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Working Skills Centre Celebrates 30 Years of Assisting Immigrant Women to Obtain Canadian Work

October 28, 2008

That it takes longer, and is more difficult, for new Canadians to reach financial self sufficiency has now been established, according to the latest reports studying transition. We also know that by 2011, the majority of the growth in Canada's labour force will depend on these same new Canadians. Is anyone making the link between these two? Certainly those responsible for public policy don't seem to be.

There are, however, a number of small agencies across Canada preparing and training immigrants to successfully gain meaningful employment in their new country. One such organization is Working Skills Centre (WSC) in Toronto and last night it celebrated its 30 anniversary of assisting immigrant women to get their first Canadian employment.

Originally established to help train a large number of Central and South American women who arrived in Canada after the military juntas made life in their homeland impossible. Working Skills Centre has considerably broadened its reach over its thirty years and has assisted over 50,000 clients from 80 different homelands.

One of the great deterrents to gaining appropriate employment for a new Canadian is the lack of work experience in her new country. So in addition to training and providing Canadian workplace orientation, WSC operates a social business within the organization, which provides the all important Canadian work experience for the clients' resumes and, at the same time, provides a source of revenue for the Centre. WSC also works actively at job placement.

Last night's affair, *A Celebration of Immigrant Women's Journeys* attended by over 200 guests, honoured the wealth of talent and prestige that the immigrant community contribute to Toronto. The program included The Honourable Madame Justice Wailan Low, the first and only Chinese member of the Superior Court of Justice of Ontario; Maryam Sanati, Editor-in-Chief of *Chatelaine*; and Eve Egoyan, accomplished concert pianist. Suhana Meharchand, news anchor for the CBC hosted the evening. The organizing committee was co-chaired by Jan Wong, well-known writer of such books as [Red China Blues](#) and [Beijing Confidential](#). As well as these and other celebrity guests, some of the graduates of the program shared their experiences of when they first came to Canada and the role that Working Skills

Centre played in their development. Despite the celebrity billing, the students and graduates were the stars of the show!

MP Olivia Chow, who has been a strong advocate for Working Skills Centre, both as the Centre's City Councilor and now as the MP, was there to share her story of success, developing from an immigrant youngster to a formidable national political force. But she also understands the public policy issues. She sees the link between successful newcomer transition and future labour shortages.

Let's hope she can convince the rest of the members of our newly elected federal government that assisting newcomers to successfully enter the Canadian workforce is the solution to our future labour shortages.

The evening was made possible by sponsorships from our corporate and community partners who recognize the important work the agency does. Continental Sponsor. RBC Royal Bank and National Sponsors: Xerox Canada, Wells Fargo Foothills, East West Resources, Miller Thomson's Women's Leadership Initiative, and Asset Engineering. Together with funds from many individual who contributed, Working Skills Centre will launch a new scholarship fund which will change lives and in the long run strengthen our economy.

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Text of Executive Director's Speech enclosed for quotes

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