

Mentor program aims to help skilled newcomers to Canada

By Kathy Yanchus
METROLAND WEST MEDIA GROUP

Studies shows that skilled newcomers to Canada turn to survival jobs, or switch careers if they do not find employment in their profession within three years of arriving in this country.

Based on these distressing findings and a request from clients for more information about Canadian workforce culture, the Halton Multicultural Council has established a mentoring component to its Labour Market Access Program.

Begun in April, the council has already secured 20 mentors and 100 mentees, according to the program's coordinator, Mira Jankovic.

"The objective of the program is to provide support and assistance to internationally-trained professional newcomers to overcome the barriers they face in their search for proper employment and efforts towards integration into the labour market and ultimately, wider community."

The Labour Market Access Program is a fusion of two services — Job Search Workshop and Enhanced Language Training (ELT). In the Job Search Workshop, clients learn resumé writing and interview skills. The ELT com-



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NEW PROGRAM: Labour Market Access Program co-ordinator Mira Jankovic (centre) is joined by team members (from left) Yang Yang, Colin Grimmond, Darshak Vaishnav and Paula Castano.

ponent helps skilled newcomers — in such professions as policing, office management and accounting — learn and enhance their knowledge of specific terms related to their professions.

"This is for people who had careers but need a little help with language," says Jankovic.

After 250 hours of class time, participants then undergo 40 hours

of internship.

It was in conversation with business partners and clients that the Council realized job assimilation required a more intense, modernized approach, explains Jankovic.

A proposal by the Council to Citizenship and Immigration was accepted and resulted in a mentoring component to the Labour Market

Access Program, where a client is matched with a professional in their field.

"The workplace culture sometimes is totally different and we find this is something people need to learn," says Jankovic. "In some cultures, you go to school, you get a job, you don't need to sell yourself to employers. In some cultures, the government decides the number of people who will be educated in this field and they get a job."

Networking, resumes, cover letters, job interviews are all completely new to many of their clients, and the mentoring program is designed to help understand and overcome these barriers.

"We want to introduce them to somebody who will really walk them through and teach them one on one."

Within the mentoring program, there are two different approaches, including Individual Mentoring, where mentors work one-on-one with a client covering educational qualifications, work environments and life-styles of a particular career.

In the Structured Mentoring program, managers and staff from business organizations are paired with the apprentice, who works within a company in an unpaid on-

the-job training role.

The Council asks a commitment of one to two hours a week over two months from a mentor. The commitment is flexible, says Jankovic.

Clients ready to be matched include foreign trained police officers, dentists, teachers, doctors, engineers, a kitchen designer, artist and office workers, ranging in age from 20 to approximately 45 years.

The fact the Council's mentoring program targets newcomers makes it unique to the region, she says.

"Newcomers entering the program have the education, experience and language skills they need to succeed in the labour market," she says. "What they need are the local insights and access to professional networks that only a professional mentorship connection with a mentor can offer."

Most skilled immigrants have high levels of education, but may not know the Canadian context of their profession or workplace culture, or understand how to translate and sell their skills, she adds.

Anyone interested in participating in the mentoring program can contact Jankovic at 905-842-2486, ext. 230 or email labour.market@halton-multicultural.org