



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

Empowered newcomers flourishing in their communities with a sense of belonging



Our Vision:

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



Our Mission:

**Assist immigrants and
refugees in settling and
integrating through
comprehensive services for
their evolving needs.**



Our Values:

**Fairness.
Inclusion.
Trustworthiness.
Commitment.
Respect.
Dignity.**



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2021-2022 Annual General Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, September 20 5:00 pm at 1004 North Park Street, Victoria, B.C.

Attendees:

Board of Directors Members:

Osaro Ezomo, Liza Sehic, Sarah Alasaly, Ye Li,
and Patti Grey,

Staff:

Karen Hira, Asuka Hirai, Bushra AlQudayri,
Jennifer Rawlinson, Neil Bhoondpaul, Amrik
Thind, Nasim Hamed, Natasha Pakula, Jayanthi
Rajkumar, Brennan Crabb, Maureen Ochagla,
Phuong Nguyen Le, Yoko Izawa, Jane Hurtig,
Heleina Dahlias, Asiyah Robinson, Serena
(Kyoungmi) Lee, Soolin Yang, Robi Elfurjani,
Brittany Dunstan, Bushra AlQudayri, Grathy Li
(Jing), Tracy Birch-Mensah, Lindsay Budge,
Avneet Randhawa, Jamison Schulz-Franco,
Nadia Sangster, Jean Penola and Keri Greenidge

Community Partners and Founders

Jane Taylor Lee

ED Family services of Greater Victoria

Mak Gary IRCC Acting Supervisor)
Perepletchik Diana (IRCC Manager)



VIRCS

Minutes:

Liza Sehic (V.P.)

Call to order: 5:05 pm

Welcome/Greetings: 2020/2021

BOD President Osaro Ezomo

**Call to Order/Acknowledgement of the
territory of Lekwungen speaking peoples,
Songhees First Nations.**

Agenda

1. Motion to approve the Agenda
 - Liza motion to approve
 - 2nd by Patty
2. Minutes from the last AGM-Motion to approve
AGM minutes from last year
 - Ye moving the motion
 - 2nd by Patti
3. ED Report
 - See attached
4. President's report
 - See attached
5. Treasurer's report
 - See attached
6. Appointment for accountant- same as last
year.
7. Appointment of directors - no new directors
have been appointed at this meeting.
8. Adjournment of meeting - 5:24 pm
 - Patti moving the motion
 - 2nd by Ye Li



VIRCS

A Brief History



1989

The Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) is founded by three former refugees (Viet, Hereity, and Carlos) as a result of two generous donations from the Catholic Foundation of Victoria and Saint John the Divine Anglican Parish.



1994

5 years after opening its doors, VIRCS is a pillar in the community. The centre receives federal and provincial funding allowing it to establish its Settlement Program, introduce an ESL class (2900 attendees in the first year) and citizenship preparation classes. VIRCS also implements a new federally-funded Settlement Program to assist African newcomers.



1996

VIRCS connects to the internet! This enables counselors to find more job openings, access employment opportunities, access training, and connect clients to community services. VIRCS organizes a 3-day Latin Music festival that brings in 600 attendees and VIRCS receives provincial funding to produce its TV show, 'Ethnivation', for Shaw Cable.



2000

By 2000, the demand for settlement services grows immensely and the number of clients served by VIRCS increases by an average of 20% annually, while inquiries rise by 40% to an incredible 50% in 2002. Staffing increases to 20 employees.



2005

In 2005, VIRCS completes "First Step", a multi-year project funded by Canadian Heritage to promote multiculturalism and anti-racism among children. VIRCS distributes 10,000 children's books and 5,000 parents' books to schools and community organizations.



2010

By 2010, VIRCS expands to include a program focused specifically on newcomer children and youth (Enable, 2006), a cultural bridging host program, and numerous ESL and employment programs. In 2010, VIRCS moves from its initial location on 535 Yates Street to 637 Bay Street to accommodate the organization's growth.



2015

In 2014, VIRCS celebrates 25 years by launching an annual scholarship of \$25,000 to sponsor newcomers seeking help with education leading to professional qualifications. By 2015, VIRCS begins a relationship with Paragon Testing to become the first CELPIP testing site on the island and secures funding to start the Welcome Gardens program.



2019

In 2018, VIRCS joins the Social Innovation Centre at its new location at 1004 North Park, signs an MOU with the District of Oak Bay to provide transitional housing to refugees, and secures two employment service contracts (BC SIS and P2PTE). In 2018, the Social Innovation Centre also secures funding approval for a trauma-informed daycare. At the end of 2019, VIRCS experiences its first pandemic and must adapt quickly to changing Provincial Health Orders and legislation. In Spring 2020, VIRCS closes the centre to clients, but continues to provide services online and via telephone. VIRCS expands previously-existing community Emergency Assistance Resources services and starts an Emergency Food delivery initiative.



2021

In 2020, the murder of George Floyd Jr. by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, sparks global Black Lives Matter protests and in 2021, Covid-19 fuels anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. As a result, VIRCS organizes a local response. In 2020, VIRCS is selected by the Province of BC to serve as the provincial hub of the Resilience BC Anti-Racism network. The pandemic continues well into 2021; however, VIRCS is able to open to some limited in-person programming and continues to provide critical services to newcomers.



Board of Directors 2022-2023

Liza Sehic, President of the Board

Liza has extensive experience across government departments. She has an M.G.M. (Royal Roads University), a B.A. International Studies (Simon Fraser University), and a B.A. Economics (Simon Fraser University).

She has worked on projects that range from regional economic development to international export development. With her passion for working with newcomers, she led the Foreign Qualification Recognition program at the Government of B.C. She looks forward to promoting diversity and multiculturalism through her involvement in the community.



Osaro Ezomo, Vice President of the Board

Osaro, served as Board President at VIRCS from 2017 to 2021, and guided the board through transitions and transformations. Serving as Senior Team Lead in British Columbia's Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, she aids in technology solution delivery. Before her public service role, she worked with the Commissionaires Victoria, supporting veterans and Canadians' welfare. A first-generation immigrant, Osaro faced challenges upon her 2012 arrival in Canada, sparking her passion for assisting fellow immigrants. She possesses degrees from the Master of Arts in Global Management at Royal Roads University, also from the University of Wales, Ambrose Alli University, and an Immigration Consultant diploma from Ashton College.

Ye Li, Treasurer of the Board

Ye joined VIRCS in early 2020 as a board member and has served as Treasurer since early 2021.

She came to Canada in 2001 to pursue post-secondary education. She has started working in Accounting since 2007 and has worked in public and private sectors. She is a Chartered Professional Accountant. As an immigrant, she understands the journey is not easy for new Canadians and is committing her time to help those who need help.



Board of Directors 2022-2023



Zaheera Jinnah, Member at Large

Zaheera Jinnah, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in Social Work at the University of Victoria and a Research Associate at the African Centre for Migration and Society, Wits University, South Africa. She has taught and published extensively in the area of migration, and refugee studies.

She is a racialised mother and migrant, a Designated Representative at the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, and volunteers as a board member at the Masjid Al-Iman. Zaheera is a grateful visitor on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen peoples, and is committed to decolonial and anti racism work.

Patti Grey, Member at Large

Patti studied at the New York School of Interior Design, and has had her own Interior Design company for 23 years! Prior interior design, she worked on Real Estate launches and she also has a background in the Film and Television business. Over the years, Patti has volunteered in the community; however, most of it has been around using her Design skills with set-up and props. Two years ago, Patti spoke to a friend asking where she could once again get involved in her community, and her friend promptly introduced her to VIRCS. Patti does not shy away from learning new skills, leans in with her heart, and embraces new opportunities, especially around helping others.



Sarah Alasaly, Member at Large

Sarah graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and worked as a Registered Nurse for a number of years prior to becoming a lawyer. She now owns her own firm, *Alasaly Law Group*, in Victoria BC and specializes in the area of family law and wills and estates. She is also a Family Law Mediator and a Collaborative family lawyer.

Sarah volunteers much of her time to her community and serves on various boards. She joined VIRCS in 2022 and is delighted to be able to serve her community. She loves challenges and is always seeking to improve the lives of those around her.

Board of Directors 2022-2023

Ly Ye, Member at Large

Ly is a highly experienced and dedicated Human Resources professional with over 20 years of experience working in various industries. Her areas of expertise include compensation and benefits, employee relations, leadership, employee development, reorganizations, labour relations, and training. Ly is also a Benefits Broker and owns her own Benefits & Human Resources Consulting business. Her focus is on providing businesses with customized and cost-effective benefit plans that align with their organizational goals and budgets. As an immigrant from Cambodia, Ly is passionate about supporting the immigrant community. She volunteers her time and serves on various boards to help immigrant individuals and families navigate the challenges of integrating into a new country. Ly is deeply committed to helping immigrants thrive and achieve their goals.



Thandi Williams, Member at Large

Thandi, an 18-year Royal Canadian Navy veteran, excelled in leadership, disaster response, and public relations roles. Transitioning to civilian life in 2015, she leveraged her leadership skills in business development and later served as Director of Operations in the Office of the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia for 6 years. Embracing her entrepreneurial spirit, she founded ISLND GRL Collective on Pender Island, prioritizing local Canadian designs. As the President of the Pender Island Chamber of Commerce, Thandi promotes local businesses. She's also a proud member of the VIRCS Board, ready to contribute her diverse expertise.



President's Report



On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am happy to report that we had another exciting year. Despite the challenges that we faced throughout the year, the dedication and tenacity of VIRCS' incredible team made it possible for us to serve our clients to the best of our ability.

We had a change in our leadership by the end of the calendar year, and I am incredibly proud of how the agency continued to adapt quickly to deliver existing programs, develop new programs and source additional funding.

It has been a pleasure working with our experienced and capable Executive Director and the incredible management team.

One of our achievements this year was to closely collaborate with the management team to update VIRCS' Strategic Framework.

It was pertinent that we undergo this exercise this year so we have a road map that will guide us to address post-covid challenges, the increase in our client intake and budget, and overall consolidation of our achievements.

Personally, the experience was fulfilling and an absolute honor to work closely with the management team. The commitment and dedication of staff and management to the agency's mission, vision and goals has been exceptional.

As we begin to prepare for the next year, I am looking forward to VIRCS' outstanding team continuing to innovate and adapt to meet challenges. The board is committed to supporting agency staff and building relationships with community partners.

To all the staff, senior management, volunteers, and the board, thank you for your efforts and contributions over the last year. It has been an honor working with you all.

Liza Sehic
Board's President



Executive Director's Message



As I look back over our journey from September 2022 to October 2023, and consider my own time since stepping into the role of Executive Director in March of this year, I'm struck by the diverse paths that have led so many to the Greater Victoria Region. These paths, paved by the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of newcomers, refugees, and immigrants, converge to create a vibrant and evolving community mosaic. This is a place where the promise of a brighter tomorrow beckons to all, even as we remain deeply conscious of the echoes from our individual and shared complex past.

In May of this year, we reached a significant milestone. Our Board Of Directors, Managers, and Staff, came together in a spirit of collaboration and introspection to review our strategic framework. It was a transformative exercise, one that led us to articulate a renewed Vision, Mission, and set of Values that will guide VIRCS into the future. Our Vision is clear: *"Empowered newcomers flourishing in their communities with a sense of belonging."* Our Mission underscores our purpose: *"Assist immigrants and refugees in settling and integrating through comprehensive services for their evolving needs."* And at the heart of our endeavors are our Values: *Fairness, Inclusion, Trustworthiness, Commitment, Respect, and Dignity.*

Each immigrant, with their unique history and aspirations, steps into a broader narrative - a narrative where the echoes of cultural eradication and suffering of indigenous peoples reverberate.

We acknowledge the pressing need for reconciliation and healing between settlers and indigenous communities. The path of decolonization and anti-racism is a journey for everyone, including newcomers. At VIRCS, our commitment is to ensure that as we settle and integrate, we do so with respect, mindfulness, and a dedication to advancing reconciliation, decolonization, and anti-racism.

The global backdrop of our times, shaped significantly by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, has emphasized the need for unity, understanding, and mutual support. Drawing from our rich history and our newly minted strategic pillars, we are more prepared than ever to meet the challenges ahead.

The heart of VIRCS beats with its people. Our passionate and professional team exemplifies the idea that in unity and shared purpose, we find hope, resilience, and the capacity for transformative change. Thank you all!

As we move forward, let us do so with clarity, purpose, and a renewed commitment to uplift the lives of newcomers and play our part in the broader journey toward a more just, inclusive, and harmonious society.

With gratitude and hope,

Luis G. Aguirre
Executive Director



VIRCS



Program Highlights 2022-2023



Jennifer Rawlinson and Crabb Brennan with a P2PTE Cohort



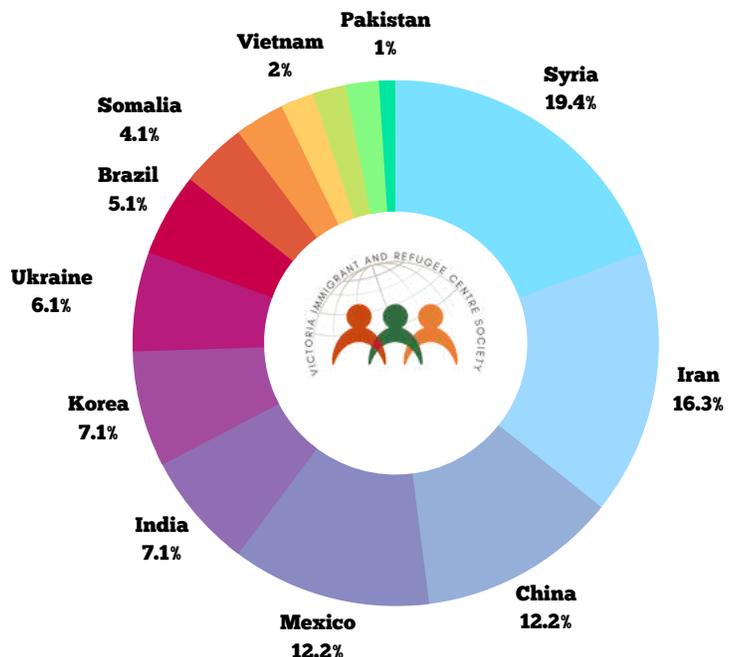
CELPIP®

OFFICIAL TEST CENTRE

The Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) proudly stands as one of the three designated CELPIP testing facilities in the Greater Victoria Region. In the 2022-2023 period, we've administered the test to 400 individuals. CELPIP, or the Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program, is an esteemed general English language proficiency test. Tailored to assess practical English skills, the CELPIP test measures proficiency in everyday situations—be it workplace communications, daily interactions, or understanding of media content. This computer-delivered test, conducted in a single sitting, boasts features like a personal timer, word counter, and spell-check. It uniquely focuses on a single North American accent, ensuring that the language and vocabulary resonate with daily, real-world scenarios. Test takers can anticipate quick online results within 4 to 5 days post the test date. Furthermore, a myriad of free study materials, ranging from sample tests to webinars, is readily available. At VIRCS, we recognize the paramount importance of English proficiency for newcomers. It's instrumental for them to unlock their full potential and seamlessly integrate into their new Canadian lives. Offering the CELPIP test aligns with our commitment to facilitating this crucial aspect of their transition.

Whom do we serve?

At the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS), we serve a diverse array of individuals, each hailing from distinct regions and carrying with them unique stories and backgrounds. In 2022-23, the most represented countries of origin among those we aid were Syria (19%), Iran (16%), China and Mexico (each at 12%), India and Korea (both at 7%), Ukraine (6%), Brazil (5%), Somalia (4%), and the Philippines (3%). We also extended our support to individuals from Vietnam, Japan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, each representing 2% of our service population, with the latter at 1%. This ever-evolving landscape of immigration trends is influenced by myriad global factors, including climate change, natural disasters, and the harrowing impacts of armed conflicts. These external drivers constantly redefine the composition of our immigrant and refugee community. It's also worth noting that of the individuals we assist, 55% identify as female and 44% as male. With a clear grasp of these demographics, VIRCS is better equipped to address the unique needs and challenges of each community member.



Community Bridging Program Community Liaison and Volunteer Coordination

Rashed Alsadek and Keri Greenidge



Volunteers are crucial to deliver our programs

swelled with over 213 eager individuals, each wanting to do their bit. Their reasons were many – some had been newcomers themselves, some had friends who had faced the struggles of settling in, and some just wanted to give back to the community. Every single one of them became an integral part of our mission.

The VIRCS journey throughout the pandemic aftermath wasn't without its hurdles. Yet, with each challenge, we adapted and evolved. We found ways to connect, even when physically apart. We leveraged technology, organized virtual events, and ensured our services were accessible to everyone, regardless of location.

Our year was more than just a series of events or partnerships. Through the Community Bridging Program and Volunteer Coordination, VIRCS reaffirmed its commitment to making Victoria a City welcoming newcomers and a place they proudly may call home.

In 2022-2023, as the world wrestled and left behind the challenges brought by Covid-19, Victoria wasn't immune. Amid the chaos, the Community Bridging Program and our Volunteer Coordination at the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) were, and still is, an option for newcomers to ensure the city remained a destiny of health, warmth, and inclusion.

Newcomers to a city often face overwhelming emotions – excitement, hope, anxiety, and doubt. For many arriving in Victoria, this mix was magnified by the ongoing pandemic. Yet, whenever they felt the weight of starting anew, VIRCS and our team of volunteers and coordinating staff were there, holding out a helping hand, ready to guide them through the complexities of settling in.

Our collaboration was crucial during these times. With partnerships and referrals to local organizations, we

crafted a net of support. These weren't just partnerships on paper but active engagements, ensuring newcomers found homes, got access to essential services, and even embarked on new educational or employment ventures.

Our community events became appealing congregations of human interaction, where newcomers and locals converged, sharing experiences, learning from one another, and enriching Victoria's traditional, cultural and diverse mixed backgrounds.

Within the inviting spaces throughout Victoria, families found more than just recreational activities. They found communities. Parents exchanged notes on settling in, children played together, eradicating language and cultural barriers, while the elderly shared tales from their homelands, bridging generational and geographical divides.

The influx of volunteers is always increasing. By June 2023, our database

**Thanks to
our funders:**



**Department of Justice
Canada**

**Ministère de la Justice
Canada**



Anti Racism Initiatives Team

Resilience BC

Anti Racism Network Hub

Cleia Sangster, Jean Penola, Avneet Randhawa, and Jamison Schulz-Franco

The Hub's overarching goal is to provide tailored support to 35 Network Members in BC.

Expected outcomes:

Part of the day-to-day operations at the Hub include dealing with urgent issues that may come up for our Spokes. Our Network members serve their communities in unique ways to address gaps left by other institutions, and they are doing this work on top of their other responsibilities. They often face complications and conflicts that are as unique as the services they provide. There are various reasons the Hub is called on by Spokes: to provide guidance on a blossoming project; to advise when dealing with difficulty in the community; or to communicate larger issues to the Branch on behalf of the Spoke. In 2022-2023 alone, the Hub facilitated many conversations like this with our Spokes.

In the past year, the Hub, through regular engagement with Network members, developed a relevant resource (Communities of Care Toolkit), provided education or training opportunities, and actively engaged in the province's anti-racism initiatives. Examples of the training opportunities we offer include Bystander Intervention Training offered by Victoria spoke, ICA, and Decolonization Training hosted by Delta spoke, Hummingbirds Rising.

Barriers and challenges overcome:

The Hub currently supports 35 Network member organizations (Spokes) across the province. $\frac{3}{4}$ of these organizations are in rural communities and $\frac{1}{4}$ urban. These Spokes operate in varying capacities: settlement, literacy, restorative justice organizations. Some of these Spokes are small organizations with staff working in a limited or part-time capacity. During check-ins,

monthly meetings, briefings or debriefs, the Hub learns more about the Network member organizations, and the most common challenges we found are lack of funding and lack of resources. Some sentiments of Network members include not being able to hire a full-time staff or to send staff for training, not being able to contract training facilitators, not knowing where to go for resources or where to send victims of racist incidents for support, and not being able to urgently respond to or address racist incidents due to limited funding.

Because the Network members are working in varying capacities, anti-racism work is only a portion of the services they are offering to their communities. Personnel working on their anti-racism program also have varying levels of understanding of anti-racism and its intersections, which is challenging in this line of work. In addition, Network members have varying feelings for and relationships with the police, and therefore, they have different views about engaging the police while doing anti-racism work. These challenges were addressed by providing resources and training opportunities that are relevant to the needs of Network member communities. More details are provided below.

Resource Development

The Hub continues to provide appropriate resources for the Network. One resource that is much needed by the Network is a mental health resource. To address this gap, the Hub, in partnership with Clinical Counsellor Macayla Yan and Roselene Dhaliwal of Canadian Mental Health Association, developed a mental health resource called Communities of Care Toolkit. This toolkit is a comprehensive and interactive resource that enables BC

residents, especially children of immigrants and international students, to gain knowledge and deepen their understanding of racism in BC, so they can more safely navigate Canadian society. To seek feedback from Network members on the draft created, the Hub conducted a consultation session with invited partner organizations and individuals. The draft has been revised and submitted to the Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Branch and the GCPE for further review. The Hub hopes to launch the toolkit in October this year. At our recent meeting on September 21, Network members expressed their enthusiasm about receiving, learning, and using the toolkit for their communities.

Aside from developing or sourcing out resources for the Network, the Hub also provides support to Network members who are developing their own resources like the anti-racism community response protocols. The Hub provided support by sending templates, offering feedback on the draft, and connecting Spokes with other Spokes that have already launched their own protocol. Network members that have recently launched their community protocols are Smithers and Impact North Shore. Currently, there are 26 protocols developed by Network members for their communities. →



Event about Accountability & Action, an open dialogue. With Aisha and Angela. One of many events coordinated by the Hub.

Educational Opportunities

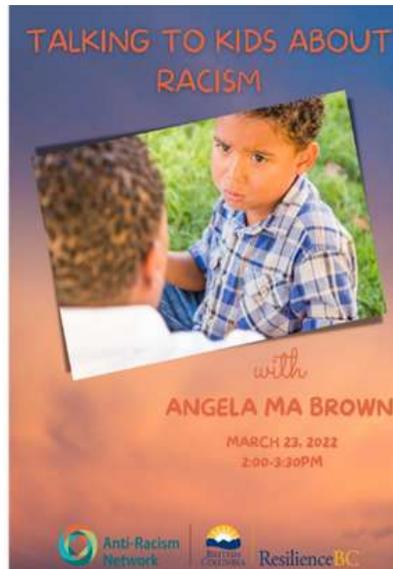
Recognizing the limited resources Spokes have, the Hub offers educational opportunities for both the Network members and their communities. From 2022-2023, apart from monthly meetings, the Hub hosted internal trainings like Social Media Moderators Training (12 participants), Network Discussion Group on Anti-Oppression Curriculum (20 participants), Decolonization Training (8 participants), and most recently, Open Dialogue on Accessibility and Action (32 participants). The training topics were based on responses to an interactive survey given to Network members. The briefings and check-ins with Spokes also provided the Hub with an opportunity to learn more about what's going on in their communities and to better understand their varying needs. In response to what we heard, the Hub organized trainings like Bystander Intervention Training to Network member communities, especially those that had rampant racist incidents happen. To date, 20 Network member organizations have already hosted a Bystander Intervention Training for their communities, and one hosted an Active Witnessing training.

Feedback from participants include:

“Thank you, the training was very useful. We found the tips you taught us could be applied to racist incidents, but also to any incident where one group is being targeted.”

“I sincerely appreciate this session and will add more tools from this session to move forward!”

Another educational opportunity the Hub provides for communities across BC is the Taking Action Lecture Series in partnership with SFU. In May 2022 and January 2023, the Hub hosted the second and third lectures of the four-lecture series. Speakers for these events were Sarah Augustine, a Pueblo (Tewa) descendant and the author of *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* and Sophie Williams, UK Author, TED Speaker, and equalities advocate. The average number of participants for both events is 180.



Community training



Anti-Racism Legislation engagement



Internal training

Engagement in the Province's Anti-Racism Initiatives

The Hub supports the anti-racism initiatives of the province, particularly those of the Ministry of the Attorney General, our funder, and BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHR). In early 2022, the Hub, through different funding, engaged five Network member communities in the race-based data collection consultation that led to the creation of the provincial government's Anti-Racism Data Act in June 2022. Just this September 5th and 6th, the Hub once again supported the province's Anti-Racism Legislation engagement by inviting Network members to participate in further community consultations. About 20 participants in total from both sessions attended and generously shared their experiences.

The Hub also regularly engages with and supports the work of the BCOHR. In October 2022, the Network participated in the consultation session conducted by Emily Chan and Carly Hyman of BCOHR. The main objective of the consultation was to provide a presentation on the findings and recommendations on the Inquiry into Hate in the Pandemic and to gather further feedback from communities through the Network prior to the release of the final report in March 2023. With the involvement of the Hub and the Network in the consultation, the Hub, representing the Network, was invited to the media conference for the release of the Inquiry's final report, titled "From Hate to Hope". Among those present at the event were Parliamentary Secretary for Anti-Racism Initiatives Mable Elmore, Commissioner Kasari Govender, some Network members, and the rest of the BCOHR team.

Thanks to our funder:



Anti Racism Initiatives Team

Leading Change for Resilient Communities

**Cleia Sangster, Asiyah Igbokoyi, Shannon Hope,
Vibha Gaonkar and Grathy Li**

Our three-year project aims to create a rural focus to support employers across the B.C. province. We are committed to achieving this by offering access to community-based trainers and workplace equity specialists who can effectively address equity, diversity and inclusion challenges in rural workplaces. Our goal is to attract & retain an increasingly diverse workforce. To make this possible, LCRC is focused on fostering education and promoting collaborative societal action.

Expected outcomes

During Phase One of our pilot project, there were three main project goals.

The first was to deliver anti-racism training, which we accomplished through a combination of virtual and two 3-day in-person sessions hosted in Richmond and Kelowna.

Our second goal was for our program to be evaluated by a qualified expert who connected with program participants, facilitators and the LCRC team to evaluate if we were successful in delivering impactful community anti-racism trainings. While there were recommended improvements, the final evaluation report also showed that our hybrid training model was effective, and emphasized just how essential a program such as this is to support anti-racism education in rural BC.

Our third and final objective was to create an anti-racism curriculum that is tailored to rural communities in British Columbia. To achieve this, we utilized existing resources and drew on the knowledge and experiences of both our team and participants throughout the ARCS program. At present, the LCRC team is putting the finishing touches on this curriculum that, pending confirmation of funding, will be implemented in Phase Two; our workplace program.

Barriers and challenges overcome

Given that this program is operating out of Victoria but rolling out across rural BC, a core challenge is being able to build and maintain meaningful connections with program partners and participants. Additionally, each of the rural communities we engage with have their own unique set of experiences and challenges in regard to racism. Moving forward, LCRC proposes to maintain our consistent communication through various channels (Zoom, email, phone and Slack chats). In addition, as the program becomes more established and moves out of the pilot phase, we anticipate that our reach will increase. We also see the value of a potential LCRC chapter operating out of rural BC.

During the pilot phase of our project, LCRC faced a significant challenge with a high turnover rate among our team members. For more than half of the project's duration, the LCRC team operated at less than full capacity. Despite this challenge, the LCRC was able to form valuable partnerships with organizations such as McCreary Centre Society, Strategic Communications and Arrive Consulting. These partnerships helped the LCRC team to effectively complete program tasks and ensure the success of the program.

Evidence and highlights:

We are proud to have launched the Anti-Racism Community Stewardship (ARCS) program with 19 program participants from 9 different rural BC communities: Kelowna, Cranbrook, Penticton, Salmon Arm, Vernon, Terrace, Vanderhoof, Smithers and Nelson. Of the final 19 program participants, we operated out of half of the BC Economic Regions (Thompson-Okanagan, North Coast, Kootenay and Nechako). We are pleased to report that we were working with a very diverse group as 26% of participants were Indigenous, 37% of the participants identified as PoC or Black immigrant settlers, and the remaining 37% identified as white settlers. However, 95% of our participants were women, and we hope to increase the gender diversity in future program iterations. →

Quotes from program participants:

“I feel empowered that this training is set up in a way that allows us to bring our full selves, and understanding about our communities to co-create content, tools and materials. We’re not being told the best way to communicate and work with our communities. We’re being allowed to make informative decisions ourselves and among colleagues. That just feels incredible.” - program participant

“Going back to my same friendship and family circles made me realize that I have more learning and unlearning to do, and I’m excited for it.” - program participant

“I feel really rejuvenated to be around so many people wanting to do good work, and already doing good work. I had lost hope a little that but seeing everyone here and being around everyone here has really warming.” - program participant

Anti Racism Initiatives Team
Leading Change for Resilient Communities

Acknowledgements

Thanks to our funder:



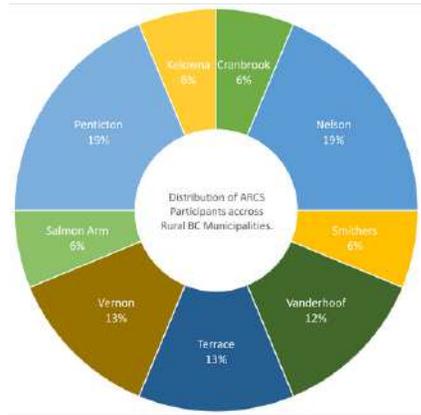
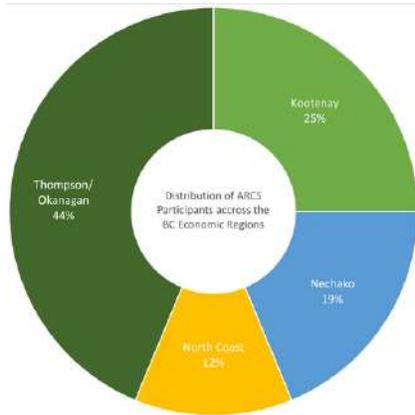
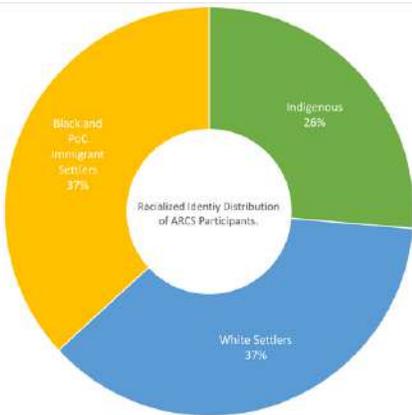
Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills

Sub-Contractors

Indigenous Works, Indigenous Anti-Racism, Animikii, Arrive Consulting, Graham Briggs, McCreary Centre Society, Strategic Communications

Contributors

Resilience BC Anti-Racism Network Hub, LCRC Governance Committee (Michelle Roberge, Annette Sharkey, Lana Fitt, Helen Barron, Dhakāle Hayle Gallup, Tom Conway, Ian Ricketts, Karishma Zaman, Julian Wilson and Valsy Bergeron



ARCS participants

(ESL)

English as a Second Language Program

Jennifer Rawlinson, David Bradley

Established in 1989, the VIRCS ESL program has delivered communicative English classes to newcomers for more than 30 years. Our goal is to continue to deliver high quality programs to newcomers in our community who have barriers to accessing language training options in our community. Our ESL program offers the following unique features to best serve the needs of learners in our community:

- Continuous intake: which means that a student may begin their program at any time as long as we have a seat available.
- Flexible attendance: students may attend as many or as few classes as they choose. We use a punch card system. This flexibility has been a hallmark of our program, as it allows students to attend when they want. Many of our students have other commitments such as employment, family and other academic pursuits.
- An Individualized Education Plan: Our program is flexible which requires a differentiated approach to learning. Our curriculum is based on individual needs because the classes are multilevel and multicultural.
- A two- tiered payment schedule: We are able to offer a reduced tuition fee for our domestic students. Our international visitors pay a higher tuition fee, but it is still lower than other comparable programs. In addition, VIRCS offers four free seats per class to accommodate those who may face barriers to accessing English language training in our community. The duration of stay for each student is 6 months, so that we may offer the free seats to other students waiting in our community.

- High quality programs: We offer beginner, intermediate and advanced classes at VIRCS. Our instructor, David Bradley, recently added a third level in order to accommodate the needs of the students. We are excited to announce that we are offering a free Pronunciation class every Friday afternoon which is open to all VIRCS clients. In the fall, we plan to offer Saturday morning specialized English classes such as CELPIP Preparation, Medical Terminology and Business English. We are fortunate to have a bright, airy, comfortable classroom and an accessible location in the community.
- Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Testing: VIRCS is a licensed CLBPT Centre and we have two trained assessors on staff. We have partnered with Cambria College, Sprott Shaw College and recently Edison College to provide testing for their Health Care Assistant applicants which generates revenue for the ESL program allowing us to offer more free and low-cost programs to our newcomer community.

**Thanks to
our funder:**



The VIRCS ESL program is unique both in its accessibility and delivery. This quality fulfills a need in our community, as many other programs are structured, costly and often difficult to access because of reduced funding and long waitlists. We believe in delivering quality programs in a timely and efficient manner.

Our flexible, continuous intake programs offer students an opportunity to learn English immediately without compromising quality.

In 2022-23, we delivered language services to 165 students, who were unable to access government funded English programs as they were not eligible or placed on lengthy waitlists.



David Bradley and ESL participants

(ESL)
**English as a Second
Language program**

Success stories:



David Bradley and ESL participants

#2 We recently opened a new class to accommodate the numbers of students needing to attend a beginner class.

The new class is on Thursday morning and is designed to deliver basic English skills to students at level 1 Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) and lower.

We had an inquiry from a community member sponsoring a refugee who needed assistance with literacy. This student came to the class with no reading or writing skills in their first language and the sponsors were hesitant to send her as she gets very stressed when faced with challenges. Our teacher David and the other students gave her a warm welcome and now she is attending class regularly and has learned to write her name.

#1 Bella is a refugee from Afghanistan and her formal education was sporadic because of the Taliban regime refusing to educate women. She arrived in Canada 3 years ago with minimal English and low literacy in her first language. This has made life difficult for her as a single parent to a teenage boy as she had limited opportunities to develop her skills. She joined the VIRCS ESL program 6 months ago and has participated in both the beginner and pronunciation classes at no charge. The VIRCS ESL program is able to offer 4 free seats to newcomers with limited resources to pay for language training. Bella told me she loves VIRCS, her class, and her classmates who have supported her to learn and grow in her new community. Her son has also had more opportunities because his mother is now able to advocate for his needs at school and in the community.

Enable's mission centers on helping children and youth adjust by exploring both their differences and commonalities, practice language skills, fostering self-narration of their lived experiences, and creating safe and secure environments where they can confidently express themselves. Our programs prioritize mental and emotional wellness as a fundamental guiding principle when creating programming.

When Enable set out on its mission to empower children and youth in the community, it envisioned a brighter future for these individuals. It aimed to provide a nurturing space where they could build connections, develop essential life skills, and find a sense of belonging during times of transition. Enable's commitment to fostering personal growth, community engagement, and lasting friendships was unwavering. The organization anticipated that its programs would make a significant difference in the lives of 200 clients and indirectly touch 500 individuals. The goal was clear: to create safe and secure environments where children and youth could confidently use their voices and nurture their well-being. Enable believed that by embracing diversity and promoting wellness through art and education, it could make a positive and lasting impact on the community.

As the fiscal year 2022-2023 unfolded, Enable's dedication translated into tangible results that exceeded its expectations. The organization's programs not only met but surpassed its goals, with 229 program registrations and outreach to approximately 511 individuals, including dedicated community volunteers. The impact of Enable's initiatives goes beyond numbers; it is a narrative of transformation.

Children and youth entered the programs and gained newfound confidence, friendships, and a deeper connection to their community. They not only improved academically but also gained practical life skills and found their voices through art, sport, food, and cultural exchange. Enable's comprehensive approach to wellness and its commitment to inclusivity made a meaningful difference in the lives of those it served, paving the way for



Enable for Children & Youth

**Ava Shabestari, Robi Elfurjani,
Lindsay Budge, Evelyn Griffin, Imrose Gogi.**

continued growth and positive change in the face of rising living costs.

In September 2022, Enable underwent a significant staffing transition, moving to a team of three part-time members. In response to these changes, we made strategic adjustments to our programming by moving to an in person focused approach with restriction.

Covid brought about financial changes regarding funding opportunities and what resources Enable had to work with. Recognizing the need to foster stability, and connections among children, Enable has focused on stabilizing our core programming of Homework Club, SPARKS, Youth Night, and Art Therapy by setting programs to run on constant days and times. We modified Homework Club to focus on ages 6 - 11, transitioning from a 1:1 ratio online to a 2:1 ratio in person, facilitating stronger peer connections as we emerged from the challenges of isolation caused by COVID-19. During this period, we also introduced Kids Days for ages 6 - 11,

addressing the need for school-break activities, and supporting families dealing with the increasing cost of living faced by families in Victoria. Kids day filled a gap for children who may be homebound over school breaks due to financial pressure. Further enhancements were made to SPARKS, with a focus on incorporating an art therapy approach at its core.

This adjustment underscores our commitment to the health and wellness of children adapting to a new country in a post-COVID environment. These changes reflect our dedication to meeting evolving needs while maintaining our mission of supporting children and families.

For Youth Aged 12 - 18 we found that by having a consistent schedule of Thursdays every two weeks allowed for a consistent gathering that fostering belonging, friendships, and leadership growth through a sense of Familiarity and something that could be relied upon. Youth have struggled through →



Thanks to our funders:



isolation and loneliness during COVID. Programing has been focused on creating connections between youth while learning new skills or engaging in new activities. The need to offer programing for free has been important as with the rising cost of living, families can offer fewer extras to their children.

What was improved from past years? In the fiscal year 2022-2023, Enable set a goal to serve 200 clients directly and 500 individuals indirectly through its programs. Remarkably, Enable not only met but exceeded these ambitious targets. 229 program registrations were recorded, showing the organization's substantial impact across various initiatives. The breakdown of program registrations includes Homework Club (41), Youth Nights (46), SPARKS (18), Art Therapy (4), Strides Summer Camp (16), Kids Days (35), Keep On Learning (18), and Winter Celebration (51). In addition to the direct impact, Enable reached about 511 individuals indirectly, with 53 being dedicated community volunteers. This outstanding achievement underscores Enable's commitment to serving the community's needs and the essential role it plays in enhancing the lives of children and youth.

Beyond the impressive quantitative results, Enable's impact is profoundly felt through the qualitative data collected. The qualitative data reveals a heartwarming story of transformation and empowerment. Through Enable's programs, children and youth are not only gaining academic support, but they are also developing crucial life skills, forging lasting friendships, and experiencing a sense of belonging.

These programs have created safe and nurturing environments where children can confidently express themselves. Enable's emphasis on cultural exchange, wellness, and art-based healing has been instrumental in helping newcomers adapt to their new surroundings and overcome language barriers. As Enable looks ahead to the future, it recognizes the growing demand for its programs due to the increasing cost of living. This underscores the organization's importance in the community and its commitment to continuing its mission of making a positive and lasting impact on the lives of children and youth. In the words of one parent of children who Enable has reached, "My Kids Loved the camp they went on. So much adventures. It's the perfect camp for kids they were so happy at camp. The pictures look like they had so much fun."

(NWP)

Newcomer Women's Projects Healthy Women, Healthy Communities

Jenn Rubin, Cleia Sangster

Newcomer Women's Projects (NWP) collaborates with community partners to provide accessible information to newcomer women in Greater Victoria on issues related to women's physical and mental health, as well as their safety, well-being, and legal rights as they relate to their relationships with both their spouses and their children. Program activities occur through interactive group workshops supported by translation services, participant feedback, volunteer engagement, and presentations by skilled facilitators and guest speakers from community organizations.

During 2022 to 2023, the Newcomer Women's Projects delivered an array of programs with the following focus areas:

Workplace Sexual Harassment

NWP completed year 4 of the multi-year program generously funded by the Department of Justice Canada. The Safe at Work Project provides newcomer women employees with information on sexual harassment in the workplace. The project's goals are to (1) create workshops to inform newcomers about sexual harassment in the workplace, their rights as employees, and available resources; (2) offer training sessions for those who wish to become resources for information about and prevention of workplace sexual harassment in their respective cultural communities; and (3) educate employers about the unique needs and potential vulnerabilities of newcomers in the workplace. The project shifted to online delivery, continued to experience positive engagement from participants, and continued to move forward in its current Curriculum Development phase.

Domestic Violence Education and Prevention

In 2022, funded through BC Civil Forfeiture, NWP collaborated with the Victoria Police Department to deliver a series of workshops and activities for →



NWP served over 370 clients



Cleia Sangster and NWP participants

newcomer women, men, children, and youth designed to prevent domestic violence through education, reducing fear of police, building trust, increasing connections between police and newcomer communities in Greater Victoria, while promoting general mental health and well-being.

Women’s Health Workshops

In partnership with the Nesting Doula Collective and funded by the Hamber Foundation, The NWP conducted workshops promoting women’s health. The workshops focused on various topics to support women and empower them to advocate more effectively for themselves and their cases, such as their physical and sexual health, pre-natal and post-natal care, and nutrition. Further, the workshops allowed newcomer women to explore their experiences in these areas as they transitioned from their country of origin to Canada.

Capacity Building Funding

The program received the Shockproofing Communities and Capacity Building Funding on behalf of the Canadian Women's Foundation. This funding significantly contributed towards the NWP's deliverables to support work in the critical area of gender-based violence programming, and the creation of a Furniture initiative to provide clients with furniture items to make their settlement in Canada comfortable.

The flexible financing also supported VIRCS' overall organizational operations through the enhanced continuation of services, adaptations due to COVID-19, the purchase of technological equipment, administration costs, organizational development, and capacity building.

5 workshops to promote
WOMEN'S HEALTH

Feb 1 - Period 101: Menstrual Health
Learn how menstrual hormones work in your body. Coping with changes from puberty to menopause.

Feb 8 - Love, Boundaries, Intimacy
Explore what brings you pleasure. Learn how to communicate your needs and boundaries.

Feb 15 - Is This Normal: Pelvic Health
Common pelvic health issues and how to address them through medical care and holistic wellness.

Feb 22 - Conception to Birth
Know what to expect in the Health Care System. How to prepare for the pregnancy and birth you want.

Mar 1 - Finding Joy in Mind & Body
Understand the mind, body connection. Explore the joy of food, movement, and connection for long term health.

Drop-in or Save Your Spot
2pm-3:30pm @ 1004 N Park St.

Testimonials:

“I am Rima, I have received furniture last year from VIRCS. That time I did not have any money to pay furniture so that helped me a lot. Thank you so much for my case manager and VIRCS in general to provide me that support.”

“I am Rikia. I am a single mom who came last year to Canada through government Program. My rent is so high, so I asked Iman to help me to get furniture, and I received some from VIRCS. Big Thanks for VIRCS and Iman team.”

Thanks to our funders:



(BCSIS)

B.C. Settlement and Integration Services

Nasim Hamed, Serena Lee, Jayanthi Rajkumar, Natasha Pakula, Wing Le, Shennan Li, Zahra Dehini, and Bahram Foroutanapay. ESL teachers: Mike Carrow, David Bradley, Brennan Crabb and Brittany Dunstan. TI Literacy instructor: Simplicio (JR) Sumauang. Practicum student: Mariane Radke.

At the heart of the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society lies our program, BC Settlement and Integration Services (BCSIS). This past year, BCSIS unfolded its mission: to support the social and economic integration of newcomers, especially those who might not qualify for assistance from federally funded immigration and settlement programs. Journeying through this year, we have witnessed transformative growth among our newcomers. They have steadily progressed, not only feeling a sense of belonging in our community but also preparing themselves for the workforce. Our concerted efforts aimed at preventing poverty and unhousing have illuminated many lives. And as we look to the future, we remain steadfast, ensuring we're ready to support our community, even in the face of potential humanitarian crises.

Recognizing the hurdles faced by temporary foreign workers, we forged a crucial partnership with the Migrant Worker Centre. This alliance allowed us to effectively address workplace barriers, ensuring these workers had the necessary resources and support. Accessibility has been at the forefront of our initiatives. By increasing our outreach to various spoke locations, we've brought our services closer to those in need. In addition, our team



Nasim, Jayanthi, Natasha, Serena and Wing Le.

welcomed an additional immigration lawyer, streamlining our ability to address urgent immigration inquiries. In response to the overwhelming demand in the Westshore, we initiated English lessons at the Westshore (Juan De Fuca) Library.

Reflecting on the period from October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023, our efforts have touched the lives of over 2000 clients. Our team expanded with the addition of two dedicated part-time settlement workers, Shennan & Zahra, to meet the diverse needs of our clients. Exciting changes lie on the horizon, with the introduction of the BC Newcomer Support Program (BCNSP) slated to replace the current BCSIS →



VIRCS beneficiaries receive bicycles from donor Tim Storm



School District 62 authorities and teachers with the BCSIS team

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN NEWCOMERS AND INDIGENOUS CULTURE



In April 2022, The Oasis Society joined hands with the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre's BC Settlement and Integration Services Program (BC SIS) to embark on a journey of cultural exchange. This partnership was designed to offer monthly workshops that enabled BC SIS participants to delve deep into the rich backgrounds of Indigenous history and culture. One such memorable session was the Indigenous Food and Culture Seafood Luncheon, attended by 15 eager participants. During this event, Oasis's Outreach Worker, Tobias Jones, took attendees through a captivating visual journey showcasing traditional salmon harvesting methods such as Weirs, Gill netting, Gaffing, and Reef Netting. Attendees had the opportunity to see and understand the intricacies of traditional smoked, half-smoked, wind-dried, and canned salmon. To further enrich the experience, the Songhees Dance Group graced the workshop with their presence, sealing the event with evocative song and dance. The partnership's expansive range of workshops also included hands-on experiences like a Songhees Canoe Tour, drum-making sessions, and tote bag painting where participants learned the symbolism behind various animals. These workshops were more than just activities; they were a bridge connecting newcomers to Indigenous stories of resilience, reflections on colonization's enduring impact, and the vast expanse of Indigenous history. The evident success and enthusiasm borne from this collaboration catalyzed the inception of several other partnerships, extending the reach to other VIRCS programs like the Pathways to Professions and Trades, Entrepreneurship youth program, and the Enable Child and Youth program. Adapting to the unique needs and interests of these programs, Oasis-BCSIS continued to offer tailored workshops, further solidifying the bond between the communities. This collaboration has been renewed for the 2023/2024 year, promising another year of meaningful exchange and learning.

initiative. This change promises a more substantial and extended support period beginning April 1, 2024. Our network has flourished, forming and strengthening affiliations with public and community organizations such as the Migrant Worker Centre, the Greater Victoria Public Library, the Victoria Literacy Connection, and the Vancouver Island Human Rights Coalition. Furthermore, our collaboration with School District 62 underpins our commitment to the Westshore newcomers' community.

In closing this annual narrative, gratitude is essential. To our funder, partners, donors, stakeholders, and the community at large—thank you for bolstering our mission. Together, we are shaping a brighter, more integrated future for all.

Thanks to our funder:



P2PTE

Pathways to Professions, Trades and Entrepreneurship

Jennifer Rawlinson, Shazia Rashid, Brennan Crabb, Brittany Dunstan, Michael Luk, Rashed Alsadek, Bushra ALQudayri, Maureen Ochagala, Amrik Thind and Tracy Busch-Mensah.



The purpose of our program is to deliver employment training and skills and work experience to youth ages 18-30 with barriers to employment. The goal is to prepare the youth for sustainable, long-term employment in our community which will improve the lives of the participants and help build the local economy. The P2PTE, program funded by Service Canada, is expected to reach specific milestone and targets based on the number of participants employed or returned to school and the demographics of the participants. To date we have achieved an 88% success rate and have attained 100% results for our required demographics. Service Canada extended our program last

month until March 2024. In early October, Service Canada will release the Call for Proposal for YESS programs nationwide.

One trend we have noticed with participants recently is that their need for support has increased and diversified. Over the last year we have had an increase in requests for mental health supports and emergency funds. In the next funding proposal we will address these issues by adding mental health support to our employment skills training curriculum. Additionally, we will increase our request for emergency funds for items such as dental care, emergency rental assistance, dependent care, and work clothing and supplies. →

P2PTE results:

**142 youth served
since August 2020**

**88% success rate for
employment**

Testimonials from participants

#1 I am Imrose Gogi. Vircs has helped me gain so many opportunities for the future. I started by taking their P2PTE program and learning so much from it such as how I could start my career. From there I applied for the Youth Settlement Associate full-time job at Vircs and with all the support and help from the Vircs team, I was able to get it! From there on I gained many new skills and now have more experience for future opportunities, as well as gained experience for my college program! Vircs is a place where they make sure everyone gets the help and support they need 24/7 and I will always admire them for helping so many people! Thank you VIRCS!



#2 To the P2PTE team at Vircs

I am Sakher Abazeid. I would like to express my deepest thanks and gratitude for all the help you have given me in my job search. You have been so kind and helpful, and we couldn't have made this success happen without your help. Through your valuable guidance and advice, I was able to set professional goals and run my business. You have given me valuable information on how to prepare my resume and write an effective cover letter. You also shared valuable information with me on how to search for job opportunities and deal with job allowance. I am grateful to you for taking the time to listen to my needs in cooperation with you. I understand that you are efficient and interested in achieving my professional goals. I look forward to hearing from you and knowing you in the future. And I am sure that I will continue to grow and develop thanks to your valuable help. Once again, I thank you with all my heart for all that you have given me. I am grateful to you and appreciate your great efforts.

Thanks to our funder:

Service
Canada

Acknowledgments to our Community Partners and Volunteers:

**Leo Yuan
Dr. Michael King
Parmjeet Singh
Carolyn Fast**



**GREATER VICTORIA
PUBLIC LIBRARY**



VIHRC
Vancouver Island
Human Rights Coalition

ALERT
First-Aid INC.



COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL
research·insights·solutions



We're better together



island health



Oasis Society for
the Spiritual
Health of Victoria

Welcome Gardens

Cenit Muñoz and the volunteer team: Nancy Nyandika, Aaron Hall, Christina Li, Dallas Posavad, Duncan Cardinal, Cindy Sun, Adam Lawrence, Graham Hayes, Jim & Louise Wallace, Alejandra Vera, Bushra Alqudayri, Nathan Cartwright, Monique Nadeau, Xylona Hu, Bill Thwaites, Tim Rutherford, Todd Hallett, Jackie Xin, Tammy Scott



Volunteers are crucial to deliver Welcome Gardens activities

The Welcome Gardens Program at the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS) is blossoming with potential, sowing seeds of inclusivity, cultural diversity, and community resilience. Our mission resonates with the philosophy of nurturing immigrants and refugees in Greater Victoria by diminishing the barriers they face in accessing culturally preferred, healthy, and sufficient food. We facilitate this through comprehensive gardening education and enriched food literacy programs.

Expected Outcomes:

As our roots extend deeper into the community, Welcome Gardens aspires to proliferate the availability of complimentary garden spaces. These spaces will flourish on underutilized public and privately-owned lands, making gardening more accessible to immigrants and refugees. We are also cultivating partnerships with various organizations to enrich our soil with an array of resources—ranging from gardening essentials to educational workshops. By intertwining shared garden spaces with essential supplies, diverse educational platforms, and compassionate volunteer mentorship, Welcome Gardens is blossoming into a crucial component of Victoria's sustainable and diverse local food production ecosystem.

Overcoming Challenges:

Navigating through the thorns of challenges such as limited continuous, long-term funding, we are evolving and adapting. Thanks to the City of Victoria, new buds of funding opportunities are beginning to bloom, allowing us to diversify our financial nutrients. We are also advocating for enhanced accessibility to community garden plots, especially for the BIPOC population, immigrants, and refugees who are often left on the waiting list for extended periods.

Highlights and Achievements:

In a vibrant display of growth and improvement, our program has robustly diversified its funding avenues and elevated public visibility through annual fundraising and media engagement. Collaborations have been our pollinators, enhancing the synergy with other VIRCS programs and magnifying our community impact.

In 2023, our blossoms of success were vividly visible. Events like "Get Growing Victoria!" showered benefits on over 300 immigrants and refugees, and collaborations with entities like the Government House and Food and Shared Relief Society enabled us to harvest and distribute over 1500 pounds of fresh produce to diverse community members. →

The ripple effects of our initiatives, like the Health and Wellness Fair, spearheaded by Aaron Hall and Christina Li, and supported by the amazing volunteer team, and a series of empowering workshops, have been transformative. These platforms have unveiled avenues for holistic well-being, knowledge enhancement, and community connectivity for immigrants and refugees. Through a meticulous blend of mentorship and multicultural garden spaces, we have facilitated the flourishing of nutritional wisdom, food growing proficiency, and a sense of community belonging amongst immigrant and refugee families and seniors throughout Greater Victoria.

Looking Forward:

Envisioning a garden of prosperity, diversity, and sustainability, Welcome Gardens is committed to enriching the social fabric of Victoria. Through innovative initiatives and collaborations, we aim to cultivate an environment where every immigrant and refugee feels nurtured, valued, and resilient.

At the heart of Welcome Gardens lies a simple yet profound philosophy: every seed, regardless of its origin, deserves a chance to grow, bloom, and thrive. As we tend to our garden, we're not just cultivating plants, but dreams, aspirations, and a shared vision for a community that's inclusive, resilient, and harmonious.

We are eternally grateful for the continued support of our partners, volunteers, and the community. Together, under the vast sky of possibilities, let's sow the seeds for a future where everyone finds their place in the sun.



Envisioning a garden of prosperity, diversity, and sustainability

Thanks to our funders:

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
New Horizons for Seniors Program



Thanks to our partners and collaborators:



Government House



Yates Street Community Garden

Get Growing Victoria

**Alex-Harned and
Tim Ross
from
The City of Victoria**



**Aaron Hall and
Christina Li**



Cenit Muñoz and cherry tomatoes harvest

Newcomer Wraparound Support Program (NWSP)

Asuka Hirai, Haixia Liu, Iman Skati, Daria Haggard, Fayrouz Mohammad, Sanjida Marium Hridi, Farnoush Eftekhari, Soiling Yang, Marah Naeef and Oleksandr Sabadosh / Practicum students: Cory Mapson, Mina Lucacher, Wing Le, Ashley Dargatz, Nahomi Matsui, Natasha Feist, Tatiana Teterkina, Joshua Parkins



NWSP Staff and practicum students at their planning meeting

The Newcomer Wraparound Support Program (NWSP) provides settlement and integration services to newcomers with overwhelming and or complex barriers. Through this program, clients receive one-on-one, family and group orientation support. The program utilizes the wraparound approach and is based on an in-depth needs assessment, where the NWSP case manager works with a client and creates a wraparound plan. The plan is created based on the client's strengths, wishes, and dreams. Through the program, clients feel their voices are heard, their strength is utilized, and they also feel they are not alone in a new country.

The NWSP program provides individual, family and group information sessions to the vulnerable newcomer population so they are successfully settled into new community.

Post pandemic, there is a lack of affordable housing, inflation and shortage of staffing around the community, so the NWSP team worked diligently to work with volunteers,

practicum students community partners, Government and non-Government agencies and successfully supported the needs of the multi-barriered newcomers in timely manner.

In the FIY 2022-2023, the program provided over 1000 services including home visits and community outreach to various locations.

The NWSP also organized over 100 group information and orientation sessions where clients enjoyed participating in workshop activities such as: Parenting, Food Skills for Newcomers and Digital Literacy workshops, which helped newcomers navigate their new Canadian lifestyle. Through the group activities, the clients learned about many topics including basic life skills, laws and regulations in Canada, cultural differences and similarities, environmental sustainability and basic employment skills. The clients often mentioned that they enjoyed learning new skills, meeting with other newcomers and obtained a lot of support from the program and many newcomers also gain confidence and

successfully obtain their first job in Canada.

The NWSP is grateful to the federal government and its contribution. With this federal government support, the NWSP can continue to provide specialized settlement services to the vulnerable newcomer population. Many of our newcomer population are resilient, bright and hardworking individuals and once they are provided with settlement support, they are able to integrate into their new community, and realize their value as a member in this society.

Thanks to our funder:



**Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada**

**Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada**

Financial Report

VICTORIA IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CENTRE SOCIETY
Statement of Revenues and Expenditures
Year Ended December 31, 2022

	2022	2021
REVENUES		
Operating Grants	\$ 2,689,894	\$ 1,827,774
Gaming	86,516	69,357
Donations	32,853	18,384
Social Events	4,410	100
Training	32,470	26,796
Interest Income	20	163
Rental	5,550	30,968
	<u>2,851,713</u>	<u>1,973,542</u>
EXPENDITURES		
Wages and Contracted Services	1,865,822	1,446,963
Direct Program Costs	710,669	312,393
Building Occupancy	168,894	146,132
Office and Supplies	31,199	20,299
Professional Fees	15,914	41,053
Travel and Transportation	15,319	7,629
Amortization	14,261	14,320
Recognition, Training and Recruiting	7,603	5,101
	<u>2,829,681</u>	<u>1,993,890</u>
EXCESS (DEFICIENCY) OF REVENUES OVER EXPENDITURES	\$ 22,032	\$ (20,348)

Net Asset Balance

	Operating Fund	Capital Fund	2022	2021
Net assets beginning of the year	\$ 1,333	\$ (79,408)	\$ (78,075)	\$ (57,727)
Excess of Revenues over Expenditures	22,032	-	22,032	(20,348)
Amortization of Tangible Capital Assets	(14,261)	14,261	-	-
NET ASSETS-END OF YEAR	\$ 9,104	\$ 65,147	\$ (56,043)	\$ (78,075)

Independent reviewed report available upon request.

Please,
**Donate
Today**



vircs.bc.ca/donate

Your donation is a
community investment.



VIRCS

ANNUAL
REPORT 2022-2023

**Our Vision: Empowered newcomers flourishing in
their communities with a sense of belonging**

**Our Mission: Assist immigrants and refugees in settling and integrating
through comprehensive services for their evolving needs.**

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