

## **CHAMPION IN FIGHT TO HAVE INTERNATIONAL CREDENTIALS RECOGNIZED RECEIVES WOMEN OF LABOUR AWARD**

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It took six years, but Anita Dhawan's successful challenge to have Toronto's York University recognize her international academic credentials permanently changed admission policies for foreign-trained professionals entering teachers college.

Today, Anita is a librarian and ESL teacher whose influence reaches far beyond the classroom to help teachers and community leaders take action on human rights and equity issues. On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, she was presented with the first annual Women of Labour Award by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council in conjunction with its Women's Committee.

Anita arrived in Canada with a Masters degree in linguistics, having taught at a college in India where she was born. When she applied for teacher's college in 1993, York University insisted that she complete an undergraduate degree to qualify here. Anita refused to take one course and continued to challenge the admission policies for the next six years. As a result, the university made changes in its admission policies that have benefited many new Canadians.

In every type of institution, there are systemic inequalities, says Ms. Dhawan. We need to acknowledge and validate them, then set to work to do something about them. Anita has written and reviewed school curriculum and developed workshops to train teachers and others throughout Ontario on how to teach equity in classrooms. A mother of two children herself, she has co-authored resources for elementary schools to address issues relating to a variety of equity issues.

It's not enough to teach young people to support charities, food banks and the homeless. Young people need to understand why these conditions exist, and that they will only have done a good job when food banks and homelessness are eradicated, says Anita. In her job at Lord Roberts Junior Public School, she holds a weekly Girl's Group to discuss these and other topics such as violence against women, women's history and the labour movement's role in addressing social injustices. She also organizes school activities for Heritage Day, International Women's Day, Ability/Disability forums and essay-writing contests for peace and equality.

I encourage students and adults to change things, not just for themselves, but for others as well she says. What are we doing in the world if we're not here to change it. It's our duty to serve.

Along with raising money for Breast Cancer Research and United Way efforts, Anita finds time to volunteer at a Toronto Women's Shelter, Westminster Church's Out of The Cold program and her local food bank. She says she is deeply honoured to receive the Women of Labour Award as an active member of the Elementary Teachers of Toronto union.

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