



LONDON & MIDDLESEX  
LOCAL IMMIGRATION  
PARTNERSHIP

## Immigrants Demonstrate ‘Leadership in Action’ During COVID-19 Pandemic

Prepared by: The London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership Inclusion & Civic Engagement Sub-Council

### A Community Initiative of Individuals and Organizations

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## Introduction

The generosity of Londoners has been displayed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many individuals and organizations have rallied in various ways, to help fight this increasingly devastating disease. The London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP) reached out to London's immigrant population, to gather 'leadership in action' stories of how individuals are helping through front line work or volunteering. It is hoped that the following narratives will not only encourage and inspire other immigrants to participate in our community but will also inform the wider community of the contributions being made by immigrants locally.

## Immigrants in Action

### Ada Yu



68-year-old Ada Yu is originally from Hong Kong and arrived in Canada in 1992. After living in Montreal for 23 years, she moved to London, Ontario in 2015. Ada had worked as a seamstress throughout her entire career for more than 30 years before retirement. Ada firmly believes that we must never underestimate our abilities and there is always a role for everyone to play in the community. During the COVID-19 crisis, the shortage of face coverings during the early stages prompted Ada to return to her old trade, applying her skills and experience to make reusable cloth masks tirelessly at home for anyone in need. So far, she has donated

more than 400 cloth masks to our frontline workers, community members and non-profit organizations.

Ada's effort to help frontline workers is not only due to her daughter and daughter-in-law being nurses, but also due to the surge in demand for face coverings, especially from essential workers which motivated her to scale up her homemade face covering project to give back to the community.

### Wa Ntita Serge Kabongo

Wa Ntita Serge Kabongo is a 54-year-old school settlement worker who arrived in Canada from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2016. As part of his work, Wa Ntita

Serge mentors young newcomers through the youth mentoring program that runs from Carrefour Communautaire Francophone de London (CCFL). He also assists their parents in their integration processes. During the COVID-19 crisis, he organized group information sessions to educate young people about the pandemic, its consequences, and the precautions to be taken regarding the government's recommendations. Young people were



provided help for schoolwork especially those for whom e-learning was a new experience. Students were taught time-management and organization skills and online group games were also organized to prevent isolation. As a volunteer, Wa Ntita Serge held a weekly French conversation circle with a small group of seniors who shared their weekend experiences followed by a reading of a proposed text at each meeting. The activity was much appreciated by the seniors as it not only allowed them to break their isolation but also enabled them to develop reading and conversational skills in French.

According to Wa Ntita Serge, Canada is a wonderful country that has given him the peace he would always like to share with all immigrants to perfect their integration process. His motivation to participate in immigrant support activities during COVID-19 stems from the belief that immigrants can be very vulnerable due to lack of communication and connections in the community and may become isolated during this difficult period. As these situations can cause mental health problems with incalculable consequences, he believes helping them was sincerely justified.

Wa Ntita Serge is convinced that other immigrants can be encouraged to volunteer by demonstrating that community activities help facilitate their integration and by providing them with the necessary information and useful connections to other members of the community. For example, he recalls that some families in financial difficulty during the first few months of COVID-19 period did not have information on government assistance and receiving this information through community activities had been beneficial to their families.

## Vincent Tao



Originally from Hong Kong, 31-year-old Vincent Tao arrived in Canada in 2018 and is currently working as an Administration Coordinator at South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre (SLNRC). During the pandemic, Vincent served at the emergency food cupboard at Northwest London Resource Centre and St. Justin's Parish, providing necessary services to Londoners in need. He also helped develop pandemic policies as well as health and safety procedures for SLNRC to safeguard the well-being of staff and public accessing their emergency services.

Having experienced the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in Hong Kong in 2003, Vincent was motivated to contribute his experience and perspective to dealing with the COVID 19 pandemic to a place he now sees as his new home. His message to new immigrants is to be bold and participate actively in the community to break down pre-existing misconceptions of newcomers.

## United Sikhs

United Sikhs is a humanitarian aid organization actively engaged in global disaster relief and empowerment activities since 1999. Their motto is: Recognize the Human Race as One. During the COVID-19 crisis when many people were isolated due to the lockdown, United Sikhs volunteers, despite their full-time jobs, helped provide physical, emotional, and financial support to the London community. They distributed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and two weeks worth of free groceries to families in need along with gently used clothing and toys for young children so they could remain occupied safely in the comfort of their own homes. In partnership with Bombay Bistro in London, more than 200 hot meals were also delivered to frontline workers in recognition of their service during the pandemic.

The following individuals emigrated from India, with the exception of one who is second generation Canadian, and have been active volunteers with United Sikhs. They worked tirelessly to provide relief to the London community in the face of an unprecedented crisis. They spent hours in gathering donations, including hot meals, identifying those in needs and delivering food baskets as well as hot meals to frontline workers.

## Gurmeet Kaur

Gurmeet Kaur arrived in Canada from India in March 2002. The 47-year-old school teacher is also the head coordinator and the driving force behind the United Sikhs



London, Ontario chapter. She considers volunteering to be a core Canadian value, whether it is in the form of financial, physical or emotional support. Gurmeet has learned a lot from the London community and as a proud Canadian Sikh, she firmly believes that as humans it is our duty to serve others. During the lock-down, Gurmeet spent over 500 hours in planning and executing the distribution of needed materials and food.

### **Jaitsree Kaur**



Fifteen-year-old Jaitsree Kaur is currently a high school student. She was born in Toronto to immigrant parents from India. Jaitsree was motivated to volunteer as she was inspired by her mother Gurmeet Kaur. Jaitsree feels that the gratitude expressed by people as well as the satisfaction one gets from knowing they have helped someone in need is what keeps her motivated to participate in these activities. She used her digital skills to support the group in making press releases, raising awareness about the hampers. Throughout the lock-down, she spent more than 100 hours in sorting and preparing the baskets for those in need.

### **Tanmeet Prabhakar**



Tanmeet Prabhakar is a 44-year-old real estate salesperson who arrived in Canada in 2005. Tanmeet believes that there is no better way to thank this country than by giving back to the society and working for the community.

During the lock-down, Tanmeet contributed a number of hours buying, packing and delivering groceries to those in need. She also reached out to pharmacies to coordinate food delivery from Bombay Bistro restaurant to provide food for front line workers.

## Sonu Sihra



Sonu Sihra is an esthetician who arrived in Canada in 2013 from India. According to Sonu, the time and effort spent on even the simplest volunteering task can make a difference and she would like to see more immigrants participating in such activities. As part of the team, Sonu put in more than forty hours in collecting information on where to deliver the grocery needs and calling the recipients about their needs. She also coordinated the Hot Meal project with a group of volunteers as well. She communicated with community organizations that donated food for frontline workers and coordinated the delivery of the Hot Meals.

## Amna Saleem

Amna Saleem is a 38-year-old graphic designer originally from Pakistan, who arrived in Canada in 2012. Soon after settling in London, Amna started volunteering with the London Muslim Mosque and worked with Islamic Centre of Southwest Ontario. Frequently coming across individuals in need motivated Amna to establish her own charity project “Caring Canadians Society” (CCS) in 2015 (formerly known as Hands in Hands). Today CCS runs a free food, clothing and essentials bank with the help of volunteers. They also help new immigrant families, refugees, settling families and families who move out of shelters with almost all their basic needs.



During the pandemic, the situation worsened for many less privileged families. Amna with her volunteers at CCS put together a COVID-19 Relief Campaign and started distributing supplies. Amna has spent close to 300 hours in the last six months, CCS provided door-to-door food and meat hampers to hundreds of families. Thousands of masks, gloves and hand sanitizers (PPE kits) were provided to different shelters in London, such as the Salvation Army Centre of Hope, Mission Services of London, My Sister’s Place, Middlesex-London Paramedic Services and the Muslim Resource Centre for Support and Social Integration. CCS provided its grocery drop off services to some of the elderly as well to those who could not leave their homes during this pandemic, due to health concerns.

Amna strongly believes that God has given us all the ability to go beyond our capacity and help humanity, which has always been her motivation in helping others. Amna strongly encourages all immigrants to get involved in community activities as it is an opportunity for them to pay back as well as to keep the community up and running by keeping the circle of life going.

## **Yodit Habtemariam Kidane**

Yodit Habtemariam Kidane is a 37-year-old Personal Support Worker (PSW) from Eritrea. She came to Canada in May, 2018. Yodit is currently working as PSW at a long-term care facility since February 2020. During COVID-19 when family visits were restricted, the anxiety of not being able to meet their families led to depression, anxiety and even aggression among some residents at the long term care facility. Yodit and her colleagues, despite being short staffed, went above and beyond their expected duties to take care of the personal and psychological needs of the residents, at times working longer shifts to accommodate their needs. Yodit connected with the residents at a personal and psychological level, trying to understand their needs and providing emotional support through empathy and understanding. For Yodit, nursing had been a passion since childhood, which motivated her to become a PSW. She believes that coming to a new country and culture and starting everything from scratch isn't easy but becoming involved in the community helps one integrate and develop a strong sense of purpose.



## **Conclusion**

The London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP) has been funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada since 2009, with the objective of facilitating the integration of immigrants and engaging stakeholders, residents and immigrants in creating a more welcoming community in the region.

Immigrants play a vital role in our community, economy and social fabric. The stories featured in this document, demonstrate the contributions of immigrants, who work either on their own or as part of an established charity, such as the United Sikhs.

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