

Trailblazers

.....
Inspirational journeys
of migrant women
entrepreneurs
in New Zealand

IMMIGRATION
NEW ZEALAND



THE OFFICE OF

ethnic affairs

Te Tari Matawaka

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FOREWORD

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From the outset, New Zealand women have influenced how this country has grown and prospered. Trailblazers captures the stories of a new generation – new migrants keen to seize the enterprise opportunities of a more competitive, internationally focused New Zealand.

Making use of the skills, talents and cultural knowledge of newcomers to New Zealand is core to developing a successful and thriving nation. These stories demonstrate ways in which migrant women have overcome settlement difficulties to achieve much as entrepreneurs, adding to New Zealand’s economic growth and diversity.

New Zealand is one of the easiest countries in which to start a business. In the words of one of the seven women profiled, Wendy Chen, “this is a great country to be fearless in and do business”.

These stories are inspirational and together reveal the array of skills, attitude, tenacity and rich cultural heritage that exist within our communities today. These women also show how bringing international knowledge and connections benefit New Zealand’s future.

The Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy plays a key role in building a welcoming environment for migrants. Immigration New Zealand is proud to be associated with the collaborative effort that produced the booklet’s portrayal of the entrepreneurial talent of these new New Zealanders.

Stephen Dunstan

General Manager – Settlement, Protection and Attraction Division
Immigration New Zealand

INTRODUCTION



The Office of Ethnic Affairs is passionate about seeing ethnic communities successfully participate in New Zealand life and supporting the valuable role that women play in society.

This collection of inspirational stories shows the spectacular contribution of seven first generation migrant women business entrepreneurs. Their journeys are each quite different but they are united by similar strengths and skills.

The path travelled by migrants within a new country is often filled with a myriad of difficult issues from social, educational and cultural differences to emotional and financial challenges. These challenges can be particularly enhanced for first generation women migrants who juggle the demands of their young families while cultivating their fledgling businesses into a new environment.

These dynamic ‘trailblazers’ faced their trials with courage, grit and optimism. Their unswerving belief in themselves and their commitment to pursue their professional aspirations in New Zealand is truly motivational.

We invite you to read these stories which the Office of Ethnic Affairs has brought you. Find inspiration in their journeys of courage, determination and success!

Mervin Singham

Director

Office of Ethnic Affairs, Department of Internal Affairs

“When I noticed how well the business was doing, I told my husband ‘I don’t want to look for a job, I want to buy this shop!’”

SHIVANI ARORA



SHIVANI ARORA

Shivani Arora is a businesswoman with a passion for hospitality and a commitment to honesty and integrity. Shivani was born in Chandigarh, India but also lived for a number of years in Bahrain before making New Zealand her home. Shivani first visited New Zealand in 1990 with her young family and with plans to settle in a new country. However, homesickness made them decide to return to India. A decade later they knew they wanted to come and live in New Zealand permanently, choosing this country over other possible options such as Canada and Australia.

“We always wanted to come to New Zealand because we thought it was so beautiful and the lifestyle is so good. Kiwis are so friendly. They have a supportive and motivating approach. That explains why I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else.”

Shivani had gained Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts degrees before migrating and her professional background was in teaching. However, arriving in New Zealand with young children, she chose to look for opportunities that allowed her to be with or work around her children at all times. Shivani and her husband had owned their own business before coming to New Zealand, so she was not daunted by the prospect of becoming an entrepreneur in this country.

“Frankly speaking, I was and always am a confident person. I feel that it is a positive attribute. To achieve success you need to have confidence.”

Although Shivani was prepared for the challenges that business entailed, she needed to persuade her husband to accept the necessary risks involved and to take a leap of faith.

In 2000, Shivani and her family bought an Indian food store in Sandringham, Auckland. She describes how she came to own this business as a way of demonstrating the good fortune that she feels has always smiled upon her life in New Zealand.

“When we landed here we went to buy groceries in that shop. When I noticed how well the business was doing, I told my husband ‘I don’t want to look for a job, I want to buy this shop!’ I don’t know what happened. It was a miracle. After a month I owned that shop. The strange part was – it was not even for sale.”

From the success of that store, Shivani and her husband ventured into importing, exporting, and property investments. It was Shivani’s passion for hospitality that led them into the restaurant trade. They currently own and operate two Nando’s restaurants both located in Hamilton and also recently opened their first Indian restaurant in the Auckland suburb of Epsom. She has a strong vision for the future. This involves substantial investment in their new restaurant and includes creating franchise opportunities as well as a plan for a third Nando’s restaurant in Auckland to add to their growing business portfolio.

Shivani believes that being an immigrant and a woman have not negatively affected on her endeavours as an entrepreneur. She credits this positive experience to Kiwi attitudes, which she believes make New Zealanders cooperative and open to interaction. Although in her early years in New Zealand, Shivani found it difficult to juggle being a mother and running a business. She mentions that having clear priorities helped her to balance her commitments and manage her time well. A good support network has also been important, which has been her family and in particular her husband. Shivani takes a holistic approach to her work keeping in mind that family, business, and spirituality are all interconnected, something she learned from her mother. This means she always tries to conduct even the simplest exchange with honesty and integrity.

“My mum used to tell me that you should keep your heart clear. If your heart is clear, good things will come to you. Be very open and be very good to everyone, and I think that helps me to achieve success in my business.”

One way in which Shivani demonstrates the success of this approach to business is through her innumerable contacts. Knowing many people and having positive, ongoing relationships with them has enabled her to make the most of many opportunities, locally and internationally. Due to her connections, she recently had famous Bollywood movie stars Aishwarya Rai and Abhishek Bachan at her restaurant India Gate in Epsom.

For Shivani there are two key principles for success in business – passion and integrity. She suggests that other migrant women can also succeed in business by sharing these values. Shivani recommends making a commitment to serving New Zealand and having a passion for your business. As Shivani’s background demonstrates, her business choices and involvement in numerous community and international organisations reflect her Indian heritage. She is also passionate about her contribution as a New Zealand citizen to this country’s society and economy. Shivani believes that by reaching out to help and share her success with other people, the acts of generosity will be reciprocated. She believes that learning is important for growth and growth is important for success. For Shivani, there is no separation between who you are and what you do, making the qualities of a good person also the qualities of a successful entrepreneur.

CRISTINA CASARES

Cristina Casares is a 3D Animation Producer who has been living in New Zealand since 2002. Her highly specialised profession and the fact that she is a woman in a male-dominated industry gives her a unique perspective on migrant business. Originally from Argentina, Cristina knew from a very young age that animation would be a life-long passion and career. The limited opportunities to study her craft led her to train at the Vancouver Film School in Canada and she has enjoyed a highly successful career working in a number of countries around the world. While Cristina had several options, she chose to migrate to New Zealand, motivated by the buzz generated by The Lord of The Rings films, as well as a strong affinity with Kiwi culture.

When Cristina arrived in New Zealand she had already secured a position teaching at the Media Design School in Auckland. She followed this with a period of time working at Huhu Studios in Warkworth. Cristina also came to New Zealand with her own project – an animated children’s feature film script that she had written, The Magic Shoes. It was the desire to see her movie produced that spurred Cristina to start her own animation studio, La Luna. Cristina admits that when she started La Luna she was “a little bit naive, because making a movie is not really that easy.” Although setting up her own company in New Zealand wasn’t difficult, Cristina faced a number of challenges such as travelling all over the world to raise at least \$US10 million in funds for the project through private investors. This produced her first significant setback.

“A deal with one of the investors, who was contributing half the money, fell through. That was a really difficult time – I had to start from scratch, and decided to make the movie under an international co-production treaty, between New Zealand and another country.”



"I am very self-motivated because I love what I do. I always try to go to all the industry events and meet people and keep learning - I'm totally into it."

CRISTINA CASARES

Producing a 3D animation film is a long process, which can take up to 10 years even at a major studio like Dreamworks. Cristina has spent the last few years running her studio, as well as working as an independent producer for other studios and organisations in the industry. As the team at La Luna work on developing The Magic Shoes, they have continued to create more ideas which Cristina hopes will also be produced in the future. She sees home-grown intellectual property as a major investment for the country's economy. Animation has the potential to create long-term revenue through TV, feature films, DVD sales, merchandising, and gaming. The Magic Shoes currently has co-production partners in Italy and Argentina, and Cristina is confident the project will soon be given the green light.

There are a number of challenges involved in her work that Cristina suggests are simply due to the nature of the industry.

"It's a very tough industry worldwide because you never really have a steady income. It is also more difficult to support this industry through the funding which is available because animation is actually more expensive than other TV and film projects. But I think the industry is changing and I think New Zealand can see the potential of this industry."

Cristina believes that being a woman in a male-dominated industry has been an advantage and thinks it is one of the reasons she was offered her first job in New Zealand. She believes New Zealand is special in that regard.

"New Zealand has a lot of strong female leaders and entrepreneurs. Helen Clark is an obvious example. There really is a culture of respect for talented women."

Cristina sees this culture of respect extending to immigrants as well, which she believes comes from the Kiwi desire to travel and experience the world.

“In their own country, New Zealanders want to make sure that people feel comfortable. This makes them really good hosts.”

For Cristina, success is the ability and confidence to do what you love.

“I am very self-motivated because I love what I do. I always try to go to all the industry events and meet people and keep learning – I’m totally into it.”

This proactive attitude born out of a passion for her vocation has enabled Cristina to build a wealth of contacts both locally and internationally, to keep working when times are tough, and to continue striving to achieve big goals. In fact, Cristina is even unsure about being referred to as a ‘successful businesswoman’. She feels she still has important goals she wants to achieve. This reflects one of Cristina’s strategies for success in her business – a clear plan for goal-setting.

“If you know where you are going, you can choose the right path but if you aren’t sure, even though you may choose a beautiful road to travel down, you might not be happy where it takes you.”

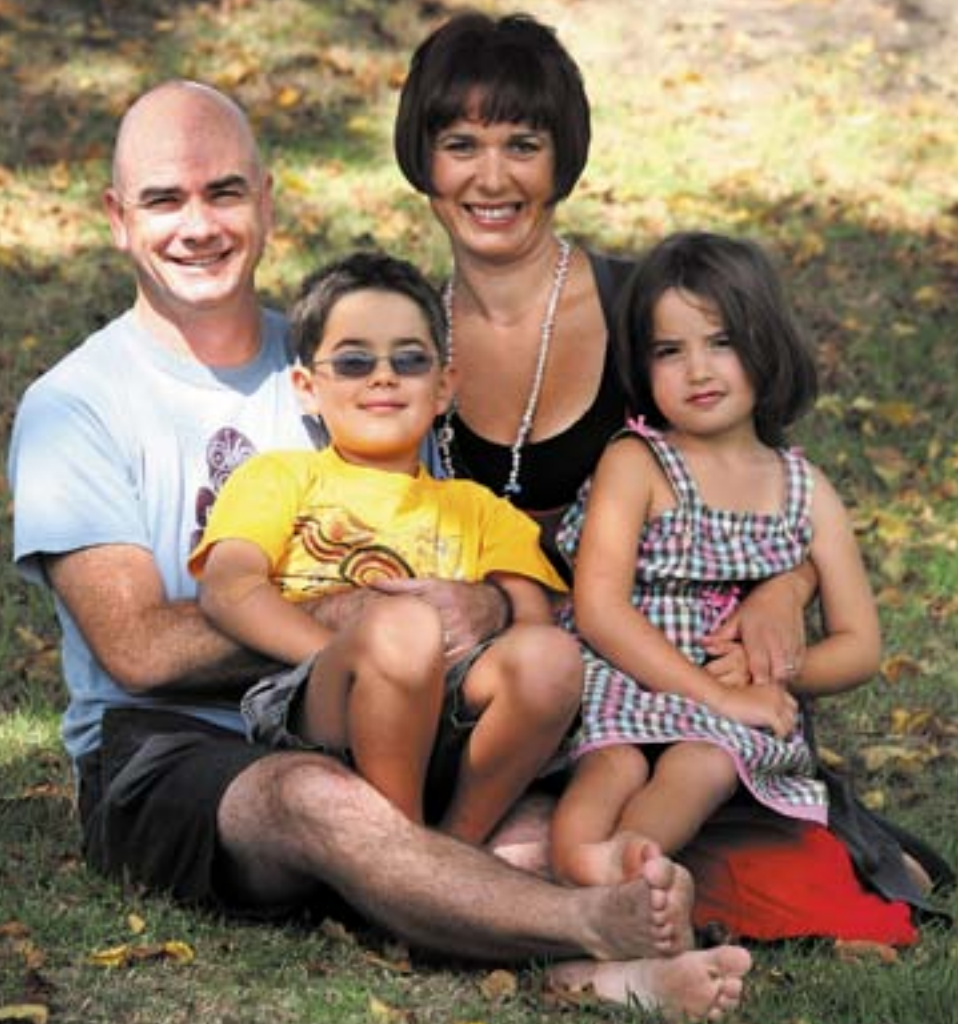
However, as Cristina has learned throughout her career, unexpected hurdles can appear which throw you off-course.

“You need to be prepared to be flexible as well. However it’s important to always keep your goals clear. On the ride, you have ups and downs, but at the end of the day success is the ability to keep going.”

“As New Zealand becomes more multicultural I am able to share some insight, be it with a senior executive who is working with people from other cultures, or with a migrant who has to work in the New Zealand business environment.”

GALIA BARHAVA-MONTEITH

Photo provided by the Weekend magazine/NZ Herald



GALIA BARHAVA-MONTEITH

Galia BarHava-Monteith had never imagined living anywhere other than her home country of Israel until she fell in love in Queenstown on her OE at age 21. Having made the decision to move to New Zealand and marry, Galia subsequently graduated from Auckland University with a Master's degree in developmental psychology. Galia worked with a number of internationally recognised consulting firms, making a name for herself that has now allowed her to carve out an independent career. Currently, Galia manages a portfolio of work that includes executive coaching. In addition to working as a Minister-appointed member of the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, Galia is also a co-owner and director of Professionelle, a social entrepreneurial venture designed to support women in business.

The concept for Professionelle came about through Galia's experience as an executive coach. She found she was consistently meeting with women who felt isolated and who were struggling with the challenges of juggling a full-time career and family. Galia saw this as an opportunity to create a safe space that would empower women, by discussing topics that really matter to them such as values, mentoring, and career strategies. Professionelle holds public networking seminars in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch as well as online engagement, and also works with private sector businesses that are keen on working with skilled, professional women.

Galia does not view her status as a migrant woman to be an impediment or a handicap, but rather a strength and something to be celebrated. She has been challenged throughout her career by the need to create a space for herself within her chosen profession where she can do meaningful work and make an impact, despite often feeling like an outsider. In her early career, Galia found the cultural differences between New Zealand and Israel very difficult.

“New Zealand is a very nuanced culture, and the nuances of communication can be very difficult: like understanding the subtext, understanding the way people communicate – the subtleties. I was lucky to have my husband, who for a very long time would edit my (non-confidential) emails, because it was important for me to get the tone right.”

Galia also admits that there were times when she did not fit in with the working group around her.

“The challenge was to hold your own; be authentic to yourself. Change enough so that you fit in, but always know that you’ll never fit in 100%.”

Another challenge as a woman was to be opinionated but avoid being labelled ‘difficult,’ particularly in some of the senior levels of management, where she believes an ‘old boys club’ is still apparent and powerful. Being a migrant woman has also allowed Galia to carve out a niche for herself, gaining leverage on her point of difference in the business arena.

“It’s never been something I have formally developed, but as New Zealand becomes more multicultural I am able to share some insight, be it with a senior executive who is working with people from other cultures, or with a migrant who has to work in the New Zealand business environment.”

Galia attributes her success to a number of factors, including an incredibly strong work ethic.

“First of all, I work really hard. I worked hard throughout university to get top marks. I worked very hard throughout my career. You can’t get anywhere if you don’t work hard.”

This is compounded by a thirst for knowledge and a commitment to lifelong learning. An important part of this learning process is investing time in understanding herself and the world around her. Galia believes in the importance of making informed proactive choices in order to live and work with purpose and not by chance. She suggests that this awareness enabled her to identify a gap in the market for Professionelle.

“Have you heard of the term zeitgeist? My understanding of it is that it’s the spirit of the times, of the period, the essence of now. And being able to read that in the world around you, that is what led me to Professionelle. In 2007, women in New Zealand seemed to have it all – Theresa Gattung was CEO of Telecom, Helen Clark was Prime Minister, and there were many more women in top positions. But I had a feeling it wouldn’t continue for too long – it was a blip.”

Another strategy Galia has used for her success is to surround herself with smart people whom she calls ‘trusted advisors’. ‘Trusted advisors’ can be mentors, friends, or peers. They are people she can learn from, who will challenge her decisions and provide honest feedback.

“Where would I be without these people? It’s the best thing you can do opening yourself up to different perspectives, listening, and getting out of your comfort zone.”

Galia encourages other migrant women to get engaged in the opportunities that New Zealand offers and to be proactive in seeking them. Galia suggests a perfect launch pad can be a school board, which is an excellent way to get involved and integrated into the community whilst developing skills for your career.

“New Zealand is a true meritocracy. If you work hard, you’ve got the right skills and you make an effort, you can really succeed here, there’s no judgement.”

She is also an incredibly strong advocate of the Ministry for Women’s Affairs Nomination Service (<http://www.mwa.govt.nz/women-on-boards>), which is how she came to be involved in the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women.

“The Ministry of Women’s Affairs nominates women from all different backgrounds to be on government boards and advisory councils like National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women. They are incredibly supportive and even help with CVs. It is very transparent and really accessible. It’s a fantastic resource for women who want to make a contribution to New Zealand.”

"If you don't look back you have to move forward.
I just wanted to go for it and try something out.
This is a great country to be fearless in."

WENDY CHEN



WENDY CHEN

When Wendy Chen moved to New Zealand from China in 1999 she never imagined herself becoming an entrepreneur.

Wendy had studied English at university and worked for various companies in China, and came to New Zealand with the expectation of finding a job. Her first few weeks were incredibly challenging.

“We were living in one bedroom in someone’s house. Every morning at about 8 o’clock we got up and put my two-year-old daughter in the back seat of the car and my husband drove me around all day to attend interviews. After a while you do start to question yourself.”

Although she did eventually find work, the difficulties her husband was facing settling into New Zealand encouraged Wendy to look into the possibility of starting their own business together.

Through a friend they were introduced to a supplier who gave them some stock to sell at local markets at the weekends. It was a two-week trial and Wendy and her husband had the option of then pulling out. Wendy admits that the supportive welfare system in New Zealand made it easier to make the decision to go for it.

“I am really appreciative of the support in this beautiful country – you can always fall back on help from the government. And because of that there isn’t any fear. It’s mistakes and money, but it would never be a life or death situation.”

Wendy was energetic in her approach to settling in New Zealand. Within two years of arriving in the country, she had taken two jobs, had returned to studying and was running her own business. She was also doing the accounts for another local business after teaching herself the skill from instructions supplied by Inland Revenue.

In 2001, Wendy and her husband decided to open a store selling imported products in Waiuku, south of Auckland, where they remained for six years. From there, they moved into importing and wholesaling and now distribute products all over the country to more than 500 buyers, while also running a retail store in Auckland. Wendy believes the decision to expand their business was a natural progression.

“If you don’t look back you have to move forward. I just wanted to go for it and try something out. This is a great country to be fearless in.”

Wendy has three children, and juggling family and business has been a challenge.

“You always feel guilty about what you could have done for your children. Always. No matter how much you do, you always feel there is more you should have done.”

She decided to leave regular employment and try out a business idea when she realised how much her husband was struggling to settle in New Zealand.

“His work wasn’t recognised here. It’s a different system. He struggled with English and he felt isolated. At one stage I wanted him to go back to China to rebuild his self-esteem, but he was committed to supporting the family.”

Being a migrant also affected Wendy as she tried to integrate with the local community. While in Waiuku, Wendy felt that in the beginning some locals were uncomfortable with immigrants or made assumptions based on the way they looked.

“Customers would come in and look at me and straight away they would speak slowly and mime what they wanted.”

Despite some challenges early on, Wendy believes that as she became more proactive and reached out to people, the community became more familiar with her and her family and she remembers feeling very connected to the town and its people.

“It’s normal for people to feel uncomfortable about immigrants. We need to believe in ourselves and make people believe that we are part of the community; we can contribute and we want to contribute.”

Wendy believes many migrants can succeed in business and the workforce, as well as integrate into New Zealand society if they have the right attitude. Wendy particularly feels that confidence is crucial for anyone to succeed.

“I consider myself lucky. Although I struggled in the beginning I never felt completely rejected. Even though I questioned myself, I never for a minute thought that I was not capable of succeeding.”

Wendy acknowledges that confidence is about knowing your strengths, but also knowing that you can make mistakes. She is passionate about encouraging people not to quit based on mistakes but to keep going. Recognise the mistake and learn from it.

Wendy also believes it is very important to talk to people, communicate, ask questions, and accept feedback. She knows that it can take courage to reach out to people, particularly if your confidence has been knocked, but thinks this approach is absolutely necessary. Wendy's positive approach to settling in New Zealand; her self-belief and determination have helped her to make the most of challenging situations and emerge as a successful businesswoman. Yet, she is humble when talking about her achievements. She has an encouraging message for other migrants.

"This is a lovely country, a supportive country. Just go for it! Believe that there is a place for you here and know that you will find it if you keep looking. There are so many opportunities here."

“Sharing, that’s my really successful business concept! I always share everything I have. I never made a plan to have a big business, only to help people, but when you share your knowledge with people, your business will grow.”

YONG KIM



YONG KIM

Yong Kim is a force to be reckoned with, a woman who possesses an incredible multi-tasking ability and can juggle an eternally busy and varied work schedule.

“Sharing, that’s my really successful business concept! I always share everything I have. I never made a plan to have a big business, only to help people, but when you share your knowledge with people, your business will grow.”

Yong and her family moved to New Zealand from Korea in 1990, where she had been a nurse, a teacher, had run her own business, and published photography. When she arrived in this country, despite having very limited English and being pregnant with her third child, the frenetic pace at which she approached life did not slow down at all.

Yong began working as a nurse’s aid while she retrained. She passed the nursing licence exam within just four months. While nursing, she and her husband spent two years gaining an export licence from the Dairy Board and for the next 15 years they exported New Zealand dairy products to one of the three largest confectionary companies in Korea. One day, while visiting the bank, Yong was told they were looking for a Korean-speaking person to join the branch. Yong took a leap of faith and began a new banking career at ASB in 1992, where she worked her way up from teller to branch manager.

A decade later, Yong opened her own mortgage and insurance brokerage company, Yong Kim Consulting Co. Ltd, which was aimed at servicing the financial and investment needs of immigrants in New Zealand. In 2004, after realising that many overseas Koreans were seeking information about possible

investments in New Zealand, Yong also began to produce the *Business and Property Journal*, a Korean language publication which is both in print and online. In addition, Yong and her husband own a Japanese restaurant in West Auckland. Although her daughter has called her a workaholic, Yong says that because she has always done what she loves, she has always wanted to go to work and has never counted the hours on the clock.

Yong decided to leave the ASB to create her consulting company for a number of reasons. She had struggled with the language and cultural barriers for many years and as she earned more responsibility and attained higher positions at the bank, she felt it was becoming increasingly difficult. She feels that language and cultural barriers definitely have their drawbacks, but with her positive attitude can still see the humorous side.

“If people swore at me, I couldn’t understand, so in that sense it was an advantage.”

Yong also wanted her own business so that she could allocate more time to her various projects and focus on what was really important to her. Helping immigrants to overcome the challenges they face in New Zealand has been her overriding passion since she first moved here.

Yong has felt the effects of being a migrant woman in New Zealand. She enjoys the fact that here men and women are treated equally, but thinks this can make things harder when women work and are still the primary caregivers for the family. She believes that for women to succeed in business what they really need is a lot of family support which she can gratefully say she has had.

“My husband was always there for the children, and my mother-in-law, who came to New Zealand with us, also looked after them a lot. They helped me overcome the restraints of being a mother, so that I could be a businesswoman as well.”

Yong has also had to adjust her way of thinking to fit in with the Kiwi lifestyle and business ethic.

“Because there is so much competition in Korea, we are always working hard to be number one. Business always comes first. But Kiwis aren’t like that; they close the business and go home for family time. It’s a lot more balanced. I think it’s a good thing, but it’s hard to change how you were brought up.”

Despite enjoying a more balanced lifestyle in New Zealand, Yong has no plans to slow down even when she reaches retirement age. It has been one of her lifelong ambitions to learn more about psychology and she anticipates that she will finally make it happen in the next year or two. This partly reflects one of her key commitments – to continue learning and studying. In this country Yong has trained and studied numerous times, for the nursing exam as well as to be a registered financial advisor and broker.

“If you don’t keep studying, what will you do? This new generation is the technology generation. Life keeps changing and you have to keep up.”

Yong encourages other immigrant business women to make a plan of their goals and aspirations, be prepared to study, and most importantly, to maintain a positive mindset.

“If you hesitate and doubt, you will never get anything done. Don’t be afraid of failure. It is just another experience you can learn from and you can never fail in the same way twice.”

Yong advises that no business plan is complete without thorough research, so she recommends that entrepreneurs seek advice from people who already have experience in the same field, ask questions, and learn from them. Finally, she believes that to be successful, desire for money should not be your main motivation.

“Some people have too much money, too many businesses, and they aren’t happy because they have too much to protect. Success isn’t about money. It’s about being happy.”



"I'm the type of person who shoots for the stars and I reach them, because I know what I want. I work hard, and I achieve my goals."

EDIT HORVATH

EDIT HORVATH

Edit Horvath grew up in Hungary and was a well-seasoned traveller when she moved to New Zealand more than 20 years ago. In Hungary, she had owned her own VIP Travel Company and was used to a position of independence and freedom.

However, when she arrived in New Zealand and soon after had her first child, Edit found she was grappling not only with a culture shock but also a lifestyle shock as well. Despite having a wealth of international experience and training, Edit found that her qualifications were not recognised in New Zealand. This prompted her to decide to go back to university.

“I was quite upset and angry, but I decided it was silly for me not to be working at the level of experience and knowledge that I had.”

Edit graduated with a Master’s degree from Waikato University as an organisational psychologist. She mentions that while studying at university the business networks that she had formerly been involved in came to a close and were replaced by new networks that opened up during the course of her study.

“In New Zealand it was all about where you grew up, where you went to school, where you went to university. The moment I established my own relationships at university, doors opened for me.”

Edit was headhunted and worked in several consultancies and for a number of organisations before setting up her own human resources consultancy company, Active Worklife Solutions Ltd, in 2007.

When Edit first arrived in New Zealand, she found the country small and isolated. She encountered a great deal of discrimination and scepticism due to her foreign name and unfamiliar accent.

“There is no way I could have gone out on my own (in business) back then, because as soon as I put my name forward for an activity or project, people shied away.”

Edit thinks this attitude has changed remarkably in the last five years and sees that New Zealand has begun to embrace diversity. Being a migrant also challenged her as a young mother.

“My in-laws were in Stewart Island and aside from them, there was nobody so there was no support. It was really hard. And you can’t build a career based on someone else taking care of your child.”

At one point, Edit realised her fast-paced career was causing her to miss out on raising her daughter. She made a decision to slow down, which she admits was very challenging.

“I’m the type of person who shoots for the stars and I reach them, because I know what I want. I work hard, and I achieve my goals.”

Edit believes she made the best decision because she admits that she does not separate professional and private goals in her thinking. Instead, she follows her instincts and makes decisions based on her ‘gut feeling,’ in both spheres of her life.

Today, she continues to face some challenges as a woman in her professional field.

“There are certain areas and industries where being a woman makes it hard to receive respect, and be given credit, be given responsibility.”

However, Edit sees the challenges she has faced as an asset and believes the skills they have taught her can be translated in many ways, giving her an edge in the business arena.

As a businesswoman, a partner, and a mother, she fills a variety of roles on a daily basis and this is reflected in her ability to adapt and work with a variety of different clients in diverse business cultures. One of these skills is her ability to see alternative avenues when hurdles appear.

“I never dwell on the negative. If I try one approach and it doesn't work, I try another approach. You never hit your head against a wall twice.”

Edit has some key suggestions for helping other immigrant women in New Zealand to succeed in business. She recommends that having someone who is ahead of you on the journey as a mentor can be incredibly helpful. Even now, when she mentors others, she still remains in contact with people whom she can bounce ideas off and who offer her an alternative perspective. Edit is also selective about the type of work she does as she knows that this is where her motivation comes from.

“I learn every time I get to work with a new business. So what I want are great projects, interesting work and interesting people to work with.”

Edit credits a large amount of her success in business to her cautious approach, even though she says this may not be the most glamorous strategy.

“It is important to be safe as a business person, a woman, and an ethnic person and that isn’t easy at times. Knowing when to shut up and walk away can be really hard. You’ve got to tread quite carefully before you know there is solid ground beneath you.”

On a positive note, Edit believes that the challenges she faces as an immigrant businesswoman make the work she does better, stronger, and more sustainable. She believes sustainability is the most important factor of success and suggests that sustainability encompasses not only business but family as well. Edit is confident that her priorities will continue to provide the direction for the journey ahead.

ODETTA NTEZICIMPA

Odetta Ntezicimpa came to New Zealand as a refugee from Burundi in 1999. She spent three years living in a refugee camp in Tanzania and two years in Kenya before she made New Zealand her home.

Odetta spent her first year in New Zealand as a single mother with young children and no savings. Although she was fluent in French, Swahili, and her mother tongue Kirundi, she struggled with limited English and took any opportunity available to improve her English skills. She then got involved in voluntary work but knew that in order to provide a better future for her children she would have to find paid work. However, this seemed to be nearly impossible as a single parent with few resources.

Learning to drive in New Zealand had a remarkable effect on Odetta's life. She can vividly recount the challenges of living in Auckland with limited options for transport.

"I had my little baby, he was four months old, while my daughter was three and a half and needed to go to kindergarten. Where I come from, everyone can carry their babies as they walk up the road, but here everyone goes by car. It was winter and travelling by bus wasn't practical."

Odetta's life became much easier once she passed her driver's licence. She felt it was a significant and liberating achievement and recognised that other migrant women would also benefit hugely from learning to drive. Odetta first became involved in teaching friends and fellow migrants how to drive through her volunteer work. After two years, she saw these lessons as a way to revive her former profession as a teacher and a means to support her family. She completed her training course with the Automobile Association, which qualified her as a driving instructor, and subsequently started her Mobile Driving School in 2008.



"I just think life will be easier if everyone is positive. If you don't open up to people, you'll never learn their language. If you don't smile at anyone, noone will smile back at you. And if you don't greet people, noone can reply."

Odetta Ntezicimpa

Initially Odetta found it very difficult to establish her driving school. As a refugee she needed a micro-loan to start up the business, but her first application for an enterprise grant was rejected on the basis that her project would not be financially sustainable.

“That was so disheartening, I failed, my plan had failed. But it didn’t matter to me. I still wanted to continue. I still knew that it would help people.”

Odetta was able to make her ambition a reality through Migrant Action Trust. Together they worked on a business plan and she was given a loan with a long-term repayment plan. She used the money to buy a car, get her new company name displayed on the vehicle, and have a second set of controls installed on the passenger side.

As an instructor Odetta’s role is multi-faceted. She teaches driving skills, but she is also a reassuring face for many migrants who are struggling to settle in New Zealand. Teaching people how to drive is truly her passion and she believes the main purpose of her work is to empower people.

“When you move from a learner’s to a restricted licence, it’s really an empowering experience. Sometimes after a student passes, we all dance and hug and kiss and I just know that it’s a huge success for them. At the end of the day it does change somebody’s life.”

Odetta feels at home with other migrants and refugees and one thing she loves about her business is that it introduces her to people from many different cultures. At the current count, she has taught people of more than 30 ethnicities. This can often present challenges. However, Odetta has learnt to cater to different cultural expectations, in particular responding to different gender roles.

“Many women are not able to take lessons with a male instructor. Sometimes when I teach a man, his wife will come along to watch. Particularly with Muslim women as well, when I teach them their husbands will ride along and watch. It’s a bit of fun and I never feel uncomfortable.”

In spite of the challenges she has faced, Odetta has an overwhelmingly positive attitude, and she believes this may be an attribute which has helped her to succeed.

“I just think life will be easier if everyone is positive. If you don’t open up to people, you’ll never learn their language. If you don’t smile at anyone, noone will smile back at you. And if you don’t greet people, noone can reply.”

Odetta knows that many other migrants face the same language barriers she faced when she first arrived in New Zealand. She recommends taking every opportunity to learn English, whether it is being brave enough to talk to someone or reading the road code. She also advises other immigrants to think creatively when it comes to their career paths.

“Everyone I met was always talking about what they used to do and complaining that they couldn’t do it anymore. Maybe you have to change course, but if you stick with the skills you already have, it isn’t as hard. I couldn’t teach in schools anymore, but I found another way to teach and I’m really happy. I will be teaching my whole life.”

MIGRANT WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROJECT

OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Background

Auckland is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world. In recent years its population has changed rapidly and the region has benefited from an influx of skilled migrants.

More than half of these immigrants are women. They arrive predominantly in New Zealand as wives and partners to principal skilled or business category migrants. But they also arrive as international students, academics, family members, and refugees.

These women are often a rich source of skills, knowledge, and international connections. However, they are an under-utilised source of talent and migrant women are more likely to experience specific barriers in the job market.

Instead, many find employment by becoming involved in small to medium-sized businesses.

This is reflected in the comparatively high rate of migrant small and medium enterprise (SME) ownership in Auckland.

Project Partnership

This project is one of several under the Connect Economic Value goal of the Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy, Auckland's interagency platform on migrant settlement¹.

¹ 2009-2014 Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy and Auckland Settlement Action Plan: 2010/11 Action Review, the Department of Labour.

The goal focuses on activities that strengthen the quality of migrant and refugee contributions to Auckland's economic growth. The action is jointly led by the Office of Ethnic Affairs as part of a wider collaboration with migrant and host communities.

The Office of Ethnic Affairs has strong networks with migrant women from diverse ethnic backgrounds and helps to promote the expertise and connections of ethnic communities to further New Zealand's economic growth.

Project Overview

The Migrant Women and Entrepreneurship (MWE) project seeks to build engagement among and between migrant women and host communities that will encourage a supportive business environment.

Objectives

The project aims to:

- provide a catalyst for the development of migrant women's networks
- connect migrant business women to mainstream women's business networks
- showcase migrant women's businesses and their contribution to the economy, and
- identify ways to build knowledge of enterprise options and business opportunities.

Framework

The project, through a series of case studies, seeks to understand the challenges encountered by first generation migrant women and their experiences of settling in a new country and establishing fledgling enterprises.

The case studies contribute to the project by highlighting the professional and personal journeys of seven migrant women. The exercise captures the individual barriers experienced by these women as they work to build their enterprises into sustainable businesses. Their stories are being shared more widely through workshops with migrant women and mainstream audiences and with the publication of this booklet, *Trailblazers*.

Key Outcomes of the Initiative

The project:

- is an output of the Auckland Regional Settlement Strategy's new *Goal 2.3 Migrant Entrepreneurship* activity and a key regional activity that places a lens on migrant women and enterprises
- establishes a network intended to motivate migrant women and host networks to continue development
- encourages wider opportunities through better knowledge and ties between host and migrant communities.

Case Study Overview

A total number of seven participants were selected for the portrait and interview process. To ensure a wide representation within the sample size, women interviewed for this project were selected from diverse ethnicities and regions of origin: Asia, Africa, Middle East, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.

Criteria for the selection included successful first generation women entrepreneurs of ethnic backgrounds, aged 18 and over, who were permanent residents or New Zealand citizens, who consented to and were committed to, the various stages of the MWE project.

The selection focused on migrant business women whose entrepreneurial endeavours illustrate positive business practices and offer the potential to inspire and motivate other migrant women.

Project Synopsis

The women interviewed for the MWE project have lived in New Zealand for more than 10 years. Their experiences encompass the early years of New Zealand as an emerging 'immigration destination' to its present day as an established country of settlement. Their stories also document the change in attitude towards recent migrants in New Zealand.

While participants selected for the MWE case studies are successful business entrepreneurs, their experiences do not necessarily reflect those of other migrant women currently seeking to start up or run their own business or who may not have had success in the first instance.

The case studies portray the opportunities and the challenges faced by new migrants, especially in the early years of settlement when differences in social, educational and cultural backgrounds may be pronounced.

Globally, numbers of women in the workforce have increased over the last few decades with part-time and contractual work, flexible working arrangements, and dual career households. In a similar fashion, the numbers of ethnic women in the workforce have soared, yet their employment experiences are frequently quite different from women of the majority culture². Many ethnic women face the prospect of being differentiated on the basis of factors such as skin colour and physiological appearance, making it a challenge to secure work in line with their skills and qualifications³.

There are further challenges when first generation women migrants have to juggle the demands of their young and growing families, infants, and aging dependants, who are simultaneously facing the demands and challenges of settling in a new country. The difficulties of finding meaningful employment and gaining recognition of overseas skills and education often further compound the financial hardships experienced by migrant women and their families.

Therefore it may be no surprise to find an exceptional level of resilience emerges from these first generation women migrants.

This resilience includes a deep-seated commitment to making New Zealand their new home combined with a strong desire not to let the differences in educational, cultural, or social systems become a barrier in their professional progression.

² Pio, Edwina.(2008). *Threads of constraint: ethnic minority migrant women and employment*.

³ Ibid.

The capacity to develop new opportunities, utilising a combination of well-established skill-sets and evolving competencies is a crucial sustaining factor within their business endeavours.

Is enough being done to use the skills of migrant women?

These case studies provide convincing examples of rich sources of skills, knowledge, and international connections that are available from migrant women.

Ensuring these skills are used and valued is not straightforward. Migrant women arrive in the country with variable educational, financial, professional, and linguistic capabilities.

To maximise the opportunities, a substantial effort and multi-faceted strategy needs to be implemented which includes early identification of migrant women with potential entrepreneurial capabilities and follow-through with initiatives to ensure business success is encouraged.

One in four New Zealanders was born overseas. In Auckland, the figure is one in three⁴. Accordingly, there is a clear business need to respond to the implications of New Zealand's multi-ethnic demographic change.

It is now more important than ever to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution, resilience, and success of migrant women entrepreneurs – the 'trailblazers' in New Zealand.

⁴ Census 2006, Statistics New Zealand.

www.ethnicaffairs.govt.nz



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