

# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 2, 2009

BC Hydro, BC Ferries, VANOC And Vancouver Parks Board

## **Leading Employers Hire Immigrants to Fill the Gap**

VANCOUVER—Wind engineer Carlos Helou was working at Pizza Hut and 7-Eleven in Ontario when he first arrived in Canada. Jacob Abraham came to Canada from Kuwait where he used his extensive skills and experience as a facility management engineer, but discovered that finding work without Canadian experience was not so easy.

“I came to Canada for a wind engineering job in Ontario to find out the contract would be delayed for six months,” Helou says. “The day I arrived, they told me there might be no job.”

How they found great positions at BC Hydro is a story of perseverance, a great service for immigrants, and an innovative employer that knows skills have no borders.

Helou and Abraham are just two of 800 skilled immigrants that Richmond-based Back in Motion has assisted throughout the Lower Mainland since 2006 through the Skills Connect for Immigrants Program (Skills Connect).

“BC’s population is growing older, and a large number of baby boomers are moving into retirement,” says program director Brent Mulhall. “When combined with a shortage of newcomers to the workforce, that means BC is not meeting replacement labour demands. Our economy and employers will be in real trouble in the future without new immigrant workers.”

Yet a common frustration for new Canadians is that after complex immigration screening, it’s difficult to find work. “It was a shocker for me that I couldn’t even find a survival job,” says Shala Hay, an MBA in marketing from Trinidad & Tobago. “People need to know to hang in there; there are organizations that can help.” Hay now uses her skills as an administrative assistant for a BC municipality.

When Danny Rey Arcenas arrived in Canada, the highly experienced seaman learned his credentials as a ship’s second officer weren’t recognized. He survived by delivering the morning paper and spending his days driving a forklift while trying to save the money to recertify at BCIT. “I felt I was best at sea, and I wanted to go back into my own field,” Rey Arcenas says. He wanted a job at BC Ferries. Skills Connect not only helped him get the job, but also the funding for school.

VANOC’s Anda Tudor agrees. Having arrived from Romania with high expectations, she too lacked Canadian experience. “With my certification in project management, I worked at IBM in Romania for 5 years,” she says. Today, Anda is the project coordinator for several Olympic-supplier contracts. Her own contract has been extended to May 2010.

“These employers are open to applicants with experience outside of Canada,” Mulhall says. “They really are leading the way. Despite the current economy, Canada still needs skilled workers to replace those who retire.

“Immigrants need to know that employers are still hiring, and we are here to help them bridge their skills to the Canadian workplace,” he adds.

After four years of running ArriveBC, a successful career program for skilled immigrants, Back in Motion was recently awarded the contract to deliver a broader version of the program under the Skills Connect banner. The BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development funds Skills Connect.

Back in Motion, in partnership with MOSAIC and Immigrant Services Society of BC, provides Skills Connect in Burnaby, Coquitlam, Surrey, Richmond, Vancouver and North Vancouver. For more information about the Skills Connect for Immigrants program, visit [www.skillsconnect.ca](http://www.skillsconnect.ca) or contact Linda Van Raes, Skills Connect program manager at Back in Motion: 604.937.1242.

- 30 -

**Brief synopses of five successful clients follow. All are available for interview.**

For interviews or further information:

Maggie Kerr-Southin  
Artemis PR & Design  
[maggie@artemisbranding.com](mailto:maggie@artemisbranding.com)  
T: 250.595.0136  
C: 250.812.7553

## **BACK IN MOTION'S SKILLS CONNECT CLIENTS**

Carlos Helou  
Manager in Training, BC Hydro Construction Services, Surrey  
Lives in: Port Moody  
Works in: Surrey  
Native country: Argentina

Carlos Helou was born in Argentina and attended college in the US where he earned his degree in management engineering. After a short time back in Argentina, Carlos received two 3-year work visas to the US and worked on contract as a field engineer in wind energy. “My 6-year stay in the US started a few days after September 11,” Carlos says. “It became difficult for companies to sponsor foreign employees for residence once their working visas came to an end.”

In 2008, Carlos came to Canada for an engineering job with his American employer Granite International Services, but learned upon arrival that the contract was delayed for 6 months. He worked odd jobs at 7-Eleven and Pizza Hut to support his family while he waited.

Carlos spent 8 months working on contract for Granite at a GE Wind project in Ontario, and credits the company with helping him get some Canadian experience. "I appreciate their support. I left simply because I didn't want to travel so much any longer," he says. Luckily, Carlos discovered the Skills Connect program and is now happily employed at BC Hydro.

Jacob Abraham  
Procurement Support Assistant, BC Hydro  
Lives in: Coquitlam  
Works in: Vancouver  
Native country: India

As an engineer who specialized in project and facilities management, Jacob Abraham came to Canada with extensive skills and experience. But after getting his family settled, he discovered that landing a job was harder than he expected. While working with other organizations and attending networking events, Jacob met a Skills Connect counselor.

"I realized that resume writing is different in North America, and that makes the biggest difference in having someone call for an interview," Jacob says. Skills Connect helped him fine tune his resume, align it to the organizations he was applying to, gave him leads, and honed his interview skills at mock interviews. "Looking for a job can be a long drawn out process, but if you have patience, you can be successful," he advises other immigrants.

Danny Rey Arcenas  
BC Ferries  
Lives in: New Westminster  
Works in: West Vancouver (Horseshoe Bay)  
Native country: The Philippines

When Danny Rey Arcenas arrived in Canada, the highly experienced seaman learned his credentials as a ship's second officer weren't recognized. He survived by delivering the morning paper and spending his days driving a forklift while trying to save the money to recertify at BCIT. "I felt I was best at sea, and I wanted to go back into my own field," Rey Arcenas says. He wanted a job at BC Ferries.

When a friend told him about Skills Connect, he was ready for some help. "Along the way I had some difficulty with various government agencies," he says. Skills Connect prepped Danny for his interview, helped him with follow-up and cheered him on as he got his new job. But the help didn't stop there. Skills Connect also helped him source funding to recertify, enabling Danny to attend BCIT.

Anda Tudor  
Project Coordinator for Commodities  
VANOC  
Lives in: Richmond  
Works in: Vancouver  
Native country: Romania

Anda Tudor was a seasoned project manager in her native Romania where she worked at IBM for 5 years. She was only able to land a short-term contract before she approached Skills Connect. With the program's help, Anda landed a job as a project coordinator at VANOC where she manages several supplier contracts. Her contract has recently been extended to May 2010.

Shala Hay  
Administrative Assistant  
Lower Mainland municipality  
Lives in: Burnaby  
Works in: Greater Vancouver  
Native country: Trinidad and Tobago

When Shala Hay arrived in Canada a year ago, she was surprised at how hard it was to land a job. With an MBA in marketing from a university in the UK, Shala expected her skills to be in demand. Yet despite much publicized worker shortages, she and other Skills Connect participants faced employers who wanted applicants with Canadian experience. Skills Connect helped them with Canadian job seeking skills, such as networking and expectations in the local marketplace. A large BC municipality now employs her.