

Making connections

BY MONIKA MORAVAN

"This is a place for people to talk and out of that comes good. That's what we do here," says Bozena Stobinska, Settlement Worker at Community Development Council Durham upon walking into The Networking Group. Funded by Community Connection, they meet every Tuesday night from 6-8 p.m. at the Ajax Public Library main branch.

Some like Mickey Mann aren't even looking for work. The retired GM worker attends to pass on his experience and one night he brought info that a local school bus company was looking for drivers.

"Informal conversations are driven by participants and often, interviewing techniques, networking skills, and listening

skills. When they show up, that is.

"The hardest obstacle is getting people to come out and share their experiences," says Stobinska. In some cultures, it is not acceptable to go out and admit you're out of work.

"They need to make room, to open their minds to it," adds Mann.

Finding work in a new homeland is hard but it doesn't just happen to immigrants. The economic situation the past few years has been an equal opportunity unemployer.

"We're all in the same boat. Everyone comes to Canada with an idea of their dream job, but in the beginning you have to take what you can get," says Stobinska.

"Once you arrive in Canada, you should immediately become a job hunter," Mann

emphatically states.

Millicent Laing did just that nine years ago after arriving from Kingston, Jamaica. Within seven weeks, she was an insurance administrator. Her employer downsized and Laing used the opportunity to take a computerized accounting course. She graduated in March and is now looking for work.

Laing has experienced racism but her biggest hurdle was jumping into a very different workplace culture: "I learned back home that your ability helps you advance. Here, it's involvement: there's a greater emphasis on attitude not just aptitude."

She remembers her boss asking if she was okay because 'you're always working.'

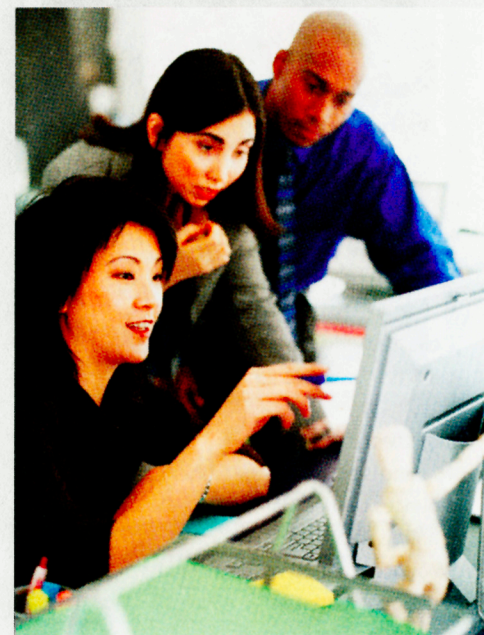
"I'd rather take that time to do my job," Laing explains. "You look good when I perform well," she adds.

Another drawback was education. "People sometimes think a foreign one isn't as good. It might be different but it's not inferior," she says.

She cites her daughter, who was in the Jamaican equivalent of grade nine at nine-years-old when they immigrated, but placed in elementary school here.

"I've gotten past that. I took it as a learning experience and now I teach that to others," Laing says.

Mann agrees. "I believe in guiding and helping others but they have to do something with it," he says. Upon coming to Canada he took his life savings to buy a small home and used car, figuring that would allow him more opportunity to work. If things didn't turn out, he could sell the house.



Laing also looks for the positive. "I always tell my children you don't quit the game because you didn't get good cards. You can still win if you play them well."

This is eerily familiar to Stobinska. A

chemical engineer in Poland, she found herself on a different career path in Canada, studying environmental protection and legal administration before landing a volunteer position with CDCD and earning a certificate in Settlement Practice. It's not quite the career she had in mind while meticulously calculating complex compound solution ratios, but not such an unusual

career turn after all: connecting people and paths to employment is all about chemistry. **For more information on the Networking Group, please contact: Bozena Stobinska at 905-686-2661 ext. 103 or email: bstobinska@cdcd.org.**

NETWORKING DID YOU KNOW?

You can meet and learn from former newcomers at the weekly Networking Group meetings.

To learn more or to become a mentor, phone (905) 683-2661 ext.103