

Ottawa companies awarded for employer excellence

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EMC news - When Maya Chikaishi first moved to Ottawa 14 years ago, she immediately felt like it would be her new home.

Having made the 15,000-kilometre journey from Japan to Ottawa to learn English and expand her career prospects, Chikaishi went to Carleton University. As she approached graduation, the young woman admitted her lack of Canadian work experience would make it hard for her to find a job, but Ottawa software firm Kivuto gave her an interview and eventually the chance she was looking for. Now a director with the firm, she said she is proud to still call Ottawa her home.

Kivuto and Chikaishi were honoured on March 6 for employer excellence at the 2013 Employer Council of Champions Summit, organized by the local organization Hire Immigrants Ottawa.

"I'm honoured and pleased to be part of this company and to receive this award," Chikaishi said.

The event took place at the National Arts Centre as part of a two-

day summit to help promote diverse workplaces.

Henry Akanko, the director of Hire Immigrants Ottawa, said the awards handed out at the summit are a way to encourage more employers to consider hiring recent immigrants.

"The value is to raise the profile of why it's important to have diverse workplaces," Akanko said. "These awards help us tell successful stories to organizations who may be thinking of expanding."

The second recipient of the award was Bridgehead Coffeehouse and Roastery.

Tracey Clark, the managing director of Bridgehead, accepted the award.

"This is a nice recognition for the efforts that we are making," she said.

Clark added that she feels this award is also something the coffee house's employees can celebrate too.

"We think diversity is really important," she said. "It came out of us trying to be competitive, but everyday we are learning new things from our employees."

For starters, Clark said, some of

the new immigrants the company has hired have proven to be a great influence in the kitchens of her establishments, offering ideas on new dishes the coffee house could serve.

For Chikaishi, working for Kivuto has been life altering.

"They have given me one opportunity after another," she said.

Chikaishi started her career in email support, as a Japanese translator and is now the director of her department.

"I just kept getting more and more responsibility," Chikaishi said.

Now part of the hiring team, Chikaishi said she is interviewing a lot of new immigrants for positions at the company.

"They remind me of myself, 10 years ago," she said. "I didn't get a lot of interviews because I didn't have much Canadian experience, and I know what they are going through."

Her goal as a manager, she added, is to continue to create a diverse workplace at Kivuto, where she has met some of her best friends.

"Working here feels like being part of a family," she said.

Located at the Ottawa United



MICHELLE NASH/METROLAND

Maya Chikaishi and her employer, Kivuto were one of two companies awarded for employer excellence at the 2013 Employer Council of Champions Summit on March 6. Chikaishi works as director of customer support at the company, climbing the ladder since she was first hired in 2004.

Way's office in Overbrook, Hire Immigrants Ottawa is a community-based initiative that connects employers with access to skilled immigrants as well as resources and tools to be encouraged to hire new

immigrants. Launched in 2006, the government funded organization hosts the annual awards to help promote the ongoing process of building diverse workforces.

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