

WINS Toronto

The Diversity Forum

First Issue, 2021

THE INAUGURAL ISSUE



Editor : Mark Lovewell

Email us your views, ideas and comments for the next issue!
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Welcome to the first instalment of The Diversity Forum, a newsletter on issues related to workplace diversity and equity sponsored by WINS Toronto.

Dr. Hitu Sood, Founder & CEO

Who We Are

WINS is a not-for-profit that promotes inclusive policies in the Canadian workforce. Our name reflects our commitment to advocate and help take steps towards ensuring the creation of more equitable workplaces in which diverse professionals can flourish.

What We Do

WINS is bringing attention to challenges faced by diverse professionals through a community-based approach driven by research that focuses on understanding the barriers impeding the professional success of those we represent. We make sure to view diversity and equity issues through a distinctly Canadian lens, keeping in mind that very often Canada's diversity narrative gets swamped by the larger North American media spotlight. We intend to achieve this through three main initiatives.

Our [Showcasing Diverse Voices](#) initiative uses community research that involves interviews, questionnaires, surveys, case studies and focus groups to examine the unique challenges of the groups we are representing. For example, we are conducting a survey Showcasing Immigrant Voices whose empirical results will help WINS develop programs that advance and enable immigrants on their professional paths and will allow us to advocate for more equitable policies. We are paying particular attention to the voices of immigrant women, because the unique issues faced by this group have not received due attention till now.

Our [Road to Success](#) initiative highlights diverse professionals' skills and strengths in a variety of ways. We provide a public platform for diverse professionals as speakers. We offer an embracing community of support in which diverse professionals can learn and network with like-minded others. In addition, we offer consulting to employers, government service providers and other not-for-profits which aim to empower diverse professionals towards success. Through all this, we are finding proactive ways to bring employers, diverse professionals, and policy makers together to forge a novel, growth-driven approach that benefits all.

Finally, this newsletter under the editorship of Mark Lovewell, the Chair of WINS Toronto, has been established to promote dialogue and discussion with the broader community to highlight a range of views on issues affecting under-represented groups in Canadian society.

Our Mission

WINS' current mission is to bring further attention to the barriers and challenges faced by immigrants professionally in Canada, especially immigrant women. Skilled immigrants have come to Canada with their professional and life experience already vetted by the government. We have agencies spending millions of dollars devoted to reschooling and integrating immigrants to "fit" into the Canadian workforce, as if Canada is not already a part of the world and global economy. Given the colonized approach and mindset towards immigrants, it is particularly important to mobilize a paradigm shift that moves beyond the notion of the landed immigration process as "fixing" the newly arrived immigrant.

Taking a critical view, one can ask, "How can a fruitful relationship begin when one is told from the beginning that one is not good enough?" At present, Canada as a nation is not empowering immigrants; rather there is a presumption of their supposed "lack". From any standpoint, this is both dis-empowering and counterproductive.

We canvassed ten public figures and asked them to respond to the question, "If you could make one change to help overcome Canada's colonial approach towards integrating immigrants, what would it be?" In 'Showcasing Community Voices', you'll see their responses.

Showcasing Community Voices

"If you could make one change to help overcome Canada's colonial approach towards integrating immigrants, what would it be?"



Drew Fagan is a professor of public policy at the University of Toronto and a former Ontario Deputy Minister.

Canada does much right, including the Express Entry system, the Temporary Foreign Workers Program and Family Sponsorship "undertakings." But Canada has never excelled at integrating skilled economic immigrants as it does at attracting them – the surgeon-driving-a-taxi-problem. Solutions aren't easy due to challenges of government jurisdiction, professional regulation and bureaucratic stasis. But we must and can do better.

Tanya de Mello is a human rights lawyer, coach and mediator.

We often say we underutilize the gifts of our immigrants and "we don't want doctors driving taxis when they can be doctors!" But we need to stop thinking about immigrants as solely useful when they help increase Canada's GDP. The importance of every human doing work in which their skills and gifts shine brings dignity and purpose and transforms our society.



Michael Adams is president of the Environics Institute and an author of 'Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism'.

The process of gaining citizenship in this country needs to change. Values such as gender equality and tolerance of the beliefs and (legal) practices of other racial, ethnic, religious and other identity groups should replace the anachronistic bits of knowledge currently required for citizenship outlined in the current Citizenship Guide such as the name of the last Canadian to receive the Victoria Cross.



Omar Ha-Redeye is a Toronto and Durham Region lawyer and legal educator.

The Canadian job market unintentionally excludes job applicants based on non-Anglo/Francophone names. Employers assume based on a name alone that a person does not have the education, skills, or experience necessary for the job. Some immigrants change their names to fit in. I think employers should change their perspectives instead.



Dr. Ivan Joseph is a TEDx speaker, author, performance coach, and Wilfrid Laurier's Vice President of Student Affairs.

My father has kept a stack of rejection letters for close to 50 years. When my parents immigrated to Canada in 1970 from our native Guyana, he was a qualified soil scientist with 15 years of experience, including managing a lab. He enrolled at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College and later graduated from McGill as a mature student. Yet the letters kept coming. So he took a job as a hired hand on a farm. We lived at Jane and Finch, and he'd hitchhike north every morning before dawn. He never did find work in his field, and his story remains relevant today. There is an endemic perception that Canadian qualifications and experience are the one true way. We need a system that views the credentials of differently prepared professionals for what they are, especially when they are supported by extensive work experience.



Brian G. Bachand is Chair of the Board of ACCES Employment, and the founder of evolution evolution.

Canada as a society is extremely risk averse. This has a direct impact on business innovation, education and human behavior. Spurring a cultural shift will take time and an evolved mindset. This includes the recognition that modern immigrants arriving in Canada bring global expertise to boost Canadian commerce. Employers must stop hiding behind the need for "Canadian experience" and learn to appreciate international excellence.





Surranna Sandy is the CEO of Skills for Change.

We need to develop an evidence-based approach, whereby employers and service providers collaborate to understand the gaps/challenges newcomers face and train employers on how to better communicate their workforce development needs to inform the right technical and soft skills training for newcomers and access to newcomer talent for employers.

Darrel Bowden is Executive Director, Office of the Vice President, Equity and Community Inclusion at Ryerson University.

The phrase “lack of Canadian experience” today is disempowering, hurtful and illegal. In fact, Canada’s colonial conquest of Indigenous peoples and their lands, was largely funded through the spoils of enslaved African Labour. Thus, Canada was built with the blood, sweat and tears of Indigenous peoples, Black/African Canadians, and a countless number of migrants. So, who lacks Canadian experience?



Colin Druhan is Executive Director of Pride at Work Canada and Mentor with Jumpstart Refugee Talent.

Change starts at the top, but too many immigrants are forced to start at the bottom. For Canada to succeed in the global marketplace, more immigrants are required in senior management positions and on corporate and nonprofit boards. Employers need more intentional practices in place to support the advancement of immigrants within their organizations and beyond.



Dr. Kamal Al-Solaylee is a university professor and award-winning author of Brown: What Being Brown in the World Today Means.

Canada needs to stop being two-faced about credentials from developing countries. If they were good enough to merit points in a points-based immigration system, why are they not as valid in Canada? We need to have robust, clear and fast-paced programs for the retraining and licensing of professional immigrants. So much talent is wasted and lives destroyed by our imperial attitude to education.



From The Newsstand

How is COVID affecting diverse Canadians in their jobs and businesses? Canada’s Chief Statistician, Anil Arora, provides an enlightening answer[1]. In the decade prior to the pandemic, he notes, Canada was succeeding in levelling the playing field. Poverty rates were dropping, including for diverse Canadians, and there was a gradual rise in employment. Since COVID, racially diverse Canadians have seen unemployment and poverty rise disproportionately. At the same time, businesses with racially diverse owners have been more likely to experience significant losses. That’s because racially diverse Canadians are heavily represented in badly harmed sectors such as accommodation and food services. Also, the businesses they own tend to be smaller and more recently established. The result? Since COVID, “One in three members belonging to an ethnocultural group faced financial struggles,” Arora concludes, “compared to one in five Canadians not belonging to a visible minority group.”

[1] “Seeing Inequality,” The Globe and Mail, February 20, 2021, p. O3.



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