

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

INTERCEDE for the Rights of Domestic Workers, Caregivers and Newcomers

March 2006

Toll Free 1-877-483-4554



A JSW SUCCESS STORY

By Yvette de la Torre

Before I came to Canada in May 2005, somehow I already knew what to expect. I knew I had to work hard in order to find the job that I really wanted. But I did not know just how hard it was going to be.

The minute I landed I immediately started looking. I looked everywhere and anywhere: in newspaper ads, in the Internet, on wanted signs posted on bulletin boards, doors and windows. I sent a lot of resumes to lots of job postings. Nothing seemed to work.

I remember one time when I had a telephone interview for a customer service position and the interviewer told me when we were finished that I had "a funny accent". At the time I did not have any idea how to respond to the remark, and needless to say I did not get the job.

I also remember responding to an advertisement for a secretarial posting in a law office feeling confident that my five years of experience as an executive secretary would qualify me for the job. I got an interview but not a job.

I was starting to feel so down and depressed. One day I met a countryman at the mall with whom I exchanged notes about our life in Canada. It was him who suggested that I contact INTERCEDE "because INTERCEDE can help" jobseekers like me. And so I contacted INTERCEDE where I was directed to their Job Search Workshop (JSW), one of the free services offered by the organization.

At the Job Search Workshop, I learned the different tools and techniques for accessing the hidden job market. I learned the different options and ways on how I can improve my job search. I learned how to become more resourceful and to use my skills and talents to the fullest. I learned how to prepare customized resumes and cover letters which were appropriate for the jobs I was seeking. Also I learned how to answer interview questions including the difficult ones.

After attending the workshop, I worked at two part time jobs as a sales clerk: at a butcher shop and at Eddie Bauer. Later I decided to spend my spare time working as an office volunteer. Five months after my Job Search Workshop, I got the job that I wanted. I am now an Administrative Assistant in a manufacturing company located in Mississauga. It was a JSW at INTERCEDE that helped me a lot to attain my goal.

REMINDER:

INTERCEDE **FREE** Income Tax Clinic on Sunday, April 2, 2006, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. at INTERCEDE's Office, 234 Eglinton Ave. E., Ste. 405. For more information, call Genie at 416-483-4554 ext. 21.

YOU ARE INVITED

to an INTERCEDE BREAKFAST to celebrate

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2006

8:00 a.m. Saturday, March 11

at Future's Café, 483 Bloor St. West

(W of Spadina Subway)

**Followed by International Women's Day program and march
at 11:00 am, OISE Auditorium, 525 Bloor St. West**

For more information, please call Genie at 416-483-4554 ext. 21

See you all there!

Note : No monthly meeting at Cecil Community Centre for the month of March

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

By Bernice Small

On Sunday February 5, 2006, INTERCEDE celebrated Black History Month at the Cecil Community in Spadina. The afternoon started with a talk by Martha Ocampo, Executive Director of Across Boundaries, an ethnocultural mental health centre, and Treasurer of INTERCEDE. Ocampo stressed the importance of commemorating Black History Month even though we were not taught Black History in school.

The afternoon's guest speaker was Deborah Headley, President of Network Therapeutic Alliances. She spoke strongly about reclaiming our personal and political power and about extolling our heritage, our pride and the accomplishments in our life.

Emceeding the celebration was Sonia Roberts who turned out to be a "natural". The audience enjoyed a song performance by Gerald and Janell, and poem recited by Sotoy and Yche. A surprise came from INTERCEDE's Black Connection Group whose members did a short skit about the situation of domestic workers, which was well done.

Awaiting the celebrators was a wide variety of Black food and drinks which they enjoyed after the formal program.

This year's celebration was much bigger than last year's and we are counting on it to be still bigger next year. For the success of this year's event, INTERCEDE has to thank all those who helped in different ways as well as those who came to participate on February 5th. Without their support and commitment such a success would not be possible.

LIFE: WHAT A PRECIOUS GIFT

by Marinel Alcoba Lopez

Life! What a precious gift from God. What a blessing to be alive in a wonderful vibrant world of unlimited possibilities. So I felt until one day adversity struck. I could not help thinking it was a curse. Why me? I could not help asking.

It was February of 2005 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer stage II. This was my toughest challenge to date. I was devastated at the news and did my crying for 24 hours. Anger, fear, sadness, pity, frustration – I felt a surge of mixed emotions in the face of this hurtful reality. I thought my life was just beginning, all really good things just starting to happen for me, my dreams for my family were within reach

How I longed for someone to talk to, someone who might have gone through this whole ugly ordeal and would understand what I was going through. My parents and my husband begged me to come home and undergo treatment where they could be around to care for me. Lurking in the darkest part of my soul were deep-seated fears too painful to bear and too horrifying to even admit. Still I believed there was a purpose for everything - whether we knew it or not.

A series of tests showed that the lump in my breast was indeed malignant and needed to be removed. I was scheduled for surgery on March 10. I was so nervous before the operation and prayed the whole night that God would guide the hand of my surgeon as he removed my tumor. While being wheeled to the operating room, a powerful feeling swelled over me like a huge gently rolling wave which lifted my feet off the ground. I knew then that God was with me and felt absolutely assured that everything would be okay. I simply felt positive that I was in his loving embrace.

My recuperation was a bit painful after the removal of 24 lymph nodes. It hurt to move particularly my left arm on which I had to lean most of the time. By May I began chemotherapy and experienced every side effect possible: unbelievable weakness and fatigue, nausea and mouth sores, then my hair started falling. I suffered a lot of pain from the chemo, as well as from daily injections meant to increase my white-blood count.

I certainly would not want to be so sick again. Everytime I threw up I felt full of self-pity, I just couldn't take it anymore. After four months of chemotherapy I started radiation treatments which lasted 33 days. It was not as bad as I expected. One day, I felt God had completely taken away the cancerous cells from my body.

Today my hair is growing back, even thicker than it was before. I am back to "normal" again, but this time I have adopted a new lifestyle and am eating healthy. I am also working again. I did not realize how much I took my health for granted until it was in jeopardy. I have also learned the power of positive thinking. When I learned that I had cancer, I began reading a lot of books about it and read inspirational stories written by cancer survivors.

One important thing that helped me conquer breast cancer is the loving support of my family. Their prayers kept me going and helped me through the worst times when I wanted to give up. Yes, they were far from me but their concern brought me tremendous peace and hope. Then there was my "special group" of friends from INTERCEDE and its staff who were a source of support, strength and inspiration.

Today I marvel at what an unbelievable life I have had thus far, at my accomplishments and my dreams, at the trials and blessings my cancer has bestowed on me. Cancer has made me a better

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

**Sat. April 15, 2006
Trip to Casino Rama**

FOR ONLY \$10

When: Saturday, April 15, 2006

Assembly time: 8:30 am

Departure Time: 9:00 am

Meeting Place: York Mills Subway Station
(at Shell Gas Stn., Southeast of Yonge)

FREE Buffet Meal Voucher from Casino Rama

To register, please call Genie at 416-483-4554 ext. 21

**Fri. May 5 to Sun. May 7
FROM VICTIMIZATION
TO EMPOWERMENT**

**INTERCEDE Domestic Workers
and Caregivers Conference**

**Inviting workers in the Live-in Caregiver Program
employed in Ontario and other Cities**

Call now 416-483-4554 ext 21

and stronger person. I always thank God for the best day of my life and praise Him for each day that begins.

I will sleep the sleep of a contented child and wake up with the excitement of a new year. Yes, 2006 will be the best year of my life ever.

Join the next INTERCEDE LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY TRAINING

When : Saturday

March 4 & 25, 2006

April 8 & 22, 2006

May 13 & 20, 2006

Where : To be announced

Time : 10 am - 4pm

"I learned about my rights and how to become assertive—now I am treated with more respect!" - Training participant

To register call Genie at 416-483-4554 ext. 21

SOS SMS System

FOR FILIPINO MIGRANT WORKERS IN DISTRESS

By Center for Migrant Advocacy (CMA)

The SOS Short Messaging System for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Distress is a project which was conceived and developed by migrant workers themselves, led by those based in Saudi Arabia.

When they want to report cases of abuse or to request for government or non-government assistance, Filipinos working abroad can avail of the SOS SMS - a handy, inexpensive, easy to use, accessible, 24-hour/7day mechanism that may be used any-time and anywhere around the world

The SMS messages are logged and saved in a computer and are auto-forwarded to the Centre for Migrant Advocacy (CMA) and concerned agencies of government for prompt and appropriate action. The SOS SMS information system will also facilitate analysis of the common problems besetting Filipino migrant workers and the ability, efficiency and adequacy of assistance and intervention by government and non-government organizations (NGOs). Hopefully as a result, gaps will be identified and recommendations made which will have an impact on policies, practices and attitudes related to migration issues.

How does it Work?

Step 1. To ask for assistance or report an incident, send Text/ SMS as follows

Text <sos> <space> < your message and your name>

Then send to:

+63 9209 OFW SOS (+63 9209 639 767)

Step 2. Text Message is received by the SOS SMS System; it is logged/ stored in the data base (Date and Time received, Mobile Phone Number used, Message)

Step 3. Text Message is autoforwarded by computer to the cell-phones of CMA, OWWA and OUMWA-DFA.

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Step 4. OWWA and OUMWA act on the message. Text message is verified and acted upon. CMA does the same and follows up the case with OWWA and OUMWA.

Step 5. As back up, periodic written reports of cases that come in through the SOS SMS system are submitted to DFA OUMWA and OWWA for follow up.

Step 6. Advocacy for Migrants Rights and Well Being: CMA documents the cases of distressed OFWs and analyzes the information according to types of work, gender, forms of abuses, destination/ work place, form of intervention made, etc in order to identify the gaps in policies and issues for advocacy work.

Work in Progress

CMA emphasizes that this mechanism is still a work in progress and is a product of cooperative efforts contributed by individuals and organizations within and outside government, here and abroad. The project can only be effective and useful if the OFWs know about it thus they request assistance to disseminate the above information as widely as possible.

Q & A

Q: *A newly-arrived townmate who is in a detention centre contacted me and asked if I could post bail for her or guarantee a bond. I am currently on Open Employment Authorization and recently got married to a Canadian Citizen.. I really want to help this friend. What can I do and will I be qualified to be a "bond person"?*

A: You are very nice to offer help to your townmate but be aware that to be a bond person you:

- 1.) must be a Canadian citizen or permanent resident,
- 2) need to have enough money for a security deposit
- 3.) must show proof that you own certain property
- 4.) must earn an income which is seven times the amount of performance bond needed

You can bring up this matter with a community organization that assists immigrants and refugees or ask your friend to call Legal Aid Ontario at 1- 800-668-8528.

Q: *I filed my application for Permanent Residence under the Live-in Caregiver Program and requested concurrent processing for my husband and two minor children. I received " approved in principle" after my dependents completed the requirements specified by the visa office in the Philippines. I was completely devastated when I was recently diagnosed with cancer and had to undergo a series of chemotherapy treatment. Now I am very worried and scared: can my husband and children still be approved to come to Canada ?*

A: We would hope that Canada Immigration will be sympathetic to your situation and Canadian embassies abroad have usually facilitated processing for emergency situations. As your dependents have completed the statutory requirements - security and medical - there should be no problem in processing their application for permanent residence or in approving their application for visitor's visa or temporary resident visa . For this latter they would need to support their application with:

- 1) a letter from your doctor confirming your illness
- 2) a letter of support from relatives or friends who can provide support and assistance to your family when they arrive in Canada.

Come to INTERCEDE for assistance by one of our counselors.

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Q: Two years ago, my application for Permanent Resident was refused because I was not able to complete the 24 months-in- three-year requirement of the LCP. I was able to complete only 20 months. I then sought the assistance of an Immigration consultant who helped me file an application for Refugee status. Recently I received a letter from Canada Immigration informing that my application was refused and that I must leave Canada immediately. I now want to apply for Humanitarian and Compassionate consideration but I do not know what reasons to give for this H&C consideration. My previous application files are still with the Consultant.

A: To give your H&C application a better chance for approval you should have answers and information justifying why you are seeking such exceptional consideration. Ask your Consultant for your files so that you can bolster your appeal and ensure you are not contradicting previous information you gave. Make sure that information you give is supported with appropriate documents, for example: a police report related to matters of Security, a doctor's report to support any health information, bank statements to show your financial stability or a certification of employment to prove self-sufficiency. In any case, please contact INTERCEDE for further assistance or for referral to a community legal clinic or to lawyers who accept legal aid.



REMINDERS

Make an appointment first

Please call for an appointment before you decide to visit INTERCEDE and have your appointment confirmed by a counselor you want to see. Otherwise, counselors will not be able to talk to you as they may already be booked for other appointments and they will just give you an appointment for another day. To avoid being sent home and wasting your day, do confirm your appointment before coming to INTERCEDE.

FREE JOB SEARCH WORKSHOP FOR CAREGIVERS & NEWCOMERS

WHEN: SUNDAY
 March 5, 12 19 & 26, 2006
 April 2, 9, 23 & 30, 2006
 May 7, 13, 14 & 28, 2006
TIME : 10:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
WHERE: INTERCEDE
 234 Eglinton Ave E., Suite 405
 Toronto, On, M4P 1K5

Please call (416)483-4554 ext. 30 or 21 to sign up.
 Seating is limited.
 Funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada

INTERCEDE

INTERCEDE STAFF:
 Address: 234 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 405
 Toronto Ontario
 M4P 1K5
 Regular Hours: Mon-Friday 9 am – 5 p.m.
 Telephone: (416) 483-4554
 Fax: (416) 483-9781
 Toll-Free: 1-877-483-4554
 E-mail: info@intercedetoronto.org

INTERCEDE STAFF:
 Fely Villasin - Part - Time Executive Director
 Jo Alcampo - Administrative Consultant
 Columbia Diaz - Settlement Counsellor & Program Manager
 Anita Fortuno - Settlement Counsellor
 Bernice Small - Settlement Counsellor
 Vicky Policarpio - JSW Facilitator
 Salma Saadi - JSW Co-Facilitator
 Genie Policarpio - Intake & Administrative Assistant

We wish to thank: Citizenship and Immigration Canada - ISAP and Job Search Program; the Municipality of Toronto CSP, and The Ontario Solicitor General's Office for their financial support.



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