

The Mennonite New Life Centre's

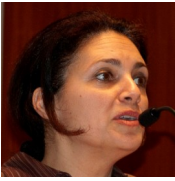
NEWCOMER SPEAKERS BUREAU

Offers:

- **Dynamic speakers** ... for your next meeting, conference or special event
- **Inspiring workshops** ...that mobilize participants to take action for social change
- **Experienced leaders** ...to bring lived experience of migration and integration to boards and committees



**Voices of Challenge.
Voices of Change.**



LETICIA ESQUIVEL (Origin: Cuba)
Leticia trained as a psychologist at the University of Havana, where she completed a masters degree in Clinical Psychology. For more than fifteen years, she worked at the “October 10th” Hospital in Havana, Cuba as a supervisor, researcher, psychotherapist and trainer.

She says: *“The opportunity immigrants need is that first open door. Integration is a sharing process where both newcomers and host society are influenced and change to create a better society.”* Currently she is a settlement worker and mental health program coordinator at the Mennonite New Life Centre. She is also a general member of the Ontario Association of Consultants, Counselors, Psychometrists and Psychotherapists. **Speaking interest: Immigrant and refugee mental health.**



CAROLINE (LI) ZHANG (Origin: China)
Caroline arrived in Canada in 2006 with many hopes as a new immigrant who used to be an English teacher back home. She got survival jobs, went back to school and obtained her Career and Work Counsellor Diploma from George Brown College. Currently, Caroline is working as an Employment Advisor at Humber College. She says: *“Having the lived experience, my passion is to help people, especially newcomers who have gone through the frustration of getting recognition for their degrees and improving their English, to help them to know their strengths, what offer to employers.”*

Speaking interests: Newcomer life - settlement, job search, career exploration, life skills.



LUBNA KHALID (Origin: Pakistan)
Lubna has lived in Toronto since 2000. She holds a masters degree in physiology from Karachi University and is a medical lab assistant by profession. She has been involved with the Crescent Town community for more than five years, working with community women and engaging them in different arts and crafts activities. She said: *“After twelve long years in Canada, I find myself still a newcomer, as I am going through the same struggle which every newcomer does coming from other country and having foreign degrees which are only good for conversations with strangers.”*

Speaking interests: Women’s issues, especially issues concerning homemaker women.



IMTIYAZ PIRMOHAMED (Origin: Tanzania; he has lived in Dubai, Zambia, and Florida)
Imtiaz moved to Canada in 2006. At that time, he had just graduated as an electrical engineer from the University of Central Florida and begun his career in construction management. Since moving to Canada, he has been battling to get his credentials as an engineer accepted in Ontario. He says: *“It is time for us immigrants to take action! We have to convince these professional organizations that our education standards are at par with Canada’s! And that we can also perform these jobs very well! We have to fight for our rights!”* He is a successful engineer and academic tutor and entrepreneur who is coaching students to achieve success in high school and college. Imtiaz’ new venture, WhizKiddo, will soon be offering courses in professional development and academic tutoring. **Speaking interests: Educating, coaching and mentoring students. Career counselling, employment opportunities and mentoring for newcomers.**



SANDRA CORDERO (Origin: Colombia.)
Sandra arrived in Canada in 2002, fleeing death threats from paramilitary groups. She had been a communications union leader, fighting for labour rights, human rights and social justice in her home country. Sandra is safe here in Canada, but as a mother of six – including five teenagers - she struggles with huge barriers: acquiring English language skills, finding a job, educating her children, managing family health problems. Nevertheless, she continues to be involved in the work of social change. She says: *“We need spaces where people can speak about their experience, express their feelings, and organize to bring about their own solutions to problems and challenges.”*

Speaking interests: Human rights, mental health, youth services, Latin American community concerns.



OLGA FLOREAN (Origin: Mexico)
Olga worked for the Mexican government for over fifteen years, the last five as a civic engagement coordinator. She arrived in Canada in 2008, where she lived in a shelter for almost five months, struggling with the challenges of poverty and getting legal representation. Olga

says: *“Thousands of people are suffering right now from poverty in this country and we need to speak up, to take care of our future.”* Olga hasn’t yet seen her fridge full even once—but as a single mother, she also knows that she is not the only one trying to survive as a new immigrant. That’s why she wants to speak, raise her voice, air her concerns and share her story.

Speaking interest: Engagement of newcomers to speak about their needs. Empowering women to speak out against violence, injustice and discrimination.



ANTONYRAJAN ALBERT (Origin: Sri Lanka.)
Antonyrajan arrived in Canada in 2009 under the Skilled Workers Program. As a family man, he takes good care of his family of two children. In Sri Lanka, Antonyrajan worked as an academic with the University of Jaffna for over 17 years. He holds a PhD in geography. Recently, he graduated from George Brown College as a

Social Service Worker. He speaks Tamil and English and is proud to belong to the Tamil community. He says: *“I don’t want to survive with the support of social assistance, I want to be the breadwinner for my family.”*

Speaking interests: Immigrant/refugee settlement and services, seniors, coping with challenges, socio-economic issues and cultural diversity.



MARIA MARGARITA DIAZ (Origin: Colombia)
Maria Margarita has been living in Canada since December of 2007. In Colombia, she was a university professor and co-founded several organizations dedicated to help women, youth, children and families. She has been praised for her work as an advocate for the Latin American community and for her dedication to newcomer issues. In addition to being part of the Speakers Bureau,

she currently participates in the Newcomer Advocacy Committee at the Mennonite New Life Centre. She says: *“I am a dreamer and I firmly believe that our society needs education to raise healthy kids who don’t wander aimlessly. I won’t cry over my problems, but I’ll do something to change the situation.”*

Speaking interests: Taking action to eradicate poverty, raise awareness of the dignity of human beings and achieve social justice.



JUDY CONG (Origin: north-eastern China)
 Judy immigrated with her family in 2001. In China, she earned a degree in electronic engineering and worked for eleven years as an electrical designer for an iron and steel company. This experience and expertise has yet to be recognized by employers in Canada. Judy says:

“How to get Canadian experience, when nobody is willing to lend a hand? Judy has not only struggled to find meaningful work, but also attributes her most recent battle—against a brain tumour—to the resultant stress. This latest challenge put her family’s life on hold for a long time. Judy studied Baking & Pastry Arts at George Brown College.

Speaking interests: Improvement of OW & ODSP, involvement of under served immigrant communities, mental health balance, women issues, and TCHC housing issues.



SIMA DINI (Origin: Iran)
 Sima has been living in Canada since 2004. She’s had the experience of working as a nurse, an English tutor/translator/interpreter, a freelance researcher, and an artist (painter). During the four years it took for her to obtain residency in Canada, Sima acquired a passion for social justice . As grateful as she is for the help and support she has received, Sima believes there is a great need for improvement. Because of her belief system, which is based on the inter-connectedness of all human beings, and also because of her deep love for Canada, she thinks *“the betterment of the condition of any part of society has a direct and positive and impact on its entirety”*. She’s eternally thankful for the freedom she has to do what she loves to do in her second home. **Speaking interests: The dilemma of how to acquire Canadian work experience, health and housing challenges, refugees and single immigrants.**

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ENDRIT MULLISI (Origin: Albania)
 Endrit arrived in Canada in 2009 under the Skilled Worker Program. He holds a B.Sc. degree in Food Chemistry from Tirana University. With thirteen years’ experience in the non-governmental sector, he arrived in Canada with great hopes to give and receive in this country of opportunities, but his expectations have been bitterly shaken. He says, *“How can an internationally educated individual gain Canadian experience if no one will give us a chance? Why do they call us skilled workers, if we need to start from scratch?”* He loves to be involved in social and holistic initiatives.

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Speaking interest: Improvement of Ontario Works, employment and the hidden job market, job hunter loneliness, mental health balance and immigrant family issues.



VENECIA ZUÑIGA: (Origin: Mexico)
 Venecia came to Toronto in June 2009, to be with her brother and to find a better and safer life. A graduate in culinary arts, she is currently working at two restaurants and taking a sociology course at Ryerson, even as she faces the many challenges of settling and staying in

Canada. Venecia says: *“Everything is possible in Toronto if you are willing to pay a very high price for it.”* She takes nothing for granted, but has a tremendous story to share about Food and Love. Venecia is interested in food security and social justice, considering herself a Food Agent of Change.

Speaking interests: Human rights, empowerment and community building, environmental justice, immigration and refugee issues, nutritional food habits.



MARIA ELENA PIEDRAHITA (Origin: Colombia.)
 Maria Elena arrived in Canada in 2002, living first in Jonquière, Quebec and then moving on to Toronto. Maria Elena studied French and later English. In Canada she has been involved in volunteer leadership and coordination of diverse groups for seniors and women. For two years she was the president of ALIDDESA (Organization for Leadership and Development of Women in Canada). She is also very active with the Social Housing Hispanic Tenants Association (currently vice president). Maria Elena believes that: *“Women should be prepared to participate at different levels of society in order to improve conditions for themselves and their families.”*

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Speaking interests: Advocacy initiatives, human rights, political participation, wellness for women and seniors, Hispanic community participation.



JASON LEE (Origin: Taiwan)
 Jason came to Canada in 2008 under the Skilled Worker Program. Jason has been a successful marketing and sales professional throughout his career. He understands the challenges newcomers face today because he has been there. These challenges include a disconnected relationship with

potential employers, less knowledge about self-branding and self-marketing, belittling voices in one’s own head, and fierce competition within the talent pool. He says: *“There are no easy answers especially under a tight economy and a tense election season. All we can do is to work hard, work smart, and be patient and persevering. How to keep up with an excellent spirit when things are not going as expected is a key to transitional success.”* **Speaking interests: civic engagement, newcomer empowerment, community development, economic development, policy involvement and policy analysis.**

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SELUCIA GEORGE-LODGE (Origin: St.Vincent)
 Selucia came to Canada in 2004. Currently, she is working as a Community Service Worker and Licensed Financial Advisor at Simple Solutions Consulting. Selucia attended Medix School, where she studied to become a Community Service Worker, and the University of Toronto where she did studies in Settlement. She is involved in many community initiatives,

empowering individuals and families in the areas of education and social issues. She says: *“The immigration situation must be dealt with. We must have equalization. In order to dispel the myths and misconceptions about us, the other side of Canada must be willing to work to fully understand us. To effect the change we want to see in the world, we must first begin with ourselves.”* **Speaking interests: women’s empowerment, advocacy for immigration reform, social justice for women and mental health & addictions.**

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Newcomer Speakers Bureau's:

MISSION:

The mission of the Newcomer Speakers Bureau is to use the power of personal stories to connect Canadians with the experience of immigrants and refugees, to engage newcomers in decision-making processes and to advocate for the rights of new and future Canadians.

VISION:

The vision of the Newcomer Speakers Bureau is to contribute to the development of an open and welcoming Canada where people of diverse origins can build a new life for themselves and their families with equal opportunities for employment and full integration.



**Voices of Challenge.
Voices of Change.**

**Please contact us for more information
or to book a speaker at
416-699-4527 X229 or
asalazar@mnlct.org**