

Plan's goal to ensure skills of new Canadians not wasted

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A Kitchener-based research group is preparing an action plan to help ensure the education skills of new Canadians aren't wasted. The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services has been encouraged by the public's increasing interest in the subject, senior researcher Rich Janzen said yesterday. The shortage of doctors and recent census data have raised awareness of the brain-gain potential of making better use of immigrant skills, he said. TRAINING NOT RECOGNIZED Canadians know that while they can't find a family doctor, numerous foreign-trained physicians can't find work in Canada because their qualifications are not recognized, Janzen said. The latest Canadian census showed that between 1996 and 2001, 14,304 skilled immigrants came to the Waterloo Region area, mostly from eastern Europe and Asia. The census data highlighted the fact that the unemployment rate among foreign-trained professionals in Ontario is more than three times higher than other groups of people in the province. The data also noted that 47 per cent of employed foreign-trained professionals do something irrelevant to their job qualifications. Janzen said his agency is organizing a forum of Waterloo Region politicians, employers, agency representatives and foreign-trained immigrants in November to discuss ways to make better use of skills. Those at the meeting will discuss findings of an ongoing \$100,000 federal-government study in Waterloo Region, Brantford and London, where immigrants over the age of 18 said they accepted a variety of survival jobs because their qualifications and skills were underutilized. In recent months, the centre, a non-profit organization that conducts research with community groups and academics, has surveyed more than 200 new Canadians in Waterloo Region and documented how their abilities are wasted. Janzen, who has spent the past decade studying job barriers faced by immigrants, said he's pleasantly surprised at the public attention and growing momentum the issue has received in past months both inside and outside government. He said his agency wants to take advantage of that momentum and get politicians and others to agree on proactive ways to strengthen local communities by taking advantage of a backlog of immigrant skills. "What's striking is that people are finally recognizing a wrong and irrational situation where . . . these skills are being wasted," he said. "We seem to be at a stage where we're ready for change." fetherington@therecord.com

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