

Welcome to the first installment of the Speech New Zealand Success Stories – a place for us to highlight the successes of past and present candidates.



Professional Speaking opens doors

Celebrating the success of Patrice Sabanal

Patrice Sabanal gained the Certificate in Professional Speaking with Distinction in August 2020 and recently informed the Speech NZ team that she has successfully found work as an architect in New Zealand. Before moving to New Zealand, Patrice had worked as a Licensed Architect in the Philippines for about five years. Emma Carpenter reached out to her to ask her about her experience of the programme, how she came to find out about it, what the benefits have been, and if she has any advice for others.

“When I arrived in New Zealand in January 2020, I was keen on getting to know the New Zealand culture and, most especially, the Rotorua community. One of my friends invited me to join the Women's Wellbeing Programme organised by the Rotorua Multicultural Council led by Margriet Theron. For me, that was an opportunity worth grabbing as it would help me get to know more about the place I now call home. Fast forward, I became up to date with other Rotorua Multicultural Council activities. One of the activities that caught my attention was the Professional Speaking for Migrants course. I immediately inquired about the course, hoping that I was eligible to enrol. I knew that it was what I needed at that time because though I've been using the English language since I was kid, I was not confident enough to speak it. The course was held at the Rotorua Arts Village, every Thursday from 6 to 9 pm for 10 weeks.”

What was your overall experience of the course?

“Honestly, at first, I was hesitant and nervous because speaking in front of people was not my cup of tea. I do not like being judged by the way I speak or the way I formulate words that would end up grammatically incorrect. I mean, I can easily write paragraphs in the English language, but the speaking part is not something I am proud of. But the course became something to look forward to; every week it was something different.”



Patrice (front, second from left) next to Speech NZ examiner Gabrielle Thurston. Margriet Theron, who has taught the Professional Speaking for Migrants course in Rotorua for ten years, is centre back, next to volunteer tutor Christine Koller.

How has this course benefited you?

“I gained confidence in speaking the English language and learned the right pronunciation and intonation of words. I did not know it at the time, but one of the most important benefits came from sharing the topic of my talk: “Women in Architecture”.

The course helped me share the biased reality that women are facing in this male-dominated industry. Though the topic is quite controversial, we are part of a generation where people are learning to be outspoken about the reality of prejudice. With this course, I was able to share this talk to people of different races, ages, genders, and backgrounds. The reality of women in Architecture made me vocal enough to share my struggles even when looking for jobs here in New Zealand. Applying for Architectural jobs in a different country with a different set of standards requires twice the effort and thrice the patience. I was about to give up. There was this one particular job interview that I almost did not attend because I was already losing hope. This job interview went the same as every other job interview I've been to - same questions, same patterns, same concerns. The difference was ME.

I had gained confidence by sharing my thoughts about Women in Architecture during the course. I was frustrated by applying unsuccessfully for job after job. When they asked me: “What are your weaknesses?”, I firmly answered: “The fact that I am a woman.” It may come off as egotistic to a close-minded person, but it is true. I believe being a woman in a male-dominated industry is a weakness, but with the right mind and the right amount of passion, that weakness will turn into a strength.”



Patrice Sabanal

“They looked interested and asked: “Why?” Maybe they were taken aback because that's not how you usually answer that question in a job interview. One of the interviewers, who turned out to be the boss, offered me the job right then and there. They did not even bother to contact any of my referees. That day, my weakness became my strength.”

“I thank the course, Margriet Theron and Speech NZ for bringing out something in me that I know I could not overcome by myself. I wouldn't be where I am now without all your help.”

- Patrice Sabanal

What advice would you have to others?

“Take that leap and do it for yourself.

I am forever grateful to Speech NZ - for offering such a helpful course to any person in New Zealand, to the Rotorua Multicultural Council for your unwavering support for the people in your community, and last but definitely not the least, our mentor, Margriet Theron, for always being there for us migrants and for always organising programmes that are very useful and meaningful to us who are building a life here.”

We could not be more thrilled with this success story – if you have one you would like to share, please send it through to the Speech NZ National Office at info@speechnz.co.nz

We have more free Professional Speaking for Migrants courses coming up in 2021 – contact National Office for info. The next course starts in Rotorua on 10 June 2021.