

## Five Questions for Madina Wasuge

The New Leader of the City's Anti-Racism Efforts Has Big Dreams for Hamilton and Its Immigrants. As Executive Director of the Centre for Civic Inclusion, She Has Walked the Road She Will Help Others Travel.

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### **What will the Centre for Civic Inclusion actually do?**

We want to mobilize all Hamiltonians -- from the grassroots, to industry, to labour and institutions -- to create an inclusive city free of racism and hate through dialogue and partnerships. We want newcomers to integrate fully into life in our community, from employment, education, housing and health care, to accessing recreational programs. When you feel you belong, you have hope. But when you're isolated, you're not participating in society. It creates suffering and even mental health issues and the whole community loses out.

### **How will this translate into jobs?**

We'll focus on employment, not only for immigrants but for visible minorities too. We'll approach business and institutions to help them with recruitment. Most of the workforce will be coming from people who were not born here, people who are from visible minorities. I'm not saying a million jobs will be created in Hamilton but we will raise the awareness of employers and others to open their door.

### **Can dialogue accomplish all of this?**

When we talk to each other, we realize we have so much in common and we create a united community that respects diversity and practises equity. And we'll all have an opportunity to speak out against discrimination.

### **Why are you the person for this job?**

I came here as a newcomer. I'm from a visible minority. I walk this road. In my 14 years working with SISO, I've walked with people who are marginalized. And yet I've managed to build bridges with institutions like Employment Insurance, the school board, the police service. The dialogue with them is working.

### **One of the biggest problems for immigrants is the empty promises they're given abroad about their job prospects here. How do we address that?**

We're not looking for overnight change but it will make a big difference to help employers understand that diversity in hiring is a wise thing to do from a business perspective.

Interview by Sharon Boase

MADINA WASUGE, a 40-year-old mother of three, arrived here 15 years ago as a refugee from her native Somalia, leaving behind family, a medical career and her beloved homeland. She now leads the city's fight against racism as head of The Centre for Civic Inclusion. The centre is a marriage of the Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative and an immigrant resource centre at Settlement and Integration Services Organization (SISO). With a \$125,000 startup grant from the city and \$75,000 a year for three years from the Trillium Foundation, the centre is devoted to helping immigrants and refugees find their place in our community.

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