



Photo by Andrés Felipe Valenzuela

Talha Peerzada is one of thousands of immigrants struggling to find qualified work in Canada. He completed his studies in cybersecurity more than a year ago.

# Immigrants face uncertainty during tough economic times

By Andrés Felipe Valenzuela

When Talha Peerzada was packing his bags to prepare for his trip to Canada, he believed in the hope of finding the possibilities of a better future for himself and his family on North American soil. He came to Belleville from Gujrat, India, two and a half years ago to pursue his dream of becoming a cybersecurity expert, a program he studied at Loyalist College and completed a year ago.

But reality has shown Peerzada, 25, that the path is not easy to follow and that the opportunities are not simple to achieve, because during all this time, after having graduated with excellent

grades, he has applied for about 20 jobs in his field but has not received a positive response from any of them.

His situation is not unusual. Many immigrants in Canada who have obtained their college diplomas have found it impossible to obtain a job in their fields. Like Peerzada, many of them are forced to survive by working in warehouses, packing merchandise or food, preparing burgers or serving coffee.

“I had a vision of a promising future for me. I imagined myself gaining technical and technological knowledge and working in important companies. The reality is that finding a qualified job in

Canada is not easy at all, even more so when policies are being tightened for newcomers. What I feel now is a mix of frustration and fear,” said Peerzada.

According to the Canadian Bureau for International Education, the number of international students in 2023 exceeded one million, and India is the nationality with the highest percentage in national statistics with 41 per cent, followed by China with 10 per cent, the Philippines, five per cent and Nigeria at four per cent. Because of this, from the first months of 2024, the Canadian government has proposed to tighten immigration policies to stop the massive arrival of foreign students, who have

been branded with the stigma of being responsible for the housing crisis in the country.

Even though the outlook is very uncertain at the moment, Peerzada considers himself a resilient person and does not forget the purpose that brought him to Canada: to get the job of his dreams. To do this, he will have to continue applying online to all job offers, while packing cheese in a factory in the mornings, and unloading merchandise from trucks in a chain store, because one job is not enough to make ends meet.

According to information provided by Quinte Immigration Services,

in addition to the struggle that immigrants are facing in the search for qualified work, this is compounded by an equally complicated economic situation. “Statistics show that most migrant workers work in low-paying jobs and, for example, in 2021 they earned less than the average Canadian annual income.”

The truth is that, like Talha Peerzada, thousands of immigrants of different nationalities who already have their Canadian diploma today are in a state of job vulnerability and economic insecurity that clearly does not allow them to achieve the long-awaited Canadian dream.

# Diverse backgrounds shared in Loyalist event

By Via Abbott

Loyalist College hosted its annual cultural exchange event on Friday, honouring the diverse backgrounds and traditions within its student body.

The event featured booths showcasing the cultures of 15 different countries. Each of the 15 cultural booths at the event was designed and staffed by students from that culture, excited to share their heritage.

Each country had its own display board with its flag, fun facts, and photographs/drawings. The booths were full of life, with traditional clothing, decor and even food samples that made the whole event feel immersive to those who participated. Some of the countries that took part included Iran, China, Russia, Nepal, Germany, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Nigeria, and Indigenous culture.

“The purpose of the day is so that all the students, not just international and domestic students, know about the other. The diverse culture we have we celebrate in Loyalist College, and we always like to include different cultures in our community,” shared Devansh Sharma, Loyalist’s international support and settlement officer and organizer of the event. He emphasized that the event was designed for everyone to participate in, creating a mutual understanding.

Sharma described the preparation process, which included outreach to students.

“I email to all the students, like, whoever wants to join us for tours or participate,” he said. “They can set up a booth for their home country, or they can also



Photo by Via Abbott

Loyalist College held a cultural exchange event on Jan. 10. (From left) Farishta “Fresh” Rahimi and Roya Shafai, hosted the Afghanistan booth in traditional Afghanistan attire.

perform. They can sing, dance, act, whatever they want to perform to showcase their diverse culture, they can do it.”

He encouraged participants to wear

traditional clothing and to decorate their booths to be engaging, while attendees were encouraged to explore the booths, ask questions, and learn about various

traditions.

Farishta Rahimi, who represented Afghanistan, provided a glimpse into her booth.

“We’re just showcasing our culture, the jewelry, the food, and everything like that,” she said.

Rahimi highlighted Afghan specialties they were serving, such as mentu, a type of dumpling, and rice dishes garnished with carrots and raisins.

“We are a very diverse college, and not only that, it’s important to showcase different cultures for educational purposes so that people realize that there’s so much more than what’s being portrayed and what people see in the media and social media as well.”

Catherine Bell, who ran the Canada booth, shared her enthusiasm for the event.

“I think that it really helps to build a culture in hand and teach everyone so that we can be more inclusive in the end,” she said.

Bell also expressed excitement about the event’s continuity.

“I think that it’s a great opportunity, and I love that we’re going to be doing it every year because it’s a great way to share and learn cultures in a really big environment instead of just kind of trying to meet people.”

Sharma emphasized the cultural exchange’s larger importance.

“The best thing we can do is we can just maintain that diversity. And maintain that brotherhood among us,” he stated.

With more than 150 students in attendance through-out, the event was a success and showcased Loyalist College’s commitment to inclusivity and its openness to celebrating its students’ diverse cultures.





Photo by Via Abbott

Belleville Senators forward Oskar Pettersson, in action against Ville Koivunen of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins during Sunday's game at CAA Arena.

# Player dedicates life to hockey

*Oskar Pettersson leaves Sweden to pursue lifelong dream*

By Via Abbott

With just 2.2 seconds remaining, the Senators defeated the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins 4-3 in a thrilling game held at CAA Arena. Even though Sunday's game was captivating, Oskar Pettersson's incredible journey to join the Belleville Senators is even more impressive. Moments like these for 20-year-old Pettersson, a rising star from Sweden, emphasize the dedication and determination that have defined his journey from Sweden to North America.

For Pettersson, the move is a step to

help fulfill a lifelong dream.

"Ever since I grew up, you always wanted to play in North America. That's every kid's dream. Obviously, I want to make it to the NHL, and for a lot of guys, the first step is to play in the AHL. So ever since I got drafted by the Senators, my goal was right away to get the chance to play over here," he shared.

Making the transition to North America was a bold decision for Pettersson, requiring him to break a mid-season contract with his Swedish team.

"It's a weird dynamic because their club teams in their home country have contracts for them. So they have to break the contract to come over here," said David Bell, the Belleville Senators coach.

"Oskar had to make a big decision. He made it last year, 30 games into his season over there, to leave mid-season. That's a big, big choice to make."

Pettersson first found it challenging

to adjust to the fast-paced style of Canadian hockey. "The type of game over here is a lot faster," he explained.

"Since it's a smaller ice surface, obviously. Then it's just a different style of play. In terms of you always wanting to play north here. You always want to take the puck down low and put up a forecheck rather than bring the puck home. Compared to back home in Sweden, the coaches would always want us to bring back the puck and keep the puck—winning our team puck management."

Off the ice, the transition presented its own challenges.

"The most challenging thing is probably off the ice rather than on the ice. It's a six-hour time difference, so on an off day, if I wake up a little bit later, I might not even chat with my family at all that day. It's a little bit harder to stay in touch with your family and friends back home,

and that can be challenging at times," Pettersson said.

Still, he's found camaraderie among his teammates. "I'm living together with Jorian Donovan and Jamieson Rees, so it kind of comes naturally that when different situations happen at home, I get kind of surprised, and I get to explain to them how we do it back home—whether it's about food or just the way things are done over here."

"It's his hockey IQ. A very smart player can play all three forward positions, and his work ethic," said Bell. "He was a captain in his junior club team, and he was a captain and assistant captain at the World Juniors. So, leadership skills, work ethic, and hockey IQ are probably the biggest things that stood out when he was being recruited."

Fitness is another cornerstone of Pettersson's success.

"His fitness level—you know what,

guys don't see it. He's a fitness freak. He's a gym rat. He loves to be in the gym. He's just, he's a fitness freak," Bell added.

Pettersson's intelligence and work ethic continue to set him apart.

"He just works, and he's smart. So those guys usually get a chance—they figure it out," Bell noted. "There are guys that are super skilled, super big, or they have talent, but they're dumb. He's not a dumb kid. He's a smart guy on and off the ice. He understands the game; he understands systems."

Pettersson's path demonstrates his determination and love for the game as he continues to adjust to the AHL and works towards his NHL goals. Pettersson continues to show that he has the intelligence, adaptability, and unwavering dedication necessary to succeed on the biggest hockey platforms.

# Reuse culture serious business

By Andrés Felipe Valenzuela

Many countries around the world have adopted policies and strategies in recent years to promote the care of natural resources and the environment, trying to confront climate change and avoiding excessive and unnecessary pollution. Canada is one of those places where today there is a kind of social awareness about the importance of protecting forests and water, and also recycling and reusing various products.

Even small cities like Belleville currently have an interesting collective dynamic about the reuse of clothing, shoes, toys, household items, among other things, in order to promote a local, provincial and national idea about the importance of resources in daily life and even donation and charity.

It is common to see in the city's neighborhoods how sidewalks or front yards become display cases for different objects such as furniture, chairs, microwave ovens, baby strollers, tools and even sporting goods. All this is because the neighbours prefer that other people or other families have free access to all of this (if someone really needs it), instead of throwing things away or leaving them forgotten in the garage.

The culture of reuse is here to stay in Canadian society, and proof of this is the business model that some second-hand stores manage here in the city. This was precisely the opportunity that Chris and Kate Pieneman saw, when they arrived in Belleville after the COVID-19 pandemic brought them here from Toronto, trying to find a place where they could breathe the air more freely.

Chris Pieneman, an engineer with several years of experience in construction and optimal use of materials, and Kate Pieneman, a business professional who was also an actress and fitness model, are today the owners of the local outlet of Once Upon A Child, in Bel-



Kate Pieneman is the owner of Once Upon a Child in Belleville, a store specializing in second-hand children's items such as toys, clothes, books and baby strollers.

Photo by Andrés Valenzuela

leville, a store that follows a particular business model. They are dedicated to buying and selling second-hand items related to children. This means that if a mother does not know what to do with that old toy excavator that her son no longer plays with; Or if she doesn't know what to do with the tutu skirt your daughter no longer wears, you can go there and earn a few dollars, which in these times, is not bad at all.

"The culture of recycling and reuse

is part of who we are as Canadians. Many of us, when we buy something, take good care of that item so that we can resell it and someone else can use it; so, you know, don't throw it away, bring it back and we'll pay you for it. Surely there is someone else looking for that thing that you have and no longer use," said Kate Pieneman.

In Belleville, the community has understood this message in a positive way, she said, and the new generations

have been adapting to this dynamic easily. Parents have taught their children that, if they take good care of their toys, clothes and books, later on, when they no longer want to use them, they can sell them, get a few dollars and buy again. It is a circle in which everyone wins.

There is another important aspect in the dynamics of reuse in the current context and it is the national economy.

According to Statistics Canada, "The

country's unemployment rate reached its highest level since May 2017 in December 2024, excluding the pandemic period between 2020 and 2021, reaching 6.8 per cent."

And this seems to show that the winds are not blowing in the best way for citizens and they are carrying less money in their pockets. Therefore, buying used items also becomes a great option for those who want to save a few dollars.