



# Adjusting to Life in a New Country

**Adjusting to Life to a New Country** is a program that offers training sessions to international newcomers and their families to help them to navigate the challenges of the new culture within a context of cross-cultural exploration and adult learning.

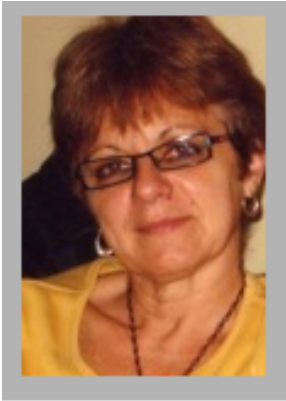
Our program is unique in the fact that it provides a safe place where newcomers can share their experiences, ask questions, and receive information in an environment of mutual respect. More importantly, the program utilizes the intercultural training sessions to help newcomers overcome signs of cultural 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.

The program consists of a series of six intercultural meetings that focus on some of the central issues and concerns of international families (Core program) and a series of meetings that address specific topics of interest for newcomers. However, because of its modular structure, the program can be modified to satisfy the specific special needs of different groups.

Liliana Busconi, Cross-cultural Trainer, and Andrew Miser, Cross-cultural Coach have been conducting *Adjusting to Life in Brookline* for three consecutive years. The program has been recognized as one of five successful support programs at the 2011 Families in Global Transition Conference.

## About the Leaders

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**Liliana Busconi** is a native of Argentina. She has a Ph.D in Biochemistry from Universidad Nacional de Buenos Aires, Argentina. She moved to Boston in 1990 with her family to do her postdoctoral training at Harvard Medical School.

After six years in Boston, she returned to her home country. She experienced firsthand how difficult it is to move from one country to other and discovered that it was just as hard to adjust to life in the United States as it was to go back to her home country after being away for several years.

Liliana and her family returned to Brookline in 2001 and, as a consequence of her own experience, she became very interested in the challenges of adapting to a new society and returning to one's native country. This interest led her to take a cross-cultural training workshop to train her in the processes of intercultural transitions and adaptation.

In 2008 she decided to create a program for international families with children in the Brookline Public School system. She saw this as an opportunity to help new families who were now in the position she was once in, as well as a way to give back to the community that had helped her adjust to Brookline many years ago— including teachers, ELL teachers, and counselors.

In 2009 she met Andy Miser and they decided that their different backgrounds but similar interests and experiences would complement each other in reaching out to the international community.

After working for many years in research at Boston University School of Medicine, Liliana is now enjoying teaching at Emmanuel College.

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**Andrew L. Miser**, Ph.D. launched his international coaching and consulting business, Elysian Enterprises, while he and his family lived in The Netherlands from 2002 to 2006.

He is certified as a professional coach through the Coaches Training Institute and has a professional background in psychology and marriage and family therapy.

He is passionate about providing cross-cultural training and coaching to expatriate couples and their families and supporting them in being successful in living and working internationally.

He is particularly interested in expanding the role of professional coaching in the global mobility industry. He is the author of a number of papers, including a recently published paper on couples coaching for expatriate couples in a book on international business coaching.

In the past year, he has designed and facilitated an innovative couple's coaching curriculum, called International Partners in Living, in which couples explore what's important to them, create a vision for their lives and build an enduring and fulfilling partnership together. To his coaching and consultation work, he brings a unique blend of expertise in developmental psychology, systems theory, strategic planning, cultural awareness and action learning.

Dr. Miser received an M.A. in educational psychology from the University of Nebraska in 1974 and a Ph.D. in developmental psychology at the University of Connecticut in 1985.

He is a member of the American Psychological Association, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, and the International Coaches Federation. He currently lives with his wife, Martha, and his family in Boston, Massachusetts.

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## **Core Program**

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### **Session 1: Managing the Transition**

In this initial session, the intention is to welcome the participants and form a 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 the new community and the group looks at the new community 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.

### **Session 2: Cultural Differences**

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 of 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 to understand each other in a cross-cultural context.

### **Session 3: Communication between People from Different Cultures**

In this session, participants explore another very important 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 the country of origin and see how different cultural styles of communication can hinder or enhance communication.

#### **Session 4: The Challenges of Learning a New Language**

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 circumstances often challenge the new language learner's understanding and communication skills.

The power of enlisting the support, patience and attention of others in fostering understanding verbal expression in the new language is highlighted.

#### **Session 5: Dealing with Cross-cultural Challenges**

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.

Participants participate in an exercise that allows them to recognize what they can do to empower themselves, i.e., feel connected, effective, balanced, creative, open and responsible.

#### **Session 6: International Potluck Breakfast**

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 festivals and traditions in which they will participate. Religious observances and New Year celebrations are included in the discussion.

## Specific Topics

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- **Building your Network for your Work and Personal Life**

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**

In this session, the presenter discusses the role of parents and teachers in raising multilingual children. Some of the topics include the role of social interaction and the cultural context in the process of learning a language, parental expectations and family structure (who speaks to whom and in what language), and how the level of multilingualism is influenced both by parental attitudes and strategies and by the role that schools have in supporting the child who is learning more than one language.

Participants are encouraged to participate actively with questions.

- **Understanding American Schools**

This session provides an overview of how the school 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 the American value of equality, expectations of parental involvement within the school and practical tips for parents around dress code for students, 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**

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 American 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.

- **Growing up in different cultures**

This session discusses 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 reflect on how they can support their kids 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.