

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights

May 1990

(INTERCEDE)

INTERCEDE HOLDS WORKSHOP ON COUNSELLING DOMESTIC WORKERS

Through contact with domestic workers, INTERCEDE became aware of the fact that outside Metro Toronto, domestic workers in Ontario do not have an organization like INTERCEDE to serve them. Most agencies which are serving immigrants in these communities are not very familiar with the Foreign Domestic Movement Program (FDM) nor with the employment rights of domestic workers. Consequently, domestic workers often have nowhere to go to with their problems.

Through a one-day seminar held on March 16, INTERCEDE set out to share experiences in counselling domestic workers, so that settlement workers from outside of Metro would better understand their situation and assist them.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants who attended were mostly settlement workers or supervisors of services for their agencies.

Prior to the workshop they were asked to complete a pre-workshop evaluation form to assess their own knowledge of domestic workers in general, of the FDM Program and of labour protection for domestic workers in Ontario.

Most of the participants expressed that they had little previous contact with domestic workers and that their knowledge of the above mentioned topics was inadequate to counsel domestic workers properly.

WORKSHOP AGENDA

The morning began with an introductory address by the Co-ordinator of INTERCEDE, Fely Villasin, who explained the purpose of the workshop. She expressed that, although the majority of domestic workers who ~~currently~~ ^{come from} Ontario work in Metro Toronto, there are a significant number who are in communities outside Toronto - from where these settlement workers came.

Characterized by the isolation of their work, their lack of access to services, and their lack of information as to the services available, domestic workers are more vulnerable than many other immigrants and other workers to exploitation and abuse.

Fely gave an account of INTERCEDE's history of lobbying for domestic workers, and how INTERCEDE played an important role in winning landed status rights, minimum wage, and maximum hours, in addition to their being covered by the human rights code and workers' compensation benefits.

In addition to INTERCEDE's advocacy work, Fely spoke of the service unit which has provided domestic workers with information and counselling, as well as settlement. Having led the struggle for more equality for domestic workers, INTERCEDE hopes that the agencies participating in the workshop would benefit from its experience working with domestic workers.

***Come to INTERCEDE's monthly meeting on Sunday, May 6, 1990
from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street.***

***Douglas Ord of the Metro Toronto Police Inter-Community Relations Unit
will discuss some common problems and useful information concerning the police.***

***There will be CLASP Legal Clinic and
INTERCEDE counselling will be available.***

A HISTORY OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

The first presentation of the workshop was on the History of Domestic Workers in Canada by Sedef Arat-Koc. Sedef is a post-doctoral fellow in Sociology at York University and a member of the Board of Directors of INTERCEDE. Sedef's presentation, in addition to her article **History of Domestic Service in Canada** which was included in the workshop handouts, was very insightful.

Sedef explained that in order to make sense of the present low status attached to domestic work and its relegation to women, it is necessary to understand the historical developments which led to the transition of domestic work. With industrialization, came the division of productive and reproductive work. Sedef discussed the feminization of housework which resulted in women members of the household, in general, and female "servants" being confined to housework.

Sedef traced Canada's history of importing domestic workers, the role of the Immigration Department from the development of the first policies that governed domestic workers to the present FDM Program.

In the question and answer period, the participants expressed their appreciation of the complex historical events which have influenced the status of domestic workers. One of the participants commented on the enormous economic contribution which the domestic workers make, not only to the families for whom they work, but also to the nation because they relieve thousands of other women of their domestic responsibilities in order that they may participate in the labour market. Another par-

ticipant commented that as women of colour, there are further political and philosophical issues which must be addressed. She said that if we believe in women's equality, we must address the issue that the domestic workers, most of whom are women of colour, are paying for the social mobility of the white Canadian women for whom they work. We ended this discussion with the proposal that we must challenge the fixed concepts which people have regarding the value of domestic labour.

OVERVIEW OF THE FOREIGN DOMESTIC MOVEMENT (FDM) PROGRAM

The second presentation was on the Foreign Domestic Movement Program by Mary Jarrell. Mary, the President of INTERCEDE, is a lawyer specializing in labour law who currently works with Legal Aid. Mary went through the Immigration Manual which contains the sections on the FDM Program and explained the philosophy behind the program and the selection criteria. She then went on to explain the criteria for landing and some of the procedures involved.

There was much concern regarding the criteria which must be met in order for a domestic worker to become landed. While on one hand there is a great demand for domestic workers to come to Canada, in effect it is not enough that they remain domestic workers if they are to continue living in Canada. Many of the workshop participants felt that this implied that this work was not worth doing as a lifelong career. Another comment was made about few employers being sympathetic to the need of the domestic workers to fulfill upgrading and volunteer criteria required by the FDM Program.

We wish to thank the Employment and Immigration Canada (Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program); Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Women's Program); Ontario Ministry of Citizenship; Ontario Women's Directorate; the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Community and Social Services); and the City of Toronto, for their financial support.

NEW SUBSCRIPTION:

CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

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YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

Intercede Members	FREE	Non-member Domestic Worker	\$ 5.00
Non-Profit Organizations	FREE	Others	\$10.00

CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The third presentation of the workshop was a Critique of the FDM Program and INTERCEDE's Recommendations by Fely Vilasin. Fely explained that following the completion of a survey of hundreds of domestic workers, in addition to interviews and discussions, INTERCEDE made several recommendations to Immigration based on the concerns which were expressed by the domestic workers.

Lively discussion centred on the living-in condition, overtime, underpayment, and vulnerability to sexual harrasment and assault experienced by domestic workers. There were questions raised about the propriety of release letters, the enforcement of labour standards and deportations.

LABOUR PROTECTION

The third presentation on Labour Protection for Domestic Workers in Ontario was made by Ian Anderson. Presently a lawyer in private practice, Ian was co-founder and staff lawyer for the Workers' Rights Group at Parkdale Community Legal Services.

Ian explained that the real issue is the lack of knowledge; many immigrant workers do not know they have any employment rights at all. This is not an issue which just concerns domestic workers but all immigrant workers. Many are unaware that concepts like minimum employment standards, the human rights code and workers' compensation protect them. Because of immigrant workers' lack of knowledge of these rights, they experience a high degree of exploitation by their employers.

Ian went through the right of domestic workers to: minimum wage, overtime pay, vacation pay, written notice or termination pay, and paid public holidays and statement of earnings as

stipulated in the Employment Standards Act. He also discussed the special provisions for domestic workers with regards to two guaranteed free periods per week. He went on to explain that deductions should be made for UIC and CPP and that domestic workers are entitled to these benefits in addition to WCB.

Although this labour protection exists, Ian acknowledged that it is difficult for a domestic worker to make a complaint regarding employment standards without repercussions to her job.

Many questions arose about making claims through the Workers' Compensation Board. A concern about challenging the release letters was voiced. One of the participants wanted to know why so much abuse takes place despite the existence of contractual agreements and employment standards. The exploitation of Third World labour and the exploitation of women were cited as two obvious explanations.

EVALUATION

Most participants expressed confidence that they would now feel better informed and prepared to serve the domestic workers in their communities. Many of the participants were eager to do outreach work to let the domestic workers know of the services they would now be able to provide them. One participant would have liked to have heard the testimony of domestic workers at the workshop. Several encouraged continued contact between INTERCEDE and their agencies.

**WATCH OUT FOR
ANNOUNCEMENT OF
INTERCEDE MEETING DATE
AND PLACE FOR JUNE.**

NEWLY ARRIVED DOMESTIC WORKERS' ORIENTATION

**St. Ann's Parish Church Hall
Corner of Gerrard and Degrassi
(2 Blocks East of Broadview)**

May 13, 1990 - 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

FREE ADMISSION -- LUNCH PROVIDED

Coco's Calendar:

Condolence:

To Magda Biscera, Fely Donato and Alice Bernabe on the death of their fathers.

Congratulations

and Best wishes to Lina Flor Seat on the occasion of her marriage.

To the participants of the Awareness & Leadership Training under Sister Chit Bautista who completed the course.

Defend yourself...

WEN-DO WOMEN'S SELF DEFENSE CORP.

2 Carlton St., Suite 817
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3
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They teach women to defend themselves.

- Share Ways To Avoid Dangers
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For Information...

about tenants rights, call Metro Tenants Legal Services at 926-9693.

BULLETIN

TO DISPELL RUMOURS ABOUT THE Foreign Domestic Movement Program

NO CHANGES HAVE YET BEEN MADE TO THE FDM

**Domestic Workers currently in the FDM Program WILL NOT BE
AFFECTED adversely by any future changes.**

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Canada Immigration Centre	973-4444
Employment Standards Enforcement	326-7160
Revenue Canada (Taxation)	869-1500
Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre	656-8933
Educ & Skills Training Ctr, Labour Council	971-5893
Legal Services	
Parkdale Community Legal Services	531-2411
CLASP (Osgoode Law School) Legal Clinic	736-5029
Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Serv.	363-0304
Metro Tor. Chinese & SE Asian Legal Clinic	971-9674
Emergency Housing	
Nellie's Hostel	461-1084
Evangeline's	762-9636

Unemployment Insurance	730-1211
Ontario Human Rights Commission	326-9511
OHIP	965-1000
Immigrant Women's Health Centre	367-1388

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

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FIRST CLASS