



## CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

### Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence

The following case study illustrates how Shift – a prevention of violence initiative based out of the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Social Work ([www.preventdomesticviolence.ca](http://www.preventdomesticviolence.ca)) – overcame policy and collective agreement limitations to help young professional immigrant women secure their first Canadian job placements.

The University of Calgary is one of Alberta’s Top Employers, employing 1,800+ academic and 3,200+ non-academic staff across 14 faculties and 5 campuses.<sup>6</sup> Its Shift initiative drives social change with its aim to advance a primary prevention approach to stop violence before it starts. The team’s work is built on four pillars – research, capacity building, knowledge integration and policy & systems change.

Shift played a key role in expanding the University’s talent pool by introducing 12-14-week “Immigrant Bridging Program Work Experience Placements” into its collective agreement. These placements were generally funded from outside the university and in partnership with several local immigrant serving agencies, like the Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association (<https://www.ciwa-online.com/>).

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### Why Youth Matter to Shift?



Shift acknowledges that domestic violence is a complex issue that impacts many parts of the population – including youth. In many cases, young immigrant women can struggle to leave situations of domestic violence because they cannot support themselves financially. Offering job placements is one way that Shift has helped young immigrant women get economic independence. Placements within the university provide valuable Canadian work experience along with mentorship and learning opportunities.

Introducing newcomers into the university talent pool also serves to increase its diversity and build a broader pipeline for other work assignments throughout the organization.

## Shift's Challenge: Administrative and logistical hurdles

Shift faced a number of significant challenges in securing work placements:

- The University of Calgary is a unionized environment. Collective agreements didn't include such placements, and changes could be made to the agreements only during designated bargaining periods.
- There was no understanding of how the Immigrant Bridging Programs are regulated by the Income and Employment Supports Act<sup>7</sup> and how they fit into the unionized environment.
- It was challenging to get buy-in from Human Resource managers as the funding for workplace placements came with conditions around the pay and benefits for the interns and they were not in accordance with the collective agreement.
- There was lack of administrative capacity along with competing priorities which prevented the processing of work placements.
- University departments were not familiar with this type of program and its benefits.



### DID YOU KNOW...

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**Immigration is a driving force in meeting Canada's labour force needs:**

immigrants account for 2/3 of Canada's population growth. According to StatsCan 2016 Census data, immigrants are a highly educated labour force: over half of recent immigrants have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 17% hold a master's or doctorate degree. Close to 1/3 of refugees who became permanent residents in Canada upgraded their educational credentials after arriving in the country. In comparison, of Canadians who are Canadian-born, 24% have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 5% hold a master's degree.



## Shift's Approach:

Shift's Project Manager, Elena Esina, took a personalized approach to getting things done and employed a number of key strategies, including:

- > Understanding legislation and policies related to the Immigrant Bridging Programs and building capacity of relevant centralized departments about the regulation of such placements and their fit within a unionized environment.
- > Identifying allies in departments that played a key role in providing approvals for placements (for example, Human Resources eventually designated responsibilities to an HR Recruiter to implement placements).
- > Spending time with department managers to explain how the candidate's skills and experience could provide immediate value to the department and organization.
- > Collaborating with community agencies to find solutions that can support long-term vision (for example, during first placements, the community agency temporarily put the placements on their own payroll providing time to create necessary processes at the University).

**Over the years, Elena facilitated many of the successful work placements at Shift and supported others in understanding the process. She worked shoulder to shoulder with interested department managers and Professors to overcome bureaucratic and administrative hurdles and provide the necessary support to work their way through the placement process.**

### DID YOU KNOW...

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Since 2004, western Canada has seen a rise of landed immigrants by 62% and, as of 2013, Alberta surpassed British Columbia with the number of settling immigrants, making Alberta the third most popular province for newcomers.<sup>8</sup> It is estimated that Calgary's immigrant population will amount to nearly half a million by 2020<sup>9</sup> with a growing number of economic immigrants each year.<sup>10</sup>



## Shift's Lessons for Success

### > Messaging is key

To engage potential employers, they must understand “what’s in it for them”. It’s important to tailor messaging to the audience, especially in an environment where change happens more slowly.

### > You can’t do it alone

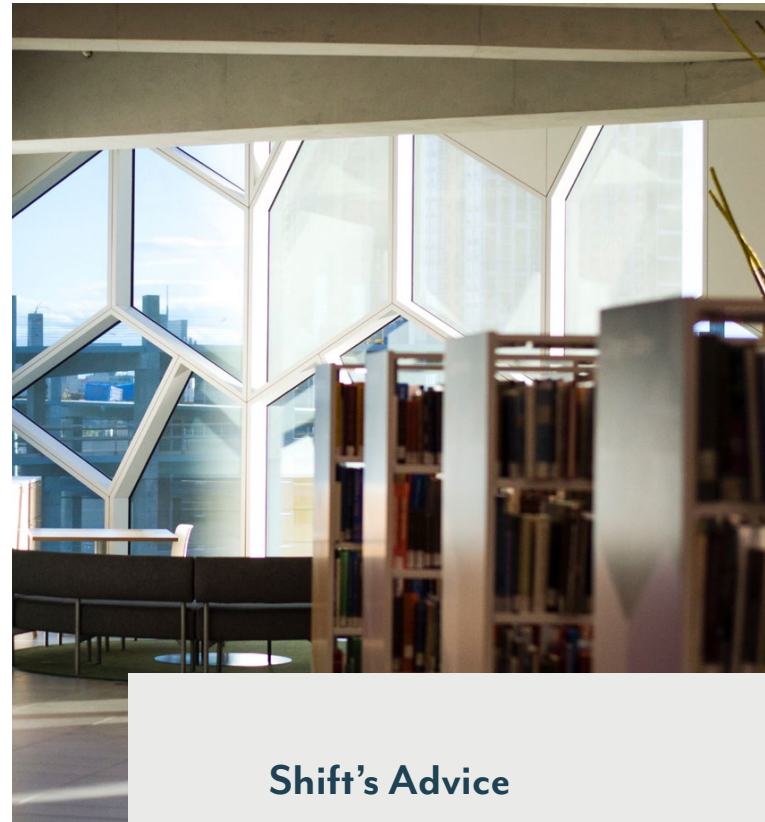
Shift has experienced many successes with very few resources. To increase its overall reach, Shift may have to focus on expanding its partner network to bring in needed support. When scaling initiatives, it is important to develop a network of administrative supports, logistics supports, and interdepartmental allies who can vouch for the program and its benefits.

### > Be ready to work with others, for others

In conjunction with the previous lesson, Elena learned that, to increase workplace placements, she had to provide significant supervision and administrative support to both the university and the community agencies. Key to success is having the organization believe in the initiative, see the impact it can have and be willing to provide significant administrative support at all stages.

### > Work placement “graduates” can turn into excellent champions

As of 2019, nearly 75% of all work placements turned into employment – over half at the university. These individuals can now act as champions, helping to cascade and lobby, increase buy-in, and be the focal point of success stories that can be shared with other departments and other universities to demonstrate the benefits of the program and inspire them to embrace it.



## Shift's Advice



“In order to support immigrants to secure work placements at the University, we needed to be passionate, patient and persistent.”

– Elena Esina,  
Shift Project Manager