

Ontario's 'Nanny Hotline' goes live

April 27, 2009

Dale Brazao – Toronto Star

STAFF REPORTER

Foreign caregivers working in Ontario who believe they've been abused by labour recruiters or employers now have a direct line to the provincial government.

A special "Nanny Hotline" has been set up by Ontario's Ministry of Labour to inform caregivers of their rights under provincial labour laws, and document alleged cases of abuse. Any report of abuse will be forwarded to "a specially trained team" for follow-up and investigation, a source told the *Star*.

The hotline, 1-866-372-3247, will start taking calls as of 8:30 a.m. today. This is a dedicated line for nannies. There are about 18,000 nannies working in Ontario, most employed in the GTA.

The ministry already has a "snitch line" for other labour issues.

Labour Minister Peter Fonseca had promised a hotline would be part of tough new legislation he will introduce later this year to protect vulnerable foreign caregivers from exploitation. He moved up the timeline for the hotline after meeting with members of Caregivers Support Services who implored him to take immediate action to stem what they say is widespread abuse.

"We are taking action to help protect vulnerable employees who are in Ontario under the federal Live-In Caregiver Program," he said.

The proposed legislation comes in the wake of a *Star* investigation that showed labour recruiters were charging nannies as much as \$10,000 for jobs that did not exist.

More:

Job bank could end rogue fees for nannies

April 09, 2009

Lesley Ciarula Taylor

Immigration Reporter

Most of the agencies in Toronto that charge migrant workers and nannies exorbitant recruitment fees would be forced to close with a simple adjustment in the government's online job bank, says an immigration consultant.

"The bulk of these Ontario recruitment agencies would be out of work tomorrow if Service Canada maintained a list of the supply of employers and employees on their existing job bank," said Richard Kurland, who yesterday released government emails on the issue. "The federal government could implement it at no cost to the province."

The job bank is a searchable database on which companies and individuals can advertise thousands of jobs. Kurland's proposal would let them be hired only through job bank listings and not through recruiters.

He praised the efforts of overseas visa officers to try to protect temporary workers, some of them charged an \$8,000 recruitment fee on a job that may earn them \$20,000 in Canada.

Overseas officers are shackled, however, by a "silo mentality" between two federal departments, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and by provinces that don't specifically protect migrant workers and nannies with labour laws.

Manitoba and Alberta do. Ontario has promised to, because of a *Star* investigation.

Kurland uses Freedom of Information requests to get the emails of dozens of top bureaucrats in CIC and HRSDC dating back a year or more to ferret out pressing issues. This month, recruitment fees for temporary foreign workers is one of them.

The email exchanges "tell me they recognize that exploitation exists and they're trying to help," he said.

Allan Frankenberger at the embassy in Seoul reports a law in Korea requires recruiters must charge a fee, which can climb to \$19,000. In another email last June, he said the high fees consultants in Korea charge to prepare applications "are hidden recruitment fees" for low-paying jobs.

In several emails, overseas officers tell each other that if only HRSDC had required an employer's approval to hire a foreign worker, to comply with provincial law, they could have had ammunition to act against the recruiters.

Ontario Labour Minister Peter Fonseca last Saturday promised legislation by year-end to license Ontario's nanny recruitment industry, ban placement fees, create a hotline to report abuses and begin "targeted enforcement" of agencies that breach labour laws.

The *Star* found many of the province's 8,000 live-in caregivers paid agencies thousands of dollars for jobs in Ontario that don't exist.

Filipinos celebrate nannies' triumph

April 06, 2009

Robert Cribb

TORONTO STAR

More than 100 Filipinos gathered last night to celebrate the promise of new provincial legislation to protect foreign caregivers from exploitation in Ontario.

MPP Mike Colle, who took on the cause of Filipino caregivers following a *Star* investigation three weeks ago, said his government is taking decisive action against "systemic abuse and exploitation."

"This is Canada's dirty secret," he told the crowd. "Exploitation is a real black stain on this country. ... This is not a Filipino struggle. It's really a struggle that concerns all of us. ... When abuse happens, when exploitation happens, it happens to all of us."

At one point Colle broke into tears speaking about his mother, an Italian immigrant who worked as a seamstress when the family immigrated to Toronto when he was 5 years old.

"This has been going on for a long time," he said, holding back tears. "You've got the attention of government ... and the public out there. They're listening now and they will take action."

The celebration was originally planned as a rally to support a private member's bill Colle tabled two weeks ago to protect vulnerable foreign caregivers mistreated by recruiters and employers. The bill was replaced on Thursday by proposed legislation designed to license Ontario's vast and unregulated nanny recruitment industry.

The proposed legislation, announced by Labour Minister Peter Fonseca, contains provisions for a toll-free phone number to receive reports of abuse, targeted enforcement of recruiters who breach provincial labour laws and the banning of placement fees charged to foreign caregivers by their agencies.

Colle said he introduced his bill to prompt the government to action. He said he is happy now to let his bill die on the order paper.

Colle attributed the swift government response to the *Star* probe.

"This has been a secret for too long," he said. "The stories lit this fire and this flame is not going to go out."

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Victory for our nannies

April 03, 2009

Robert Cribb – Toronto Star

Ontario will crack down on unscrupulous recruitment agencies in the wake of a *Star* investigation into widespread exploitation of foreign caregivers.

In a surprise announcement at Queen's Park yesterday, Labour Minister Peter Fonseca said his government intends to license Ontario's vast and unregulated nanny recruitment industry, ban placement fees charged to foreign caregivers, create a hotline to receive complaints of abuses and begin "targeted enforcement" of agencies that breach labour laws. "These stories of exploitation of vulnerable workers in Ontario are very disheartening," Fonseca said yesterday. "Many of these temporary workers devote their lives to caring for our loved ones ... The province will move to ensure that the rights of caregivers working in Ontario are respected."

Fonseca hopes to have legislation in place before the end of the year.

Toronto nanny advocate Pura Velasco pumped her fists in the air and shouted, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" when she heard the news.

Velasco, a 59-year-old Filipina and former caregiver, has been fighting for nannies' rights for 20 years.

The *Star* investigation found many of the province's 8,000 live-in caregivers paid agencies thousands of dollars for jobs in Ontario that don't exist. In some cases, the caregivers have their passports seized by their agencies and are forced to work illegally in menial jobs to pay off hefty placement fees.

After the *Star* series ran nearly three weeks ago, Fonseca initially said his government had no plans to tighten provincial laws around the nanny recruitment industry.

"The federal government, as an umbrella for temporary foreign workers, is the right level of government to address what is seen as a very complex and difficult thing," he said at the time.

Yesterday, Fonseca did an abrupt about-face.

"My ministry will continue to move forward with a made-in-Ontario solution, Mr. Speaker, to weed out the unscrupulous agencies," he said in the Legislature yesterday. In an interview, Fonseca said a chat last week with federal Immigration Minister Jason Kenney prompted him to take action.

"He could not give me assurances that he could fix a flawed and broken federal program and so we took it on ourselves to ... protect Ontario workers," Fonseca said.

In an interview yesterday, Kenney said Fonseca is "muddying jurisdictional waters." While he acknowledges problems with the Live-in Caregiver Program at the federal level, he says federal responsibilities around processing approvals for foreign caregivers have nothing to do with the abuse of caregivers once they arrive here.

"They are two separate issues," he said.

Kenney said his ministry has begun a review of the program and expects to announce reforms in the first half of this year. One idea on the table is a publicly available blacklist of unscrupulous recruiters.

"I think you need a sanction against abusive (agencies) and employers. It seems to me that's a sensible sanction."

Velasco, head of Caregivers Support Services, was thrilled to hear the protections she has been seeking for 20 years are finally coming.

"My God, this has been so long in coming," she said, as she listened to a recording of Fonseca's announcement.

Catherine Manuel, a Filipina nanny who came to Toronto to look after an 8-year-old boy and instead wound up working at a bed and breakfast in Central Ontario, was elated.

"This is great," said Manuel, who went public with her ordeal in a *Star* story last fall. "Nobody should ever have to go through what I went through."

Joelina Maluto, a mother of four, took a similar stance earlier this year by going public with allegations of abuse at the hands of a Thornhill recruiter who took her passport upon arrival and pressured her to work illegally. She never met the employer who sponsored her to enter Canada.

"I'm very happy. I hope Canada will become an example for the whole world."

New Democratic MPP Cheri DiNovo called yesterday's announcement a "victory."

"We're pleased that the government has finally listened," she said. "(The *Star*) has done a great bit to push the government."

Fonseca agreed the issue triggered strong public reaction.

"A lot of our constituency offices have received calls, emails and letters from community-minded individuals. People don't want to see abuses. They want to see workers in Ontario treated with dignity and fairness."

Nanny recruiters were licensed in Ontario until 2001, when the Mike Harris Conservative government deregulated agencies – a move that many say opened the industry up to widespread abuses.

"Agencies absolutely need to be cleaned up," said Tova Rich, owner of Family Matters Caregivers Inc., a Toronto nanny placement agency. "There are greedy people who came in and exploited these girls. I've thought for a long time they should license this. It's become a shady industry that brings the rest of us down."

Rich charges nannies \$2,800 for the work her agency does to arrange their immigration and jobs in Canada.

"We charge a fee because we work really hard for the girls. You're a matchmaker. You have to work for both sides."

Charles MacPherson, president of Charles MacPherson Associates, a Toronto company that places nannies, butlers and chefs with local families, says his 13-year-old agency has never charged placement fees to nannies.

"That's double-dipping. I don't understand how you can take money from both parties. ... I've seen a lot of horror stories out there."

Nannies trapped in bogus jobs

March 14, 2009

Dale Brazao – Toronto Star

Four months after being lured to Canada, housed in a basement and pressured by a nanny recruiter to work illegally, Filipina Joelina Maluto summoned the courage to take back her life.

Desperate and disillusioned, Maluto stood on the doorstep of the woman who had brokered her entry to Canada – nanny recruiter Rakela Spivak – and demanded return of the passport that had been taken from her.

Maluto claims in court documents that after her promised job with a Toronto family turned out to be bogus, she joined 16 other unemployed Filipina nannies sleeping on the floor of Spivak's basement "in custody, detention, imprisonment and incarceration, without proper food ... harassed, frightened, scared." She said she and the other nannies were "exploited to work for Rakela and under stress, pressured, pushed and oppressed."

Following a curt exchange, Spivak handed Maluto, a demure 44-year-old mother of four, her passport and then served Maluto with a lawsuit claiming the nanny owed \$3,500 in brokerage fees.

Maluto's story of mistreatment is being played out frequently across Ontario.

A *Toronto Star* investigation has found that the popular federal Live-In Caregiver Program has become a nanny trap. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of foreign caregivers have paid \$5,000 or more to come to Canada to care for children or the elderly during the last decade – jobs that too often turn out to be fake. Once here, their federal contracts are void. Faced with what is for them a crushing debt, some are forced to work illegally at part-time, sometimes menial jobs; others are deported.

Federal authorities are turning a blind eye to this exploitation.

Documents obtained by the *Star* show Canada Border Services Agency officials believe there is "ongoing fraud and misrepresentation" within the program, but the immigration and human resources departments are not taking action. The *Star* presented its investigative findings to Immigration Minister Jason Kenney who said his department is aware there is abuse in the program.

"We have this whole industry, most of which is unlicensed and unregulated, and large numbers of unscrupulous operations in Canada and throughout the world who exploit people's dreams and hopes to come to Canada," he said. Kenney says he has asked his officials to recommend changes to tighten controls over the program.

The *Star* has interviewed two-dozen caregivers who came to Canada over the past five years. Almost all arrived to find their employers did not exist or had hired someone else.

"It's a human depot," said Frank Luna, the labour attaché with the Philippine consulate in Toronto. "The exploitation has been so widespread and going on for so long that the perpetrators no longer feel or see evil in what they do."

In an interview, Spivak said she runs a reputable business – Rakela Care International – that brings about 200 foreign caregivers to Canada each year, mostly Filipinas coming via Hong Kong. She denied housing nannies in her basement, and claimed Maluto used her to get to Canada.

"They come here and they use me and they run away," said Spivak, whose advertisements overseas promise "real jobs" and "real employers" that will make a prospective nanny's "dream come true."

Spivak said it is not her fault if employers who use her services decide they do not want a nanny.

"It's nothing to do with me. I never know until they arrive if the client wants them," Spivak said.

In an interview, Spivak would not address allegations that her agency is violating the rules of the federal program and is exploiting nannies with high fees while failing to deliver the promised jobs.

Instead, she talked of how she trains all her nannies to do laundry and cook; and produced cards and a guest book, filled with supportive comments from nannies expressing thanks for her help.

The 17-year-old federal Live-in Caregiver Program, designed to fill a shortage of nannies, allows Canadians to import foreign caregivers through employment agencies, which in Ontario are neither regulated nor licensed.

Anyone can open a nanny importing business. The Internet is replete with ads from dozens of Ontario agencies claiming to have nannies on hand.

The promised payoff for the nannies is a chance at landed immigrant status after two years of work. The number of foreign nannies given permits to work in Canada has tripled in the last five years (from 3,458 in 2002 to 11,878 in 2007, the most recent information available). Most are from the Philippines.

Likewise, the number of approvals Canadian families received to hire overseas nannies – issued by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada – hit nearly 36,000 last year, about 11,000 more than were issued two years before.

A border services source told the *Star* the level of fraud in the program is also growing.

On many days "at least 90 per cent of the women coming in as caregivers come in for bogus employers," said one official on the condition of anonymity. "The minute they start working illegally they are open to exploitation by both the agencies and the employers.

"This is clearly human trafficking," the border services source said.

A bulletin from the Anti-Fraud and Human Trafficking Section of the Canada Border Services Agency last March cites a "trend occurring in which dishonest employment agencies sign up fraudulent 'employers' to bring live-in caregivers to Canada but the contracts disappear once the caregivers arrive," the memo reads. "The caregivers are innocent and are left obligated to pay the agency fees but are left without employment."

But instead of going after the agencies, the government nabs some of the nannies, with the authority of a 2007 Federal Court ruling that found caregivers with bogus contracts cannot remain in Canada even if they find a legitimate job.

"This is so unfair to these women who have given up everything and taken on so much debt to come here and work," said Pura Velasco, of the Caregivers Support Services Centre. "We have to stand up as a community and make the government account for its lack of respect for us."

Advocates such as Velasco regularly host meetings across the GTA where nannies speak angrily about their predicament.

One recent meeting in a North York auditorium attracted more than 120 nannies. They complained openly about the fees, and the bogus families. Some talked about being forced to work 12- to 15-hour days without overtime, days off or even minimum wage salaries.

Others complained of isolation, lack of nutritious food and mistreatment by employers.

"We look at Canada as the land of milk and honey," said Mel, a 50-year-old Filipina nanny and mother of two children in the Philippines shortly after two *Star* reporters helped her leave a home where, she said, she had been verbally abused and mistreated.

"Everyone wants to come to Canada – until they're here."

Marsha Mason, director of Intercede, a non-profit agency that counsels domestic workers, said most of the 5,000 cases the agency handles each year are Filipina caregivers.

Mason says she recently gave \$100 from her own pocket to a nanny who didn't have enough to buy sanitary napkins and deodorant.

The practice of charging fees to the nannies to secure them work is banned by governments in all western provinces, but not in Ontario. The Philippines government also bans the practice, but it still goes on, with many agencies getting around the laws by recruiting nannies working in Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai.

Some nanny advocates say agencies should charge families for arranging a caregiver. While some respectable agencies do this, they say they lose business to agencies that just charge the nanny. Some agencies charge both the employer and the nanny.

Memos obtained by the *Star* show federal enforcement officials have repeatedly warned their bosses that the program leaves "innocent victims" open to exploitation by both agencies and employers. One memo from the Border Services Agency lists about 20 Toronto-area Live-In Caregiver agencies and individuals suspected of fraud, and recommends they be prosecuted.

Another memo from an enforcement officer at Pearson International Airport states the problem is widespread.

"Again today we had another live-in caregiver with no employer," the memo reads. "The integrity of the program seems to be in jeopardy."

At Pearson, some officials call to see if an employer exists. Most do not. Typically, the women are allowed to enter the country, are picked up by an agency driver, and then housed in basements or dingy apartments run by the agencies. For nannies who can't afford to pay their placement fees up front, some agencies offer financing by closely related companies that charge interest of up to 20 per cent.

Some agencies compel the women to open bank accounts into which their paycheques are deposited until their placement fees are paid back. Caregivers who cannot – or refuse to – pay sometimes find themselves in small claims court fending off lawsuits from their recruitment agents. Spivak has sued two and threatened a third nanny with a lawsuit.

"It's as if all the agencies got together and came up with a template for exploitation," said Velasco, a former caregiver who has spent the past 20 years advocating for nannies' rights. "We have to stand up against this intolerable situation. It's disgusting what's happening to these women."

Three nannies interviewed by the *Star* say their lives in Canada became so intolerable they seriously considered suicide. One of these women is Joelina Maluto, brought in by the Rakela Agency.

"I was so depressed, I didn't want to keep living," said Maluto, who paid Spivak's agency \$1,100 up front in the Philippines for a job as a caregiver looking after six children with a Thornhill family – a job that had disappeared when she arrived.

"My children are desperate and asking for money and I had nothing to send them," she said of her four daughters back in the Philippines.

Rakela Spivak has sued Maluto claiming unpaid fees; Maluto has filed a defence alleging mistreatment by the Rakela Agency. The claim and counterclaim are allegations and have not been proven in court.

Spivak runs her agency out of her spacious Thornhill home, using her red Range Rover (licence plate RAKELA) to drive new nannies to the bank and other appointments. She advertises in hockey rinks and the local *Shalom Toronto* newspaper. Her ads boast of the 2006 "Excellent Service Awards," an honour she said she bestowed on herself at the urging of a group of nannies.

To bring in a foreign caregiver, federal regulations state that a family with suitable income must sponsor the nanny. An application must be filled out, paperwork processed, typically taking up to a year.

But Spivak, and many other agencies, can get you a nanny almost instantly. The *Star* found that's because a person who applies for a nanny today is actually getting one that was sponsored by another family months earlier.

When a *Star* reporter posing as a potential client visited Spivak, she said a nanny could be provided within a week, and acknowledged that the proper application process would take much longer.

Asked if the government could learn of the illegal employment, she told the would-be client: "Why would they have to find out?"

Spivak also said her nannies work well beyond the contractual eight hours without overtime pay.

"No, no overtime ... don't worry about that. I've never had any problems with this."

Maluto is one of nine nannies interviewed by the *Star* who came to Canada through Spivak's Rakela Care Agency.

All said Spivak promised them jobs for fees ranging between \$2,500 and \$3,500, which ballooned to \$5,000 when they arrived in Toronto. All but one arrived to learn their jobs didn't exist. None had ever even spoken to employers who supposedly filled out the federal paperwork to sponsor them.

Spivak demanded the nannies sign contracts that required turning over their passports and social insurance cards.

Most were housed in Spivak's basement for as many as two weeks with as many as a dozen other women. The nannies say they slept on mattresses on the floor and spent their days cleaning the house and cooking for Spivak's family.

If the basement becomes too crowded, some are moved to an apartment at Steeles Ave. and Bathurst St. To pay their debt to Spivak, most were offered part-time jobs cleaning homes, which immediately placed them in violation of immigration rules that stipulate they must work and live with the family that sponsored them.

In an interview at her home office, Spivak denied telling the undercover reporter she could provide a nanny without proper federal approvals. She acknowledged the Hong Kong government warned her in 2007 about recruiting there without a licence.

She said the matter has been resolved and she visits Hong Kong several times a year to hold "orientation" seminars for nannies interested in Canada. Her caring treatment of the women has often been abused, Spivak said.

"You should talk about the girls that come here and are using me," she said. "Some come here to find guys and get pregnant. You know how many are pregnant?"

As to the passports, Spivak said she collects them "for safe keeping." She recently received a stern letter from the Philippine consulate in Toronto demanding she return them to their owners. Spivak said she will comply.

Until the consulate letter, nannies interviewed by the *Star* said Spivak would not return passports until placement fees were paid up.

Immigration Canada's website alerts foreign workers that employers cannot take their passports.

In the food court of Thornhill's Promenade Mall last month, half a dozen nannies lined up to hand cash to one of Spivak's assistants, who handed them back receipts.

Six of the women who spoke with the *Star* all said they worked longer than the 40-hour weeks listed in their contracts, without overtime.

Ali Martell, a former Spivak client, said she received a strange call from an Immigration official in 2007 telling her that her nanny had just arrived at the Vancouver airport.

The Martells had gone to Spivak months earlier asking for a nanny for their three children. Spivak had them fill out an application form and got them a nanny within days.

"We picked up (the nanny) and she had a completely different name than the name we were originally given."

When the nanny quit three months later, Martell said she cancelled all ties with Spivak. But Spivak used the previous application to bring a nanny to Canada without her permission, Martell said.

"It makes me sick to think about it," Martell said in an interview. "What happens to this poor woman who just showed up in Vancouver, completely alone, thinking she was going to have a job? I was devastated for her."

In an interview, Spivak denied misrepresenting her services to the Martells and said the couple never cancelled their original request for a nanny. As for providing nannies quickly, Spivak said if a family wishes to hire a caregiver without the proper federal work permits, "that's their problem, not mine."

Federal agencies fail to protect migrant nannies

March 15, 2009

Robert Cribb – Toronto Star

A woman living in poverty receives government approval to bring a nanny into Canada.

A nanny recruiter uses falsified documents to hire a nanny for a phantom employer.

Twenty nannies pay a combined \$30,000 to come to Canada and are denied work permits because their recruiter filed dubious applications.

These are some of the cases the *Star* found in its investigation of the federal government's Live-in Caregiver Program. Combined, they show serious problems with a system that is supposed to be administered by two federal departments — Human Resources and Immigration Canada.

Hundreds, maybe thousands, of foreign caregivers have paid \$5,000 or more to come to Canada to care for children or the elderly during the last decade – jobs that too often turn out to be fake.

Once here, their federal contracts are void. Faced with what is for them a crushing debt, some are forced to work illegally at part-time, sometimes menial jobs; others are deported.

The Canada Border Services Agency suspects that some agencies are abusing the program.

The *Star* also found federal offices have made questionable approvals of applications from nanny recruitment agencies.

In an interview, federal Immigration Minister Jason Kenney acknowledged shortcomings in the program. Among the necessary reforms, he said, is tighter scrutiny around "unscrupulous" and unregulated recruitment agencies.

When employers and recruiting agencies fill out applications, federal guidelines require that employers demonstrate they can pay a caregiver's salary, plus provide accommodations in their homes.

The *Star* found that Theora Scott, a 34-year-old Mississauga mother of three, was approved to sponsor a nanny even though her annual income was only \$24,573 and she was living in subsidized housing. That puts Scott far below Statistics Canada's before-tax poverty line for a single mother of three children (\$39,383).

People sponsoring nannies need enough income to pay a live-in nanny the average annual salary of about \$19,000.

Based on the size of her family, Scott needed to earn at least \$60,000 annually to qualify as a nanny sponsor. With Scott's low salary, almost all her income would go toward the nanny salary.

Toronto-based recruiter Jinkholm International handled Scott's application. When the nanny, a Filipina woman from Hong Kong, arrived, a border official questioned Scott's low income but allowed the nanny in. A border services agency memo reads:

"This is a questionable employment contract in that the employer showed limited income for last year and limited income potential in general," the officer wrote.

"I issued the work permit but limited the duration based on the questionable ability of the employer to retain her."

The nanny bolted from Scott's home within a month.

In an interview, Scott said Jinkholm president Heron Lloyd Tait assured her the nanny would be allowed in. A previous nanny obtained through Jinkholm also quit shortly after arriving.

"Employee quit without reason – just saying she feels unwanted," Scott wrote in a report to the government before applying for another one.

Tait told the *Star* both nanny contracts had been properly approved by Service Canada, a division of Human Resources Canada. He has no problem with Scott's low income, saying Scott, a caregiver for the elderly, could earn more money if she had a nanny to watch her children.

Tait and his agency are on a Canadian Border Services Agency list, obtained by the *Star*, of about 20 recruiting agencies suspected of fraudulently using the federal nanny program. Tait wouldn't say who told him he was on the list.

A part-time recruiter, part-time real estate agent, Tait said he provides an important service. "Mostly, what I'm doing here is helping people come and help families."

In another Jinkholm case, Toronto computer engineer Doina Brejan says she bought a house from Tait four years ago. At the time, he suggested Brejan, a single mother and Romanian immigrant, would require someone to work around the house. She says she never requested a nanny for her son, then 13.

"I needed someone to look after the garden or some stuff like that," Brejan said in an interview.

About a year ago, she said Tait called asking if she would call a government official and say that she did want a caregiver. She refused.

"I told him I don't want to hear about him ever again and I never called anybody," Brejan said.

Documents obtained by the *Star* show Tait charged a Filipino man named Ronell Tabafunda \$8,000 (U.S.) to immigrate to Canada and work as a caregiver for Brejan.

Tabafunda arrived in Canada under the Live-in Caregiver Program, sponsored by Brejan. But the two never met.

Tait says Tabafunda did arrive in Canada to find he had no employer after Brejan declined to hire him. Tait said Brejan was aware she was sponsoring a caregiver for her son.

"She knew what she was doing," he said. "No matter how well you run your business, some employers are going to refuse their nannies."

A senior border official says the 31-year-old Tabafunda remains in Canada, and recently applied for a new work permit. Tabafunda could not be reached for comment.

In some cases, nannies pay what for them are hefty fees – but never make it to Canada.

Twenty Filipina caregivers say they were left stranded in Cyprus after paying Toronto nanny agency Primecare International between \$1,000 and \$3,600 each in advance for jobs in Canada that never materialized.

The *Star* has obtained receipts showing more than \$30,000 in payments to Primecare by the 20 women.

Emma Ombid, a Filipina caregiver who worked as an agent for Primecare in 2007, said there were actually as many as 27 women who paid recruitment fees to Primecare without ever being placed in a Canadian home. She says she was outraged by the way the women were treated.

"They have to leave Cyprus after five years and that's why Canada is so attractive," says Ombid, adding that some of the Cyprus nannies have returned to the Philippines after their work permits expired.

Primecare is also on the federal fraud watch list obtained by the *Star*. Operating out of the Peek-A-Boo children's store on St. Clair Ave. W., the recruiter never refunded the money despite repeated requests from the women stranded in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Several of the nannies, who earn an average of \$500 a month in Cyprus, told the *Star* in telephone interviews that they borrowed heavily to pay the placement fee. They have tried unsuccessfully to reach Primecare owner Veronica Crone.

"I send message to her, but she ignores me," Mariacel Morales said in an interview from Cyprus.

Federal documents show Morales's prospective employer never provided the necessary documents to prove she could afford a nanny.

"Therefore, I am refusing your application," reads the denial from the Canadian embassy in Damascus, Syria, which processed the Cyprus nannies' applications. The prospective employer listed in Morales's 2007 application has a phone number that no longer works and an address in a Scarborough subsidized housing complex.

Letters from the Canadian embassy all cite a lack of financial information from employers as the reason for declining the nannies' admission to Canada.

In January, Crone was arrested and imprisoned in the Philippines on charges of "mass recruiting" and fraud. She remains in prison, her husband John Crone said last week.

Penalties for those convicted of mass recruiting in the Philippines include life imprisonment. A woman convicted of the offence in the Philippines last week was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

"My wife has been accused of something that took place back in 2003," John Crone said in an interview. He said a man involved in a recruiting scam implicated his wife, who he said is blameless.

Crone, who owns the Peek-A-Boo store, says he is not involved with his wife's recruitment company.

"I don't know what happened with these girls from Cyprus. It's obviously a bad situation."

He said his wife has placed hundreds of foreign women in Canadian nanny jobs. "She is not a con artist I'm not saying nothing ever goes wrong," he added.

During the *Star's* investigation, a reporter visited Primecare posing as a potential employer looking for a nanny. Under federal rules, the hiring of a nanny from overseas can take several months, even a year. That's because employers need to first advertise for a Canadian nanny. If none is available, the employer then needs to submit documents to apply for a foreign worker.

The *Star* reporter asked Primecare employee Joy how quickly he could get a nanny. Just a few days, he was told. He was presented with two candidates on the spot; both Filipina nannies who recently arrived from Dubai to learn their employers don't want them.

"If you need them urgently, we can arrange a plan that they can work in your residence, but in case (Human Resources Skills Development Canada) call you, and if they will ask you if this lady is already working, you say, `No.'"

John Crone says it is common for nannies who show up without an employer to start working with new employers without proper approvals.

"I guess there's a shortcut being taken, but the shortcut is so that the nanny doesn't have to sit idly for three months waiting for paperwork to go through," he said.

"I think it's true that it's the way all the agencies operate. When I hear these things, I have the same reaction you do. ... I'm appalled by it."