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N E W S

## Immigrants find greener pastures in eco-sector

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Erin Donais, program co-ordinator with CCIS, was pleasantly surprised by the sector's willingness to welcome immigrants into their ranks. Leah Hennel/Postmedia News

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Derek Sankey, Postmedia News · Apr. 30, 2011 | Last Updated: May 2, 2011 5:34 PM ET

Ruth Ibemesim spent years working in the environmental sector in Britain after earning her undergraduate degree and her PhD in biology, working in both academia and the public sector, before immigrating to Canada last October.

Despite having a strong command of the English language, she was

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surprised by the differences in the business cultures between Britain and Canada, and she also lacked Canadian experience. It was tough to find a job in her field.

Then she heard about the Environmental Immigrant Bridging program offered through the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society that launched in February as a pilot project with support from ECO Canada. She was accepted into a group of 15 that got six weeks of training to help them gain credential recognition, communication skills and local experience.

"It's really taught me about the Canadian workplace culture," Ms. Ibemesim says. "One thing I really benefited from is they emphasized soft skills."

She says when immigrants come to Canada, they are focused on "qualifications and what we can do . so that was really beneficial because the Canadian market really concentrates on the soft skills."

After completing the EIB program, she landed a job two weeks ago with Golder Associates as a senior project co-ordinator working on various environmental projects.

"I am settling in," she says. "One thing I love about Canada is that you do get that support. You are able to go around to the various immigrant agencies and then you see the one that can actually meet your needs."

Erin Donais, a program coordinator with CCIS, oversaw the EIB program that accepted immigrants from all over the world. She was pleasantly surprised by the willingness of environmental employers to accept newcomers into their ranks -a process that is often difficult in other fields.

"I think because it's a growing and relatively new field, [employers] are interested in what other countries are doing, so the environmental

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professionals I can bring them give [employers] an international perspective," Ms. Donais says.

"With the environmental sector, they're much more open to hiring people who've worked in the sector internationally because then they can share their experiences and learn from them," she adds.

The future of the EIB program is in limbo for now, since ECO Canada -a federal agency -provided some initial seed funding for the pilot and now CCIS doesn't know where it will secure additional funding to keep the program running.

Out of the 15 immigrant professionals that took part, 12 landed permanent jobs within the first two weeks of completing the program and Ms. Donais is confident the remainder will find work in their respective fields.

By far, the biggest challenge in finding these environmental professionals jobs in Canada is addressing the language, interpersonal and communication skills -the types of soft skills that helped Ms. Ibemesim land her job at Golder Associates.

"[Employers] just want to know that the personnel can speak English, communicate and have some [Canadian] ex-perience," Ms. Donais says.

"As long as they have the degree and some transferable skills . communication is all they want to know."

Ms. Ibemesim says participants also benefited from the mentoring program, which helped the immigrants in her group become accustomed to the Canadian workplace, focus their job search efforts in the most effective areas and gain a better understanding of how environmental professionals tend to be employed in different sectors.

The EIB program also gave the group access to a small, customized job fair, assistance in interview techniques and resumé writing, coaching on informational meetings and how to effectively network within their fields.

Ms. Ibemesim says, for her the sky's the limit. She's getting comfortable in her new role while looking forward to progressing in her career.

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