



**United Way**



## **Overcoming isolation alongside other immigrant women**

**Mariya was able to meet new people through training and volunteering.**

“I was born in Kazakhstan, in a village called Merké, where I lived until I was 16. Then, I left to study medicine, and I met my husband, who is from Azerbaijan. He was studying in France at that time, and I went to join him. We then decided to emigrate to Canada, and we arrived in 2016.

The first challenge when you emigrate is the absence of family, relatives and friends who you leave behind. I find it challenging to make new friends here. Family, love and friendship are values that are very important to me. I wish we could be more considerate of the people around us and kinder to all living things.

I came into contact with a United Way-funded organization that provides services to immigrants when I saw an advertisement on social media to recruit ‘intermediaries.’ At first, I thought it was a paid job, but I soon found out that it was a volunteer position. I was still interested because it would allow me to work with immigrant women and families. I would also receive training that would be useful to me.



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More than that, this experience allowed me to overcome isolation and depression. The training I received also gave me a better understanding of the society where I now live. It helped me to feel at home. I met wonderful people and felt useful.

Through that role, I was able to learn about Quebec society and the services offered by various organizations. As an intermediary, I might act as an interpreter during board meetings or during parent-teacher conferences. I could also, for example, help someone fill out a form or find activities for the children.

I think this training should be offered to most immigrant women. Usually, it is the men who go to work in the new country first. But thanks to the training, women can improve their French and learn how to look for a job or write a resume. And this can benefit the whole family.

My work experience is over now, but I am still called upon when needed. As they say in this organization, 'once an intermediary, always an intermediary.' We are like a big family."



## **Social commitment, an economic necessity**

**Yannick believes that all of society benefits from charitable giving.**



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“Social engagement is a very important thing in my family. It was impressed upon us early on, as my parents were very involved in their community. My sister and I participated in student movements at college and university. When I entered the workforce, my first job was with an community organization supported by the United Way.

This social commitment carries over into all areas of my life: at work, in my neighbourhood and with my family. So it’s not just a matter of altruism because I benefit from it, if only by the satisfaction I derive from it.

When I first got a paycheck, I found it natural to give to local organizations or causes that I felt strongly about. Then, little by little, as my means increased, I gave a little more.

As a trained economist, I see the world through that prism. I believe it is in our common interest to reduce social inequality, because it touches us all in some way, regardless of our income level. We have all experienced difficulties or known someone close to us struggling with mental illness, addiction or other issues.

With the pandemic, the divide between rich and poor has become even starker, which means that we need to provide more support to vulnerable people. To do this, we must either pay taxes so that the state can take care of them or increase our financial support to community organizations. One way or another, each of us must give a helping hand. Otherwise, we run the risk of worsening social problems.

When I make a donation, whatever the cause, I need to know that it will reach the intended beneficiaries. As an individual donor, I found it challenging to choose organizations that reflected my values and to judge their effectiveness. But United Way does that for me. In giving to United Way, I know that the money will be used in the best way possible to meet the needs in my community. That’s why I ended up consolidating all my small individual donations into one amount for United Way and signing up for the payroll deduction program offered by my employer.

On a personal level, my son has autism and, like many children with this condition, he needs special services to help him socialize and become independent in his daily life. By giving to the United Way, I know that my donation goes back to my son through the United Way-funded agencies that help him.

I think it’s essential to be more responsive and more rooted in our community. When we connect more closely with people around us, it creates more vibrant schools and neighbourhoods and improves our human environment. Everybody wins!”