

**We're working to integrate skilled immigrants**

Thursday, July 16, 2009

Re: Another kind of brain drain, July 3.

The Social Planning Council report shows a worrying trend: many immigrants are facing difficulties with their new life in Ottawa, and underemployment is becoming a growing problem largely because of the challenges inherent in hiring and retaining skilled immigrants in positions that match their experience.

Many employers in this city recognize the importance of bringing immigrants into their workforce.

They understand how our city and the people who live here are changing.

But -- more important, --they appreciate the diversity of experience and skills, the eagerness to succeed and the fresh perspective that internationally trained individuals can bring to a job.

Hire Immigrants Ottawa (HIO) is a community-based initiative led by the United Way. We bring together employers and immigrant-serving agencies to help integrate Ottawa's skilled immigrants into the workforce. More than 30 Ottawa organizations belonging to HIO's employer council of champions have committed to championing the recruitment and integration of skilled immigrants into their workplaces.

The public service, Ottawa's largest employer, presents some unique challenges for those job-seeking immigrants.

These barriers include tight language, security clearance and citizenship requirements.

With the renewal of project funding to HIO from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, one of several commitments we have made is to enhance our support for the federal public service.

We will work with government departments, providing tools and resources, hosting cultural workshops and networking events where recruiters and newcomers can connect. It takes time to break down systemic barriers, but progress is happening.

In April we presented Human Resources and Skills Development Canada with a 2009 HIO award for its immigrant internship pilot program. A leading example for other employers, the program creates opportunities for skilled immigrants to use their qualifications to contribute to that department and connect with mentors.

Through HIO, employers are learning how to reach beyond the familiar talent pools to access other qualified candidates, adopting more inclusive policies and developing cross-cultural communications skills.

Essentially, workplaces in Ottawa are being redefined to work for and with our city's immigrant workforce, enabling both employers and skilled immigrants to flourish.

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