

Immigrant now helping others

From page 1.

questions, but addressed her needs.

The flyer explained how the agency helps immigrants and refugees. Ms Daneshi learned the government and agency would assist her with language, employment and social issues.

Since a counsellor at the agency spoke Farsi, Ms Daneshi was able to explain she graduated with a degree in sociology from the University of Allameh in Tehran in 1994 and spent seven years teaching in Iran's public school system.

She also had experience as a counsellor.

She was assigned counsellor Mitra Beikmirz, who

became an adviser, facilitator and friend.

"Mitra was the first person to help me find my confidence," Ms Daneshi said. "She's been wonderful."

Ms Daneshi took language classes and the family decided to attend St. Matthew's United Church to fulfill spiritual and social needs.

"I was encouraged to go to church to mix with Canadians," Ms Daneshi said. "People at the church were very kind and this helped improve my English."

It didn't take Ali long to pick up the language.

"His father helped him and he mixed with the English-speaking children," Ms Daneshi said. "Ali has adjusted well."

Mr. Yazdankia found work in manufacturing almost immediately, while Ms Daneshi secured a job teaching Farsi in York Region public board's international language program.

She also volunteers as an interpreter and translator.

Ms Daneshi was pleased to hear a \$920-million immigrant settlement deal was struck this week between the province and federal government.

The funding is for improving language training for immigrants, many of whom speak neither official language.

Ontario is using some of the money to launch a website to provide information for immigrants on job opportunities, training, skills accreditation and more.

Agencies hope cash will eliminate settlement roadblocks

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

At what point in an immigrant's journey to Canada does the land of promise turn into a series of road blocks?

As far as Hashim Ali can tell, it's as soon as the plane touches down.

The barriers are odd given Canada's history as a nation built on the backs of newcomers, said the executive director of My Canada Integration and Settlement Services, a Richmond Hill-based agency offering services to York Region immigrants.

More importantly, immigration is now the backbone of York's growth and the reception newcomers face is critical to the region's success, he said.

Of the 38,000 people who move to York each year, more than 11,700 are new immigrants, with another 13,600 being newcomers from other countries who settle elsewhere first before moving to the region.

That's why Mr. Ali is hoping a historic agreement signed Monday between Ottawa and Queen's Park, which will see the federal government invest \$920 million over five years in Ontario immigration services, will usher in innovative and comprehensive changes.

Not that he is holding his breath based on the lack of co-ordination he's seen in the system so far.

"The system is not working as it should be. People who come here have to go through a lot of work to know where settlement workers are," he said, concerned the splintered system often leaves immigrants floundering in their new homeland.

It's not that agencies don't exist — for example, a search of "York Region immigration" on the website of York's Community Information and Volunteer Centre reveals 15 related organizations — it's that services are fragmented with no one association overseeing operations.

The system needs more accountability with clear benchmarks for agencies, Mr. Ali said.

"The government is spending millions of dollars. Where is that money going? That is the question. This is the public's money. It's tax money. Money is being wasted," he said.

Roger Manning, executive director of Catholic Community Services of York Region, the region's largest immigration agency, agrees more co-ordination is needed. But a new diversity office being implemented through York Region's human services planning coalition in the next year will provide one-stop shopping for newcomers seeking programs, he added.

At the same time, Mr. Manning cautioned against establishing a super-agency to deliver the services now provided by different community-based organizations, stressing the more important issue is addressing the immigration funding gap between York and other communities.

"As far as the needs of York Region are concerned, our per capita funding for serving new immigrants is substantially lower."

Federal and provincial funding for immigrant services in York in 2004-2005 was \$179 for each new immigrant, compared to \$873 in Toronto, \$558 in Peel, \$503 in Durham and \$418 in Halton.

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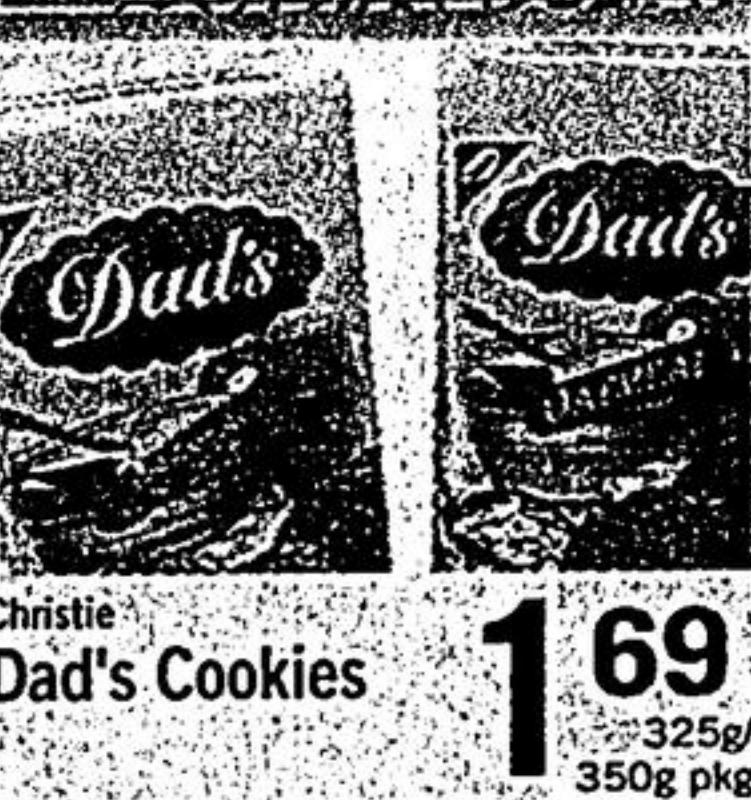
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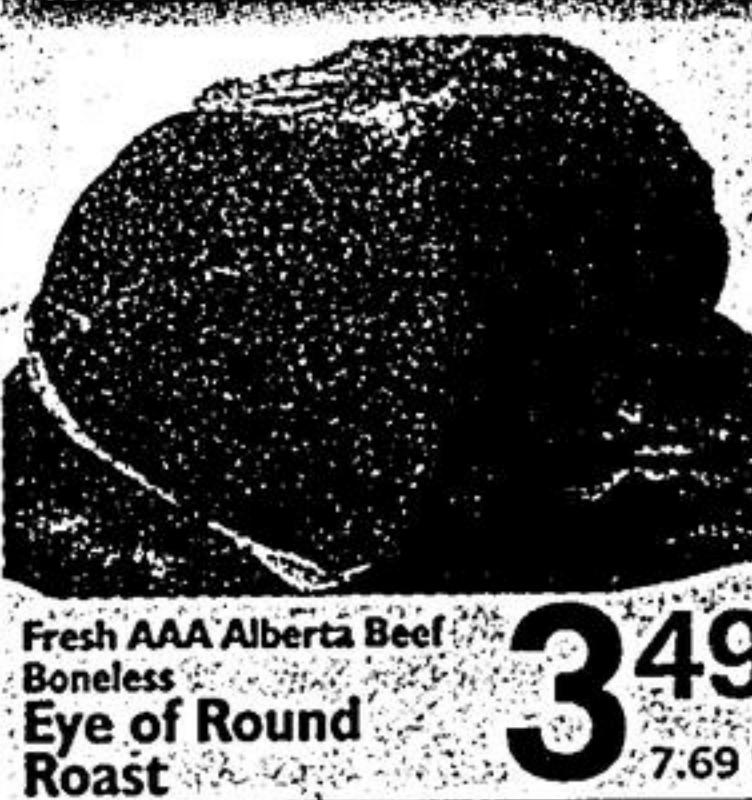
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350g phg

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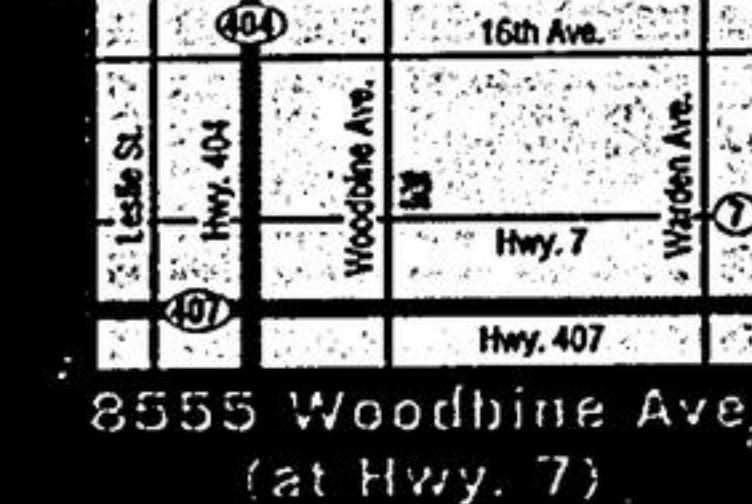
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