

Annual Report

2025



**Ottawa Community Immigrant
Services Organization**



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CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT



As we celebrate OCISO's 45th anniversary, we are filled with immense pride and gratitude for what we have accomplished together and for the people who make this work possible every single day.

This milestone year has been both a celebration of our legacy and a testament to our resilience. Our staff are the heart of OCISO, and we want to recognize their extraordinary dedication. In a year marked by significant sector challenges—including decreasing immigration numbers despite ongoing international crises that continue to displace people around the world—our team demonstrated remarkable adaptability and commitment. They have continued to deliver exceptional services with compassion, expertise, and the warmth that defines the OCISO experience.

We are equally grateful for the extraordinary contributions of our Board of Directors, led by Mr. George Enei as Board Chair. Their strategic guidance, governance leadership, and unwavering commitment to OCISO's mission have been instrumental in navigating this transformative year.

The challenges facing our sector are real. Changes to immigration policy and reduced targets have created uncertainty, yet our commitment to newcomers has never wavered. Our efforts to evolve are evident in everything we do—from modernizing our programs to strengthening partnerships, from investing in our people to ensuring organizational sustainability for the future.

A Personal Reflection from the Board Chair

As I reflect on my time on the Board of Directors and as Chair of the Board, I continue to marvel at the energy and passion exhibited by OCISO staff throughout the entire organization as they support each newcomer to Canada. I want to thank our Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Mary Roman, and her dedicated staff for their hard work and leadership. I would especially like to thank them for their smiles and laughter every time I visit the offices and am fortunate enough to get a few minutes of their time.

My first experience with OCISO was, and continues to be, coaching and mentoring of newcomers to Canada looking to contribute to the community through gainful employment and continuous learning. The newcomers' commitment to the core values of adaptability, responsibility, open-mindedness and generosity was exemplified when I first met and engaged with employees and management in my capacity as Board Chair.

Our Organizational Journey

OCISO's commitment to management excellence is obvious in all that we do. The focus and drive on a service-centred approach to delivering settlement services, combined with our openness to continuous improvement through self-reflection and adoption of best management practices, ensures the stage is set for ongoing success for years to come.

This past year was charged with intra-city meetings and exercises to prepare and submit proposals for the federal government's next major funding cycle. For OCISO, this included over 60 letters of endorsement with a more structured and transparent approach to funding, efforts to elevate the organizational salary band and employee benefits to reflect market rates for better workplace health and employee retention, with the overall objective of supporting excellence in service delivery.

Looking Ahead

We are embarking on a year-long journey to refresh and re-invigorate our policy suite of HR, Finance, and Procedural rules, while focusing on resetting our corporate identity under the new Ontario Not-for-Profit legislation. In addition, we will be exploring our real estate footprint in the community as we continue to offer and expand our services both virtually and in-person, aiming to better serve newcomers and the community.

It is an exciting time to be at OCISO. We are fortunate to work alongside a visionary Board of Directors, an excellent administration, our 145 committed staff and many volunteers, and our funding partners and stakeholders—all sharing a common vision to be one of Canada's leading organizations devoted to helping newcomers make Canada their home.

George Enei
Chair

Mary Roman
Chief Executive Officer



RAPPORT DU PRÉSIDENT DU CONSEIL ET DE LA DIRECTRICE GÉNÉRALE

Alors que nous célébrons le 45^e anniversaire de l'OCISO, nous ressentons une immense fierté et une profonde gratitude pour tout ce que nous avons accompli ensemble et pour toutes les personnes qui rendent ce travail possible chaque jour.

Cette année marquante fut à la fois une célébration de notre héritage et un témoignage de notre résilience. Le personnel est le cœur de l'OCISO, et nous tenons à souligner leur dévouement extraordinaire. Dans une année marquée par des défis importants dans le secteur — y compris la baisse du nombre d'immigrants malgré les crises internationales persistantes qui continuent de déplacer des populations partout dans le monde — notre équipe a fait preuve d'une adaptabilité et d'un engagement remarquables. Elle a continué à offrir des services exceptionnels avec compassion, expertise et la chaleur humaine qui définissent l'expérience OCISO.

Nous sommes également reconnaissants pour les contributions exceptionnelles de notre Conseil d'administration, présidé par M. George Enei. Leur orientation stratégique, leur gouvernance éclairée et leur engagement indéfectible envers la mission de l'OCISO ont été déterminants dans la réussite de cette année de transition.

Les défis auxquels fait face notre secteur sont bien réels. Les changements dans les politiques d'immigration et la réduction des cibles ont créé de l'incertitude, mais notre engagement envers les nouveaux arrivants n'a jamais faibli. Nos efforts d'évolution sont visibles dans toutes nos actions — de la modernisation de nos programmes au renforcement de nos partenariats, de l'investissement dans notre personnel à la garantie de la durabilité organisationnelle pour l'avenir.

Réflexion personnelle du Président du Conseil

En réfléchissant à mon mandat au sein du Conseil d'administration et comme Président du Conseil, je continue d'admirer l'énergie et la passion dont font preuve les employés de l'OCISO à travers toute l'organisation dans leur soutien à chaque nouvel arrivant au Canada. Je tiens à remercier notre Directrice générale, Mme Mary Roman, et son équipe dévouée pour leur travail acharné et leur leadership. Je les remercie tout particulièrement pour leurs sourires et leurs rires à chaque fois que je visite les bureaux et que j'ai la chance de partager quelques instants avec eux.

Ma première expérience avec l'OCISO fut, et demeure, le mentorat et l'accompagnement des nouveaux arrivants au Canada qui cherchent à contribuer à la communauté par un emploi valorisant et un apprentissage continu. L'engagement de ces nouveaux arrivants envers les valeurs fondamentales d'adaptabilité, de responsabilité, d'ouverture d'esprit et de générosité s'est révélé dès ma première rencontre avec les employés et la direction, dans mes fonctions de Président du Conseil.

Notre parcours organisationnel

L'engagement de l'OCISO envers l'excellence en gestion est évident dans tout ce que nous entreprenons. L'accent mis sur une approche centrée sur les services pour la prestation des services d'établissement, combiné à notre ouverture à l'amélioration continue grâce à l'autoréflexion et à l'adoption des meilleures pratiques de gestion, garantit une base solide pour le succès durable des années à venir.

Au cours de la dernière année, nous avons participé à de nombreuses rencontres et préparé des propositions pour le prochain cycle majeur de financement du gouvernement fédéral. Pour l'OCISO, cela a inclus plus de 60 lettres d'appui, une approche plus structurée et transparente du financement, des efforts pour rehausser les grilles salariales et les avantages sociaux afin de refléter les taux du marché et d'améliorer la santé au travail ainsi que la rétention des employés — le tout avec pour objectif de soutenir l'excellence dans la prestation des services.

Regard vers l'avenir

Nous entamons une année de renouvellement et de dynamisation de notre ensemble de politiques en ressources humaines, finances et procédures, tout en redéfinissant notre identité organisationnelle conformément à la nouvelle législation ontarienne sur les organismes à but non lucratif. Nous explorerons également notre présence immobilière dans la communauté alors que nous poursuivons l'expansion de nos services, à la fois virtuels et en personne, afin de mieux répondre aux besoins des nouveaux arrivants et de la collectivité.

C'est une période passionnante pour l'OCISO. Nous avons la chance de travailler aux côtés d'un Conseil d'administration visionnaire, d'une administration compétente, de nos 145 employés et nombreux bénévoles dévoués, ainsi que de nos partenaires financiers et communautaires — tous unis par une vision commune : faire de l'OCISO l'une des principales organisations au Canada vouées à aider les nouveaux arrivants à faire du Canada leur foyer.

George Enei
Président du Conseil

Mary Roman
Directrice Générale

Board of Directors



George Enei
Chair



Mark Zekulin
Vice-Chair



Saruul Ayurzana
Treasurer



Katya Hodge
Secretary



Corina Barbul
Member at Large



Fatymah Dido
Director



Victoria Hopkins
Director



Rahul Chandran
Director



Imaan Sandhu
Director



Mudassir Syed
Director



Leanne Holt
Director



Anya Kortenaar
Director



OCISO PROGRAMS

CED | Community Economic Development Program

The Community Economic Development (CED) program supports newcomers in building careers that align with their skills and experience by providing employment-focused programming and personalized coaching. Through mentorship, workplace readiness training, and strategic guidance, CED helps clients navigate the Canadian labour market and workplace culture with confidence.

Rooted in an equity-driven approach, the program addresses systemic barriers and empowers newcomers to thrive professionally, enhancing their long-term career prospects and contributing to Canada's economic growth.

CP | Counselling Program

OCISO's Counselling Program provides culturally responsive clinical counselling to immigrants, refugees, and other newcomers in Ottawa. Our team specializes in supporting clients facing migration-related challenges, including post-war trauma, torture, political persecution, family stress, and cultural adjustment.

We offer up to six sessions of short-term, confidential counselling, with referrals for extended support as needed. Services are delivered in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Farsi, Dari, German, and Czech, with interpretation available in other languages. Interpreters working with our counsellors receive specialized training to ensure the highest standard of care.

LINC | Language Instructions for Newcomers to Canada Program

OCISO's Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Program provides adult newcomers (18+) with responsive English language training to support their settlement and integration in Canada. Through learner-centered instruction, students develop essential language and communication skills needed for everyday life—whether navigating services, securing employment, or participating in their communities. The program fosters an inclusive, welcoming classroom environment that builds confidence, cultural awareness, and community connection.

To support learner participation, on-site Care for Newcomer Children (CNC) is offered for students with young children (ages six months to five years). This safe, educational, and nurturing childcare service enables parents to focus on their studies while their children receive attentive care. Aligned with OCISO's mission, the LINC Program equips students with one of the most vital tools for building a successful life in Canada: the ability to communicate effectively in one of the country's official languages.



MLO | Multicultural Liaison Officer Program

Since 1991, OCISO's Multicultural Liaison Officer (MLO–SWIS) program has supported newcomer students and families in Ottawa schools through partnerships with Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), and Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB).

In addition to working in schools, MLOs support newly arrived families at the Family Reception Centre (FRC) and Family Welcome Centre (FWC)—key entry points for school registration.

OCISO's MLOs, Ottawa's only SWIS program, support student success, strengthen school-family connections, and foster inclusive school environments for immigrant and refugee families. Services include orientation, needs assessments, referrals, conflict resolution, daily school-based support, and interpretation in over 70 languages through OCISO staff and a broad interpreter network. By promoting equity and connection, the MLO program helps families navigate the education system with confidence.

MILO | Multicultural Inmate Liaison Officer Project

The Multicultural Inmate Liaison Officer (MILO) Project provides culturally responsive support to inmates at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre (OCDC), with a focus on individuals from immigrant and racialized backgrounds.

Through one-on-one and group sessions, the MILO offers emotional support, spiritual resources, and referrals to community services.

SIP | Settlement and Integration Program

OCISO's Settlement and Integration Program (SIP) supports newcomers in addressing their immediate settlement needs and building long-term integration goals through tailored services such as needs assessments, individualized plans, information sessions, short-term counselling, and social integration programming. The program served a wide range of clients—including Permanent Residents, Protected Persons, CUAET visa holders, Refugee Claimants, Work/Study Permit holders, and Naturalized citizens—while responding to humanitarian arrivals from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and Latin America.

With a focus on inclusive, client-centred support, SIP also delivered targeted services for LGBTQIA2S+ clients in a culturally and gender-sensitive environment. Services were offered in 21 languages through in-person, hybrid, and community-based models at OCISO locations and partner sites across Ottawa, enhancing accessibility and regional reach.

YOCISO | Youth Program

The Youth Program at OCISO supports immigrant and refugee youth ages 12 to 29 as they navigate the challenges of settling in a new country. The program offers one-on-one support and group workshops that help youth adjust to school, build friendships, gain confidence, and feel a strong sense of belonging. Many arrive feeling isolated or unsure of themselves. Through caring and culturally responsive programming, they begin to feel seen, heard, and valued. They connect with others who understand their journey, discover their strengths, and start to believe in their ability to lead and contribute to their communities.

The program reflects OCISO's mission by supporting youth not only in where they are now, but in who they can become.





THE NUMBERS TELL OUR STORY



12,645
Clients Served



41,930
Direct Services



4198
Workshops
Completed



907
Volunteers
Engaged



22,615
Volunteer
Hours



50+
Languages
Served



OCISO's 45th Anniversary Gala



OCISO Celebrates 45 Years of Service to Ottawa's Newcomer Community a Milestone Anniversary Honoring Decades of Dedication

The Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) marked a momentous occasion with its 45th Anniversary Gala at the elegant St. Elias Banquet Hall, celebrating nearly half a century of unwavering commitment to supporting immigrants, newcomers, and refugees in finding their place in Canada.

From Grassroots Beginnings to Community Pillar

OCISO's remarkable journey began in the late 1970s, during a time when Ottawa witnessed an influx of refugees from Southeast Asia and other regions seeking safety and new opportunities. In 1976, recognizing the urgent need for coordinated immigrant services, the International Immigrant Services Committee was formed as a task force. This initiative led to the expansion of the Newcomer Welcome Centre's services, which were relocated to Gloucester Street in August 1977.

By 1978, under the guidance of dedicated volunteers known as the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Council, OCISO was officially incorporated in the province of Ontario. The organization's establishment coincided with a pivotal moment in Ottawa's history—Mayor Marion Dewar's announcement of Project 4000 in 1979, which saw the city match every Southeast Asian refugee sponsored by the government with a private sponsorship, demonstrating Ottawa's commitment to welcoming those in need.



Four and a Half Decades of Impact

Today, OCISO stands as a cornerstone of Ottawa's immigrant services landscape, directly serving approximately 10,000 to 12,000 immigrants and refugees annually. Operating from four locations across Ottawa—central, south, and east—the organization delivers multi-faceted programs and services in over 40 languages to clients from 120 countries.

OCISO's comprehensive services include the Settlement and Integration program (SIP), Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, Multicultural Liaison Officer (MLO) program, Multicultural Inmate Liaison Officer (MILO) project, and the Youth Program (YOCISO). The organization also provides career mentoring and networking programs, as well as specialized clinical counseling. The organization's mission to support immigrants through their journey of making Canada home is delivered through culturally and linguistically appropriate programs that build community through mutual respect and partnerships.

A Night of Gratitude and Celebration

The 45th Anniversary Gala brought together over 200 attendees, including supporters, partners, staff, volunteers, and the many individuals whose lives have been transformed by the organization's services. The evening at St. Elias Banquet Hall was filled with reminiscence, gratitude, and celebration as guests reflected on four and a half decades of dedicated service.

The evening began with a powerful and meaningful indigenous celebratory opening led by Grandmother Irene, honoring the traditional territory and setting a tone of respect and inclusivity for the celebration. This acknowledgment of Indigenous heritage reflected OCISO's commitment to building bridges across all communities.

The program featured inspiring keynote speeches from OCISO Chair George Enei and Chief Executive Officer Mary Roman, who eloquently shared the organization's journey, achievements, and vision for the future. Additional guest speakers, Grandmother Irene Compton, a co-founder of Minwaashin Lodge, as well as Mohammed Al-Krad, and Galya Matkovska, contributed to the evening's meaningful program, each offering unique perspectives on OCISO's impact on the community.



Throughout the evening, guests enjoyed vibrant entertainment provided by DJ Elia from Montreal, whose music created a celebratory atmosphere that brought attendees together on the dance floor, reflecting the joy and diversity of the communities OCISO serves. The event also featured performances by Rodina, a Bulgarian folk dance group, and Bev Dunn and Starlight Jazz Trio.

The event was honored by the presence of MP Yasir Naqvi and the representative from the mayor's office, Riley Brockington, whose attendance underscored the vital importance of OCISO's work to Ottawa's fabric. Their participation reflected the strong governmental support that continues to strengthen immigrant services across the capital region.



Community Partners and Generous Sponsors

The success of the 45th anniversary gala was made possible through the generous support of sponsors across multiple levels:

Diamond Sponsors



Gold Sponsors



Silver Sponsors



Bronze Sponsors



These partnerships reflect the collaborative spirit that has always been central to OCISO's approach, bringing together diverse organizations united in their commitment to building a more inclusive and welcoming Ottawa.

A Resounding Fundraising Success

Thanks to the generosity of sponsors and contributors, along with a silent auction that ran parallel to the event and the dedicated efforts of a group of University of Ottawa students who were instrumental in the fundraising initiatives, the organization achieved an impressive milestone—raising over \$66,000 from this event alone. This remarkable accomplishment will directly support OCISO's vital programs and services, ensuring continued excellence in serving newcomers to our community.

Looking Forward

As OCISO celebrates this significant milestone, the organization remains focused on its vision for the future. The anniversary gala served not only as a reflection on past achievements but as an affirmation of continued commitment to fostering healthy and inclusive spaces for dialogue, healing, and community building.

In the words of OCISO's guiding principle: "Embracing Diversity, Building Community." The 45th anniversary celebration honored the past, embraced the present, and paved the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for all who call Ottawa home.

A Heartfelt Thank You

OCISO extends its deepest gratitude to MP Yasir Naqvi, representatives from the mayor's office, funders and all sponsors, community partners, dedicated staff members, passionate volunteers, and every individual who has contributed to the organization's success over the past 45 years. Your unwavering support has been instrumental in transforming countless lives and strengthening the social fabric of our community.

As we celebrate this milestone, we look forward to continuing our mission of welcoming, supporting, and empowering newcomers for decades to come. Together, we continue building a more inclusive and welcoming Ottawa for all.



CED Community Economic Development Program

CED's mentorship model and employment programs provide newcomers with tailored support to start their career journey. Aligned with OCISO's mission, CED delivers culturally and linguistically appropriate services that foster community, respect, and inclusion. By offering inclusive mentorship and employment support, CED helps newcomers successfully integrate into the Canadian labour market.

In 2024-2025, the CED program included:

- Career Mentorship
- Credential Recognition Program
- Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) for Internationally Trained Health Professionals (IEHP)
- Job Search Workshops
- Refugee and Immigrant Support to Employment (RAISE) Program
- Workplace Language Training (WLT)
- Federal Internship for Newcomers (FIN) Mentorship Program
- Federal Internship for Newcomers – Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) Mentorship Program
- Ottawa Newcomers Entrepreneurship (ONE) Hub Mentorship
- Ottawa Connector Program
- Pre-Arrival Mentoring
- Immigrant Women Mentoring Network (IWMN)

A major milestone in 2024 was OCISO's first-ever job fair, exclusively for our clients. Held in November, the event connected participants with employers and over 20 job opportunities across public and private sectors—marking a first in OCISO's 45-year history.

To further enhance job readiness, CED offered a series of practical workshops on Canadian workplace culture, employer expectations, interview skills, WHMIS & job safety, and mental health in the workplace. At the same time, mentors participated in training on cross-cultural competencies and modern mentoring techniques, supported by networking and peer learning opportunities. Employer outreach also played a dual role—facilitating job connections and strengthening mentor recruitment.



Turning Insights Into Actions

CED's integrated approach—combining mentorship with settlement, language, and mental health support—proved vital to client success. Many newcomers also received in-person support to overcome digital barriers in using LinkedIn, Zoom, and other job search tools.

Looking ahead, CED aims to expand one-on-one counselling, reach more underrepresented newcomer groups, and deepen partnerships with immigrant-serving agencies. Plans include growing a more diverse mentor pool, increasing employer engagement, and creating sector-specific job-matching opportunities. Continued investment in staff development and a new outcome tracking system will support responsive, data-informed program improvement.



"I am extremely grateful for the OCISO mentorship program and the guidance it has provided me in navigating the Canadian job market. My mentor has been an invaluable resource, providing me with insights and advice that have helped me build my career in Canada. The program has been instrumental in helping me to develop my professional network, gain Canadian work experience, and learn about Canadian workplace culture. I have found the mentorship program to be an excellent way to connect with other professionals in my field and to learn from their experiences. The support and guidance that I have received from my mentor have been great, and I feel much more confident in my ability to succeed in the Canadian job market as a result of this program. I would highly recommend the OCISO mentorship program to anyone who is new to Canada and looking to build their career here. Thank you, OCISO!"

— Anonymous Client

1023

Clients served

930

Employment
Counselling sessions

435

Clients matched

13,600

Volunteer hours of
support

Languages supported

English, French,
Pashto, Farsi
(Persian), Dari, Urdu,
Punjabi, Hindi, Bangla
and Tamil.

Service delivery format

In-person, hybrid,
and virtual



This year, the OCISO Counselling Program has continued to be a key component of our settlement services, providing a welcoming and supportive environment to help newcomers to Canada overcome resettlement challenges and integrate into their new lives.

Worked with
607
clients, including
youth, couples,
families and seniors

Providing
1,852
counselling
sessions

Recognizing the increasing mental health challenges faced by our clients, especially those linked to post-war trauma, cultural adjustment, and migration stress, our Counselling team continues to offer compassionate, culturally sensitive, and tailored care. Through individual counselling and group workshops, we have supported clients in building resilience, improving their coping skills, independence, and creating supportive networks within their communities.

Our approach remains comprehensive and inclusive, recognizing that each client's needs go beyond immediate counselling issues to encompass social, emotional, and cultural aspects. By creating a welcoming, inclusive, and safe space, we have enabled newcomers to heal, grow, and build a strong foundation for their successful integration into Canadian society.

OCISO continues its journey to become an organization deeply rooted in mental wellness for both clients and staff, supported by embedded systems and practices. As a key partner in the Immigrant and Refugee Mental Health Promotion Project through OCASI, we look forward to building on this collaboration and strengthening our role in advancing community-wide mental health supports.

“

“After leaving my country, I thought I could escape the past, but the memories followed me. I had nightmares, and sometimes I could not even leave my apartment. The counselling sessions helped me to face my trauma step by step. My counsellor showed me ways to manage fear and to slowly reconnect with people. I started volunteering, and I am beginning to see myself as part of the community again.”

– Anonymous Client



LINC Language Instructions for Newcomers to Canada Program

In 2024–2025, OCISO's LINC Program continued to provide a welcoming and supportive environment where newcomers could build their English skills while connecting with their new community. Beyond classroom learning, students engaged in employment-focused opportunities, including a job fair, employment workshops, and guest speaker sessions covering topics like fire safety, legal services, and dental care. These experiences fostered language use in real-life contexts and increased awareness of Canadian systems and culture.

Students also participated in cultural events, fundraisers, and field trips, which helped reduce isolation, promote community building, and reinforce classroom learning. Celebrations such as Teacher's Day, Halloween, and the year-end picnic encouraged cultural exchange and boosted confidence through public speaking opportunities. Fundraising initiatives and trips to local sites like Gatineau Park and the Tulip Festival supported hands-on learning, social integration, and practical language development, making the LINC experience both educational and empowering.

503

**Students in
progressing at least
one CLB benchmark
supported**

Languages supported

Arabic, Somali, Dari/
Pushtu, French,
Persian/Farsi,
Tigrigna/Tigrinya,
Spanish, Pashto,
Ukrainian, Swahili.

Age

18+ years old
students.
6 months to 5 years
old for children

Country of origin

Syria, Afghanistan,
Somalia, Iraq,
Eritrea, Lebanon,
Djibouti, Ukraine,
Cameroon, Iran

Service delivery format

In-person and hybrid



Turning Insights Into Actions

While the LINC Program achieved many successes this year, several challenges also sparked opportunities for innovation and growth. To strengthen engagement and retention, we enhanced classroom learning with job fairs, digital literacy support, and one-on-one volunteer tutoring. A partnership with the Ministry of Transportation added relevant traffic safety education, demonstrating that targeted support leads to faster integration outcomes.

Internally, team collaboration played a critical role. New staff received peer-led training on assessment tools and technology, fostering both professional development and a stronger team culture. Regular reporting and data collection were introduced to support timely decision-making and program improvement.

Looking ahead, the team remains focused on strengthening learner outcomes and community engagement. Plans include targeted support for learners, more community-based and intergenerational activities, and improved attendance through PD Day programs. Despite funding limitations, we are committed to delivering quality language training that supports integration, inclusion, and learner success.



"My teacher explains everything clearly. I feel very comfortable in her class because she is patient and supportive. Her lessons are always clear and helpful."

"I like the CNC program because it helps my child improve."

"They are so kind and always smiling. Thank you for helping my child."

"I thank them for their support, which allows me to study properly."

"I don't have a specific comment, but I want to express my special thanks to my teacher and the school. Your hard work and dedication do not go unnoticed. Thank you for everything you do to help us succeed."

"I like the administration. I also liked learning about fire safety and how to drive in the snow. I enjoyed the trip to Gatineau Park and the New Year's celebration."



Throughout the school year, the OCISO MLO–SWIS program actively engaged in school events such as fairs, parent-teacher interviews, newcomer clubs, and workshops covering topics from the education system to intergenerational communication. The program facilitated newcomer families' access to IRCC-funded services and offered informed referrals, helping clients better understand their needs and navigate settlement, language training, and life in Canada—especially the school system.

MLOs supported a new GAR student registration process at OCDSB, accelerating school access, and presented the program's impact to school board staff. Their contributions were formally recognized by OCSB in June 2024.

Capacity building was a key priority, with MLOs completing training in suicide prevention, cybersecurity, Indigenous history, and more, and participating in a knowledge exchange with other Ontario SWIS teams. In August, the program partnered with YOCISO to deliver the NOW Program, while also integrating mental health counsellors into the team—strengthening support for newcomer youth and families.

6,352

Clients in total

210

Schools Served

131

in OCDSB

60

in OCSB

Languages supported

English, Arabic, Pashto, Mandarin, Somali, Spanish, Dari, Turkish, Cantonese, Vietnamese, French, Tigrinya, Korean, Ukrainian, Portuguese

Country of origin

Syria, Afghanistan, China, Iraq, Somalia, Cameroon, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Morocco

Service delivery format

In-person, hybrid and virtual



Turning Insights Into Actions

The OCISO MLO–SWIS program played a vital role in helping newcomer students and families understand their rights and responsibilities within the school system. Through targeted orientation sessions and ongoing support, MLOs addressed behavioural and adjustment challenges, improving students' ability to adapt to school expectations and routines. These efforts also helped parents better support their children's education.

Language barriers and limited knowledge of the Ontario school system posed ongoing challenges, particularly around academic expectations and communication with schools. The schools responded with effective strategies, such as providing translated materials and dedicated parent meetings, which led to stronger engagement and improved student outcomes.

Looking ahead, the program aims to align services more closely with school needs, increase in-school presence where possible, continue MLO training, and strengthen collaboration across teams. Closer ties with Youth Services ensures more holistic support for newcomer youth.



"I am so glad I met you."

- Anonymous Client

"You really helped me so much, even when I move to a different school next year, I want to stay in touch with you."

- Anonymous Client

"I am reaching out to let you know how happy the team has been with the service provided by MLO. This MLO has supported us with communication with one of our Arabic-speaking families for the past two years. This MLO is friendly, responsive, helpful and thorough in his ability to link us successfully with this family. The family feels assured that their child is being supported, and they are thankful for the help in accessing information about their child's progress at school. We look forward to continuing to work with this MLO in the future."

- A School Principal



MILO Multicultural Inmate Liaison Officer Program

The MILO program plays a key role during cultural and religious occasions—coordinating observances, sharing spiritual materials, and raising awareness among inmates and staff. Community outreach, including holiday and Eid gift drives, helps maintain dignity and connection while strengthening ties between OCDC and Ottawa’s diverse communities.

By fostering trust and cultural understanding, MILO eases the emotional toll of incarceration and supports successful reintegration. Funded by the Ministry of the Solicitor General, the program enhances visibility by placing information materials in OCDC’s admissions and discharge areas.

MILO’s culturally grounded approach helped clients reconnect with their identities, maintain ties to loved ones, and envision a more hopeful future. Looking ahead, the program will continue expanding its visibility and community partnerships to support reintegration and reduce barriers for incarcerated individuals through dignity and care.



“I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation for all that MILO and your team do. Please know that your work does not go unnoticed; it is making a real difference. I sincerely hope that OCISO and OCDC will ensure the continuation and growth of this essential program.”

- Anonymous Client

61

Group sessions

50-80

**Clients served
per month**

**In-Person
support in**

**Somali, Arabic, and
other languages
through OCISO
interpretation**

**Referrals and
coordination with
family, lawyers,
spiritual leaders, and
community agencies
like the John Howard
Society**



SIP Settlement and Integration Program

In 2024–2025, SIP staff conducted detailed client assessments and delivered tailored referrals and orientation sessions, supporting navigation of immigration portals and benefit applications. Individualized Settlement Plans provided ongoing support for vulnerable clients, while the Friends of the Family initiative fostered social integration through volunteer partnerships. Transportation assistance improved access for up to 20% of clients.

The program met its targets by engaging diverse clients, including LGBTQIA2S+ and seniors, and expanding outreach via community events. Clients showed increased independence in system navigation and technology use, supported by consistent follow-up and referrals to complementary services.



"I would like to express my sincere gratitude for all the support you have provided to my family. Your timely responses to my emails and your assistance with document processing have been invaluable. I truly felt the support that newcomers so greatly need. Thank you."

- Anonymous Client



Turning Insights Into Actions

SIP staff managed high caseloads and delivered services across multiple locations amid immigration policy changes that sometimes caused confusion. Challenges included limited shelter capacity, a shortage of affordable housing, difficulty accessing family doctors, and barriers to employment matching clients' qualifications—resulting in repeat client visits for support. Despite these obstacles, the team remained adaptable and committed to providing high-quality, client-centred services.

Moving forward, SIP will maintain its focus on needs assessments, tailored referrals, and orientation sessions to help clients navigate available resources. The program will continue optimizing existing capacity to respond effectively to growing community demand and support newcomers' successful integration.

9279

I&O sessions delivered

510

Tax returns filed
through the OCISO Tax Clinic
(Feb–Apr 2025)

Languages Supported

English, French, Amharic, Arabic, Azerbaijani, Creole, Dari, Farsi, Hindi, Igbo, Nepali, Pashto, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tigre, Tigrinya, Turkish, Ukrainian and Urdu.

(Clients collectively spoke 108 different languages, reflecting the program's broad linguistic and cultural reach.)

Service Delivery Format

In-person, hybrid, and virtual

YOCISO Youth Program

In 2024–2025, YOCISO continued supporting newcomer, refugee, and immigrant youth in their settlement and integration through tailored programs that foster belonging and skill-building.

Two new initiatives launched this year:

1. YOCISO's Kitchen, where youth learned cooking skills, gained confidence, and developed leadership—strengthening family ties and promoting responsibility.
2. YOCISO French Club, a virtual program offering city-wide youth the chance to improve their French, enhancing integration and engagement.

In partnership with Black History Ottawa, OCISO delivered the Railroad to Success program, offering 25 workshops and mentorship to 22 Black, marginalized, and racialized youth. This program provided a supportive space for youth to connect, build skills, and grow in confidence, fostering pride and a strong sense of belonging.



3,738

Group participants across

657

Group sessions

2,914

One-on-one support sessions
providing mentorship, educational
assistance, employment support,
and mental health resource

25

Schools reached

Languages Supported

Arabic, English, French, Urdu,
Pashto, Hindi, Bangla, Somali,
Spanish, Ukrainian, Russian

Age

6 to 29 years old

Gender

396 women

377 men

131 undisclosed

Country of origin

Afghanistan, Algeria,
Bangladesh, Brazil,
Cameroon, Chile, China,
Democratic Republic of
Congo, Egypt, Eritrea,
Ethiopia, Greece, Haiti,
India, Iran, Iraq, Ivory Coast,
Japan, Jordan, Kenya,
Korea, Kuwait, Lebanon,
Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco,
Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine,
Philippines, Rwanda, Somalia,
Sudan, Syria, Taiwan, Turkey,
Ukraine, United States, Yemen

Service delivery format

In-person, virtual,
and hybrid

Turning Insights Into Actions

Over the past year, limited funding challenged the program to innovate, leading to the exploration of social enterprise initiatives like a summer camp to boost sustainability. Clear, transparent communication with partners about data collection proved essential for building trust. Increasing program visibility also emerged as a priority to ensure newcomer youth voices influence community planning. Flexibility in adapting services to evolving youth needs strengthened the program's impact.

Looking ahead, YOCISO aims to grow its team and expand its reach to better serve newcomer youth across Ottawa. Upcoming initiatives include:

- Thread of Care: addressing period poverty through education and resource support
- Break the Cycle: a biking program promoting wellness and community connection
- Strengthening partnerships with local organizations to enhance programming and engagement

Committed to staying responsive and inclusive, YOCISO will continue adapting to the needs of the communities it serves to maximize its positive impact.



"Collaborating with the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO-YOCISO) across multiple programs has been both enriching and impactful. Together, we've created welcoming spaces where newcomer seniors, youth, and children from diverse backgrounds can connect, express themselves, and share their stories and cultures. The OCISO team's dedication, collaboration, and professionalism have been essential to the success of each initiative. We value this partnership, which fosters meaningful connections and positive change in our community."

- Areej Qassem, City of Ottawa



"Being a peer leader during one of YOCISO's programs was such a rewarding experience. I got to support newcomer youth as they learned about mental health and positive strategies to alleviate and prevent illness. It was amazing to see their confidence and our connections grow throughout the sessions. This opportunity also helped me strengthen my leadership and communication skills."

- Anonymous Client



Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) and Refugee 613

Joint Statement December 23, 2024

We are excited to share an important update regarding the evolving relationship between OCISO and Refugee 613.

Refugee 613 was founded in 2015 by a large network of organizations in the settlement, sponsorship, faith, health and legal sectors to help coordinate and mobilize refugee welcome in Ottawa. At the time, OCISO generously stepped up to host this new initiative, and it has provided crucial administrative, legal and financial services ever since. This partnership has played a key role in helping Refugee 613 grow into an important community asset, and we are proud of all that we've accomplished together.

As a natural step to this growth, the two organizations have mutually agreed that it is time for Refugee 613 to become independent. Refugee 613 has registered as an independent non-profit organization with a separate Board of Directors. As of April 1, 2025, Refugee 613 will no longer be hosted by OCISO and will operate from a new location in Ottawa, details of which will be shared by Refugee 613 in the coming months.

"Refugee 613 is deeply grateful to OCISO for being such a supportive home and partner," says Louisa Taylor, Director of Refugee 613. "We would not have grown into Canada's leader in migration communications without that solid foundation. Refugee 613 has always managed its own programming, and we are now ready to operate independently as we build on the success we've had with OCISO."

"OCISO is proud to have played a pivotal role in supporting Refugee 613 from its inception to its current status as an independent organization," says Mary Roman, Chief Executive Officer of OCISO. "OCISO has long championed the growth of multiple organizations including Refugee 613, and this transition highlights their remarkable development into an independent entity in migration. We are confident that Refugee 613 will continue to make a significant and lasting impact in the community."

In the lead-up to March 31, 2025, the two organizations are working together to ensure a smooth transition. OCISO will continue to manage most financial functions on Refugee 613's behalf, including receiving funds and making payments related to existing agreements. Charitable donations for Refugee 613 will also continue to be received by OCISO until Refugee 613 completes the registration and establishment of its own system, no later than March 31, 2025. Starting April 1, 2025, Refugee 613 will assume full responsibility for managing its funding contracts and administrative functions. Refugee 613 programs and operations will continue as they are, and staff will share updates as needed in the coming months.

This transition is not the end of our collaboration, just a new phase. Both organizations remain committed to working together on shared community initiatives, and we will continue our joint projects until March 31, 2025.

We look forward to this next chapter and to the continued success of both OCISO and Refugee 613 in making a positive impact on our community and beyond.



Mary Roman
Chief Executive Officer



Louisa Taylor
Director, Refugee 613

Financial Statement

	2024 - 2025	2023 - 2024
Revenue		
Grants	9,487,573	10,189,001
Fundraising and Donations	228,040	118,621
Other Revenue	276,436	116,162
	\$9,992,049	\$ 10,423,684
Expenses		
Program Expenses	7,463,042	7,852,216
Occupancy	990,335	959,881
Administrative and Related Costs	1,535,557	1,354,096
	\$ 9,988,934	\$ 10,166,193
Excess revenue over expenses	\$ 3,115	\$ 257,491
Assets		
Cash and Prepayments	2,397,243	2,786,654
Investments	626,718	508,248
Grants and Trade Receivables	1,078,642	915,682
Long Term Assets	340,295	383,540
	\$ 4,442,898	\$ 4,594,124
Liabilities and Fund Balance		
Bank Debt and Other Payables	2,078,422	2,189,289
Long-Term Debt and Other Obligations	234,805	278,369
	\$ 2,313,227	\$2,467,658
Changes in Fund Balance		
Fund Balance (Deficit) - Beginning	2,126,556	1,869,065
Excess (Deficit) for the Year	3,115	257,491
Fund Balance (Deficit) - Ending	\$ 2,129,671	\$ 2,126,556
	\$ 4,442,898	\$ 4,594,214

MDSF MARION DEWAR SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The Marion Dewar Scholarship Fund (MDSF) was established by Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) in 2009, in honour of the late Marion Dewar, former Mayor of Ottawa. The goal of the scholarship fund is to provide financial support to foster academic and leadership excellence in immigrant and refugee youth. The fund supplements the tuition and supplies required for their post-secondary education in the National Capital Region. Each year, a scholarship of \$1,500 each is awarded to three immigrant and refugee youth.

Let us present the winners for this year:



Batool Karimi

Batool Karimi came to Canada at the age of 15, overcoming the challenges of adapting to a new country while facing significant financial hardships. Drawing from her own experiences, she founded the Financial Literacy Program for newcomers to help others avoid the difficulties she once encountered. In Fall 2025, she will begin her studies in Public Affairs and Policy Management at Carleton University, with the long-term goal of becoming a lawyer and advocating for vulnerable communities. A proud recipient of the Marion Dewar Scholarship Fund, Batool is recognized for her resilience, leadership, and dedication to empowering others.



Mariam Al Mostafa

Mariam Al Mostafa is the 2025 recipient of the Marion Dewar Scholarship Fund (MDSF). Born in Syria and raised in Lebanon before arriving in Canada in 2017, she has shown remarkable resilience in overcoming the challenges of displacement and learning a new language. Through academic excellence, volunteer work, and leadership in her school and community, Mariam has built a strong foundation for her dream of becoming a neurosurgeon. In Fall 2025, she will begin her studies in Biomedical Science at the University of Ottawa, specializing in neuroscience.



Zawadi Kasemire

Zawadi Kasemire came to Canada from Uganda in 2019 and has since shown remarkable determination in adapting to a new culture and language. She has actively given back to her community through volunteer work with BGC Ottawa, Pathways, her church, and local events. In Fall 2025, she will begin studying Public Affairs and Policy Management at Carleton University, focusing on immigration policy. Her long-term goal is to work in the government and help create policies that make life easier for newcomers.

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Orléans-Cumberland



CONTACT US

Main Office/Siège Social

959 Wellington Street West
Ottawa ON K1Y 2X5 Canada
Tel: 613-725-0202
Fax: 613-725-9054

Administration

945 Wellington Street West
Ottawa, ON K1Y 2X5
Telephone: 613-725-0202

OCISO East/Est

815 St. Laurent Blvd, Rooms 212/214
Ottawa ON K1K 3A7 Canada
Tel: 613-454-1401

OCISO South/Sud

1800 Bank Street
Ottawa ON K1V 0W3 Canada
Tel: 613-249-0006
Fax: 613-249-9642



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