



PETER BATTISTONI/VANCOUVER SUN

Polly Nahar (right) was a professional engineer with 14 years experience before emigrating to Canada in 2002 with husband Syed and son Arka, now 11. She worked at menial jobs while struggling to get accredited and build a new life.

LANDING THAT ELUSIVE JOB IN B.C.

IMMIGRANTS | Canadian rules and regulations make it very difficult for foreign-trained professionals to become accredited here

When Polly Nahar arrived in Canada in the summer of 2002, she knew she would have to prove her professional expertise, and that it might take some time to find a good job.

But the woman who had been a professional engineer in her native Bangladesh, who completed a master's degree at one of the former Soviet Union's best technical schools and who had worked as a civil engineer for 14 years, had no idea how hard her landing here was going to be.

After a year of fruitless searching, and more than 100 applications for engineering-related jobs, Nahar's savings were spent, and she was forced to take menial jobs just to keep her family housed.

"I had some idea there would be trouble, but I didn't know it would last so long," said Nahar, who took another three years to find her professional feet.

It is a familiar story in immigrant circles in Canada, where government regulations and powerful professional associations combine to make it very difficult for foreign-trained professionals to become accredited here.

"From my own experience and sufferings, I can say one thing: We need a little bit of support to have a platform under our feet," Nahar told a packed seminar of skilled immigrants and government accreditation officials in Vancouver last week.



BY MICHAEL SCOTT
VANCOUVER SUN

After a year of applying for jobs that never materialized, Nahar was forced to apply for income assistance.

Her case manager at Employment Insurance sent her to S.U.C.C.E.S.S., the Lower Mainland's largest immigrant assistance agency, for help with job leads and contacts.

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. found her a mentor, a professor of civil engineering at the University of B.C., who in turn helped focus her job search. The slow-turning wheels of Russian bureaucracy took three years to produce documents in support of her Soviet education.

During that time, she was diligently attending seminars, workshops and professional mixers.

She learned to work her new contacts — something she had not even imagined in Bangladesh — checking back with people who had shown interest, sending fresh resumes.

She found training money to improve her computer-aided design skills, and selected a

school that offered a work-study program. It was a way, she thought, she could get her foot inside the door of an engineering practice.

A contact she had been cultivating for more than a year finally came through with an interim job. At night, she continued her computer design courses.

In October 2006, she completed a diploma course as a construction technician, and shortly afterward she found an engineering job in civil mining, in the Vancouver office of AMEC, one of the world's largest engineering firms.

She is now working on the development of a gold and copper mine.

According to the provincial Ministry of Economic Development, immigration will account for 100 per cent of B.C.'s net labour force growth by the end of the decade.

"Many immigrants to B.C. possess skills in occupations where there are shortages, but face language barriers, difficulty getting their credentials recognized, lack of Canadian work experience, and challenges navigating an unfamiliar job market," according to printed material supplied by the ministry.

Shelley Forrester, manager of the province's international qualifications unit, was one of the officials at Wednesday's seminar. She had a chance to hear about the barriers firsthand from Nahar and several other speakers.

"We know engineering theories and applications; we need to know the local systems and working atmosphere," Nahar told the assembled guests. "I was not eligible for a professional internship, because of my age. Internship here is only for beginning engineers up to 30 years of age."

"I want to ask the appropriate authority to [consider] this point," she said. "Because we bring our skills and experience [from our countries of origin], if you could provide us six-to-12 months of internship, we could find our proper job much earlier."

"We have so much knowledge and experience to contribute to the society and to the nation as a whole."

Four-and-a-half years along, Polly Nahar is still not finished her long integration.

She is not yet fully accredited as a professional engineer: instead she is working as an EIT, or engineer-in-training. She needs one full year of Canadian experience, under the supervision of two Canadian engineers, as well as a seminar course in law and professional ethics.

Has it been worthwhile? Nahar says yes: "In so many ways, Bangladesh is getting worse. If you have children, you know this is the right decision."

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For more information on foreign credential recognition, visit the

S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

employment service website at sti.successbc.org.