

Newcomers find valued help with LINC

Graduates go on to volunteer time for others

By **KATRINA SIMMONS**
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A lot of success stories start with the Halton Multicultural Council. But they are not the immediate accomplishments that a lot of recent newcomers to Canada expect.

About 40 per cent of the nearly 2,000 immigrants to Halton region last year came independently. They are highly trained, experienced professionals with advanced technical skills and university education.

This new trend, in recent years, has shifted some of the council's focus. Since 1979 it has provided a variety of services to help newcomers with settlement and integration issues, such as acquiring social insurance numbers, health cards, permanent residence cards, education and language training. But finding affordable housing, financial assistance and interpretation services are no longer the predominant frustration for recent immigrants seeking the council's services.

"The greatest barrier is that associations that recognize education have their own standards," says Maria Brzeska, program co-ordinator and intake worker. "Doctors, engineers, computer programmers, teachers ...



From left, Lynn De Lathouwer of LINC; clients and volunteers Eva Marmolejo, Robert Marmolejo and Pooja Pathania.

they all say the same thing. Expectations are so high in Canada that to upgrade is almost equal to starting over again."

Pooja Pathania is one of those professionals. She knows first-hand how frustrating this can be.

She moved to Oakville with her husband from India in January, seeking the opportunity and independence that Canadian culture offers. She arrived in Canada with a degree in social sciences, her Master's degree in political science, and a diploma in computer

applications.

Does this ensure her a place in her chosen profession? "I don't think so. I've tried many places for work, but they always ask me 'Do you have any Canadian experience?' But how can I get the experience without a job?"

To improve her English and increase her chances for employment, she enrolled in LINC - Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada - the program through which most clients discover the council. The relationship has turned into a win-win situation that will benefit both Pooja and the organization. A perfect vehicle for her re-entry into the workforce will see her as a guest lecturer at the new cultural awareness workshops being offered for Grade 2 students.

"I will teach about India and its different religions," she says. "I want to improve their knowledge so they'll know about the world, about different countries, different cultures."

Joanna Matthews, race relations youth worker, says, "When we designed this program that's exactly who we wanted to have facilitate - a graduate of LINC. Pooja was a perfect candidate to go into the schools. She's highly qualified, and her only barrier is her language. She needs the confidence and the opportunity to communicate. That's how we came up with the marriage of the community-based program and the school program."

In fact, many of HMC's staff came up through the ranks, from client, to volunteer, to front-line worker. Though ongoing training keeps staff up to date on current issues affecting newcomers, they have an empathy rooted in their own experience. New clients, like Eva and Roberto Marmolejo, who emigrated from Uruguay recently, are already donating their time. In return, they get help with legal papers, finding a place to live and money

2003- LINC clients and volunteers discuss their success with the Halton Multicultural Council's Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada program.

30th
Anniversary

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