information about the program was distributed in new way, there was an expansion of the target population and there was much greater support from members of the Brookline community.

In getting the information about the Adjusting to Life in Brookline successfully distributed to international families, Mindy Paulo, the ELL coordinator in the Brookline school system, played a crucial role. She utilized the database containing the contact information of all new international families in the school system to disseminate the information about the upcoming meetings. She distributed by email the flyers announcing the events to the ELL coordinator in each individual school and to individual international families. Also, she helped to secure a meeting place in a neutral location outside of the school system at no cost. She was able to book the program sessions at a conference room located in the Brookline Town Hall. During the school year 2010-11, the ELL program allocated funds to cover expenses of photocopies and printed material and provide fees for six invited speakers. In summary, the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program got off the ground because of the critical support of the Brookline public school system.

The Adjusting to Life in Brookline Program

The Adjusting to Life in Brookline program is a 12-session program for international residents of Brookline, Massachusetts. The program is free so as to make it available to all international newcomers. Each session is an hour and a half long. Parents of international students in the English Language Learners program in the Brookline Public School system, adult international students learning English in the Brookline Adult Education program as well as other expatriates living in Brookline are invited to participate in the sessions. The leaders of the program have an open invitation for participants to attend on a session-by-session basis. There is no requirement that participants must attend all sessions or even a certain number of sessions. The program typically extends from late September to early April.

The Adjusting to Life in Brookline program is conducted within a context of cross-cultural exploration, adult learning and understanding of the transitional dilemmas that are naturally inherent to living and working outside of your own country. The program is designed to be

participatory with each session being designed around a specific topic of interest to international families. The structure of the sessions may include lecture, small group exercises, large group discussion, individual sharing, as well as special presentations from community leaders from the different institutions in the greater Boston area who provide information on the practical issues of international adjustment.

A key component of the program is the creation of a safe and sharing environment in which the participants can connect with people from other countries, share similar kinds of experiences and know that they are not alone. Participants' experiences are normalized within a context of cross-cultural understanding with an emphasis on making sure each participant feels seen and heard.

The twelve sessions of the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program includes a core program of five sessions and a speaker's program of five topics, facilitated by guest speakers. The program is divided into a fall program and a spring program both concluding with a social gathering, an international potluck breakfast in the fall and an international picnic in a local park in the spring.

1. The Core Program. A series of six intercultural meetings focus on some of the central issues and concerns of international families. The curriculum of the Core Program includes:

- **Managing the Transition.** (Liliana Busconi, Cross-cultural Trainer, and Andrew Miser, Cross-cultural Coach). In this initial session, the intention is to welcome the participants and get into relationship with them in a way that allows them to be free to share their story and be known by the group. The leaders share information about the international diversity of Brookline and the group looks at Brookline from a multi-cultural perspective. The participants have the opportunity to share some of the challenges they have faced in moving into the community and the group examines reasons why it is challenging to move to a new country. The participants' discussion centers on the phases of cultural adjustment, the signs of cultural shock, how different family members adjust differently to their new surroundings and the importance of local, community support services. Community resources in the greater Brookline area are provided.
- **Cultural Differences.** (Liliana Busconi, Cross-cultural Trainer, and Andrew Miser, Cross-cultural Coach). In this session, the participants examine how cultural differences can impact their interactions with host nationals. The group first looks at some of the ways that cultures differ, e.g., social greeting rituals, eating habits, and personal space. Then, how cultural differences are the consequences of deeply rooted values, beliefs, history and geography is highlighted. Specifically, the origins of both eastern cultures and western cultures are explored in terms are a variety of variables, such as family membership, values, time, social roles and social etiquette, to name a few. This material allows participants to share aspects of their culture and to understand each other in a cross-cultural context.
- **Communication between People from Different Cultures.** (Liliana Busconi, Cross-cultural Trainer, and Andrew Miser, Cross-cultural Coach). In this session, participants explore another very importance aspect of intercultural understanding: Cultural differences in communication styles. Cultural differences in eye contact, facial expression, interpersonal distance and the use of emotion are explored. Then, discussion centers around distinguishing linear vs. circular, direct vs. indirect, verbal vs. non-verbal, attached vs. detached and confrontational and non-confrontational styles of communication. Participants share the styles of communication that seem to be

predominant in their country of origin and see how different cultural styles of communication can hinder or enhance communication.

- **The Challenges of Learning a New Language.** (Liliana Busconi, Cross-cultural Trainer, and Andrew Miser, Cross-cultural Coach). In this session, participants are encouraged to share their challenges in learning a new language, in this case, English. The discussion of these challenges often reveals the importance of the situational or specific context in which listening and speaking occurs. Communicating over the phone, interacting with governmental or bureaucratic agencies or socializing in many kinds of social circumstance often challenge the new language learner's understanding and communication skills. The power of enlisting the support, patience and attention of another in listening to and understanding a speaker of a new language is highlighted.
- **Dealing with Cross-cultural Challenges.** (Liliana Busconi, Cross-cultural Trainer, and Andrew Miser, Cross-cultural Coach). In this session, participants share about some of the common cultural dilemmas that people who move internationally face. These common dilemmas include, but are not limited to, a loss of belonging, a loss of one's support system, a change in family roles and responsibilities, stress associated with practical tasks, changes in personal and cultural values, and stress associated with a loss of identity and being misperceived. These challenges, when they occur, can lead to disempowerment, namely feeling alone, being ineffective, feeling out of balance, feeling reactive, being judgmental, and feeling like a victim (Miser and Sjodin-Bunse, 2010). Participants participate in an exercise that allow them to recognize what they can do to empower themselves, i.e., feel connected, effective, balanced, creative, open and responsible.
- **International Potluck Breakfast.** (Liliana Busconi, Cross-cultural Trainer, and Andrew Miser, Cross-cultural Coach). This session typically occurs during the holiday season in December. Participants are asked to prepare and bring a favorite breakfast or holiday dish from their country to share with the other participants. Each person provides cultural information about their dish and then the group enjoys the international potluck. During the last half of the session, participants, share their plans for the holidays and some of the cultural festivities and traditions in which they plan to participate. Religious observances and New Year celebrations are included in the discussion.

2. **The Speaker's Program.** An additional series of five intercultural sessions address a number of topics that have been identified as being of interest to this year's participants. Several local speakers are invited to address issues of interest to the participants. The curriculum of the special program includes:

- **Building your Network for your Work and Personal Life.** (Jennifer Recklett, Program Manager, MIT Spouses & Partners program). In this session, the participants learn about the very valuable skill of networking in their new community. Networking can be valuable for numerous purposes, such as finding a job, making friends, building a business, and connecting with professional associates. Networking can be a vital skill in feeling connected to a new community in a new country. During the session, the participants engage in a speed networking exercise to practice and hone their networking skills.
- **Raising a Bilingual Child.** (Andrea Bleichmar, Brookline Psychologist). In this session, the presenter discusses the role of parents and teachers in raising multilingual children.

Some of the topics include the role of the cultural context, parental expectations family structure (who speaks to whom and in what language) and the social environment in the process of learning a language. Also, how the level of multilingualism influences both by parental attitudes and strategies and by the role that schools have in supporting the child who is learning more than one language is discussed. Participants are encouraged to participate actively with questions.

- **Understanding American Schools.** (Anne Copeland, Executive Director, The Interchange Institute). In this session, the speaker presents an overview of how the educational system works in the United States. Topics include the impact of decentralization on educating students in America, the teaching of American values, including equality, effort, optimism, and individualism and the comparison the educational system in America with that of other countries. Participants explore teacher expectations and teacher/student interactions in the context of American values, parental involvement within schools and practical tips for parents around school dress codes, what a Parent Teacher Organization is, etc. The group is encouraged to participate in a discussion about the similarities and differences between American schools and schools in their home countries.
- **Parenting in America.** (Jessica Bethany and Ellen Beth Suderow, Professors at the Bunker Hill Community College). In this session, the participants examine how American values and beliefs influence parenting and how parenting in the United States is similar or different to parenting in other cultures. To explore some of the central values in America society, the group reflects on common American proverbs, such as, “time is money,” or “the early bird gets the worm.” Participants then have an opportunity to share some of the proverbs common to their culture and explore the values they represent. Participants reflect on all the messages about parenting that are conveyed in American marketing, advertising, television programming, etc. Lastly, the group explores the impact of parenting values and the challenges of parenting in today’s world.
- **Why Does a Cross-cultural Childhood Matter?** (Tina Quick, Founder, International Family Transitions). In this session, the presenter, a third culture kid (TCK) herself, explains what it means to be a TCK. The presenter speaks about the challenges and the feelings experienced by children and teenagers who have spent their childhood in different countries and how their international upbringing has given them a broadened world view, a unique skill set, a knowledge of languages, and incredible experiences. Participants will reflect on how they can support their children to understand that they are different and how they can manage those differences to live in a positive way and to be able to thrive in their new surroundings.
- **Brookline International Day Picnic.** (Liliana Busconi, Cross-cultural Trainer, and Andrew Miser, Cross-cultural Coach). This session is the last session of the program and is held in one of the town parks in Brookline. It is designed to be a celebration of the international diversity of Brookline, Massachusetts. Participants, program speakers, and people who have supported the program throughout the year are encouraged to bring international dishes that they enjoy at family celebrations to share with the gathering. Enjoying an American barbeque is essential! Each person provides cultural information about the dish they bring to the picnic. During the last part of the session, participants share their plans for the summer and their potential return to their countries of origin.

Community Connections

An important step in the growth and success of the program has been the developing of other vital community connections. Although the original goal of the program was to reach families with children in the public schools, during its second year, the program expanded to reach Brookline residents who did not have any connection with the school system at all. This was possible because of the commitment and dedication of an English teacher of the Brookline Adult Education Program who invited her students to attend the program sessions.

In addition, many members of the Brookline community have supported the program in many different ways. The Interchange Institute, a Brookline-based non-profit organization focused on the needs of families that move to a new country, has endorsed the program since its inception in 2008. Anne Copeland, Ph.D., Executive Director, is a recognized leader in cross-cultural training and education and has been a valuable resource for the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program. Members of the Boston Chapter of Families in Global Transition have given presentations on specific cross-cultural issues, which have been central to the concerns of the international families. Several Brookline residents have offered their time and expertise in discussing topics of interest to newcomers.

In summary, our program uses an innovative approach at a local, community level oriented to helping international newcomers in their transition process. Through the participation of different community members and institutions in the Brookline, the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program has been able to be responsive to the needs of the international residents the Brookline.

The Impact of the Adjusting to Life in Brookline Program

Over the past three years, interest in The Adjusting to Life in Brookline Program has expanded. Whereas in the first year, less than five people would show up for program sessions, now 20 to 25 or more people regularly attend. What has made this program so compelling for the international families in Brookline?

We sent out a questionnaire to all the program participants who have participated in more than one of the sessions in the past two years. Although we had limited response to the questionnaire, the respondents who did provide feedback were aligned on the five most important benefits of the program:

- Being aware of the challenges of an international transition;
- Learning about and becoming familiar with the American culture;
- Getting to know other people who are experiencing similar difficulties adjusting to their new life in Brookline;
- Making new friends;
- Having fun.

What has been most remarkable about the attendees of the program has been their international diversity. We have had participants attend who are from five of the continents: North and South America, Europe, Africa and Asia. Participants from over thirty different countries have attended as some point during the past three years. This backdrop of rich cultural diversity has given the sharing and discussions real meaning and value to the individuals who come away feeling validated and known. Though their personal stories are all different, participants share in a common experience. Through discussing the challenges they each face in their international

experience, participants are able to normalize the feelings and reactions they are having in their adjustment to life in a new community and a new country. This kind of understanding across cultures has been the most real benefit of the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program.

Another very real impact has been the awareness in the greater community of the need to support the international families who come to live in Brookline and work in the greater Boston area. The Adjusting to Life in Brookline Program has built a network of alliances representing the Brookline school system and their ELL program, the Brookline Adult Education program, The Interchange Institute, the Spouse and Couples Program at MIT, the Boston Chapter of Families in Global Transition, as well as professionals from the major universities in the Boston area. Community leaders and program participants have consistently provided very positive feedback about the impact of the program. Feedback excerpts are presented in the Appendix.

Liliana and Andy in conjunction with a first-year participant of the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program recently had the opportunity to be featured and interviewed in a program at the local Brookline access television station, which has broadcast the program to other communities around the nation. In addition, Liliana and Andy are pleased to be giving a presentation, entitled “Adjusting to Life in Brookline: A community-based program to help new international families in their adjustment to a new country,” at the 2011 Families in Global Transition conference in Washington, D.C in March, 2011. These kinds of opportunities are helping to communicate the success of this program and to broadcast the need to organize grassroots, community efforts in other parts of the globe to assist international families in adjusting to life in their new country.

Lessons Learned

A unique aspect of the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program is that it began simply out of one person’s experience of her own international adjustment to her new life in Brookline, Massachusetts. She shared her vision of contributing to international families in her own community with others and, over time, created a viable community program to support other international families adjusting to life in Brookline.

The main lesson learned in getting this program off the ground was the development of a partnership between the leadership of the ELL program in the Brookline school system and the co-creators of the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program. Once the opportunity of program was communicated successfully to all the international parents of the ELL students in the school system, a nerve was struck. These parents seemed to be hungry to have a forum in which they could learn about their new culture, where they could gain perspective and understanding around the challenges they were now facing and where they could make new friends. The Adjusting to Life in Brookline program has been such a forum for these families.

The promise of the program is that it can be replicated. With the personal commitment of one or two people and the establishment of a partnership with leaders in the local school system and community at-large, community programs like the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program can be started anywhere. One Danish participant in the program shared that she could see the very real opportunity of providing such of program for international families moving to Denmark after she returns there next year. Two of the local presenters in the program have started their own conversation for creating a similar program in a community just west of Boston.

Moving forward, the future holds great things. Some participants in this program have expressed interest in being trained in cross-cultural work through the Interchange Institute in Brookline.

This cross-cultural training program is where the co-creators of the Adjusting to Life in Brookline first trained and met. Such cross-cultural knowledge coupled with the first-hand experience gleaned from one's own international relocation can spawn intercultural leaders, thus, paving the way for new community initiatives and expanding the work already accomplished. Creating cross-cultural leaders, building local networks of support for international families, and establishing community partnerships so that programs similar to the Adjusting to Life in Brookline program can spring up in other international localities is a vision of the future that holds great promise.

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Appendix

Feedback from Program Participants and Community Leaders

“I felt, after attending to these series, less stressed and with more information and tips that make my adjustment and my family’s adjustment easier. After the series, I felt I was not alone. It was great to share with people from other countries and cultures that were going through similar challenges as I was. Liliana gave us useful information about the town, the American culture in an easy to digest way, tips that help in the interactions with other parents, teachers, and co-workers.

...Andy and Liliana are constructing communication bridges that go beyond the spoken or the written word.”

Elvira Perez de Castelli
Adjusting to Life in Brookline participant
Brookline Resident

“In my first visit to the ‘Adjusting to Brookline’ program I arrived with low expectations and some doubts about the benefits I can get from it. I found a group of people from all over the world sharing similar feelings and concerns. I discovered two warm, caring leaders that know about relocation not only from books but from direct experience. Coming every week, for free, to those meetings became a meaningful anchor for me, getting support and information. The meeting was interesting, important and helpful, and for moments even touching and encouraging. It helped me feel empowered, learn about opportunities, meet people and make friends. As a psychologist I was impressed from the professional approach and the response for such important need in town like Brookline that is coping every year with a large population of newcomers. I know how it helped and still helping me to become a part of this wonderful community and I think it is a great idea that should be continued. I like the idea as a newcomer and as a psychologist, and I think that it can be an example for other towns or even countries, like Israel, to learn from.”

Michal Almagor
Adjusting to Life in Brookline participant
Brookline Resident

“Through my association with *Adjusting to Life in Brookline*, I am aware that more than sixty people from many countries from throughout South America, Asia and Europe have actively participated in discussions and workshops on topics such as “Culture and Communication,” “Managing the Transition,” and “Dealing with Cross-Cultural Challenges.” Many participants are recent arrivals to the US (less than one year) and experience culture shock, anxiety, tension, disappointment and depression. They seem lost and disempowered in a foreign culture while trying to learn a new language.

The leaders of *Adjusting to Life in Brookline*, Liliana Busconi and Andy Miser, are both skilled cultural coaches and world travelers. They have managed to raise the awareness of ethnic differences, explain cultural conflicts, soothe anxieties and encourage healthy communication among newcomers. Moreover, they are sensitive to varying language levels of my students.

They create an atmosphere of patience and friendliness. One particularly useful course offered, *The Challenges of Learning a New Language*, in my opinion, is vital and should be made available to as many newcomers as possible.

Adjusting to Life in Brookline, provides a wonderful and innovative opportunity for students of English to come together and discuss problems, such as “Raising a Bilingual Child,” “Understanding American Schools,” and “Building Community and Getting Involved in Adjusting to Life in Brookline.” My students report to me their intense interest in the program and the discussions. They view the events at *Adjusting to Life in Brookline* as wonderful opportunities to practice their listening comprehension and speaking skills, as well as some typical American skills such as delivering presentations and networking. Students report feeling more empowered, and yet relieved and excited about their new homeland through the support they receive from *Adjusting to Life in Brookline*.

This program offers a great opportunity for new immigrants to Brookline to come together and celebrate their successes in becoming part of Brookline community, while enriching its cultural diversity, building bridges between different traditions and promoting tolerance and goodwill in the international population of the town. My students and many others will continue to feel enriched as well as happier and productive, if the *Adjusting to Life in Brookline* continues to evolve and if it becomes a permanent anchor in Brookline.”

Galina Volkova
ESL Instructor
Brookline Adult and Community Education

“Liliana Busconi and Andrew Miser are providing an important service for international newcomers in the Brookline community through the topics they present in their meetings and the opportunity they provide for newcomers to make social connections and build a local network. From practical information about living in the US to access to local resources and personal support, they help families more easily transition into the Brookline community. They also serve as cultural ambassadors, giving international newcomers a safe place to ask questions and get reliable and accurate information. Their regular meetings allow newcomers to meet each other and practice their English. Without these types of programs, newcomers can become isolated and unaware of the services available and how to access them. I am unaware of other programs that have been developed by a community group to address the variety of concerns and issues facing international newcomers in a particular town or city.”

Jennifer Recklet
Program Manager
Spouses and Partners Program
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

“The way schools are organized, the expectations of how much parents should be involved with the school and how parents interact with teachers, changes from culture to culture. Brookline is a magnet for families from all cultures thanks to its openness to diversity, well known astounding school system and quality of services. These foreign families bring to Brookline the richness that diversity creates in our cosmopolitan Town.

I think that facilitating parent's adjustment to the culture of the community provides good basis for a good relationship between these new families and the community. When parents feel comfortable and part of the school community they are well equipped to facilitate their children success in their new school.

The 'Adjusting to Life in Brookline' program proved with it ample attendance last year that foreign families are eager to learn the skills that the program brings to them. Research shows that acquiring these skills facilitates the process of adaptation to a new culture."

Andrea Bleichmar, PsyD
Psychologist

"In my experience, newcomers to Brookline need a place to (a) get their concrete questions answered, (b) garner support from others in similar situations, and (c) discuss challenges they face under the guidance of professionals who understand cultural and transition issues. Many communities have Newcomer's Clubs to address these needs, but Brookline does not. In many communities, the majority of newcomers have come to the US to work in a particular organization or corporation, which provides the support they need, this is not the case in Brookline, which welcomes international residents from a wide-ranging array of organizations and circumstances, none large enough to offer cohesive support. Too often, misinformation and isolation prevail, with predictable consequences for both adults and children.

Into this space, Andy and Liliana have in a short time established a loyal and interested group of attendees at the *Adjusting to Life in Brookline* program."

Anne P. Copeland, Ph.D.
Executive Director
The Interchange Institute