



**FOSTERING HOPE,
CULTIVATING
BELONGING FOR
NEWCOMERS**

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society

2024/2025 Annual Report

Prepared by Jennifer Rawlinson & Charis Tazumi

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge with respect that our work at VIRCS takes place on the traditional territories of the Ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) Peoples known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations. These lands, located in Greater Victoria, have long been a place of gathering and home to the original families who made their home a long time ago. As we continue our mission to assist those new to this region, we recognize the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge of the Ləkʷəŋən (Lekwungen) traditional families' territory.

We are committed to learning from and respecting Indigenous peoples' rich history, culture, and wisdom as we support our staff to provide services and help clients build their new lives as guests on these unceded lands. We are also committed to respectfully contributing to the ongoing mutual learning and healing process needed by acknowledging Indigenous peoples' suffering under colonization and its devastating effects to date





Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society

Our Vision

Empowered newcomers flourishing in their communities with a sense of belonging.

Our Mission

Support immigrants and refugees in settling and integrating through comprehensive services for their evolving needs

Our Values

Fairness
Inclusion
Trustworthiness
Commitment
Respect
Dignity

OUR FUNDERS & PARTNERS

VIRCS is grateful to our funders and partners, who support a variety of programs at our organization. Our work would not be possible without the generosity of our funders.



2024/2025 VIRCS' TEAM

Ava Shabestari
Brennan Crabb
Cenit Munoz
Charis Tazumi
David Bradley
Edeen Vincent
Hammuda Abdulsalam
Hiro Minakawa
Iman Skati
Jayanthi Rajkumar;
Jennifer Rawlinson
Kimia Yousefian

Malak Al Homsy
Michael Carrow
Michael Luk
Natasha Pakula
Nasim Hamed
Nahlah Jabra
Phuong Nguyen Le
Sahar Mansourian
Simplicio 'JR' Sumauang
Victoria Chen
Yoko Izawa
Zahra Dehini

2024/2025 Board of Directors

Zaheera Jinnah - President
Gladys Wambugu - Vice President
Parmjeet Uppal - Treasurer
Bushra AlQudayri - Secretary
Andrea McCoy - Member at Large
Ali Hemani - Member at Large
Bruce Brady - Member at Large
Farjeel Javed - Member at Large
Rashed Al-Haque - Member at Large
Shivam Patil - Member at Large

Annual General Meeting 2023/2024 Minutes

Date: September 18, 2024 at 4-6 PM

Venue: VIATEC – 777 Fort Street. Victoria, B.C. Conference Room

Agenda

- 1. 4:10 PM General Welcome/ Territorial Acknowledgement**
Master of Ceremonies (Daria)
- 2. 4:10 PM Call to Order 2023/2024 BOD President Zaheera Jinnah**
- 3. Confirmation of Quorum.**
Quorum confirmed (see attached attendance list)
- 4. Approval of 2024 AGM Agenda**
Motion: Zaheera Jinnah
Seconded: Luis G. Aguirre
All in Favour.
- 5. Acceptance of 2023 AGM Minutes**
Motion : Zaheera Jinnah
Seconded: Bushra Al Qudayri.
All in Favour.
- 6. President's Report/Message: Zaheera Jinnah. Attached.**
- 7. Executive Director's Annual Report: Luis G. Aguirre. Attached.**
- 8. Financial Statement & Financial Report: Attached**
Kaveh Sarmast (Treasurer) and Hammuda Abdulsalam (Financial Controller)
Motion : Zaheera Jinnah
Seconded: Masoud Manzouri
All in Favour
- 9. Motion to retain Auditors: Uvision Chartered Professional Accountants**
Motion: Zaheera Jinnah
Seconded: Luis G. Aguirre
All in Favour

Annual General Meeting 2023/2024 Minutes

10. Nominations for BoD:

The VIRCS By laws require between 5- 12 volunteer BoD's. We have received nominations from 9 members, 6 returning and three new.

- Zaheera Jinnah
- Andrea McCoy
- Bushra AlQudayri
- Patti Grey
- Kaveh Sarmast
- Karen Iturbide

In terms of the by laws, a Nominating Committee was struck with the president, secretary and ED. Three applications were shortlisted and are attached here for conditional approval subject to CRC and further screening:

1. Bisan Alseabi
2. Masoud Manzouri
3. Justin Patton

Motion to approve on condition of final reviews with the sub-committee.

Motion : Zaheera Jinnah
Seconded: Luis G. Aguirre
All in Favour.

Resignations: Sarah Alasaly with immediate effect, Karen Iturbide, effective after a new Director is onboarded

Roles of members will take place during the next Board of Directors Meeting.

11. No new business.

12. Adjournment of formal proceedings

Time: 4:35 p.m.
Motion to move to adjourn: Zaheera Jinnah
Seconded: Bushra AlQudayri
All in Favour.



Board Chair Message

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am delighted to share the VIRCS 2025 Annual Report with you. Over the last 12 months our we have been working hard to do what we love; serving our communities of immigrants, refugees, newcomers and Canadians with pride and dedication. Community is at the heart of VIRCS. Since our establishment 36 years ago, we have grown in size and services each year, while remaining close to the values and people that are at the heart of our agency.

Over the last year we have experienced significant political and economic shifts across Canada that have impacted our work. Like many other settlement agency, a sudden loss of funding from the IRCC resulted in the closure of our largest program that provided much needed services to newcomers. This loss will be deeply felt in communities across Canada.

Our resiliency and creativity is our strength, and as a non-profit in a fluid and complex funding and political environment we have had to draw on these more than ever. This past year we concluded 5 years of managing the Province of B.C's Anti racism program, and take important lessons forward on working on Reconciliation and anti-racism within settlement services.

VIRCS innovative approach has helped us successfully diversify our funding base. As part of our strategic plan we have also restructured our many projects and initiative into three coherent programs: Settlement, Employment, Education and Training, and Resilience Communities. We have concluded several new partnerships and multi-year funding grants, and continue to provide excellent services to clients .

I am proud of the accomplishments that the staff and volunteers of VIRCS have achieved this past year. With creativity and care we have supported more than 4000 people across our programs, helping people thrive and building connected and strong communities.

Zaheera Jinnah
President of the Board
Victoria Immigrant and Refugee
Centre Society

A Message from the Interim Executive Director

WHERE WE ARE

Dear Friends, Supporters, and
Community Members,

As I reflect on the past year at the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS), I am filled with deep gratitude—for the courage of the newcomers we serve, the dedication of our team, and the unwavering support of our funders, partners, and community.

Our work takes place on the traditional, unceded territories of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples, today represented by the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. As newcomers and settlers, we are committed to Truth and Reconciliation and to ongoing decolonization in our work. We continue to listen, learn, and take action in ways that honour the Indigenous peoples whose land we live and work on.

This past year brought both transitions and renewed momentum. In March 2025, we completed the Newcomer Wraparound Support program, funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). This initiative provided trauma-informed, holistic support to individuals and families with complex needs. We are proud of its impact and grateful to have played a role in helping so many rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.



We were pleased to receive renewed funding for the Pathways to Professions, Trades, and Entrepreneurship program through 2028, supported by Service Canada. This program continues to empower internationally trained professionals and aspiring entrepreneurs by opening doors to sustainable careers and self-employment.

Another major milestone was the extension of the BC Newcomer Support Program until 2029, with the possibility of an additional two years. This long-term provincial investment ensures stability and continuity for newcomers accessing essential services like housing support, language training, employment services, and community connections.

We also launched our Program for Community Resilience, focusing on groups often underrepresented in traditional settlement services: newcomer children and youth, newcomer women, and seniors. Through leadership initiatives, wellness programs, and digital literacy training for seniors, we are working to foster inclusion, connection, and long-term integration across generations.

None of this would be possible without the incredible support of our Board of Directors—a team of volunteer professionals from across the community who bring experience, insight, and deep commitment to our mission and values. Their leadership, accountability, and advocacy help guide the direction of VIRCS and ensure that we remain grounded in both community need and strategic vision.

Across all areas of our work, VIRCS remains firmly committed to anti-racism, equity, LGBTQ2S+ inclusion, and the dismantling of systemic barriers. We strive to create safe, inclusive spaces where every person is valued for who they are—and supported in building the future they envision.

To our clients—thank you for your trust and courage. To our staff and volunteers—thank you for your compassion and perseverance. To our Board, funders, and partners—thank you for your guidance and belief in this work.

Together, we are creating a stronger, more just and welcoming community—one where newcomers are not only welcomed but truly belong.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Jennifer Rawlinson
Interim Executive Director
Victoria Immigrant and Refugee
Centre Society



Visit from Parliamentary Secretary Sunita Dhir: International Credential Recognition



VIRCS staff and program participants with PS Sunita Dhir and Eric Peters.

In July, VIRCS was honoured to welcome Parliamentary Secretary Sunita Dhir and Eric Peters, Chief of Staff to the Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Advanced Education and Future Skills. The visit focused on the newly introduced International Credential Recognition Act and the systemic challenges faced by internationally trained professionals in having their credentials recognized in Canada.

PS Dhir and Mr. Peters facilitated an engaging roundtable discussion with VIRCS staff and program participants who shared their lived experiences navigating the credential recognition process. These powerful stories highlighted the importance of accessible pathways to employment and professional integration for newcomers.



PS Sunita Dhir and Eric Peters leading a roundtable discussion with VIRCS staff and internationally trained professionals.

This visit also opened an important opportunity for VIRCS to be considered as a potential partner in supporting the implementation of the Act. Given our extensive experience in employment, training, and settlement services, VIRCS is well-positioned to serve as a focal point for clients seeking support with credential evaluation and recognition.

We are encouraged by this productive dialogue and remain committed to helping internationally trained newcomers contribute their skills and talents to Canada's workforce.

SETTLEMENT SERVICES

BC NEWCOMER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Empowering Newcomers Successful Integration



OUR MISSION

BCNSP is committed to supporting the social and economic integration of newcomers to British Columbia who are not eligible for federally funded settlement services. Our dedicated team—including settlement counsellors, English instructors, immigration consultants, lawyers, and volunteers—strives to deliver high-quality, culturally-sensitive, and client-centered support. Through BCNSP, newcomers enhance their employment readiness, navigate their settlement journey with confidence, and develop a strong sense of belonging within their new community. This contributes to improved individual and family well-being, while fostering a more diverse, skilled, and inclusive society that strengthens the social and economic fabric of British Columbia.

The BC Newcomer Services Program (BCNSP) at the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) supports temporary residents and naturalized Canadian citizens living in the Greater Victoria area. The program, through the funding from the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills, provides a comprehensive range of settlement services designed to meet the diverse needs of newcomers. These services include information and orientation, referrals to community resources, employment support, and access to English language training.

OUTCOMES

In the last fiscal year (April 2024 – March 2025), we served approximately 3000 clients, exceeding the annual target number for all Hub and Spoke locations. In order to meet the high-volume caseloads, our team has provided a comprehensive range of services through various community outreach, workshops, and events.

- We have conducted more than 25 on-going conversation classes with an education and information focus, both online and in-person, engaging 15-20 participants in each session to foster community connections and promote social integration.
- BCNSP has provided more than 20 workshops for individuals and families, with an average of 15-20 participants in each workshop. These activities promote community connections, build bridges between newcomers and different communities, and create meaningful relationships and understanding among newcomers, Canadians, and Indigenous peoples (including First Nations, Inuit and Métis), with the aim of creating a welcoming environment and enhancing a sense of belonging.
- Our formal English Language Training classes, delivered at Hub and Spoke locations, has provided English education and language support for more than 463 eligible clients, which is pivotal in helping clients integrate to the community and workforce.
- In addition, our employment services have served 735 clients through 1-on-1 career consultation and educational workshops delivered in multiple languages to assist vulnerable temporary foreign workers.



“I truly appreciate your time, your feedback, and the wonderful positive energy you shared with me. Your kind words about my abilities made me happy and encouraged me to believe in myself. I loved your inspiring ideas.”

**BCNSP Client
May 1st, 2025**

PARTNERSHIPS

We deeply value the significant contributions of our current community partners and volunteers, such as the Greater Victoria Library, the Vancouver Island Regional Library, the Migrant Worker Centre, Worker Solidarity Network, Women In Need Community Cooperative (WIN) Volunteer Victoria, Victoria Literacy Connections (VLC), School Districts, Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA), immigration consultants and lawyers. Their dedication and collaboration have been crucial in enabling us to deliver essential services to newcomers in our community.

Furthermore, we have expanded our network of community partners and are grateful for the invaluable support of community partners like Victoria Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees (VICCIR), which provides mental health counselling support, and Corey Keith from Spectra Services, who delivers peer support and 2SLGBTQI+ workshops.



"I am writing to inform you that I have successfully completed both the Food Safe and First Aid Level B certifications. I wanted to take a moment to sincerely thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this process. These certifications have been a valuable learning experience, and I'm confident they will contribute positively to my future opportunities in the community and workplace. Thank you once again for your guidance and continued support."

CONCLUSION

We extend heartfelt thanks to the Ministry of Immigration Integration, Post Secondary Education and Future Skills for their generous funding and ongoing support, which is essential to our mission of ensuring the successful integration of newcomers into British Columbia. As an integral program at VIRCS, BCNSP is committed to empowering newcomers flourishing in their communities with a sense of belonging while upholding the values of VIRCS - Fairness, Inclusion, Trustworthiness, Commitment, Respect, and Dignity.

**BCNSP client
Tuesday, July 8, 2025**



"I'm grateful for all your help. Since I got to know VIRCS, a sense of joy and light has entered my life. Thank you so much for the Family Artz Show, yesterday's class, and the potluck party. They were all wonderful and brought me so much happiness. I'm still full of joy! The class was very helpful and informative, and I truly enjoyed spending time with you and my classmates yesterday."

**BCNSP client
Thursday, Aug 7, 2025**

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

ENABLE PROGRAM

Supporting Newcomer Children, Youth, Women & Seniors to Thrive in Canada

The Enable Program for Youth, Women, and Community Supports has been a cornerstone in serving newcomer, immigrant, and refugee children, youth, women, and vulnerable families. The program has provided the emotional, academic, psychological, and community supports needed for individuals to settle, thrive, and feel included in their new home. Throughout the 2024–2025-year, Enable served 250 individuals, delivering a variety of initiatives that addressed the diverse needs of our community.

For children, the program offered a Weekly **Homework Club** in collaboration with the Greater Victoria School District's Welcome and Learning Centre. With the support of volunteers, newcomer children were guided in adjusting to the school system, engaging in fun activities, learning language, and building friendships. We continued to deliver **Art Therapy** and **Music Therapy** in partnership with the Sooke School District, offering group-based sessions to children ages 6–11 in Sooke, Langford, and Colwood. These creative programs provided safe and welcoming spaces where children could explore expression, build confidence, and strengthen their emotional well-being while growing academically and socially.



For youth, the program created supportive peer environments through initiatives such as Youth Nights, which gave newcomer youth opportunities to meet peers, share experiences, and learn the culture.

The Youth Summer Camp was delivered as a week-long summer program for youth ages 12–18, combining leadership and life skills development with engaging activities such as sports, art, and outdoor recreation. These opportunities highlighted our commitment to supporting youth in building confidence, leadership, and a strong sense of belonging.

The program also focused on family and early learning. As subcontractors, Immigrant Parents as Literacy Supporters (IPALS) project, funded by Decoda Literacy Solutions and IRCC, newcomer families gained new strategies to support preschool and kindergarten-aged children's learning in fun and interactive ways. Sessions included adult-only time for parents and caregivers to connect with facilitators, as well as time for adults and children to learn, play, and grow together..



“Art therapy has been my kids’ favorite activity they looked forward to it all week! Through different creative activities, they were able to express themselves and build self-confidence. It was especially meaningful for one of my sons who has ADHD. He often doesn’t enjoy other classes, but he was fully engaged and truly enjoyed art therapy.”

In addition to these services, the program delivered several smaller projects, including initiatives in food security, mental health, and youth leadership, in collaboration with the Welcome Gardens Program at VIRCS and funded by the Victoria Foundation. These projects offered a multi-program initiative focused on improving the well-being of racialized communities through food security resources, mental health support programs for women, and youth leadership development in Victoria.



This work laid the foundation for the expansion of services under the Community Resilience portfolio, bringing together a variety of new initiatives under one umbrella. Through Community Resilience, several new projects were launched: the **Newcomer Women's Project (NWP)**, providing trauma-informed and culturally sensitive case management, referrals, workshops, and community initiatives for newcomer women; the Community Cabinet program, an event-based initiative providing essential items for newcomer women (supported by Soap for Hope, Joni, Period Purse and community donors; and the **Seniors' Project**, which provides BIPOC seniors (55+) with foundational digital skills and online safety training in a welcoming environment. These projects have already begun fostering stronger connections, confidence, and resilience among participants.

Most recently, the program received funding for the **BC Civic Connect for Youth initiative**, supported by Government of Canada, Youth Take Charge/Canadian Heritage. This project will empower immigrant and refugee youth aged 15–30 across British Columbia to engage in civic life, advocate for inclusivity, and influence systemic change through training, mentorship, creative expression, and policy participation.

The program also launched the **Youth Healing Circle**, funded by the United Way's Anti-Racism Impact Grant, designed to support the mental health and well-being of newcomer youth who have experienced racism, discrimination, and systemic barriers by creating a safe space for healing, peer support, and resilience.

In summary, the Community Resilience Program, which now brings together the work of the Enable Program and new initiatives under one portfolio, continues to make a profound impact on individuals and the community. Children are growing in confidence and adapting successfully to new school environments. Youth are developing leadership and life skills while building strong peer networks and connections to culture. Families are strengthening their ability to support their children's learning at home. Women are gaining access to trauma-informed services and resources that enhance their well-being. Seniors are learning vital digital skills that increase their independence and sense of safety.

VIRCS thanks the Community Resilience staff: Ava Shabestari, Cenit Munoz, Iman Skati, Kimia Yousefian, Hiro Minakawa & Charis Tazumi.



“As newcomers who just moved to Canada, our daughter was struggling to feel confident in a new environment. The summer camp was a wonderful opportunity for her to explore different places in Victoria and participate in her favorite art activities. It brought her so much joy and really helped boost her confidence.”



Beyond individual outcomes, the program has strengthened the community as a whole by creating inclusive, supportive, and resilient spaces where newcomers are welcomed, valued, and empowered. By listening to the voices of those it serves and responding with culturally sensitive and community-driven approaches, the Community Resilience Program is building a stronger, more connected society where everyone has the opportunity to belong and thrive.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our funders, including BC Gaming, United Way of Greater Victoria, TELUS Community Grant, Victoria Foundation, Vancouver Foundation, Civil Forfeiture Office (Ministry of Public Safety), First West Foundation through the Island Savings Community Endowment, Government of Canada (Department of Canadian Heritage and New Horizons for Seniors Program), Districts of Saanich and the Greater Victoria Savings & Credit Union Legacy Fund.

We are equally grateful to our community partners, school districts, nonprofits, and individuals, who continue to support this meaningful program and help create direct, lasting changes in the lives of individuals and the community as a whole.

WELCOME GARDENS

ROOTED IN RESILIENCE: RECLAIMING FOOD, CULTURE, AND POWER

Welcome Gardens continues to grow not only food, but futures. In 2024–2025, our community-driven, land-based program provided over 400 immigrants, refugees, and racialized individuals across Greater Victoria with the skills, tools, and confidence to grow their own culturally meaningful food, wherever they are, with whatever space they have.

Guided by the global principle of food sovereignty, Welcome Gardens empowers newcomers to reclaim food traditions, share intergenerational knowledge, and reduce reliance on expensive, inaccessible food systems. Our gardens are spaces of resistance, where food is not charity, but dignity, culture, and survival.

Groundwork for Equity and Food Justice

Food insecurity continues to disproportionately impact racialized people, particularly women, single mothers, and gender-diverse newcomers, many of whom face systemic barriers to land access, safe housing, employment, and culturally relevant food. Welcome Gardens works to break these cycles by equipping participants with long-term, self-sustaining food-growing skills.



“This program has changed my life.”

“I’ve never seen my child so proud, eating something we grew together.”

“I didn’t know I could still grow food without land.”

These statements, often spoken by women and caregivers, reflect not only personal transformation, but a deeper intergenerational impact on families facing poverty and social isolation. Our focus on low-barrier access, providing interpretation, transit passes, childcare, tools, and inclusive spaces, ensures women, elders, and LGBTQIA+ newcomers are fully welcomed and supported.

2024–2025 Highlights

Multicultural Gardens: Grew over 40 varieties of culturally significant crops.

Container Gardening & Urban Farming Workshops: Addressed lack of land access, empowering apartment dwellers, particularly women-led households, to grow on balconies, windowsills, and shared community plots.

Harvest Relief Partnership: Delivered 1,500+ pounds of fresh produce to newcomer families, supporting household nutrition and reducing grocery expenses for low-income families.

Volunteer-Led Education: Many former participants became volunteer educators, facilitating workshops in their languages and cultural contexts. As one put it: “Now I’m not just learning, I’m leading.”



Policy, Leadership, and Systemic Change

This year, Welcome Gardens took on a leadership role beyond the garden beds. In collaboration with CRFAIR, we co-created the first-ever Anti-Racist Equity Toolkit for Community Food Systems in the region. This toolkit is now being used as a model by other gardens and is often referred to in the City of Victoria’s equity planning. In addition, we:

- Hosted Food Equity Roundtables with racialized farmers, urban growers, and newcomers to inform local food policy.
- Advised on inclusive practices equity in community gardens.
- Actively supported initiatives that center Indigenous land stewardship and food sovereignty, recognizing the colonial history of land and food access.



- Participants engage in practical activities like Seed Saving, Seed Sowing, Harvesting Vegetables for Families in Need, and Urban Gardening Techniques. The program further facilitated Climate Change Dialogues, distributed Seedlings and Soil-Building Materials, and offered guidance on creating Pollinator Habitats. This comprehensive approach provided participants with valuable skills, knowledge, and resources, empowering them to cultivate sustainable and resilient gardens while fostering community engagement.

Participant Story:

"When I arrived in Canada, I felt invisible. I had no garden, no language, no power. The first time I touched soil again, I remembered who I was. Now I grow food for my neighbors, and I teach others. I'm not just surviving, I'm contributing." This experience mirrors that of so many who arrive disconnected from land, community, and culture. Through Welcome Gardens, these connections are re-established, with the earth, with each other, and with oneself.

Funding & Support

Welcome Gardens' success is made possible by the dedication of community members and the generosity of our funders:

- City of Victoria
- BC Gaming
- Victoria Foundation
- Service Canada

This funding has enabled us to provide free workshops, materials, garden plots, access supports, and leadership opportunities to those most impacted by systemic inequities.

In Gratitude

Especial thanks to:

- Odd Fellows Victoria
- Andrew Beckerman
- Harvest and Food Relief Society

To our volunteers, funders, partners, and most importantly, our participants: thank you. You are proof that food can be a tool of healing, connection, and resistance.

Together, we are planting something deeper than crops. We are growing justice, belonging, and hope, one seed at a time.

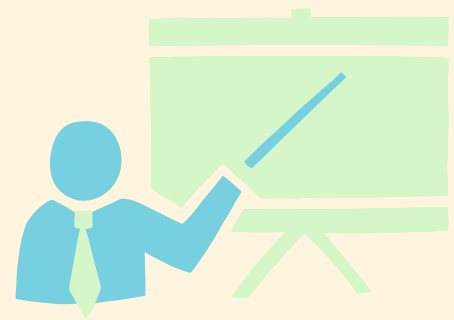
In solidarity,

Cenit Munoz, Welcome Gardens Manager

"When we plant seeds, we plant memory, resistance, and future."

EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING & EDUCATION

PATHWAYS TO PROFESSIONS, TRADES & ENTREPRENEURSHIP (P2PTE)



This past August, we celebrated the one-year anniversary of our Pathways to Professions, Trades, and Entrepreneurship (P2PTE) program, funded through Service Canada under the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS).

Program Objectives

The YESS program is designed to help youth build the skills and gain the experience they need to successfully transition into the labour market. It emphasizes supporting youth facing barriers by providing opportunities for skills development, education, networking, and meaningful work experiences.

Over the course of 43 months, the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) will assist 150 youth facing barriers to employment. The program offers:

- **12 program intakes** featuring up to 8 weeks of Employment Services and Skills Training, plus up to 12 weeks of Quality Employment Experience.
- **Accredited Skills Training** when no other funding sources are available to meet identified training needs.
- **Individualized supports** such as childcare, transportation, coaching, and living expenses, to help participants fully benefit from the program.



Program Highlights

In just one year, our P2PTE team has supported 51 youth participants facing barriers to employment. Of these, 95% are newcomers and IBPOC youth, and 88% have successfully secured employment or returned to school.

In the 2024–2025 program year, we have expanded our network of employers and community partners, strengthening our capacity to improve youth employment outcomes in our community. Looking ahead, the P2PTE team is excited to host a job fair at VIRCS, connecting local employers with trained and motivated newcomer youth from the program.



Ala Alhaj Obid, 21, hailing from Syria, sits in his newly opened tailoring shop, D&F Tailoring Experts, at 543 Herald St. (Olivier Laurin/Victoria News) Ala graduated from the VIRCS Pathways to Professions, Trades and Entrepreneurship program in 2022.

Hello everyone,

When I first came to Canada, I had the chance to join the P2PTE course, and it was truly a blessing for me. The program gave me valuable information about the Canadian job market, taxes, and even how to be careful about scammers. We also received practical training such as Food Safe, WHMIS, and First Aid, and they even supported us with a police record check.

One of the biggest supports I received was from my job coordinator Michael, who helped me revise my CV, connect with employers, and guide me on the path of transferring my credentials to return to my career as a dietitian here in Canada.

What I really appreciated was also the review of management and entrepreneurship at the end of the course, which added to my learning.

I feel very grateful for this experience, and I want to sincerely thank the whole team for their guidance, support, and encouragement. This course gave me not only skills but also hope and confidence to start a new life here.

My advice to all newcomers is: take this course as soon as you arrive in Canada. It will give you the tools, the knowledge, and the support you need to build your future here.

Thank you.
Noor

English Language Training Program

Enhancing Communication Skills for Newcomers

Since opening our doors in 1989, the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) has proudly supported newcomers through English language training tailored to meet the evolving needs of our community. Over the past 36 years, the ESL program has continued to adapt and grow, ensuring greater access, flexibility, and relevance for our learners.

Our community-based English classes are specifically designed for individuals who are not eligible for government-funded programs and are seeking practical, accessible, and flexible learning opportunities. This year, our fee-payer ESL classes follow this schedule:

- Beginner classes on Monday and Tuesday afternoons
- Intermediate classes on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons
- Introductory classes on Friday mornings
- Free pronunciation classes are available on either Thursday mornings or Friday afternoons

Each class focuses on equipping learners with the English language skills essential for daily life in Canada. Our approach prioritizes speaking and listening, while also incorporating reading and writing. The pronunciation classes are open to all VIRCS clients and are designed to help students recognize and produce English sounds more clearly and confidently.



I am a Brazilian immigrant living outside Brazil for the first time, and when I arrived in Victoria, I spoke very little English. Learning a new language has been one of the biggest challenges of my life, but the English classes with teacher David have been essential for my development and for giving me the chance to practice speaking. David is patient, funny, and truly cares about our learning, and his classes are always filled with positive energy. I am very grateful to VIRCS and especially to David for being such an important part of my journey.

Paulo Cesar Lopes

What sets VIRCS' ESL program apart is its student-centered model and commitment to accessibility:

- **Continuous Intake:** Students are welcome to join the program at any time, space permitting.
- **Flexible Attendance:** We recognize that many learners balance work, family, and other responsibilities. Students are welcome to attend classes as often as they are able.
- **Individualized Learning Plans:** Each class is multi-level and multicultural, so lessons are designed to respond to learners' unique goals, skills, and progress.
- **Tiered Tuition Fees:** We offer affordable rates, with lower fees for domestic students and reasonable rates for international visitors. Additionally, four seats per class are reserved as free spaces for those facing financial or systemic barriers. Each student may remain in the program for up to six months to ensure more equitable access.

I like VIRCS for all the programs they offer for immigrants. This helps us experience Canadian culture in a more welcoming way. The English classes have been unforgettable experiences.

Adriana Munoz

Our dedicated ESL instructor, David Bradley, continues to enhance the program in response to student feedback and evolving needs. This year, he introduced a third instructional level and a second pronunciation class, ensuring that all students—regardless of their starting point—have a space where they can thrive.

VIRCS is also proud to be a licensed Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Test (CLBPT) Centre. Our two certified assessors provide testing services to our partner colleges—Cambria, Sprott Shaw, and Edison—which have become a valuable source of funding for our ESL program. This allows us to continue offering free and low-cost programming to more newcomers.

Our ESL program continues to reflect our core values—accessibility, inclusion, and community. We're proud to offer high-quality language learning in a welcoming, supportive, and student-driven environment.

We are grateful to BC Gaming for their generous donations. VIRCS thanks the ESL team: David Bradley, Malak Al Homsy



My name is Ryeong Lee, and I have been attending the Wednesday English classes at VIRCS since March. I have been in Canada for three years, but I still felt nervous about speaking in English and often studied alone. After joining David's class through a friend's recommendation, I discovered the joy of learning English and gained much more confidence when speaking with classmates. David prepares useful and engaging materials every week, and he is thoughtful and cheerful, which helps students overcome their fear and hesitation about English. I always look forward to each class and am grateful to VIRCS and David for providing such a positive and valuable learning experience.

Ryeong Lee

CELPIP



As one of only three CELPIP testing locations in the Greater Victoria region, we administered tests to several hundred individuals in 2024–2025. This service helps community members meet immigration and employment requirements and reinforces VIRCS's role as a central hub for language support and integration services.

Community Workforce Response Grant Partnership

VIRCS is proud to continue its partnership with Cambria College through the Community Workforce Response Grant (CWRG). Now in our fourth and fifth project cycles, this collaboration provides fully funded training programs for unemployed and marginalized individuals in our community.

Through this initiative, we have offered both the **Community Support Worker** program and the **Medical Laboratory Assistant** certificate. These programs are designed to support VIRCS clients—particularly newcomers—who are seeking to upgrade their skills or transition into new career paths.

By removing financial barriers to education and aligning training with high-demand sectors, the CWRG partnership is making a tangible impact on the lives of participants and supporting long-term workforce development in our region.

REFLECTING ON PREVIOUS PROGRAMS

NEWCOMER WRAPAROUND SUPPORT PROGRAM

In 2024-2025, the Newcomer Wraparound Support Program (NWSP) provided a wide range of services, in particular wraparound, trauma-informed and culturally sensitive case management for individuals and families with Permanent Residence and Protected Persons status, in the Greater Victoria Area. We provided personalized, holistic settlement support for newcomers by creating individualized life plans and providing information and referral services to various community partners and resources.

The program was designed to support newcomers facing overwhelming and complex barriers towards settlement and integration in Greater Victoria. In 2024-2025, the Newcomer Wraparound Support Program (NWSP) experienced a challenging transition. Unfortunately, due to reduction of funding from Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), NWSP ceased operations at the end of March 2025. The impact of this loss on our clients, community, staff and overall organization was immense and very challenging. Despite this difficult change, we reflect on the work of NWSP with gratitude and respect. Not only for the support we received from the community, but importantly, the faith and trust of clients imparted on our NWSP team to support them through meaningful and comprehensive service.



With the help of staff, practicum students, and volunteers, the NWSP program has served over 560 clients. Through one-on-one support and case management, the NWSP team ensured clients' needs were addressed with empathy and care by creating wraparound plans tailored to each individual's unique situation. The program expanded its impact by offering workshops and information sessions on a variety of topics, including Canadian law, citizenship, women's mental health, healthy lifestyles, parenting, employment skills, and more. To date, NWSP has facilitated over 121 workshops for more than 280 participants in the past year.

While the Newcomer Wraparound Support Program has come to a close, VIRCS is eager to support and engage clients through new programs and start our next chapter. Through the Enable Program for Women, Youth & Community Support, VIRCS now again offers additional services for Women and Seniors through the Newcomer Women's Project and Digital Literacy for BIPOC Seniors.



RESILIENCE BC

With financing from the province of British Columbia, the Resilience BC Hub was established in April 2020 to assist members of the Resilience BC Anti-Racism Network. As of March 2025, 30 members of the Network are active throughout British Columbia.

In its fifth year, the Resilience BC Hub operated from the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society with a three-member team including Program Manager, Abena Ayepah Atta-Gyan, Program Coordinator, Zeinab Hammoud, and Communications Manager, Roberto Alberto.

The Hub team sub-contracted Indigenous Community for Leadership and Development (ICLD) to run Cultural Competency Trainings. ICLD planned with the team to offer each module in two sessions. The Cultural Awareness module was the first to be offered; the first session was offered on November 13th, 2024, from 9:00am-11:00am, and the second session was held on November 19th, 2024, from 1:00pm-3:00pm. The Cultural Safety module was the second and final module to be offered; the first session was offered on February 12th, 2025, from 9:00am-12:00pm and the second session was held on February 19th, 2025, from 1:00pm-3:30pm.



The training was facilitated by Sara Curley of ICLD with about 17 attendants for the first module, and 14 attendants for the second module. The attendants consisted of Network members, community members, the Hub team, and VIRCS staff members.

Module one started with a pre-assessment of the participants knowledge on Indigenous experiences and knowledge on engaging with Indigenous communities. Sessions always started with a circle of introductions, where Sara encouraged participants to introduce themselves, their cultural backgrounds, and what participants were hoping to gain from this training.

Black History Month — Resource Catalogue

To commemorate Black History Month for February 2025, the Hub created and released a 60+ page resource catalogue aiming to commemorate Black History Month by centering and honoring the voices, experiences, and contributions of Black Canadians and Black communities all over the world.

Each week of February 2025 we created and released a resource list with a different focus, including Black Canadian events, histories, arts and cultures, and Black-owned businesses in B.C. One list was shared to our social media pages each week in February. This required converting the resource lists into Instagram posts and promoting these posts upon their upload. Collectively, these posts garnered over 60 "likes," 100+ page interactions, and saw over 20 new followers on our Instagram page during their postings.

Racist Incident Helpline

The Racist Incident Helpline was launched on May 30th, 2024, and has been in operation since then to provide trauma-informed support to individuals across British Columbia who have experienced or been a victim of racism.

Communities of Care Toolkit

The Communities of Care Toolkit was completed, passed onto the Branch, and received approval from GCPE. The Toolkit has been launched as an internal resource for Network members. An external launch of the Toolkit is projected following a year of piloting the resource and receiving feedback from Network members.

Black History Month Resource Catalogue

This catalogue highlights and archives some of the many avenues that may be used to directly engage with Black communities and their experiences throughout so-called B.C. Each resource list features a variety of curated materials to inspire learning, reflection, appreciation, allyship, and action. The catalogue was sent to the Branch for GCPE review. It can be posted to the Resilience BC website as a standing resource for the public once it passes GCPE approval.

The program concluded on March 31, 2025 noting both successes and challenges due to funding losses for both Hub and Spoke organizations.

VICTORIA IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CENTRE SOCIETY

Statement of Financial Position

December 31, 2024

	2024	2023
ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Cash	\$ 88,042	\$ 131,725
Accounts receivable	297,203	174,668
GST receivable	2,336	12,244
	<u>387,581</u>	<u>318,637</u>
CAPITAL ASSETS <i>(Net of accumulated amortization) (Note 4)</i>	<u>35,524</u>	<u>49,715</u>
	<u>\$ 423,105</u>	<u>\$ 368,352</u>
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT		
Accounts payable and accrued charges	\$ 14,824	\$ 21,112
Wages payable	-	186
	<u>14,824</u>	<u>21,298</u>
DEFERRED REVENUE <i>(Note 5)</i>	<u>406,486</u>	<u>380,594</u>
	<u>421,310</u>	<u>401,892</u>
NET ASSETS		
Operating fund	(33,727)	(83,253)
Capital fund	35,522	49,713
	<u>1,795</u>	<u>(33,540)</u>
	<u>\$ 423,105</u>	<u>\$ 368,352</u>

APPROVED BY THE DIRECTORS

Zaheera Jinnah

Zaheera Jinnah, President

Gladys Wambugu

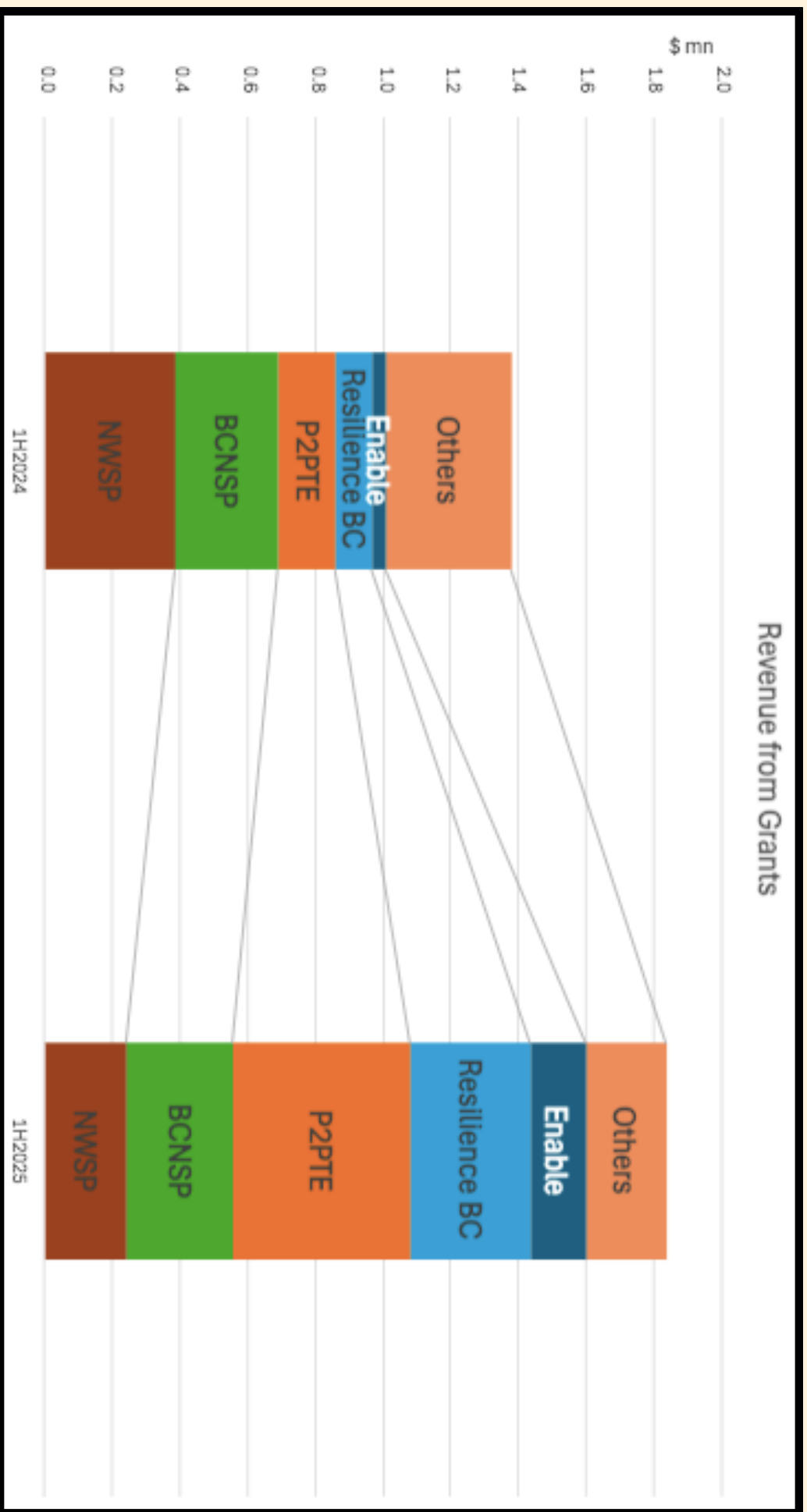
Gladys Wambugu, Vice President

See notes to financial statements

VICTORIA IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CENTRE SOCIETY**Statement of Revenues and Expenditures****Year Ended December 31, 2024**

	2024	2023
REVENUES		
Operating Grants (Note 8)	\$ 2,674,971	\$ 3,264,191
Gaming	85,556	84,260
Donations	15,596	15,856
Social Events	1,386	55
Training	73,560	44,464
Interest Income	384	63
	<u>2,851,453</u>	<u>3,408,889</u>
EXPENDITURES		
Wages and Contracted Services	1,983,780	2,240,193
Direct Program Costs	532,488	872,707
Building Occupancy	204,168	188,119
Office and Supplies	39,655	28,157
Travel and Transportation	18,220	24,453
Amortization	14,191	14,220
Recognition, Training and Recruiting	10,513	5,439
Memberships	2,838	3,448
Professional Fees	10,265	9,650
	<u>2,816,118</u>	<u>3,386,386</u>
EXCESS OF REVENUES OVER EXPENDITURES	<u>\$ 35,335</u>	<u>\$ 22,503</u>

See notes to financial statements



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**FOSTERING HOPE,
CULTIVATING
BELONGING FOR
NEWCOMERS**

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society

2024/2025 Annual Report

Prepared by Jennifer Rawlinson & Charis Tazumi