

WEST EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND TRAINING (WEST)

WEST finds the right fit for employers and employees

Ilham always enjoyed math. From an early age, she had a confidence with numbers and math was her favourite subject in high school. When Ilham graduated from a post-secondary accounting program, she found there was interest from employers, but no job offers.

“It was so discouraging, I heard so often ‘she’s got potential, but we can’t take the time to train her if someone else has the experience,’” says Ilham.

A friend of Ilham’s told her about the West Employment Services and Training (WEST) program at West Neighbourhood House. When Ilham called, she was put in touch with a WEST staff member who helped Ilham explore options and opportunities.

In addition to resume and cover letter writing support, mock job interviews, and one-on-one guidance, WEST staff introduced Ilham to new opportunities to help her get more experience in the field. “She was very persistent on my behalf,” says Ilham.

This included connecting her to West Neighbourhood House’s Financial Empowerment and Problem-Solving (FEPS) program where Ilham became a volunteer. By volunteering with FEPS,

grateful, it’s so good to have someone remind you of your strengths,” says Ilham.

In March, Ilham landed a temporary placement accounting position with Career Edge. “While it was really important [to me] to find a job in my field, it was also really important that the work culture fits ... and Career Edge fits,” says Ilham. Within her first week of placement, Career Edge was so impressed with Ilham, they hired her as a full-time staff accountant.

Throughout Ilham’s job search, WEST staff offered tailored services that were responsive to Ilham’s unique needs. When Ilham needed someone to take a chance on her, WEST helped her gain practical accounting experience and supported her transition to full-time employment by creating a paid placement at Career Edge.

In forgoing one-size-fits-all career services, WEST supports individuals and employers to find, in Ilham’s words, the right “fit.” For Ilham and her new employer, that was invaluable.



Ilham is right at home in her new work space at Career Edge, thanks to West Employment Services and Training.

Ilham gained practical experience while helping others navigate the tax system.

“I kept telling myself, you’ll get there. The [WEST staff] motivated me and helped keep my spirits up. I was so



Ellen Spears and her son Andy remember Lally Fleming's important role at West Neighbourhood House.

The two women who gave life to our music school

West Neighbourhood House's Music School has a long history. What began as the vision of two remarkable women has become a family legacy and a source of pride for community members.

Lally Fleming was the Head Worker at West Neighbourhood House from 1928 to 1933. "[My mother] was a true social worker, that's who she was," says Lally's daughter, Ellen Spears. Lally was driven by a passion to do what she could for others, taking on war guests during WWII and advocating for children and families all her life. In her role as Head Worker at what was then St. Christopher House, Lally was also a pioneer.

Lally saw the value of access to music from an early age. This value was something she shared with Helen Larkin who would become the first Music School Director. Helen had trained in music and was teaching

music at a school for girls, but it was public health that became a life-long mission for Helen. "Helen was a creative soul, and those who are creative see where the hurts are around them ... [in this way] I believe music is inseparable from health," says a relative of Helen's.

Both Helen and Lally knew how powerful music

could be in people's lives. Together, Lally and Helen created the Music School at St. Christopher House to share music with all those who needed it.

Nine decades later, West Neighbourhood House's Music School is one of Canada's longest running community music schools, sponsoring the first steel drum band in Canada and offering instruction in everything from marching bands to jazz music.

The Spears family and Helen Larkin's family are also still involved with West Neighbourhood House, including as very generous financial supporters. Both families continue to feel the impact of Lally's and Helen's commitment to others.

"West Neighbourhood House was always a part of our life," says Ellen. A relative of Helen Larkin adds, "ultimately it is about supporting the valuable work of West Neighbourhood House ... It is nice that it is in memory of Helen ... She continues to influence [us]."

Their support of West Neighbourhood House means more people will have access to music and community in decades to come, sharing the legacy of Helen Larkin and Lally Fleming with future generations.



The Music School offers individual classes in piano, guitar, violin, and voice for all ages and abilities.

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT AND PROBLEM-SOLVING PROGRAM (FEPS)

FEPS helps people go beyond the numbers, take control of their finances

Douglas recently became the primary caregiver for his two boys, aged 11 and 14. Very quickly, Douglas knew that caring for two busy kids would mean looking at his finances in a different way. He needed support to do his taxes and he had questions about saving for his sons.

Douglas soon discovered that West Neighbourhood House's Financial Empowerment and Problem-Solving (FEPS) program was about a lot more than just taxes. "They knew what I need[ed] and what I should be getting," says Douglas. It was by working with FEPS staff that Douglas realized he qualified for the full Canada Child Benefit.

Whether it's supporting seniors to make sense of changes to the tax code or helping parents plan for their children's future, FEPS provides financial

information and helps people to make informed decisions. At a community level, FEPS offers free workshops and advocates for changes to financial policies that adversely affect low-income people.

Ultimately, FEPS empowers people to take control of their financial lives.

Through FEPS, Douglas was able to file his taxes, but he also prepared the financial documents he needed to start looking for a bigger apartment and he started RESPs for his children's education. Douglas trusted FEPS to

help him get more from his personal resources and identify where he might be missing financial opportunities. "[Working with FEPS] took a big weight off of my shoulders," says Douglas.

More than 3,100 people were served by FEPS in 2018–19 and over \$5.4 million was brought back to the community. "People have an impression that tax services are just 'in and out' but we take the time to talk about all of the benefits [and options] available," says Tamara who has been the FEPS contact for Douglas. "It's about being able to look beyond the numbers and see the human story there," she says.

Like all West Neighbourhood House programming, FEPS aims to understand the unique strengths and stories of its clients and, in the end, this is what creates a lasting impact in their lives.



Douglas and FEPS staff worked to identify the options and benefits available to him as a father.



Get involved and make a difference in downtown west Toronto!

With six locations and over 35 programs serving all ages at West Neighbourhood House, there are many ways to share your time, talents, or other contributions to help make your community stronger and better for all.

When you *volunteer* with West Neighbourhood House, you join more than 1,000 volunteers who make over

14,000 lives better in downtown west Toronto. When you *donate* to West Neighbourhood House, you support the programming and community development work that strengthens this community and this city.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting positive personal change and progressive societal change.