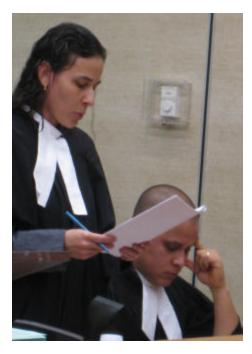


The 10 Faces of OJEN

Cristiane Arnold



For Cristiane Arnold, taking part in OJEN's justice education program through the Halton Multicultural Council's Enhanced Language Training provided not only valuable information about Canada's justice system, but inspiration to consider a career in a field she had previously given up on.

OJEN's programs for newcomers introduce participants to Canada's justice system. They learn about the role of the justice system in Canadian democracy and are exposed to principles such as fairness and rule of law. They also have opportunities for positive interactions with volunteers from the justice community, many of whom are immigrants themselves or represent diverse backgrounds.

Meeting the lawyers who volunteered in her program was a revelation for Cristiane. Hearing them talk about the high standard of ethical expectations within Canada's justice system gave her new appreciation for the practice of law.

Before moving to Canada just over three years ago with her husband and two daughters, Cristiane was a lawyer and human rights activist in Brazil, defending landless peasants in their struggle for agrarian reform. In a system were corruption was commonplace and the rule of law did not exist, she had become discouraged by the failure of court system. When she left Brazil to find a better life for her family she had no intention of practicing law again.

Through the OJEN program, Cristiane and her classmates participated in a mock bail hearing. Preparing for and staging a hearing gives English language learners an opportunity to develop presentation skills, gain confidence speaking in front of others and practice pronunciation. It also serves as a demonstration of how our court system works and can be an important step to building confidence in Canada's justice system.

Approximately 1000 newcomers to Canada have participated in an OJEN program similar to the one Cristiane completed. Cristiane would like them made more widely available. She believes OJENs programs are successful because they help foster awareness and contribute to an inclusive justice

system. Many people know very little about this important Canadian institution, she notes. There is a lot of misinformation, even among well educated people.

"The OJEN program enabled me to see and participate in a legal system I was not familiar with. I witnessed how the Canadian justice system provides more space for creativity and community involvement in the solution of the problems, like in the role of the surety in the bail decision. This was inspiring because my experience with the law in Brazil was very different."

"When I first came to Canada I didn't think about being a lawyer again because I was really disappointed in my profession. After the experience with OJEN I started considering the possibility of working in the law field again."

OJEN staff put Cristiane in touch with Internationally Trained Lawyers Program to determine what would be required to become licensed to practice law in Ontario. She is also considering a career in policing. What she could no longer imagine doing in Brazil has become a possibility in Canada.

"The justice system in Canada is really, really awesome. It's one of the main reasons that makes me love this country."





