



Caregiver Connections

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HIGH COST OF LOOKING AFTER OTHERS' KIDS

(An excerpt from *Toronto Star* issued on January 3, 2009- By: Lesley Ciarula Taylor, Immigration Reporter)

Filipina nannies support their own families back home and find they are estranged when their children come here

Vicky Policarpio left her son when he was 20 months old to come to Toronto and look after someone else's kids. It took her 11 years to bring her boy here.

Judy Gonzalez minded twins in Toronto from the time they were born while her four children, the youngest just turned 3, grew up in the Philippines with a succession of relatives.

When Maria Castro finally reunited with her three children, 11 years after she left them to work as a nanny first in Israel and then in Toronto, her daughter arrived with a grandson in tow and another on the way.

Amid a few tears and a great deal of resilience, the three university-educated former nannies describe the heartbreak of years spent with just a fragile telephone link to their families – and the unexpected, searing pain of reunion with teenaged strangers often angry and wounded by those long years apart.

"I asked my little girl on the phone what she remembered of her mommy and she said, 'Nothing,'" says Gonzalez, 41. "It was hard financially to go home but I did it once a year, just to get a smile back on her face." She called twice a week. "We love them, but the only way we can show it is by phone." Her children arrived last April at her home in Pickering. That little girl is 10 now.

Policarpio's son hid in his room when he first arrived in west-end Toronto at age 13 and wore a hoodie pulled tight around his face. His eyes followed his mother around a room, alert and wary. "I hated that hood," says Policarpio, 45. "I had my sisters here, so I could do my crying behind his back." When finally they argued it out, the teenager said he, too, would get up during the night and cry for his old home. "What we realize now is that these kids we are sacrificing for are being victimized," Policarpio says. "The first stage of reunification is very hard."

Castro's children were in their twenties when they finally reunited with their mother and father in North York. There was so much conflict and tension that "I felt like giving up and leaving," Castro says. "You can't imagine the pain."

Filipino teenagers, many of them raised by relatives and transplanted in their most volatile years, have one of the highest school dropout rates in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. From a culture that prizes a university education, second-generation Filipinos are doing badly compared to other immigrants, Statistics Canada reports, based on the 2006 census.

There are 20,000 live-in caregivers in Canada, many of them Filipinas. Almost 2,500 women leave the Philippines every day to work around the world as nannies, companions and cleaners, sending money home to children, husbands, brothers and sisters who depend on that cash to eat.

"The choice we have is to die with a hungry stomach or get out," Gonzalez says.

The average separation is eight years.

"We are the lucky ones," Policarpio says. The three women are working now in accounting or business administration and counsel Filipina nannies shattered by their loneliness or their estranged families through the newly created Caregiver Connection. "Some of them are working three jobs," she says. "Even when their own children come, there is no time to bond. It's clear that some children aren't getting the guidance they need. We hear heartbreaking stories."

Gonzalez and Policarpio praise their former employers, families who encouraged them to go back to school, who didn't make them work around-the-clock and provided work for relatives when they moved on.

Even so, they criticize Canada's live-in caregiver program for indenturing women and treating them "like a transaction between rich and poor countries," in Policarpio's words.



Bong Castro and her family

High Cost Cont'd.

Women aren't allowed to change employers or go to school, she says. If they lose their jobs, they lose their status and their paycheque deductions.

"Lots and lots of caregivers can't get out of the house. They have degrees back home, but they can't upgrade their skills."

Gonzalez says the nanny experience is "totally opposite to what we dream will happen. I hated myself. I used to ask myself, 'Why am I deprived of watching my girl grow up? Why am I looking after someone else's children?' But I had to deal with it."

It's a guilt and an anger they share. "It's why we develop an attachment to the children we look after," Castro says. "Whenever I would hold any child, I would think I was holding my own child. I looked after them as if they were my own because my own were so far away."

Martha Ocampo, a long-time advocate of caregivers' rights who runs a weekly support group for nannies, says children "are left to fend for themselves" when they get here.

"They get into drug use, gangs. They're bullied at school for their English. They assert themselves and answer back. They're not the kids their mothers thought they would be."

Their mothers are different, too: independent breadwinners who long ago abandoned their traditional submissive roles.

Castro, 49, advocates an immigration policy that lets nannies "come as immigrants and choose their own employers and bring their families. Eliminate the live-in clause and let women choose for themselves."

"We need to let this community know these women can be good citizens of Canada," Gonzalez says. Was it worth it?

"When we look back, the pain is no longer there."

Policarpio's son is now 17. "I've said to him, 'Michael, when you have your own family, let me go back home then. I will take my rest.'"

Caregivers Connection New Board of Directors

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- Vice-President** Cheryl Ibale
- Secretary** Johnalyn Firmeza
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- Bong Castro Edna Tiozen
- Mila Mariano Vicky Policarpio

Dear Ate Nitz...

Q. I have been working as live in caregiver under LCP for 19 months, I went home for vacation and when I came back to Canada, I found out that I am pregnant. Fortunately, I will be able to complete the 24 months live-in care giving work and I can submit my application for permanent residence before I give birth. Am I entitled to Canada Child Tax Benefit after birth of my child in Canada even I am not yet a permanent resident?

A. *Yes you are. If you have lived in Canada for a minimum of 18 months and have a valid work permit in the 19th month you can apply for Canada Child Tax Benefit. However, if "Does not confer status" is stated in your work permit, you are not eligible for this benefit even if you met the residency requirement.*

Other eligibility requirements are:

- a.) *you must live with your child*
- b.) *you are the primary caregiver of the child, means you are responsible for the care and upbringing of your child, makes decision for him like health care and education*

You can also apply for this benefit as soon as the child is born and as soon as your child starts to live with you provided that he/she is below 18 years of age. When you apply for Canada Child Tax Benefit, processing includes National Child Benefit Supplement and Universal Child Care Benefit.

Q. My work permit has expired Jan 31, 2009 and I overlooked its expiry date. I was not able to apply for extension of my work permit and my friends are telling me that I will be sent back home since I am now out of status. Is this true? What should I do now to be in status again?

A. *No, that is not true. Upon expiry of your work permit, you have 90 days to apply for restoration of your status and extension of work permit. This will cost you \$350.00 because restoration costs \$200.00 and work permit is \$150.00. However, if you failed to apply for above-mentioned application after the 90 day period, your status is no longer restorable and this time CIC will advise you to go back to your country of origin. For further assistance with this application call Caregiver Connections.*

EDUCATIONAL MEETING WITH IMMIGRATION LAWYER MAC SCOTT

People flocked to attend the Caregiver Connections' educational meeting with Mac Scott, an immigration lawyer whose expertise includes the LCP. Caregivers who are hungry for information and answers to their long standing questions, expressed their frustrations and the abuse they're experiencing from employers who are exploiting and taking advantage of their temporary working contract. Mac Scott not only provided them answers to their questions, he also provided more information on how to find ways to resolve their problems. It was a very interactive session where one question led to another and another until the meeting ended.

The crowd expressed a collective sigh of dismay when it was announced that the speaker had to go for another meeting. Obviously there were many more unanswered questions, so Mac was kind enough to offer another day to meet with the group in the very near future.

Did you know that you can sue agencies who are charging placement fees? "That's illegal", said Mr. Scott. He stated that you can sue the agency who is charging exorbitant placement fee within two years of occurrence of the said issue. Another two big concerns brought by the caregivers was the rumour about a) phasing out (scrapping) the Live in Caregiver Program and b) those newly arrived caregivers' are no longer eligible to apply for permanent residency.

Mr. Scott stated that as of now, such changes are still just rumours because to his knowledge there have been no new changes with the immigration policy concerning LCP. This was further backed by the information given by Deanna Okun-Nachoff, Barrister & Solicitor from the West Coast Domestic Workers' Association (a non-profit organization for caregivers from Vancouver) who supports Caregiver Connections



In relation to this issue, caregivers who are applying to come to Canada must apply through the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) and not as Temporary Worker. A person who comes in under the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) and completes 24 months as a live-in caregiver are eligible to apply for permanent residency while a person who comes under a Temporary Worker permit will not be eligible to apply for permanent residency even if the person works as a caregiver and completes 24-months employment. Be sure that in your application, your occupation title is **Live-in Caregiver** and not as Nanny or Domestic Worker or Babysitter.

In his closing remarks, Mac Scott encouraged the caregivers to continue to be aware and assert their rights but he also promised to provide his support in advocating to the Canadian government for caregivers to be accepted to Canada as permanent residents.

CAREGIVER CONNECTIONS AT INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (IWD)



International Women's Day (IWD) is a celebration of the many victories and the continuing struggle for equality of women all over the world.

Women from all walks of life celebrate this day every March 8. On Saturday, March 7th, members of the Caregiver Connections met for breakfast before proceeding to attend the IWD rally at OISE, 252 Bloor St West. Organized by Women Working with Immigrant Women, the group joined the march under a pouring rain which ended at Ryerson University.

