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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 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<sup>th</sup> 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 the last 30 years and assisting 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 two social enterprises 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*, was attended by over 200 guests, honouring 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, a graduate of the program shared her experience of immigrating to Canada and the role that Working Skills Centre played in her development. Despite the celebrity billing, she was the star of the show!

MP Olivia Chow, who has been a strong advocate for Working Skills Centre, both as the Centre's City Councillor 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. The corporate sponsors included: 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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