

JOB HUNTING ESPECIALLY TOUGH FOR NEW CANADIANS

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"For a skilled, experienced person, there isn't much out there, and when applying for what is available, you're questioned in regards to being overqualified," said Brenda Mathies, who was on the local job hunting scene last year.

The Acton resident said she came across many entry level positions in manufacturing, warehousing and hospitality, but she was looking to put her 30-plus years of customer service and office management skills to use.

In the end, she accepted a customer service position last fall at one third of her previous wage.

"This pandemic has changed many things, (including) job opportunities and job expectations," she said. "And that doesn't even touch on the COVID protocols — cleaning, screening

and vaccination expectations — that add an additional level to the process."

The pandemic has also impacted Carol Primo's employment efforts.

The 72-year-old — who said she has to work as the pension money she receives through the government isn't enough to pay the rent — had a job through a temp agency, but was the first to be let go when the company started scaling back operations.

The Burlington woman said she's done extensive application processes and testing for many different companies, but so far the positions haven't panned out.

"I have to find a job. I don't mind taking any job as long it brings in some money and I don't have to worry about paying my rent," she said, noting she's now working with the Goodwill career centre to

secure a position. "I have food to eat, I have clothes on my back, I have a bed to sleep in. All I care about is keeping the roof over my head."

Long application processes are among the challenges facing those who are new to Canada and Halton Region as well.

According to the staff at Halton Multicultural Council (HMC) Connections, which provide employment supports for immigrants, job-seeking newcomers are also up against: a lack of credential recognition and Canadian work experience, language barriers, lack of mentoring in their profession, and much more.

"In addition, due to COVID, the kinds of jobs that are available are labourer jobs," said HMC Connections executive director Kim Jenkinson, noting that even before the pandemic,



HMC Connections photo

HMC Connections staff (from left) Meray Sedak, Aatika Sikander, Nilofar Yousof and Ayesha Usman work with job-seeking newcomers to help them get on the path to employment in Halton.

those types of positions would often go unfilled.

"Newcomers have much higher career expectations, and typically a high education and work experience that don't suit those jobs in the first place."

Among those who've come to Canada and Halton with big career aspirations is Syed (who asked that his last name not be used). He arrived from Pakistan in June 2020, knowing that his

search for work could be made that much more difficult by the ongoing pandemic.

He got in touch with the HMC Connections team, which began guiding him on the path to employment in Canada.

"I'm a pharmacist by education, so I jumped on my bike and started peddling and dropping my resumés to all the pharmacies that were in reach," he said.

The Oakville man's persistence paid off as he was offered a volunteer position in a pharmacy, which gave him Canadian experience that ultimately translated into a job as a pharmacy assistant.

After upgrading his skills with a certification and taking advantage of a mentorship program, Syed has now realized his long-term goal of working in the corporate world as a project manager.

He acknowledges that he's among the lucky minority of newcomers to land a position in their field upon arrival and credits HMC Connections with his success.

"They don't give you fish — they teach you how to fish."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With COVID-19 continuing to have an effect on most aspects of life, we wanted to take a closer look at how local job hunters are faring in a pandemic market.

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