



Annual Report

Ottawa Community Immigrant
Services Organization (OCISO)

2026

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Chair Report

George Enei
Chair



Almost 100 years ago Sir Austen Chamberlain said ‘we live in interesting times’, and I can say it is also most certainly the case today.

This year has been filled with both highs and lows.

We began the year filled with optimism and hope that reality soon tempered with new government policies and the resulting reduction in budgets and flexibilities. The staff and leadership at OCISO nonetheless met the challenge by realigning services, managing better through efficiencies, and engaging in deeper partnerships to limit risks. This was hard work and the Board of Directors is appreciative of the efforts of staff and leadership in managing the change to bring focus and calm in implementation, all while continuing the support of newcomers arriving in Canada.

We cannot forget to note that OCISO lost some exceptional and dedicated staff. It was not easy, but the supports put in place to help the impacted staff, and the network and tools available for those remaining, was a testament to the ‘people first’ culture within OCISO. On behalf of the Board, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our CEO Ms. Mary Roman and her leadership team in navigating the complex situation. Unfortunately, the new normal is change, but I feel buoyed by the experience, thoughtfulness and vision of the senior leadership in weathering whatever comes our way.

As this ‘top-down’ change driven by governments was unfolding, we faced the challenge of a lease ending for our now former headquarters/service hub at 945 Wellington Street West. After careful analysis a new lease was signed at 275 Bay Street, giving the organization a sense of rebirth and fresh start. All feedback to date had been positive, and I look forward to making new memories as we march to our 50th anniversary in the near future.

The Board was seized by the policy changes in government and the impact it had on services offered. In looking forward, we see continued uncertainty with policy and budgets, but the Board is encouraged by our early returns on new social enterprises, the opportunities to explore new locations for ‘pop-up’ service centres with partners, and broadening our presence beyond the greater Ottawa community to serve newcomers outside the city limits. We remain laser focused on generating new sources of revenue and better managing our dependence on government grants.

We have seen difficulty and persevered. I am confident in the strong leadership team and the visionary Board of Directors to work through whatever comes our way. Our calm presence and excellent service remains our reputation, and I am proud to be part of OCISO.



CEO Report

Mary Roman

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)



I am proud to share the progress OCISO has made this year: progress built not despite a shifting funding landscape, but because we chose to meet it head-on. Sector-wide changes to federal immigration and settlement funding tested every organization in our field this year. OCISO met that test by leading with intention: we reassessed our cost structure, modernized how we operate, and chose, deliberately, to protect frontline service and the wellbeing of our staff above everything else. The result is an organization that is leaner, sharper, and better positioned for what comes next.

We connected with close to 10,000 clients this year; newcomers building careers, learning English, finding stability, and settling into life in Ottawa, all delivered by a team that refused to let a harder funding year become a lesser year of service. That is the number I am proudest of.

This was a year of real milestones: a new home at 275 Bay Street, the Alfonso García Robles Award from UNAM, our Run for a New Start and Culture2Culture campaigns, growing visibility through media and sector partnerships, and the opening of our YOCISO Lounge and many other initiatives. Underpinning it all were the four pillars that guided our decisions this year: growth, innovation, people and culture, and profile. We grew where it mattered, modernized our policies and internal systems from the ground up, invested in our people even under budget pressure, and raised our profile as a voice for newcomers at exactly the moment that voice needed to carry. You'll find the full story of this year's milestones on the following pages.

None of this happens without governance behind it. Thank you to our Board of Directors, who anchored our move to 275 Bay Street and contributed their own expertise and time to our modernization efforts, and in particular our Board Chair, Mr. George Enei, who helped lead and spearhead this work. And thank you to every member of our staff and our 412 volunteers, who gave over 10,300 hours of service; your care and commitment are what allowed OCISO to turn a difficult year into a year of forward motion. To our funders and donors who stayed with us and believed in this mission through a genuinely hard year, thank you.

Looking ahead, our focus is clear: build revenue that doesn't rise and fall with a single funding envelope, so that whatever the next funding cycle brings, OCISO responds from a position of strength.

"Step by step and the longest march can be won." — Confucius

That's the spirit behind the renewal already underway at OCISO, an organization that has served this community for 48 years, and is only getting stronger.

OCISO Board of Directors



George Enei
Chair



Fatymah Dido
Vice-Chair



Saruul Ayurzana
Treasurer



Anya Kortenaar
Secretary



Corina Barbul
Member at Large



Katya Hodge
Director



Victoria Hopkins
Director



Imaan Sandhu
Director



Mudassir Syed
Director



Leanne Holt
Director



Robert Decher
Director

A Year of Growth and Connection

This year brought new spaces, meaningful recognition, stronger partnerships, and more opportunities to connect—milestones that reflect OCISO's continued growth and commitment to building a welcoming community for newcomers.



A New Home at 275 Bay Street

Our move to 275 Bay Street opened a new chapter, creating more space to serve, connect, and grow.



OCISO in the Media

Features on Rogers TV, News Talk 580 CFRA, and CHIN Radio helped bring OCISO's work and newcomer stories to wider audiences.



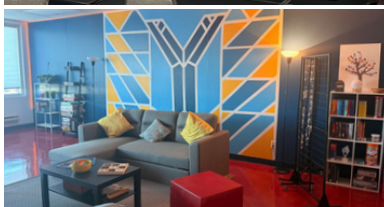
LASI Professional Day

OCISO helped bring together hundreds of settlement professionals across Ottawa to reconnect, recharge, and strengthen collaboration in supporting newcomers and our communities.



Run for a New Start (R4NS)

R4NS brought runners, families, and supporters together at Ottawa Race Weekend to celebrate and stand alongside newcomers building new lives in Canada.



Alfonso García Robles Award

OCISO was honoured by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) with the award, recognizing our commitment to protecting and promoting the rights of migrants.

Culture2Culture

Together with Algonquin College students and supporters, Culture2Culture raised more than \$11,000 for OCISO programs.

YOCISO Lounge

OCISO opened the first Youth Lounge of its kind in Ottawa—a welcoming space for youth to hang out, connect, and simply be themselves.

Buy Social Canada Certification

OCISO's social enterprise became Buy Social Canada certified, increasing its visibility and creating new opportunities to connect with other social enterprises through a network that covers all of Canada.

Community Economic Development (CED)

The Service

The CED Program helps newcomers build meaningful careers in Canada through employment counselling, mentorship, networking, and employer connections.

The Impact

In 2025-2026, CED expanded pathways to meaningful employment through employment counselling, mentorship, and employer connections. New initiatives included the Employment Counselling Pilot Program and the Pan-Canadian Green Buildings and Retrofits Training Project, while sector-focused partnerships created more opportunities in health care, construction, skilled trades, and the green economy.



Client Testimonial

"My mentor provided exceptional support, encouragement, and practical advice throughout my job search journey. He helped me improve my resume, better understand the Ottawa job market, and stay motivated during a challenging period. I am truly grateful for his time, knowledge, and kindness, as well as for the opportunity to participate in this program."

— Anonymous Client

620

CLIENTS INTAKES

369

EMPLOYMENT
COUNSELLING
SESSIONS

137

MENTORSHIP
MATCHES

68

EMPLOYER
INTRODUCTIONS

63

EMPLOYMENT
PLACEMENTS

3,413

VOLUNTEER
HOURS



Counselling Program

The Service

OCISO's Counselling Program provides culturally sensitive mental health support to newcomer youth, adults, couples, families, and seniors, helping them navigate the emotional and psychological challenges of settlement.

The Impact

In 2025–2026, the Counselling Program supported newcomers experiencing trauma, migration stress, and cultural adjustment through individual counselling and group workshops. Culturally responsive care helped clients strengthen resilience, develop coping skills, and build supportive community connections.

225
CLIENTS
SUPPORTED

1,056
COUNSELLING
SESSIONS

Youth, Couples, Families
& Seniors Supported
Individual + Group
Support



Client Testimonial

"I feel much more comfortable expressing my thoughts and feelings in my own language. It is easier for me to understand and explain myself, and I feel that I can connect with you more easily. I also feel understood culturally, which makes our sessions more comfortable and meaningful for me. I really appreciate having this opportunity and the support you have given me."

— Anonymous Client

Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) Program

The Service

OCISO's LINC Program helps adult newcomers strengthen their English skills and build confidence for everyday life in Canada. On-site Care for Newcomer Children (CNC) helps make language learning more accessible for newcomer parents.

The Impact

In 2025–2026, LINC combined classroom learning with employment workshops, guest speakers, field trips, and community activities, helping students practice English, build connections, and navigate life in Ottawa with greater confidence.

Client Testimonial

“Joining OCISO LINC School has been a valuable experience. I am truly grateful and excited to be part of this program. My teacher has taught me a great deal in a short period of time, and I now feel much more confident. It has become easier for me to ask questions and make requests when communicating with others.”

— Anonymous Client

453

STUDENTS
SERVED

83

CHILDREN
SUPPORTED
THROUGH CNC

332

STUDENTS
PROGRESSED AT
LEAST ONE
BENCHMARK

145

CONTRACTED
STUDENT SEATS

29

CHILDCARE
SPOTS



Multicultural Inmate Liaison Officer (MILO) Program

The Service

The MILO Program provides culturally responsive support to individuals with immigrant backgrounds at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre (OCDC). MILO connects clients with families, community services, and resources during incarceration and as they prepare for reintegration.

The Impact

In 2025–2026, MILO provided individual and group support, connecting clients with legal, housing, employment, social, spiritual, and community resources. The program also helped clients maintain family connections and develop skills to navigate challenges and prepare for life in the community.



150

CLIENTS
SUPPORTED

56

GROUP SESSIONS IN-
PERSON SERVICE AT OCDC

Client Stories

Rebuilding Life After Release

A family sought MILO support for a relative experiencing incarceration for the first time. Through emotional support, mentorship, and culturally responsive care, MILO helped him manage anger, maintain his medication, and stay connected with his family. Following his release, he secured stable housing, returned to university in January 2026, began seeking employment, and became involved in volunteering and community activities.

“The program helped my family member stay calm, feel heard, and begin healing. Your support made a real difference in his life and in our family.”

Keeping a Mother Connected to Her Family

While incarcerated, a mother needed support participating in decisions concerning her children. MILO coordinated with child protection services, her spouse, and other supports and facilitated her participation in a Circle of Care meeting by phone. This ensured her voice was included in discussions and safety planning for her children. Through advocacy and coordination, MILO helped her remain connected to her family and participate directly in decisions affecting her children’s well-being and safety.

Multicultural Liaison Officer (MLO) Program

The Service

The MLO Program – Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) helps newcomer students and families navigate the Canadian education system and settlement journey. MLOs connect families, schools, and community services through orientation, referrals, advocacy, and individualized settlement support.

The Impact

In 2025–2026, MLOs supported newcomer families through individualized support, information sessions, newcomer clubs, and peer activities. Students and families gained greater access to academic, well-being, settlement, and community resources while building connections within their schools.

4,643
CLIENTS
SERVED

173
SCHOOL
SERVED



Client Stories

Finding Support in Grade 12

A Grade 12 newcomer student was experiencing anxiety, academic stress, financial challenges, and social isolation. Her MLO connected her with counselling, tutoring, school guidance, financial assistance, winter clothing, and social supports while providing regular encouragement. With coordinated academic and personal support, she became more connected and reassured as she worked toward graduation.

She shared, “I feel better already after talking to you. Thank you for your time today.”

Finding the Right Learning Environment

A Grade 9 newcomer student struggled academically and socially at a school without ESL programming, leading to poor attendance and suspension. Her MLO worked with the student, family, and school to identify her needs and advocate for appropriate language support. The MLO helped the family transfer her to a school with dedicated ESL resources, giving her access to a learning environment better equipped to support her success.

Settlement and Integration Program (SIP)

The Service

SIP helps newcomers navigate settlement and build their lives in Ottawa. Through personalized planning, information, referrals, and community-based services, SIP connects clients with the resources they need to integrate successfully.

The Impact

In 2025-2026, SIP connected newcomers with language, employment, mental health, legal, housing, and other essential supports, helping clients navigate services with greater confidence and independence.



2,660

UNIQUE CLIENTS
SERVED

7,494

SERVICE
INTERACTIONS

21

LANGUAGES OF
SERVICE

Client Testimonial

“Staff at OCISO supported me as a protected person with submitting a permanent residence application for my family members overseas in January 2025. I am very happy to share that my family members have now successfully arrived in Canada. I have returned to OCISO to access other SIP services and referrals as I continue to settle and build my life in Canada. I greatly appreciate OCISO’s ongoing support, professionalism, and dedication to newcomers. Your assistance played an important role in helping me reunite with my family and has given us a wonderful opportunity to build a new life together in Canada. I am truly grateful for the support and guidance I have received from OCISO.”

— An anonymous client



Youth Programs (YOCISO)

The Service

YOCISO support immigrant children and youth ages 6 to 29 through their settlement and integration journey. Through school and community-based programming, YOCISO helps young people build skills, confidence, connections, and a sense of belonging.



The Impact

In 2025–2026, YOCISO expanded opportunities for young people to connect, lead, learn, and give back. New initiatives included the YOCISO Garden, Thread of Care Project, and KidzClub, alongside entrepreneurship and outdoor programming.

YOCISO also opened the new YOCISO Lounge, a safe and welcoming space for youth, and launched its first Annual Youth Sports Summer Fun Fest, bringing together more than 350 children and youth to celebrate health, wellness, and community.

Client Testimonial

“Based on what my children shared about their experience, the program had a very positive impact on them. It provided opportunities for new learning, new friendships, and the development of important skills such as teamwork and communication. They especially enjoyed participating in the outdoor activities and sports, which helped them stay active, build confidence, and try new experiences. They looked forward to attending each day and came home excited to talk about what they had learned and accomplished.”

— Claude Toukam, Parent

1,175
CLIENTS
SERVED

1,620
ONE-ON-ONE
SESSIONS

840
GROUP
SESSIONS

2,373
PARTICIPANTS

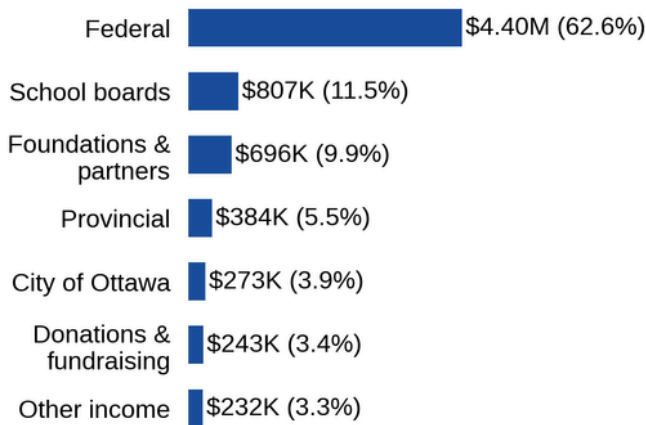
21
SCHOOLS
REACHED

Financial Report

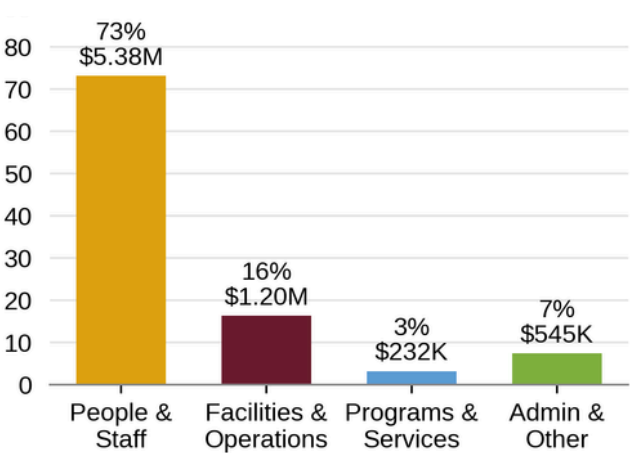
Fiscal year 2025–2026 (April 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026)

Total Revenue \$7,036,457 Contributions + other income	Total Contributions \$6,906,749 Government, school board & partners	Operating Expenses \$7,360,189 Programs, people & operations	Donations & Fundraising \$242,536 Thank you to our donors!
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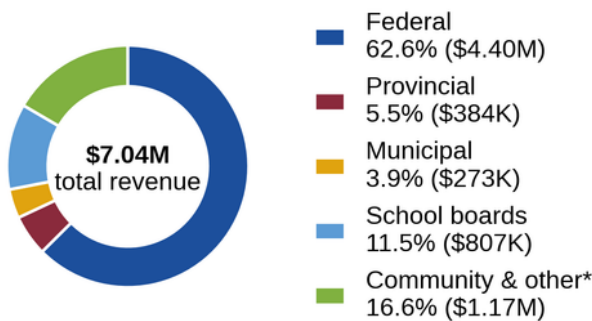
Revenue by Source



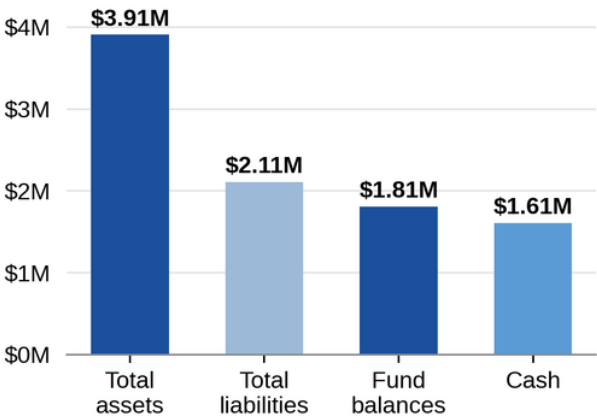
Expense Categories (%)



Funding Mix by Source



Financial Position (March 31, 2026)



Marion Dewar Scholarship Fund (MDSF)

MDSF was established by 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.

Award Recipients of 2026:



Amani Khan

Amani Khan's experience coming to Canada as an immigrant inspired her commitment to leadership, inclusion, and community service. Throughout high school, she mentored younger students, supported mental health initiatives, organized fundraisers, and volunteered with OCISO Youth. Her dedication to promoting peace, kindness, and diverse voices was recognized with the UN@80 Youth Global Citizen Award from the United Nations Association in Canada. Amani is studying Public Affairs and Policy Management at Carleton University, with the goal of building a career in public service and advancing policies that promote fairness, inclusion, and opportunity.

She hopes to continue giving back and creating positive change in her community.



Karim Mouhalami

After arriving in Canada in 2023, Karim Mouhalami worked to build a new sense of community while staying focused on his academic goals. Throughout high school, he balanced challenging coursework with meaningful involvement in sports and community service, including varsity soccer, volunteering at the Ottawa General Hospital, and two years of service on the AMA Youth Committee. Karim is pursuing biochemistry at the University of Ottawa, inspired by his interest in science, medicine, and improving people's lives.

Karim brings resilience, curiosity, and a strong commitment to using his education to make a positive impact in his community.



Sabina Umba

Sabina Umba moved to Canada at the age of 14, navigating a new country, school, and way of life while learning to adapt and persevere through change. With the support of her family and teachers, these experiences strengthened her determination to pursue an education and make a difference in the lives of others. Sabina is studying Community and Justice Services at Algonquin College and hopes to continue her education in law.

She is passionate about supporting people who need a voice and building a career that allows her to make a positive impact in her community.

To Our Valued Funders and Community Partners

Our work is made possible by the trust and support of our funders and community partners. Together, we empower newcomers, create opportunities, and build a more welcoming and inclusive Ottawa where everyone can thrive. Thank you for being part of our journey.

Funders



Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada



Employment and Social Development Canada

Emploi et Développement social Canada



Community Partners

Algonquin College
Assiniboine College
Black History Ottawa
Boys and Girls Club
Caldwell Family Centre
Care for Newcomer Children (CMAS)
Caring and Sharing Exchange
Carleton University
Catholic Centre for Immigrants (CCI)
CHEO Foundation
City of Ottawa
Community Arts and Social Engagement – City of Ottawa
Contact North
Crime Prevention Ottawa
CVE Inc.
Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre (EORC)
EnviroCentre / EnviroCentre Build
Fabricland – Walkley location
FAMSAC Food Cupboard
Greater Ottawa Home Builders' Association (GOHBA)
Hazelview Properties
Helping With Furniture
Housing Help
Ingenium Canada
Jewish Family Services (JFS)
Jewish Vocational Service (JVS)
Lebanese and Arab Social Services Agency (LASSA)
Maker House

Maple Wishes
Matthew House Ottawa
Mesh-Up
National Arts Gallery
National Capital Commission (NCC)
National Connector Program – Halifax Partnership
Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)
Orléans-Cumberland Community Resources Centre (OCCRC)
Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre (OCCSC)
Ottawa Community Loan Fund (OCLF)
Ottawa Food Bank
Ottawa Public Health
Ottawa Public Library (OPL)
Ottawa Safety Council
Petres New Jobs
Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre (PQCHC)
RBC
SUCCESS British Columbia (SUCCESS BC)
Ukrainian School Ottawa
University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic
Volunteer Ottawa
Western University Canada
Winnifred Wellness
World Skills Employment Centre
YMCA Employment Access Centres
YMCA Language Assessment and Referral Centre
YMCA Newcomer Information Centre (NIC)
Youth Services Bureau (YSB)



Contact Us

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OCISO South

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Ottawa Community Immigrant
Services Organization - OCISO



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