

# How to Create Equitable Employment Practices

A Guide for Employers of Internationally Educated Social Workers (IESWs)

## Strategies for

- Job postings
- Hiring Panels and Decisions
- Interviews and Decisions
- References
- Orientation
- Supervision
- Retention
- Promotion

**Become an employer of  
choice for internationally  
educated social workers**

**Ryerson  
University**

**The Chang School  
of Continuing  
Education**



*The IESW Bridging Program is managed by  
The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education  
and School of Social Work at Ryerson University,  
and Access Alliance Multicultural Health and  
Community Services.*

**perspectives**

**strong  
connections**

**skills**

**equity and access mandate**

**learning organizations**

**employers**

**professional development**

**knowledge**

# Introduction

## **Purpose of this Guide for Employers**

The Internationally Educated Social Work Professionals (IESW) Bridging Program was created in 2005 as a collaboration between Ryerson University's G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education and School of Social Work, and Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services, a community partner. This guide presents a compilation of ideas and suggestions that have evolved from discussions among employers, program staff, and internationally educated social workers (IESWs) who have participated in the Bridging Program.

The guide poses questions and offers suggestions to help social service organizations become employers of choice for IESWs. By analyzing their practices and building success in the hiring, orientation, supervision, retention, and promotion of IESWs, agencies can become more equitable and achieve better outcomes for the communities they serve.

The material in this guide can be adapted to create strategies for the inclusion of other equity-seeking groups, such as Aboriginal peoples and people with disabilities.

Human Resources staff, hiring committees, diversity committees, and supervisors in a variety of social work settings can use this guide as a quick reference tool. You can:

- Bring the guide to meetings to promote reflection and discussion
- Photocopy selected pages to share with colleagues
- Use it to orient new supervisors and help with problem solving
- Keep it visible and alive, adding new ideas that emerge from experiences in your organization

*“We IESWs are not a problem to be solved. Rather, we are a resource that can add value to your agencies, to your clients, and to the profession.”*

– IESW



## Background

### **Internationally Educated Social Work Professionals (IESW) Bridging Program**

The IESW Bridging Program offers a range of supports designed to enhance the employment prospects of social work professionals who have been educated outside of Canada and are now residents of Ontario. IESWs can engage in individual consultations related to their educational and career goals, take courses designed specifically for internationally educated social workers, and seek assistance related to their job search.

The IESW Bridging Program also partners with social service organizations that are interested in furthering their equity and access mandates and in gaining access to a wider pool of qualified and experienced professionals. Agencies participate by offering:

- Work experience placements for IESWs

- Guest speakers for classes
- Agency visits for groups of newly arrived professionals
- Advice on program design
- Employment, volunteer, and mentoring opportunities for IESWs

Staff from partner agencies also participate in workshops offered by the IESW Bridging Program. These learning opportunities focus on developing a deeper understanding of various factors that block the career paths of IESWs and result in underutilization of their knowledge, skills, and experience. Systemic barriers—those embedded in an organization that may appear neutral but have the impact of excluding certain groups—are examined in these workshops, and strategies for addressing them are shared.

## Internationally Educated Social Workers (IESWs)

IESWs seeking employment, or those who are already working in the social service sector, are a diverse group. Differences among IESWs are worth noting, as they can both positively and negatively impact job search and employment experiences. These variations include factors such as:

- Relevance (real and perceived) of prior education and social work experience
- Length of time spent living in Canada, and the extent to which personal and family settlement challenges have been addressed
- Previous access to local training opportunities and supports
- Oral and written English language skills

*“We have navigated social work practice in different countries, and we are bringing this global perspective to workplaces and teams serving very diverse client groups. We are global workers.”*

– IESW

- Level of financial security, family responsibilities, and pressure to secure employment
- Extent of connections to other IESWs, social work agencies, and networks

While motivation to succeed and an eagerness to learn may be very high, the level of confidence of some IESWs may have been negatively impacted by:

- Prior rejections (or being completely ignored) when applying for social work jobs
- Exposure to racism and other forms of discrimination and exclusion
- The challenge of having to express themselves professionally in a second or third language
- A shift in status, financial security, and role within their families and communities

*“Your self-esteem takes a plunge... when in this vulnerable position. We have hopes, experience, and education, but I wonder how to keep the head high...”*

– IESW



- Hearing stories from other immigrant professionals who are struggling professionally, and believing that access to relevant employment is seldom possible
- Emphasis throughout the hiring processes on the concept of “Canadian experience,” which can erode the perceived value of prior professional experience
- The challenge of exploring and questioning existing values and perspectives related to issues such as sexual orientation, gender roles, class, clients’ rights, power, and privilege

While acknowledging many common experiences, it is important that employers assess the individual merits and experiences of each IESW.

**perspectives**

**strong  
connections**

**skills**

**equity and access mandate**

**learning organizations**

**employers**

**professional development**

**knowledge**

## Setting the Stage

**M**ost social service organizations have identified an intention to be inclusive and equitable in their employment practices. Diversity committees are formed, policies are written, and training is offered. Literature which confirms that the authentic inclusion of staff from diverse backgrounds boosts team and organizational performance has been reviewed and shared among staff. Yet many organizations struggle to maintain a strong commitment to this goal, and to consistently implement strategies that result in substantive and lasting changes.

The following questions and discussion points can be used throughout your organization to promote reflection, dialogue, and action:

- Are we genuinely excited about the changes that equity and inclusion can bring, or are we a little reluctant to make changes? What is our vision for the future of our organization?

*“It is undeniable that it is enriching for a modern organization to have diversity.”*

– IESW Bridging Program  
Advisory Committee Member

*“IESWs can provide that particular nuance to the programming that we provide.”*

– Employer

- Our communities have changed. To what extent has our organization changed? How can a more diverse staff, including internationally educated professionals, help us to make needed changes?
- If we really want things to be different, we have to be prepared to do things differently. What are we prepared to do differently? How far are we prepared to go to realize a different outcome?
- Who in our organization is excited about changes related to access and equity? Managers? Front-line staff? Clients? Everyone has both an opportunity and a responsibility to support (and benefit from) the access, equity, and anti-oppression initiatives of the organization. How can support be broadened?

*“Even if they are not from the same country, IESWs break down barriers with newcomer families in a way that is really helpful.”*

– Employer

- The actions of those with positional power (that is, those whose positions give them the power to make decisions and create policies and procedures) set the tone for the organization. How can we encourage these leaders to make inclusion and equity a strategic priority of the organization, and use their power to identify and interrupt inequitable practices?
- Have we built in ways to measure and analyze employment practices and outcomes? Have we considered that some practices might have the impact of marginalizing IESWs?
- Do we measure success by the ways in which IESWs and racialized staff benefit from the changes, or do we rely too much on the perceptions of those with power and how they feel? Does the organization have a way of capturing this information accurately?
- Do we acknowledge and celebrate organizational accomplishments and successes in our efforts to become more equitable?

*“Opening up our employment opportunities will make us more accessible to people who need our services.”*

– Employer



- Can the organization offer unpaid or paid placements, internships, or short contracts as a way to open doors for IESWs? Can volunteer programs be modified to support the same goals?

Developing and maintaining an organizational culture in which these questions can be explored in a climate of openness, curiosity, mutual respect, and excitement about change is not always easy, but is worth the effort. It can promote the creation of an equity action plan that critiques all aspects of the agency's employment practices, and initiates changes that benefit all employees and help the organization to achieve its goals.

*“There is just a richness [with IESWs], a depth. It is really very exciting when you think you can have the best of all worlds in one place. Why does that make us nervous? That is the real question.”*

– Employer

# Job Postings

**J**ob postings are sometimes written in a way that unduly, and often unintentionally, offers advantages to “insiders,” while failing to reach out to those still outside the organization. Overly specialized language, heavy use of acronyms and jargon, and narrowly defined qualifications can discourage prospective applicants. Job postings, and the job descriptions that underpin them, can be revised to better reflect an organization’s priorities and to remove any unnecessary barriers that might deter applications from IESWs. You can bring inclusion principles to life in your job postings in a variety of ways.

## **Use language that is welcoming and shows explicitly what you value**

*We encourage applications from qualified internationally educated professionals.*

*We value education and experience gained in other countries.*

*Fluency in English is required; knowledge of an additional language or culture is a definite asset.*

*Join an organization that is actively developing an agenda of equity and inclusion.*

*Familiarity with newcomer communities and immigration and settlement issues is an asset.*

## **Reduce barriers that deter applicants**

**Applicants must have experience working in the local community served by this agency.**

This is essentially a variation of “Canadian work experience required,” a phrase which has contributed so strongly to the exclusion of immigrant professionals from relevant positions that the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has taken the position that “a strict requirement for “Canadian experience” is prima facie discrimination (discrimination on its face) and can only

be used in very limited circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> Most IESWs have already demonstrated a significant capacity for adaptability and resourcefulness. They may have lived and worked in more than one country before coming to Ontario, and have recent experience in locating resources and services for themselves and family members as part of the settlement process. Many have volunteered in their own communities, helping others with settlement needs while gaining knowledge about local resources. Bringing a fresh perspective and new contacts, and adding additional language skills and cultural knowledge to a work team, may be more important than having knowledge of specific local resources. Local community knowledge can be learned quickly—much is available online—and information changes rapidly, requiring all staff to be adaptable.

## **Suggestions for revision:**

*Strong information and referral skills.*

*Proven ability to develop and maintain effective interagency partnerships.*

<sup>1</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC). (2013, February 1). Policy on removing the “Canadian experience” barrier. Retrieved from [www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-removing-“canadian-experience”-barrier](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-removing-“canadian-experience”-barrier)

## **Applicants must have at least three years of experience working on an ACT Team.**

Many IESWs have worked in jobs that were not as narrowly defined as positions in Ontario tend to be. For example, as social workers employed by a large corporation (where there may be little local social service infrastructure), they may have been responsible for counselling employees with problems related to mental health, addictions, and family violence, while also being responsible for running health promotion activities and organizing community development initiatives. Other social workers may have worked on large-scale initiatives sponsored by international aid organizations, or been employed in hospitals or schools working with people of various ages facing a variety of problems. These experiences are often less specialized and may not fit neatly into local job descriptions, yet the skills and experience may be very transferable, and the breadth of experience and holistic approach may prove to be a definite asset in a work team.



What should be considered significant is the scope and quality of experience, the transferability of skills, the underlying values, and the ability to adapt and learn new things—not the number of years of service.

### **Suggestions for revision:**

*Experience working on an out-patient basis with adults living with severe and persistent mental health challenges.*

*Excellent teamwork skills.*

### **Applicants must have access to a car that is fully insured for workplace use and for transporting clients.**

While this is often a legitimate requirement for a position, requiring applicants to have a car and insurance at the time of application is problematic. Many IESWs cannot afford to purchase a vehicle, and first-time car insurance in Ontario is expensive. It is also very difficult to obtain a loan for a car lease or purchase without a current job or a solid job offer. Access to a car may not

be essential during the initial period of orientation and job shadowing. It is also helpful to specify the minimum level of license required (G2 or G).

### **Suggestions for revision:**

*A valid Ontario driver's license (G2 or G level) is required at the time of application. The successful applicant must have access to a car that is fully insured for workplace use and for transporting clients by the end of the third week of employment.*

### **Must be registered with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers.**

Some organizations specify that all professional staff must be registered with the appropriate regulatory body. However, requiring applicants to have this in place at the time of application can be difficult for IESWs, as the process is costly for those who are unemployed or underemployed. Some IESWs wait to see if the position they obtain requires registration, or

until they are in a stronger financial position. At the same time, an employer may need to know that the applicant is eligible for registration before hiring them. If the IESW's social work degree has been assessed by the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) as equivalent to a Canadian BSW or MSW, in almost all cases, this will ensure that registration with the College can be expedited quickly; the assessment by CASW generally takes more time than registration by the College.

### **Suggestions for revision:**

*Must be registered, or eligible to register, with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW). For those with social work degrees earned outside Canada and the United States who are not registered, proof of credential assessment by the Canadian Association of Social Workers must be available at the time of application. Registration with the College is required upon commencement of employment.*

**perspectives**

**strong  
connections**

**skills**

**equity and access mandate**

**learning organizations**

**employers**

**professional development**

**knowledge**

**H**iring new staff is a very important function in any organization. Yet for many, hiring is often an added task in an already busy workload, and may not get the thoughtful attention it warrants. Rigid approaches developed out of a desire to be “objective” have often had the impact of disadvantaging skilled immigrants; more flexible and individualized strategies are yielding results that are proving to be more equitable, accurate, and beneficial for the organization. Examination of hiring processes through an equity lens, using the considerations and questions below, offers great potential for achieving equity goals.

### **Composition and Preparation of Hiring Panels**

All too often, staff are assigned to hiring panels that meet for the first time just before the first interview has been scheduled.

*“We come with great expectations and then get the door shut on our faces.”*  
– IESW



However, we know that effective use of time, the quality of decisions, and the potential for learning and for strengthening relationships can all be significantly enhanced through the careful structuring and preparation of hiring panels.

- Are panel members aware of the agency's policies, strategic directions, initiatives, and workplace surveys related to diversity and inclusion, and have they considered how these apply to this hiring process?
- Has there been a thorough and open discussion among panel members about this particular job posting, including the composition, strengths, and needs of the team the successful candidate will be joining, current and projected client needs, and the particular responsibilities and qualifications related to this position?
- Have the details about selection and decision-making processes been reviewed and agreed upon by panel members?

*"IESWs are not asking for special treatment or unfair privilege; we simply want barriers to be removed so that we are given a chance to demonstrate our skills and to earn the respect of our colleagues and managers and clients."*

– IESW

- Have panel members been encouraged to reflect on and discuss aspects of their own identities and experiences, possible biases and conflicts of interest, and the impact of power differentials in the decision-making process? Have they discussed their perspectives about hiring IESWs?
- Does the panel include representation from diverse groups? If not, how can this be achieved? Consider, for example, how it might impact a person of colour to face an all-white panel; might this encourage defeat before the interview even begins?

## Selecting Applicants for Interviews

Consider the following factors when selecting interview candidates:

- IESWs may submit cover letters and resumes that vary significantly from more familiar formats. Be careful not to screen out candidates on this basis alone, as this may have nothing to do with how well the applicant will perform on the job.

*“I had a CV that was seven pages long. In my culture, you have to write something lengthy to convince someone. I just didn’t know how to do it.”*  
– IESW

Look carefully for skills, knowledge, and experience; if in doubt, call the applicant for clarification.

- Interrupt the tendency to reward or overvalue the familiar; challenge yourself and other panel members to look for what new or transferable skills, knowledge, and attributes can be added to the team, rather than focusing only on replicating the features that exist among current staff.
- Think about clients and community members. What would they seek in a new social worker?

## Job Interviews

Interviews can be very stressful for all involved, but it may help to consider the following:

- Has the panel discussed how it can create the conditions in which applicants will be able to perform well? Recognize potential obstacles, and try to compensate for these. Talk to existing staff from racialized groups about their interview experiences. Keep in mind that even if you do not hire the person being interviewed, you want them to leave with a good impression of your organization.
- Is there someone on the panel who speaks the candidate's first language? If so, allow the candidate to answer one question in their first language. This will give the panel a glimpse of what this person is like when not having to interpret while answering interview questions.

*"I was asked 'Tell me about yourself.' What a vague question! It is not about my skills or education. I am not used to this. It was hard for me to know what they were looking for."*

– IESW

- Consider giving the candidates access to some or all of the questions ahead of time. This process can be as simple as asking them to arrive a half-hour in advance, and giving them a space in which to organize their thoughts. This more accurately reflects how we all work; we usually do have a little time to think before we act. This also reduces stress for those whose first language is not English.
- If questions are not given ahead of time, consider providing them in writing, one at a time, during the interview, so they can be read as well as heard by the applicant.
- Use a variety of methods to assess a candidate, such as simulated client interviews (in person, or by having a phone call take place during the interview), scenarios, written questions, or a presentation prepared in advance.

*“One IESW did the best interview of anyone I have ever interviewed, even though she was still struggling a little bit with English. You see right through that.”*

– Employer



- Ask specific questions to elicit information about the applicant's values. Particular skills and knowledge can be taught, but it is much more difficult for people to change their values.
- Question conventional wisdom about treating all candidates exactly the same; be open to probing for further information, re-wording questions, and using examples if these strategies are needed to help you better assess the applicant's knowledge and skills.
- Discuss and determine how to define the concept of "best qualified." What is given weight? What is ignored or minimized? How can a better balance be achieved to ensure that transferable experience is valued, the value of additional languages and cultural knowledge is recognized, and the impact of systemic barriers is acknowledged?

*"I will hire the person whose limitations I know I can handle or easily address."*  
– Employer

- Recognize the tendency to reward insiders (such as agency, sector, educational, and cultural insiders) in interview processes; ask yourselves if you want more of the same, or if you should instead be seeking more diversity in perspective, knowledge, connections, and experience.
- It can be very tempting for busy organizations to give preference to a candidate who can “hit the ground running”—someone who has done similar work, knows the terminology, procedures, and sector, and who will need little orientation. It may be wiser to select someone whose values, potential, and transferable knowledge and skills will add something new and valuable to the team over the long term. Specific details of the job can be taught during the on-boarding and probationary periods.
- Allow time for stories that illustrate knowledge and experience.
- Avoid overreacting to a mistake in word choice or terminology, and be careful about assumptions you might make because of this. Instead, explore any concerns using a follow-up question.

*“Why is it so hard to conceive that maybe someone who doesn’t “fit in” is exactly what we need—someone who will bring new perspectives, new experiences, new connections, and new approaches?”*

– IESW

- Demonstrate curiosity about new approaches, perspectives, and strengths that the candidate may offer.
- Consider what the person can add to the organization, team, and clients, along with what might be missing.
- Avoid assumptions about unfamiliar credentials or experience; ask for clarifying details.
- Be aware that silence may reflect the need for time to translate questions and responses, and that an emphasis on individual achievements may be an unfamiliar stance to take. Modesty and deference to authority may be more familiar patterns; these can shift as part of adapting to new workplace norms.
- Acknowledge the value of attributes such as commitment, passion, a positive attitude, a solid value base, and openness.
- Remember that the successful candidate will have a probationary period to allow for further learning and assessment of skills and knowledge.

Take time as a panel for a thorough debriefing after interviews, starting with a reminder of agency and team goals and needs, and previous discussions about decision making.

## **What about Risk?**

All hiring entails taking a risk. Yet it has been assumed by some that that there is a greater risk when hiring an internationally educated professional, compared to someone who is Canadian-educated. It may be wiser to think about the risk of not having a diverse staff group which includes workers who speak clients' first languages and understand their cultures and experiences. Often when clients use interpreters, their own feelings and perspectives are lost, and sensitive information can be compromised. There is a risk of misunderstanding the clients' needs or concerns. This can result in the agency's efforts being misunderstood or mistrusted by clients and other community members, and the need to spend costly time and effort in trying to correct these misperceptions.

## What about Accents?

The issue of accents—concern over the ability of clients and colleagues to understand someone who speaks “differently”—can arise during a job interview. There are over 140 languages and dialects spoken in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), which likely means as many variations of spoken English. In fact, we all carry an accent, regardless of where, how, or when we learned English, or if we ever have spoken another language. In a region like this, with so many people speaking different first languages, we all need to adapt to a variety of accents, to listen more attentively, and to express ourselves more clearly. Our goal is not to erase variations in accents; instead, we aim to promote spoken communication that is clear and easily understandable to clients and colleagues.

An unfamiliar accent may be associated with an assumption of inexperience or lack of expertise. It should instead serve as a reminder

*“Some employers don’t feel confident enough to hire a social worker with an accent or who doesn’t have a credential from Canada... Employers need training to help them realize that when they hire someone like me, they are taking the same risk as when they are hiring someone from here.”*

– IESW



of the additional languages that IESWs are contributing to an agency. It may also represent a sign of hope for newcomer clients, from successfully employed social workers who are themselves immigrants. Many clients are quite accustomed to being in very diverse environments. In their jobs and neighbourhoods, engaging with others whose first language is not English, they have learned to adjust to many different accents, and may not be at all concerned that their social worker, an IESW, has an accent that is different than their own.

IESWs generally possess a strong motivation and capacity to improve their communication skills. Progress is more likely to be rapid and noticeable in a supportive environment and in situations that are less stressful than a job interview. Written tasks can be included in the interview process to assess reading and writing skills, in order to ensure that these are adequate for the position. Any necessary upgrading can be woven into the new employee's professional development plan. It is worth noting that some native English speakers also need to further develop their documentation and communication skills.

## Checking References

Agency guidelines regarding reference checks may be so precise as to pose a barrier for IESWs, due to factors such as:

- A lack of availability of previous supervisors, especially those working for international NGOs that frequently rotate personnel
- Unfamiliarity with the concept of reference checks, which may impede return calls
- Time zone differences and language barriers, which may impede direct contact
- A significant time gap since the last relevant position, due to migration, recent studies, or other factors

Flexibility is encouraged. An employer can:

- Review any written references or portfolio items that the IESW may have, including samples of reports and proposals

- Allow the IESW to use volunteer coordinators, placement supervisors, or course instructors as local references
- Speak with employers who have supervised IESWs in “survival jobs.” These employers cannot comment on specific social work skills, but can provide references related to issues such as reliability, teamwork, customer service, and communication

Once an employment offer has been confirmed, there are a number of ways that the organization and supervisor can pave the way for the incoming IESW employee.

### **Prior to the New Employee's Arrival**

- Send an internal email to all staff that includes a profile of the IESW, highlighting the knowledge, skills, and attributes that the person will be adding to the organization. If it is a large organization, include a photo, so others outside the immediate team will recognize the new employee at events and larger meetings.
- Discuss with team members how they would like to be part of the IESW's learning process. Share your excitement about what this individual is adding to the team, and how this ties in with previously articulated team and agency goals. If the organization has a buddy system or mentoring program for new staff, make arrangements for this to start on the IESW's first day.

- Send the new employee some materials or links related to the agency, the community, or the work in which the IESW will be engaged, for advance preparation. For some, this reduces nervousness about the first day on the job.
- Take care of any relevant logistics related to work space, computer and phone setup and use, identification badges, and other issues. An IESW will appreciate that the arrival is both anticipated and valued.
- Gather materials in advance that will be part of the IESW's orientation and background reading (such as policy and procedure documents, reports, an organizational chart, and manuals), and prepare the orientation schedule.



## Once the Employee Starts

As a supervisor, you can immediately demonstrate your interest in newly-hired IESWs and in their success, your desire to get to know them, your sensitivity to apprehensions they may be feeling, and your willingness to facilitate their integration into the agency and their new roles. It is a chance to anticipate possible obstacles and to remember that the IESW does not yet know much about your organization or how it operates, or what the particular role entails. Self-consciousness and social discomfort are common and understandable for anyone joining an organization, particularly for those who may also be relatively new to the country. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the barrage of new information and introductions, especially if English is not the IESW's first language.

*“Seek out our perspectives and ideas. Ask us for, and value, our opinions and learn about our experiences. We have worked successfully as professionals in the past, and for many of us, our personal experiences give us additional ways to connect with clients and with communities. We’ve experienced racism and discrimination as low-wage workers and as immigrants with unfamiliar accents... We often know firsthand what many of our clients are struggling with, or what they might be expecting from us.”*

– IESW

On-boarding strategies will vary depending upon the agency and program area, but the following ideas may help you to develop a successful orientation plan:

- Arrange for the new employee to have lunch with one or two team members on the first day.
- Provide both verbal and written information, so that it remains accessible to the IESW for later review.
- Provide a staff list with contact information, and an organizational chart.
- Review safety and security procedures; use examples to demonstrate how and when these are used.
- Offer details related to payroll, benefits, union contract and membership, and probationary period, as well as procedures regarding absences, vacation, and timesheets. Be explicit, as this information may be unfamiliar.

- Ensure that formal requirements are dealt with (such as signing of internal documents like confidentiality statements and taxation and payroll forms). Ensure that the IESW knows when the first paycheque will be received; it is awkward for the employee to ask about this, but may be very important, especially if there is a need to purchase or lease a car for work.
- Share the “informal rules” of the agency and team (such as dress codes; access to the lunchroom, fridge, and coffee machine; length and timing of breaks; and how people are addressed).
- Confirm access to telephones, computers, fax machines, and photocopiers, and explain how to seek help when needed.
- Schedule tours of or visits to other programs and sites, and introductions to key staff members.
- Clarify access to office supplies and forms, and any other administrative details.

- Provide access to agency policies, procedures, and codes of conduct; use examples when discussing key points, to illustrate how these are applied.
- Include a thorough discussion of confidentiality and boundaries; use examples to illustrate common challenges.
- Share resources that will help the IESW become familiar with the client group, the sector, and local resources (such as reports, articles, program evaluations, websites, and lists of partners).
- Provide contact information for backup consultation if you are not available for supervision.
- Review the job description and develop a work plan for the initial period of employment; clearly explain how the probationary period is handled, as this may be an unfamiliar concept.

- Share information about any upcoming meetings, special events, and training sessions, as well as any informal or social staff activities.
- Arrange for job shadowing if appropriate; this promotes relationship-building among team members, and enables the IESW to gain a clearer idea of expectations and processes.

*“Invite us to social events.  
Don’t assume we won’t be  
interested or might be  
uncomfortable – ask us.”*

– IESW



**perspectives**

**strong  
connections**

**skills**

**equity and access mandate**

**learning organizations**

**employers**

**professional development**

**knowledge**

# Supervision

## The Probationary Period

The initial months of a new job can be stressful for any employee. IESWs beginning a long-awaited first job in Canada may particularly worry about being unsuccessful, and may hold back in demonstrating their skills; this hesitation can easily be misunderstood. The adaptability and skills of the worker are critical, but so too are the efforts made by supervisors to facilitate the confidence and productivity of the new employee and inclusion on the work team.

A supervisor can demonstrate commitment to supporting employees' success by considering and acting upon the following points:

- All new staff, including IESWs, are more likely to be successful on the job if both their strengths and learning needs are identified early and openly, and if they are routinely offered direct feedback and encouragement.

*“It is an abdication of responsibility for employers to say that they have no time for supervision. How do they expect people to provide good services if the onus is on [the IESW] to supervise herself?”*

– IESW Bridging  
Program Advisory  
Committee Member

- Clarify expectations about probation and evaluation; don't assume that these concepts are understood.
- If concerns become evident, discuss them openly and specifically, using clear examples.
- Make a plan to address concerns that have been raised.
- In supervision and in team meetings, model open and curious conversations and normalize frequent dialogue about differences.
- Make the expertise and perspectives that the IESW is adding visible, and include these new ideas in decision-making.
- Openly discuss the fact that the IESW may face racist or discriminatory reactions from clients; develop strategies to deal with this, and encourage the IESW to seek support if this occurs.

*“Invite us to share our ideas in staff meetings, at case conferences, and in informal discussions. Use us fully as a resource, not just as free interpreters. And please don't assume we only want to work with people from our own ethnic or linguistic or religious background, or – worse – that we are only good enough to work with people from our own background.”*

– IESW



- Make explicit the value of two-way learning. Use IESWs as a full resource for the team, not just as convenient interpreters. For example, IESWs can help team members to improve their understanding and skills related to working with immigrants and refugees.
- Ensure that meeting discussions are inclusive, and that all staff are made to feel like “insiders.” Include IESWs in informal and social interactions as well.
- Establish discussion and decision-making processes that promote open communication of many points of view, as an opportunity for learning, growth, and innovation, and as a way of promoting excitement about difference.

## Retention and Promotion

Once the probationary period is finished, and as the IESW becomes a longer-term employee, there is much a supervisor can do to encourage professional development, retention, and promotion, such as:

*“We are going to educate staff to make it more of a learning exchange, not just an environment where we say ‘newcomers have to learn our ways’... we need to learn new ways of doing things.”*

– Employer

*“I feel so happy because I can speak to my clients in [my first language]. They feel so comfortable when they see me. It is because we work from their cultural perspective. There is a lot of demand for me.”*

– IESW

- Showing an interest in the IESW's career; routinely reviewing goals, strengths, areas needing improvement, and opportunities for learning.
- Outlining expectations and reviewing outcomes regularly, to help the IESW build knowledge and competence.
- Seeking opportunities for the employee to have new experiences and to showcase skills, through job shadowing, assignment to special projects or committees, introduction to mentors, or by enabling the IESW to become a placement supervisor for social work students.
- Encouraging lateral moves if these will enhance future opportunities for promotion.
- Acknowledging the IESW's successes publicly within the organization, to build profile and exposure.

*“When I feel connected with my co-workers, if I feel that I am valued, if I feel that they believe in my potential to contribute, then I can do my best.”*

– IESW



- Suggesting learning opportunities that can address gaps (such as workshops, courses, or joining a Board of Directors in another organization).
- Letting the IESW know when you think they are ready to apply for a promotion; offering coaching and a reference as requested.

## Let's Make a Difference

In the words of a local social work educator, welcoming IESWs into social service organizations, along with the full utilization of their skills and experiences, “makes our society just a little bit more equal, just a little bit more just, and just a little bit less oppressive” —clearly a fit with the mandate of social work.

*“When can I stop calling myself an IESW? When am I called a social worker?”*

– IESW

## **Additional Resources: Equitable Employment Practices**

### **Hireimmigrants.ca: A Maytree Idea**

Section on Resources & Tools, including Roadmap

**[www.hireimmigrants.ca/](http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/)**

### **Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC)**

Policy on removing the “Canadian experience” barrier

**[www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-removing-“canadian-experience”-barrier](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-removing-“canadian-experience”-barrier)**

### **Glossary of Human Rights Terms**

**[www.ohrc.on.ca/en/teaching-human-rights-ontario-guide-ontarioschools/appendix-1-glossary-human-rights-terms](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/teaching-human-rights-ontario-guide-ontarioschools/appendix-1-glossary-human-rights-terms)**

*“We are really passionate to contribute to Canada and the best way we can do that is if we are able to practise our profession.”*

– IESW

**perspectives**

**strong  
connections**

**skills**

**equity and access mandate**

**learning organizations**

**employers**

**professional development**

**knowledge**

# For more information about this guide, contact:

**Internationally Educated Social Work  
Professionals Bridging Program,  
Gateway for International Professionals,  
The G. Raymond Chang School  
of Continuing Education,  
Ryerson University**

**[www.ryerson.ca/ce/socialwork](http://www.ryerson.ca/ce/socialwork)  
[iesw@ryerson.ca](mailto:iesw@ryerson.ca)  
416.979.5000, ext. 4095**

Quotes found in this guide are taken from the following sources:

- IESW Bridging Program evaluation, Nayar Consultants, 2012
- IESW and employer interviews, IESW Bridging Program video, 2011
- IESW Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Services Workers (OCSWSSW) Education Day presentation, 2011

*(Revised August 2016)*

**Ryerson  
University**

**The Chang School  
of Continuing  
Education**



*The IESW Bridging Program is managed by  
The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education  
and School of Social Work at Ryerson University,  
and Access Alliance Multicultural Health and  
Community Services.*