

Comments from Executive Director, Honey Crossley at Working Skills Centre's 30th Anniversary Gala, October 28, 2008 (St. Lawrence Hall)

Thank you Suhana for those kind remarks, but it is easy to work so hard when the cause is an organization as important and worthy as Working Skills Centre.

I am proud to be the Executive Director and to lead an amazing and diverse team of dedicated and talented individuals.

Each day we change lives. Each day we contribute to strengthening the fabric of Toronto, of Ontario, of Canada.

As I look out into the audience, it is wonderful to see so many personal friends and professional colleagues who have come to join us in this celebration of WSC's 30th Anniversary.

I want to echo Suhana and others who have, and will, thank our very generous sponsors who have made this evening possible and are providing funds which will help us to launch a scholarship program so that more and more immigrant women can take advanced training at WSC's Academy of Computer and Employment Skills.

I also want to acknowledge all 3 levels of government who provide support through various grants and contribution agreements, so that WSC can provide services in a timely and effective manner to those in need.

...You know – winter is coming soon – but how many of us are ready. Our cars need servicing and some even snow tires... and we know that the day of the first snow fall the line up at the service centre will be long and we will curse ourselves for not acting sooner. We have heard again tonight that by 2011 – 90% or more of new hires by employers in Toronto, in fact in Canada, will be immigrants. Our declining and aging population makes it clear that we depend on these newcomers to keep our economy rolling. But how many of businesses are really ready, and how many of us are supporting agencies that ensure the immigrants are able to integrate successfully.

Well, with your help, we at Working Skills Centre are doing something about this. We are getting the tires on the car before the snow flies.

The three banners you see hanging from the balcony represent the “pillars” of our services:

Direct Marketing, our first initiative to assist immigrant women with low English language levels to integrate into the Canadian workplace, still provides mail house services to non-profit agencies and small business and hires back those graduates as casual labour. It is a true social purpose enterprise! With the new avenue of fulfillment business, this business provides added revenue for other WSC ventures; I hope you all visited the “Pick and Pack” room, to celebrate this achievement!

Skills Training, including our newly registered career college, A.C.E.S., focuses on preparing individuals – both men and women – for entry level positions in office positions and in the accounting field. Graduates are hired as junior accountants, bookkeepers, secretaries, receptionists, logistics clerks, and medical receptionists.

World Service Cargo, the practice firm, provides 8-12 weeks of Canadian work experience in a virtual company, a concept that is hard to understand but very effective. A carbon copy of a real supply chain business, World Service Cargo, hires and fills all the positions needed to operate a business in Canada – HR, sales and marketing, Administration, Finance, Warehousing, Logistics, and IT.

What is unique about WSC is that there is a constant – “Settlement Services” – which are ever present in all our programs. Diploma Programs include modules such as “Business English”, “Understanding the Canadian Workplace” and “Intercultural Workplace Communication”. We ensure that our graduates have BOTH technical AND communication, problem solving and other soft skills demanded by employers. And we instill (or so we are told) confidence so they can become self-sufficient.

The learning opportunities afforded immigrants at WSC are critical to the success of newcomers as they establish lives for themselves and their families in Canada. The atmosphere at WSC is one of warmth and acceptance. With staff and volunteers coming from all cultural backgrounds and speaking 16 different languages, immigrants are sure to find their footing as they travel towards integration and full participation in Canadian society.

We can throw numbers at you to indicate our success:

- ✓ Over 50,000 women helped since 1978
- ✓ Over 4,000 information and referral calls each year
- ✓ 700 graduates annually from the skills training programs
- ✓ 50 returning lettershop customers,
- ✓ 100 recent immigrants completing 8 weeks virtual work experience and
- ✓ over 75% obtaining jobs commensurate with their experience from their home countries

BUT...

We think the most powerful way to impress you is for you to hear from our graduates.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce two of our 2008 graduates to share their journeys with you.

INCI TELGER

Inci who came to Canada from turkey with a strong background in banking and administration is now working at B2B Trust/Laurentian Bank as a Senior Administrator in Deposit Services. She was a participant at World Service Cargo.

WINNIE MUPEDZI

Winnie is from Zimbabwe and came to Canada in 2007. She struggled at first but after an employment program at YWCA, one of our community partners, she successfully completed the Office Administration Diploma in May.

After introductions each graduate will speak.