Meet Your Neighbours!

I left Ethiopia in 1991 due to the civil war and found myself as an ‘undocumented migrant’ in Europe. With support from non-profit organizations, family and odd jobs, I was able to sustain myself until I secured a visa to land in Canada in October 1992. My landing paper indicated my intended occupation was ‘domestic helper’, even though I was fluent in both English and French and had completed two years of post-secondary education.

I learned very quickly not to let others define my career path. I was very fortunate to have siblings who were already well-established in Calgary. They connected me to CCIS for settlement support and to the YWCA for volunteer opportunity. By January 1993, I was attending school, working part-time and volunteering. Later that year, I started my studies in Social Work, and earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees by 2001 and established my career in public service.

Today, 26 years after my arrival, I have achieved everything I have ever dreamed of... and more. Pursuing an education and staying connected to community groups were key elements that helped me achieve my dreams. It took a community to help me on my settlement-to-integration journey, which strengthened my commitment to give back and make life better for everyone.
Hi! My name is Kim, and I’m currently a student at the University of Calgary. I was born in the Philippines and came to Calgary with my family in May 18th of 2011. I grew up near the slums, where I spent most of my childhood outside in the streets playing with other children, and sometimes helping my grandma sell ice water. I was raised in a big family; We had over twenty of my family members living in a single house including the family of my uncles and my grandma. Moving to Canada is my first direct encounter with the Western culture. Initially the experience of having a new life, school, and adapting to the changes in the weather was overwhelming. I felt different, and lost. However, despite the difference in cultural norms, I made friends that continuously support and motivate me to go outside of my own comfort zone, including volunteering.

During our first few months in Calgary, my family and I volunteered at the Drop-in Centre with a church group. I was shocked to witness the loneliness and suffering of some people, despite having many opportunities presented to them while living in a first world country. Volunteering at the Drop-in Center opened my eyes to the common injustices people may face no matter where they live, such as poverty, which sparked my interest to volunteer.

My family and close friends continuously inspire me to work hard, to strive to be a better version of myself, and to be of service to others. Now, volunteering is one of my greatest passions. The values I learn in volunteering, such as compassion and empathy, are universal, transcending any cultural barriers and fostering a sense of human interconnectedness. Through volunteering, not only do I get to share my time and experiences with others, I get to learn from them - whether they are Canadian born or from any other country. Volunteering creates a community where we share and learn from one another and fosters a more welcoming and inclusive Calgary; a city that people can call their new home. Thank you!
Meet Your Neighbours!

Meet Jessica Wiklendt

Born in Australia

Moved here in 2007

I did not know what was in store for me over 10 years ago when I came to Canada to stay. In fact, I did not even know that I would eventually stay in Canada; I simply followed my feet down this path.

Initially, I thought I knew everything about being an immigrant. I am part of an immigrant family - my parents and siblings emigrated to Australia from Poland in the early 80s as political refugees. I grew up Polish-Australian: I would go to the beach after Polish school on Saturday mornings. I had lived through the lessons and experiences of immigrant life with my family. I thought I had this immigrant thing in the bag. Canada would be a breeze...

And so, I worked incredibly hard to become as Calgarian and as Canadian as I could. I threw myself into all things Calgarian, and I even started to hide my Australian accent. I was so successful at this that Canadians frequently say to me: “You’re more Canadian than I am” - my knowledge, my understanding, and my appreciation of Canada is more comprehensive than that of your average Canadians’. (My love of and fascination for Albertan grain elevators is almost unsurpassed by none!)

After a decade, my current impression of Calgary is not as idealistic and stereotypical as it once was. However, Calgary is now real, it is home, and it is full of far more promise and potential to me than it was when I first arrived. Being allowed to both fully live my heritage and be fully accepted as Calgarian has been vital to feeling truly at home, with all the rights and responsibilities that it brings.

As I always say: I may not yet be Canadian on paper, but I am Canadian in my heart.