

Committee: **London & Middlesex Housing Corporation / Housing Advisory Committee**

Organization/Sector represented: **Londoners**

Name: **Deirdre Pinto**

Occupation: **Currently, I am a full-time Uber driver. I received a plaque for having the highest customer service rating in London.**

Work experience: **As an Employment Counsellor and Job Developer at the Disability Employment Opportunity Centre in North Bay and Causeway Work Centre in Ottawa, my clients had severe mental health issues, learning / developmental disabilities, and physical disabilities. I assisted them in finding and keeping suitable employment. As an Employment and Training Specialist at True Self Debwewendizwin Employment and Training in North Bay, I aided women who desired to leave abusive relationships with assistance in pursuing post-secondary education and/or job search assistance. In these organizations, I also facilitated numerous workshops to teach clients about skills such as communication, job search, conflict resolution, and safety planning, etc. As an Assessment and Referral Case Manager at Northern Lights in Ottawa, I assessed clients and referred them to the appropriate agencies for services to address their various needs. As a Settlement Counsellor at the North Bay and District Multicultural Centre, I helped immigrants with issues, including job search, obtaining documents (OHIP, DL, SIN card, etc.), school placement for their children, looking for housing, legal assistance, etc. My volunteer work includes cooking and organizing 100% profit fundraisers for The Gathering Place soup kitchen in North Bay, organizing the volunteers for an MS Carnation Campaign Day, and helping fellow peers in LGBTQ support centres. As a Co-Trainer, I taught Suicide Intervention skills to over 300 professionals and students in various fields (police officers, SSWs, PSWs, nurses, paramedics, social workers, etc.).**

Education: **I graduated with a 4.036 GPA from Bishop Denis J. O'Connell High School in Virginia. I completed my B.A. in Sociology and Political Science (with academic Distinction) from McGill University. I completed my M.A. in Sociology with a Specialization in Gender Studies from Lakehead University.**

Skills: **As a Sociologist, I have excellent verbal and written communication skills, interpersonal skills, a strong understanding of qualitative and quantitative research, and am able to think critically about social issues with a solutions-oriented approach. Personally, I understand what it is like to financially struggle. I moved to London specifically because I couldn't afford the rent in Ottawa anymore. I currently reside at a fairly low cost apartment in the east end. I have first-hand experience with some of the issues of low-income housing, including bed bug and cockroach infestations, mold, heroine and meth drug busts, needles in our parking lot, domestic violence incidents, etc. Since I moved to this building, the cost of rent for a new tenant has gone up by \$140. In my previous occupations, I had the opportunity to learn about the housing needs of my clients. Some were troubled youth or had developmental disabilities, so some had to live in group homes. In the job where I helped women flee abusive relationships, they were mostly living in shelters until they could secure second-stage housing. Most of my clients were on ODSP, Ontario Works, CPP Disability, WSIB, and many were trying to get into social housing and geared-to-income housing. Many of them also had physical disabilities, so accessibility issues were also a big problem. Overall, my employment experiences gave me an opportunity to understand the housing concerns and needs of hundreds of individuals with various issues. Although I am a renter and a tenant, as an Uber driver and through my social network, I have learned about the needs of home owners, landlords, condo owners, property managers, co-op board members, and developers. I feel that my academic skillset, personal qualities, and firsthand knowledge will allow me to assist this committee to explore and address housing issues in London.**

Interest reason: **As an immigrant to Canada, I have lived in 5 Canadian cities. London is the only city that finally felt like "home" to me. I have always cared about social, economic, political, and legal issues. I have a unique personality, diverse work experience, and the desire to want to help make London a better place for all Londoners, but most especially those most marginalized and most vulnerable in our community. In my current and most recent jobs, I have not been fully putting into use all of my skillsets, and in a role such as sitting on this committee, I believe I could my skillsets to use for a greater purpose.**

Contributions: **I will be able to contribute my first-hand perspectives about housing and**

other relevant issues. My ability to interact with all kinds of personalities and people (who are on the committee or presenting to the committee) using a tactful and diplomatic approach will help to bring about a thoughtful dialogue about critically important issues and how we can affect positive social change to help Londoners with their housing needs. Past contributions: I have not yet been on a committee or board, but would greatly appreciate being given the opportunity to be on this committee so that I can demonstrate in real terms how I can contribute to this committee.

Interpersonal: The many jobs I have held required the ability to engage in dialogues with peers, customers, supervisors, and other people in a respectful manner. Over the years, I have honed my communication and interpersonal skills, and am able to reach across to people with very different and even opposing viewpoints using a diplomatic and tactful approach. Some of my experience in exchanging views with others and appreciating and respecting their skills, abilities, and knowledge would include: When I worked as an Employment Counsellor with various populations, often times I would have to interact with their family members, government case workers, and their other professional helpers (SSWs, counsellor, employers, life coaches, group home workers, etc.). It was often required that we put our heads together using thoughtful and respectful dialogue to think of how to best meet the needs of my clients. As an Uber driver, I have done almost 10,000 rides. I was given a plaque for having the highest customer service rating. I do not drive the nicest car, but I do have outstanding interpersonal skills. I have had approximately 20,000 passengers in my car. Due to my personality and interest in talking about socio-political topics with my passengers, I have had to engage my passengers in a respectful way, because we talk about all kinds of issues and we don't always necessarily agree. But the conversations have always been thoughtful, constructive, and thanks to these wonderful conversations, my customers have given me the unique title of being London's top-rated Uber driver. Also, politically-speaking, people who tend to lean on the other side of the political spectrum know that I am one of the few people they know that will take the initiative to reach out to them to try to understand in a meaningful and constructive manner their perspectives on issues. I am well-known to be the kind of person that welcomes conversations about difficult topics with people who are likely to have an opposing or different perspective. I am solutions-based, flexible, and willing to compromise. When people stop communicating, that is when there is a problem. To fix issues and be productive and constructive, I will always be the type of person to keep the respectful lines of communication with others open.

Interview interest: **Yes**