

# Group empowers immigrant women

Kiki Maragang doesn't count the hours she spends volunteering or consider her volunteer work as separate from the rest of her daily routine.

"It's just part of life," she says simply.

For the past 11 years, Maragang has been organizing an informal women's group as a way to help provide information and support to immigrant women in the Sudanese community.

"I love making a difference in the community. I want these women to do well and be successful," she says.

From scheduling facilitators and community outreach,

## One woman can make a difference

to picking up and driving women to group meetings, Maragang is working to ensure the group remains accessible and relevant to the women she's serving.

The inspiration to form a women's group came from her own immigrant and refugee experience. Her journey to Canada began in her home country of Sudan, then Egypt where stayed for eight years before finally arriving with her husband in 1998.

"We have high expectations because Canada is a wonderful country," she says.

Believing that life would become much easier, Mara-



gang and her husband were surprised by the difficulties and challenges they encountered. "We didn't know how hard it would be as immigrants. We didn't even know what the weather was like."

Her biggest challenge was the lack of information available to her as an immigrant, and like most immigrants, she also lacked much-needed English skills at the time. She discovered that in order to be successful in Canada, she needed to be open to learning new things.

"Sometimes if you're open-minded, you will learn and do better. But you have to be open-minded," Maragang emphasizes.

Determined to help others like herself, she began reaching out to those who were isolated or those who she felt needed the most help by encouraging them to get together to learn about issues like prenatal health, parenting in a Canadian context and more.

"Some people out there don't have any communication with anyone," she explains. "Some women don't get out. They're at home with the children all the time, so it's kind of a relief

for them to sit and talk to other women, get some information and express their feelings."

The specific focus on women, Maragang points out, is so that women feel comfortable and safe talking about issues that they wouldn't normally talk about in the presence of their own husbands or other men - like family violence.

The group meets once a month during the winter and once a week during the summer. Maragang estimates that there are about 15 to 20 Sudanese women currently involved. Some have participated since the group was first formed and others have recently joined, but all the women have some role in helping to make the group successful by supporting each other.

"Now we see that many of the women have become independent. That's why this group is very important for them," Maragang explains. "We have to do this because we see this as our responsibility to help make their life better."

Over the past five weeks, Volunteer Edmonton has been examining how city immigrants are making a positive impact on our communities. To read past articles on this topic or for more information about volunteering, visit [www.volunteeredmonton.com](http://www.volunteeredmonton.com).

For more information or to suggest a story idea, contact Evelyn Pham, Communications Co-ordinator, at [epham@volunteeredmonton.com](mailto:epham@volunteeredmonton.com), call 780-732-6655 or check out our website at [www.volunteeredmonton.com](http://www.volunteeredmonton.com).

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