



# Respect Works Here

## Community Champion

**Cheryl Bannoya** is a study in contrasts. At first glance she appears shy, naïve and unassuming. Once you get to know her, you quickly see the strength that has taken her thousands of miles from her home in Kalinga, Philippines, all on her own, to Vernon BC. She has also been nominated for a provincial Multicultural Award for her advocacy work as part of the Local Immigration Partnership on behalf of the Filipino Society.

It wasn't an easy road for Cheryl but along the way she learned that she had to speak up for herself and this has empowered her to help others to find their voice and their courage.

Coming to Canada in 1999 as a live-in caregiver was originally intended as a stepping-stone for Cheryl. She planned to move along to meet up with a friend in the US after her contract finished, but once she actually went to visit her friend in New York, she quickly decided that Vernon suited her much better.

"When I moved here, people were friendly, people were more relaxed and it was more like what I was used to," says Cheryl. "I grew up in a culture where the village is like one family and Vernon was more like that than bigger cities. It

had community spirit still and that was more relatable to me."

Already a registered nurse in the Philippines, Cheryl began the long process to be certified in Canada while she worked as a caregiver first privately and then at Vernon Jubilee Hospital. She learned the hard way that some of the challenges she faced were because of the way she had been raised and that she needed to change some of her cultural upbringing in order to succeed in her new world.

"If you recognize where you are from, it's easier to move forward," she says philosophically.

Nowadays, Cheryl is a strong advocate for building this kind of cultural awareness for both the newcomer and the existing community. You can see the fire in her glow as she explains her theory.

"When I first came here, people didn't understand where I came from. I was shy. I was naïve. I was intimidated. I lacked confidence. I did not speak about where I came from. But now that I have more understanding I can look back and see why I had a hard time. People didn't understand where I was coming from.

“If you recognize where you are from, it's easier to move forward.”

- Cheryl Bannoya

They didn't understand my culture and I didn't understand theirs."

As her two daughters, now aged 12 and 15, started growing up, she wanted them to understand their cultural heritage. Now however, that desire has been fueled into a burning passion that extends beyond her family to encourage all newcomers to step forward and share their stories and their histories. By doing so they are building a more welcoming community and breaking down the isolation and the barriers that newcomers feel.

