



# NEWSLETTER

## CONNECT Immigration Projects

Summer 2010

### MESSAGE

*from the Director*

As Director, Immigration Projects at CONNECT I have the pleasure of leading a team that collaborates with the Ontario colleges and community and government stakeholders to develop programs and services for immigrants. The colleges are a natural fit for the education needs of internationally trained immigrants (ITIs) as their job-focused programming and continuing education offerings are well suited to serve ITIs.

The Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE) project has established itself as a leader in developing collaborative system-change initiatives. CIITE currently supports 46 ITI advisors at 18 colleges across Ontario and is working on the *My Record/Record of Education and Experience (REE)* to enable better recognition of ITIs' international credentials and work experience.

CONNECT's newest immigration project, Increasing the Capacity of Small and Medium Enterprises to Hire and Retain Internationally Trained Immigrants (ICHR), utilizes the training capacity of the Ontario colleges to deliver workshops to employers. Using curriculum developed by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), college facilitators provide information regarding diversity and human resource practices.

The Occupation Specific Language Training (OSLT), led by Colleges Ontario and delivered within the college system provides occupation specific language training for ITIs throughout the province. CONNECT partners with Colleges Ontario to provide case management and monitoring services.

For further information visit the CONNECT website: <http://www.collegeconnect.on.ca>.

Cynthia Murphy  
Director, Immigration Projects, CONNECT

## MOHAWK COLLEGE

bridges gaps for newcomers by Ani Yildirim

Providing advising services tailored to meet the unique needs of newcomers to Canada, Mohawk College's Immigration and Diversity Project originated in September 2008 as a collaboration between Mohawk College, Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (the CONNECT CIITE Project) and Settlement and Integration Services Organization, Hamilton (SISO). "None of this would have been successful if we didn't build relations from the first day with SISO," says Ali Cheaib, coordinator of the project. "We have a unique partnership and it's growing."

In developing programs and services for immigrants at the college, Cheaib's personal passion for advocating on behalf immigrants in Hamilton and his roles on various governance boards was a great help. The project has developed into a thriving community partnership. "If you stay within the walls of the campus nothing happens," says Cheaib. "You have to build those networks, nurture your relationships and create partnerships."

Internationally Trained Immigrant (ITI) Advising Services at Mohawk fall under the Immigration and Diversity Project's umbrella and are supported by the CONNECT CIITE Project, which is funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Tayyaba Rashid, an ITI Advisor, describes her role working with various community agencies, giving presentations and attending job fairs as "just being out there and informing people." Public libraries are places to connect with newcomers. "We bring people to the college. It is a two-way process; we [are referred] clients through different organizations and we link our clients to them."

One of the qualities that make this advising service unique is that four of the five

advisors are immigrants themselves, and are able to serve their clients in multiple languages. ITI Advising Services at Mohawk College have served 1479 clients since its opening; 1299 of them were internationally trained immigrants.

Although volunteering was not initially part of the Immigration and Diversity Project, it has become one of its strengths. Volunteering was incorporated into the program when clients, eager for Canadian work experience, offered their skills. Farnoosh Khorrami, who found out about the project through SISO, didn't know anybody to give her a reference. After a successful volunteer position, she was provided with a referral letter which she used to secure a job.

Another volunteer who is benefiting from the work experience is May Darwiche. She has already taken all the necessary steps to be a certified ESL instructor in Canada, but explains she is at a "dead end" and can't find a job without Canadian work experience. Darwiche even struggled to find a place to volunteer. She is grateful to be given the opportunity to obtain work experience to include in her resume. "[the project]...helps me to build contacts, to integrate and to be part of the community." Says Darwiche, "when I go to home, I take the sense of accomplishment with me from here."



# Are You Ready? Workshops

## delivered at Ontario colleges

by Nikhat Rasheed

**With reports of an upcoming skilled labour shortage some innovative businesses are preparing themselves to meet this challenge head-on through the recruitment of skilled immigrants.**

Delivered by CONNECT Strategic Alliances and funded by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration in fifteen Ontario colleges, the *Are You Ready?* workshops are designed to help employers attract, hire and retain skilled immigrants, giving them a jump on the competition. Developed and tested by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), the *Are You Ready?* workshops are being provided free-of-charge to Ontario employers, focusing on small and medium sized businesses (fewer than 500 employees). Using videos, group discussions and role-playing exercises, workshop highlights include:

- **Measuring your cultural awareness through an online survey tool**
- **Creating a personalized action plan for your business and improving your recruitment skills**
- **Engaging in peer knowledge exchange and network building**
- **Linking with your local Chamber of Commerce representative for post-workshop support**

"Small business owners often wear multiple hats and often do not have a background in human resources," says Nikhat Rasheed, a senior project advisor with CONNECT. "The *Are You Ready?* workshops help those with hiring responsibilities understand how culture can influence their hiring practices and how they can strengthen their human resources skills." Sure enough, the demand is clear: in

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"[*The Are You Ready?* workshops] will help our recruiting efforts and hopefully reduce turnover".

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February 2010, seven colleges ran pilot workshops attended by over 150 employers, 90% of whom provided positive feedback. Many attendees with human resources backgrounds also enjoyed the workshops, demonstrating that even those with formal training can benefit from awareness-raising sessions. Rosi Makkar-Sethi, from the AFI International Group Inc., attended a pilot workshop and noted that "This will help our recruiting efforts and hopefully reduce turnover."

For more information on registration, dates, times and locations, visit: [www.collegeconnect.on.ca/areyouready](http://www.collegeconnect.on.ca/areyouready).

## Personal approach for immigrants at Confederation College

by Ani Yildirim

**Two highly-educated, focused immigrant women have paved a path for a better future, overcoming obstacles and difficulties along the way.**

Maria Castro, a dentist from Colombia, and Nataliya Rubel, an accountant from Ukraine, have never met, yet they have experienced parallel challenges while building a better future since arriving in Canada.

Maria Castro immigrated to Canada in 2006. She took ESL classes to improve her English and thoroughly researched the requirements to practice dentistry in Canada. "It is very competitive" she says, "before I came to Canada, I didn't know that it was a long and expensive process."

Before taking any steps towards practicing in her field, dentistry, in Canada, Castro and her family moved to Thunder Bay, Ontario where her husband would pursue a university education. Once there, she discovered that there was no dentistry school in Thunder Bay, and decided to enroll in the Dental Hygiene program at Confederation College.

With a Master's degree in Economics and years of work experience as an audits manager in Ukraine, Nataliya Rubar was hoping to find a job in her field when she and her family came to Canada. While she first looked for a position in her field, she describes her job search experience as "hitting a wall one after another. Nobody wants to hire someone who has experience from elsewhere."

While Castro and Rubar were trying to retrain and work in their professions, they met Maritta Polowick, an Internationally Trained Immigrant (ITI) Advisor at Confederation College. Polowick understood their needs. First, she ensured that both women met the college's English proficiency requirements, and she then put them in touch with the appropriate program coordinators to review their education and credentials. She advocated on their behalf, working closely with the admissions department to ensure that their professional assessments were recognized.

Castro started a two-year Dental Hygiene program last September and she is very grateful for Polowick's help. "I think I'm lucky that I was accepted. Maritta helped me a lot with all the process to get into the program." Castro believes that, had she applied by herself, the outcome may have been different.

Even though Castro has her degree in Dentistry and Oral Surgery - which means 9 years of university education in her country of origin - technically she was ineligible for the Dental Hygiene program due to her lack of a Canadian High School diploma. Polowick knew the admission process, and worked with Castro to navigate the system. In the end, the college accepted Castro's accredited advanced post-secondary education,

which includes her degree and a high school diploma.

"I think Dental Hygiene is easier for me" Castro says. She has a plan: "I will work as a dental hygienist, and will have the chance to observe dentistry in Canada before I try to become a dentist here."

Rubel also still plans to eventually work in her profession in Canada. Her long term goal is to become a certified general accountant (CGA). She started taking part-time courses a year ago, to obtain her bookkeeping certificate. Now she is in the process of applying to a two-year Business Accounting program. Polowick is optimistic that Rubel will get credit for her previous education, which will help to reduce her study time.

"There is a noticeable increase in numbers of internationally trained individuals in Confederation College" says Polowick. She thinks that it is important to help newcomers find the best pathway to employment in their field. "Whether they are refugees with little education or highly educated, when they arrive in a new country, it is a foreign system." She adds that it is important to provide individual case management and help them understand the process and all the steps involved. The application system is computerized. "If personal attention is not here, if someone doesn't advocate their file personally, it can slip by and get lost in the system."

Ani Yildirim ([aniyildirim@yahoo.com](mailto:aniyildirim@yahoo.com)) writes about immigrants, culture and urbanization.

## Occupation Specific Language Training

Meeting the needs of skilled immigrants by Sharon Aschaiek

**The prospect of a better life drew Miriam Sanchez to Canada, but a unique educational opportunity has helped transform her dream into reality.**

In 2007, Sanchez, her husband and their two children left El Salvador for Ontario, eventually setting in London. A marketing and administration professional with 20 years experience, Sanchez sought to continue her business career in Canada. After a year of looking for work and taking courses to improve her English, Sanchez landed a part-time office administration job in the Continuing Education department at Fanshawe College, and nine months later, shifted into a customer service position involving presenting academic upgrading options to potential students—but found herself grappling with her communication skills. "I interact with clients and constantly give and receive information, and I needed to improve my abilities in this area," Sanchez says.

Eventually, Sanchez came across a flyer at work promoting a new communication training initiative—one that would ultimately get her on the path to greater workplace success: Occupation Specific Language Training (OSLT). Led by Colleges Ontario and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, OSLT is an innovative series of comprehensive workplace-specific second-language training courses offering newcomers specialized communication instruction to help them build their careers. "One of the most common barriers to newcomers moving up in an organization is a lack of occupation-specific language and workplace culture training," says Linda Franklin, president of Colleges Ontario. "We want people coming to Ontario to be able to fully participate in the employment opportunities that are out there, and the OSLT courses are designed to help them do that."

Launched in 2009 at 13 Ontario colleges, these free communication training courses feature both language and workplace culture instruction relevant to 22 occupations within six employment sectors: business, health sciences, human services, construction, automotive and technology. These courses feature general sector-specific communication training on topics such as Ontario workplace legislation and relevant regulatory or licensing bodies, as well as specialized information for individuals of particular occupational backgrounds.

Participants learn how to effectively interact with colleagues, clients and supervisors in person, by phone and by e-mail. Students also develop a strong understanding of the socio-linguistic dimensions of their occupation and its sector, and how to communicate effectively within their workplace culture. So far, about 700 people have taken part in the 60 pilot OSLT classes, and due to strong demand, an additional 54 classes were offered starting spring 2010.

Sanchez took part in the Workplace Communication Skills for Business course, and says she gained a strong understanding of how to better communicate in a variety of ways with customers and co-workers, and how to better fit into her workplace culture. "The course made a big difference in how I communicate at work," Sanchez says. "I feel much more confident in my ability to present an idea, participate in a meeting, and have work-related discussions. I'm more involved in the way we run our department, and am overall just better at my job."

Sharon Aschaiek ([sharon@cocoamedia.ca](mailto:sharon@cocoamedia.ca)) writes about education, employment, lifestyle and automotive trends and issues.



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Published by **CONNECT**

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