

**Four Asian massage parlours workers speak out
to stop the Town of Newmarket shut down the Asian Massage parlours**

“I already have a lot of experience and don't need the English exam and certificate. This is discrimination, bullying, prejudice against the massage industry, and ignorance. It is to oppress us” Lisa.

Ivy

My name is Ivy and I am 40 years old. I am a self-employed massage parlour worker in Newmarket. I have been in Canada for fourteen years. In the beginning, I only stayed at home to take care of the children and household. I was depressed because some family members looked down on me and said that I would not do anything. I thought of working for a long time, I realized that I want to integrate into society. I want to make some money so I am determined to work in the massage industry.

I have worked in the massage parlour industry for four years. I studied in a beauty salon for a year and half. I only helped with cleaning and did not have the opportunity to learn more massage techniques. After that, I went to the second massage parlour for one year. The massage parlour provides training in beauty and massage services. I had trained 8-9 hours a day, practiced with colleagues without any breaks. I have learned the techniques of back, head & neck massages, oil pushing, sand scraping and hot stones respectively for three months. It is so strict and I did not continue after a few months. My friend in the beauty salon introduced me to working in massage parlour. I refused at first because of the image of it so I worked in the front desk of a massage parlour for three months. One time, it was so busy that the owner asked me to give it a try and then I gradually became a worker.

90% of my customers are construction workers and engineers. They are all word of mouth. After being introduced by friends, everyone said that my massage is good. The customers give tips. I am so happy and gradually gained self- confidence. I believed my techniques could make money. All of us who do massage work are doing it with sweat and tears. I have one customer who is a dentist. They shared with me that I am the one who can help them relax their neck pain. Although it is not a therapeutic massage, customers feel relieved after. There has never been a complaint over years, customers mostly appreciate it.

I used to work in beauty salons and restaurants where I was fined for using my phone. It was because my children had an urgent situation at school and my boss did not allow me to use my phone. I was so worried. On the other hand, I have more flexible time in the massage industry, which allows me to take care of my children.

I am very worried that the training requirements in this Newmarket bylaw would cause me to lose income for a long time. I cannot do English in writing and reading. It is unfair to ask me to retake the course to obtain a "professional qualification" because I have years of experience. Unfortunately, the beauty salon cannot provide relevant certificates to prove my experience. I have a family and I need to take care of my children all the time because they are still very young. I am also afraid that if we cannot get a license, the government will target Asians for different reasons and prevent us from continuing to work. I have worked very hard, very hard to get to this point in my life. Why do you say that the massage parlour is not good? I am an adult, I have my rights, and I am not a victim of trafficking. I hope that the city councillors will listen to our opinions. We make a living with our hands, we should not be discriminated against, we do not rely on the government, we rely on ourselves.

Mei

My name is mei and I am 52 years old. I came to Canada seven years ago. At first, I liked my life in Canada very much. The environment is good, and the air here is fresh. People seemed to be equal and respect each other. But gradually, I discovered the hardships of living here.

I used to work in a bank when I was in China. When I first came to Canada, I didn't know anyone and couldn't find a job. My English was not good. I found a job in a fruit factory through people I knew. It was an assembly line. The job was very tiring, and the salary was very low. We had to stand for 8 to 10 hours a day, so my legs became swollen and unable to bend. My body did not allow me to continue with this job, so I left after only a few days.

Then I went to work at a Chinese restaurant. I thought it was easier because I could communicate in Chinese, but I didn't have the skills to work there, and I finally quitted again. I am getting older and it is slow for me to learn a new language, but I still want to support myself through my own hands.

Massage is a part of Chinese culture. I used to go to massage frequently in China. I think working in the massage industry is a professional job and deserves respect. I have been exposed to massage for more than 10 years. I learned from my friends and gave massages to my relatives and friends.

This is how I entered the massage industry in Canada: One day, I went to a massage parlour, I learned about this job opportunity through chatting with them. I decided to give it a try. Massage work is relatively more relaxed, the working hours are more flexible, the environment is good, colleagues are also friendly, and I can rest when there is no customer. It is very suitable for my age and my physical condition.

Although this job is very tiring, and we also suffer from occupational diseases, but I think it is very rewarding to use my technique to help others relax their body and relieve pain.

I have been working in Canada for 6 years now, and my clients all thank me for my service. When they think that I gave them a good massage, they will give me a hug and a tip. My customers are all my friends, and everyone says I'm good. I am especially proud when I solve their problems.

There are also downsides to this job. Law enforcement officers have a lot of discrimination against us. When they came to inspect, they often did not listen to our explanations because our English was not fluent. I tried to get people with fluent English to help us communicate over the phone, but they couldn't wait and directly issued a ticket. We don't know how to appeal. But I don't speak English, so this is the best choice for me at the moment.

After hearing about Newmarket's new regulations, I was very angry. I think this is a double discrimination: racial discrimination and industry discrimination. We are old and have language barriers, how can we meet the new training requirements? I will have no income during class time and cannot live or pay rent.

I think massage focuses on technique, not written exams or books. Where can we work if the massage parlour is closed? If I don't get the license, I will lose my job, and I don't know how to survive. I feel very lost. What is even more absurd is the campaign against human trafficking. This is my job and my personal choice.

Despite the hard work, this job is still the most suitable for me. I think we should unite and let the government hear our voices.

Lisa

My name is Lisa. I came to Canada in 2015 and I am 61 years old. I like Canada's nature, blue sky and the fresh air.

When I first came to Canada, I worked as a dishwasher, a factory worker, and a wedding dress factory worker. These jobs were very tiring, the salary was low, and the working hours were long. I washed the dishes for 10 hours a day without much time to rest. My body couldn't take it.

Later, others introduced me to work at the fruit factory. It was easier than washing dishes, but the fruit factory was very cold, the wages were even lower. The agents would also charge transportation fees, so the money I actually got was very little. After working for more than a year, I fell ill and needed an operation, so I left.

I still need money for rent and food. After taking a break after the operation, I went out to look for a job near my place and saw a few massage parlours with Chinese recruitment notices, so I decided to give it a try.

The temperature inside the massage parlour is very comfortable, not as cold as the fruit factory. I only need to work when there are customers. I have flexible hours and more rest time. After trying, I felt that it was suitable for me, so I have been doing it till now, and it has already been four years.

We often face inspections by law enforcement when we work in massage parlours. The boss told us not to irritate them and not to cause trouble for ourselves. If they cannot find any violation among our workers, they will pick on the shop

In many cases, a ticket was issued for some inexplicable reason, such as not covering the drain in the bathroom. Our English is not fluent, and we didn't understand the government's procedures, and we didn't know anything about the discriminatory policies.

Many people did not understand us at first and discriminated against us. Later, through communication and public education, they understood our story and understood that this job is what we choose to do, to support our family and ourselves, and it is much better than other jobs.

I rely on myself and make money with my hands, I can pay for the rent. The customers can relax through my service. I remember a parent bringing their child to the store to experience a massage. At the end, we even took a group photo. Everyone was very happy. I think this job is respected. Now I am proud of my job.

But it is impossible for me to go back to school and get a certificate. I have to pay tuition and study. I am 61 years old. I only know how to work. Even if I have time and money to attend classes, I can't speak English and I will never get a certificate. If I can't work, I can't pay for the rent or food.

I find Newmarket's new regulations very ridiculous. The regulations on training are to make it difficult for people like us. If the massage parlour is forced to close, we cannot survive

Police are causing us a lot of trouble. They will always ask us if we were trafficked, if there were any trafficker, how much money we give to the trafficker, etc., but we only go to work normally and we are not forced.

Here, I don't need fluent English to serve the customers well. With the experience, I can tell where my customer hurts just by touch. I already have a lot of experience and don't need the

English exam and certificate. This is discrimination, bullying, prejudice against the massage industry, and ignorance. It is to oppress us.

I understand that it is not something that can be done in a day or two to fight against the government and society's discrimination against our industry. But we must still unite and fight for our own interests.
