

Hand up for job-hunting immigrants

Federal budget will plug \$500M into helping newcomers find skilled work

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Frustrated at not finding a job to match his qualifications, Zahid Iqbal is pleased Ottawa will spend an additional \$500 million to help skilled immigrants find work and settle in Canada.

Iqbal, 32, is single and worked as a mining engineer in Pakistan before coming to Kitchener last October to live with his brother while he searched for work across Canada.

"I want people to know immigrants are not here to get EI," he said.

"We want jobs. We're risk takers willing to start from scratch (and) the hardest job I ever had is finding a job in Canada."

Iqbal was commenting last night on an announcement in the federal budget an additional \$500 million will be invested in the next five years on programs to help immigrants find jobs that fit their qualifications.

Finance Minister Ralph Goodale and Kitchener-Waterloo MP Andrew Telegdi said \$300 million will be used to upgrade job centres and programs that help newcomers find work.

Another \$100 million will pay for an internet service that provides current, accurate data about the Canadian employment market and qualifications required for certain positions.

An extra \$75 million will be spent to work with provinces and streamline ways to recognize foreign qualifications and another \$25 million will be available to upgrade English-language courses for immigrants.

Iqbal has been using the New Canadian Program in Waterloo since November. The program links hundreds of immigrants with employers.

"You can't imagine how much these services mean to immigrants . . . they help make contacts with employers, help with networking and give you a morale boost every time a fellow immigrant finds a job," he said.

Iqbal said the fact the program was available in Waterloo was part of the reason he came to Waterloo Region.

He said he would like to see some of the federal cash spent to create more job programs across Canada and improve communication between those facilities.

That way a national data base of qualified immigrants would be available to potential employers.

Telegdi said because immigrant doctors and other professionals are working at survival jobs, the resulting human and financial costs are huge for Canadians.

He said Canada must quickly change a situation where the economy is losing about \$15 billion a year by wasting educational and job skills of highly trained immigrants.

"We're also getting a bad rap around the world by bringing people here and not recognizing their skills," he said.

"That's not good when . . . we're competing with other countries to get skilled immigrants to come here."

Rich Janzen, research director with Kitchener's downtown Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, agreed with Telegdi.

Janzen's agency has done extensive local research with immigrant professionals and tradespeople who have trouble finding work in their job fields.

Janzen said he's delighted to see Ottawa paying more attention to job issues faced by skilled immigrants.

Janzen and Marlene Kramer, director of local New Canadian program, urged Ottawa to develop a national strategy that would co- ordinate existing municipal, provincial and federal services that help immigrants.

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[Illustration]

Photo: TIM MURPHY, RECORD STAFF / Zahid Iqbal, 32, attends the New Canadian Job Training Program. He came to Canada five months ago from Pakistan, searching for a job in engineering. Finding a job in Canada is "the hardest job" he's ever had, Iqbal says.

Credit: RECORD STAFF

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