

# Employers reach out

Tour of immigrant settlement agencies helps employers tap into immigrant workforce talent BY MILTON KIANG

In today's tight labour market, employers need to be resourceful in hiring the right talent, with immigrants as a key source. But many employers don't know how to go about reaching out to immigrants. So when the Burnaby Board of Trade and Hemlock Printers recently hosted a tour to take business executives to local immigrant settlement agencies, a number of local companies, including Electronic Arts Canada, Vancouver Metrotown Hotel, Investors Group, Ivanhoe Cambridge and BCAA, were eager to sign up.

On the so-called "Seeing is Believing" tour, organized by the Canadian Business for Social Responsibility (CBSR), company executives visited Burnaby Family Life, SUCCESS and Immigrant Services Society offices in Burnaby to observe agency staff assist clients on issues such as employment and language barriers.

Wendy Campbell, director of mobilization at CBSR, says the tour's objective is to "broker partnerships" between businesses and community service agencies.

The October 10 tour highlighted to the executives the many barriers that

exist for immigrants seeking employment, given them a new perspective for hiring.

Tour participant Leza Muir, senior vice-president at Pacific Blue Cross, said, "I wasn't aware these programs existed. When I heard the stories this morning from some of the agency clients, I was moved to tears. Their stories were very touching. I definitely plan to tell others about these groups."

Some of the executives on tour shared some of their previous experiences with hiring immigrants. Christine Lim, Burnaby branch manager at Scotiabank, talked of her organization's participation in SUCCESS's job mentorship program. The branch recently sponsored a one-day job shadowing opportunity for a SUCCESS client. Lim explained that the jobseeker was taken through the retail banking process, from greeting customers to handling back-office procedures.

"Some jobseekers may come from a retail banking background in their home countries; the job shadowing shows how Canadian banking processes and systems might differ," Lim said.

The touring executives then heard from an immigrant who has benefited



CHRISTINE LIM (left) of Scotiabank shares her branch's success with job mentoring. Photo by Jonathan Taggart

from such a program firsthand. Rocio Nunez, a human resources professional and recent immigrant from Venezuela, spoke about how SUCCESS's job mentoring program gave her a chance to learn about Canadian HR practices. She spent March to June of this year with the HR department at the Public Service Commission of Canada where she developed strong relationships with other HR professionals. She still keeps in touch with them, and they exchange information about professional events.

Ross Lewis, general manager at CH2M Hill, an engineering company,

has been involved in SUCCESS's job mentoring program for the past year. He holds regular roundtable discussions where jobseekers ask his engineers about the profession in Canada and Canadian qualification requirements. So far, Lewis has hired one jobseeker through the program.

With corporate social responsibility on the rise, efforts like the "Seeing is Believing" Tour and the many programs available to improve immigrant employability are good news for both employers looking to fill vacancies, as well as immigrant jobseekers. 🍁



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