



# WELCOMING COMMUNITY NEWS

November 2010

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**Thanks to our partners, clients and staff, the AGM 2010 was a great success with great participations from all !**

**Fei Tang**

CultureLink and its community members celebrated an extraordinary year at the 2010 Annual General Meeting. October 18<sup>th</sup>.

Over 80 members and guests came to the event, including two Welcoming Community Champions: Cheri DiNovo and Parag Tandon. Two other long-time Host Volunteers, Mike Antoniadis, aka "Mike-the-Greek" and Amy Richards came to give their touching testimonials.

The evening went great, just as Larry Mah, the President of Culture-Link's Board, later said in an email "the stories were heart warming and the food scrumptious". Twenty (20) plus staff members proudly received their long service

certificate. Our young Pianist Futian again impressed the crowd with her uplifting performance. The Summer Youth Theatre's played "Objects of My Identity: Things that make me, Me" and won the audience hearts.

The AGM wrapped up yet another successful year and ushered in a year, and we, the members of Culture-Link Settlement Services, will again rise to many, many challenges and create more and more opportunities for our clients, the community of Newcomers!



Host Workers at Culture-Link's AGM 2010



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Eman Atawy (Host Counselor): Starting by the amazing food to the young performers from CultureLink theater group who touched the audience hearts as many were crying! Just two words can say it all  
**THANK YOU**

## Host Newcomer Family Night Was a Great Success

by Hashem Rahin



On October 29th we had our first Newcomers' Family Night. 40 Newcomers including their children and five Volunteers participated in this wonderful event.

The participants enjoyed a nice hot dinner which exemplified CultureLink's hospitality as a welcoming institution. The atmosphere of the dinner was warm and friendly, during which the families made acquaintance with each other very quickly. After dinner the presentation started. In details and examples, I presented to the participating families what services Host Program and Culture-Link can offer them, how participants get matched, what

to expect and what not to expect from the volunteers whom they will be matched with, what activities are recommended and what should be avoided, and other related information. At the end of the presentation, Dianna James, our veteran volunteer and Ho Sun Kang, a newcomer, shared their experiences about the Host Program. The presentation was wrapped up by light-hearted games to draw the door prizes, with which participants got more opportunity to get familiar with each other.

It's worth noting that the presentation was pleasantly interrupted by children's Halloween parade and after the presentation they were requested to do an encore



parade. It

was truly the highlight of the Family Night. For most of the children, it was the first Halloween Party ever. Even many adults were curious about this North American tradition. The entire evening, children were busy with dressing up and making up, They were ecstatic about costumes and gifts that were donated by the community. We also had two professional make-up artists, Gordana Pusara and Misty Danielle who volunteered for face-painting and made the experience even more unforgettable for the families.



On behalf of the Host Program, I would like to

thank those who have made the event successful. I thank our funder CIC for financing the event; thank Karen Domingo (Volunteer) for entertaining the children; thank Jessica Rudolph for the generous gift and cash donation, thank other volunteers mentioned above for supporting the event; and thank many community members and CultureLink staff for donating the costumes,



## Our Seniors on Fore-Front of Green

**Kristin Schwarz:** Around the world, people are more and more concerned about protecting the environment for future generations. In many countries people practice sustainable ways of life that are respectful of the earth -- gardening, composting, recycling, reusing, walking and cycling. At CultureLink we encourage newcomers to retain those sustainable habits and to become leaders in the greening of their new home, in Canada.



**Green Settlement®** (a registered trademark by CultureLink): Providing environmentally conscientious settlement services to newcomers namely raising environmental awareness and promoting sustainable ways of living to new immigrants and refugees through innovative programs such as cycling as an everyday means of transportation, backyard sharing and vegetable gardening which is conducted through community training, education sessions and advertisement campaigns.

**Fei Tang:** The Spanish speaking seniors' group is recycling the tops of pop cans. They use these little pieces of metal to make amazing crafts. Look at the handbag!

The handbag is made of thousands of can tops. CultureLink is planning to help them run a wonderful "Eco Work+Shop™".

CultureLink is collecting the tops of pop cans for our seniors who need them to create marvelous artwork.

**Glen Walsh:** I have seen these bags and can't believe the craftsmanship. Collect the tops from your friends and family and help support these great works of art. Great for our Spanish speaking seniors' group and great for the environment





## Ransirini Panditharatne, a CultureLink Participant, speaks at LSP 2nd Anniversary

When I was asked if I would be willing to speak for a few minutes about my experience with LSP as a Newcomer, I could not refuse because of the great service it rendered to us.

My two sons, my husband and I arrived in Canada in July 2009 as skilled immigrants. We had absolutely no family here except just one friend and her family. We came from Sri Lanka where I was a Lawyer with 15 years experience and specializing in employment law and HR while my husband was a Management accountant.

A couple of days after landing we attended to formalities like Social Insurance, OHIP, etc. The next thing we wanted was library membership as it seemed we had a lot of time in our hands !!! and so we walked to the Eatonville library as we lived close by and once we were registered, I am sure we looked quite lost when Celia Cruz walked up to us, greeted and introduced herself.

She sat with us and explained about LSP and ran through the check list of what Newcomers have to do by way of formalities. Since we had attended to most of it she immediately made an appointment with an employment counsellor at CultureLink and recommended that my husband register for a programme run by the TDSB tailored to help for newcom-

ers seeking jobs in the areas of finance and administration. The venue was just a block away from the library. He went and registered right away. At once I felt as if we were put on track and ever since then we have stood to benefit immensely by the LSP and the empathy and patience of Celia.

I attended most of the talks that were organised by LSP for the Newcomers at the library community Room. While they provided valuable information in navigating a new system there were also fun activities where we met new people in a relaxed atmosphere. It made me feel included.

From making use of the free family passes to visit places of cultural interests to filing of Tax Returns we were assisted by the LSP.

**One day I saw details of the Host Programme** displayed on Celia's desk. I asked her about the programme and she said I could sign up if I am interested. I signed up for it and it was forwarded to CultureLink which was running the programme. It took a while to match me with a Volunteer but I was glad nevertheless, that CultureLink followed it up and finally did match me up with a Volunteer. While it has been wonderful getting to know the volunteer and her family it definitely is a step towards making social relationships outside one's own community and integrat-



ing into society at large.

In an In an analysis of data from the Longitudinal survey of Immigrants to Canada Schellenberg and Marheux (2007) 'found a substantial portion of immigrants struggle to build social relationships. 7% of immigrants cited lack of social relationships interactions was one of the greatest challenges since arriving.'

The point I am trying to make is that I found CultureLink very im-



## CultureLink in The News

[metronews.ca](http://metronews.ca)

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**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2010**

When Heba Elshamy came to Canada from Egypt in 2006, she found the adjustment difficult. Home all day with a baby while her husband worked, the former teacher had no friends and knew nothing about resources like day-care.

In 2008, she enrolled in English language classes at CultureLink, a community based organization serving immigrants and refugees in south-western Toronto. Encouraged by her teacher, Elshamy applied to the **Host Program**, which matches newcomers to established Canadians for six months. She was paired with Amy Richards, also in her early 30s. Through Richards, she learned about Canadian Culture and community services, as well as Mothercraft College, where she studied early childhood Education on a scholarship.

With coaching from Richards and support from Richards's family, Elshamy landed a full-time teaching assistant job with the Toronto school board.

"It was so helpful to meet Amy," says Elshamy. "She was an inspiration. She's my best friend now."

This is only one of CultureLink's

many success stories since the Host program started 22 years ago. "It is the fastest program for integrating newcomers into Canadian society," says executive director Ibrahim Absiye. "They're getting information straight from the host. It also gives a lot of joy to the people who volunteer."

The **Host program** also matches families, and recently paired MP Gerard Kennedy and his family with Ukrainian newcomers as part of CultureLink's new community leaders campaign.

And there's more. There are also walking and biking groups, seniors aerobics classes, a seniors and youth garden program in partnership with The Stop Community Food Centre and an award-winning green initiative that encourages newcomers to maintain their bike-riding habits in Canada.

Says Absiye, who worked in business in his native Somalia and has been with CultureLink for three years:

"I spent enough of my life looking for profit. I came to Canada wanting to do something

different, something to help people. I sleep better at night now."

\* Denise Barnard

**www.culturelink.net – facilitates the settlement of newcomers to Toronto.**



**CultureLink Executive Director Ibrahim Absiye**



## HOST Program



2340 Dundas Street West, Suite 301  
Toronto, ON M6P 4A9

Phone: 416-588-6288 Fax: 416-588-2435

**VOLUNTEERS, NEWCOMERS FILL  
OUT OUR ONLINE REGISTRATION**

[www.welcomingcommunity.ca](http://www.welcomingcommunity.ca)

**CultureLink** is a settlement agency located at Bloor and Dundas West in downtown Toronto. For twenty-one years, we have upheld our mission:

**CultureLink** is dedicated to facilitating the independence and full participation of newcomers in Toronto's diverse community. CultureLink works within an anti-discriminatory framework to ensure a respectful, safe and inclusive environment.

We hope you have enjoyed Volume Two, Issue 1 of our Welcoming Community Newsletter, and that you will enjoy future issues.

**KNOW SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO  
JOIN CULTURELINK'S HOST  
COMMUNITY?**

## CONTRIBUTORS

### Fei Tang

Host Program Manager, Newsletter Supervisor

### Hilda Warren

Newsletter Coordinator and Editor

### Hashem Rahin

Program Counselor, Outreach  
and Community Engagement

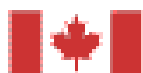
### Ransirini Panditharatne

CultureLink Participant speaks at LSP 2nd Anniversary

The Host Newsletter invites you, the members of the CultureLink Community to share your story with us. Please send your story, comments and thoughts to:

[hwarren@CultureLink.net](mailto:hwarren@CultureLink.net)

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