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## International Students Settle into Life in the Comox Valley

According to Braide Diете, a Nigerian student who arrived earlier this summer, this place just makes you feel at home. North Island College and the Comox Valley welcomed six students from Nigeria to Canada and to our community in mid July and so far their impression has been a good one.

Although they have been staying with home stay families since their arrival, by the end of August the Shantz House Hostel will become home to the group of students and is where they will live for the duration of the school year. The students will be enrolling in NIC's University Transfer program this fall studying economics, geology and engineering, after which they intend to continue their education by transferring to a BC university appropriate to their individual field of study. The six scholarship students attended Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency in Nigeria together before making the move to Canada.

"Everyone is so friendly," observes Michael Sampson when asked how he is finding life in the Valley. "People have a lot of questions and just help all the time." In contrast to the Comox Valley's population of 62,000 people or Canada's population of 33 million, Nigeria, located in West Africa, is the most populous country in Africa, the eighth most populous country in the world and boasts 158 million people. So it's easy to understand what an enormous change this has been for them. "Nigerians are very flexible people. We adapt easily and quickly to a new environment," Michael continues, "but we are definitely looking forward to the fall when things will be livelier with all the students on campus."

Student Umesi Bravo has a positive, confident demeanor and much to say about his experiences in Canada so far. When asked what he misses most he smiles and remarks, "There should really be more African food here. Since we come from a different culture, the food is quite different. I don't understand why people eat so many potatoes."

One of the ways NIC is supporting these students through this transition is by offering a series of Cultural Adaptation Seminars intended to ease the stress of culture shock. Culture shock refers to the feelings and anxiety experienced when people have to operate within a different and sometimes



*Instructor Ariane Kelleris poses with six NIC International students in front of their new home, the Shantz House Hostel.*

unknown culture. It grows out of the challenges of adapting to the new culture, which causes uncertainty.

"Moving across cultures is a multidimensional experience," states NIC Instructor Ariane Kelleris. "There are ups and downs. It's not simple."

The seminars cover such topics as touring the college campus and meeting NIC President Dr. Jan Lindsay, setting up bank accounts, visiting grocery stores and Courtenay's downtown area, Canadian history, our cultural and political system, social norms and expectations, and exploring local recreational activities.

"It is so important to try and make the transition easier for them," notes Kelleris. "We want to help reduce stressors. The support service has to include more than just helping with English skills. There are social and wellness issues too." By providing the newcomers an opportunity to be aware of the psychological as well as physiological reactions they are experiencing, the students will have an easier time adapting to their new life in Canada. Kelleris continues, "We have an obligation to ensure their experiences in Canada are rich ones, so they return to their home country as cultural envoys."

Umesi Bravo agrees, "Ariane is helping us to understand that what we're going through is normal. It helps us get over it faster."

International students arriving at the beginning of the fall semester will attend a similar series of workshops entitled NICI 101: Getting Started at NIC. This week long seminar provides all international students with opportunities to get to know each other, to meet many of the people who will work with them over the next year, to explore Canadian cultural norms – and to have some fun!

NIC is excited to welcome more than 75 international students from Nigeria, India, China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, United States, Mexico, England, France, Poland, Moldova, Ukraine and Namibia to campus this fall.

"We are looking forward to welcoming the new students to the College community," explains Colleen Hanley, NIC's Associate Director, International Education. "They bring experience, understanding and knowledge so important to the learning of students already studying at the College. Working internationally is full of many rewards and getting to know students from around the world is certainly one of them." For further information about NIC International, please contact Colleen Hanley at 250-334-5021.

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