

Finding Home, Again

Employment and Immigration Canada / Emploi et Immigration Canada

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IMMIGRANT IDENTIFICATION - IDENTIFICATION DE L'IMMIGRANT

1. Surname - Nom de famille BLUMCZYNSKA	
2. Given Names - Prénoms DOROTA	
3. Date of Birth - Date de naissance	4. Place of Birth - Lieu de naissance Poznan
5. Sex 1. Male - Homme 2. Female - Femme	6. Marital Status - État civil 1. Single - Célibataire 2. Married - Marié(e) 3. Widowed - Veuf(ve)
7. Citizen of - Citoyen de Poland	8. Passport No. - Passeport
9. If applicable, Country of Issue of Travel Document Si y a lieu, indiquer le pays de délivrance du document de voyage	



In an attempt to learn more about her personal journey, IRCOM Executive Director, Dorota Blumczynska, wrote the following email to the International Organization for Migration on October 17, 2019. This is an excerpt from the letter.

... I landed in Winnipeg on October 27th, 1989. My family was sponsored by a community group. Until a couple years ago I believed that we were immigrants. However, when I found my landing document, when I started asking questions of distant relatives, the story was inconsistent. We weren't immigrants; we came to Canada as refugees.

A few weeks ago my sister sent me a photo from the airport the day we landed. Standing, smiling, visibly exhausted is my mother, long deceased. In her hand she is clutching an IOM bag, a symbol of migrants and vulnerable persons the world over.

Because of the work I do I know what this bag means; seeing it in her hands took the air out of my lungs. This photo has left me with many questions, but I am certain of one thing. I am a refugee. I know this, and I am incredibly proud of this.

But it has been a very long 30 years. My family lived in poverty and isolation for years after we arrived in Canada. And in the 44 years my mother lived, she only knew seven years of freedom. I want to honour her story, her courage. I want to know her more completely,

and in that, I want to know myself.

I'm not sure what historical documents you have from 30 years ago. I have no one else to ask. I know very little background information that may be of help to you. Our camp was located on the outskirts of a small town called Schonberg in Bavaria, east of Munich. We lived there for over a year, maybe longer, with hundreds of people from all over the eastern bloc.

When did we leave the camp? Did we have a Transportation Loan on arrival – if yes, for how much? I kindly ask that you help me answer these questions and many more.

I am in search of my past because I want peace, I want to reclaim my life, and I want to understand.

If there is anything you can tell me, I would be eternally grateful.

Warmest Regards,
Dorota Franciszka Blumczynska

Be sure to read our next newsletter to learn about the amazing response.



Thank You

Dorota Blumczynska,
Executive Director

The hidden benefits of... *gardening*

When Dominique Musafiri first saw the job ad for IRCOM's Greening Program Coordinator, he couldn't believe his luck.

Originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, soft spoken Dominique is a 34-year-old Government Assisted Refugee with experience in gardening. While in a refugee camp in Zimbabwe, he coordinated a gardening project with space for 500 families.

Fast forward two years and everything has changed for Dominique: he lives in Canada, is making the transition into a new society, and has just finished his first IRCOM employment contract as the Greening Program Coordinator.

The Greening Program provides 15 newcomer families with the opportunity to grow their own vegetables in 1000 square feet of shared growing space. Each summer, growers spend time watering, weeding and harvesting.

Dominique's experience has taught him that gardening is about more than just growing fruits and vegetables. It's about unearthing something deeper.

For Rozina Yasmin, a recent immigrant from Bangladesh, the benefit is in having tasty fruits and vegetables that are green and healthy.

"If you compare the price of the organic fruits and vegetables that you grow by yourself, you feel happy," says Rozina. "This is my hard work. This is what my effort – the time, the commitment I gave – so this is the outcome."

Families taking part in the Greening Program save an average of \$50 a month on their grocery bill during the growing season.

For Mohamed Ahmad, a recent refugee from Burma, farming is a way of life. Arriving in Canada with his family just a month before the start of the program, he quickly took advantage of the opportunity to get involved.

"This is my job and if I don't seed like this, I don't feel good," says Mohamed. "This is my job, using the soil in



my hand and putting the soil in my hands, so it's really nice."

On the surface, the Greening Program is about growing tasty vegetables, saving money, and the joy of having a garden. But scratch the surface and there are other benefits to the program that aren't obvious at first glance.

The Greening Program fosters communication, cooperation, and helps overcome isolation through shared experiences.

Rozina's favourite memories of the program are the friendships she made with others gardeners.

"It was harvesting time and my friends, we used to talk together, we used to be together, and help each other watering the plants," says Rozina. "I enjoyed it a lot."

But just as important is the cross-cultural learning that is a natural result of the program.

"Even Canadians will know new fruits and vegetables from different parts of the world if we grow here and we mix with the Canadian people," says Mohamed. "They will know the food items. They will know the cuisine as well, and they will know the seeds how to grow, how to eat. It's a very good experience."

"For me it's psychological. That change you made to the plant it also motivates your mind. The satisfaction that you did something," says Musafiri.

Ultimately, the Greening program is about unearthing a sense of individual agency, the satisfaction of mastering a new skill, and the confidence to believe that you can put down roots and grow a new life in a new world.

Riding a *wave* of success



Photo credit: Bob Frid / Whitecaps FC

When Georges Mukumbilwa was signed to the Vancouver Whitecaps FC in August, the IRCOM community went wild with excitement and pride.

“Seeing a former tenant use their skills and abilities to succeed in such a spectacular way, not only gives hope to other newcomers but reminds our team that the work we do is incredibly important,” says Dorota Blumczyńska, IRCOM’s Executive Director.

Shortly after arriving in Canada as a Government Assisted Refugee in 2013, his skill was recognized and nurtured by the Coach of the Portage Trail Soccer Club and IRCOM staff members.

“I always knew I was good at soccer,” says Georges.

“The people there always told me I was good, so that really gave me extra confidence.”

Georges’ dramatic journey, all the way from the Democratic Republic of Congo to the Vancouver Whitecaps, required more than just confidence. It required skill, dedication, and sacrifice.

At the age of 15, Georges moved to Vancouver to pursue his dream, leaving his family in Winnipeg. He joined the Whitecaps FC Academy in September 2014, was signed to the club’s Development Squad in July 2018, spending the 2019 preseason with the team in Hawaii and Los Angeles. On August 23, 2019, at the age of 20, Georges was signed to a MLS Homegrown contract.

While riding high on the wave of his success, Georges hasn’t forgotten the help he and his family received from IRCOM while pursuing his soccer dreams.

“IRCOM played a really big role in my life. It was really big, they really helped me. They made me confident,” says Georges. “Before I really knew who I really was and how good I really was at soccer, the people there believed in me and they just kept telling me to push it.”

“This is why we have the programs, to build role models, leaders, and mentors. This is a big deal,” says Mathew Joseph, Co-Manager of IRCOM’s Afterschool Program. “Now we can point at Georges’ jersey and tell youth they can do it too.”

The mantle of role model is new to Georges, who didn’t think he would be in this position. Georges wants newcomer children and youth at IRCOM to know how talented they are and to keep working hard.

“I’m happy that I’m able to help other kids, to push them toward their dreams,” says Georges. “I would just like to thank all the people there for believing in me.”

“

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Immigrant and Refugee
Community Organization of Manitoba

IRCOM is home to hundreds of newcomers from around the globe. In order to transition smoothly into their new home, they need the housing and support programs that your donations provide. This newsletter is about how you are helping our newest neighbours *Find Home, Again.*

A series of little triumphs



For long-time IRCOM volunteer Pat Hogue, helping people learn has always been a way of life.

As an Early Childhood Educator, Pat spent much of her work life helping children and students. She ran a daycare, spent 21 years teaching Early Childhood Education, and for the last 11 years has been helping newcomers learn English at IRCOM.

So what lessons has Pat gleaned from a lifetime of teaching and volunteering? Creating a warm, welcoming, safe environment is essential for learning.

“You need to do that with children and you need to do that with newcomers. It’s the same, make people feel at ease so that they’re open and ready to learn,” says Pat. “Setting an environment is important.”

For Pat, creating that environment requires that teachers have patience, are good listeners, and have the intention to create a real connection with each student.

“Slow down, otherwise you can make wrong assumptions or not meet people where they’re at,” says Pat. “Or you might not offer them what they need in the moment that they need it.”

In all her years of volunteering, Pat has found the greatest joy in helping people learn basic skills, the

ones that lay the foundation for learning.

“It’s that sense of discovery for them and independence that they did something on their own. They wrote their name. They know the names of the letters. They know the colours,” says Pat. “To me there’s joy in seeing someone do that.”

Pat likes working with beginners. She likes getting people started on the path to learning, providing the building blocks that all future learning rests on.

“So, my eleven years has been a series of little triumphs. But they’re big, they’re big. Somebody looking from the outside might not recognize it as big. But they are,” says Pat.

It’s clear that volunteering is woven into her life. It is her life now she says. It’s rich and rewarding. So much so that she can’t envision a time when she is not volunteering at IRCOM.

“I feel at home here. I feel like I’ve made good friendships with the students,” says Pat. “I love when I see them downtown or at Superstore...it’s always like meeting an old friend. It’s a lot of fun.”

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