

LABOUR FOR A LIVING



Removing mould and restoring damaged houses has become Maria E. Peña-Zaldivar's specialty.

WOMEN'S PRESS

Disaster relief on the job

By Alyssa Lai

Maria E. Peña-Zaldivar is no stranger to dirt, dust and mould in houses; it is her job to remove them. Working for Tri-Star Disaster Recovery, Zaldivar does mould-cleaning for houses of all sizes. While she has done regular cleaning before, mould cleaning is more complicated, she said.

The 27 year old was born and raised in Cuba and lived in Spain for 6 years. She graduated from business administration, but left her job on the desk to enroll in the army in Spain. Coming to Canada in 2010, she immediately took on the role as a regular cleaner for Tri-Star, before moving on to do mould-cleaning in 2011.

Usually working 44 hours per week, Zaldivar is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For mould-cleaning, she needs to first measure the air quality followed by disinfecting the house. From there, she brings in air scrubbers, a machine to clear the air. All this must be completed before Zaldivar can go inside and begin vacuuming. If needed, she demolishes walls and repaints them.

"At the end of everything, we do an air quality test to see if it passes the test. If not, we have to clean again," she

laughed.

Her job goes beyond Hamilton, taking her to Toronto and Brantford as well. It is not uncommon for her to arrive home every day covered in tar or paint, as she also demolishes and repaints walls, and does waterproofing using tar in flooded basements. The hours are long and unpredictable. When there is an emergency, Zaldivar works up to 70 hours per week, sleeping as little as four hours a day.

"Despite the labour and risk, Zaldivar thinks that women are more than capable in this role."

Her job takes her into trying situations. She has been up inside attics to insulate pipes, and crouched on floors to scrub tiles covered with cockroaches. But Zaldivar sees her job as an important one, in keeping people healthy within their homes. High levels of mould could result in death, she said. Zaldivar cites one incident

where a dog died because of toxic particles in its lungs due to mould in a house that was untreated.

Despite the labour and risk, Zaldivar thinks that women are more than capable in this role.

"They can't understand that women can do more stuff," said Zaldivar, referring to moments when outsiders refer them as just cleaners.

"We're more strong and we do more than males. We don't say no to anything," she stressed.

Zaldivar credits the supportive working environment at Tri-Star that motivates her to remain loyal to the company. Even the company's sales representative in his fifties gets down and dirty in his business coat to assist the cleaning team wherever possible and helps them take out the garbage.

"That's how you build motivation. You are working with them. You get them motivated to work," she emphasized.

Indeed, the best part about her job is the people she works with.

"They are like family to me. It doesn't matter what we are doing. Working with the right people, we can do our job," she exclaimed. ■

NETWORKING IS KEY TO JOB SUCCESS

By Alyssa Lai

Age-old advice about having the right credentials and degrees to get a job no longer seem to apply. This is true especially for newcomers, who have difficulty in transferring credentials and work experience from abroad.

Trained as a mechanical engineer, Sanjay Kumarshaw is aware of the challenges facing immigrants on the path to employment. With more than twenty years of work experience in the automotive industry, he came to Canada from India in August 2011 as a skilled immigrant.

As a recent immigrant, Kumarshaw had his own share of hardships, as he tried to manage his family's living expenses. At the same time, he actively searched and applied for jobs, contacting employment programs at local agencies for advice on job searching. Much to his surprise, he received mixed advice on résumé formats.

Realizing that he needed to "fine-tune" his job search process, Kumarshaw enrolled in IWC's Job Search Workshop (JSW) program. Targeted towards newcomers, JSW

provides pre-employment training to increase employment prospects. Aside from preparation for action plans, résumés, and interviews, JSW also offers referral services, allowing participants to connect with relevant contacts in the broader community.

"It's important that the newcomers develop their contacts in the industry of their choice and make people aware of their abilities."

Kumarshaw was only part of the program for a few days before he was contacted for an interview. But he quickly learned the value of networking.

"I was able to confidently get in touch with people and expand my range of contacts who I knew," he

explained.

For Kumarshaw, getting the job was a multi-step process. He began by honing his résumé writing skills, tailoring to the company he was applying for, building connections with people in his field through informational interviews.

"I used the networking techniques, which built up cumulatively to finally fetch me a job interview, in which I was selected," he said. He now works as an Inventory Control Supervisor at an automotive parts company.

Relationships matter for newcomers hoping to establish themselves professionally in new working environments. Kumarshaw couldn't agree more.

"It's important that the newcomers develop their contacts in the industry of their choice and make people aware of their abilities." ■ For more information on JSW see page 5.



FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

What skills did Sanjay learn in JSW?

'Prevention is the Best Medicine'

WORKPLACE RIGHTS FOR NEWCOMERS

By Cindy Moser,
Institute for Work & Health

"Research indicates that Ontario's newcomers are more likely than Canadian-born workers to be employed in jobs with a higher risk of work injuries," said Dr. Agnieszka Kosny, a lead researcher with Toronto's Institute for Work & Health.

"Yet, they receive little information in language-training classes or job-search workshops about their job health and safety rights and responsibilities, or what to do if they get hurt on the job," she continued.

Kosny and a group of researchers at the Institute for Work & Health decided to develop a toolkit to help settlement agencies, teachers of English as a second language, workplaces and others to teach newcomers to Ontario about their health, safety, and workers' compensation rights and responsibilities.

"...Newcomers are more likely than Canadian-born workers to be employed in jobs with a higher risk of work injuries."

Called *Prevention is the Best Medicine*, the eleven-item toolkit contains everything needed to deliver instructional sessions on two separate, but related, topics within an Ontario context: occupational health and safety, and workers' compensation. It is designed to be delivered to recent immigrants who are preparing to enter, or have recently entered, the labour force.

"*Prevention is the Best Medicine* fills an important void," said Kosny.

"This is a great tool," agreed Roland Rhooms, director of Programs and Services at Skills for Change, a settlement and employment agency in Toronto.

"This is the beginning of information dissemination in this area, because the research tells us that there is a gap, that these newcomers are not getting this type of information in a timely manner. So it's a benefit to the clients because they have something simple, easy to understand."

The toolkit includes sample lesson plans, slide show presentations and more. A full list of IWH research on newcomer health and safety is available at: www.iwh.on.ca/immigrant-workers-experiences. ■ Cindy Moser can be reached at cmoser@iwh.on.ca.

**prevention
is the best
medicine**

a toolkit for newcomers
to Ontario
www.iwh.on.ca/pbm