

Seniors for Seniors by Seniors (S3) Project

Stories of Adventure,
Resilience and Adaptation



Real Stories. Real People. Remarkable Journeys.

Published by
Community Development Council Durham

EXPERIENCE. STRENGTH. INSPIRATION

Shared by Those Who've Lived It.

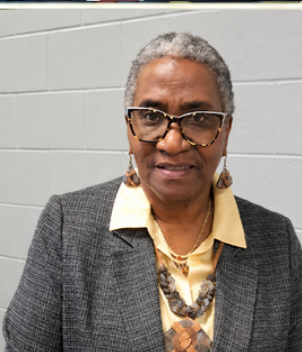


The Seniors for Seniors by Seniors (S3) Project is a heartfelt collection of true stories from older adults who have embraced life's adventures, overcome challenges, and adapted to change with courage and grace.

From new beginnings to lifelong dreams, from personal losses to powerful comebacks—these stories remind us that age is not a limit, but a legacy of wisdom, strength, and purpose.

Be inspired. Be encouraged.

Because every story has the power to uplift another.



SENIORS FOR SENIORS BY SENIORS (S3) PROJECT

STORIES OF ADVENTURE, RESILIENCE
AND ADAPTATION

BY
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL DURHAM

Seniors for Seniors by Seniors (S3) Project

Stories of Adventure, Resilience and Adaptation

Project Coordination and Compilation

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Community Development Council Durham

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FOREWORD

There is something powerful about being trusted with someone's story.

Behind every story in this book is a journey—a decision to leave something familiar, a sacrifice made, a challenge overcome, and the gradual building of a new life and a sense of home.

As an immigrant myself, these stories resonate with me personally. I know that coming to a new country is about much more than arriving at a destination. It is about learning, adapting and sometimes beginning again, while holding on to the people, traditions and experiences that shaped you.

For more than 56 years, Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) has had the privilege of walking alongside people at different points in their journeys. We have learned that behind every program, every service and every statistic is a person—with a story that deserves to be heard.

The S3 Project reflects that belief beautifully. It recognizes that seniors are not simply recipients of services. They are holders of knowledge, history, culture and wisdom, and we have much to learn from them.

The seniors whose voices fill these pages have built careers and families, navigated unfamiliar systems, overcome barriers, formed friendships and contributed to their communities. Their stories remind us that resilience is often found in the everyday courage to keep moving forward.

At CDCD, community development means creating spaces where people are not only served, but seen, heard and valued. It means recognizing lived experience as knowledge and ensuring that the people within our communities have opportunities to contribute and shape the places they call home.

To every senior who trusted us with a piece of your life: **thank you.** Thank you for your courage,

your contributions and the wisdom you have chosen to pass on.

We are honoured to help preserve and amplify your stories. Because when we listen to one another's stories, we do more than learn where someone has been—we begin to understand one another. And that is where stronger communities begin.

Hermia Corbette
Executive Director
Community Development Council Durham
(CDCD)

DEDICATION

This collection of stories is dedicated to the millions of immigrants who have journeyed to Canada in search of opportunity, safety, belonging, and a better future.

Within these pages are stories of courage, determination, sacrifice, and hope. They reflect the challenges of leaving behind familiar places, loved ones, and established lives, while embracing the uncertainties of a new country. They also celebrate the resilience, adaptability, and strength that immigrants draw upon as they navigate barriers, build new communities, and create opportunities for themselves and future generations.

These stories remind us that behind every immigrant journey is a person with dreams, talents, and aspirations—a person who contributes to the rich social, cultural, and economic fabric of Canada.

May these stories inspire understanding, foster

connection, and affirm the invaluable contributions of immigrants to our shared Canadian journey.

To all past, present, and future immigrants to Canada—this compilation is dedicated to you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) gratefully acknowledges the support of the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility for funding the Seniors for Seniors by Seniors (S3) Project. This initiative would not have been possible without their investment in community engagement and seniors' well-being.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all project participants whose enthusiasm, commitment, and willingness to connect, learn, and give back brought the S3 Project to life. Your dedication, including attending meetings throughout the winter months, made this initiative a success. We are equally grateful to our community partners and service providers for sharing their expertise, resources, and support. Your contributions strengthened the project and enriched the experience for participants.

Special thanks to former MPP Patrice Barnes and the Town of Ajax for recognizing the project's impact through Certificates of Recognition and Congratulations. We also acknowledge our dedicated volunteers, Bolade Soyeye and Naz Naqvi, whose reliability and support helped ensure every session ran smoothly.

As Mother Teresa once said, “We can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.” The S3 Project is a testament to that spirit. Thank you to everyone who contributed to making the S3 Project a meaningful and successful experience.

Padmini Roberts & Richard De Gaetano
Project Coordinators

SPECIAL THANKS

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- Jennifer Garton, Former Regional Housing Coordinator, Durham Mental Health Services, Lakeridge Health
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- Patrice Barnes, Former MPP for Ajax
- Neru Padmanabhan, Former Constituency Assistant, Community Office of Patrice Barnes, MPP Ajax
- Jeff Dart, Manager, Health Equity and Priority Populations, Durham Community Health Centre
- Kristen Roberts, Executive Coordinator, Victim Services of Durham Region

Volunteers

- Bolade Soyegbe
- Naz Naqvi

Thank you for your dedication, partnership, and contributions to enhancing the lives of seniors throughout Durham Region.

FUNDING PROJECT BACKGROUND

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) applied to and was successfully awarded funding through the Seniors Community Grant Program 2024-25. This grant was made available through the Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility and is awarded by His Majesty the King in Right of Ontario.

The Seniors for Seniors by Seniors (S3) Project, made possible with the grant funds brought together diverse newcomer and established immigrant seniors in Durham Region to engage in discussion of issues and challenges facing immigrant seniors, cultural sharing, learning about available services, and building relationships between seniors, and with local service providers.

The project provided an opportunity for the seniors to utilize their richly diverse experiences and expertise through stories, shared ideas, and strategies

they developed to navigate commonly experienced barriers. Discussions were facilitated by a coordinator who also provided culturally-appropriate food, program materials, and guest speakers from the local community and the municipality.

The project provided a forum for seniors to connect with other seniors, and with service providers, sharing their lived experiences of migrating and making Canada home. They shared tips and strategies for engaging in meaningful ways with the broader community.

The interactive and culturally diverse themed sessions provided a forum to share stories, and the opportunity to build connections and develop relationships with other seniors through shared experiences.

The S3 Project was a new initiative that complemented a suite of programs for newcomers, including seniors, delivered by the CDCD. With a

population of 18,000+¹ in Durham Region, older adults, aged 55+ represent 28%² of that number. A 2016 study indicates 5,890 immigrant seniors in Durham live below the poverty line (below the Low-Income Measure-After Tax)³.

In 2024, we anticipate that number has grown. Seniors are increasingly at risk of housing insecurity, isolation, food insecurity, and poor quality of life.

To better understand the challenges seniors face - especially those new to Durham Region - and to develop a long-term relationship and communicate with seniors, CDCD plans to initiate a Council of

¹ The Regional Municipality of Durham. The Regional Municipality of Durham is one of the fastest-growing regions in Canada. Planning for Growth. <https://www.durham.ca/living-here/planning-for-growth/>. 2/10/2025.

² The Regional Municipality of Durham. Age Friendly Durham Strategy and Action Plan. 2017. <https://www.durham.ca/living-here/age-friendly-durham/#Age-FriendlyDurhamStrategyandActionPlan>. 2/5/2025.

³ Community Development Council Durham (CDCD). (2020). Community Lens: Seniors Report. Oshawa, ON: CDCD. Data source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, "Target group profile of the population and citizenship," accessed through the Community Data Program. https://www.cdcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Community-Lens-Seniors-Report-083120-1.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com. 2/10/2025.

seniors that can inform CDCD and other service providers of their needs and assets. The seniors of this Council will benefit from connection with others like themselves, and with service providers, and will have the opportunity to learn new knowledge and skills, and contribute to the broader community, thereby increasing their confidence, self-esteem, and comfort dealing with agencies, institutions, and governments in the Region.

In addition to helping project participants to build relationships and obtain peer support, learn more about supports and services and tips for successful settlement, this project can lead to a more permanent, and sustainable, advisory body of immigrant senior volunteers, supported by a network of human services organizations and funding organizations. Such a body may address issues of immigrant settlement and integration, housing, income and food security, and social isolation, among others. Participants will gain opportunities to strengthen their community by

contributing their knowledge and skills as a part of the action group which will be sustained through CDCD's leadership.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The S3 Project Coordinators conducted outreach, recruited, and facilitated a group of newcomer and more established immigrant seniors living in Durham Region, to discuss their lived experiences related to being new to Canadian society and Ontario. Their stories and ideas will be shared with service providers and regional staff, orally and in print. Guest speakers provided information to the seniors on services, programs, healthy lifestyles and institutional structures.

About one (1) in every 10 seniors in Durham experience poverty, namely 9% of all racialized seniors live in poverty.⁴ Immigrant seniors face several problems that Canadian-born seniors may not have to overcome. Adjustment to a new culture,

⁴ Community Development Council Durham (CDCD), Community Lens: Seniors Report (2020), citing Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, accessed through the Community Data Program. https://www.cdcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Community-Lens-Seniors-Report-083120-1.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com. 2/12/2025.

language barriers, lack of familiar community and social relations, in addition to religious and/or racial discrimination, lack of knowledge of places and transportation systems, unfamiliarity with institutional structures and how they work or how to access critical resources, can impact negatively on their wellbeing.

CDCD has considerable experience providing services to newcomer seniors and has learned of the challenges they face. Newcomers can further learn from established immigrants and from representatives of organizations or governments.

Newcomer and immigrant seniors can also help service providers understand the obstacles they experience. This knowledge sharing through storytelling can be valuable to service providers as they will gain insight into the challenges and co-create solutions for newcomer seniors.

Once the S3 project is over, the established Immigrant Seniors Action Council (ISAC) will work

to further explore the issues newcomer seniors experience and inform and advise government leaders on policies that will support the aging population in Durham Region. In the process of learning about each other, the seniors who participate in this project will have the opportunity to develop new relationships within and outside their own ethno-cultural groups.

Through CDCD staff and guest speakers, the seniors were able to access information about programs, institutional make-up and avenues of access, and enhance their voice in community development activities. It is expected that seniors will improve their confidence and well-being and increase social relations within Durham Region communities.

Promoting diversity and inclusion by amplifying the voices of typically marginalized seniors and ensuring their concerns and suggested solutions are heard by local government and service providers, was also achieved.

THEN AND NOW: IN SUMMARY - SENIOR IMMIGRANTS REFLECT ON CANADA'S CHANGING LANDSCAPE

In the cozy Welcome Centre in Ajax, a group of senior immigrants share their stories spanning five decades of Canadian immigration. Their experiences, ranging from the late 1960s to recent years, paint a compelling picture of how the Canadian immigrant experience has evolved – and what's been lost and gained along the way.

"You could quit a job today and find another one tomorrow," recalls Richard, who arrived from the United States in 1969. "It was that easy." His eyes light up as he describes the economic mobility of that era, a stark contrast to today's competitive job market. Richard's departure from the U.S. was prompted by social unrest and opposition to the Vietnam War, making Canada an attractive alternative despite its own challenges with discrimination.

The economic landscape these seniors describe feels almost mythical by today's standards. Housing costs once typically consumed less than 20% of household income; today, 22% of Canadian households spend 30% or more of their income on shelter costs.⁵ "The houses were bigger then," notes Jalal, a more recent arrival who regularly visited Canada since 2007 before making it his permanent home. "Now the living spaces are shrinking, while costs keep rising – it's creating new challenges for families trying to live together."

The changes they have witnessed extend beyond economics. Toronto's demographic makeup has transformed dramatically, with immigration from Asia and Africa accounting for an increasingly large share of the population, alongside a highly educated

⁵ Statistics Canada, "Housing affordability in Canada, 2022," The Daily, September 10, 2024; Statistics Canada, Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 — Shelter-cost-to-income ratio. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/az/definition-eng.cfm?ID=households-menage028&utm_source=chatgpt.com. 2/12/2025.

immigrant population.⁶ "The professional people, they know very well what they are doing," Jalal observes, though he notes with concern how many skilled immigrants struggle to practice in their fields due to licensing barriers.

Others had to give up the idea of their dream job: "I was going to be a cop in Canada but I ended up working for 30 years at a hospital and just blending, getting into the system", shares Annette.

For Mervyn, who first visited Canada in the late 2020s through family connections, the initial welcome felt warm and genuine. "People would say, 'Oh no, you are here first, you go ahead,'" they reminisce about their early experiences in grocery stores and public spaces. This basic courtesy made such an impression that Mervyn declared, "God! if there's one

⁶ Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population, Focus on Geography Series — Toronto Census Metropolitan Area; Census Profile — Toronto CMA. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?dguid=2021S0503535&lang=E&topic=9&utm_source=chatgpt.com. 2/12/2025.

place other than Trinidad I have to live, let it be Canada."

However, the infrastructure supporting these newcomers hasn't kept pace with population growth. Healthcare, while still preferred over the American system, now involves lengthy emergency room waits. Public transportation struggles to serve the expanding population, leading to increased car dependency and urban congestion.

Yet, amidst these challenges, they identify emerging opportunities. Several of them point to Canada's less populated provinces as promising alternatives for newcomers. "You stand a better chance if you're going to Calgary," one suggests, noting the lower living costs and abundant job opportunities outside the major urban centres.

Their collective wisdom offers valuable insights for both policymakers and newcomers. The changing nature of their experiences highlights both Canada's enduring appeal and its evolving challenges. While the

fundamental values of Canadian society – its multiculturalism, social support systems, and welcoming attitude – remain strong, the practical hurdles of settlement have grown more complex.

As the S3 Project winds down, it's clear that despite the challenges the participants describe, none regrets their choice to make Canada home. Their stories serve as both a testament to Canada's success as an immigrant-welcoming nation and a call to action for addressing the mounting pressures on housing, employment, and infrastructure that particularly affect newcomer communities.

"The welcome is still there," Jalal reflects, "but the path has become more complicated." It's a sentiment that captures both the enduring spirit of Canadian immigration and the evolving challenges that new generations of immigrants must navigate.

For those contemplating similar journeys today, these seniors' experiences offer both encouragement and caution: Canada remains a land of opportunity,

but success increasingly requires careful planning, resilience, and perhaps a willingness to look beyond traditional immigrant destinations to find one's place in the Canadian mosaic.

The decision to leave one's home, family, friends, job and everything that you know and move to a new place is a huge one and one not often taken lightly. Just what was the motivating factor for this group?

"I migrated as a senior because my kids are here. I sent them to learn and come back to home, but they settled here, so I didn't have any other option. Apart from the delay in the process, the process was smooth. I never had any issues with going through the documents and being informed of the different steps that I should take. It has been 29 years."

Another stated, "It becomes a bit difficult, when your children settle abroad. We parents have only one option to live near them. That was the reason for immigrating to Canada."

Reasons differ, "I have a sister already here, and then the other reason why I wanted to come was because of my girls. I have two daughters and for their better future I wanted to move to Canada."

For some, it's difficult, "... the navigating process was not easy. It was very difficult because my husband and I had good jobs in the Middle East, and we had to leave everything and come and start all over again from scratch. That was the tough part."

CHAPTER ONE

A New Beginning in Canada

GHAZALA'S STORY

When I was fifteen years old, my parents decided to immigrate to Canada. My uncle had moved to Toronto from U.S. and he could sponsor his brother's family.

It was not a common practice in those times so my mom had to face a lot of opposition from her family. She was the only daughter of my grandparents who had four sons.

My parents were always ahead of their time, did things that were not common practice in those days. Rightly so, they wanted a better future for their kids.

It was not as lengthy a procedure in those days as now. My dad got an invitation for an interview for the whole family after some months of my uncle applying for sponsorship. We all did pretty good since

communication in English was not a problem since my two brothers, kid sister and I were all students in private English schools and my mom was taking lessons from a tutor to learn English.

After a few months, our immigration was approved and our family started getting ready to move to Toronto. That was a big project, wrapping up a household of 23 years. My sister wrapped up her toys and gave them as presents to all the cousins.

Something interesting to mention was the flight from Pakistan. In those days, there were so many stopovers. Every stop was a few hours long. It took us forever to get to Canada. When we arrived at the Toronto Airport on a summer day in 1972, it was a bright sunny day. The highways were so broad and the cars were so fast. It was all so new and clean. We immediately fell in love with our new country.

Willowdale area of North York is where our uncle lived in a beautiful condominium with a view of Highway 401. This area was newly developed at the

time. After a few days there, we moved to a house on Greenwood Avenue which was rented by my dad. It had a convenience store at the front and living quarters upstairs. Soon, both of my older brothers put their education on hold and got jobs to help out the family finances. My sister started to go to school but I was at home to help my dad with the business. My mom was attending English classes at George Brown College.

In Pakistan, our dad was the only breadwinner but now all of us were doing our part to help us survive in this new country.

In those days it was not easy to acquire the kinds of foods that we were used to. There was only one Halal meat shop. My mom would bake Pitas in the oven from scratch. It was simply not easy. We were also homesick as not many Pakistanis were here. Whoever was here, knew each other. It was a very close-knit community and people gathered in a church turned mosque near the High Park area.

Finding jobs was not as great a challenge as it is today. Since my dad was not cut out to do retail, he sold the store and in a year we all moved to a new building opposite Fairview Mall.

My dad got a job as the manager of Odeon cinema, and my mom got a job in a stereo manufacturing facility. Since my dad did not need my help with the business anymore, I also went and got admission in High school.

High school was intimidating for me in the beginning. The environment was completely different. I am a survivor, so I focused all my attention towards getting good grades. The basic difference in the education system was that I grew up memorizing everything for the exams but here in Canada they encouraged you to brainstorm, to think on your own and creativity was encouraged. Whatever I learned in Canada helped me so much in my future.

The cold weather was one of the big challenges moving here. Even though I would enjoy the snow,

walking to and from school, my fingers and nose would freeze.

My teachers liked me for my enthusiasm, but I had a hard time understanding the mindset of kids my age. Soon enough I was lucky to find some like-minded girls to hang out with at the cafeteria or the library. I also joined a lot of clubs in my school. Since I was a teenager when I migrated here, these are my memories.

When I got married to someone from Pakistan by arranged marriage by my parents, he had to start his career all over again when he got here. He had a good career as a movie cameraman and worked at Riyadh Television in Saudi Arabia. Even though he had experience and had shot a documentary covering the whole country (Saudi Arabia), when he came to Toronto, he found it very challenging to get back in his field.

After applying at a lot of TV networks and having no positive response, he had to choose a second choice as a way to pay his bills. We both eventually ended up

having our own small business. We ran it successfully for 25 years and things eventually got easier.

I will not change anything as far as my experience as an immigrant is concerned. It simply made me who I am today. After facing a lot of challenges, I am very confident and strong. I feel I can live anywhere in the world easily now. Life in Canada with all its challenges has made me so tough that nothing seems difficult any more. I am blessed to have a great family life. Canada is amazing. It is tough but it makes you ready to face any challenge. If you survive in Canada, you can survive anywhere.

CHAPTER TWO

Seeking a Better Life **RICHARD'S EXPERIENCE**

Arriving from the United States in 1969 at age 21, Richard's journey was driven by a desire to escape racism, sexism, and war. Though Canada didn't prove to be entirely free from these issues, the initial transition period offered certain advantages: jobs were plentiful and easily obtainable, and housing was both affordable and accessible.

However, Richard faced discrimination in housing, recalling an incident where a landlady evicted him and his partner due to having Black friends visit.

Working in hospitals, he observed the evolution of healthcare services, noting how today's technological advances are offset by longer wait times and overcrowded emergency rooms. His perspective uniquely highlights how Canada, while different from

the US, shared many similar challenges but with the crucial distinction of universal healthcare access.

CHAPTER THREE

A Welcoming Beginning **MERVYN'S REFLECTION**

I already had connections here when I decided to leave my home country. I first visited Canada in the late 1980s through family connections so I found the transition remarkably smooth thanks to my aunt's presence in Hamilton.

The welcoming atmosphere, especially the courtesy experienced in everyday situations like grocery shopping and public transportation, made such an impression that I declared, "God, if there's one place other than Trinidad I have to live, let it be Canada."

While I found early adaptation easy due to existing community support, I observed significant changes over time, particularly noticing how securing employment has become more competitive, requiring

extensive documentation compared to the simpler processes of the past.

I think this calls for creative solutions and I would advocate for newcomers to consider settling in less populated provinces for better opportunities, recognizing how cities like Toronto have become overcrowded and increasingly expensive.

CHAPTER FOUR

Seniors as Mentors

JALAL'S STORY

After regularly visiting Canada from 2007, I made the permanent move when my children settled here. My transition was relatively seamless, having already established familiarity with the country through regular visits.

As an engineer, I gained valuable insight into the professional challenges faced by skilled immigrants, particularly noting the complex requirements for getting professional engineering licenses in Canada. I observed significant demographic changes, with an increase in professional immigrants from Asia and Africa. From my perspective, current challenges include the shrinking living spaces in modern housing, increasing mortgage costs, and transportation

infrastructure that hasn't kept pace with population growth.

My wife and I were on parent sponsorship program, which was a little easy but lengthy due to the COVID pandemic which led to us having to go through a few procedures two times or more. Being parents and having immediate family here in Canada, we did not go through any major issues.

The culture of Canada is not so difficult to adjust to. This is due to the multicultural and plural society. Adjusting in Canadian society is a lifelong activity and we need to adjust as and when required. As far as access to services is concerned, health care is good but slow to respond. The driver's licence process for seniors is also cumbersome and too demanding. Making social and cultural connections is difficult due to less time available with other groups, as they are busy earning a livelihood. Services such as libraries are very beneficial.

In our community a lot of cultural programs and activities are held, which keep us closely connected with society. It is necessary to visit, interact and meet different communities in the society to find their strength and use it for common goals.

The focus should shift from seeing youth as the primary drivers of the future to recognizing seniors as valuable mentors. Their experience, wisdom, and strength can provide guidance and inspiration to younger generations as they navigate the digital era.

Thirty Years of Contribution **ANNETTE'S EXPERIENCE**

I came to Canada from Trinidad as an eighteen-year-old. My mother was here and as expected, I had to come to Canada. I arrived in the spring of 1971 and for me, it was cold. When I entered high school, I found it very easy because coming out of the British system, our standards were very high, but Canada had a way of putting you back one grade. They started me in grade ten, not grade eleven.

Things were much more challenging when I entered the workforce. There was a lot of stereotyping, but I was able to navigate through it all and I completed thirty years of service in the healthcare system. I am now navigating life as a senior.

One of the things I have seen as I travel around the region is the need for newcomers to understand the

bus system, how to book appointments for doctors and how to handle finances and navigate banking.

My success in Canada has been my ability to understand the systems, keeping my head down and applying myself and not expecting the Government to provide for me. I am looking forward to what's next for me as a senior actively involved in my community.

CHAPTER SIX

It Is Never Too Late EFFIONG'S NEW CHAPTER

My wife and I came to Canada from Nigeria in March 2023 to join our daughter, who had made Canada her home. Like many immigrants, we were seeking greater stability and the opportunity to spend this stage of our lives close to family.

Arriving as permanent residents, our entry into Canada was smooth and welcoming. From the moment we arrived, we were treated with kindness and respect. We quickly obtained the essentials needed to begin our new life—health cards, bank accounts, library cards, and driver's licences. These may seem like simple things, but they represented the beginning of our integration into Canadian society.

Before immigrating, I knew very little about Canada. In my part of Nigeria, people more commonly migrated to the United States or the United Kingdom. I arrived with many assumptions about what life here would be like, and some of those assumptions quickly changed. Like many newcomers, I discovered that adapting to a new country involves learning new systems, understanding different expectations, and sometimes starting over in ways you never anticipated.

One of my most vivid memories is arriving during winter. It was my first time seeing snow. The endless white landscapes, snow-covered rooftops, and leafless trees looked like scenes from a movie. Everything felt new and fascinating. I remember being puzzled when I saw what looked like smoke coming from people's mouths when they spoke outdoors. It took me a while to realize it was simply the effect of the cold air. Looking back now, I laugh at my own curiosity and wonder.

The weather, however, was one of my greatest challenges. The cold kept me indoors for long periods, and adjusting physically was not easy. Coming from a tropical climate, the Canadian winter required a level of adaptation I had never imagined.

What impressed me most about Canada was its diversity. People from many cultures, backgrounds, and faiths live side by side. I found Canadians to be polite, respectful, and welcoming. There is a strong culture of inclusion and respect for differences, which helped make the adjustment easier.

At the same time, I noticed differences in social life. In Nigeria, neighbours, friends, and extended family often spend a great deal of time together. Community life is very visible and active. In Canada, life seemed more private and independent. It took time to adjust to this different way of living, and I came to understand why loneliness can be a challenge for some seniors.

One of the greatest blessings during my settlement journey was the support I received from newcomer

organizations and community groups. The Welcome Centre, the CDCD, local churches, and senior-serving organizations provided guidance, friendship, learning opportunities, and social activities that helped me feel connected. Through these programs, I met people from many backgrounds, participated in cultural activities, learned new skills, and built meaningful relationships.

I was particularly touched by the kindness shown to me by staff and volunteers who went above and beyond to help when transportation was difficult. Their generosity reminded me that community is built through simple acts of care and compassion.

Like many internationally trained immigrants, I also experienced frustration in trying to find employment that matched my qualifications and experience. It was difficult to understand why years of education and professional experience did not easily translate into opportunities in Canada. Yet rather than give up, I chose to continue learning and adapting.

One of the most important lessons I learned was the value of digital literacy. When I arrived, I had very limited computer skills. Realizing how essential technology is to daily life in Canada, I enrolled in computer training programs and committed myself to learning. Today, I am confident using computers and online systems—something I never imagined doing at this stage of my life.

I also completed courses in customer service, warehouse management, financial literacy, and insurance studies. In December 2024, I earned my Harmonized Life License Qualification Program (HLLQP) certificate and am continuing my journey toward becoming a licensed Life Insurance Advisor.

Looking back, immigration has been a journey of learning, adaptation, and growth. There have been challenges, disappointments, and moments of uncertainty. There have also been opportunities, kindness, and achievements that I could not have imagined when I first arrived.

Canada has given me the chance to continue learning, contributing, and growing, even in my senior years. While no country is perfect, I have found Canada to be a place of opportunity, diversity, and compassion. Most importantly, I have learned that it is never too late to begin again, learn something new, and build a meaningful life in a new home.

Finding My Place and Purpose **ANGELA'S EXPERIENCE**

My decision to migrate was in response to being sponsored, and the migration process was seamless. I didn't experience any challenges upon arrival as this was flawless. Integration into the culture was not difficult as it is somewhat similar to that of my home country. The challenges experienced were in the areas of awareness and accessibility including the benefits to be derived from the requisite services for resettlement and professional registration.

Although making personal and professional connections took some time, it was made easier by the assistance of family and friends as I was able to gain success through networking and other social events.

Prior to participating in the S3 Project, I was aware of the CDCD, YMCA and Welcome Centre, and benefitted from the last two organizations' program offerings. During the process of the project, my awareness of other community organizations heightened with invaluable information about the services that they offer, as well as the relevant demography.

For me, living in Canada is an oxymoron; it is an enlightening and enriching experience while at the same time frustrating. It is great building friendships and networking, but as an internationally trained professional, it is challenging to find jobs in my field, or even jobs where transferable skills can be employed.

My achievements to date, after a little over one year, have been beneficial, though minimal. Through research, volunteerism, networking and the S3 Project I was able to know more about the workforce, culture and services offered including those for immigrants; and also have better understanding of the registration

process for my professional field. Despite the successes aforementioned, I am still not able to pursue registration because of the complexities involved, and I am yet to find permanent employment using transferable skills.

From Challenges to Achievement **SANDRA'S REFLECTION**

My home country is India where girls are considered second class citizens and when I had my 2 daughters, it was my fault!! I did not want my girls to go through the same treatment and so I decided to migrate. I had a choice between New Zealand and Canada - I chose Canada.

The legal aspect of the migration process included applying and doing lots of paperwork and filling documents to be attached to the application. It was a big relief when we got approved, which was the first step. Then came the decision to be taken about our home and all the memorabilia in it. Everything had to be packed in 8 suitcases. Difficult decisions for the girls were, which Barbie doll to take and which to leave behind!

We arrived in Canada in February at the peak of winter. Initially the snow was very beautiful just like a Christmas card, then it became difficult to travel since we never had a car. Going for interviews also became difficult without a car especially if it snowed on the day of the interview.

We had to adjust to the idea of using our credit card instead of the debit card. This was huge for me, because I was told my whole life never to spend money that is not yours! The second amazing experience was the mortgage factor and the insurance factor. Everything has to be insured even your pet!

My family and I needed to adjust to our new community, building relationships and making friends since I never had much family here, just one sister who came to Canada 10 years before me and had her own circle of friends. I then joined a church group 2 years after coming to Canada and I am still a very active member there. Joining a social network, finding culturally relevant programs and activities and

attending all the meetings and appointments is very time consuming and not easy as there is not much free time.

Accessing government services is still a challenge. All services are now online and not easily accessible. All government services involve too much paperwork and not much help to get it done. Getting help on the phone is also very difficult.

Generally, though, I am happy I made the decision to come to Canada. Initially the struggle was difficult and nerve-racking but eventually it worked out well. The first hurdle was finding a job. After this, everything else fell in place. One of the hurdles finding a job was not having Canadian experience. I am fortunate that I got my first job 2 months after arriving in Canada and I have been working since. I have been working in my present job for over 10 years. My second success is my home – being able to become a homeowner here was a huge achievement for me.

Finding our way in a New Country **TARIQ'S ACCOUNT**

I came with my wife and three children to Toronto in the late nineties. The challenges we faced were getting accustomed to the cold climate as we came from a warm place and did not have the proper clothes needed for Canadian winters. The other challenges were adjusting to the social norms, a different lifestyle, lack of social support and absence of extended family and friends.

The good thing was that I knew a few people who had been here for some time, and they helped me and the family to settle quite quickly and helped in some very basic things like grocery shopping, how to use different public transportation, getting a driving license, and purchasing a car.

It took us almost two years to get used to the way of life here and to understand the culture and the do's and don'ts in this social setup.

Building a Better Life for My Family **ANDREA'S JOURNEY**

My decision to migrate to Canada came about after making a comparison between Canada and the US. The majority of my family had migrated to the United States then it was my turn. I wanted to experience the country before moving there and so I decided to temporarily live there. After almost 1 year in the United States, I decided to return to my home country of Jamaica because I could not handle life there and did not think it was the right place to grow my children who at the time were very small. I then turned my sights to Canada and after visiting here, decided that this was a better place for my family.

I was sponsored to live here and came as a legal immigrant with my son and arrived here at the age of

32. I had left my other 2 children back in Jamaica and after only 1 year, I was able to sponsor them to immigrate to Canada as well. I found the process of immigrating myself and later getting my children here, to be seamless. At that time, sponsorship of children as a parent, you had to be here at least 12 months, and right at the 12 – month mark was when I applied to sponsor my other 2 children. They arrived just 3 months after.

I arrived in Canada in November and as would be expected for anyone coming from a warm climate to a cold climate, it was a shock to both myself and my son. We arrived in jeans and shirts and had to go straight to the store to purchase winter jackets. Of course, we wanted to go right back home, mostly due to the cold and so the first 4–5 months were very hard adjusting. However, once the weather changed and got warmer, it was less ‘traumatic’ and both my son and I started adjusting slowly. The biggest adjustment for me was finding work.

As it is for most immigrants, the cultural shift is usually the longest and hardest to make. Coming from a culture where things moved slowly and were more laid back; your neighbors were community and family oriented and everyone said "hello" there was a stark difference with life in Canada and took some time getting used to. Learning the bus system and school system was another adjustment. When I learned that children who immigrate here were required to start school at a lower grade, it did not sit well with me and I had to challenge the system to get my son evaluated to avoid him being downgraded to a lower level in school.

One of the first things I did to help to learn about living in Canada and how to access the services and programs, was to find a library. Once I signed up and received my library card, it became my "home away from home." I found solace in the library and would go every opportunity I got. There I read books on Canada, on how the different systems work, about

newcomer programs and much more. There I learned about adult education where I could get my GED before enrolling in college. I soon after enrolled in the Business Administration program at Centennial College which then set me on my way to my career.

Generally, living in Canada provides many benefits and opportunities to an immigrant. The notion of a "better life" is why most people from other countries immigrate. It becomes clear to immigrants that in order to achieve that "better life" one must work very hard (sometimes harder than in one's own country); that once reality sets in, it is not the fairy tale life we thought it would be and then there is the racism and prejudice that immigrants have to face.

I encountered prejudice on many occasions and one that stuck with me for many years was my attempt to enter the Journalism program at one of the colleges. The academic counsellor who I had the interview with spent the entire time letting me know how difficult it would be for me to succeed in such a program. This

interaction discouraged me to the point of losing interest and enrolling in Business instead. It was only after speaking with others like myself who encountered similar interactions, that I realized what the intention was. And there have been other instances over the years of prejudice and stereotypes that we have had to endure as immigrants.

On the other hand, there are also many good things about living in Canada. The healthcare system has its challenges, but is a game-changer when it comes to choosing between living in the US and Canada. Canada also promotes a family-oriented society by providing amenities and services geared towards the family e.g. parks and green spaces in most communities. Canadians are also generally more friendly in comparison to Americans (in my opinion). I do the Canada-US comparison, because these were my options when deciding to immigrate.

My main personal success is raising my 3 children in Canada to become successful adults who have been

able to accomplish educational and career achievements that they can now pass on to their children. That was my goal for choosing Canada over the US and I am thankful that so far it has been accomplished.

The Power of Resilience

USHA'S PATH

I came to Canada from Sri Lanka as a refugee because my husband was already here, and I wanted to build a life with him. Arriving in Canada was a major adjustment. It was my first experience with snow, and the cold weather was difficult to adapt to. Coming from a different cultural background, even simple things such as dressing for the winter felt unfamiliar. The language barrier made it challenging to communicate, build friendships, and connect with the broader community.

In those early years, I relied on phone calls with other South Asians to maintain a sense of connection and belonging. I also attended ESL (English as a Second Language) classes for several years. There, I met people from many different countries and realized

that while our stories were different, we all faced challenges as newcomers trying to build a new life in Canada.

Financial difficulties were one of my biggest struggles. The cost of living was high, and I often had to seek additional work to support myself and my family. Despite these challenges, I remained determined to move forward and create opportunities for myself.

As my confidence grew, I became more involved in my community. I volunteered with the Toronto District School Board, providing Tamil interpretation for parent-teacher meetings and helping families overcome language barriers. Later, I taught Tamil to elementary school students and continued supporting parents through interpretation and translation services. I also learned to drive and earned my driver's licence, which gave me greater independence and opened new opportunities.

Living in Canada taught me the importance of equality and opportunity. I appreciated the freedom available to women and the ability to pursue personal and professional goals. These experiences inspired me to help others facing similar challenges.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, I partnered with other multilingual women to establish a nonprofit interpreters and translators cooperative. Together, we created virtual and in-person employment opportunities, provided training and mentorship, and developed language-specific programs for seniors and youth. Through this work, we have empowered women, strengthened communities, and helped newcomers access vital services and opportunities.

Today, I am proud to say that I am a successful and independent woman. I am able to support myself financially and use my experiences to help others build confidence, find employment, and overcome barriers. My journey has not always been easy, but it has shown me the power of resilience, determination, community

support, and the opportunities that can come from starting over in a new country.

A New Stage of Life **ROSHANE'S REFLECTION**

I first visited Canada in 2009 as part of a delegation for an Environmental and Mining Seminar at Banff. I was working as a Geologist in Iran at that time. I was impressed with the beauty, tranquility and cleanliness of Canada at that time and the people I met were so very hospitable.

After my husband passed away, my son, who is living in Canada, felt it best that I come to live with him and his family as I was now very lonely at home without my husband. I came through my son's sponsorship in 2021 to live with my son, his wife and my grandson. It was a joy to spend time with my grandson for the first time.

My mom became ill shortly after I came to Canada and I returned home to Iran to take care of her. I returned in 2023 and Canada has been my home since then. My transition here was not difficult as my son took care of everything and taught me how things are done here. Since coming to Canada, I began to change my lifestyle and mindset. I am choosing to celebrate this new stage of my life by slowing down and focusing on personal growth. I have become more relaxed and peaceful and I spend time gardening, exercising more and learning to be patient.

I have managed to build meaningful relationships with new friends from different cultures who I met while attending programs at the Ajax Welcome Centre and those who are my neighbours. I have improved my communication skills and I am enjoying cooking and helping others. However, I have not been able to find a job and I am still looking for a part-time job where I would be able to use my skills and experience as a Geologist and contribute to Canada. Through self-

reflection and acceptance of differences, I was able to overcome social isolation and I see myself as a winner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As participants shared their experiences through the S3 Project, a number of common themes emerged. Many spoke not only about the challenges they faced as newcomers, but also about ideas that could help future immigrants settle and thrive more easily in Canada.

Pre-Arrival Information

One of the strongest messages was the need for better information before arrival. Many participants felt that access to clear and up-to-date information on housing, employment opportunities, credential recognition, settlement services, and immigration policies would help newcomers prepare for life in Canada and make informed decisions before they arrive.

Opportunity to Practice

For internationally trained professionals, the road to practicing in their chosen fields was often long and frustrating. Participants questioned why experienced professionals are unable to contribute their skills while working toward Canadian certification. They suggested pathways that would allow newcomers to work under supervision while completing any required training or examinations, enabling them to gain Canadian experience and continue developing their careers rather than starting over.

Opening Doors to Job Market

Employment was a recurring concern throughout many of the conversations. Participants spoke about the importance of being given a fair opportunity to demonstrate their skills, experience, and potential. They also noted that volunteer opportunities can play a valuable role in helping newcomers gain Canadian experience, build confidence, and establish

professional networks. Making these opportunities easier to find and access could help many immigrants take their first steps toward meaningful employment.

Employment Opportunities

The experiences of immigrant seniors revealed another important issue. Many seniors arrive in Canada with extensive professional experience, qualifications, and a strong desire to remain active and engaged. Participants suggested that more opportunities should be created for seniors who are willing and able to work, whether through employment, mentorship, consulting, or community-based initiatives. Even modest employment opportunities could help reduce social isolation, provide a sense of purpose, and allow seniors to continue contributing their knowledge and skills.

Pathways to Self-Employment

Several participants also spoke about the entrepreneurial spirit of immigrant seniors and the need for greater support for small-scale businesses and

self-employment initiatives. Creating opportunities for seniors to pursue business ventures could help them remain financially independent while continuing to contribute to their communities.

The Need for Housing Solutions

Housing emerged as one of the most pressing concerns. Participants described the difficulties many newcomers face in finding safe, affordable accommodation and emphasized the need for solutions that address both the housing shortage and the unique vulnerabilities experienced by some seniors. Additional supports and alternative housing options could provide much-needed stability and security for those facing difficult circumstances.

Affordable Health Care for Seniors

Access to health care was another area of concern. Some participants felt that dental care remains out of reach for many immigrant seniors, particularly those who are unemployed or living on limited incomes.

They expressed the view that essential dental care should be more accessible and affordable.

Seniors as Teachers and Mentors

Many participants also reflected on the wealth of knowledge and life experience that immigrant seniors bring with them. They envisioned opportunities for seniors to share their stories, experiences, and wisdom in schools and educational settings, helping younger generations learn from their journeys while fostering greater understanding across cultures and generations.

Recognizing the Contributions of Immigrants

Underlying all of these conversations was a shared belief that immigrants and immigrant seniors have much to offer Canada. With the right supports, opportunities, and recognition, they can continue to contribute their talents, experiences, and resilience to the communities they now call home.