



Rakesh Naidu

“Almost every immigrant that’s come here that’s become relatively successful has got a very beautiful story, a very interesting story, about their early times here and the struggles they went through, the challenges, and how they made things work for them. When you really look closely into that, you find there are attributes in these people that they relied on that was their strength to overcome challenges. Sometimes your eyes moisten up because of the times people go through and what they had and what they lost. When I meet with people who are immigrants, I like to hear their stories. It is very inspirational.”

As interim Chief Executive Officer at Windsor Essex Economic Development and as an immigrant himself, Rakesh Naidu has extensive insight into incorporating immigrants into our workforce. I had the pleasure of sitting down with Rakesh, a friendly and professional individual, to learn about his story.

Rakesh immigrated to Canada from India in 2001. “I worked in India and I was successful in launching a car there, which was accepted as one of the best launches in GM globally”. Rakesh heard of opportunities that were available at GM in Detroit. He thought he would explore these opportunities, “feeling adventurous”, as his wife stayed behind to finish her residency in medicine.

“The GM building in Detroit is iconic for those in the auto industry,” explained Rakesh. “That is why I came here. I got my SIN, started applying for jobs, and got an interview for GM at a plant in London.” Though presented with a fantastic opportunity, the timing was unfortunate. “A few days after, September 11 happened, life changing for so many. All recruitment was frozen...so life took a new turn.

“I had not planned to be out of a job, and it was very challenging,” explained Rakesh. He did not have the funds to stay unemployed and he did not have family here that could help to support him. Being unaware of the service providers and community supports available, he wasn’t able to use them for help. “I was desperate,” Rakesh recalled. He then heard about a job and he eagerly took it. Rakesh started working this job, but it was very different from his past working experiences.

“I got the shock of my life,” Rakesh said. The conditions he was working in were poor and there were many issues with the run-down facilities. Rakesh described it as a “pathetic working environment. Oil and grease and metal on the floor, exhaust pipes didn’t work, lights didn’t work, dark, dirty, noisy, dusty”. On top of the poor conditions, the work itself was difficult and physically intensive and did not pay well. This type of underemployment is common for immigrants. In 2006, the proportion of recent immigrants to Canada with a university degree was twice as high as those who were born in Canada, however, 28% of recent immigrant men and 40% of women were in jobs that did not require high education, compared to 10% and 12% of native-born Canadians (Statistics Canada, Perspectives on Labour and Income, December 2008).

Rakesh started this job at the lowest ranking position on the floor, which was another unfamiliar experience for him. “I was the youngest manager in India and did well, and from that, I was the junior most person on the floor.” Living in a new, unfamiliar country alone, with his family across the world, Rakesh continued to do physically exhausting work in horrible conditions for a low wage. “To be honest,” Rakesh reflected, “I had so much doubt in myself during those days. I asked myself, ‘what have I done to myself? Why don’t I go back?’ This was going on in myself; what was happening externally, in Canada and the US, it was all doom and gloom, it was all about the fight on terror, people losing their jobs, companies being shut down. It was a very tough time to land in a foreign country. I just kept reminding myself, one day at a time, to keep going.”

Rakesh then had his life direction altered once again. One day at work, he was called into the office of the Director of Quality. “I had grease all over and my gloves were black and soiled, I was sweaty, and he looks at me and says, ‘what are you doing here?’” Rakesh at first misunderstood the question and started to explain to the Director what he was doing that day on the floor.

“No, no,” the Director pointed to Rakesh’s resume, which was on the desk, and said, “Is this you? Have you done all this? So, what are you doing here?” Rakesh then understood what he meant.

“I told him, ‘I’m trying to earn a livelihood. I have to sustain myself.’ And he just sat there for a few seconds, to me it seemed like almost eternity, and then it slowly dawned on me; maybe...he wants to help me.” The Director offered Rakesh a position working with him to launch a product, based on his prior experience in India.

“I ended up working for him and I knew the stuff. One thing led to another, I did well, launched a few product lines, eventually was given program management.”

Then Rakesh’s wife, a physician, moved to Canada. “In those days, it was very challenging for a foreign physician to get into the system here,” Rakesh explained. After spending time and money attempting to navigate breaking into the medical field in Canada, Rakesh’s wife tried the American system.

“Her career was very important,” said Rakesh, while explaining that it was a strong possibility that they would have to move to the United States for her career. His wife applied to regions with a strong automotive industry so that Rakesh would find employment there as well. She ended up finding something in Detroit. Thus, Rakesh’s wife and young family moved to Windsor (Rakesh later explained that through expensive certification, programs, mentoring, and endless perseverance, his wife was able to eventually become a physician in Canada and has been practicing in Windsor since 2012).

For the first 2.5 years of being in Windsor, Rakesh had to commute, as he was finishing a product launch in Toronto. "I commuted back and forth from Toronto once, sometimes twice a week." When his project finished in September 2007, he began to look for a job in Windsor. "That's when this job came up and I applied here and I have been here ever since." Rakesh has now been successful in his career at Windsor Essex Economic Development for 8 years, during which he has had a positive impact on our local community.

Although Rakesh has experienced an incredible amount of success since moving to Canada, he does not forget the challenges he encountered when he first arrived. He said that he still keeps the cracked, dirty steel-toed boots that he wore on the job when working in hard conditions and said he would never part with them. "[The shoes] always remind me: 1) never take anything for granted, and 2) I came from a very cozy environment, then I had to join the lowest position, and that's life. One day, you could be at the top of the world and the next day, you could lose everything and it's just good to always remember the uncertainty life brings."

When considering what it was that kept him in Canada during difficult times, Rakesh offered three reasons: "1) I thought that things will change and an opportunity will come from GM. 2) I thought, 'What do I do when I go back?' I didn't want to be seen as someone who went [to Canada] and failed. 3) The third and most important thing was when I was in that environment it was very difficult, but I kept thinking, if others can work here, if others can be strong enough to endure it, I am not made of any less...I didn't want to give up. I would not have felt well about myself; I would not have felt a sense of pride."

Rakesh has a unique and well-informed economic development perspective on including immigrants in our workforce. He spoke of how immigrants help our overall economic development and economic prosperity as a region.

Rakesh explained that most immigrants are bright people who came through the points system, so they already have the skill sets, education, knowledge, and experience that we need in our workforce. The numbers support Rakesh's statement. In 2011 in Windsor-Essex, there were 66005 immigrants over the age of 15. Of these immigrants, 18065 had post-secondary degrees or diplomas (approximately 27%). Additionally, he explained, "they bring knowledge of their home country and their market and in a highly globalized environment. We can use their knowledge, their networks, their contacts... our immigrants can open doors into other countries and use their knowledge of culture and customs. Instead of having to figure out what the world is like and what works in some places, the world is coming to us and we can make better use of that as an advantage." Immigrants present an opportunity to help our local businesses grow, as they can help employers to expand their businesses beyond Windsor-Essex. In 2011, a study done in the Greater Toronto Area showed that 1 in 10 employers polled hired a skilled immigrant because they realized that other competing businesses were benefiting from hiring skilled immigrants.

These employers made a good choice, as 81% of them reported that the skilled immigrants who they hired were effective (TRIEC, 2011). Rakesh also described how immigrants can help our region long-term. As our children are exposed to

more diversity, they become more comfortable with different cultural norms. They have the ability to interact with people from other countries and will have little reservations working with the rest of the world as adults. Our immigrants can help the next generation of our workforce to have an advantage internationally. Rakesh stated, "I think, in my mind, there is no other country that will have as much advantage to be internationally positioned as Canada because there is no other country that is as diverse, as accommodating, as accepting as this country is." Rakesh's thoughts are echoed in a 2010 report called Immigrants as Innovators Boosting Canada's Global Competitiveness by The Conference Board of Canada. This report states that immigration rates can improve trade levels between Canada and immigrants' countries of origin. A one percentage point increase in the number of immigrants to Canada can increase the value of imports into Canada by 0.21 per cent, and raise the value of exports by 0.11 per cent!

Rakesh also spoke of the importance of tapping into this international talent and giving immigrants chances to make the most of their talents. "If the gentleman wasn't there to give me a break, I may have given up...my skills might not have been used."

Rakesh offered some advice for immigrants who are coming to or newly arrived in our region: "Work really hard, don't take anything for granted...contribute. The Windsor-Essex region is one of those places where immigrants have every opportunity to succeed, as it is accepting, accommodating, and fair."



Patricia Felisbino

Patricia Felisbino, a Human Resources Advisor at Paul Davis of Windsor-Essex, immigrated to Canada in July 2013. She is an example of an individual who demonstrates true determination, initiative, and a willingness to learn. By taking additional language and career training, attending workshops, taking courses, researching local opportunities, and volunteering, Patricia has been impressively successful in her career. The kind of strong motivation that Patricia exhibits can be seen in many Ontario immigrants. In a 2012 study commissioned by Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 54.7% of immigrant respondents used language training programs and services and 50% reported using employment and skills training programs and services. This illustrates how motivated immigrants are when they arrive in Canada. It was very inspiring to learn about this motivation first-hand from Patricia. Here is Patricia's story.

How was the decision to immigrate to Canada?

My family came to Canada in July 2013. For sure, we had to make difficult decisions before moving to a new land. We had to leave good jobs (mine and my husbands' were good jobs), sell all the things we bought during many years, and the most gut wrenching: tell people we love that we would move to a very faraway place.

Although we loved our culture, friends and family in our home country, we disagreed on some things related to politics and the lifestyle. Even though we had good employment, we had to pay huge amounts for safety, education and healthcare. We paid high taxes too, but the corruption would take money from people who worked very hard. We were constantly under the fear caused by the violence and the stress caused by the huge traffic (my husband used to spend three hours driving 20 km to and from work every day). Buying bulletproof cars, living in a building with surveillance and being afraid of walking on the streets was not coherent with our beliefs.

Me, my husband, my two year-old daughter and my four-year old son landed as permanent residents in Canada and the adventure began. We carried only 8 suitcases with clothes, a few books and the toys that the kids chose and a huge hope for the future. We had also tons of persistence, even though we were not aware of it in the beginning.

Why did you come to Windsor?

My husband got a job as an engineer after 30 days in Canada. When we first arrived, we didn't have a specific location to settle in. In this case, luck played an important role. He is working for Ford Co., the company he worked for in Brazil for 13 years. Dedication and commitment to his job in our home country were the keys to him getting a referral for a position in Canada.

Since we came from a huge urban town, Sao Paulo, Windsor felt like a very small town for us. Everything is close to our house. You have access to good doctors, stores, schools, college and university. We can drive and find good things to do around the city as well. Especially when talking about raising children, I believe that these things are very important. It makes you spend less time driving around and you have more time to spend with your family and friends.

I decided to wait longer to look for a job, so I could support my son's adaptation to school. I also could stay at home for a while with my little daughter. After one year, I started my plan to enter the job market. The fact that my mother came to spend some time with us helped a lot.

How did you get your job?

I worked for 20 years in Human Resources and I believed that it would be difficult for me to have my degrees recognized. In Canada, just a few people knew the Universities where I got my degrees - both in Brazil and Germany. The same happens to the companies I've worked for. But the professional experience that I got, nobody could take away.

I took a conversation course at Multicultural Council and the Enhanced Language Training at New Canadians' Center of Excellence Inc. At the same time, I also attended career workshops and mock interviews at the GECDSB Employment Assessment Center. I took a Human Resources course at St. Clair College and started French Classes at the Conseil Scolaire Providence. I participated in some meetings about certification to work in Human Resources. The key at this point was to gather information about the HR field to find my place in the job market.

After completing the course, I was supposed to list the companies I would like to work for. I did some research and I focused on companies where my previous experience would be valuable. I did a 40 hour volunteer job working with a Human Resources consultant, who (to my surprise) referred me to a job at Paul Davis.

I must say that it took less than I expected to get a job. I also must say that every day, I face new challenges on my daily work, mainly because of the language. On the other hand, I feel welcomed in the company and my workmates are very supportive. I had my first anniversary in October 2015 in the company and I am glad to see that my work is recognized.

Deciding to change your life is not something that you do one time. You have to make decisions every day. Just keep focused on what you want for your life.

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Making Ontario Home, 2012, retrieved from: www.ocasi.org/downloads/OCASI_MOH_ENGLISH.pdf



Nick Baker

“Instilled in me was the value of taking charge of your own life; if you want change, if you’re not happy with where you are, then take responsibility for your own path and do the things you need to do to make it happen. I think you can say this about most people who have the guts to pack up everything and seek a different life in another country, knowing that they are leaving behind a huge piece of their identity.”

We were very fortunate to be able to speak with Nick Baker, the Acting Director of the Office of Open Learning at the University of Windsor. Nick is an intelligent, dedicated, well-educated individual with many diverse interests who is visibly passionate about education and about giving back to our Windsor-Essex region and community.

Nick immigrated to Canada from Australia in August 2009. He came to Canada with multiple university degrees, a PhD in Wildlife Management, and much experience in the post-secondary education sector. It is not uncommon for immigrants who come to Canada to be highly skilled, highly educated, and experienced. In 2011, immigrant adults aged 25 to 64 represented 24.6% of Canada’s adult population, but represented 34.3% of adults with a university degree! As well, 50.9% of all STEM degrees were held by immigrant adults (Statistics Canada, National Household Survey). In Windsor-Essex alone, 11,540 immigrants had a university degree and 6,525 immigrants had a college degree (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census).

Before coming to Canada, Nick had already achieved much professional success. “I was a faculty member at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, but also worked as an ecologist, journalist, educational developer, instructional designer, project manager, and manager of an educational resource development unit.” He chose to move to Windsor-Essex for a combination of reasons. “I originally came here for a conference in 2008. I ended up staying on at the University in a new program they were just launching to bring international visiting fellows. This program has been hugely successful in bringing a broad range of expertise from all around the world. They have now had 36 visiting fellows from 10 countries come through the program, and many come back.

“While I was here, I fell in love with the area – its rich history, its climate, its proximity to culture and sports, proximity to fresh produce, and the developing wine industry. The city is relatively large with all the services you could want, but still feels like a small, country town where everyone knows each other. The cost of living (particularly housing) is something that I appreciated as an immigrant just starting out, and it is a safe community to raise a family in. This is a community that is doing good things. The University is doing good things. I have seen it grow and develop in the time I’ve been here and I see lots of opportunities for more growth and change to come. Windsor-Essex gets an unfair rap. Most people don’t know what’s here. They don’t know the opportunities. You have to ignore any of the nonsense you hear before you come here. Come here with

an open mind and explore. It’s a community that is vibrant, focused on its own community; everyone has a voice, has the ability to contribute, and the community appreciates that. I think we undervalue it sometimes.

“Of course, I also fell in love with a local girl, got married, and we have two amazing little boys who I’m happy get to grow up in a community like this.”

The connections that Nick made during his visiting time in Canada helped him to land a job at the University of Windsor, which eventually led to his current position. “My original plan was to take some time off after I arrived and just spend it getting acquainted with Canada, but I was fortunate enough to start a part time job right away at the University, which then turned into a faculty position. Now I get the privilege of leading our efforts in developing capacity in online and flexible learning approaches, not only here at Windsor, but also as part of an Ontario-wide initiative to change the way we do things in universities.

“I have been very fortunate in my career to be in the right place at the right time, my current role is an example of that. I think being willing to take a calculated risk is essential for success and I have always felt that if you have a combination of education, passion, and the ability to tolerate all the ambiguities that life throws at you, you will be able to succeed in whatever you choose to do.

“In everything I do, I am driven by a desire to leave the world a better place than when I came into it. There are lots and lots of ways to do that.”

Nick expressed that while settling in Windsor, there were some struggles he faced. He did not access any settlement services when he arrived in Canada because he was not familiar with them and after doing web searches, he didn’t find anything that he thought would be relevant to his particular situation. “I think the hardest part of the whole process, apart from the financial implications (which are probably much more significant for many people who move here fleeing war and persecution with nothing but the clothes on their backs), was the visa application process itself. Even as a native English speaker with multiple degrees, the forms and evidence needed to support an application could be overwhelming and confusing. I cannot imagine what it would have been like for someone who did not speak the language. The other real challenge I found at times was getting access to Citizenship and Immigration Canada to clarify requirements. It once took me over a month of calling every 30 minutes of every day during business hours just to get through to an agent for a small clarification on one of the forms. For a non-English speaker or someone here as a refugee, that must seem incredibly disheartening.

“I also think that the guides for the application process could be improved. Another thing I think would be helpful is a simple guide to the basics, such as how to get a bank account, how to apply for credit, how insurance works here, the health care

system, the drivers license system, etc. I found a lot of this was not easy to find. I often got conflicting advice and just had to try to figure it out and hope for the best.”

Nick was thankful to have support in his new country to help him through some of the challenges. “I was fortunate to be moving into a family – my wife’s family – who helped me integrate socially to Canada. My wife has been my rock and support throughout everything we had to do to make our life together work. She has deep roots in the community here in Windsor, and I am proud to be part of that. My mother and father-in-law used to own a pub in the west end – The Mill Tavern (now the Barrel House). They are very community-minded people who care deeply about the people of this city. Through them, I had the opportunity to volunteer at fundraising events they held for a number of different causes [and I] met a lot of amazingly talented people who care about their community.

“I believe that truly being a part of a community means getting involved, being invested, learning as much as you can about the culture of your adopted home, and not being afraid to share your own culture in the melting pot that is Canada and Windsor-Essex in particular.”

It was interesting hearing what Nick had to say about immigrants in the workplace. As an immigrant himself, Nick is aware of some of the experiences that are common for newcomers; as an employer, Nick sees the value of immigrants as employees. He advised other employers, “Don’t be afraid of [hiring immigrants]. Diversity of ideas, of experience is good. Ideas can improve efficiency; improve the way your organization works together and how you relate to unions and the political structures. Those things are really important.

“I actively look for people who have experience outside of our local context because it’s really valuable. They bring new ideas...someone who has survived in another context, even if it’s someone who is a Canadian and has been overseas, it shows a level of commitment and flexibility and willingness to take on and try new things and that is really valuable. If I see that on someone’s resume, I think, ‘this is someone who is willing to tolerate change, to do what it takes to be successful, who tolerates diversity, risk, challenge, and doesn’t fade away in the face of these things.’ And those are the characteristics I look for in an employee.” Nick is not alone in valuing these qualities. On their website, The Conference Board of Canada also lists these skills (such as adaptability and a willingness to learn) as being the employability skills that are required to be successful in today’s workforce.

Nick himself is an example of how the novel perspective an immigrant may bring can be a benefit to an employer. He explained, “In Ontario, the ministry we deal with, they saw some gaps, they saw things they wanted to change, and one of the systems they looked at very closely was the Australian system, so I became sort of a local resource for some people, having worked in the capacity I worked in Australia.”

For other immigrants who are settling or looking for work in Windsor-Essex, Nick had some fantastic advice. “Be prepared to be flexible in what you do. There are many opportunities locally...it might take some time to find a job in your field. This is a pretty welcoming and accepting community. Take advantage

of that and get involved in the community – this will open up doors to potential employment, and help you integrate much quicker. Also, ask as many questions as you can. Don’t get too worked up about the challenges in the system you might face, and don’t take it personally. These processes take time and can be frustrating – they take time for a reason. Just be patient.”

The Windsor-Essex Local Immigration Partnership and Workforce WindsorEssex would like to thank Nick Baker for his donated time and for his valuable insight!



Ajith Rengaraj (AJ)

AJ immigrated to Canada from the southern part of India in September 2013. “I graduated as an undergrad engineer and I worked for three months. When I was working, I got the offer letter from the University of Windsor to do my Masters in Computer Electrical Engineering, so I discontinued my work and came here. I was looking at Ontario and I had applied to six universities and I found that Windsor was good for electrical. I got [accepted to] three universities, but I chose a professor in Windsor.”

AJ said that his undergrad degree from India was very relevant to his employment – more so than his Masters degree from Windsor. His Masters degree, however, gave him other valuable information. “My undergrad helped me, but my Masters helped me to learn Canada and the people here.”

AJ made use of the University of Windsor’s Soft Landing Program to help him with his transition. “I used all the student services, the student bus pass, the Soft Landing Program.” He said the University programs were fantastic for introducing him to Canadian culture. “They showed us everything in Windsor, almost. [They] took us to an ice hockey game with The Spitfires. I never saw any ice hockey game before – not even on TV. Now I follow the Montreal Canadiens.” He compared hockey culture in Canada to cricket culture in India. “I play cricket. Born in India, we follow cricket.”

AJ kept the labour market in mind when choosing his career focus. “Because I’m an electrical engineer, I would have to go to Toronto, but if I chose PLC, I could stay in Windsor. I chose electrical instrumentation (for my undergrad) because I got good marks, so my parents said, ‘this is the best course and you get this, you will find a job.’ They pushed me.”

AJ said that there were some challenges he encountered when he came here. “Culture and language are two big things. The third is financial. That’s why I started looking for a part time [job]. When I was in school, I got a part time. We never got a part time in India because my parents paid me. Go to school, they pay me. Stay in residence, they pay me. My parents can send [money], but I don’t want to push them. I worked at a part time at Z and R Hotdog and a Pioneer gas station. I made some close friends. My friend Richard I knew through the gas station. He invited me for Christmas and Easter dinner and every weekend, we played board games. He helped me a lot.”

Thanks to his persistence, AJ found employment relatively quickly after graduating. It took him three months from graduating to finding employment. “I graduated in December. In January, I started the process to get my work permit. After that, I started my resume and applied to all the companies online.” After not getting immediate results from his online applications, AJ physically took his resume to the businesses

he had applied to so he could apply in person. “Two weeks after I dropped my resume here, they called me.” After two interviews, AJ got the job.

“I like walk-ins,” Al Gordon, Field Service Manager at Control Systems International explained. He saw AJ’s application first. “I said, ‘this guy might be worth talking to.’” Al explained that AJ’s professionalism and eagerness to work influenced his decision, as did AJ’s skillset. “He had Wonderware on his experience on his resume.” This is a kind of HMI (Human Machine Interface) computer-based software. AJ explained that he had gained this experience during his undergrad in India.

Like most immigrants, AJ experienced some challenges. AJ explained, “how to speak, how to do everything, it’s totally different in India. I didn’t speak English before I came here.” He could understand some English, but couldn’t speak it at all. Despite his lack of English training, AJ did not have to go for ESL training – evidence of his intellect and adaptability. “When I applied for my Masters, they had a certificate called IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and if you passed it, you didn’t need to go to class.”

AJ’s integration into the Canadian workforce was enhanced by his volunteering activities. AJ got involved with the community because he found it interesting. “I registered for the volunteer internship program,” AJ recalled. He volunteered at Erie Wildlife Rescue. “I met a lot of students who came for volunteering too.” AJ explained that volunteering exposed him to more people and he was able to observe how they spoke and interacted, which helped him become more accustomed to Canadian culture.

AJ had some great advice for immigrants looking for work in Windsor-Essex. “Find a demand in the market instead of selling your skills. If they want some skill, you can learn it - it’s not very hard if you can speak English. There [are] a lot of openings... understand the market, that’s it. You can do part time until you find a job for the market.”

AJ enjoys living in Windsor. “This is my hometown. I landed here, I got my Masters, I got my job, so even if I get a job in a different place, it would be my second option. Staying in Windsor is always my preference. I know a lot people here and a lot of places. Raise a family, buy a house, settle here, even if I go somewhere, I will come back. This is my home town. There is a community. I love small towns.”

Although AJ worked hard for his success, he is very grateful to those who were there to support him. “I want to thank everyone after I came to Canada, my brother, cousins, company, school, professors, everyone.”



Silver Khami

Silver immigrated to Canada in May 2014. “I left Iraq when I was 8 or 9 years old, went to Lebanon, and lived there for 13 years before I came here.

“In Lebanon, they didn’t give you any [identification] papers so that police can trust you. They didn’t give you citizenship or any papers that prove that you are in this country [legally]. If the police caught you, they would put you in jail because there was no proof.” The difficult conditions Silver and his family were facing were part of why they chose to leave.

“I applied for other countries, but they didn’t accept my family. My cousins, they live here, that’s why we chose Windsor. My uncles and aunts, they are living in Michigan, so we are close.” Silver and his whole, immediate family settled in Windsor.

Silver said he likes that Windsor is close to the United States and he often will go to the USA. “In the US, there are a lot of places, beautiful places. I like Windsor because it is safe, not like my country where they kill people. You can do whatever you want, and you can say ‘no’ if you don’t accept anything. In my country, you don’t have a choice. You always have to do what they want from you.”

When Silver first settled here, he encountered many challenges because he was unfamiliar with the language. “If you don’t know the language, it’s too hard for you. I stayed at home for three months. I didn’t go outside because I was shy. I didn’t know the language, and I didn’t know how to talk with the people. One day, I was thinking to myself, ‘I have to go out. I have to go with people. If I do a mistake, I will learn from my mistake.’”

Silver took the initiative of learning the English language. He accessed the services at Collège Boréal. “My aunt was here, she told me this was the best school if you wanted to learn fast.” Silver also accessed Collège Boréal’s Orientation Services. “When I came at first, I didn’t know the language, so if I got bills or something I wanted to know, they would translate it.” They also helped him with his travel documents, provided him with volunteering opportunities, and were a support for his transition to Canada.

Silver said that he appreciates the fact that he can take full time language classes at Collège Boréal because they help him to learn English quickly. He attends language classes for five hours a day, four days a week. When he began the language classes, he was an English language level 1. Now, he is moving on to the level 5/6 class! This would be a great success for anyone, but Silver was able to accomplish this with no prior experience in a classroom. “I didn’t go to school before in all my life. This is the first time.”

A barrier that Silver encountered when looking for employment was that he didn’t have a high school diploma or equivalent. He said it was difficult to find work in the city, but in the county, he was able to find employment. “In Windsor, there is no work here [in the city]. It’s all in Leamington. There are lots of farms there, you can apply there. [In the city], it’s too difficult to find work. They need from you the certificate from high school or college. A lot of people from Iraq or Syria or anywhere, they don’t have a certificate, they didn’t go to school. They had to work. My country is different from here. I was 11 years old and I was working. I was a mechanic. I worked a lot of jobs.”

Silver made great use of his network and secured employment at Highline Mushrooms in packaging. “My aunt, she was working there before and she knew the supervisor, so she told her about me and she took my resume.” Silver has already experienced success at Highline Mushrooms and he is advancing in the company. He very soon will be starting a new job as an operator! “You have to always keep your mind on, [you] can’t do mistakes.”

Silver said that his job allows him to attend classes at Collège Boréal. “I can work, and I can study. I can pay my insurance and bills.”

Silver is an ambitious individual who has some exciting plans for the future. “I want to finish here to do my language. Then after, I can go to St. Michael’s to get the [high school equivalency] and after, I can go to college.” Silver said he is considering going into business or engineering when he gets to college.



Sameer Bhaskarla

Sameer immigrated to Canada from India in September 2013. After completing his Bachelors in Electronics and Instrumentation, Sameer came to Windsor as an international student to do his Masters degree in Electrical Engineering. Sameer didn't always know he would be an engineer. "Most of the Indians do engineering; that's what most of our parents ask us to do and that's what the society talks about lots of times. It is very common to do engineering, IT, and medical. I actually thought of doing business management, but it's a tough part in India because of the population and competition there with people, so this was a better way to go. I just wanted to do my bachelors and take it from there.

"I did not plan to do my Masters initially; I was hired by my university [in India]. I wanted to do that. We all got placed, but it took a lot of time. One of my undergraduate friends had come to Windsor and was doing his Masters here and he told me about the opportunities here. I also wanted to go to the US, but I wanted to get into something I was trained in."

Sameer was systematic and did research online to decide where he wanted to go. "I was looking into what's the employment rate like, how much percentage of immigrants get jobs here, and the rankings of all the universities."

After his undergrad, Sameer was fortunate to gain experience. He said he did not want to have a big time gap in his work experience, so he found employment in India after graduating. "I finished my undergrad and was learning at a company. My uncle works for a very big firm in India, so I went into it and then I applied here [to Windsor]. The funny part is after I came here, about a week later, I got a call letter from [the company I was supposed to be placed with]!"

As a Masters student, Sameer became involved in the community by volunteering with the University of Windsor. "We had to accompany people at night from the library to their homes." He said that he didn't volunteer because he wanted to advance his career. "I just wanted to do it."

The financial strains of being an international student were difficult for Sameer. "For your Masters here, it costs a lot for international students. The part time work we do, I think that should be increased to 30, 40 hrs a week. Rent is so high, and it isn't enough when you have to pay all these fees. I think it is thrice the amount [the international students pay, compared to] citizens with a PR (permanent residence). So I think that would be a factor for people coming in right now. When you have to do part time here, you have to go work at a gas station and do night times, so I think they need to increase university jobs and give more hours to students."

Sameer faced many challenges as an immigrant, but his resilience was apparent before ever coming to Canada. "My

dad was a very influential person for me. During my undergrad, he met with a very bad accident, so after that, life had changed. We didn't even know how to bank. And banking is very tough in India, not like here. It's not easy and to get a loan for my education was a real nightmare." Sameer said he appreciates how much easier things like banking is here in Canada and said he would like to bring his family.

Another challenge that Sameer encountered was finding employment after graduation. "After my Masters, I went back to India to look after my dad. I came back [to Canada] in June and got this job in November." Sameer said that many immigrants experience this challenge, and for many, they do not find employment as quickly. "I know many people looking for jobs. One friend has been looking for the past 1.5 years and he has experience from India. The citizenship issues can have a big effect. The work permit you get for 3 years, they don't trust you to stay with the company unless you get the PR."

Part of why Sameer was able to find employment was because he was very smart and resourceful in his job search. Understanding that his lack of citizenship was a barrier, he made great use of his network. "Most jobs ask for citizenships because the projects are in the US and you can get work there. When I applied to this company, citizenship was an issue. My friend was already here and he helped me a lot."

Al Gordon, Field Service Manager at Control Systems International, added, "his friend told us, 'Sameer is brilliant.' Sameer was professional, [his friend] really pushed for him and he's a guy we trust and want to see him in management one day (hopefully, Sameer too). Sameer had a good resume, good marks, and presented himself well. Sameer is getting it. He's good to work with and were happy with him."

Sameer had some advice for immigrants looking for work in Windsor-Essex. "People who consider work here in Windsor, it should be mostly those who are into mechanical and electrical. There are a lot of companies here – they are small, but there are lots. If there were not barriers with your citizenship, most could get a job.

"I love Windsor – it's the place I came to study, so I am very familiar with it. It is calm, traffic's not bad, and it is so close to Detroit. My girlfriend's in Detroit. It's fun to go to the US. I play for a cricket club, The Cavaliers, we have all our cricket leagues in the US. In the summers, we go every week for a match."

Sameer was very grateful for the people who have helped him throughout his settlement process and life transitions. "I would like to thank my company for giving me this opportunity to work here, to learn, to grow, because they are teaching me everything and treating me good...I'm getting confident day by day and learning."



Mahendra Nallapaneni

Mahendra immigrated to Canada from India in 2011. He came to Windsor to obtain his Masters degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering.

Mahendra initially didn't consider moving to Windsor. "Actually, I was thinking of going to the US, but I found that public universities here are more valuable and I also found that when you are in university, you get a lot of job opportunities, like co-op. Not only the education [did] I look at, I looked at the settlement here." Mahendra said that the ease of going between the two countries is something he appreciates. Another reason he chose Canada was for the work permit process, which he said was better than in the states.

Mahendra accessed a program through the University of Windsor called the Connecting 4 Success program; a mentorship program for first generation students. Mahendra said the program helped him become familiar with the course selection process at the university. "It's different from India, how you choose the courses. For my Bachelors in India, I didn't have to choose the courses, but...there was a choice of courses. I took some help from the students there about what kind of courses [I should take]." Mahendra later volunteered for the Connecting 4 Success program and became a mentor. He was able to advise international students and help them learn from his experiences. "For the first semester or first two semesters, we have to think where we are going with the university, what courses we are going to choose and our interests and have more attention to the university activities." Mahendra said focusing on how students can use the university activities to help their careers can be beneficial.

One University activity Mahendra did not take advantage of was co-op. "I didn't take co-op because it would have delayed my process by 8 months for my PR (permanent residence)." Most provinces and territories in Canada can nominate immigrants through the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). These immigrants must have the skills, education, and work experience to contribute to the economy of that province or territory, and must want to live there. Mahendra was one of these nominees! "They nominated me for the PR, saying I would stay in Ontario. I maybe should have taken co-op, not thinking about my PR, but [getting started early on] my PR has helped me." Mahendra's co-op choice is an example of the additional factors that go into career and education decision making for immigrants. Mahendra's excellent and careful foresight helped him with these decisions.

When deciding on his career path, Mahendra considered his interests. "In India, we had two [choices], go to medical or go

to engineering. I was scared about medical...so I thought, 'why should I [go into medicine]? I would like to be an engineer.' I started thinking, 'what stream of engineering is good for me?' I don't like programming computer languages or coding, so I thought electronics and communications. I still like communications over anything, so it was the right path."

Mahendra also considered his potential job prospects. "I was doing computer IT (Information Technology) courses. After that, I thought, 'in Canada, especially in Windsor, it's hard to find [IT jobs] with no experience'. Then I started learning more about PLC (programmable logic controllers). I felt Windsor was really good for electrical stuff, especially PLC."

This intelligent career moved proved to be valuable for Mahendra. He applied to only two companies, and was hired at Control Systems International. "They didn't call me for a week, but I got the job in less than two days."

Al Gordon, Field Service Manager at Control Systems International, explained that although Mahendra was hired before Al's time at the company, Mahendra's experience, education, and professionalism helped him to secure employment. "Mahendra was experienced with his education."

Mahendra said, "I got a lot of feedback from my friends and my managers...This is the best company for people coming out of university because you have the best people here to guide you to the right path". Mahendra also spoke about how Control Systems International has given him exposure to many different aspects of the field. "Here, I can work on conveyers, auto companies, everything...it's really cool to do."

He had some fantastic advice for other immigrants looking for work in Windsor-Essex. "In Windsor, we have a lot of jobs; the potential for jobs is too much! They say Windsor is the unemployed city of Canada, but it's not. You should look for what we have in Windsor." Mahendra enjoys living in Windsor-Essex. "I have been trying to think for the last 3 years why I like Windsor - I just like it! I tried to live in Toronto, [but] I like to stay in this town. It's peaceful, calm, you can access everything, you have everything here."



Saad Elia Bahoura

The following success story is written from the viewpoint of a counsellor at the Unemployed Help Centre.

Client's needs/reasons for accessing Settlement programming

Saad initially came to our centre to inquire about possible programs for newcomers. We discussed in detail the programs and services offered at UHC, and a tour of the facility was conducted at the interview. Saad immigrated to Canada on July 15, 2015 from Iraq; he, along with his wife and two children, were privately sponsored refugees and came as Convention Refugees. Saad has a Bachelor Degree from Iraq in Biology, specialized in Microbiology. He had work experience from Iraq, but no Canadian work experience.

Complicating or unique factors

Saad is a 32 year-old individual with education from Iraq and had no Canadian credentials. His former experience was as a restaurant manager and a lab technician.

Results or outcome of the services received

Saad was informed of programs and services offered at UHC. He was very interested in the Ready To Work Program and he registered to start the August 04, 2015 - to October 09, 2015 session. At first, Saad was unsure if he could succeed in the program, as they had just arrived in Canada for a week and he was overwhelmed with all the new information of settling in a new country. I explained to him that I would also be able to guide him and assist him with any needs or refer him to appropriate agencies for additional help he might need in regards to settlement in Canada.

Saad felt more at ease after the initial conversation and stated his wife would like to register as well; however, they have two children and would be unable to both attend the program. I explained to Saad that we would be able to assist him in this matter as we have a Childcare for Newcomer program in our Centre. One child was registered for the Childcare for Newcomer program at our Centre; we had funds as well for the second child, who was only 16 months old, and was registered at ABC Daycare. During the program, Saad had excellent attendance and was very committed to succeeding. He successfully completed the program and was able to obtain all certifications which included: Service Excellence, WHMIS, National Food Safety Training Program, Smart Serve and Workplace Essentials. More so, Saad's confidence and self-worth has increased. He received assistance with resume and cover letter writing and interview techniques.

Saad was eager to obtain employment immediately due to his financial situation. He applied on his own to Highline Mushroom farm for a Production Labourer position. As his counsellor was informed of the upcoming interview, his counsellor trained him one on one with interview questions specific to this position. Saad was offered full-time employment to start immediately. The certification in National Food Safety Training Program, WHMIS and Service Excellence, along with training in the Canadian Workplace Culture, was of significant assistance to Saad to secure employment.

Update

The UHC counsellor has maintained contact with Saad to provide advice and/or support to assist in furthering his employment goals. Saad states that due to the training he received in the Ready To Work Program, he was able to have a better understanding of the workplace culture, problem solving, effective communication, formal and informal expectations of the workplace, and team work. These skills helped him advance from Production Labourer to Machine Operator. In the future, Saad has an opportunity to be promoted to Quality Control.

Saad expressed interest in continuing education. He updated his counsellor that he sent his documents to ICAS for evaluation. He is aware it will take some time to obtain his evaluation, so in the meantime, he has registered at the Unemployed Help Centre to commence January 18, 2016 and upgrade his Math and English skills. He is also able to continue working part-time. Saad's goal is to obtain a Biology Lab Science diploma from St. Clair College. His counsellor will continue to maintain contact and assist Saad to obtain his future goals.

"The program made me brave. I remember when I had my interview, they asked me a lot of questions that I did not know before. When they called me, I knew how to answer the phone, use their names and titles and what to say - just like I learned in the class. They had WHMIS questions and the manager said I answered well and they also provide training there. I told the manager I got the training at UHC and the teacher spent many hours to make sure we understand all the symbols and the rules. It helped me get the job right away. It was like drinking water or how we say, 'piece of cake'."