

Oral Histories of Immigrants in Peterborough

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By

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NEW
CANADIANS
CENTRE
PETERBOROUGH


Trent Centre
for Community-Based Education

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 4

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5

 Project Overview 5

 Main Outcomes 6

 Profiles and Short Stories..... 8

 Consuelo Fox 8

 Javier Bravo 11

 Lizette Martin 14

 Reina Rodriguez..... 17

Key Words 20

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Overview

This project examined the social factors factors involved in immigration from Hispanic countries to the city of Peterborough, Ontario. By means of interviews conducted with five participants, a study was made of the elements involved with easing the transition between cultures; the resources available to new immigrants; and the experience of entering a new community, including factors such as language barriers, the process of finding work, and the ease or difficulty in transferring a family. Participants reflected on their personal experiences integrating into the Peterborough community, highlighting both positive and negative aspects of the process and giving advice to potential newcomers.

The social factors were examined in relation to Peterborough and the surrounding area specifically, but were also extrapolated upon in order to determine what skills, resources and cultural factors are most important to those immigrating to Canada, with an emphasis upon Hispanic immigrants.

Main Outcomes

Participants were asked to respond to a number of questions in either English or Spanish, and sometimes elaborated on aspects of their transition to Peterborough which they found particularly significant, either positively or negatively. While there was some variation in terms of why participants came to Canada, most of the questions regarding emotional reaction, main difficulties and greatest challenges were quite similar.

Almost all of the participants moved to Canada in order to be with their spouse, having married a Canadian citizen. One participant moved with their spouse for no particular reason, choosing Peterborough finally because of a work opportunity. Most participants knew someone in Canada, whether their spouse, a family member or a close friend. This was unanimously agreed to be a very helpful factor in terms of moving to a new location.

It was universally agreed that the most difficult transition was not between the country of origin and Canada, but between a big city and a small town (Peterborough). Most participants moved from a large urban centre, and this transition was difficult for many. The biggest obstacle was universally declared to be the language barrier; although many had preexisting knowledge of English, it was unanimously recommended that anyone thinking of immigrating to Canada improve their English to the highest degree, and then be aware that they will still not be able to communicate perfectly. This hindered participation in the community, but also made job searches more difficult.

Job searches are quite difficult for immigrants, because many skills are not perfectly transferrable from their country of origin to Canada, and often immigrants are forced to abandon their professional degrees and qualifications because their work experience is not valued as highly. In some cases, jobs available in the country of origin were simply not available in Peterborough. Some participants have decided to start their own businesses as a result of this.

Childcare was not too difficult to find, but waiting lists were reported to be a problem. Many participants chose instead to stay at home with their children. It was reported that the switch from the healthcare system in the country of origin to the Canadian healthcare system was difficult to navigate, both because of the difference in structure and the language barrier. Resources such as the New Canadians Centre (NCC) helped with these obstacles.

Participants reported using their family or friends in Canada and social resources such as the NCC to make connections in the community, get involved and give back to the community, prepare themselves for job hunts, learn English, and in general integrate themselves into the community. The NCC's host program was reportedly very helpful, as were English classes and resumé workshops.

All participants stressed the importance of both finding ones place in the community and giving back, whether through volunteering, becoming a small business owner, or just getting involved in Peterborough's activities. This involvement, plus starting a family, has become some of the most memorable experiences held by new Canadians in Peterborough. The following profiles detail the immigration experiences of four of the five participants.

Profiles

Consuelo Fox

Consuelo was living in Bogotá, Colombia, when her sister who lived in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, had a baby. Because of her immigration status, Consuelo's sister was unable to leave the Northwest Territories, and as a new mother she missed her family. Consuelo was unable to acquire a visa to visit her sister for an extended period, but she was granted a visa to come over and work as a nanny, and she decided to take the opportunity. She arrived in Inuvik on December 1st, 1995, and was contacted soon after to say she could apply to be a landed immigrant. She acquired her citizenship three years later.

Soon after she arrived in Inuvik she began working as a nanny, and met her brother-in-law's boss. The two began dating, were married a couple years later and had their first child in the northern town. Her husband's job with Parks Canada then took them to the small town of Ucluelet, B.C., where they lived for eleven years and had two more children. Her husband was offered a job in Peterborough which he accepted, bringing Consuelo and their children to Ontario in 2010.

Moving to Canada from Colombia wasn't difficult overall, but there were significant cultural differences in Inuvik that exist even between that town and the rest of Canada. These differences are largely between the Inuit and non-Inuit population, but they did not affect Consuelo negatively. Having a sister in Inuvik made Consuelo's transition much easier, and she already knew a good amount of English, having worked with Americans while living in Bogotá. Finding work in Canada has been both easy and difficult: working as a nanny in Inuvik was an easy job, and Consuelo continued that line of work by providing childcare in Ucluelet. However, in Colombia Consuelo worked as a secretary – a position that does not exist in Inuvik and is largely unavailable across Canada due to the growing nature of technology. As she did not have recent job experience, Consuelo was unable to get even retail positions, and is currently not working in Peterborough.

Overall, Consuelo advises new Canadians to make sure they have a good grasp on the English language before coming to Canada. She also advises that new Canadians be prepared for the weather! She recommends use of resources such as the New Canadians Centre, which can help newcomers network, workshop their resume's and improve their language skills. Consuelo's experience in Canada had been wonderful: she has seen so much of the country, taken so many opportunities and enjoyed it all. She has a happy family and is involved in her community and her church, and she loves Peterborough's laid-back atmosphere.

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Consuelo estaba viviendo en Bogotá, Colombia, cuando su hermana que vivía en Inuvik en los Territorios del Noroeste tuvo un bebé. A causa de su estatus inmigrante, la hermana de Consuelo no pudo irse de los Territorios del Noroeste, y le echó de menos a su familia, especialmente como una nueva madre. Consuelo no pudo obtener una visa para visitar su hermana por un periodo extendido, pero le concedió una visa para venir y trabajar como una niñera; ella decidió aprovechar la oportunidad, y llegó a Inuvik el 1 diciembre 1995. Pronto después, fue contactado para decir que ella podría solicitar inmigración afincado, y tres años más tarde se obtuvo su ciudadanía.

Poco después de llegar a Inuvik Consuelo comenzó trabajando como niñera, y conoció al jefe de su cuñado. Los dos comenzaron saliendo y dos años más tarde se casaron; tuvieron su primer hijo en Inuvik. Su esposo trabajó con Parks Canadá, y su trabajo los llevó al pequeño pueblo de Ucluelet, C.B., donde vivieron por once años y tuvieron dos hijos más. A su esposo le ofreció un trabajo en Peterborough y lo aceptó, llevando Consuelo y sus hijos a Ontario en 2010.

Mover a Canadá de Colombia no era difícil en conjunto, pero había considerables diferencias culturales en Inuvik que aún existen entre Inuvik y el resto de Canada. La mayoría de estas diferencias existen entre la población Inuit y la población no-Inuit, pero no afectaban Consuelo negativamente. La transición entre Bogotá e Inuvik era mucho más fácil para Consuelo porque ella tenía su hermana para ayudarle, y habló inglés relativamente bien porque había trabajado con gente americana en Bogotá.

Encontrar trabajo en Canada ha sido fácil y difícil en los diferentes lugares en que ella ha vivido: trabajando como niñera en Inuvik era fácil, y Consuelo continuó con esto en Ucluelet por proporcionando sus servicios de su casa. Sin embargo, en Colombia Consuelo trabajó como secretaria – este posición no existe en Inuvik y gracias a la expansión rápido de tecnología, es menos y menos común a través de Canadá. Porque ella no tenía experiencia laboral reciente no pudo encontrara trabajo aún en ventas, y no tiene trabajo ahora en Peterborough.

Consuelo aconseja que nuevos canadienses se aseguren que tienen una comprensión bien de ingles antes de venir a Canada. ¡También se aconseja que ellos se preparen para el clima! Ella recomienda usar recursos como el New Canadians Centre, que puede ayudar a la gente recién llegada conectar con otros (inmigrantes y no) en la comunidad, perfeccionar su curriculum vitae, y mejorar su inglés. La experiencia de Consuelo en Canadá ha sido maravilloso: ella ha viajado a muchos partes del país, aprovechado de tantas oportunidades, y disfrutado todo. Tiene una familia alegre y sana, es involucrado con su iglesia y comunidad, y le gusta mucho el ambiente relajada de Peterborough.

Javier Bravo

Javier Bravo moved to Canada from Mexico City on Oct. 6, 2000. He met his wife in Southern Mexico, who was visiting from Canada. Her two-week visit extended to two years and, after they got married, Javier decided to move to Canada with his wife. They had their first daughter a month later, and their second daughter in 2006. Upon moving to Peterborough, Ontario, his wife's hometown, Javier started looking for a job while his wife returned to Trent University to finish her degree that she had put on hold. His job search continued for eight months while living through his savings; however, it was not easy for him to look for a job within his career path. In Mexico, Javier studied business administration in university and worked for IBM, but his work experience from back home was not easily transferrable since Canadian companies required Canadian work experience. After working in construction, he found a job at GM Financial, where he still works as part of a call centre.

Although Javier spoke English well enough even before moving to Canada, the cultural nuances in the language hindered his ability to fully engage in his job and life in Canada. He wanted to find his own space in the Peterborough community, and so he took a two-year course in web design at Fleming College. Now, Javier is helping support the Peterborough community through a website that he developed, which facilitates donations to local businesses and organizations. He also started volunteering with the New Canadians Centre three years ago. Javier's most memorable experience in Canada was his first job in construction where he built cottages. He remembers being sent across a frozen lake on a snowmobile to chip away ice so that they could build a dock; it was a typical Canadian experience and nothing he would have ever experienced at home. His two biggest accomplishments are that he has a strong, healthy family and that he is able to give back to the community through his website.

Javier wishes he had a better knowledge of the language and community before moving to Canada, but he believes that you have to be exposed to the culture and experience them in order to learn; you can't just learn them out of books. He also believes that moving to another country is an opportunity to learn more about yourself and your strengths and weaknesses. As well as studying English before moving to Canada, Javier recommends future newcomers to be more open-minded; it takes time to re-establish yourself in a new environment so it is best to be

prepared for change. He also recommends that people get involved in the community, whether it be volunteering or working, because he believes that it is important to find your place and give back to your new home.

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Javier se mudó a Canadá desde la ciudad de México el 6 de octubre de 2000. Él conoció a su esposa en el sur de México, quien estaba de visita desde Canadá. Aunque sólo tenía la intención de visitar por dos semanas, ella quedó en México por dos años y se casaron. Después, Javier decidió mudarse a Canadá con su esposa. Tuvieron su primera hija un mes después y su segunda hija en 2006. Al mudarse a Peterborough, Ontario, la ciudad natal de su esposa, Javier comenzó a buscar un trabajo mientras que su esposa regresó a la Universidad de Trent para terminar su carrera que ella había puesto en espera. Su búsqueda de empleo continuó mientras que vivían fuera de sus ahorros durante los primeros ocho meses. Sin embargo, no fue fácil para buscar un trabajo dentro de su trayectoria. En México, Javier estudió administración de empresas en la universidad y trabajó para IBM, pero su experiencia de trabajo allí no era fácilmente transferible puesto que las empresas canadienses requieren experiencia laboral canadiense. Después de trabajar en la construcción, encontró un trabajo en GM Financial, donde todavía trabaja como parte de un centro de llamadas.

Aunque Javier hablaba inglés muy bien antes de mudarse a Canadá, los matices culturales en la lengua obstaculizaron su capacidad para participar plenamente en su trabajo y vida en Canadá. Quería encontrar su propio espacio en la comunidad de Peterborough y así que tomó un curso de dos años en el diseño web de Fleming College. Ahora Javier está ayudando a apoyar a la comunidad de Peterborough a través de un sitio web que él desarrolló que facilita las donaciones a organizaciones y empresas locales. También empezó a ser voluntario con el New Canadians Centre hace tres años. La experiencia más memorable de Javier en Canadá fue su primer trabajo en construcción donde edificó casas rurales. Él acuerda de ser enviado a través de un lago congelado en una moto de nieve a socavar el hielo para que pudieran construir un muelle. Fue una experiencia típica canadiense y fue nada que hubiera experimentado en México. Sus dos mayores logros son que tiene una familia fuerte y saludable, y que es capaz de dar vuelta a la comunidad a través de su página web.

Javier desea que tuvo un mejor conocimiento de la lengua y la comunidad antes de mudarse a Canadá, pero cree que hay que estar expuestos a la cultura y vivirlas con el fin de aprender. No puede simplemente aprenderlos de libros. También él cree que mudarse a otro país es una oportunidad para aprender más sobre su mismo y sus fortalezas y debilidades. Además de estudiar inglés antes de mudarse a Canadá, Javier recomienda futuros recién llegados a ser más preparados para el cambio. También recomienda que la gente se involucra en la comunidad, ya sea voluntario o trabajo, porque él cree que es importante encontrar su lugar y devolverle a su nuevo hogar.

Lizette Martin

In 2007, Lizette came with her husband to Toronto, Canada from Guadelajara, Mexico. She and her husband wanted to live somewhere new, and chose Canada; however, it took two years for Canada to grant them permanent residency. After a year spent in Toronto living close to some Mexican friends, Lizette's husband was offered a job with SAFRAN Electronics in Peterborough, and the couple moved in 2008 with their newborn baby. They had no trouble finding housing, as Lizette's husband had some work colleagues who recommended good areas to live in and helped them make the transition.

As a new mother in a new town, Lizette struggled without her friends, family, or knowledge of the resources she could use. She found a childcare provider easily but was on a waitlist for many months. By the time she had her second child three years later, she had friends to help her and was already using YMCA childcare, which made the experience much easier. Aside from childcare, Lizette had trouble acquiring a family doctor, and the transition from the Mexican healthcare system to the Canadian system was quite difficult. Once she found a doctor she felt much more secure, although the language barrier made communication difficult at times, and as she was pregnant when she arrived it was a stressful element in her life as a New Canadian.

Lizette had difficulty finding a job in Canada because her English was not perfect, and because she found that most businesses required Canadian work experience. However, she made good use of the New Canadians Centre (NCC) by acquiring a tutor for English, and by enrolling in the host program. She was paired up with a Canadian woman who has since become a good friend, and who helped her get to know the community and social resources in Peterborough. She found the NCC helped her integrate into the community and find her own space within it, but she notes that she was actively seeking resources when she found it, rather than encountering advertising.

For Lizette, the transition from big city to town was harder than the transition from Mexico to Canada. At first she found it difficult to adjust to such a small town, where everything closes so early on weekends and it felt like there was hardly anything to do. Although she didn't dislike the climate, the length of the winter was daunting. She loves the diversity of Canada and the opportunity to learn about new cultures, and she finds Canadians polite and friendly but not

necessarily inviting; however, once she made friends and found her place in the community, she felt much more comfortable. She noticed that while in Mexico the atmosphere in cities and in the workforce is competitive, Canadians in general tend to be politer and have a more communal attitude. This attitude is important to Lizette, as she feels that the most important part of being a New Canadian is finding ways to assert your own identity while feeling like part of your new community.

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In 2005 Lizette y su esposo decidieron moverse de México para una nueva aventura, y eligieron Canadá por su destinación. El gobierno canadiense tardó dos años en concederles residencia permanente, y llegaron a Toronto, Canadá, de Guadalajara, México en 2007. Después de un año en Toronto viviendo cerca de amigos mexicanos, el esposo de Lizette recibió una oferta de trabajo con Electrónicos SAFRAN en Peterborough, y los dos llegaron en 2008 con su bebé recién nacido. No tuvieron ningún problema encontrando una vivienda porque algunos colegas del esposo de Lizette les recomendaron que áreas sean buenas para vivir, y les ayudaron con la transición.

Una madre nueva en un pueblo nuevo, Lizette luchaba sin sus amigos, familia, o conocimiento de los recursos que pudiera usar. Ella encontró una guardería fácilmente, pero esperaba muchos meses en una lista por un lugar. En el momento en que tuvo su segundo hijo, tenía amigos para ayudarlo y ya estaba registrado con la guardería en el YMCA. Lizette encontró algunos obstáculos en buscar un médico de cabecera, y la transición entre los sistemas de asistencia médica mexicano y canadiense era difícil. Cuando encontró un médico sentía más seguro y protegido, aunque la barrera del idioma complicaba comunicación algunas veces.

Lizette tenía dificultad encontrando trabajo en Canadá porque su inglés no fue perfecto, y la mayoría de empresas querían experiencia laboral reciente. Sin embargo, ella usó el New Canadians Centre (NCC) para encontrar un tutor para su inglés, y registró con la programa anfitriona. Ella fue agrupada con una mujer canadiense que ahora es una amiga buena, y que le ayudó familiarizarse con la comunidad y los recursos sociales en Peterborough. Para Lizette, el NCC le ayudó a integrarse y encontrar su propia espacio a dentro de la comunidad; ella nota que

encontró el NCC cuando era buscando activamente para recursos, no de publicidad hecho por el NCC.

Para Lizette, la transición entre una ciudad grande y un pueblo era más difícil que moverse de México a Canadá. Inicialmente era muy difícil adaptarse a un pueblo como Peterborough después de vivir en ciudades como Toronto y Guadalajara, porque todo cierra muy temprano los fines de semana, y ella sienta como no había nada para hacer. Aunque no desagradaba el clima, la duración del invierno era descorazonadora. Ahora ella le gusta mucha la diversidad de Canadá y la oportunidad de aprender sobre nuevas culturas. Canadienses le parece amables y correctos, pero no demasiado hospitalarios; no obstante, una vez que había hecho amigos y encontrado su lugar en la comunidad, sintió mucho más comfortable. Esta actitud es muy importante, según Lizette, porque la parte más importante de ser una canadiense nueva es buscar las maneras de afirmar su propia identidad mientras sentir parte de su nueva comunidad.

Reina Rodriguez

Reina Rodriguez arrived in Canada in February 4th, 1994. She left the Dominican Republic to move in with her then-husband, who was from Lakefield, Ontario. Logistically, moving to Lakefield was very easy for her because of her then-husband; on a personal level, it had a similar feeling to that of the town where she had lived back in the Dominican Republic, which made her feel “like [she] came home.”

Having her then-husband and kind neighbours to rely on eased Reina’s transition to her new home; however, she had difficulty transferring her work skills over to Canada. Reina was a nurse in the Dominican Republic, but was a housewife in Lakefield until her children were older; she moved to Lakefield with her eight-year-old daughter and her three-month-old son, but rather than seeking for child care, she became a housewife and looked after her children herself. Once her English improved and her children became more self-sufficient, Reina got a job at a grocery store where she did very well, and afterwards, with AmeriCredit.

Overcoming the language barrier was the most challenging adjustment Reina had to make when she first arrived in Canada; she felt welcomed and her neighbours were kind, but the language barrier was isolating. Reina had to adjust to not being able to communicate easily and it often left her feeling lonely. Christmases have been the most pleasant experiences for her as a newcomer to Canada; it often reminded her of her family, which made her feel happy and sad at the same time. Miscommunication and lack of communication in general made her feel trapped and like she was disappearing as a person.

Despite doing well at her office job with AmeriCredit, it was not personally fulfilling to her so she eventually left to start up her own business (i.e. holistic health and life-coaching), which was after twenty years of living in Canada. She took online courses and learned about holistic practices, and now feels all-round healthier. She networks and relies on word-of-mouth to get clients for her personal holistic coaching, and is very happy doing so. She has had great success with a LINK class, had very good teachers, and made friends. She also taught interpretation at Fleming College and has hosted several Spanish, exchange students.

Reina wished she had known who to talk to before arriving to Canada. Instead of seeking out official or professional help in integrating herself into the community and networking, she

relied on a friend who had offered to help her. However, this person ended up holding her back. When she finally approached the New Canadians Centre (NCC) last year, she found them extremely helpful, especially the classes that the NCC offered when she was learning English. For future newcomers in Peterborough, Reina recommends going directly to official resources, such as the NCC and City Hall, rather than relying solely or even predominantly on personal resources. Learning English is also an important factor, but more than anything, Reina feels that it is important to stay connected with your own culture and do what makes you happy.

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Reina Rodriguez llegó a Canadá en 4 de febrero de 1994. Dejó a la República Dominicana para mudarse con su ex-marido que era de Lakefield, Ontario. Logísticamente, moviendo a Lakefield fue muy fácil para ella debido al marido. A nivel personal, tenía una sensación similar a la de la ciudad donde ella había vivido en la República Dominicana, que la hizo sentir "como ella regresó a su hogar."

Tener gente que ella puede confiar como su ex-marido y amables vecinos facilitó la transición de Reina a su nuevo hogar. Sin embargo, ella tenía dificultad para transferir sus habilidades de trabajo en Canadá. Reina era una enfermera en la República Dominicana, pero era un ama de casa en Lakefield hasta que sus hijos eran mayores. Se mudó a Lakefield con su hija de ocho años y fue también embarazada con su hijo de tres meses en el momento, pero en lugar de buscar para el cuidado infantil, ella se convirtió en un ama de casa y cuidaba sus hijos ella misma. Cuando mejoró su inglés y sus hijos llegó a ser más autosuficientes, Reina consiguió un trabajo en una tienda de alimentación donde lo hizo muy bien y luego, trabajó con AmeriCredit.

Superar la barrera del idioma era el ajuste más desafiante que Reina tuvo que hacer cuando llegó en Canadá. Sintió la bienvenida y sus vecinos eran amables, pero fue aislar la barrera del idioma. Reina tuvo que ajustarse a no ser capaz de comunicarse fácilmente y a menudo dejó su sensación de soledad. Navidades han sido las experiencias más agradables para ella como un recién llegado a Canadá; a menudo le recordó a su familia, que la hacía sentir feliz y triste al mismo tiempo. Falta de

comunicación y falta de comunicación en general le hizo sentir atrapada y como ella estaba desapareciendo como persona.

A pesar de hacerlo bien en su trabajo de oficina con AmeriCredit, lo no personalmente cumplía con ella para que finalmente dejó para poner en marcha su propio negocio (integral salud y entrenamiento de la vida), que fue después de veinte años de vivir en Canadá. Ella tomó cursos en línea y aprendieron acerca de las prácticas holísticas y ahora se siente integral saludable. Se basa en las redes y en el boca a boca para conseguir clientes para su entrenamiento holístico personal y está muy feliz de hacerlo. Ha tenido un gran éxito con una clase de LINK, tuvo muy buenos maestros y hecho amigos. También enseñó interpretación en Fleming College y ha albergado varios español, estudiantes de intercambio.

Reina deseaba que ella hubiera sabido quién hablar antes de llegar a Canadá. En vez de buscar ayuda oficial o profesional en la misma integración en la comunidad y las redes, ella confió a un amigo que había ofrecido a ayudarla. Sin embargo, esta persona terminó abstenerse de ella. Cuando ella finalmente se acercó al New Canadians Centre (NCC) el año pasado, encontró muy útil, sobre todo las clases que ofrece la NCC cuando ella estaba aprendiendo inglés. Para los recién llegados futuros en Peterborough, Reina recomienda que vayan directamente a los recursos oficiales, como el NCC y el ayuntamiento, en lugar de confiar únicamente o incluso predominante en los recursos personales. Aprender que inglés es también un factor importante, pero más que nada, Reina siente que es importante para mantenerse conectados con su propia cultura y hacer lo que te hace feliz.

Key Words

Adjustment

Community

Culture

Immigration

Integration

Oral Histories

Spanish

Transition