

Job Development Program: *project to address shortage of nurses
a step towards employment equity*

VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN WORK TO BREAK BARRIERS PREPARE WOMEN TO RETURN TO R.N. PROFESSION

Responding to the need for training programs that address the barriers faced by immigrant and visible minority women in the area of accreditation and ESL (English as a Second Language) training, the CVMW (Coalition) is sponsoring a Job Development Program that will enable the women to return to their profession as Registered Nurses in Ontario. The program is also a concrete way of solving the shortage of registered nurses in the province.

"The response is overwhelming. Over 100 women have applied in less than a month," said Elaine Prescod, Program Manager.

"Our project, which is funded by Employment and Immigration Canada, consists of two phases. During Phase I, which is the delivery assistance component, the participants undergo ESL training with the purpose of preparing them to take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and TSE (Test of Spoken English)."

Passing the TOEFL and TSE exams is a requirement before one could be allowed to take the licensing exam. Classes started on March 20, 1989 and are being held during the day. Since the number of seats for this

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COOPERATION OF COLLEGE OF NURSES LAUDED

The advisory committee has been in constant communication with the College of Nurses of Ontario (College) since the initial stages of the project.

Ms. Betty Secord, Director of Registration of the College gave an overview of the requirements of the College at an information session on February 25, 1989. "While the College may have sufficient information on the nursing profession in some countries, there are countries where we have no information. It is very important that each and every applicant get in touch with the College so that we can immediately determine what is required," said Secord. There are those who face difficulties in getting documents out of their countries like: Somalia, Vietnam, Poland, and Iran.

The applicants for the program are from Kenya, Iran, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Poland, Philippines, Korea, Czechoslovakia, China, El Salvador, Bolivia, Brazil, Soviet Union, Panama, India, Hong Kong, Guyana, Argentina, Chile, Sri Lanka.

Research studies have shown that professional accreditation is an important issue for

immigrant women with professional train and occupations from their countries of origin. Although a task force has been set up to examine the issue of accreditation in trades and professions, both the federal and provincial governments have been slow in examining and addressing the serious implications of under-utilization of immigrant professionals. The report of the Task Force on Trades and Professions, headed by Professor Peter Cummings of York University, was scheduled to be presented in January 1989.

"Because we can only select 25-30 percent of the total applicants the women on the waiting list are anxious to find out when they can participate. It is a very difficult and trying time for all of us", said Meerai Cho, ESL trainer.

"Although Phase I is a pilot, we have to capture the moment of the project. Again we see a juncture in our history where some changes could concretely happen and be maintained on a higher level. This could be another anchor" said Winnie Ng, a founding

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WOMEN POWER: SOURCE OF STRENGTH

"A very significant and inspiring result of this project is the blossoming of volunteers. Visible minority women in the health profession are part of our team," said Carmencita Hernandez, chairperson of the Coalition.

Lydia Norona, Director of Nursing - Special Care Services of Doctors Hospital, Sally Quan from George Brown College, Emma Alcaraz (all registered nurses), and Maria Herrera of the Department of Public Health have stepped forward to assist and be part of the program.

Women who were professional social workers in their home countries are also participating in formulating, planning and evaluating certain phases of the program. Nora Angeles - Richardson, president and manager of ASAP Wordpro Services, a company that trains immigrant women in word processing and computer basics, is a consultant to the project. "Her years of experience has been invaluable," said Prescod. Another social worker, Marion Villanueva, who has worked with immigrant women on Canadian Jobs Strategy projects, will also help in the life skills portion of the program. Villanueva presently works with OCASI (Ont. Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants). Both women spearhead "Project: Ang Bata", a group of Filipino community and social workers involved in bettering the lives of street children in the Philippines.

"This program has injected a new surge of energy to

women who have been waiting for the right time and the right project to come along. The women we are working with now are anxious to serve and become the next project's volunteers," said Angeles-Richardson.

"What we have done is give an organizational life to an untapped pool of visible minority women in the community," said Hernandez. "As we all have a role to play, we create, get hold of and maximize each and every opportunity."

"As we advocate and lobby for changes, visible minority women are themselves agents of, and for change."

The Immigrant Women's Health Centre (IWHC) staff have been very supportive. "We would like very much to share our work and our experiences," Administrative Coordinator Barbara Isaac said. The IWHC is a pioneer and the only immigrant women's health centre that provides its services in six languages, namely Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese and English. It has a Mobile Health Unit that travels to factories, community centres, schools, and other places. Their counselors, representing various communities, provide information, counselling and referral services relating to birth control, pregnancy, pap tests, breast examination, etc. It provides health education programs and resource materials to various groups and agencies.

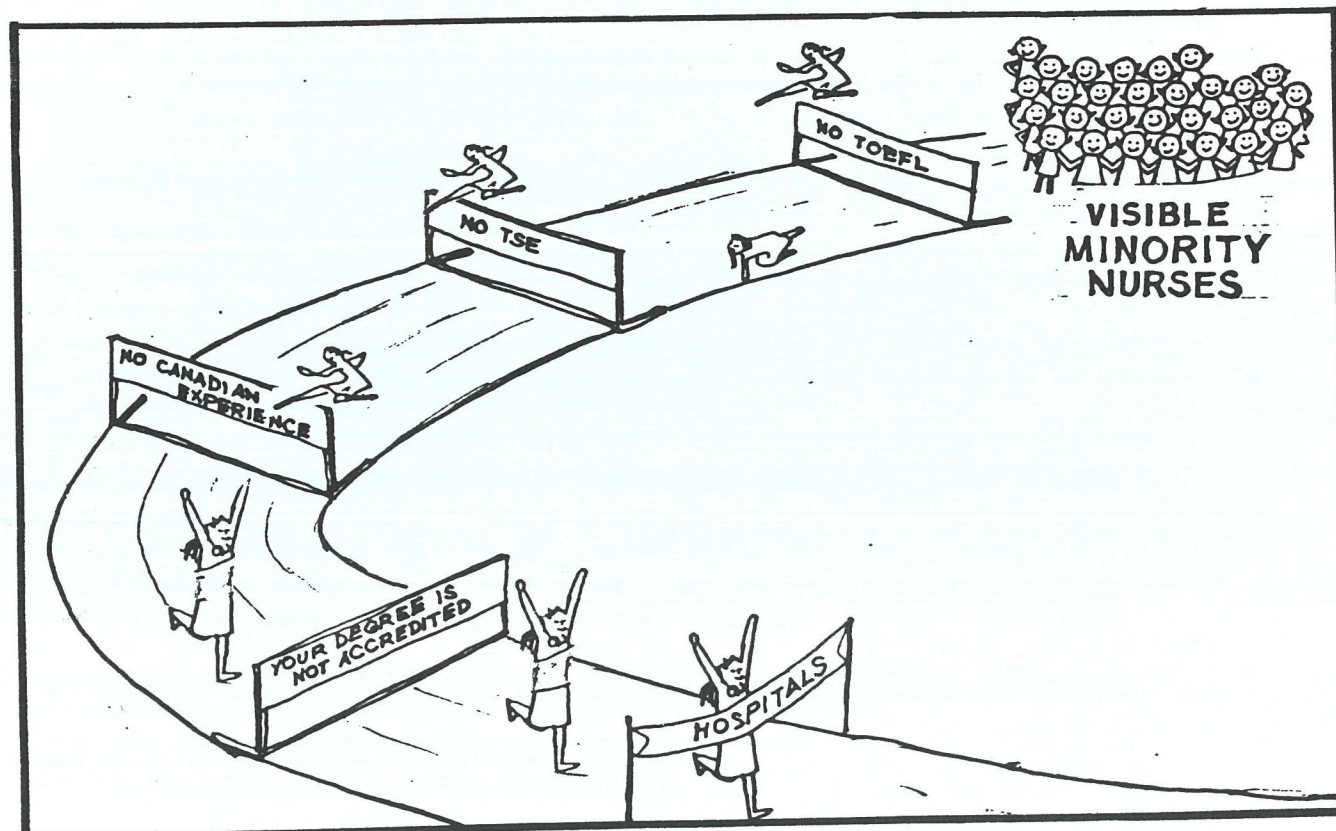
Recognizing the need for life skills programs, Akua Benjamin, member of the Toronto Chapter of the Congress of Black Women, Jojo Geronimo, Administrative Coordinator of the Cross Cultural Communications Centre, Barbara Isaac, and other volunteers are among the resource persons who will conduct workshops. A play will be read to the group in May, as part of the Mayworks, a festival of working people and the arts.

"The development of this project has its own peaks and valleys. The enthusiasm shown by Jennifer Lothian, our program officer, was certainly a ray of sunshine. However, sometimes, the bureaucracy she works for manages to sneak in dark clouds and rain," said Hernandez. "We want to express our thanks to Catherine Chambers, Lilian Hughston, Martin Allentoff and Diane Belanger for the immediate attention given to some participants' needs."

Moving forward

"This project will help give us an insight into exactly how systemic racism affects visible minority women in their every day lives. It will definitely contribute towards developing our theory and our work against systemic racism and towards employment equity in the province of Ontario," said Maria Wallis of the Coalition.

"As we advocate and lobby for changes, visible minority women are themselves agents of, and for change," said Hernandez.





"I had sixteen years of experience as a nurse in my country and I came with a strong will to continue my profession. Shortly after I arrived, I contacted the College of Nurses of Ontario to ask about the requirements for foreign nurses to get a professional licence. I received only information that I had to pass the TOEFL and TSE examinations with a proper score and after that I would be able to take the refresher course for nurses."

"I think every nurse would like to go back to her profession, but some of them give up. Because of their financial situation, they get any job that is available. And then they cannot leave work to take the courses required by the Ontario College of Nursing."

Finally I found a job as a health care aid in a nursing home. It was hard work --- a lot of lifting and I had to do the laundry, lots of laundry. When I came home I was very tired. My back ached. I was tired mentally and physically."

"I was happy to be in a new land with lots of opportunities. But I find it difficult because they (Canada) won't allow me to work in my profession."

MEET THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE PROGRAM:

On this spread, they speak about their new life in Canada, their problems in re-entering the profession and their views on the Coalition's Registered Nursing Program which is helping them meet the requirements of the Ontario College of Nursing for securing a professional licence. Because of their common experiences, they seem to speak in a single voice and their stories can be welded into one:

"My friend took me to a nurses' agency and I was hired as a graduate at \$12/hr. I worked for almost 2 years in different hospitals. One day, my head supervisor called me and asked me if I had passed the TOEFL exam. I said I did it once and got 498. She told me that because I really had not passed the exam, my pay rate would be reduced to \$10/hr. I felt very sad. I learned nursing for four years and nothing is recognized here."

"I was constantly under stress and as a result my health failed. I had to undergo medical treatment for a long time."

"I wanted to attend a course on English to prepare me for the TOEFL but I had small children and I couldn't afford day care."

"There's no subsidized day care for my kids. I am on the waiting list. How can I attend courses?"

"If the nursing problem is a real one, why is the government doing too little to solve the problem?"



"When I came to Canada, I didn't speak English at all. I enrolled in an ESL class. It was very basic. After the course, I looked for work. It was very hard because I could not communicate in English well. Even filling out application forms was difficult. I filled out many application forms and I got only two phone calls about my application."

"As soon as I arrived in Canada, I started to search for a job. I went to many hospitals, but the answer was, if I didn't have the Ontario registration I couldn't be hired."

"More immigrants are coming to Canada. There is a big demand for nurses who can offer not only their professional skills but also their language skills to serve these newcomers."

"I came to Canada by myself, with no relatives or friends here."

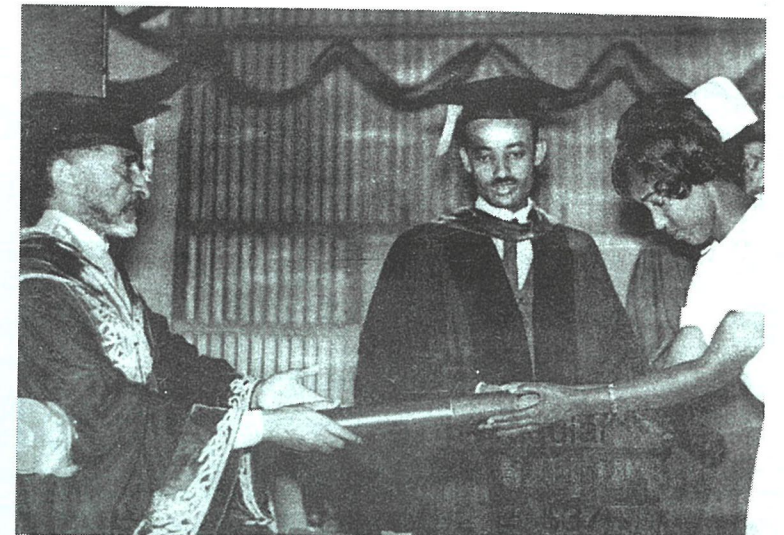
"I came from a tropical country. I came at winter time; I had problems adjusting to the weather."

"I must work to survive in Toronto."

"We started our life here from scratch by trying hard."

"I have had some problems, such as finding an apartment to rent a place which is accessible by public transportation."

"My daycare problem is taken care of and we get transportation allowance. But we still need help in Phase I. I do not know if I can survive 6 months without work. Even if I am on UIC, because I earned so little money, it is not enough to pay my bills."



"The program gives us moral support and encouragement."

"Everyone knows how hard it is to find a place to live in Toronto. After 3 months I was moving to my fourth place. It was at the basement; there were other tenants. I was promised a room after a month but I was asked to move out instead. My landlady wanted "someone who would shovel the snow and help her fix the house"; she made a rule for me and a for the others; she kept a \$100 deposit because she did not know what I would do. I completely broke into pieces. I had been in the country for a month and already somebody doubted my honesty. I filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission against her for discriminating against me."

"What was the most difficult and unbearable for many months? The uncertainty of my professional future!"

"The women give each other emotional support."



"Giving up my job to be in the program was the most difficult decision for me. I couldn't ignore the fact that my income was needed by my family. But I know that the sacrifice will be worth it in the future."

FACTS ON THE PARTICIPANTS

Number of Participants	30
Married	74%
Single	26%
Number of Countries Represented	17
Nursing Experience in Country of Origin:	
10 years or more	27%
5 - 10 years	47%
Less than 5 years	26%
Employment prior to Program:	
◦ factory worker	◦ pastry cook
◦ counter help	◦ nurses aide
◦ receptionist	◦ store clerk



The Project Coordinator

"A LEARNING EXPERIENCE"

The day we opened our office on February 13, 1989 was also the first day of the recruitment period. There was never a moment that the telephone was not busy. The response to the program from nurses who had heard about the program by word of mouth, through Coalition members, other community organizations and advertisements placed in the ethnic press was simply overwhelming. Daily, I received about 25-30 calls from people whose interest had peaked on hearing about the program and who now wanted specific information on how to become part of it. Women from various countries - Chile, Argentina, Laos, Czechoslovakia, Panama, Korea, China, Brazil, Philippines, Russia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka, Poland, Somalia, Hongkong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Iran, Columbia, Bolivia, India and El Salvador - called to register.

As Project Manager, I arranged one-on-one interviews with the women and helped them complete an application form. This was a great learning experience for me. I was culturally educated as I met with these women from different countries and talked with them. This activity made the days go by very quickly. At the end of each day during that recruitment period, I felt a sense of ac-

The ESL Teachers

"I know that this project will be a success because it serves a need," said Pat Thomas, one of the ESL trainers. "The women have expressed their hope for the program to continue and expand to include other professions."

"This job is in a way 'My dream come true'. I have come a long way as an immigrant woman, myself struggling through 'the language barrier' and still suffering from it. My heart breaks when I hear stories from the learners, the kind of stuff I myself went through," said Meerai Cho.

complishment and gratification, not only from the job I was doing, but also from interacting with these women.

I never expected that kind of response to the program. We received a total of 109 applications, but due to the limitations of the program, we could only accept a small group of 30 women for the program. It was very emotional for me, after getting to know these women, to call them with a negative reply to their applications. Some of them cried when the response was not favourable, others shrieked with joy when they heard the good news. I could still hear their reactions.

Still hoping, the unlucky ones asked whether we would be conducting another such program in the future. I could not give them any definite reply although they were quite willing to leave their names, addresses and telephone numbers for future consideration.

A program like this has been too long in coming. Think of the sacrifices these women have made coming to Canada, the loss to Canadian society of the services these women, with many years of experience and training, could have been rendering and the waste of their potential to contribute to better and more efficient medical care.



The Staff from left to right: Meerai Cho, Elaine Prescod and Pat Thomas.

WOMEN TO BREAK BARRIERS

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phase is that there is no training allowance and very minimal amount of daycare subsidy.

Phase II (Job Development) of the program starts in September. "Upon achieving passing scores in TOEFL and TSE, the women will be put through a special Nursing Refresher/Upgrading Course. They will be on training allowance. Although there is also a daycare/baby sitting cost component it is very limited," said Prescod.

Lack of training allowance and day care benefits have been the two most serious barriers women encounter in pursuing any training program that may be available. "It is impossible for any woman, more so an immigrant and visible minority woman not to have a job for 24 weeks out of 30 weeks. For many years now, immigrant and visible minority women's groups have been pressuring the federal government to change this requirement. The federal and provincial governments should show their commitment to the employment of visible minority women by addressing these systemic barriers," said Maria Wallis, a member of the Advisory Committee and the Chair of the Research and Education Committee of the Coalition.

COLLEGE OF NURSES

Continued from page 2

member of the Coalition and the Chair of the Curriculum Development and Community Outreach. She is also the English in the Workplace Coordinator of the Labour Council of Metro Toronto. A meeting is being scheduled with the Ministry of Skills Development to discuss its role in providing similar training programs.

MEET THE PARTICIPANTS

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"When I went to the College of Nurses of Ontario, I had my professional papers with me. But they told me to bring only proof of TOEFL and TSE scores as if these two were more significant than my professional skills. They didn't mention the Registered Nurse Test. It would help if things were explained."

"I was going to take the TOEFL and TSE without going to school. The Coalition made me open my eyes to the need to study."

"It is helping me improve my English and I am making friends and knowing different cultures."

"I know that in many European countries, such as West Germany and Sweden, there are special programs for foreign nurses available after a basic language preparation. Those programs, sponsored by the government, help nurses to get back to their profession as soon as possible and to use their experience for the benefit of society."

"The women give each other moral support."

"This program is the first of its kind I have heard of. I hope that this program will be successful and become a permanent program helping foreign nurses to get a licence and helping Canada solve the problem of shortage of nurses."

These women speak many languages but they tell a story familiar to most visible minority women in Canada. Their story is our story!

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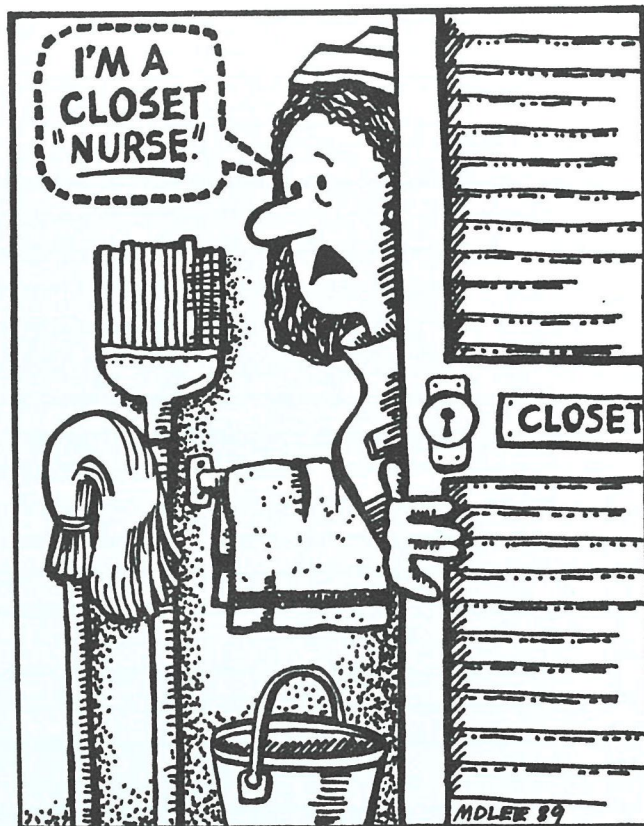
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I have several years of nursing experience, however . . .



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