

Group helps new Canadians feel at home

Halton Multicultural Council builds bridges between new arrivals and long-term residents

Angelina and her family fled the war in Bosnia and arrived in Canada one year ago.

They were alone and unable to speak English. Then they found the telephone number of the Halton Multicultural Council and a settlement worker who spoke their language.

Through the help of the council, Angelina is now attending language instruction for newcomers classes. After having Angelina's husband's educational documents translated by the council, the settlement worker helped find out where he can qualify for his electrician's certificate. He is currently preparing to write his Canadian qualifying exams.

Angelina's story is just one example of the kind of problems facing immigrants when they come to Canada. It's also an example of the kind of services provided by the council, a non-profit community agency which employs six workers to assist in the settlement needs of new Canadians.

These workers help their clients in their own language to get the services

they need to become productive citizens of their new country. Services are provided in Chinese, Croatian, French, Hindi, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish and Russian. Settlement services are open, however, to all new immigrants regardless of language or cultural background.

The settlement program is only one of the services the council provides to immigrants. Since its creation in 1979, the council has strived to create bridges to foster understanding between our long-term residents and our new arrivals.

As an organization dedicated to enabling every individual regardless of racial/ethnic origin to participate as a full and active member of Halton, the council provides regular workshops

on multicultural and anti-racism education. These include topics such as race relations, anti-racism education, cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural education. The sessions are free and are attended by educators and interested residents of Halton.

The council also offers a volunteer tutor program for mothers with young children, the elderly, and the disabled who are visited at home by volunteer English tutors. The tutor provides language training in an informal and conversational setting to residents who would otherwise find it difficult to learn English.

The council also provides Language Instructions for Newcomers to Canada, or LINC, and other classes for seniors and members of our multicultural communities.

Many immigrants, when they first come to Canada, need documents translated and interpretation at important meetings. Through our volunteer translators and interpreters, the council provides translation services in many different languages.

Since the 1970s, Burlington has expe-

rienced an increase in multicultural immigration. Statistics from the Halton Social Planning Council show that more than 31 of the world languages, other than English and French, are spoken in the households around Burlington.

Provides an avenue

The council provides an avenue by which the cultural diversity of Burlington and Halton can be explored and the knowledge gained from this exploration shared.

Newcomers to Halton are eager to become active in the community so they can apply their expertise and knowledge for the benefit of our community.

Council staff have been helping clients become part of the community for more than 18 years by providing volunteer opportunities for new immigrants so they may get the Canadian experience which will eventually land them their first job.

New Canadians who have benefited from the services offered at the council have been eager to give something

back and many volunteer their services to the council. As a result, the council has a dedicated base of volunteers who are eager to assist those who need their help.

The agency is also grateful for the assistance provided from the community in helping to maximize the wealth of human potential new immigrants bring to Canada. This potential benefits not only the new immigrant, but also our community as a whole.

As part of the council's commitment to the community, for 15 years it has organized the annual Canada Day celebrations in Coronation Park in Oakville, celebrating both Canada and its multicultural diversity.

If you are interested in learning more about the work of the Halton Multicultural Council and the services it provides, call 842-2486.

■ ■ ■

Rajneesh Sharda is president of the Halton Multicultural Council.



RAJNEESH SHARDA

1997- Rajneesh Sharda, President of the Halton Multicultural Council, described the Council's programs and services that help newcomers feel at home in the community.

30th
Anniversary

Halton
Multicultural Council