



TABLE OF CONTENTS

03 ABOUT US

04 CICS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

05 MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

06 MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

08 CICS STORIES OF 2020 - 2021

40 STATISTICS

43 APPRECIATION TO OUR FUNDERS



About Us

Mission

To empower newcomers in settling and integrating as contributing members of Canadian Society through diverse, professional, and innovative services.

Vision

Fully integrated newcomers who participate in and contribute to all spheres of Canadian society.

Core Values

- **Compassion**
- **Inclusion**
- **Collaboration**

Our commitment to our clients:

We are committed to providing our clients with equal access to services that meeting their individual needs.

CICS Board of Directors



Chair
Berta Zaccardi



Vice-Chair
Mercy Yan



Treasurer
Julie Scott



Secretary
Daniel McCoy

Directors



Tim Cheng



William Chu Kwan



Hisham Ghostine



Jeremy Mullin



Glendy Sze

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

This past year has been an eventful one for us. As we worked through the on-going challenges of continuing to provide services while navigating the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, we also dealt with an important change in our organization. After many years of dedicated leadership, our former Executive Director, Moy Wong-Tam, retired at the end of the year. The Board is very grateful to Moy for her vision, passion and commitment to our community, and we strongly believe her leadership has positioned us well for success in the future. We wish Moy the very best in her retirement!

When Moy advised the Board of her plan to retire, the Board undertook a search process that resulted in the appointment of Alfred Lam, formerly Manager of the Markham Welcome Centre, to the position. The Board welcomes Alfred to his new role, and looks forward to working with him.

Our primary mission, to empower newcomers in settling and integrating as contributing members of Canadian society through diverse, professional and innovative services, continues to drive all of our plans and actions. As my time as Chair comes to an end, and I begin my sixth and final year as a member of the Board, I have reflected back on the contributions made by past Chairs and Board members to the evolution of the governance in our organization. Their focus on strategic and operating plans, financial management, the development and updating of policies, procedures, processes, as well as Board and Committee development and renewal, has provided our Management and staff with the framework and support to focus on building a strong, resilient, community-based hub of services and activities. While funding for our programs and services has remained relatively stable over this period, the ability to grow and expand our services to the community continues to be an important challenge for us. Work has begun to renew and strengthen our approach to fund-raising and our relationship with the CICS Foundation. This renewal will position us to face a post-Covid future with confidence.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Back in 2003, I was in South East Asia on a teaching contract and having the time of my life. Teaching was always my first love. After spending four years devoting every minute outside of work to complete my doctoral studies, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to travel and teach.

During a break in the semester we took a short weekend trip to Thailand. It was jarring for me to witness the poverty on the streets of Bangkok: Entire families begging on the streets, children running up to strangers asking for money or food, the homeless looking for a place to sleep. I tried my best to play the tourist and block it out of my mind, but all weekend it was in my face, almost challenging me to not look away and think about what I was seeing. And then it happened. An encounter that changed my life forever.

It was our last day in the city, and my wife and I had just finished some last minute shopping and heading back to our hotel. I turned the corner and almost ran over a person begging on the street. I looked down at him and froze.

He looked (and smelled) like he hadn't had a bath for weeks. He was kneeling on a mat, looking down on the ground. And when he saw my feet, he looked up at me, and I will never forget what I saw: He had no arms, and he was holding a small tin can with his teeth, begging for pocket change.

Our eyes met. I had never looked into a pair of eyes that was so stripped of human dignity. I instinctively wanted to put some money into his can. But I quickly realized my arms were so full from the spoils of our shopping spree that I could barely free up my hand to reach into my pocket. After finally able to give him some money, I walked away, but the impact of the encounter has stayed with me till this day. I kept thinking to myself: "We are both humans, created as equal, yet one of us had no arms and held a rusty, empty can between his teeth to beg for a living, and the other one had arms so full from shopping that he could not free a hand to help."

That is wrong.

Ever since then, that lens of social justice and human dignity has framed the way I look at the world, my work, and my life as a whole. During this past year, that lens has also driven the way I looked at what was happening during the pandemic, where across the country it was the most vulnerable populations that were disproportionately hit the hardest: Low income earning families, recent immigrants, seniors in long term care, children and youth living in neighbourhoods of poverty, among other groups. The rate of hospitalization was 3 to 4 times higher and the rate of death was up to twice higher among these vulnerable populations.

That is wrong.

And when we see something is wrong, we have a responsibility to make things right. That was the focus of CICS throughout this pandemic year of 2020-2021: We delivered meals for isolated seniors who could not go out to buy food. We helped people find jobs in this most difficult economy (One of our virtual job fairs achieved a hiring rate of greater than 50% among all participants!). We offered programs helping parents and children who both had to adjust to online education. We hosted a COVID assessment centre and we took leadership in promoting the vaccine rollout in the community. We invested in new technologies to help us build our online service delivery into our strength, and we laid plans to expand into new locations when in person service return.

That was just a small sampling of what CICS achieved in 2020-2021. In the following pages you will read the stories of the people that made it all happened, as we track month by month through this past historic year. You will meet staff and volunteers who gave what they could to help people. You will read the stories of some clients and how they came to CICS to find what they need. Theirs and countless others' stories are woven together to become CICS' story in 2020-2021, the year when everything changed.

I have often thought about how we want history to remember CICS during the pandemic year. And when I think about that, I went back to that encounter on the streets of Bangkok over 18 years go. I want CICS to be known as the place where people go and find dignity and compassion and the help they need. When all is said and done, I want history to remember CICS as a community of ordinary people who together did extraordinary things. In a world, and during a year when so much was wrong, I want CICS to be remembered as having done our best, to try and make things right.

This Month in the Pandemic:

With the economy reeling and massive disruptions in employment, on April 15 the Federal Government announced extending the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) to benefit more people. Over 7 million people applied by end of April.



SETTLEMENT SERVICES AT CICS

The 2020-2021 fiscal year started literally in a state of emergency for CICS while the world was gripped by uncertainty and fear from the COVID global pandemic. Towards the end of March, in one single week, nearly 1 million Canadians applied for Employment Insurance (EI), compared to the “normal” figure of approximately 27,000 applications during the same week the previous year. The pandemic ravaged the economy and people were desperate for help. Our phones rang non-stop as people needed help to apply for government assistance.

Our Settlement Services Teams in Toronto and York Region responded to these unprecedented times by transitioning to 100% virtual service delivery very quickly. In addition to our usual wide range of services to help newcomers integrate into their communities, we focused on services that help people connect with one another as well as accessing the help that they need during the pandemic. Examples of these services included helping people apply for government relief programs, computer literacy support for newcomer seniors, English and French conversation circles, employment assistance for newcomer job seekers, and social and academic support for Newcomer youth.



Pearly's Virtual Talent Show

Finding a trusted voice in the storm

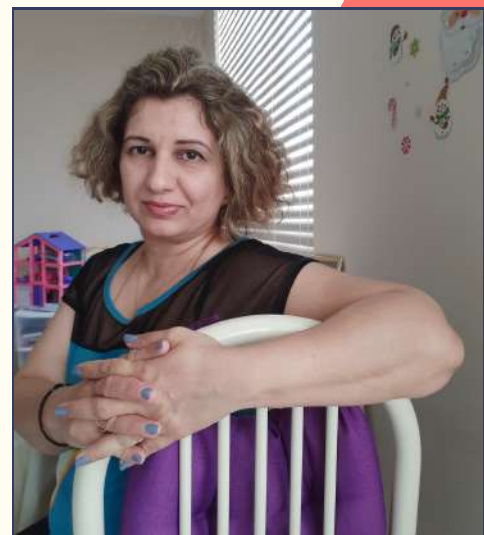
He Tong (Teresa) was one of our clients caught up in the challenges of living in a global pandemic as well as trying to find her way as a newcomer to Canada. "I had to juggle between work and looking after my young son. As a newcomer, I didn't know whom I can trust for help and guidance. I am thankful I found CICS!"

Teresa started participating in the online information seminars offered by our Settlement Team. Other than getting timely and accurate information, Teresa found something else that she needed as a newcomer: Connection and support:

"Not only was I able to get the answers I needed, in the seminars I met other newcomers in a similar situation as myself and understood the challenges and issues I was facing. I was especially touched by the staff of CICS, who took time even after the workshops to call me and check on me, making sure I was doing okay. They are always there for me and I knew I was no longer alone. Even though we live in such uncertain times in the pandemic, I now am confident that I will be able to build a better tomorrow here in Canada, my new home!"



Zhu Liu (Pearly), Volunteer



Reem Danbel, Settlement Youth Worker

During these desperate times, we found community heroes stepping up from unexpected places to make a difference. People like Reem Danbel, our Arabic-speaking settlement staff. Reem came to Canada 10 years ago and still remembers what life was like as a newcomer. She resolved to use her experience to help others so they won't have to go through the same frustrations she did. She joined CICS as a receptionist in 2017, and subsequently became a settlement counsellor in 2018, helping our language students navigate around the barriers they faced and to settle in their new communities. "I had to learn so many new digital skills in order to serve my clients remotely! But even though the platforms have changed, I am still motivated by the same purpose: Combining my experiences as a newcomer from yesterday, with the settlement knowledge I have today to help others build a better tomorrow in Canada!"

We have dedicated volunteers like Micheline Desjardins who teaches French to our clients. Like Reem, Micheline had to learn new skills to be able to teach online. Not willing to let a pandemic get in the way of her teaching Canada's other official language to her newcomer students, Micheline mastered the digital teaching platform so she could seamlessly offer classes, prepare lesson worksheets and handout homework assignments to her students.

"As a teacher, I was much more comfortable with actual pen and paper, but I do whatever it takes to continue to help my students." With a dedicated teacher like that, no wonder her students are so inspired by her!

Then there is Zhu Liu, who has volunteered with CICS for the last 10 years as a technology instructor. She teaches seniors on all things digital: How to use WhatsApp and WeChat to connect with one another, how to use social media to stay in touch with friends, how to look for accurate and trustworthy information online, especially during times like these. Zhu's classes regularly attract more than 200 seniors!

Volunteers like Micheline and Zhu empower both our clients and our staff. They help us realize there is so much that we are all capable of to make lives better for others. There is one more small detail that made their stories even more inspiring:

Micheline is 69, and Zhu is 78 years old.

There are heroes all around us. They are waiting for us to join their ranks. We just have to step up and do what we are capable of.



COVID-19 Vaccine Orientation



Micheline Desjardins, Volunteer

This Month in the Pandemic:

On May 14, Canadian released a report on the condition in Ontario's nursing homes, depicting critical conditions, drawing attention to the needs of seniors.

SENIORS' MEALS DELIVERY SERVICE DURING COVID

During the COVID-19 pandemic, shopping for food became a challenge for seniors who live alone. Many of them have underlying or chronic health issues making them especially vulnerable to the harm that the virus can do. With support from the Federal Seniors Response Fund and United Way funding, CICS partnered with Café Hollywood to deliver cooked meals at a subsidized price to seniors. There was tremendous demand for the service in the community, and when we wrapped up the project after offering the service for 12 months, we had delivered 45,000 meals to almost 1000 seniors!





Ally Lui, Program Director of Youth and Family Services

It's all in the heart

In the work that we do we are always interested in measuring impact: How many people benefited from a program? How many volunteers did we recruit? How many participants found employment? And so on. Sometimes it is easy to forget that behind every piece of statistics there is a member of the CICS family who tirelessly pours his or her heart into the work, not just for another click of the counter or to check another box, but because they care about the lives of the individuals being helped by CICS. Ally Lui, our Program Director of Youth and Family Services is one of the finest examples.

Ally is a “veteran” of the business, with a career that spans over 25 years with 10 different community service organizations. She celebrated her 10th anniversary with CICS, but in her work she still lives by the same principles that have guided her since day one: “It’s always about caring from your heart. Always trying to listen without judging, trying to understand and offering support.” Well loved by everyone in CICS, those who work for her typically describe her as being “motherly”. One person said, “Every step, every move Ally makes, it’s done from her heart. I feel like I can always go to her when I need someone to talk to, she is like a mother to me. She genuinely cares about her clients, staff and volunteers.”

When CICS received funding to deliver the Seniors Meals Delivery service we had to respond very quickly to roll out the program. As the project lead, Ally encountered the first major setback: The restaurant that originally agreed to partner with CICS decided to pull out because they were not convinced there is a profit to be made. In desperation Ally started “cold calling” one restaurant after another. When that didn’t yield a new partner, she pounded the pavement and visited more restaurants. Finally, through a mutual contact we reached Café Hollywood who said yes to us right away. The partnership that will ultimately drive the most successful seniors’ meals delivery service in the GTA was born!



But that was just the beginning of the work. We couldn't serve the regular menu items offered at Café Hollywood because the meals had to be designed specifically for the dietary needs of the seniors. Ally hired a dietitian to design the menu, which called for new methods of meal preparation than the restaurant was accustomed to. That did not faze the owner of Café Hollywood. He purchased a new commercial steamer and other cooking equipment, thermal bags for delivery, and paid to develop an app to make ordering meals simple and fast for the seniors.

With two weeks of preparation, Ally put together a team of staff to take orders and another team to promote the program. The moment CICS launched the Meal Delivery Program, phone lines were jammed and each week meals were sold out within 30 minutes!

Just like the start of any new programs, there were other obstacles to overcome: some seniors did not like the food, some complained they did not know how to order online and could not reach our staff to order the meals, others said the delivery took too long. The team took each feedback seriously and looked for ways to improve. In Ally's words: "The dedication of staff and volunteers, and the amazing teamwork between staff, volunteers and our restaurant partner ultimately made the Meal Delivery Program a success. But the true reward for us is every time we receive a 'thank you' from the seniors. It goes straight to our hearts!"

Ally is a role model for all of us in CICS that after 25 years of doing this work, she has never forgotten the one thing that motivated her since day one: work that is done from your heart, with your heart, will always go to the hearts of those you serve. And whatever you give, it will come back to you, straight to your heart.

This Month in the Pandemic:

On June 18 2020 Canada hit the grim milestone of 100,000 COVID cases. As the pandemic grew worse, the most vulnerable populations became more and more at risk of falling through the cracks.



Qiu Hong (Teresa) Chen
Volunteer

COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY PROGRAM

When the pandemic initially swept over the world, the Community Services team was faced with a challenge to continue living up to the namesake, serving our community. Our regular programs had been put on hold, indefinitely it felt at the time. However, this pause in programming allowed us all to come together to address our community's immediate concerns with regards to the pandemic, and food insecurity emerged as the prominent topic in discussion. When Daily Bread approached us to take over as the pop-up location for the Agincourt branch of the Toronto Public Libraries, we were excited to be able to help our community in this way. What started as a fresh program with program staff and volunteers previously unfamiliar with food bank processes, has blossomed into a program that clients, volunteers, and staff look forward to every week. This program has been a heart-warming experience and we are excited to continue growing this program, introducing other strategies to combat food insecurity and partnering with other local organizations in order to better serve our community.



Tinashe and Teresa: Doing whatever it takes and offering whatever you can

Tinashe Kanengoni is our Community Service Assistant Program Manager who has a big heart for his community. He was the driving force behind the start-up of our Food Pantry program. CICS has never offered a Food Pantry program before, but when putting food on the table became a challenge, and living with hunger became a reality for many families in our community, Tinashe and Brian Joyce (Our Program Director of Community Services) got to work and put together plans to begin operating a Food Pantry out of our Multi-Purpose Hall. Later, when the pandemic raged on and CICS was once again asked to step up to help the community, this time to host a COVID Testing Centre in the same space, we had to move the entire operation into the Warehouse to make way for the Testing Centre.

The warehouse was dusty, filled with everything imaginable such as used furniture, years of paperwork, old equipment that no one uses anymore, among everything else including the kitchen sink! Tinashe had no clue how to convert the mountain of stuff into a space for the Food Pantry. "OH MY GOD! What have I gotten myself into?"

Tinashe knew he had to do whatever it takes to keep the Food Pantry going, because more than 300 people depend on it every week. He knew he needed help and lots of it.

So he called together a team, or more accurately, an army of volunteers to help clean up the warehouse. Among them was Qiu Hong (Teresa) Chen. When she found out about the opportunity to help, she wasn't sure what she could do, but she signed up to help, offering to do whatever she can. When we spoke with her, she shared with us her simplest and purest motive: "I want to help. I want to see people have food for their families." Being a newcomer herself, Teresa was able to improve her communication and build her network of friends as she volunteered with CICS.

The Food Pantry program was made possible by staff and volunteers to do whatever it takes and offering whatever they can. In Tinashe's own words, "All of us are pulled together by the same sense of purpose, and we are all motivated when the clients tell us how much they appreciated the Food Pantry." Teresa echoed those same sentiments: "I feel such a sense of purpose and satisfaction when I hear the clients' appreciative words."

People from different backgrounds united by one purpose, working together, motivated to help people in need, the Food Pantry Program is indeed a living illustration of CICS' core values: Inclusion, collaboration, and compassion.

This Month in the Pandemic:

On July 8, Ontario extended the state of emergency for another week. As the pandemic rages on in the summer and most activities being cancelled. How are our youth doing?



IMMIGRANT YOUTH CENTRE:

With over 10 years as York Region's sole standalone youth centre that is dedicated to serving immigrant youth, the CICS Immigrant Youth Centre (IYC)'s mission is to enhance immigrant youth's sense of community that is youth-led, youth-centered and youth-developed in an inclusive, supportive and diverse environment. IYC provides a variety of services to youth ages 13-24 at their families at no cost in support of their settlement and integration into Canadian society. IYC offers programming in numerous areas including: pre-employment and education support, academic and English support, leadership and life skills training, self-understanding and expression, volunteering and community engagement, as well as individualized settlement services and support

Xu Han (Hannah) Zhao: "IYC gave me the wheels to see my new word"

On the surface, Hannah Zhao looks like any typical grade 9 student: She is happy, energetic and loves spending time with her friends. Hannah came to Canada 2 years ago and was introduced to the IYC through her cousin. She found a home among the staff team and the other youths and began volunteering right away. The friendship and social network she built at IYC was instrumental in helping her integrate into her new community. Unfortunately, just like all other students, all of that was shut down when the pandemic forced the closure of in person learning at schools.

Unlike the beautiful summer days and Hannah's cheerful self, when we started to talk about her struggles, Hannah told us that the pandemic has definitely affected her mental wellness, and she was not alone as many of her friends experienced similar struggles. Being in remote learning disrupted the routines and rhythms of her life. She knew she was struggling, but it was hard to put a finger on it. She understood she should talk to somebody to seek help, but the pandemic has effectively placed her in social isolation. Just as she was caught in the cycle of knowing she should talk to somebody, but not sure who or what to talk about, the IYC introduced an innovative new program to help the mental wellness of youth.

Partnering with Markham Cycles, the IYC offered a program called "Cycle the City". The program provides youth aged 13-25 access to refurbished bicycles for the summer and support and encouragement to ride through group training sessions.



Xu Han (Hannah), Client

They are loaned a refurbished bicycle and lock and are given a helmet and repair kit to keep. Throughout the summer, they ride independently around the city exploring their new communities on two wheels, and participate in weekly virtual discussions sessions about their experience. The program also teaches youth about the environmental impact of transportation emissions, and how they can effect change by develop "green" transportation habits.

For Hannah, the program gave her more than just a bicycle. "Having a bicycle gave me the opportunity to look at my world in a different way. I can bike to places that I don't normally go and see different parts of the city. It also gave me back a part of the freedom that COVID has taken away, and that has really helped my mental health!"

The Cycle the City program is only one example of the holistic approach that the IYC takes in serving newcomer youths. We are committed to helping youths with the physical, mental, emotional and social wellness. But the driving force behind all we do is the care that the staff has for the youth they serve, like Hannah. "IYC staff really cared about my feelings; they would call to follow up on how I am doing. They give me a lot of confidence that I can overcome the challenges from the pandemic"

This Month in the Pandemic:

As August comes to an end, the population began to question what will happen with school in September. Parents began to wonder if their children will be able to return to school in person



SEPT Team

THE SETTLEMENT AND EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS IN TORONTO (SEPT)

SEPT is a partnership with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB).

Since September 1999, our SEPT workers have been placed in elementary and secondary schools in North York. SEPT workers proactively contact newcomer parents (and youth in secondary schools) to assist them with their settlement needs. The presence of settlement workers in the schools also allows teachers to consult with settlement workers about newcomers and settlement issues, help to raise awareness of educators on immigration and integration issues faced by newcomers.

Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW) has been a part of SEPT since 2008, a successful program that helps newcomer students and their families settle in their school and community. The program usually takes place during the last week of August; the newcomer students are oriented to their school by Peer Leaders. Peer Leaders are fellow students who were newcomers in previous years. The Peer Leaders lead the activities and share their own challenges when they arrived and how they succeeded.



Sandy Chiang, SEPT Program Manager

Sandy Chiang: “It’s always been about finding solutions for clients”

On social media, the slang term “OG” is often used to describe someone or something that is an “original”. When it comes to the SEPT program, Program Manager Sandy Chiang is definitely the “OG”. To put it into perspective, Sandy joined CICS before Google came along and become the popular search engine that we all used today! She became part of the CICS family in 1998, the same year of the first-ever recorded Google search.

“Even though I graduated with a degree in Science and Management, I have always found my greatest enjoyment through interaction with people.” Sandy said. Indeed, personal interaction is a crucial component of SEPT’s success. CICS’ SEPT staff speaks 12 different languages and serves clients from about 78 elementary and secondary schools all over Toronto. They must build relationships of trust with each school’s administration, as well as with clients to be able to function in their roles.

Without the ability to be physically present in the schools, Sandy and her team had to draw from the strength of the relationships they have built and be very intentional in maintaining communication to ensure they are well informed of the needs of the students, and be there for them to provide support and services. “My education background in Science and management education background gave me skills for problem-solving and resources management. When I encounter a challenge, it is about understanding the underlying problems and maximizing the tools available to solve them.” The world has seen many new tools to make our lives easier since Sandy joined CICS, Google being one of them. But as Sandy has proven for over 20 years, nothing can replace personal interaction. That has been the backbone of SEPT success since the beginning.



Svetlana Kravchenko,
School Settlement Worker



Tom Zvereva, Client



Natalia Zvereva, Client

Svetlana Kravchenko, Natalia & Tom Zvereva: “It’s all in the bones”

Speaking of “backbones”, that is one of Svetlana Kravchenko’s favourite topics of conversation when she speaks with her student clients. Svetlana was born in Ukraine and like Sandy she has been a long-time member of the SEPT program team since 2001. For the last 20 years, she has been helping newcomer students navigate through the school system: connecting with their teachers, looking for volunteering and employment opportunities, introducing them to resources available in the community and ultimately helping them apply for post-secondary education.

When working with newcomer students facing fear and anxiety about living life in a new country, she likes to tell them the key is in learning to grow three bones: They need to grow a “wishbone” and have a dream for their future. They need a “backbone” to help them stand firm and do the hard work that it takes to accomplish their dreams. And they need a “funny bone”, a sense of humour to help them through the tough times. Natalia Zvereva and her son Tom are living examples of this.

When Natalia first came to Canada, she could not speak English. Often questioning whether she could survive in this new country with her son, Natalia met Svetlana, who guided her through many newcomer orientations and encouraged Natalia to learn the language. Grown the backbones of knowing that she needed to be strong for her family, Natalia took the challenge and now is able to carry many conversations in English. Tom, Natalia’s son, now has grown to a Peer Leader of the NOW program. When schools shifted to virtual learning, the experience Tom had in the NOW program not only taught him to adjust himself quickly for the online learning but also let him empathise with the newcomer students who just like himself years ago. Like what our SEPT team worker Svetlana said: “I tell my students we all have to learn to stay strong to help each other, and together we will make it through this pandemic.” It looks like everyone is learning to grow their bones, just like Svetlana advises her clients.

This Month in the Pandemic:

September brought the second wave of COVID in Ontario. People began to worry about schools re-opening. On September 28, Ontario recorded 700 new cases, the highest one-day case count since the beginning of the pandemic.



CICS LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION SERVICES

CICS offers LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) classes in both Toronto and York regions, including 3 full-time classes in York region and 23 part-time classes at Toronto LINC. Funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the LINC program offers language training for eligible adult learners coupled with support services such as Care for Newcomer Children (CNC) program. During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, both LINC and CNC programs were successfully transitioned to online delivery format and proudly served 700 adult language learners and 90 newcomer children through our interactive online programming.

Sadia Zahid & Allan Webster: Learning new tools for an ancient craft



Sadia Zahid, LINC Instructor



Allan Webster, LINC Instructor

Do you know that the chalkboard, the most iconic instrument of teaching has been around for more than two centuries? Toward the end of the 18th century, paper and pens were very expensive, and students will bring individual slates or small pieces of wood coated with paint to write on in class. Teachers had to go to each individual student and write on their slate to teach.

Then In 1801, James Pillans, a geography teacher at the Old High School in Edinburgh, Scotland put a simple solution into action: He hung a large piece of wood in front of the class for all students to see at once. The “modern” chalkboard is born!! The chalkboard was the original mass education technological device, and it has not changed much in 220 years. Imagine in your mind the typical picture of a classroom, and you will likely see a chalkboard with the teacher in front and books on the desk of the students. For hundreds of years, chalkboards and books were indispensable tools for the teaching profession.

Allan Webster and Sadia Zahid are teachers in CICS' Language instruction program. For decades, teachers in CICS just like them have taught thousands upon thousands of newcomers English and gave them critical language skills so they can integrate into Canadian society. When it comes to teaching, both Allan and Sadia are self-proclaimed "old schoolers". When we caught up with them to find out how they are coping with the pandemic, Sadia jokingly said, "When COVID hits, one of the most pressing questions in my mind was what am I going to do when I can't use my books to teach?" Likewise, Allan said with a smile: "I loved the chalkboard...the idea that I had to teach without one scared the lights out of me!"

Allan and Sadia came from different ends of the world: Sadia was born in Pakistan and came to Canada in 2000. She speaks Urdu and understands Punjabi. Allan was born in Toronto and is a native English speaker. Despite their difference in background, their love for teaching brought them to CICS, and the COVID pandemic put to them the common challenge of learning to teach in a new way.

Even though Sadia was "tech-savvy", the transition to an online teacher was energy and time consuming. "Sometimes finding online materials is overwhelming and it can take the entire day outside of the teaching hours." Allan concurred: "In order to function in the new reality, I had to be both a good learner and a good teacher at once. I had to learn the new technologies very quickly, and also had to develop patience with students when they had difficulties with the technology and struggle with handing in assignments, for example."

In addition to the technology, accommodating the needs of students was another challenge. Some students are more capable of technology than others. Students who have young children of their own attending school virtually sometimes cannot make it to their own language classes. Some families don't have the financial means to afford multiple devices at home. Sadia and Allan adjusted by doing what they can to make the learning accessible and relevant to what the students are going through: Sadia records her lessons so students can "attend class" whenever their schedule allows or when they can use the devices at home. Allan makes it a point to encourage the students to practice their English in class by talking about the challenges they are facing, as a way to address their mental wellness and relieve their stress. Despite all the adjustments they had to make, both Zadia and Allan found the whole experience to be rewarding: "At the end of the day, the point of teaching is not the method or the tools, but seeing students learn and appreciate what you are doing for them"

This Month in the Pandemic:

Ontario government recommended No trick or treating for Halloween. The media turns its attention to the effects of the Pandemic lockdowns on children.



CICS EARLY YEARS SERVICES

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of our daily lives. Remote learning and connection have become the new norm. Parents and children are facing new challenges and higher levels of stress during these isolated times. For instance, there are new parents who are struggling with their newborns' developmental issues. Some parents may have no clue how to prepare their three-year-old for kindergarten. These common scenarios represent only the tip of the iceberg. During the pandemic, CICS' Early Years transitioned to web-based service delivery and successfully offered programs via Zoom, WeChat, and Facebook to address parents' top priority needs. This virtual programming has successfully extended our services to families in need who do not live in our local community. It is amazing to see our teamwork with parents, grandparents, and children to help them thrive and grow stronger together during these challenging times.

Shirley Wan: "I am an Early Childhood Educator. But one of my most important tasks during the pandemic is to work with parents."

Shirley Wan is an Early Childhood Educator (ECE) at CICS and has been with the organization for two and a half years. Like most other ECE's, Shirley loves being around children. "Children bring so much joy and happiness into my life! They make me feel active and young, so I decided to study ECE!"

As the pandemic rages on in 2020, Shirley began to see how the lack of socialization is affecting the children's development. At the same time, Shirley also saw the need to help families through the challenges they are facing. "I realized it is crucial to offer support to parents, so they can provide the nurturing and supportive environment the children need." So she offered different interesting and encouraging workshops where parents are involved with their young.



Shirley Wan, Early Childhood Educator

Those workshops turn out to be tremendously popular among parents. Shirley's WeChat group grew from 70 to over 500 participants. The group has become a source of encouragement for Shirley: "It is so rewarding to see a group of program participants evolved into a community of parents that offer support to each other and sharing experiences and resources during the pandemic. They are ambassadors for my work as they helped promote our programs and workshops to their families and friends!"

Sandy Wu: CICS supported me during my darkest days as a mom

Sandy Wu is one of the participants of the CICS Early Years Program. Being a first time mom of a 1.5-year-old, motherhood has been a difficult journey for Sandy. As the lockdown continued, she struggled to find new activities for her daughter. In addition to the challenges brought on by the pandemic, Sandy was fighting another battle: “I have lived with depression for many years, and I worry if I can handle the challenges of being a mom during a pandemic.”

A friend introduced Sandy to the CICS Early Years Program offered by Shirley. From Shirley’s programs Sandy learned new skills that she can practice for self-care, and activities she can do with her daughter. For instance, Sandy learned different craft skills. She has found them very relaxing and her daughter enjoys every craft activity with her. In Shirley’s workshop, Sandy learned how to talk to and interact with her daughter, and she has grown to appreciate the fact that the pandemic has made it possible for her to spend a lot of time with her little girl and watch her grow during these formative years.

The pandemic has opened our eyes to see that our Early Children Workers are not just people who sing songs and do crafts with kids. They are highly skilled professionals who have been trained to work with entire families to create a safe and supportive environment for every member of the household.



Sandy Wu, Client





This Month in the Pandemic:

On November 23, 2020, with rising COVID numbers in Toronto and Peel, another lockdown was announced. With no end in sight to the lockdowns, mental health became an increasing concern.



CICS MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

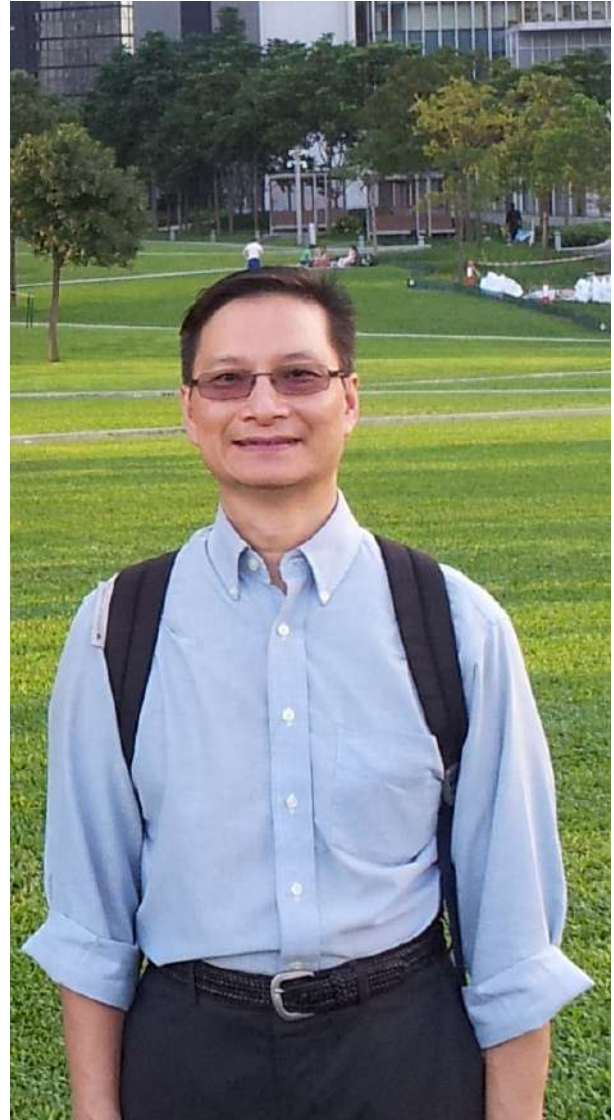
CICS is committed to supporting all newcomers' well-being during their settlement journeys. We embrace the fundamental principles of anti-oppression, client recovery as well as a holistic approach when delivering our services, and address the unique mental health needs and barriers that new immigrants often face when settling in Canada.

1. One-on-one Wellness Support -- we work with individuals to identify their strengths and needs. Together we develop a strength-based, goal-oriented wellness plan.
2. Wellness Group Activities -- we offer group activities with a view of creating a safe space for individuals to learn the skills and strategies to stay healthy.
3. Community Outreach - we work with community partners to organize events on educating the public about mental wellness.

Alan Yim: "Being a Mental Health Worker is like being a GPS"

Alan Yim became a mental health worker right at the onset of the COVID pandemic, in March 2020. 10 years ago, Alan was a counsellor helping at risk persons in Hong Kong. Even though he wasn't working in the mental health profession after coming to Canada, he never lost his passion to help others, and he never gave up on his hopes to one day work as a mental health professional again.

When CICS launched the new Mental Health Project in March 2020 with modest resources and was looking for a mental health worker, Alan jumped at the opportunity. The circumstances were challenging: The program was launched during the pandemic when in person services were being shut down, and Alan was going to be the only mental health worker at the time. "The project was new and the funding was scarce. But I looked at the trajectory of the pandemic and knew that in addition to battling the physical virus, sooner or later people will need help with their mental wellness. I had been looking to get back into the mental health profession for the last 10 years, so I simply saw this as an opportunity to help."



Alan Yim, Mental Health Worker



Julia: "The ultimate goal of getting help is so that one day you can help others"

For many years Julia struggled with bipolar disorder. Her life was like a pendulum that swung between the extremes of overflowing happy energy and suffocating sadness and hopelessness. She has bounced in and out of the hospital many times. When the pandemic started, due to the closure of community programs and services she was left with no support.

Julia came across CICS in July 2020. Alan was an excellent support to her. Once she was ready and felt like herself again, she approached Alan because she wanted to share her experience with other people who are battling with mental illness. In 2020 September, Julia became a volunteer at CICS, where she was able to support Alan. There she was able to help another client who was facing bipolar disorder. Julia expressed, "Admitting you need help is the first step towards being helped, and once you have been helped, you can't help but want to share and help others."

This Month in the Pandemic:

On December 26, 2020, with COVID numbers continue to rise, another province-wide shutdown was announced. With infection numbers soaring to new heights, CICS began hosting a COVID Testing/Assessment Centre at our head office.



COVID ASSESSMENT CENTRE

In November CICS was approached by the Scarborough Health Network about opening a COVID Assessment Centre in the Multi-Purpose Hall at the IRC. Although there was some initial hesitancy and concern from staff about having this operation occurring 7 days a week, the Facilities team worked with SHN in ensuring that all precautions were taken. Renovations were initiated to separate all building functions and operations to provide a safe workspace for both SHN and IRC staff. Although there were some financial benefits to having SHN rent the space it was also an important community partnership to assist the healthcare system in tracking and assessing the impact of this pandemic to provide information that leads to critical decision making on how to mitigate this devastating virus.



Brian Joyce: How to be the Directory of Community Services when the community is in shut down

Christmas is normally the most festive month of the year. But Christmas of 2020 was anything but normal. COVID numbers were still surging and another round of province-wide shutdown was around the corner. On December 1, CICS started hosting a COVID assessment centre. Brian Joyce, CICS' Director of Community Services was tasked with the difficult job of getting the assessment centre up and running, while safely maintaining our weekly food bank in another part of the building.

Brian joined CICS in early May 2020, but had to delay the start until June due to the pandemic. Despite the fact that he didn't even have a proper orientation, once he entered the role he began to take on project after project. "Even though I came onboard during somewhat chaotic circumstances, being involved in multiple projects actually helped me gain a wider and deeper understanding of the work of CICS." As challenging as those early months were, they did not compare to the difficulties of getting the COVID testing centre operational.

The testing centre was a partnership between CICS and the Scarborough Hospital. It needed to have the capacity of serving 25 people per hour. In order to create a safe environment for others who use the building, Brian had to work with the hospital team to do substantial renovations: "The real challenge was to create a large space that is completely sealed off from the rest of the building. It meant building new walls, putting in new doors, even re-working the ventilation system and installing an air purification system, so that the test centre will not even share air with the rest of the building. Later on, we had to put in additional heaters as clients of the testing centre found the space too cold."

Having completed the renovation, Brian had to solve the next piece of the puzzle: how to create a safe separation between the members of the public coming to use the testing centre and the clients of the foodbank.

"Clients and volunteers of the foodbank were feeling uncomfortable as COVID testing clients were coming over to the other side of the building to check out the Food Pantry," Brian explained. "So we had to contact the hospital and navigate through their administration and ask for more signage, and for them to hire more security personnel to direct traffic and make sure COVID testing clients are using the proper area for parking and only access that side of the building."

As he jumped through hoops and over hurdles, Brian never lost sight of what it means to be CICS' Director of Community Services: He was there to serve the community. He felt useful in bringing his prior experiences from working in the health services to provide leadership in CICS during a health crisis. "To be able to give back, to contribute, and touch the lives of people in our community is a privilege, something that we should always be grateful for."

This Month in the Pandemic:

Moy Wong-Tam, our Executive Director officially retired after her distinguished 12-year tenure with CICS. On January 1, 2021 Alfred Lam became the new Executive Director of CICS.

Alfred Lam: Breaking down walls and building communities in a time of isolation



A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens opens with the iconic words: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” Those words are an apt description of the circumstances Alfred Lam found himself in as he stepped into the role of CICS’ new Executive Director on January 1, 2021. On one hand, it is an exciting time with new possibilities for growth, but to take office in an (mostly) empty headquarters in the middle of a pandemic when most of the agency is working from home; surely that is a formidable challenge. But Alfred has a surprisingly different perspective:

"I suppose on one hand people can say it is a terrible time to start as the new ED, with all the uncertainties and chaos of being in a global pandemic. But at the same time, the unique circumstances also open up opportunities for the entire agency to rethink and reimagine the way we do things. Also, the isolation of the lockdown actually forces us to be very intentional and mindful of communicating with one another using online technologies, and I actually find myself touching base with colleagues more frequently throughout the workday, just to make sure we are doing okay and on the same page work-wise."

Alfred has made a career of breaking free from traditional stereotypes, reaching across barriers, knocking down walls and building communities. For example, he volunteered as a driver taking AIDS patients who were too frail to get on public transportation to medical appointments when he was a church minister. "I am always suspicious when people create an "us vs them" narrative. Rather than alienating people because they are supposedly "different", I want to meet them, have conversations, build relationships, and in the process learn that we are actually more alike than we realize. I have always believed that to be the foundation for community building."

While some believe the pandemic has been the "equalizer" that affected everyone the same way, Alfred feels otherwise. "I read a quote a few weeks ago challenging the idea that the pandemic has put all of us in the same boat. The reality, the quote says, is that we are all in the same storm, and some of us have much better boats than others. The pandemic has crystalized CICS' vision and galvanized our mission: we are here to help and serve those who do not have very good boats."

"The pandemic will one day be over, and when history looks back on this year that changed everything, I ask myself, 'how would I want CICS to be remembered? What will be our story and legacy?' For me, I want history to remember CICS as a place where during the pandemic, people who were caught in the storm found compassion and the help that they need. If we commit ourselves to do that, to BE that, then CICS will emerge from the pandemic stronger than ever, being confident in knowing the role that we are supposed to play in the community regardless of what changes come our way."

Indeed, it was the best of times and it was the worst of time as Charles Dickens wrote. But those were not the only words in the epic opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*. The same passage goes on to say, "It was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope..." Let those words also characterize the work of CICS as we move forward with Alfred's leadership.

This Month in the Pandemic:

With the rolling out of the COVID vaccine and ramped up delivery, on February 19, 2021 Ontario hit the milestone of administering 500,000 doses of COVID vaccine. With increased vaccination came brightened optimism that we are slowly on the track towards recovery. The Ontario unemployment rate in February dropped to 9.2%, down from a high of 13.5% in May 2020, during the height of the pandemic. The improved economic outlook caused many to venture out to look for work again.



Employment Program

CICS EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

To support underemployed and unemployed immigrants to engage in the Canadian workforce, we are dedicated to offering individualized services and sector-specific skills training programs, assisting job seekers in finding and retaining employment, and achieving financial independence. Job seekers receive the latest information about the labour market, career trends and prospects, as well as hiring opportunities through our programs. We collaborate with community partners, employers from multi-sectors, and professional volunteers to host hiring events, networking and information sessions.

S.O.A.R. (Skills, Opportunities, Action-Plan, Resources) is one of our signature programs that offers placement opportunities where immigrant women can experience working in a Canadian office environment. Many of the participants end up being hired by their employers following their placement.



Annie Chen: We can all use help when it comes to looking for work

12 years ago, Annie left Canada for a job in Shanghai, China. In 2018 she returned to Canada or more specifically a Canadian labour market that was very different from the one she left 12 years prior.

With a family to support, Annie needed a job, so she tried to jam all her work experiences onto a page and started sending it out as her resume. She had no strategy and wasn't sure if that was an effective way to find a job. Months went by without results. Annie watched the calendar turn from 2018 to 2019, and towards the end of the year the news started reporting a new virus outbreak in Asia. By early 2020 it has found its way to Canada, and the pandemic was underway. Seemingly overnight everything got thrown into a blender in total chaos. Annie's prospect of finding a job never felt more distant. It was then she found CICS, and enrolled in the S.O.A.R. employment program.

S.O.A.R. (Skills, Opportunities, Action Plan and Resources) is an employment support program for newcomer women, offering training in workplace culture and communication, administration, and intermediate level Microsoft Office training. Participants then receive placement opportunities where they can be connected with potential employers and experience first-hand working in Canada.

With 12 years of working experience overseas, Annie picked up the training very quickly and found the job search training very helpful.

"I was tempted to put down everything I have done and all the places I have worked on my resume to try and impress potential employers. From the job search strategy training in S.O.A.R. I learned that not everything is relevant to the job I am applying for, and sometimes it is more helpful to leave things out. That was a hard lesson for me to learn as I felt I was 'wasting' some of my experiences. The mock interview training was also a big help for me as I can practice answering common questions in interviews without any pressure. After completing the program I was offered a placement position in an accounting firm, where I was subsequently hired. After working there for a while, I found my current position as an accountant. More important than just finding a job, I feel good about myself that I can support my family. I have to thank CICS and my instructors in S.O.A.R. who helped put me on the right career path. CICS literally helped me SOAR!"



This Month in the Pandemic:

March 11, 2021 marked the first anniversary of WHO declaring COVID 19 a global pandemic



CICS ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT TEAM

As part of the CICS family, the Administration Support Team works to make sure that the day-to-day operation runs smoothly at CICS. When COVID-19 hit, the Administration Support Team worked tirelessly to pivot the agency to online services in a timely manner and made sure everyone in the agency was well-supported with necessities working from home. As a team that often works behind the scene, the work of the CICS Administration Support Team is an essential piece for the success of the agency. The Support Administrative Team includes Accounting, Facility & Operation, Human Resources and the general administration.

Ricky Qu, IT Manager

Ricky joined CICS in 2007 as an IT specialist. Over the last 14 years Ricky has learned all the facets of CICS' IT infrastructure and has grown in his career to being our Manager of IT Services today. When the pandemic hit and the agency went into lockdown in accordance with the provincial order, Ricky and his team had to transition the entire agency to online service delivery immediately. We had to literally start from scratch. "When we started, we didn't even have agency ZOOM accounts, and had to purchase the licenses in a rush," Ricky said.

But that was just the first step in a series of "first steps": "Staff needed to be trained on how to use ZOOM, we had to write and develop guidelines for online service delivery to protect the confidentiality of all our clients. For clients who could not afford mobile devices, we received funder support to purchase and lent out laptops for them to use so they can continue taking classes and attending programs. Staff also needed to be set up technically so they can work from home while maintaining strict data security. My team and I configured more than 100 laptops for clients and staff to use! All the work came at us at the same time, like a tidal wave! I will never forget this experience as long as I live!" Ricky remembered with a smile. In addition to all of that, Ricky and his wife also recently welcomed their first child! Talk about multitasking!!

When we spoke to Ricky, the work of the IT department has already shifted from trying to stop the "tidal wave" to using what we learned in the pandemic to prepare for the future. We are exploring a better phone system so staff can maintain communication more efficiently, and transitioning our file storage to enable better remote access. Pandemic or not, the job is always to make sure our colleagues have the best technical support possible to do their work.



Ricky Qu, IT Manager

Connie Leung, Manager of Facility and Operations

Connie Leung has been with CICS for 11.5 years and, now holds the position of Manager of Facility and Operation. Before taking on that role, Connie was one of our Program Managers and that's where she first explored using ZOOM. Before the pandemic and the IT team taught staff members to use ZOOM, Connie had already taught her team!

During the pandemic the facility and operation team encountered many challenges. For instance, every time when Connie and her team had a meeting they always talk about the potential of reopening. "We try to imagine when staff can come back and what programs can resume in person, and we try to anticipate what we need to do to get the buildings ready. But it was a conversation that changes all the time depending on what was going on in the city and the province. It's a bit like running a race where the finish line is always being changed."

Because of the reduction of staff presence during the pandemic, Connie and her team had to double up on duties such as watching the front desk in case someone is there with deliveries. Connie laughed and said the pandemic actually made her healthier from all the extra exercise she has been getting!



Connie Leung, Manager of Facility and Operations

Shazia Sohail, Manager of Human Resources

How do you manage the human resources for an agency, when you hardly get to meet any humans who work there? That was the challenge facing HR Manager Shazia Sohail when she joined CICS early this year in January 2021.

When Shazia joined us during the pandemic, she knew that she would have very little opportunity to meet with colleagues to get to know them. Just as importantly she also knew very few colleagues will have the opportunity to get to know her. So Shazia set off on a mission to make sure staff knows that she is here to help them. “When you cannot meet with a person physically, every little thing helps form an impression. So I made sure I respond to requests from colleagues within the same day, so they know I am here for them.”

Shazia will be the first to admit she definitely misses the human touch. “Most of us get into HR work because we are people-oriented persons. We want to help. We want to bring out the best in every employee. We want to make sure people are cared for. And it’s hard when you cannot interact with people.” Even though Shazia currently spends most of her work in front of a computer, she has not lost sight of why she is here: “HR is all about well-being. It is important to remember that employees are people. We all need help from time to time weathering issues that can threaten our health and wellness. During those times, it is important that the CICS family knows HR is here to support them.”



Shazia Sohail, Manager of HR

Client Statistics From 2020 - 2021

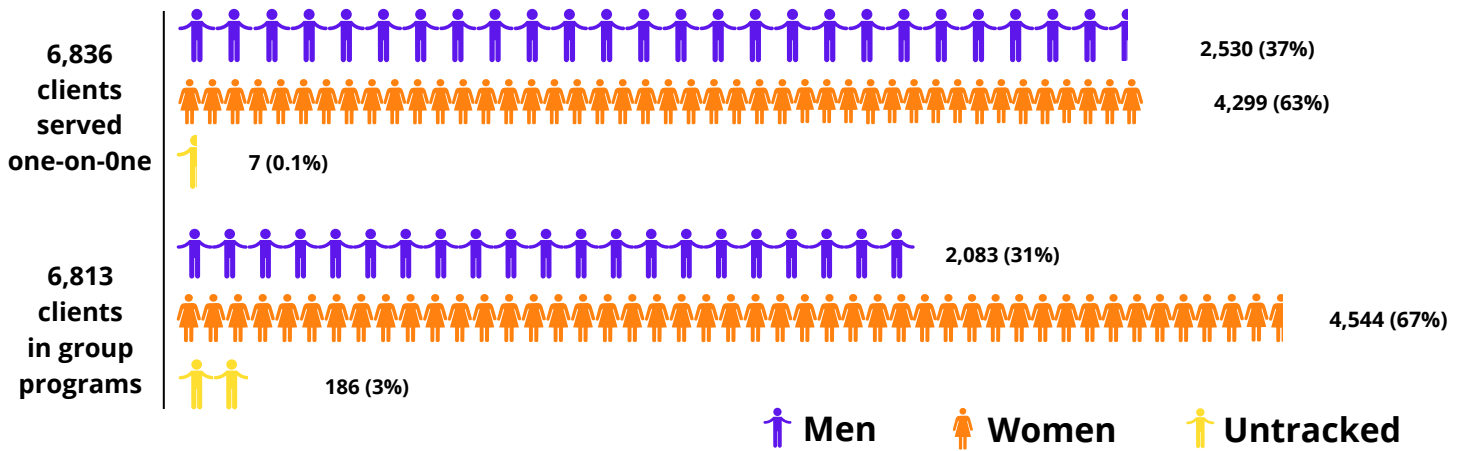
Canada is a nation of immigrants who come from all over the world with diverse backgrounds. Below are the statistics about our clientele in 2020 - 2021, reflecting the diversity of newcomers and community members.



Native Language	Overall Percentage	One-on-one Services	Group Programs
Arabic	2.9%	200	189
Armenian	0.1%	1	19
Bengali	0.2%	15	19
Cantonese	26.2%	1,507	2,071
Dari	0.5%	27	35
English	4.6%	329	302
Farsi	5.2%	495	209
French	0.1%	9	6
Hindi	2.0%	193	75
Korean	3.7%	241	260
Mandarin	29.0%	1,950	2,013
Russian	2.1%	110	181
Spanish	0.5%	30	33
Tagalog	1.3%	37	142
Tamil	0.9%	50	79
Turkish	0.2%	18	12
Urdu	1.4%	59	130
Others	19.1%	1,565	1,038
Total	100%	6,836	6,813

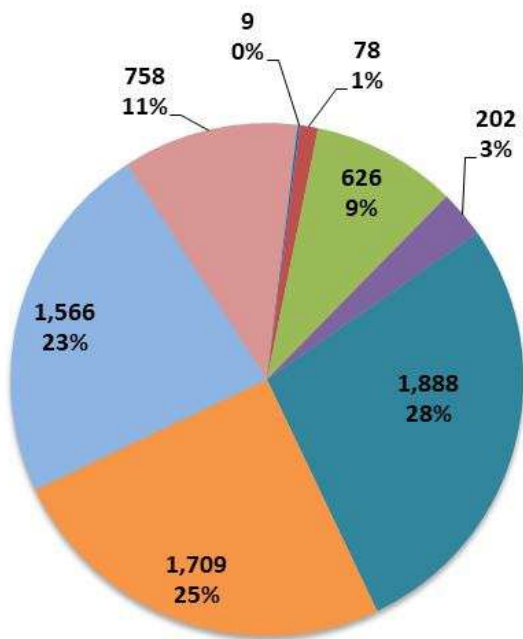


Gender Distribution

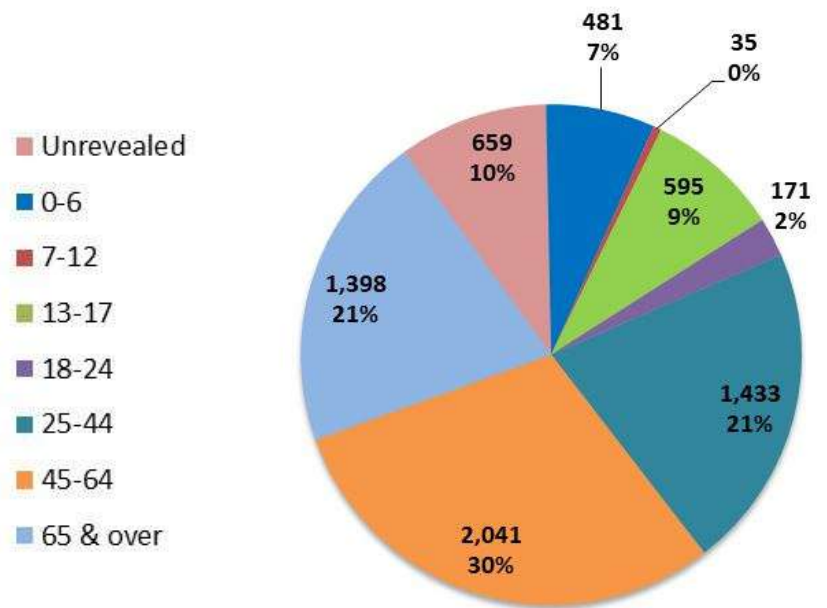


Age Distribution

One-on-One Service



Group Programs



Total Numbers at a Glance

23,051

Individual
Sessions

6,835

Group
Activities

134,603

Attendees in
Group Activities

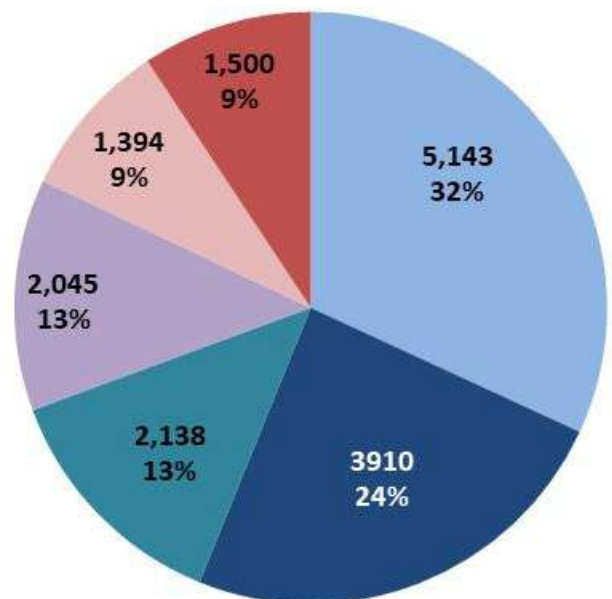
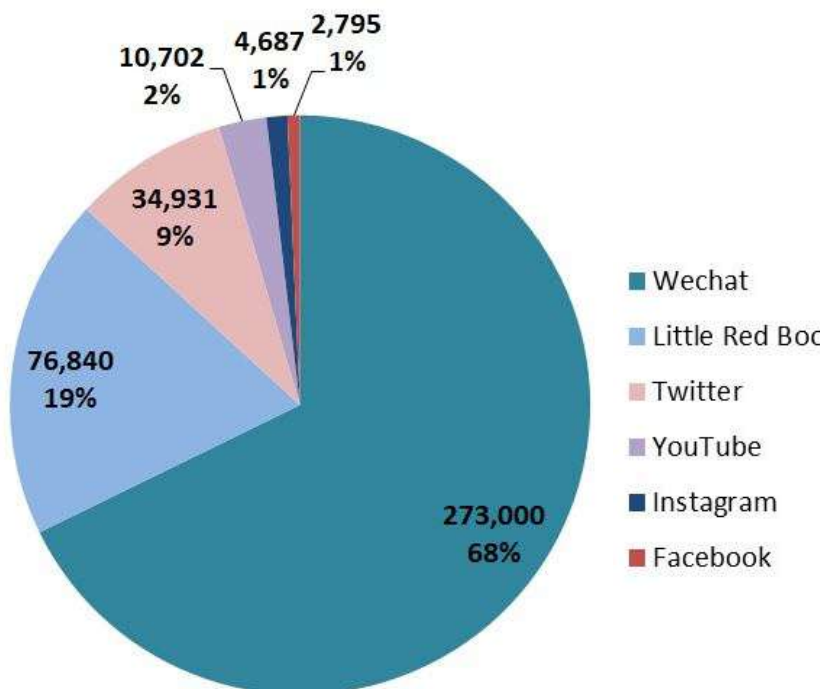
157,653

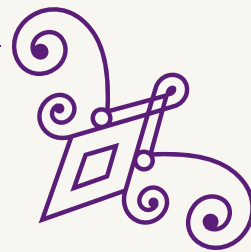
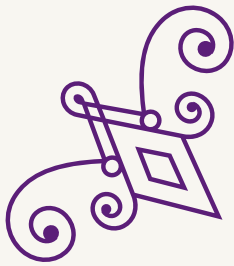
Total
Visits

Social Media Statistics

Number Of Times Our
Content Was Seen

Number Of People We
Have Engaged





APPRECIATION TO OUR FUNDERS

City of Toronto

Employment and Social Development Canada

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Ontario Trillium Foundation

Service Canada

The Regional Municipality of York

United Way of Greater Toronto



CONTACT US:

Website: www.cicscanada.com

Toronto: 416-292-7510

York Region: 905-479-7926

-  Email: info@cicscanada.com
-  Facebook: www.facebook.com/cicscanada
-  Twitter: www.twitter.com/CICS_Canada
-  Instagram: www.instagram.com/CICS_Canada
-  LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/cicscanada

