

Hands-On Newcomer Grasps Alternative Career in Mining Water Treatment

Shahriar Shahnia is a hands-on guy.

A self-described handy man, this waste water treatment plant supervisor from Iran has never feared tackling big renovation projects in his own homes. That characteristic has helped on his path to an alternative career.

Welcome to British Columbia!

Shahnia came to the Lower Mainland with his family November 8, 2012. He brought almost 18 years of experience in industrial laboratories, in particular, an automobile manufacturing plant. His work began after a four-year degree in Biology. For eight years, he was a supervisor. He knew that it would be hard to get the same job.



Shahriar poses for a holiday photo with his family.

“When I first came here, I thought I could apply to any jobs related to the environment, regardless of the job title. This was totally false. When the job title is indicating an “engineering” position, you should be an engineer, not a biologist, to get a positive response from the people who are hiring.”

The Shahnia family landed in Vancouver and within a week, a friend connected him to a six-week renovation/demolition “almost-a-labourer” job. That led to other similar jobs. The work was physical and hard, but Shahnia didn’t mind. “Free English class, free workout,” he said.

On and off for about two years, Shahnia had more than 10 employers, several temporary jobs and gaps in between jobs. During those times, he applied to any environment-related job ads.

He considered his choices: he could pursue a career in construction where the goal would eventually mean being a general contractor, possibly for his own business. Or, he could try to get back to the water industry work he knew well. He realized work closer to his educational training and work experience would mean a better future.

Funding for this project from:

Learning about the B.C. Labour Market

This realization happened at the same time as a LINC for Employment (English for Work/EFW6) class assignment he had at the Immigrant Services Society (ISSofBC) in January of 2013. Shahnian was faced with an assignment: participate in an informational interview. He felt stuck.

“It was my responsibility to find someone but I couldn’t,” he admits. His teacher found an HR representative from a large municipal organization that manages water.

In the informational interview, Shahnian learned about the Environmental Operators Certification Program (EOCP) and was connected to an operator who had passed the exam.



Shahnian Shania in a 2016 selfie.

Getting the Certification

When the two met, Shahnian received additional information: in order to take the test, he would have to provide proof of 1,800 hours of work at a Class I wastewater treatment facility. The newcomer contacted his former employer in his home country and asked for documentation needed to submit to the EOCP. He also needed to prove his high school graduation. With some study, the former lab/treatment plant supervisor was able to pass the \$150.00 exam and achieve a Level 1 certification in April of 2014.

Getting Help with Job Search

With this valuable new distinction, Shahnian joined the Skills Connect for Immigrants program at ISSofBC. Here he learned to write his construction experience on his resume, something he hadn’t been doing.

In early 2015, Shahnian saw an ad for a position that seemed like a possibility for him. He was soon hired as a Water Treatment Plant Operator and began work in Brucejack Mine, a fly-in, fly-out gold mine near the B.C.-Alaska border. Every two weeks, he flies to Terrace and then buses to the camp for sixteen days of work. When that is complete, he flies back to the Lower Mainland for two weeks. The position has meant much greater financial stability and allowed him to use his skills.

The Future

The pathway remains under construction for this newcomer. Making progress since arriving in Canada has been challenging but, Shahnian has options. To see them, check Alternative Pathways in Life Sciences at <http://issbc.org/programs/career-services/impact-newcomers/>. Whatever pathway he chooses, Shahnian is ready to offer his knowledge and his hands-on skills in his field.

Funding for this project from: