

David's Story

Interview and story written with Nikki Huang



Illustration by Xue Xu. @yumigou_

David is a Part-time Personal Support Worker in a Long-term care facility.

I am David. I turn 61 years old this year and immigrated to Canada back in 2006. When I first arrived in Canada, I lived in Montreal for a bit, but ended up moving back and forth between Canada and China because the lifestyle here did not suit me. Eventually, after taking my children's education into consideration, I decided to reside in Toronto.

Speaking of my work experience in Canada, I have worked as a delivery worker, a picker in a warehouse, an auxiliary worker at a car dealership, and a worker in a factory assembly line. Unfortunately, it is difficult for me to get full-time positions with these jobs. Considering my age, I wanted to find a stable job which I am physically capable of as my learning ability and physical strength decline as I age. So, in 2019, when I turned 59, I enrolled in a

course for personal support workers (PSW) and earned a diploma after practical training. Since then, I have been working as a PSW for one and a half years now, but I am still facing difficulties in obtaining a full-time position since more years of work experience is required.

Personally, joining the healthcare industry is very stimulating as well. PSWs' work can be roughly divided into two types: one, serving in the long-term care home (which is what I'm currently doing), and the other type is care work in the community. Working in the community would mean needing to visit the patient's home and assist those with mobility impairments.

The work of the latter may be relatively easy, but the income is relatively low. Even though PSW is a profession with relatively stable working hours compared to my previous jobs, it is still difficult to apply for a full-time position and requires at least three years of work experience. Further, despite inflation in recent years, salaries of personal support workers have not increased much, resulting in fewer and fewer people willing to join this profession.

The pandemic immensely impacted my work. Before the pandemic, many of my part-time colleagues and I worked in different long-term care

homes to ensure that we earn the same income as full-time workers since many long-term care homes only provided part-time positions. With COVID-19 restrictions in place, we are only allowed to work at one fixed home, which is financially brutal for us. Take my situation for instance, I can only work two days a week. Just looking at numbers, my income has reduced by a lot. Sometimes what I earn is less than my friends who applied for government relief. But I insist on working on the frontlines because I take responsibility for what I do and did not apply for any benefits. I think this income maintenance policy may not have taken us into consideration much.

On the other hand, the pandemic drastically decreased my job options. Since I started working in this field relatively recently, I want to try out working in different working environments. Unfortunately, the pandemic has restricted my job mobility, leaving me with no options at this time. When work shift slots come up, I try to work

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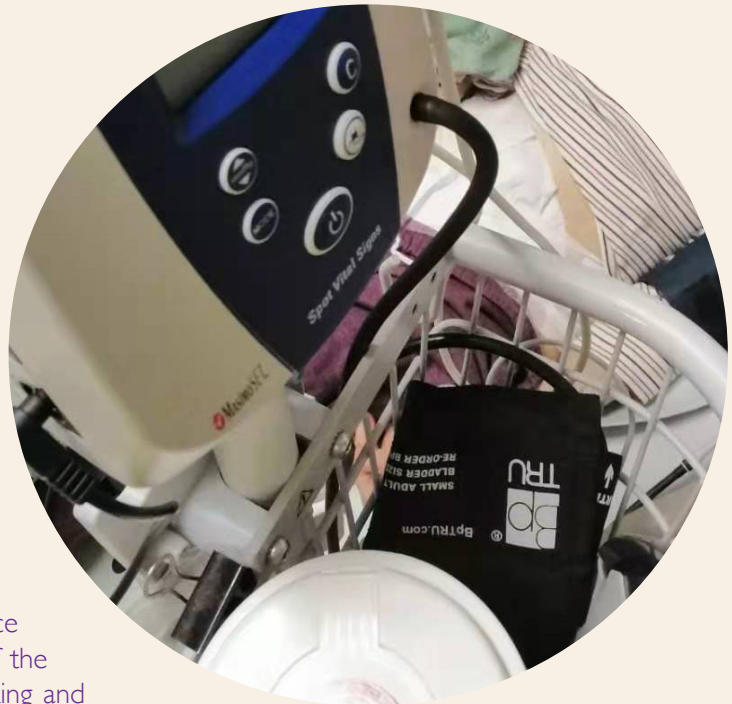
as much as possible to sustain my livelihood, and at the same time I want to help more people. Nevertheless, my livelihood is not as stable as before the pandemic, and I can only rely on my general savings to maintain my day-to-day life. Fortunately, outbreak prevention measures in my workplace are efficient, and many of my colleagues persist in continuing to work as well. I remain at home as much as possible; except when I need to go to work and make essential trips for groceries. I abide by government regulations with strict stay-at-home orders.

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I have always wanted to be a person who positively contributes to society. With that said, I hope that my children can see how their father, I, persist to work during these challenging times; I hope that I can serve as their role model and inspire them as a positive influence as well. In the near future, when they become part of the larger society, I hope that they can also be hard-working and honest people. These thoughts and dreams motivated me to stay grounded and keep working hard during the pandemic.

My wish is for the government to be more considerate and show more appreciation towards part-time employees. In fact, many part-time positions are significant to the entire healthcare field, but they have not received corresponding benefits and a stable income. For instance, those who work part-time do not receive paid leave; and if they do not have a job, they have no income. Again, if the government can take more account of the working conditions of those who work part-time, they may help a lot of people. Likewise, newcomers and immigrants who have just arrived in Canada need to adapt culturally and integrate into their Canadian life. If they are welcomed, well supported, and encouraged to work faithfully, they will be more confident living here and play a greater role in the unity of society.

I think that CCNCTO can act as a community organization to help vulnerable groups and protect the rights and interests of the Chinese Canadian community and can become a bridge between the community and the government as well. There is a lot of room for development in the future. I hope the organization can extend their activism to help more ethnic groups in the future. I strongly believe in the work done by CCNCTO.



Closely framed image from top view showing medical equipment and food container. Photo by David.