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Everalda Sideravicius has collected more than 130 pieces of lost gloves which she adorns on a tree. The Brazilian immigrant says the tree symbolizes the "integration" of professional people.

It's thumbs up for hope

Brazilian says her glove tree symbolizes the difficult time immigrants have finding skilled work in Canada

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Everalda Sideravicius is not a person who tends to walk with her head down.

But something in winter has her gazing at the ground. It's the dozens of mismatched gloves and hats that she's been finding around Toronto since 2003.

The first glove she found at a bus stop. "I didn't know what to do with it, so I took it with me," she recalls.

Today she counts more than 130 pieces in her collection.

"The men always lose the whole pair while women lose just one," she said.

The Brazilian psychologist said she can read a person's character by his or her glove.

"It's funny. The gloves carry their owner's scent; the smell of smoke, cologne, perfume. There's one with its fingers completely worn-out, showing that it was a beloved piece for who it belonged to."

She suggests people put their names, phones, or e-mails, on their winter acces-

sories. "It would be easier to get them back," she said.

But what to do with those in her home? Sideravicius found an unusual solution.

"I decided to use them as ornaments for a tree: The gloves symbolizing the hands (physical) and the hats being the brains (skills) of thousands of immigrants unable to work within their profession in Canada," she said.

Immigrants like herself. Sideravicius has a bachelor's degree in psychology and is specialized in treating HIV patients, but can't find a job.

Sideravicius, her husband — a food engineer — and daughter, decided to leave Brazil because of the country's growing violence. Three places were considered — Australia, United States or Canada, which they chose because of its less strict immigration policy.

"The people at the Canadian consulate told us that my husband would have many job opportunities in Canada," said Sideravicius.

However, months after landing in Vancouver in 2001, the believer couple faced the same reality as thousands of other immigrants — not having their international credentials recognized and the lack of English impeding their goals of getting ahead.

Sideravicius is just one of the 1.1 million newcomers who arrived in Canada between

2001 and 2006. According to Statistics Canada, this group of immigrants had the most difficult time integrating into the labour market compared to those who landed between 1996 and 2001. The unemployment rate among her group was 11.3% in 2006, higher than the 7.3% for those who arrived before her and more than double that of the

Canadian-born population (4.9%).

She has a job but her diplomas, obtained during 15 years of studies and practice, are collecting dust in a drawer. To be called a psychologist again, Sideravicius has to go back to school, the first step of a long journey.

According to the College of Psychologists of Ontario (CPO), to become a psychological associate or psychologist in Ontario, one must have a masters or doctoral degree in psychology and several years of experience.

But before that, Sideravicius would have to improve her English skills — the number one item in CPO's requirements for international applicants — then submit her credentials for evaluation. If approved, she would then undergo one or two years of a supervised practice (paid or unpaid, depending on her luck), and take three different exams to test her knowledge of psychology, Canadian legislation and code of ethics.

Meanwhile, the "psycholo-

gist wannabe" has to eat. And even that can be a major hurdle for many skilled immigrants. In 2006, the unemployment rate for immigrants with bachelor's degrees who had been in Canada less than five years was 11.9% — almost four times higher than for those born in Canada and with a university education (2.9%). Researches say that it is "the desire" of the highly-educated newcomers to search for jobs that allow them to apply their skills.

Rent comes due

Sooner or later, though, the due rent overcomes the dream, pushing highly-educated immigrants into the Canadian labour market. In 2006, 20.1% of immigrants, regardless of how long they've been here, were working in factories, versus 13.0% of those born in Canada. Sales and services are also good employers for immigrants.

Sideravicius was working in telemarketing when she found her first glove. Today, after being accepted by the

Ontario Association of Consultants, Counsellors, Psychometrists and Psychotherapists (OACCPP), she makes a survival wage working as a psychotherapist tending to an irregular clientele from her own community.

"My tree is ecumenical, symbolizing integration of people, of professionals," she said. "I wish that Canada could make better use of so many skilled immigrants arriving every year."

"Like these gloves and hats, people out there are lost. I hope my tree can deliver the message to all Canadians that we, immigrants, are not here to take anything from anyone, but to add our knowledge to yours."

Next year, Sideravicius wants to make a bigger tree, but she will be happy to reunite any item with its rightful owner. So, if you find yourself missing your winter essentials or come across a pair of lost mittens and want to contribute to Sideravicius' project, her e-mail is sideravicius@rogers.com.