



# Links for Success Program

## Restoring Professional Dignity for Underemployed Foreign Trained Professionals

Catholic Social Services

**Frank Bessai · Irit Shaposhnikov**

Cultural Links

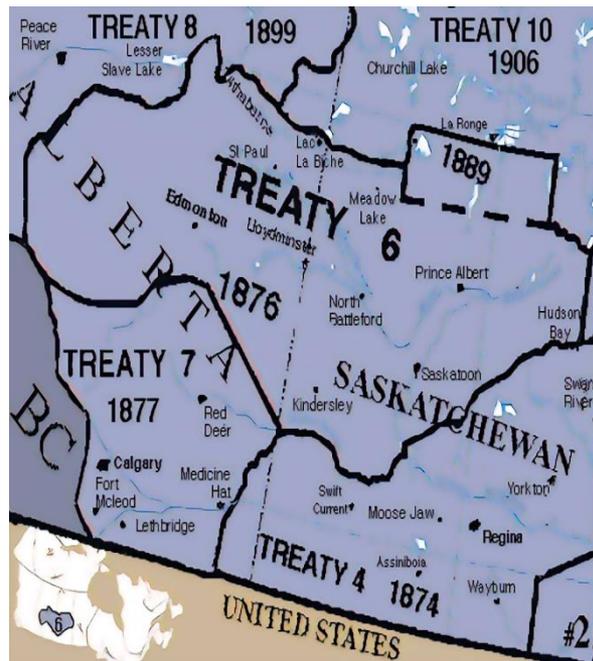
Immigration and Settlement Service

Catholic Social Services

[Frank.Bessai@cssalberta.ca](mailto:Frank.Bessai@cssalberta.ca) [irit.shaposhnikov@cssalberta.ca](mailto:irit.shaposhnikov@cssalberta.ca)



## Treaty 6 Land Acknowledgment

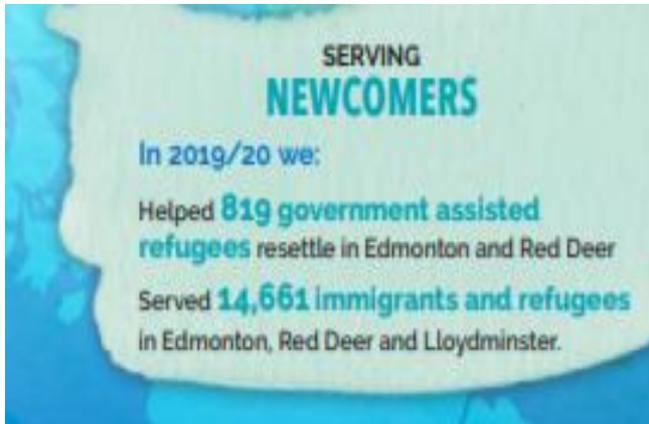


"We acknowledge the first people, their land, and their culture to be the roots of our Canadian identity. We acknowledge that we are here in Edmonton home of the Papas Chase First Nation, on the traditional lands, referred to as Treaty 6 territory. A traditional meeting ground, gathering place, and travelling route to the Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Métis, Dene and Nakota Sioux. We acknowledge all the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries."



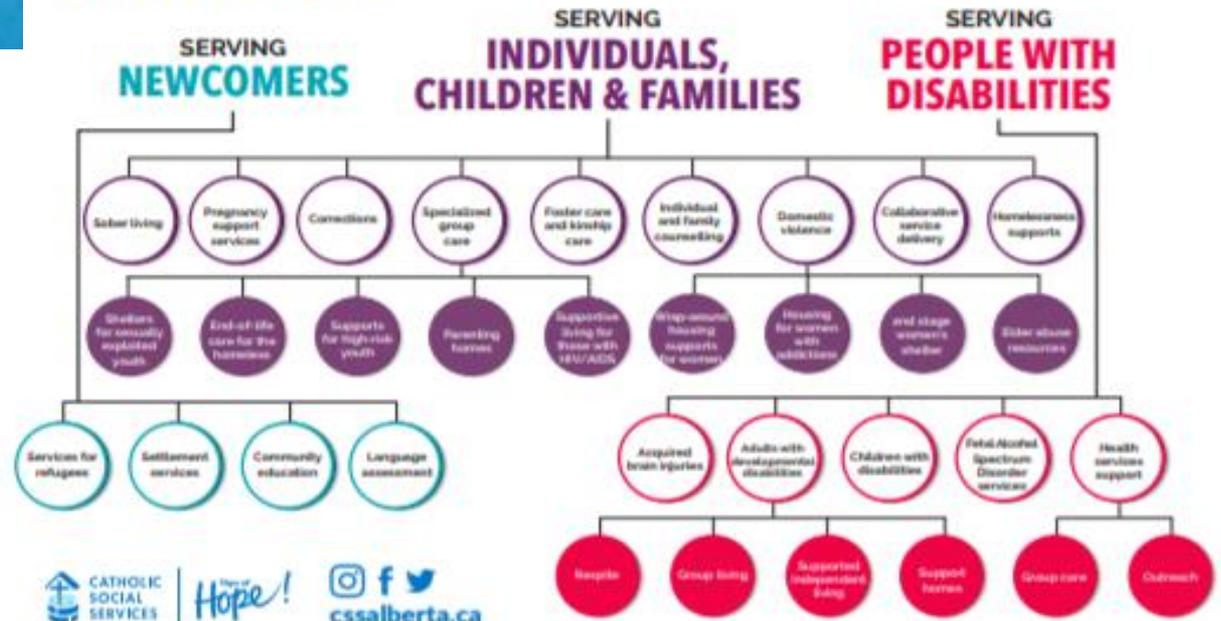
# CSS History and Activity

We are welcoming newcomers to Edmonton for more than 50 years



Our friendly staff speaks more than 70 languages

## WHAT WE DO





# Links for Success Program

## Employment Preparation Program for Newcomer Professionals

Explore and connect to your future  
through volunteering





# What our participants have to say about the program



**Abdifatah** from Somalia: **Accountant**

*"I learned how to enter-merge into a Canadian culture and about the process of launching my career into a Canadian workplace."*

**Paola** from Colombia: **Community Support Worker**

*"This experience taught me how to reinvent myself and to continue looking for opportunities in difficult times and to continue connecting with others."*



**Mabel** from Nicaragua: **HR Professional**

*"Archimedes once said: "Give me a place to stand and I will move the world". Links for Success program, for me, was that place of support I needed to move and transform my life"*



**Salah** from Libya: **Physician**

*"LS program has given me hope, made me optimistic regarding future careers and connected me through great expertise and colleagues. Words can not express how thankful I am".*



**Somali** from Cambodia: **Administrative Assistant**

*"The important thing that I have learned is workplace culture and communication between a diverse group of cultures and backgrounds."*



**Bageshree** from India: **Project Manager**

*"An excellent platform for newcomers or anyone who want to understand the opportunities that Canada gives you to spread your wings and fly higher."*





# How Links for Success Program Works?

We are connecting our clients to volunteer opportunities in their professional fields and offering them :

- 144 hours of volunteering in the field of their choice, 12 hours per week for three months
- Hands on experience of the Canadian workplace culture
- The opportunity to build their personal and professional networks
- The chance to engage in volunteerism and understand Canadian values in the workplace
- Gain Canadian professional references





## 3 Pillars of Success

### Volunteering

- 12 weeks of gaining Canadian work experience and building professional networks
- Creating resume and adding valuable references
- Enhancing English skills and professional vocabulary
- Increase knowledge in Canadian culture and workplace etiquettes

### Group Learning

- 12 weekly sessions with intercultural group of internationally trained professionals
- Guest speakers from various employment fields
- Reflection discussions on various topics including: conflict resolution, improving work confidence and self-esteem

### 1on1 Coaching

- Help to analyze the strengths and barriers
- Assist in developing personal and professional plan of action
- Building a strategy plan for professional networking systems
- Connecting to community resources and professional information sources



# Our Community and Business Partners

## More than 50 Partners and Employers

Local businesses and non for-profit organizations are supporting today the Links for Success Program and placing our volunteers.

## Fields

Customer Service, Retail, Social Work, IT, Accounting, Book Keeping, Marketing, Graphic Design, Administration and Management, Social Work Automotive, HR, Health Care, Engineering and Construction, Education and Law.

**Keep IT Local**

Jobs | Business | Community

Partners and Employers:

- EDMONTON'S FOOD BANK
- BOYLEstreet COMMUNITY SERVICES
- REACH EDMONTON Council for Safe Communities
- Edmonton Commu Legal Centre
- UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
- GREENFOX windows & doors
- Sign of Hope!
- CORNERSTONE COUNSELLING CENTRE
- The Medicine Shoppe PHARMACY
- minto Apartment REIT
- Canadian Skin Cancer Foundation
- Keheewin SCHOOL
- THE MUSTARD SEED
- Preferred Client Services "Making a difference counting the beans!"
- OBG IMMIGRATION CANADA
- PM INTEGRATED
- eriec Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council
- Shift.support
- Dandelion Renewables
- BREDIN CENTRE
- connect heal grow SJFS EDMONTON
- parentLINKcentre
- ALCO
- EMCN
- THE GOOD SAMARITAN SOCIETY A Latham Social Service Organization



# Navigating the Online World

- 12 interactive online learning sessions on MS Teams
- Creating online partnerships and developing hybrid volunteering solutions
- Expanding and reaching out to out- of town and province clients and employers
- Supporting clients with technology challenges
- Distributing devices for the struggling clients
- Encouraging participants to use this new platform to stay connected and avoid isolation





# Our Knowledgeable Guest Speakers



*Florim Tafilaj*  
Team Leader, Resettlement Assistance Program



*Lindy Brown*  
Program Facilitator



*Janna Mulholland*  
Family Counsellor, Cross Cultural Counselling



*Maya Feldman*

Financial Educator 



*Izdhar Gaib*  
Intercultural Education Facilitator



*Alaina Pascoe*  
Communication and Engagement Specialist



*Jean Jacques Mitakaro*  
Immigrant Entrepreneur Program Coordinator & Small Business Strategist



*Anna Kuranicheva*  
Lawyer



Edmonton Commu Legal Centre

*Tarek Fathelbab*  
Manager of Community and Stakeholder Engagement



*April Zhang*  
Connector Program Coordinator





# Results and Accomplishments during 2020-2021

## Program Results: Statistics and Numbers

- **6** terms of learning and volunteering
- **100** participants and **50** work placements partnerships
- More than **14,000** hours of volunteering
- **144** hours of learning, creativity and sharing ideas
- **30** professional job offers
- **16** participants have decided about a new career path and future educational upgrades





# Results and Accomplishments during 2020-2021

## Program Accomplishments

- Supporting each other in the group
- Priceless connections
- Canadian workplace experience and references
- Networking opportunities
- Upgrading skills set and resumes
- Polishing English skills and professional terminology
- Better understanding of Canadian culture and communication style
- Gaining self confidence and a positive attitude
- Dealing with isolation and improving mental health
- Actively developing new friendships and support systems





# Collaboration with Students - Mentors



Social Work Program



Community Service  
Learning Program ( CSL)

**20 hours of online one-on-one support from Student-Mentor**

- Helping to polish English skills
- Sharing experiences and cultural exchange
- One-on-one mentorship and friendship
- Strengthening sense of belonging to Edmonton and Alberta
- Widening networking and connecting opportunities
- Exploring the world of professional education in Canada



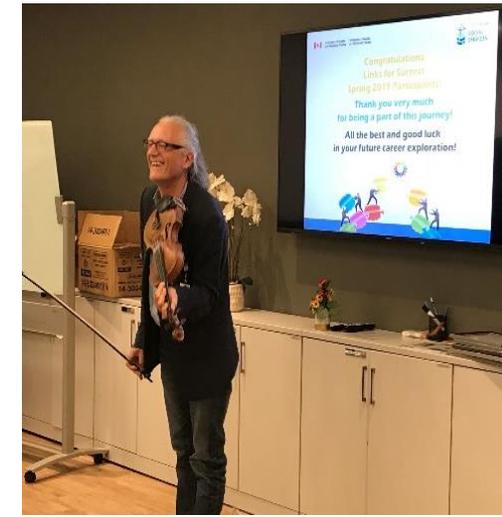
UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

Faculty of Social Work



## Final Project and Celebration

- Participants' reflection on their Links for Success journey
- Acknowledgement of partners, employers, speakers and leaders
- Networking empowerment and enhancement
- Celebration the Power of Community





# The keys for Unlocking Newcomers Success

## Self Awareness and Self Branding

- Analyzing how to take seriously a strategic volunteer experience as a tool for future employment development
- Working in a group of professionals who are interested to share ideas and to support each other
- Honest and open analysis of skills and gaps for Canadian employment
- Understanding communication styles, intercultural competence and the unwritten “rules of the game”
- Introducing yourself to other professionals and connecting to potential mentors online and in-person
- Actively exploring the power of networking, attending professional events and using professional online platforms
- Learning and understanding of networking etiquette and professional consistency
- Understanding visible feedback in a Canadian context
- Understanding how to follow up with your goals through hard work, focus and commitment
- Better understanding of Canadian Culture and the Canadian Workplace dynamics which will usually have a positive effect on your capacity to network
- Improving self-awareness, and critical thinking





# The keys for Unlocking Newcomers Success

## Improving Mental Health, Well-being and Motivation



- Developing trust and safe spaces for honest conversation
- Working on self-esteem and self-worth.
- Increasing a sense of belonging to a new home and society
- Instilling a sense of courage which enables you to follow through with your goals
- Receiving positive feedback, understanding the meaning of it and playing on your strengths
- Acknowledgement that your skills are relevant in Canada and that you have professional worth
- Connecting to others and becoming visible and valuable
- Providing yourself the freedom to reinvent yourself in a new environment
- Encouragement to continue with Canadian certification and the licensing process despite all difficulties
- Reducing negative thoughts and doubts about a successful professional career in Canada
- Encouraging hope and a proactive attitude
- Restoring your professional pride and dignity
- Improving the access to existing services and tools that can help with professional development; you are not alone in this journey





**Tatiana Ostrovskaya**

**From Russia**

## Clients Testimony and Success Story

I arrived in Canada a little less than 10 months ago. The difficulty was in the lack of knowledge of the language and the lack of any work experience in the country, despite the extensive experience in the profession earlier. I was lucky to have met very wonderful and friendly people. On my friend's advice I took part in the Links for Success Program.

Everyone around me gave me hope and confidence in the possibility of overcoming the language barrier.

By participating in the **Links for Success Program**, I got a volunteering placement in Preferred Client Services. This is a large team of professionals and wonderful people. The head of the company Barbara perfectly organized the work of the team, created a friendly atmosphere.

Fortunately, after a few days of work, I received a job offer from Barbara! Of course, I was very excited and overwhelmed with a sense of joy and a sense of responsibility for future work. I got a boost of optimism and the opportunity to believe in my career in a new country.

Now I am a Professional Bookkeeper and together with my colleagues I share the main goal: "to support clients with worry-free bookkeeping strategies". Of course, it's not easy without English speaking skills, but everyone treats me with understanding and support, and I, in turn, make efforts to improve my communication skills and hope that everything will work out for me.

And of course, during all this time we participated in the sessions of the Links for Success Program. And although it was only once a week on Fridays, these were unforgettable meetings with interesting people, both program participants and invited specialists. There was a charge of energy after each session. The Program Coordinator Irit is so involved in supporting students, always in touch on emerging issues. Irit invites very interesting professionals to cooperate, who are also ready to explain the specifics of communication in a country that is not so familiar to us.

I liked everything. The program was the best thing that happened in my practice.

**Tatiana Ostrovskaya**





Questions ?





# Thank You

- Frank Bessai
- [Frank.Bessai@cssalberta.ca](mailto:Frank.Bessai@cssalberta.ca)
- Irit Shaposhnikov
- [irit.shaposhnikov@cssalberta.ca](mailto:irit.shaposhnikov@cssalberta.ca)

