

## **Jessy: My Work Feeds my Soul**

Jessy Scaria has worked for twelve years at Gordon Neighbourhood house, where she has many responsibilities, including reception, payroll, accounting, assisting the operations manager, planning seniors out trips, organizing workshops and special event lunches, and more. She shared her story in March 2015, starting with her arrival in Canada from India, via Dubai, in 2003. Jessy explained, “Out of all the cities in Canada, we chose Vancouver because we didn’t know anybody here. We wanted to come to a place where we didn’t know anybody so that we could have an adventure. Back home in India, family is such an important part of every stage in your life, so we decided to see what we could do for ourselves - to see if we could survive without constant family support. We said, ‘Let’s move, let’s try a new country!’ It wasn’t easy to move because we’d lived in Dubai for many years and were comfortable there, but we did it.” Jessy and her husband didn’t have to think twice about which neighbourhood to settle in. Jessy stated, “We both grew up in cities and we wanted that buzz in our lives to keep going. We didn’t think we would enjoy the suburbs, so we said, ‘Let’s move right to the heart of downtown.’ When we arrived, we began looking for different places to learn about resumes and job search. At ISS they told us, ‘There is a neighbourhood house really close to where you live.’ It was so hard to find this place though - I walked by it many times! Finally I phoned and found out that the neighbourhood house was right in the middle of the garden area and that’s how I came here - that’s how I got started.”

Jessy completed a two week job search employment program at GNH and just as the program finished a maternity leave program assistant position came open. She recalled, “After I finished the program, the director downstairs asked, ‘Would you like to work here at the neighbourhood house?’ I thought, ‘Sure! I love this place!’ All fifteen clients who had taken the program with me also applied, we had interviews, and we did a few tests. I got the job and the rest is history. I’ve been here twelve years now. GNH was the right place for me, for sure! As long we are in Vancouver, I will stay at GNH. Everybody’s so great – the people who come in and all the staff - we’re family, especially Linda and Agata who have been here as long as I have. For a long time we lived just a couple of blocks away from GNH and I used to walk to work every day, which was perfect.”

Working at the NH represented a new career for Jessy. In India and Dubai, she had worked in high end hotels. She explained, “In the hospitality industry, it was all about money. When I moved here I thought to myself, ‘I should just work with normal people, where money doesn’t dictate all the terms.’ However, I had no experience with this kind of work! I didn’t even know that this kind of place existed to provide so many services to so many different people. In India, there’s nothing like this. In Dubai - forget it! It’s just really amazing; I’m so glad I found GNH.”

Looking back over her years with GNH, Jessy finds that it’s the “small things” that matter most. She elaborated, “For me, small events are big things in my life. If I can make somebody feel that this is a place that they can come to feel safe, and feel comfortable talking to somebody, or if I can just listen and give them an ear or a shoulder to cry on, that’s something big for me.” She continued, “Every single moment of my life here at Gordon House is a small achievement in a certain way. I try bring a smile to someone’s face at least a couple of times a day. Or, say somebody doesn’t have money to buy lunch - then I’ll just pay for their lunch. If a person has any issue, they may come to chat and I will always make time. Even if I’m with Paul, I just excuse myself for ten minutes and sit with them anytime. Or if somebody needs something – for example, there was a senior here the other day. She came in here because she was completely lost. I saw her sitting in the lobby and asked if she needed anything. She said was looking for a phone book. I got the phone book and she asked me to read out a number she had written on a piece of paper. I read the number to her and then asked her whose number it was; she

said it was her own number! I asked, 'Why do you want to call your number?' It turned out that she wanted to call her residence to find out the address because she was disoriented. She told me, 'I've been walking for an hour or so, completely lost.' I suggested that she tell me something about the place she lived and then I would take her home, but she couldn't, so I just sat and drank coffee with her, and talked with her. While we were talking, the name of her street suddenly dawned on her! Then I took her home. Small-small things like that mean a lot to me. When I think of people like that, I think of my parents. They are back home, they have family around them, and my husband and I visit every year but, you know, when I see elderly people I think about how they could be my mom or dad!" Jessy added, "I don't have any major achievements in my life, but I have these small things that I carry on. People say, 'work is to get money.' I say, 'my work feeds my soul.' It really does. I really enjoy the small moments."

Jessy described some of the changes that have taken place at GNH over the years: "Previously, everything was routine, you just came here, did your job, and went on day to day. We enjoyed our job, but we took things for granted. But with our new director there's always something new happening! I come in the morning and I'm like, 'Okay, what is going on now?!' It is nice because he thinks out of the box so you never know what is coming next - that is the thrilling part of it. It's so fun and much more fast paced than before. I would never have imagined that we would start urban farming in a small plot at the back of the house! Now we have so many things growing there and also in a few other plots. I think Gordon House is now just beginning to grow. It's amazing when people say, 'Oh, Gordon House!' I like it that now people know that there's a place called Gordon Neighbourhood House. Suddenly we are in focus! It is really, really exciting. I'm sure it will lead us to something wonderful. We have a great leader and it's fantastic. For me, the best part is that I don't ever have to hesitate to discuss anything with him because I know he values what we have to say. He always gives our ideas careful thought, and then he'll say, 'Okay, let's do it!' That is really, really encouraging, you know? He's very nice like that. The staff have great discussions that bring our big team together, so that's really amazing. Agata, Linda, and I always joke about how long Paul is going to be here before somebody else just grabs him and takes him away!"

Jessy also reflected on some of the changes that she has undergone as a result of GNH's influence. She offered that, in terms of her personal development, she has learned to be less judgemental and also become more confident. She described these changes in turn: "One important thing I've learned is not to pass judgement on people. In the beginning, I would see people coming here for programs and saying they have no money, and I'd be thinking, 'How can you afford cigarettes but you can't pay two dollars for the drop-in?' In India or Dubai, you wouldn't go to a place and then say that you have no money. But then I realized that the things people go through are bigger than what you can see, there's a lot more beyond that. So I've stopped judging people. That was a huge thing for me." She continued, "I've also become more confident in myself. I'm a very shy person. I could never talk during a meeting. Never. The first thing I said when I started working here was, 'Please don't ever put me in a place where I have to talk.' Even if it was a meeting with just two people, I would never talk. I was always at the back of the house; I didn't like to come up front and do anything. I would stay in the back, and I was very happy if people didn't recognize me. I didn't even want people to come to me and say I did a good job - I couldn't handle it! Recently, I've started talking. I bring up points and Paul's said, 'Oh, I notice a change in you.' I don't want people to draw attention to me, but I've really changed - I've gotten self confidence." She concluded, "Every day you learn through different small, small steps. Every day you grow, and you should want to grow."

When asked about her contribution to Gordon Neighbourhood House, Jessy replied, "Myself. When I'm here, I live, eat, and breathe Gordon House. I never think of my family when I'm here. I never take my

husband's call or do my personal stuff when I'm here. It's all about what I can do to make this place even better for people. It's like my house. When I know that people are coming to the house, I make sure the lobby looks good, if I can. For me, it's personal. I spend eight to ten hours every day here, so it's like I live here. And GNH means a lot to me. Sometimes I come really early in the morning and clean - not because I have nothing to do, but because somebody has to do it and I know that when others come in later they will feel good. A few years ago, I was working downstairs and I noticed that the floor was very dirty. It was a rainy day and there were lots of leaves and water on the floor in the lobby. Actually, it really upsets me when people don't take care of stuff like that. I started mopping the floor because, as I said, I take GNH as my house. Then somebody from a program taking place upstairs came in and told me, "Hey, you don't get paid to mop the floor, Jessy!" That comment and the attitude behind it upset me, but I didn't say anything because I was afraid I might say something in anger. Probably I care too much and should learn to just let go. That is my next step - learning to let go." Jessy concluded, "The thing is that when I'm here, I give my whole self. I have so much love in my life, so that's what I want to give back to people. I know there's a lot of love lacking in this neighbourhood and in society generally. So I can give love. At GNH we're always doing something for somebody - we care. I'm sure we have touched many families' lives. I really have a good life."