

A Recipe for Success: A Skills Connect Story

It was January 2010 – a new year and a new beginning for Eduardo Marques. A chef by trade, he came to Canada with the hope of finding a rewarding career where he could demonstrate his creativity and passion for food. His resume was impressive: a graduate of a culinary arts program, experience in a top-rated Italian restaurant, and former owner/operator of a catering company, Eduardo certainly had the talent and the skills for working in fine dining.



Just 2 weeks after his arrival, Eduardo came to the Victoria Immigrant & Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS). His Skills Connect Program case manager, Annie Shum, advised him to obtain Foodsafe certification and found him funding for the course. She also helped Eduardo find information about certification and training. Although he was able to challenge the exam for Professional Cook 1 through the Industry Training Authority (ITA), he did not feel confident because English is his second language. After discussing his options, Eduardo and Annie decided that he would enroll in English classes. While improving his language skills, Eduardo's goal would be to find an employer who would accept him as an apprentice so that he could gain the necessary experience and support to eventually reach his goal of obtaining the Red Seal certification.

Annie helped revise Eduardo's resume and cover letter and assisted with connecting him with local employers. Although he had some promising interviews at premier restaurants and hotels, the combination of a sluggish economy and a slow tourist season worked against him. One of his barriers was the fact that he was unknown in Victoria; with no local chef to vouch for him, Eduardo was left out in the cold. He finally found a position as a line cook at a family restaurant. Although flipping burgers was not his dream job, Eduardo embraced the new experience and worked hard, while continuing to search for other opportunities.

Finally, Eduardo interviewed with a chef who took a keen interest in his career. Recognizing the talent and strong work ethic in Eduardo, the employer offered him not only a job in the kitchen but also an apprenticeship. With the aid of the Skills Connect Program, Eduardo was able to reach his goal in just a few short months. Of VIRCS, Eduardo says that "there are a lot of amazing people ready to help you in all aspects... from [day one] VIRCS helped me get into the right direction to get a job, make friends. [It makes] me feel very comfortable knowing that there are people here that want to make you feel at home when you are very far away from it."

When you add the Skills Connect for Immigrants program to the mix, it is a recipe for success!