

CICS

Centre for Immigrant and Community Services

2025-2026 Annual Report

Stories of Hope

CICS Annual Report 2025-2026

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CICS
Centre for Immigrant and Community Services

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Message from the Executive Director



Hope for a better tomorrow

I remember taking office as CICS' ED on January 4th, 2021. It felt like the world was under lockdown and all things in life were put on hold from the COVID pandemic. It is hard to believe more than 5 years have gone by since that day.

As anxious as we were during the pandemic years, today the world feels scarier. Geopolitically, the world is more dangerous, with ongoing wars on multiple fronts. Economically we are struggling through a housing and affordability crisis, with oil prices rising from the conflict in Iran. Socially, anti-immigration sentiment, xenophobia, and far-right politics are at an all-time high around the world. Here in Canada funding for social services is being reduced by all government and public funders, leaving the most vulnerable in our community behind. The entire immigrant serving sector is reeling from the latest, draconian funding reductions by the federal government. CICS was certainly not immune to its impact.

There is no way to sugar coat the realities that CICS is operating in: We are in an unprecedented time of challenges. The reduction in federal funding for immigrant services will continue for at least two more years. At the same time, funders are demanding more outcomes, and service providers are being asked to do more with less to serve rising demands for service in the community.

Personally, there have been many sleepless nights where I felt exhausted physically and emotionally. As part of our leadership culture that we have built at CICS, in response to the IRCC funding reductions, the management team led by example and took a reduction



to our salaries, starting with the Executive Director. I checked my bank balance after our most recent pay period and for a moment wondered why it was lower than usual, and then I remembered it was because the reductions have kicked in. Seeing and feeling the numbers helped me empathize and understand what our staff, and workers around the sector are going through.

But there is a deeper trauma that all of us in the sector are experiencing apart from the financial impact. When funding is cut, when public support for our work swings away, it is difficult not to feel that this work that a lot of us have built our lives and careers on is no longer needed, no longer valued, no longer wanted. Like the way after a tornado rips through a town, we are left holding the pieces, trying to rebuild from whatever is left. We find, or at least I found myself struggling and asking, "Why do we keep doing this? Does this matter anymore?"

In preparing for this annual report, I set out to find an answer to that question. I left all the statistical analyses, program summaries, and financial reporting in the hands of our capable staff and went on a journey to speak face to face with our clients, our volunteers, and some of our employees. I met with them, heard their stories, and asked, "Why is CICS important to you? Why is it important we keep doing what we do?"

After playing back hours and hours of interview recordings, one thing became abundantly clear: Whether it was a client who came to Canada to pursue her dream of becoming a doctor, or a volunteer who selflessly gives time in his retirement years to help others, or a staff member who "stumbled" into this work years ago and has become a pillar of strength for her community, their experiences shared a common thread: CICS is a place where they found they can build a better tomorrow, and they are looking to help others discover the same. In other words, across all the different services and programs we provide, CICS is an incubator for hope.

Hope is not a luxury only those with means can afford. Hope for a better future, for ourselves, for our families, for our children is the promise that Canada is built on, and the reason why CICS exists. Today, when so many on social media try to prey on people's fears and divide us, we choose to build communities where all of us can live with hope for our future, where building a strong Canada and welcoming immigrants from around the world are not competing interests. We build communities who believe looking after the vulnerable results in all of us being stronger. We build communities who know the best way to solve problems that affect us all is with solutions that include us all.

Yes, the challenges facing CICS are real and the problems we are trying to solve are immense. But so is the vision that CICS exists for: We are not just in the business of providing better jobs, better housing, better health and wellness, but through all of it, we build something that ALL of us want, for us and ALL our children: Hope for a better tomorrow and a better future.

Alfred Lam

Executive Director, CICS

Message from the ***Board Chair***



Turn obstacles into training grounds for future growth.

As I write this Board Chair message after completing my 7 years of volunteering and serving on the Board, it gives me immense pride to volunteer alongside more than 1,100 other volunteers, who generously contributed over 13,000 hours collectively last year. Volunteering is not just about completing the task at hand. It is about spreading kindness and building connections. Every hour our volunteers give has the power to change someone's life, foster a positive impact, lift spirits, and bring hope to many newcomers calling Canada their new home.

Last year was a tough year for us. Due to negative global and economic turbulence and trade tariffs from the USA, our funding was cut by our funders. Our Newmarket location had to be closed. Our management team showed leadership and shouldered the financial impact by taking "no-pay leave" across the team. My profound gratitude to our management for their dedication to CICS.

CICS was founded 58 years ago by a few immigrants or volunteers to serve the immigrant population. **Our staff today demonstrated the good qualities of immigrants – resilient and determined to adapt and perform!** Despite the present unfavourable conditions, we successfully organized a Raffle and generated new revenues. This is the largest amount of funds that has been raised in our past 15 years of fundraising history. The only years that we were able to fundraise more were during our Capital Campaign years when we fundraised to purchase the Midland Head Office 20 years ago! This Raffle was a milestone achievement because it "magnified" the impact of our donations: we received $16,000 in donated prize money, and the raffle generated more than $48,000 of income, which will go to support our Community Food Programs. This means each dollar donated produced more than $3 in return, equating to a 300% return on investment. This is made possible by the tremendous support of our staff, volunteers, supporters, clients, and communities.

Looking ahead, we will work relentlessly to explore new opportunities. We will turn obstacles into training grounds for future growth and continue to make Canada a better home for all. Please join us!

Glendy Sze
Board Chair, CICS

Board of Directors



Glendy Sze
Chair



Hersh Joshi
Vice-Chair



Joshua Chan
Secretary



Joseph Chan
Treasurer



Abrar Huq



Eddie Lee



Loretta Chan



Serena Chan



Glen Crisp



Irene Guo
Served until November 2025

Stories of **Hope**

She lost her father to Leukemia when she was just 2 years old.

Khyathi grew up with a dream to become a doctor so other little girls in India won't have to lose their fathers to diseases. However, as her mother worked hard as a single parent just to make ends meet, the dream of being able to afford medical school seemed like a fantasy fading into the distance.

As those around her pressed her to give up her dream and get a job to help her mom to support the family, her mother wouldn't let her: "Do not give up on your dream. Do not waver from what you are meant to be." Against all odds, she was awarded a scholarship to attend medical school. Just when it seemed her dream of curing diseases was about to come true, her story turned on another cruel twist: as she was preparing to enter medical studies, she was diagnosed with the crippling disease of Lupus.



The pain from the disease reduced her to being bedbound most of the time. Her mother ended up needing to take care of her. Her illness eventually caused irreparable damage to her hips and necessitated a hip replacement. But still she refused to give up. When she finally managed to get the disease under control with medication, she fulfilled her lifelong dream of going to medical school. When she graduated, her story took another turn. She fell in love with the man who is now her husband, who just happened to live in Canada. Just like that, she packed her suitcase, with her dream of being a doctor carefully folded inside and flew 12,000 km to Canada.

In Canada, Khyathi discovered that the wait for a medical residency position which is a mandatory step before she can practice medicine in Canada, can take years. During this time, she found out about CICS' Welcome Centre in Markham via a YouTube video and decided to visit. There, she met settlement counsellor, Kula Kulasegaram.

"Kula became my trusted person and through her, the Welcome Centre became my trusted place in Canada. She helped me look for alternative career options while I was waiting for a residency position. She kept me updated on all the programs and services I could join. She registered me for healthcare workshops and helped me build my network among healthcare professionals. Meeting other newcomers gave me a new circle of friends. I began looking forward to all the events at the Welcome Centre to connect with people. I learned to respect people from other cultures and backgrounds." Kula and other CICS staff celebrated with Khyathi when she received an offer for a residency position in Saskatchewan!

Khyathi is blessed with a very supportive husband who is willing to uproot and move to Saskatchewan so she can finally see her dream of becoming a doctor come true! Through the years, even though the pursuit of her dream was met with multiple barriers and seemingly closed doors, Khyathi never gave up hope. CICS became the place where her hope and dreams could take root and grow.

CICS Programs and Services:
Building Hope Together

Settlement Services

CICS serves about 20,000 newcomers each year, helping them to build their new lives in Canada.







Language Training Services

CICS' Language Training program serves newcomers at all levels of English ability, giving them the language skills they need for everyday living as well as successfully entering the job market.



CICS Programs and Services

Employment Support Services

Our team of Employment Counsellors help almost 500 people last year find jobs by providing coaching, training and directly connecting them to employers look to hire.









Early Years Services

Our Early Years programs help families with pre-school aged children to prepare to enter the school system, providing support to both parents and their kids.





Children and Youth Services

Our full range of children and youth programs include after school academic support, leadership training, arts and crafts, music and drama, to allow newcomer youth to express themselves and build friendships. For the past 16 years, CICS has operated the only federally funded immigrant youth centre in York Region.

Stories of **Hope**





She was a university professor in Afghanistan when the Taliban took over.

As a professional woman in higher education, in a senior administration position, ***Zakia*** knew her career and possibly her life were in jeopardy, and she had to get out. One night, she received the call: "You have to go NOW!" Within minutes, she left everything, literally, and escaped with nothing more than the clothes she was wearing.

She arrived in Canada with no money, no friends, and no idea what would happen to her. She connected with CICS:

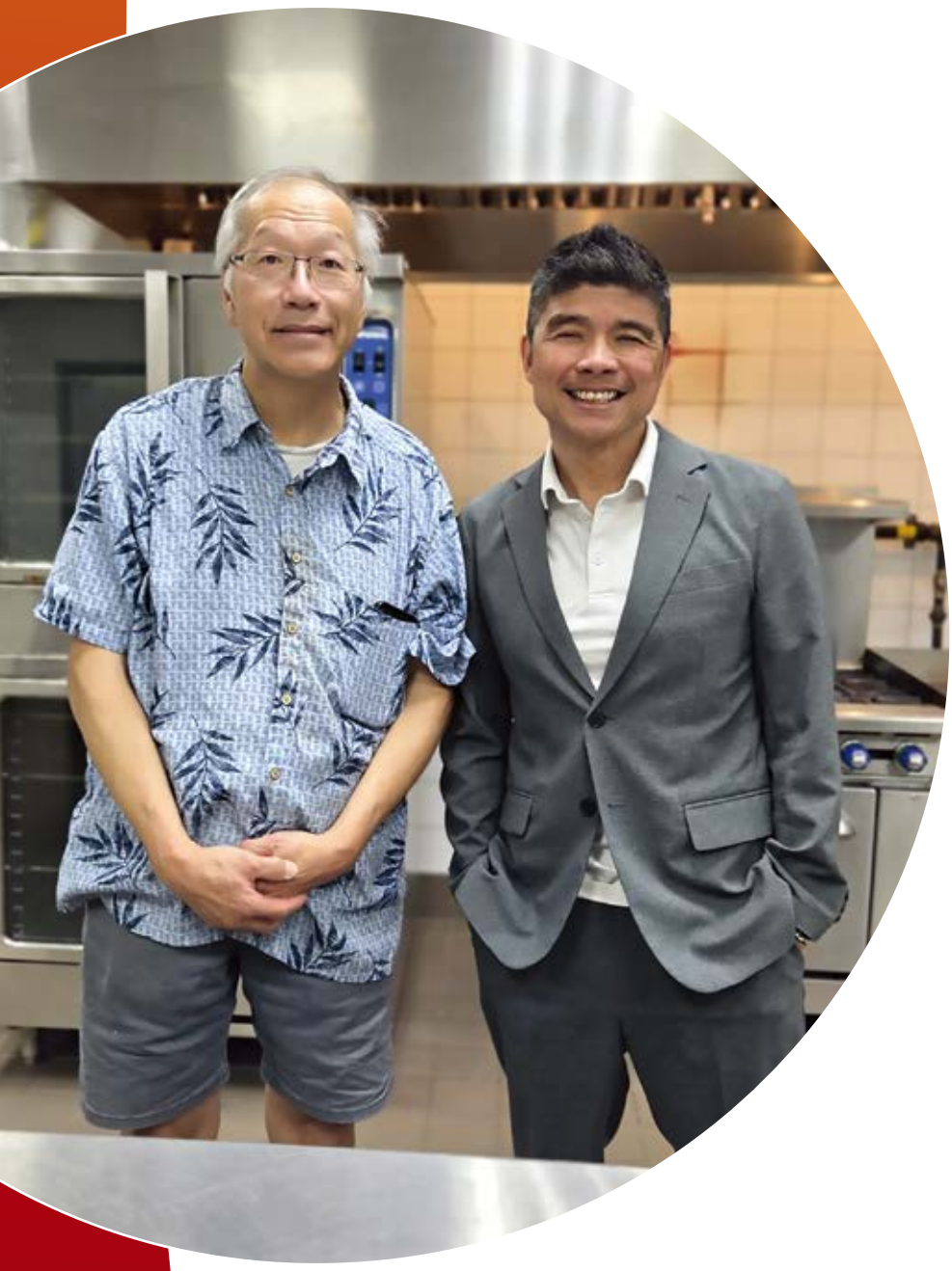
"When I came to Canada, I had a lot of struggles. I did not speak English, the language, culture and food were all new to me. I came in 2022. I lost my way and did not know where to start. So I started with learning the language.

I did the assessment and was referred to CICS LINC. Even then, I was not sure if I could establish a new life. But all the teachers and staff of CICS were very helpful to me, especially the LINC manager gave me a lot of extra help and advice. She referred me to a lot of different services, like food bank, tenant support services, etc. I received so much help, and I decided that I needed to help other newcomers who came to Canada in a situation just like mine. So many of them when they came, psychologically they were not ready to start a new life because they had just left everything behind."

CICS was able to offer Zakia a position with our language instruction program to help other Afghan women with similar experiences. She performed her duties with dedication and even when the position ended due to a lack of funding, Zakia continued to come in and volunteer to help others.

"I want to keep contributing here because Now I feel this is my land, my home."

Stories of **Hope**



42 years ago, he came to Canada from Hong Kong as a young man.

With no advanced academic credentials, ***Teddy*** had trouble finding work. To support himself, he started working in a bakery, even though he had no prior experience in the food business. He started by cleaning dishes while watching and trying to learn to be a baker. In his mind, that was a way to start earning a living, while looking for what he wanted to do as a long-term career. The owner of the bakery took interest in his strong work ethic and encouraged him to take courses in the culinary arts. During the day, he continued to work at the bakery and attended classes at night at George Brown College.

That became the beginning of a 40-year career in the food industry. A catering service that is run by one person, one pair of hands. Teddy went door to door to different restaurants in town to offer to make desserts for them. He specifically targeted buffet restaurants because of the high volume they need. He started out in Ajax and went as far west as Kitchener and Hamilton, knocking on the door of every Chinese buffet restaurant he could find. At the peak of his work, every day he made 5,000 pieces of pastry and desserts for 15 different buffet restaurants. For 10 years, he never slept more than 4 hours a night.

When Teddy was near retirement and ready to wind down his work, COVID hit. CICS responded to the food crisis of isolated seniors by starting a meal delivery service. The demand for the service was so overwhelming that meals were typically sold out within minutes when the menu for the week came online on Mondays. Teddy got involved to meet the extra demands and to this day, he is still cooking and delivering affordable meals to seniors. He cooks for seniors living with cancer who have very specific dietary needs. Additionally, he cooks for various community service organizations and faith communities like temples and churches. He regularly volunteers his talents to help CICS in various functions and programs, as our "go to person" whenever we have catering needs.

CICS Programs and Services

Women, Seniors and Family Services

Every member of the immigrant family faces different sets of challenges. Our specialized programs designed to serve the needs of women and seniors provide them opportunities to reduce social isolation and positively contribute to their communities.





Community Health and Wellness Programs

Without health, nothing matters. Health and wellness are integral pillars in CICS' community building work. In addition to teaching residents how to navigate the healthcare system, we know that the lack of proper housing is a major challenge to one's health and wellness. Our Tenant Support Program helps community members navigate housing-related challenges and provides the knowledge, support and resources they need to maintain safe and stable housing.





CICS Programs and Services

Community Food Programs

Food insecurity is becoming an ever-increasing struggle for many in our city. CICS' Community Food Program provides food for up to 200 families each week.







Volunteer Services

Last year, over 1,100 volunteers provided over 13,000 volunteer hours to support the work of CICS.





Stories of **Hope**

She was born in Iran and lived there until she was 14 years old

and came to Canada with her family. ***Tanya*** couldn't speak English, was very shy and had a lot of difficulties making friends. When she finished high school, she went to university to study science, but didn't want that to be the focus of her career. Around the same time she started volunteering her time in the Iranian community to help people fill out forms to apply for government programs, sponsor their family members for immigration, etc. and found great satisfaction in doing that work. Word got out in the Iranian community that there was this girl volunteering to help people, and before long she became a "go to person" among the community for people with all different questions and needs. That's when she knew she wanted a career in helping people.

"After I graduated from university, I found an organization called CICS and applied to become a youth worker but didn't get the job," Tanya laughed. As fate would have it, a few weeks later another opening came up for a school settlement worker to serve the Farsi speaking community. She was offered the job and her career with CICS began with the Settlement Workers in School (SWIS). 10 years later, she became the Program Manager for that program in CICS. Today, Tanya leads a team that provides services in over 70 schools across the Greater Toronto Area.

Even though she spends much less time directly serving clients today, Tanya remains a "go to person" in the community. During the recent uprising and conflict in Iran, Canada saw an influx of Iranian newcomers. Tanya led our staff in providing much needed services to the families in the schools to orient them as they began their lives in Canada.

When asked where she sees herself doing next in her career, Tanya replied, "I am open to experiencing different opportunities, but at the end of the day, I want my career to be about helping people. That's what got me into this work from the first day, and it will always be what drives me."

These are just four stories from the almost 20,000 people CICS serves every year. They came to Canada from different backgrounds and circumstances. But one common thread runs through all their stories: They have come to Canada with hope for a better life. Over the years, as CICS' services grew in scale and diversity, we realized that apart from all the programs and services, CICS is here to provide a community of connection, so we can work together to create a better tomorrow for all of us. As these four stories remind us, even though the obstacles may be formidable, when we work to support one another, there is nothing we cannot overcome.

CICS in the Media







CICS in the Media: Stories of Hope

CICS' media engagement efforts played an important role in advancing our goal of making known the "Stories of Hope" we encounter every day as part of our work. Through interviews, feature stories, and media appearances, we created opportunities for the broader community to understand that regardless of our backgrounds, we share the same ultimate wish and dream: to create hope for a better tomorrow for us and our families.

As a community agency, we served as a bridge between our clients and the public. Through collaboration with a wide range of ethnic and mainstream media outlets across print, on-air, and online platforms, the voices of our service users—including newcomers, job seekers, seniors, women, youth, and low-income families—reached a broader audience, fostering greater awareness, understanding, and empathy.

Through every interview and media opportunity, we aimed to build a more inclusive and equitable society and remained committed to the conviction that when we all learn to work together, we can create a better tomorrow for all of us.


cics
Family Wellbeing Program
City News 24/7
2:52
NIAGARA FA
MON TUE WED
-3° 0° 5°
GO Transit Alert
84% OF IMMIGRANTS CONSIDER HOMEOWNERSHIP KEY TO ACHIEVING CANADIAN DREAM: OMNI POLL
TOP STORIES
October manufacturing sales down one per cent at $71.5M: Statistics Canada
401 near Allen Rd. North
BITCOIN 118,596.55 -3687.32 ETHEREUM 4,058.15 -189.97
CONSTELLTION STW 3,298.20 12.81 CDN TIRE CORP


South America
ARTE DU MONDE
是否於同樣的時間去學英文


OMNI NEWS


最大的轉變在於評分考核的標準


CityNews Everywhere
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Almost half of GTA immigrant service organizations bracing for program cuts
A new survey shows nearly half of newcomer service organizations expect to see programs cl...
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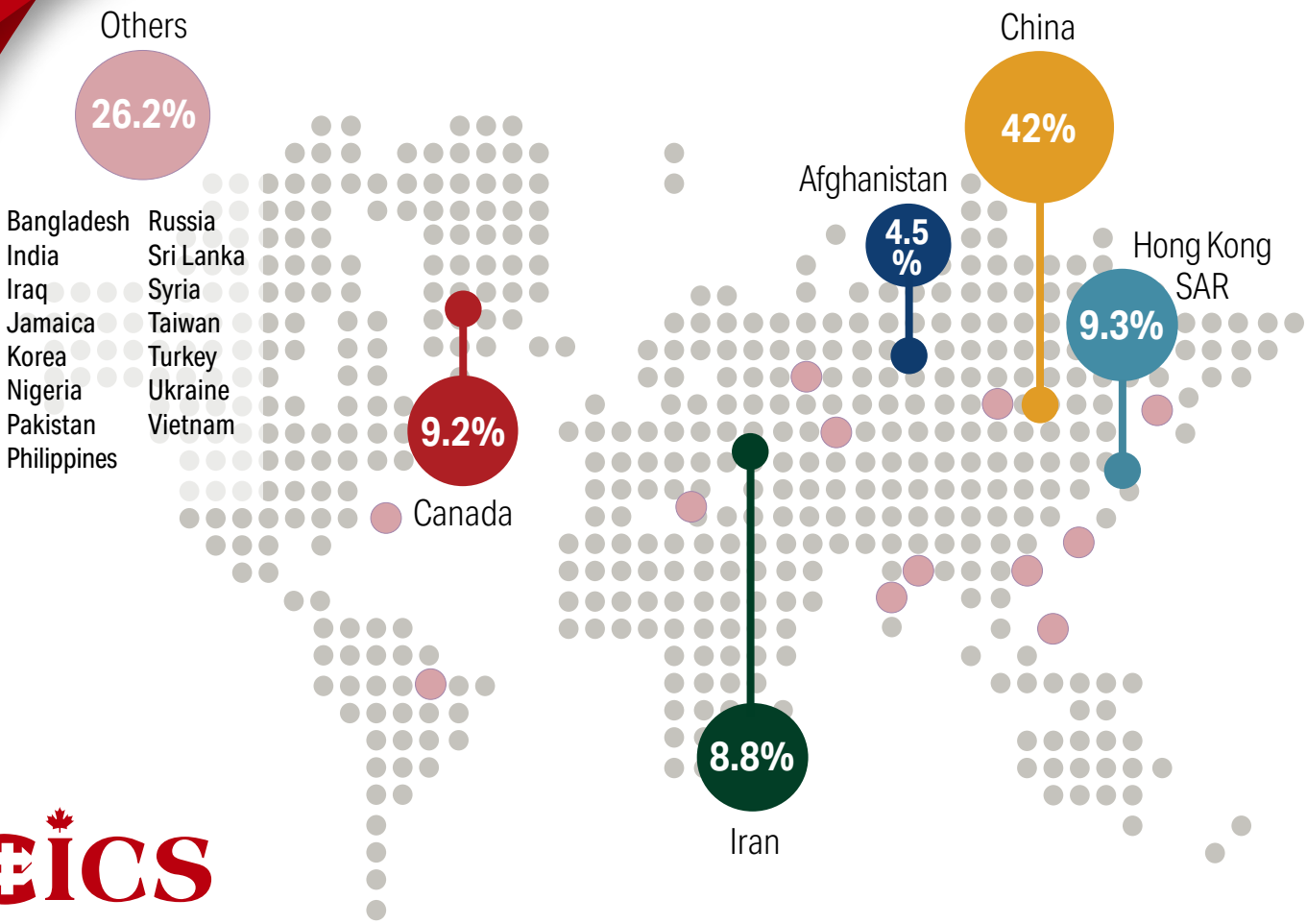
GTA IMMIGRANT SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS FACE PROGRAM CLOSURES OVER FEDERAL FUNDING CUTS
Almost half of GTA immigrant service organizations bracing for program cuts


明報加東網
2025.10
華語處「二合一」開新服務中心 設新服務拓資金來源抗撥款減


好生活
cics

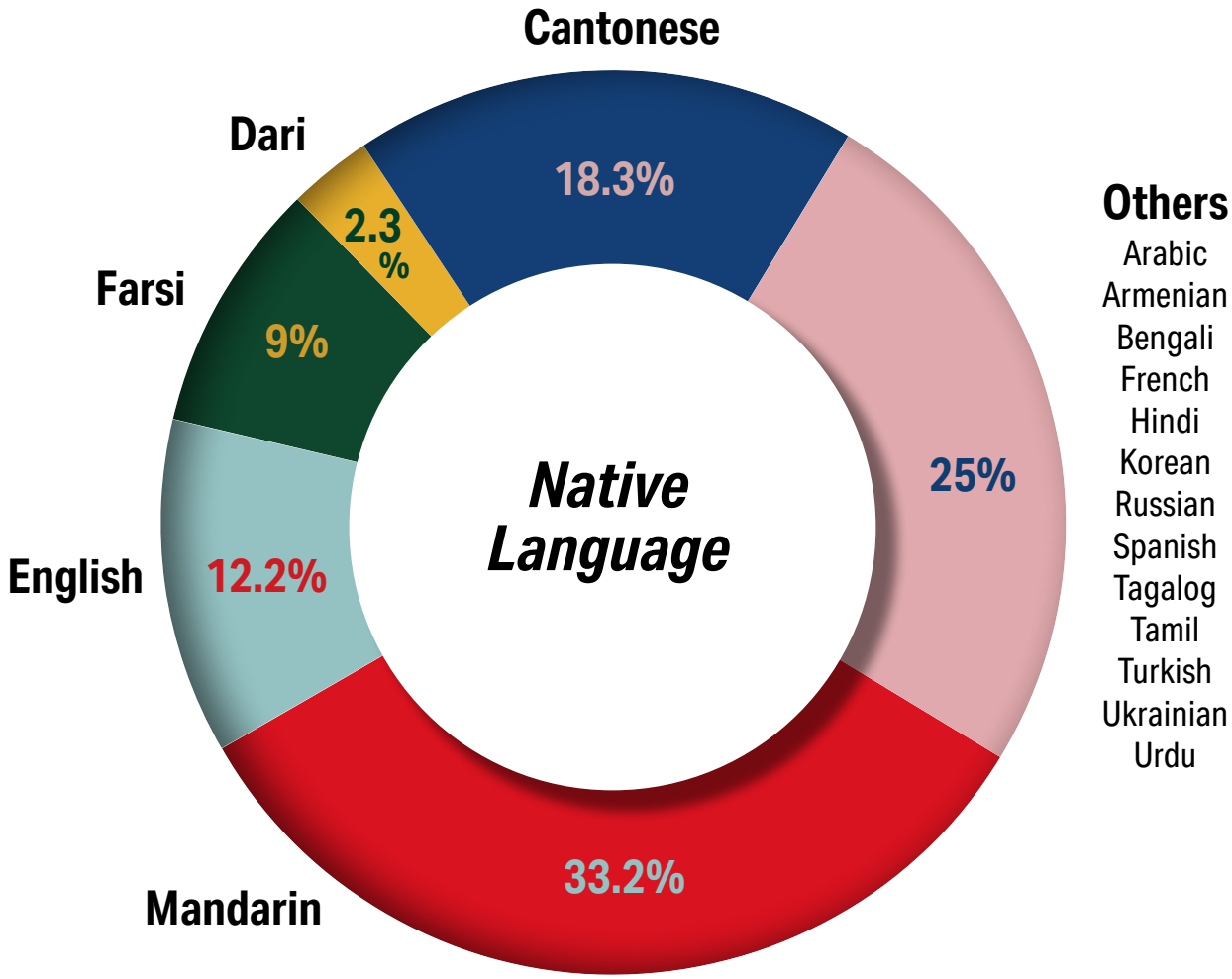
Agency Statistics

Country of Origin



Country of Origin	Number of Clients Served - Top 5
China	8,072
Hong Kong SAR	1,788
Canada	1,772
Iran	1,686
Afghanistan	860

Client Interactions	Active Volunteers	Volunteer Hours	Community partners with ongoing collaboration	Number of employers with active involvement during the year
147,916	1158	13,318	114	55



Native Language	Number of Clients Served - Top 5
Mandarin	6,376
Cantonese	3,533
English	2,341
Farsi	1,729
Dari	441

Financial Statement

2026

REVENUE	
Grants and contributions	$ 12,864,055
Amortization of deferred capital contributions	363,182
Fees for use of space	117,791
Donations	132,789
Fees for services rendered	293,723
Amortization of leasehold inducement	16,000
Interest income	118,235
Membership fees	6,960
	13,912,735

EXPENSES	
Wages and benefits	9,745,920
Building occupancy and realty tax	2,090,952
Program	577,621
Office and general	341,175
HST	99,872
Purchased services	165,744
Equipment maintenance and rental	23,515
Staff development and travel	57,601
Advertising and promotion	33,078
Amortization	596,176
	13,731,654

Excess of revenue over expenses	**$ 181,081**

Funder List *2025-2026*

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- Canada Revenue Agency
- Department of Justice Canada
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Public Safety Canada
- Ontario Ministry of Health
- Ontario Ministry of Education
- Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development
- Employment Ontario
- Regional Municipality of York
- City of Markham
- City of Toronto
- United Way Greater Toronto
- Prosper Canada
- Daily Bread Food Bank

Epilogue



"Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

– Dorothy Gale, in The Wizard of Oz

I know not all of us are old enough to recognize the famous quote above from the movie, The Wizard of Oz. Well, as a recently-turned-almost-senior-citizen, I am.

I am not sure if it is a required rite of passage as one gets older, but recently I found myself more reflective than usual. And everywhere I look, I came to the same conclusion: This is not the world I grew up in anymore.

The world is rapidly changing. It seems to grow more unstable, unpredictable, and unsafe every single day. Historians tell us that we are indeed living through the highest number of active military conflicts around the world since the end of World War II. Over 118 million people are displaced globally due to wars.

Domestically, it feels like we are living from one crisis to another, or sometimes one crisis on top of another: Uncertainty of the economy due to the trade war with the US, the advancement of AI and its impact on…well, EVERYTHING, the growing anti-immigration sentiment in our country, and with it, growing racial tensions, the struggle for affordability in housing and cost of living, the list goes on.

For organizations like CICS, we are called to do more, with fewer resources as governments divert funding away from social services. Indeed, we are currently navigating through a significant funding reduction of immigrant services across the country by the federal government. That impact will be felt for years to come.

But as you read in the previous pages, this past year CICS has continued to innovate, to lead, to serve, and to show up and help where we are needed the most. Because even though at times it feels like the ground under our feet is shifting, we have two things from our experience that will hold true regardless of what changes in the world: The strength of a community is seen in how we show up and help the most vulnerable among us, and we are always stronger, we are always better, we can always accomplish more, together.

Those are the pillars on which CICS was birthed 58 years ago. It is the same foundation that undergirds everything we do today: CICS is in the business of creating platforms and opportunities for human connections, to bring people together and build communities where everyone belongs.

Yes, the world is changing. It is different from the world we grew up in. Tomorrow it will be different than it was today. CICS is here to make sure as the world changes, it changes for the better, for all of us, together.

Alfred Lam
Executive Director, CICS

CICS Locations & Contact Information

Immigrant Resource Centre (CICS HEAD OFFICE)
2330 Midland Avenue,
Toronto, Ontario M1S 5G5
416-292-7510

Kennedy Newcomer Service Centre
2075 Kennedy Road, Unit 703 and 705,
Scarborough, Ontario M1T 3V3
416-293-4565 (Settlement Services)
416-299-8118 (Language Training/LINC)

Woodside Square LINC Centre
1571 Sandhurst Circle, Unit 109B, G/F,
Toronto, Ontario M1V 1V2
416-292-6558

North York Office
1761 Sheppard Avenue East, G/F,
Toronto, Ontario M2J 0A5
416-292-7510 By appointment only

Markham South Welcome Centre
7220 Kennedy Road, Unit 8,
Markham, Ontario L3R 7P2
905-479-7926
www.welcomecentre.ca

Immigrant Youth Centre
5284 Highway 7 East, Unit 2,
Markham, Ontario L3P 1B9
905-294-8868
www.cicsiyc.org

Itinerant Services in Newmarket/Aurora
905-895-3789
infonmc@cicscanada.com

Centre for Learning
416-797-2353 / 647-882-0439
cfl@cicscanada.com



Centre for Immigrant and Community Services

www.cicscanada.com