

Province renews funding for bridge training programs

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BY KATIE STEWART

EMC News- 700 skilled immigrants in Ottawa will be given assistance in finding jobs in their fields thanks to renewed funding to three bridge training programs by the Ontario government.

The ministry of citizenship and immigration announced that it would be giving \$1.7 million in continued funding to Algonquin College's Internationally Trained Civil Engineering Technologist Program, La Cité Collégiale's Access to Construction Trades Program for Immigrants, and LASI World Skills' Ottawa Job Match Network, as part of a total of \$3.6 million in Ontario.

"Ottawa is a model for other Ontario cities," said Dr. Eric Hoskins, minister of citizenship and immigration.

"It has taken resources of newcomer agencies and employer focused agencies like Hire Immigrants Ottawa and brought the two parts together."

At the announcement at United Way Ottawa's headquarters on Sept. 16, Dr. Hoskins explained that two-thirds of immigrants have post-secondary educations in a range of professions including engineering, construction, and medicine.

"These are extremely skilled, highly talented and a highly valued group of individuals," he said. "We need to maximize the contributions of our skilled newcomers to ensure Ontario's and Canada's prosperity."

With an aging population and a demographic that's evolving, Dr. Hoskins says that we will increasingly rely on immigration to meet our labour market needs and that it is the ministry's job to make sure that skilled newcomers can enter the job market as quickly as possible in doing so breaking down the barriers for others in the future.

Michele Wright, acting executive director of LASI (Local Agencies Serving Immigrants) explained that when immigrants come to Canada, with over half choosing to live in Ontario, many are faced with culture shock, language barriers, and not having networks that will ultimately find them jobs.

For employers, it's also a challenge to assess credentials from another area in the world and apply them to available positions.

"We have this pool of extremely qualified newcomers in Ottawa and there's a whole collective of agencies that are working very hard to support them," said Ms. Wright. "Then we have a whole pool of employers that know and want to integrate immigrants in their labour force and for some reason, that hasn't really happened yet."

Ms. Wright added that there is sometimes a perception of 'difference' and how a newcomer will fit into an organization.



Photo caption: Dr. Eric Hoskins, minister of citizenship and immigration came to Ottawa to make the announcement of continued funding by the province to three social agencies in Ottawa. Algonquin College, La Cité Collégiale, and LASI World Skills received a combined \$1.7 million dollars that will help 700 skilled newcomers in Ottawa find jobs in their fields.

"Our job is to educate and make employers aware of how to integrate a highly skilled newcomer."

On average 4,853 immigrants come to Ottawa each year, in 2002, Dr. Javaid Chaudry was one of them.

Dr. Chaudry was raised in Pakistan and received an education in Veterinary Sciences with a specialization in animal reproduction and had worked as a veterinarian in Pakistan since 1991.

Like many newcomers to Canada, Dr. Chaudry experienced challenges when he began looking for a job.

"I was told that I would get a very good job and that we would be happy...but that wasn't true," he said. "It was very hard."

Dr. Chaudry applied to Tim Hortons and to a few gas stations and wasn't offered a job for months.

"The frustration was increasing day by day," he said. "When I came, this was not my dream."

Eventually he got a job working overnight at a gas station and then got a job in security, where he was able to study for the veterinary exam.

After failing the exam once and having his wife encourage him to not give up, he passed the second time.

"I thought, the dream is coming true and I should keep working," he said, adding that he was able to volunteer at the Alta Vista Animal Hospital where he was able to gain practical hands on experience and eventually wrote and passed his practical exam.

With the help of LASI's Ottawa Job Match Network, he was taught how to talk to employers, write his resume, and how to apply for jobs.

He currently works as a veterinarian at East View Animal Hospital and part-time at the City of Ottawa's Spay and Neuter Clinic. He has a dream to establish his own hospital.

Yasir Naqvi, MPP for Ottawa Centre, has also experienced the challenges of coming to Canada.

Naqvi came here 21 years ago with his family and sees the benefit of having increased funding provided to help immigrants find employment in their field.

"Both of my parents were qualified lawyers, but not in Canada and saw their challenges," he said. "We need to make sure that everybody who comes into our province is fully integrated and is able to give back in a personal manner and a professional capacity to the prosperity of our province."

Since 2003, Ontario has helped about 40,000 skilled newcomers find jobs in their fields through bridge training programs.

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