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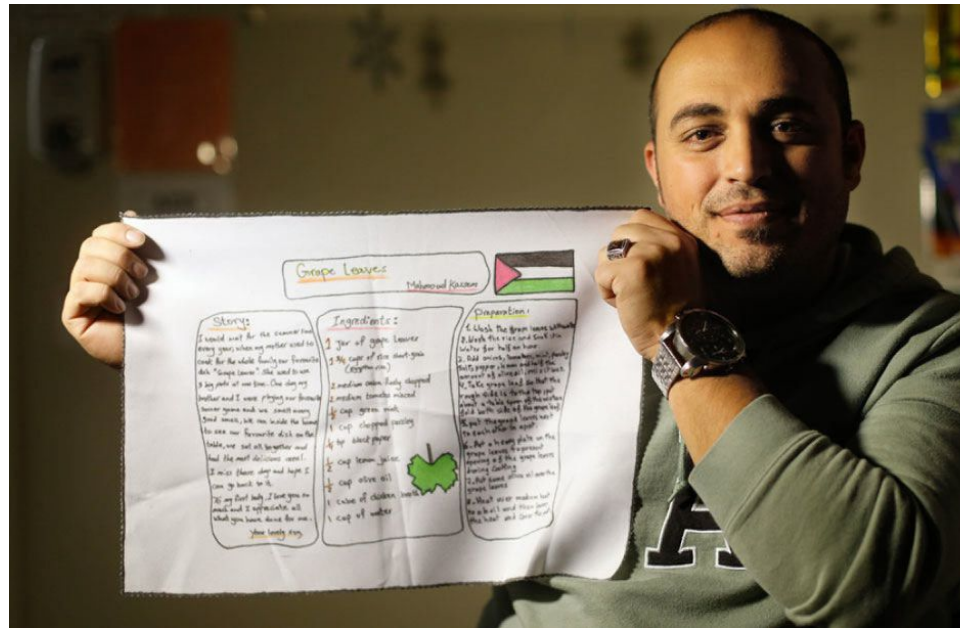
Recipe project helps new immigrants connect with their roots



By **Nicholas Keung** Immigration reporter

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Whether it is the Palestinian grape leaves filled with rice, Venezuelan cheese sticks, Sudanese meat sauce or beef-stuffed vegetables from Syria, immigrants' homemade dishes all come with a story.

For many newcomers, the aroma and taste of the dishes they grew up with help them relive their childhood memories with their families and connect with the past they left behind for a new life in Canada.

"I miss my mom's stuffed grape leaves a lot. I am so far away and can't see my family in the Saida-EinElHelwi (refugee) camp," said Mahmoud Kassem, 36, a Palestinian nurse who was born stateless in Lebanon and came to Canada as a refugee last year.

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"My mom made this dish every Friday. The whole family, some 45 people, would get around the dining table to enjoy it. But we may never be altogether to eat it again. The dish is the only thing I have to remember my mom and everyone back there."

To keep those memories alive and pass on the traditions to their

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beloved recipes — and stories — in an innovative project that enriches their language and cultural learning experience.

Over four weeks, language instructors worked with students to write up the ingredients and instructions for their favourite recipes, as well as the stories behind them. In their own handwriting, the students put their recipes and stories onto a template before a fabric printer made them into placemats.

The Recipe Project, a collaboration of the immigrant settlement agency and the Art Gallery of Mississauga, is the brainchild of Marianne Alas, a textile artist and food-lover.

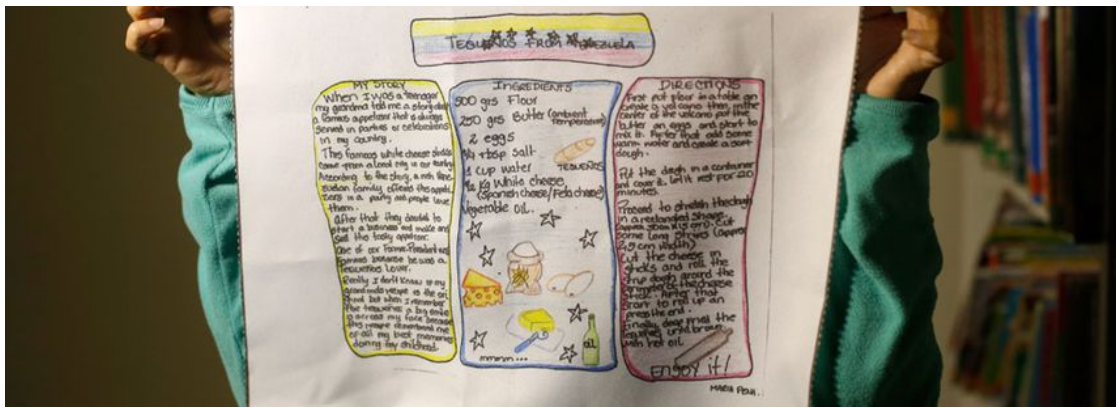
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“People always celebrate with food and have fun and happy memories about it,” said Alas, who was born in Canada to Estonian parents and whose own favourite dish is her late grandmother’s pirukad, a stuffed turnover. “In a community context, food is a great way to share one’s culture and background.”



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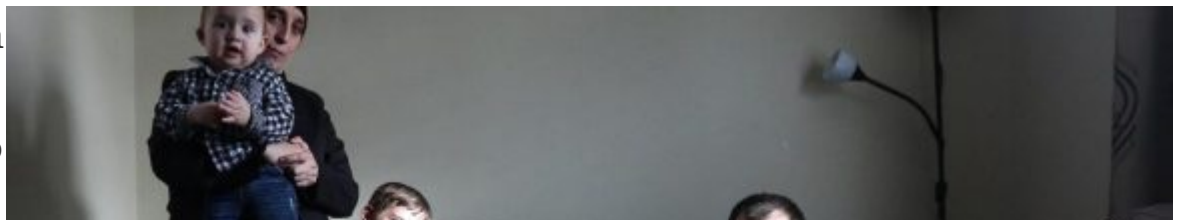
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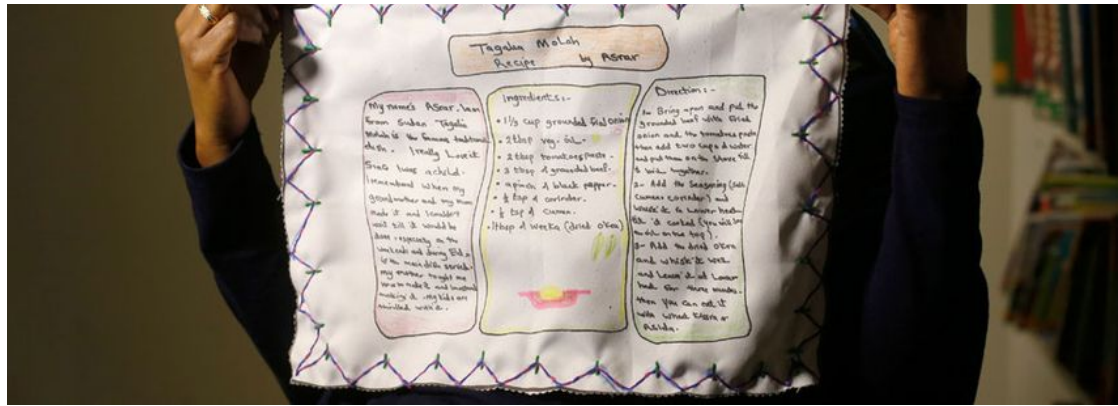
Venezuela with her husband and three kids in 2014, said she loved learning about other classmates' dishes.

"I learned what halal food is. It's all very interesting to me. We all come from somewhere and all have a story about our family and our country," said Pena, 39, who picked her late grandmother's tequenos (cheese stick) recipe for the project. "My family came to Canada for its multiculturalism."



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Asrar Badri, a hematologist from Sudan, is the first to admit that she didn't do as much cooking until she immigrated to Toronto with her husband and their four boys.

“My mother and grandmother made the tagalia moolah meat sauce all the time. We are far from Sudan and we all need something to get attached to it,” said Badri, 41, whose family came here in 2014. “My family loves our new home but I don't want my children to forget their roots. This reminds them of their culture.”

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English instructor Laura Allen said the project incorporates practical language learning in students' daily lives. She said the sharing of recipes and stories opens up the newcomers and fosters bonding in the class.

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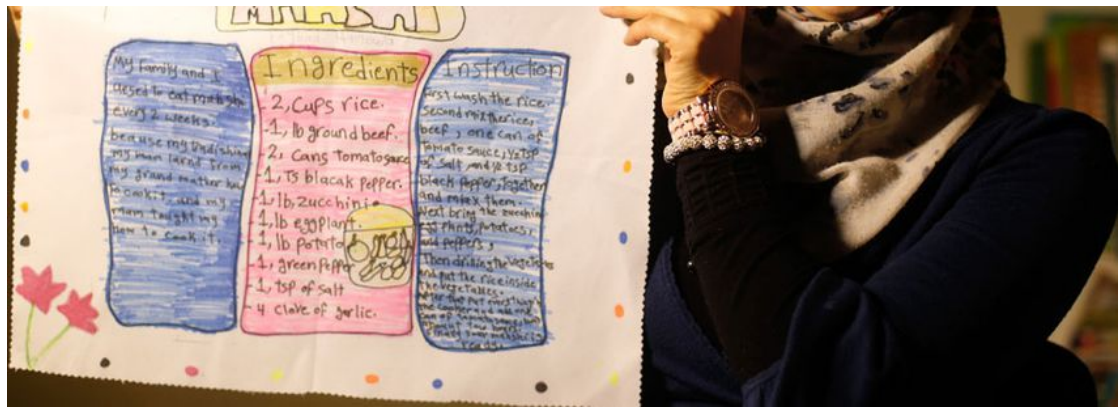
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words in cooking, like mix, stir and measure. They are expressive when they talk about something that is so important to them," said Allen. "This has changed the classroom. We feel like we are sitting around the kitchen doing crafts and sharing memories together."



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Fayhaa Hanoura, 25, said she knows the recipe of mahchi well but only in Arabic and it's nice that now she could share it in English with non-Syrians.

“To fill the zucchini, pepper and eggplant with rice and meat, you need to take out the inside of the vegetables. So you have to *drill* the vegetables,” Hanoura said with a sheepish smile. “I’m so happy other people are interested in my recipe. I am proud to share it with them.”

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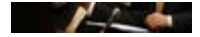


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