

For Media Release



Profile for Joanna Hong
By Jose Gabriel C. Sevilla

Centre for Community Learning and Development *Reinforcing Lives and Overcoming Immigrant Challenges with IWIP*

Like thousands of immigrants leaving behind their home countries and careers to start new lives in Canada, Joanna Hong kept a positive outlook even when faced with the difficulties of trying to find appropriate work in a new country.

The lack of Canadian experience, inadequate language skills, and the pressure of seeking employment in one's true profession are the biggest barriers of the Canadian immigrant experience.

"I arrived in 2001, like every new immigrant, I experienced hard times at the beginning. I could not find my professional job and had to accept any work to support my family. I felt that I had lost my way to a meaningful life," Joanna recalls.

Despite her initial disappointment, Joanna continued searching for answers towards a better career path, one that would capitalize on her experience in China as a teacher; she came across the Immigrant Women's Integration Program (IWIP) offered by the Toronto Centre for Community Learning and Development (CCL&D). It was here that that Joanna began to see potential for a professional future.

Providing an intensive 10-month curriculum for up to 10 women, CCL&D's IWIP program allowed Joanna to develop leadership skills, use her experience, and train in various other areas.

"IWIP focuses on the leadership and development training for immigrant women especially on community development engagement. In China, I was a computer science teacher, so naturally I want to help others with my knowledge," Joanna says.

The sense of community and the culture of support received at IWIP also helped Joanna gain the necessary confidence and perspective she needed to pursue her career.

“Through training, I learned skills and gained knowledge from the teachers at CCL&D. My communication skills were greatly improved and I became more confident. I studied and worked not only individually but also in a team,” Joanna recalls.

Now employed in Dixon Hall as a computer instructor in the Career Steps Department, Joanna says she has successfully transferred her past professional knowledge to her current community service work.

Dixon Hall, which caters to residents of local public housing and to transient homeless men and women, is based in Regent Park.

Regent Park is Canada's largest public housing complex and the needs of its 9,500 residents are a central focus for Dixon Hall's services.

Joanna says that for her, the Community Capacity Building and Neighbourhood Engagement program is one part of the IWIP program that resonated most with her.

“I also worked on a project called Community Profile and Local Scan. This helped me investigate the issues facing the community and how to solve them by using the theory of change and critical thinking,” Joanna says.

More importantly, this is where she also learned the difference between community development and community capacity building.

When asked what her biggest challenge was, Joanna answers, “It was how to use the critical thinking in learning and working. As a community worker, we must understand that not everything happens logically. We need use critical thinking to analyze and solve the social problems.”

“I recently facilitated the Practical Introduction of Internet Use and Chinese Information On-line workshop,” Joanna explains. “It was created for Chinese seniors in our community. I taught them how to get Chinese news and how to search for useful information on-line.”

For Joanna Hong, being able to overcome initial difficulties and surpass her immigrant expectations by not only improving her skills and experience but by also giving back to the community is a truly great achievement. She hopes her story will inspire others to persevere in their careers.

“I benefited a lot from CCL&D for the spirit of cooperative teamwork and the spirit of dedicating to community development in my life.”

End

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