



2023

ANNUAL REPORT

Welcome, safety, and support for refugees.



Leadership Report



Manny Wong
Executive Director

2023 was an extraordinary year in the refugee claimant sector. Over 140,000 refugee claims were made in Canada last year, a 285% increase over the previous 10-year average. Ontario received 44% of all refugee claims in Canada, a 139% increase over the past year. In Toronto, there were media reports of refugee claimants sleeping on the streets or in church basements. By the end of 2023, refugee claimants accounted for slightly over 50% of all people in Toronto shelters. The most distressing number was the over 350 refugee families on the City's waitlist for family shelters, with wait times stretching over 200 days.

We all felt the overwhelming stress about how and where to start tackling these numbers as the need quickly rose. We were so grateful to feel the generous spirit of our community, who responded time and time again to the many seemingly minor but absolutely significant things we needed, from plates, cups and utensils to winter clothes.



Alex Sancton
Board Chair

The community's demonstrated selflessness was incredibly heart-filling throughout the year, especially with a record-breaking 11 babies born while staying at Christie last year. While they say it takes a village to raise a child, I want to add that it takes a whole community to welcome a refugee baby and family. We are so thankful to our Christie community, who answered our calls for baby supplies with generous donations of diapers, strollers and baby clothes.

The support from our community has helped more than just the families at CRWC. We received enough Christmas toys from local toy drives to provide gifts to refugee children living in other shelters. With the rising cost of living, our donors were ready to support our post-shelter clients with grocery gift cards. We also raised a record amount of money in our annual RIDE for Refugee fundraiser this fall.

Beyond the donations of items and money, there were also the amazing people who donated their time. We had volunteers do income taxes for our clients, a group of medical students started weekly Homework Help sessions for our children, and a local church initiated bi-weekly youth night for our teens.

The sheer number of refugee claimants is daunting, but our community of supporters has shown how our combined actions can make such a tremendous impact. It was indeed an extraordinary year – a year when our community rose to the occasion to meet the challenge in front of us. Thank you to each and every one of you for supporting Christie and being an example of how Canada should welcome and set the foundation for vulnerable refugee families.

We also want to acknowledge and thank the staff team at Christie. As you will read in this Annual Report, Christie provides a wide range of services to meet the unique needs of refugee claimant families. It is because of our fantastic staff that those services offer individualized support that is caring, trauma-informed, and empathetic.

Thank you,

Alex Sancton, Board Chair
Manny Wong, Executive Director

At the Shelter

Summary

Our Shelter Program welcomed almost 100 new refugee claimant families to Christie Refugee Welcome Centre in 2023.

In a family's first few days after arriving to Christie, the Shelter Program team will orient families to their new living quarters, guide them through the refugee claim process, assist in registering children and adults for school and English classes, connect families to healthcare services, basic needs, recreation programs, financial assistance and more.

While at Christie, families also have access to the many varied on-site services: a food services team preparing and serving three healthy meals and snacks per day, After-School Children's Programming, an on-site health clinic, a community gardening project, a Women's Wellness program, and various special community-building events including World Refugee Day, Multicultural Days and Friday summer BBQs.

After a few weeks of living at Christie, shelter staff will begin supporting families with their housing search, helping them with the arduous process of securing permanent housing.

In 2023, Christie's Shelter Program faced a number of situations which were unexpected and challenged the shelter team's resources and capacities.

To begin, 2023 saw its highest numbers of refugee claimants to Canada ever recorded, with almost 144,000 asylum claimants reported in the 2023 calendar year.

Summer 2023 also saw Toronto's shelter system collapse under the weight of a growing unhoused community and limited shelter beds. Scenes of hundreds of unhoused refugee claimants sleeping on the streets, most visibly outside the City's homeless referral centre was commonplace during the summer of 2023. During this time, over 50 unhoused refugee claimants made their

way to Christie in search of safe shelter. Unable to offer them options in the face of an already full shelter, many families (including children) spent nights sleeping on mattresses in Christie's Dining Room while waiting for shelter options.

2023 was also the year the Shelter Program was referred an unusually high number of single pregnant women and/or women with newborns who required intensive health and childcare supports. 13 pregnant women were supported by Christie this year and 11 babies were born to families living at Christie.



One of the 11 precious babies born at Christie in 2023.



2023 Shelter Statistics

of individuals served

167

of families served

94

Top countries of origin

**Kenya, Colombia,
Mexico, Nigeria**

Percentage of new families who were female-headed single parent families

58%

Percentage of newly admitted who were children (0-17 yrs old)

44%

82% were between the ages of 0-12 years

18% were between the ages of 13-17 years

Average number of days in shelter

145

days or almost 5 months

Total number of source countries

24

of children served by the After-School Children's Program

40

of patients seen by Christie's on-site clinic

272

of appointments held at Christie's on-site clinic

1187

of Women's Wellness Program sessions

24

of individuals assisted to register in ESL classes

45

of walk-in families supported to find alternate shelter space

47

Average time spent by staff with a walk-in family looking for shelter space

**3-4
hours**

of pregnant women supported

13

Number of babies born at Christie

11

*Average daily occupancy rate

93%

Average daily number of in-house residents

70

Average number of new residents admitted per month

14

of families reunified

8

*Daily occupancy rate is defined as a daily snapshot of the percentage of occupied beds at the shelter

A Shelter Client's story

Joan arrived to Christie with her two young sons, aged 6 and 9, two days after arriving to Canada from Kenya in September 2023. For two nights, the family bounced between the airport, public transit, and more before finding themselves at Christie.

Joan's family was one of many who spent time sleeping in Christie's Dining Room this summer during a tumultuous time when the City of Toronto's shelter system could not keep pace with the numbers of unhoused arriving asylum seekers needing emergency shelter.

When Joan arrived to Christie, the shelter was at full capacity and the best staff could do was temporarily provide the family with mattresses in Christie's Dining Room where, recently, the shelter had installed a sliding partition for walk-in families needing to use the space overnight until other sleeping options presented themselves. When families looking for emergency shelter spend a night sleeping in Christie's Dining Room, mattresses are set up on the floor, linens are provided and both the families and staff pray that continued calls to the City of Toronto's homelessness referral centre (Central Intake) will yield an available shelter space somewhere in the City or beyond.



A rare sight: an empty room at Christie

"I'm so thankful to the evening staff at Christie that night who took us in," explains Joan.

"They're the ones who opened the door to us that night when we arrived, making the decision to accommodate us and not turn us back to Central Intake."

Luckily the next day a space had opened up at Christie and the family was admitted to the Centre. Joan's children joined the Centre's After-School Children's Program the very same day, a relief to Joan who wasn't even sure if her children would be allowed to attend school after arriving in Canada.

Thankfully, Christie staff allayed these and other of Joan's concerns. The children were registered in a nearby school, helped her get set up with winter clothes, and understand the immigration process. She participated in the Centre's Women's Wellness Program, was connected to an on-site doctor, and her children got to see a dentist for the first time in many months.

"The housing support has been so important," explained Joan whose Housing Worker connected her to a lifeline: a rental agent who understood the housing benefits available to families living in shelter and had a soft spot for the families at Christie.

"That connection [to the rental agent] made my housing search a breeze. I only saw two places and settled on the second one. [My Housing Worker] and the rental agent received all the no's [from landlords] on my behalf. It was invaluable."

Joan and her two boys spent almost six months at Christie. Today, they are settling in well into their permanent housing.

"The boys are happy to sit and watch cartoons. We have a small backyard. It snowed last week and the boys could play in the snow."

In our Kitchen

Summary

Food is deeply personal; connecting each of us to home, our families, our culture, and our memories.

This easily explains why our food services and shelter support staff truly are at the heart of the work of Christie Refugee Welcome Centre. Providing three meals a day to around 75 residents from around the world is no easy task.

Christie's hard-working food services team of 11 staff led by Kitchen Supervisor, Maria de Guzman, describe 2023 as a year of creativity.

Creativity was first invoked when, in early 2023, the team developed a brunch menu for residents on Saturday and Sunday mornings, rolling breakfast and lunch service into one and allowing families a later (10:30am) and more relaxed mealtime on weekend mornings. The change came after many families admitted they and their children were skipping breakfast on the weekend due to the previously earlier scheduled (8:00am) start.

School lunches are also meticulously packed and provided to each child and school-attending youth by kitchen staff; over 20 lunches are packed and provided every weekday. After staff discovered many children were not liking nor eating the snacks packed in their lunch bags, kitchen staff made the decision to give children a choice in the matter. Every weekday morning, an assortment of snacks are laid out for children and youth to choose from to include in their packed lunch bags. A creative win! Children are excited to have a choice in the foods they eat and it has afforded the kitchen budget less food waste.

Dedicated staff are essential everywhere, but they have been especially essential in Christie's food services operations at a time when, in late November, Christie had six pregnant women living in-house. Providing extra nutritious and protein-rich meals, responding to expecting mothers' cravings (millet, fried chicken), and

delivering boiled hot water to clients in their rooms (to those new mothers who recently gave birth and cannot shower post-delivery) has placed extra demands on a small team.

Most impactfully, creativity was summoned by Christie's food services team when it came to its food budget. Food in 2023 was expensive: for individuals, families, businesses and of course, shelter kitchens. Christie was no different.

"We used to get a box of 36 burgers for \$32 and now it's \$59," *explains Maria de Guzman, Christie's former Kitchen Supervisor.*

"Some food items increased by 100% in 2023 and so we had to make do with our budget and continue to be very creative," *de Guzman admits, explaining how food had to be creatively stored to extend shelf life or how donors began providing snack items.*

"We relied heavily on donor agencies like Daily Bread Food Bank for halal chicken, eggs, and yogurt. We relied on Second Harvest, Free Church and Hunter Coffee Shop for our snacks donations on weekends," *says de Guzman.*

De Guzman confirms this meant savings as these items no longer needed to be purchased from a limited budget. Second Harvest also kindly provided packed lunches to all school-aged children during the summer.

"And we had to be creative with how we accepted and stored donations. Whatever we received had to be repackaged by myself and staff to accommodate our smaller fridges and freezers," *she says, admitting the team did not want to waste a single product.*

Thanks to our generous food partners Daily Bread Food Bank, Second Harvest, and others who helped ensure Christie families were served healthy, delicious and culturally appropriate meals every day.

2023 Food Services Statistics

Pounds (lbs) of food received from
Second Harvest in 2023

19,000

Average number of meals
served per day

141



Our Food Services team serves three meals to 75 residents, including over 30 children, every day.



During Black History Month, we served ugali to celebrate the many East African families living at Christie.



A warm thank you (and thumbs up!) from our Food Services team for the brand new IKEA kitchenware brought to us by a community member. With Christie Refugee Welcome Centre providing many meals per day, kitchenware is apt to break or go missing.



Food Services team members with a valued fresh fruit donation.

Providing Basic Needs

Summary

Addressing basic needs is integral to the dignified support offered by Christie to the refugee claimant families we serve.

New families who move into the shelter are often not yet enrolled on social assistance (an emergency financial support program called Ontario Works) and upon arrival at Christie will be without income, requiring basic needs items like hygiene products for personal care or Presto Cards to travel to important appointments. On average, a family new to Christie will be without income or emergency financial assistance for at least 3-4 weeks. During this time, Christie staff will support them with their basic needs.

Thanks to our generous basic needs donors, the shelter team has continued to be able to provide children and families with the basic needs they require in their first few weeks at the Centre. This support includes welcome packages for all newly admitted families, warm winter clothing, and assistance with transportation in the form of Presto Cards and taxi vouchers for expecting mothers, families with newborns, and families moving out.

Given the high number of pregnant moms and newborns supported by Christie this year, providing for families' basic needs has involved an increase in the number of new moms and families offered emergency financial assistance. Emergency financial assistance can help pay for the costs of anything from baby clothing to birth certificates to medication. Thanks to our generous donors and donations-in-kind, the shelter team was able to meet this year's high demand for diapers, baby formula, and other basic needs items for pregnant women and babies.

Our Outreach team was able to continue to offer gift cards and new shopping carts to each and every family who moved out of Christie in 2023. Diapers, Presto Cards, kitchenware, and personal care/hygiene products were also regularly offered to families who had moved out of the Centre and required continued support with their basic needs.

Through their Emergency Support Fund, the Centre for Refugee Children, which assists separated and unaccompanied refugee children and youth across Ontario, continued to provide unaccompanied refugee children and youth with access to emergency funds for basic needs like food, transportation, winter clothing and permanent residence applications, when applicable. In addition, the Centre continued to work to provide young people with basic needs items like gift cards, school supplies, hygiene products, and laptops.

In September, The Centre for Refugee Children held a film screening of the film *The Cost of Freedom: Refugee Journalists in Canada*. The event raised over \$2,000 for basic needs items for Christie residents and the children directly supported by the Centre for Refugee Children.

We thank our generous donors including the Ontario Trillium Foundation Resilient Communities Fund and the United Way African Resettlement Emergency Fund who helped to ensure refugee claimant families living at Christie Refugee Welcome Centre were provided essential basic needs items this year.

2023 Basic Needs Statistics

#of Back-to-School Backpacks (filled with school supplies) issued to children living in shelter, children who moved out within the last year, and unaccompanied and separated children supported by the Centre for Refugee Children

over
140

#of welcome packages issued to new families arriving to the shelter

over
68

#of welcome packages issued to families moving out of the shelter

55

#of new baby baskets issued

11

#of taxi vouchers issued

over
200



Home items provided to unaccompanied and separated children moving into their first home in Canada.



Children's winter jackets hang in Christie's Donation Room.



Baby baskets provided to all new moms.



Welcome Baskets. Each new family admitted to Christie receives a Welcome Basket containing basic hygiene and personal care items.

Housing Services

Summary

For families living in shelters across Toronto, including families at Christie, 2023 was an especially trying year for securing permanent housing given the inconsistency of the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB), a portable housing benefit, for use across Ontario, to help families living in shelters bridge the gap between the housing costs they can afford and market rates, up to a maximum amount. The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit has been essential for families living at Christie to be able to afford soaring rents.

When the housing subsidy was first introduced in 2022, families living at Christie immediately felt its impact:

- **March 2022:** ten families were able to move out of Christie
- **September 2022:** eleven families were able to move out
- **February and March, 2023:** eight families moved out each month.

These families had all been living at Christie for over three months, and COHB gave them access to the Ontario housing market.

However, in May of 2023, COHB came to a sudden halt, paused indefinitely, as funds for the program dried up quicker than expected. The program eventually recommenced in September 2023.

The inconsistency of the program has been one of the greatest challenges families living at Christie have faced in their housing search.

Aside from language barriers, lack of permanent residence status, illegal discrimination and documentation asks from landlords, the added fluctuation of COHB this year has compounded to make the search for housing almost insurmountable for Christie's refugee claimant families.

The result? In 2023, one family spent over 400 days at Christie and the average length of stay for families admitted to Christie remained at over five months.

Yemi* and her teenage daughter spent nine months living at Christie before securing housing.

The family of two, originally Ethiopian, made their way to Canada via Greece, arriving at Christie in February 2023. After nine months at Christie, they were one of 14 families who moved out during Christie's mass exodus of October 2023, following the recommencement of COHB.

“Calling [landlords] and making housing appointments was very difficult for me ... with the language barrier I had,” *explains Yemi* who, like many Christie families, ended up finding private-market rental housing only after she gained the language skills and confidence to be able to communicate with landlords.

But even after Yemi accomplished these two enormous feats – learning English and gaining the self-assurance to be able to communicate with intimidating landlords – she still found that most landlords did not know about COHB processes or its benefit to landlords. Worse yet, they had not even heard about the program.

The housing staff at Christie stepped in and assisted her, speaking to landlords on Yemi's behalf about COHB, its process and its benefits to landlords. For Yemi and for most families, Christie staff take care of the COHB application process, first and last month rent deposits, tenancy agreements and the all too important communication and advocacy with landlords.

“Thanks to Christie, I have a home, I am attending classes, my daughter is in school and attending boxing classes, and every Friday I volunteer. Christie has done a lot of good to me and other families.”

“We have a good life here now and we are very happy,” *explains Yemi from her new home in Toronto.*

*names have been changed

2023 Housing Statistics

Average length of stay in shelter

145 days
(approximately 5 months)

Average number of move outs
per month

5

July to August 2023 saw

1 move-out

October 2023 saw

14 move-outs

Longest stay in shelter

408 days

Shortest stay in shelter

29 days



Christie's After-School Children's Program

Summary

Christie's After-School Children's Program offers a safe place for children aged 6-12 living at the shelter to be children. The program runs five days a week, including on Saturday mornings, and includes a variety of programming from music to literacy to fitness, STEM, arts and activities encouraging healthy social communication. March Break offers a five day all-day March Break camp and summers offer a full-day Summer Camp for the children.

Our motto for all programming: Is it fun? Is it fair? Is it safe? Is it inclusive?

In 2023, the Children's Program had a chance to begin a homework help club with medical students from the University of Toronto. Thanks to generous funders, we were also able to begin regularly offering (healthy!) snacks at the After-School Children's Program in addition to recommencing monthly field trips for the group – a monthly highlight for the children.

Fields trips in 2023 included outings to the Royal Ontario Museum, Nathan Philips Square for ice-skating (most children had never skated in their life!), and indoor and outdoor adventure playgrounds. In September, we had the honour of observing and learning about National Day for Truth and Reconciliation alongside Indigenous families and children at a communal pow wow held at Dufferin Grove Park.

The Children's Music Program featured Jamaican pan drums, Djembe, bongos, ukuleles, recorders, piano, and vocals in 2023, while continuing to impart the fundamentals of music including rhythm, melody, and harmony. Different languages in song were highlighted (Spanish!), and the group heavily leaned into dance and choreography in

response to a deep interest in both as shared by the children. For Black History month, the Children's Music Program featured a number of musicians from Aretha Franklin to Beyonce.

This year, the Children's Program continued to partner with the PowerPlant Art Gallery and the Toronto Public Library for regular March Break and Summer Camp programming. We performed at the O'Neil Seniors Centre once again and we continued our partnership with IBBY's Reading with Newcomer Children Program. Following the musical performance for seniors living at the O'Neil Seniors Centre, Children's Program staff took the time to recognize and congratulate each child for their contribution to the community, providing a certificate of accomplishment and hosting a small awards ceremony.

We have centred celebrating children this year! We host pizza parties for children moving out and children celebrating birthdays. Once per month, staff host Kids Choice Nights, offering the children a chance to determine programming and take on the role of teacher, leading and teaching one another their talents and skills.

Christie's After-School Children's Program is generously supported by the United Way of Greater Toronto, and additionally by the Gay Lea Foundation and the Kiwanis Club of Toronto Foundation. We are grateful to the Canada Summer Jobs Program for their generous staff funding during the summer months.

Our partners in programming include the IBBY Reading Program, PowerPlant Art Gallery, and the Toronto Public Library. Thanks to our varied and generous volunteers and donors.

2023 Children's Program Statistics

#of total participating children in 2023

40

Average age of child

8.5



Painting is a regular favourite activity.



Halloween preparations!



Snack table!



Christie observing National Truth and Reconciliation Day



Selling homemade lemonade this summer at Christie Pits Park. The group spent their earnings at Dollarama and gifted some of their proceeds to the Ronald McDonald House.



Performance at the O'Neil Senior's Centre for Valentine's Day



Liam's Sports Equipment Bank donated all of our sporting equipment this year.

Continuing to Work with Families in Outreach

Summary

After moving out from Christie, Isabella Garcia* and her family – like too many others – found themselves stuck without a lawyer to further their refugee claim.

Christie's Outreach team, whose mandate is to continue to support Christie residents in their settlement after they move out from the shelter, confirms that in 2023 disappearing lawyers has been a commonplace occurrence for refugee families trying to move forward in their settlement. Outreach staff imagine that due to wage discrepancies, many lawyers are leaving the refugee law sector and beginning or returning to the more profitable private sector.

“The lawyer that had our case closed [as] she’s not working as an immigration lawyer any longer. We have to look for a different lawyer,” explains *Isabella*, who with her husband and two teenage sons fled their home country after violent gangs threatened the family's lives, including kidnapping one of her sons for a period of time.

The family arrived to Christie between late 2022 and early 2023; first Isabella's husband, then her eldest teenage son who travelled to Canada alone, then Isabella and her younger teenage son followed. The family lived at Christie for eight months.

A lot of good has come since their move out from the shelter. Outreach staff helped the boys explore continuing education opportunities and Isabella even secured a job in her desired field of hospitality with help from Christie's Employment program. But the immigration piece remained unresolved.

“We tried to request Legal Aid,” explains *Isabella*, **“but they say that we don't qualify according to the [income] threshold that they have. Now we have to pay a private lawyer. But I am the only one working,”** she says, *bewildered*.

The family is grateful for the continued support of Christie's Outreach team who are working to find them a lawyer. Outreach staff have also provided the family with an invaluable income tax appointment, helping Isabella file taxes in Canada for the first time.

This year, Outreach helped a record 195 clients file their taxes. Filing taxes is instrumental for former Christie residents. Staff educate families about the tax benefits they might qualify for, introduce them to mandatory civic duties and financial literacy concepts. The tax clinic offered this year in partnership with accountants from Catholic Cross-Cultural Services, has also been significant in pre-emptively resolving future issues refugee families' might encounter as they renew daycare subsidies, housing subsidies, Legal Aid and navigate other social service applications, processes and programs that rely on an income tax return.

In 2023, the Outreach team also worked tirelessly to connect refugee claimants with a family doctor, an almost impossible task for anyone in the province of Ontario.

While families live at Christie, they are supported by Christie's on-site health clinic and can see a family doctor most days of the week. However, once families have moved out, that vital healthcare service comes to an end. Outreach staff report that in 2023 most families who've moved out from the shelter have had to be referred to walk-in clinics for ongoing healthcare.

Isabella's sons are exploring post-secondary options and it's another unique service the Outreach team provides to refugee claim families as they support families' continued settlement. Staff assist youth with researching their post-secondary options, completing admissions applications, and identifying relevant post-secondary loan applications or grants to fund their prospective studies.



Some of the Outreach team during World Refugee Day.

The Outreach team has received generous funding this year from the Ontario Trillium Foundation's Resilient Communities Fund and was able to hire a Mental Health Coordinator to develop a mental health strategy for Christie clients and staff.

The work has involved providing Christie staff with mental health training throughout the year. The work has also provided mental health resources and referrals for Christie's refugee claimant clients. Looking at what better ways refugee claimant families' mental health can be supported as they move into the community is essential for a group with an elevated risk of experiencing mental health challenges because of their exposure to war, violence, torture and forced migration – many traumas which Isabella's family knows all too well.

2023 Outreach Statistics

of new clients served in 2023

132

Total # of clients served in 2023

325

Welcome Packages provided

55

Total # of consultations provided (in-person, email, virtual, telephone):

325

% of all new Outreach clients who remained in permanent, independent housing

100%

of clients served at income tax clinic

195

She is thankful for the seemingly small things the Outreach team did to support her and her family's mental health.

"They gave us gift cards from Walmart and Loblaws. We were able to provide food for the children... that was a big help to receive that financial support with those gift cards," says Isabella, explaining the gift cards allowed her to take her mind off worrying about being able to afford groceries the first few weeks upon moving out.

A new Basic Needs Coordinator position, another addition to the Outreach team in 2023 thanks to generous funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, has helped ensure refugee families who have moved out from Christie have the basic needs (through donations) required to be able to live independently and with dignity. In this way, the Basic Needs Coordinator also weaves its influence on addressing refugee mental health. When refugee families can be supported – even just for a little while – with things like school supplies, gift cards, diapers, or formula, it takes some burden off families working through traumas (both past and present) compounding in their lives.

Christie's Outreach team is thankful for funding from the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Social Development for continuing to support their work, this year and beyond.

*names have been changed

Maya's Story

Summary

Maya* arrived to Christie six weeks before giving birth to her first child. She was one of seven pregnant women who arrived to Christie between late October and December 2023, after having cycled through churches, the Red Cross, and drop-in centres for many months.

“Before I arrived to Christie, my biggest problem was a place to stay,” *explains Maya* who arrived to Canada at the end of May, pregnant and alone, and spent the summer unable to find a shelter space, spending days at a time at various drop-in centres.

“[Staff at the drop-in centres] were telling me not to come here anymore, [saying] it’s not safe for me because at that time I was 24 weeks pregnant and my back hurt, my feet were swollen because of the heat, it was summertime,” *recalls Maya.*

Eventually Maya was taken in by a church who referred her to the Red Cross First Contact Program, a 24/7 information and referral service for newly arriving refugee claimants. Eventually, Red Cross First Contact made the connection for Maya to an available room at Christie Refugee Welcome Centre.

After six weeks at Christie, Maya gave birth to her first child, a healthy baby boy named Jack*. Maya, who is a critical care/ICU pediatrician back home in her native Ethiopia, describes how the support she received at Christie was unlike anything she’d ever witnessed.

“Everything that I could think of, I received [at Christie]. I had shelter ... I had a family setting where I [could] deliver my baby, meal services, clothing for my baby and for myself, milk, and [on-site] medical services.”

Maya explains that one of the most cherished services she received from Christie staff were the taxi vouchers. Taxi vouchers are offered by shelter staff to pregnant women and mothers with newborns to get to and from important medical, immigration, and settlement-related appointments.

“Oh my goodness, [the taxi vouchers] were a big relief because as I was reaching full-term it was difficult for me to move. It would take me hours to get to my appointments. I couldn’t believe it when they told me that they provide [the taxi],” *she laughs.*

Maya also recounts the important immigration and housing services Christie staff provided, noting that her housing search was made considerably easier thanks to Christie staff strategically preparing her with detailed housing orientations and the necessary housing search documentation before her delivery.

Two weeks post-delivery, Maya began her housing search and four weeks later she secured a rental apartment. A testament to the support of Christie staff and an essential housing subsidy in part, but more significantly a testament to Maya’s hard work and determination to continuously move forward in her settlement.

After moving out from Christie, Maya was connected to the post-shelter Outreach Department where she was assisted with retaining her housing subsidy, getting set up with furniture, finding a family doctor, preparing for her refugee hearing in front of the Immigration and Refugee Board and – just as meaningfully – connecting to a community of mothers with newborns in her neighbourhood.

“I have never seen anything like this,” *admits Maya.*

“I’m a doctor and I’ve seen so many social programs but I have never seen anything packaged in such a way,” *she describes* of the wrap-around support she received at Christie.

“How beautiful it is.”

*names have been changed



Maya with her beautiful baby boy, Jack, a few weeks after moving out from Christie.

Centre for Refugee Children

Summary

Every year, a few hundred children and youth arrive to Canada alone and seeking refugee protection. As part of the 140,000+ individuals who sought refugee protection in Canada in 2023, the numbers of unaccompanied minors seeking protection in Canada too is growing.

The Centre for Refugee Children, a specialized program within Christie Refugee Welcome Centre since 2021, has continued to provide immigration and settlement support to children alone in Ontario who are navigating the refugee claim process. The majority of unaccompanied refugee children the Centre works with are **15-17 years old**. These vulnerable young people rely on the support of the Centre for assistance with making their refugee claims, addressing basic needs, registering in school, finding housing, and more.

In 2023, **104 newly arrived unaccompanied children** were served by the Centre for Refugee Children. Aside from intensive case management support, in 2023 the Centre continued operating its Child Representative Program wherein staff and trained volunteers support unaccompanied children through the refugee claim process. This past year, the program participated in **55** admissibility hearings with unaccompanied youth, and the Centre for Refugee Children staff supported dozens of children and youth with their refugee claim process.

In 2023, the Centre for Refugee Children welcomed a vital Housing Worker role to its team. Given the lack of affordable housing, transitional housing beds, and youth shelter spaces across Ontario, it can take several months for an unaccompanied refugee child/youth to be housed (depending on their age and circumstances, most refugee children who arrive to Canada alone are either placed in foster care upon arrival or with community members from their native country). The Centre's Housing Worker is

critical in helping young people move out of foster care and precarious housing situations and into housing that is safe, comfortable, and appropriate for the needs of the young person. Youth may be moved into transitional housing, private market housing or to emergency shelters and refugee houses where a long-term housing plan can continue to be supported.

This was the case for two young boys from Afghanistan, aged 16 and 17, who reached out to the Centre for Refugee Children separately in late 2023. Both boys were in Montreal, and both had been placed in foster homes upon their arrival to Canada. Wanting to relocate to Toronto, the Centre for Refugee Children found the boys a room to share in a youth shelter. The boys, who had never met, travelled together, moved into the youth shelter in Toronto together and built a foundational friendship – leaning on each another to navigate a new city, improve their English, start school and look for work. The housing secured for them by the Centre for Refugee Children addressed their vital shelter needs and in doing so, gently began building their new community.

In 2023, the Centre for Refugee Children also launched a virtual Info Hub for unaccompanied refugee children and youth – an online resource for unaccompanied youth containing information about immigration processes, refugee claims, school, housing, mental health, work permits and more in simple and easy to understand child-friendly language. A Youth Leadership Committee, consisting of unaccompanied and separated refugee youth, consulted on the resource along the way. These child and youth-friendly resources can now be accessed by children, youth and their support networks: www.crcrefugee.ca/info-hub.



To close 2023, the Centre for Refugee Children celebrated a major advocacy win: the Immigration and Refugee Board would begin a pilot program that would see elements of the refugee claim process that currently take place in-person replaced with paper-based processes. The idea, proposed by the Centre for Refugee Children, would replace intimidating in-person interviews with paper-based processes, removing an element of stress and anxiety for vulnerable young people, while still ensuring that unaccompanied children and youth can access the support and guidance from CRC staff. The pilot will begin in January 2024 over a period of six months in Ontario for unaccompanied refugee minors going through the refugee claim process. This is a meaningful change for vulnerable young people already facing unimaginable stressors, who will now have one less intimidating interview in front of immigration officials to fear.

The Centre for Refugee Children is made possible through generous grants from the Law Foundation of Ontario, Rotary Club of Toronto, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Unifor Social Justice Fund, World Education Services—Mariam Assefa Fund, Catherine and Maxwell Meighen Foundation, Gordon and Ruth Gooder Charitable Foundation, Hodgson Family Foundation, Tippet Foundation, and Home Depot Foundation.

The Centre for Refugee Children is grateful for its community partners in 2023, including FCJ Refugee Centre, Downtown Legal Services, Collective of Child Welfare Survivors, and the Ontario Coalition of Service Providers for Refugees.

2023 Centre for Refugee Children Statistics

Top countries of origin for CRC youth served

Turkey, Mexico, Colombia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Nigeria and Iran

104

unaccompanied and separated children completed an intake with CRC

Since November 2022, the Centre for Refugee Children has facilitated the reunification of

22

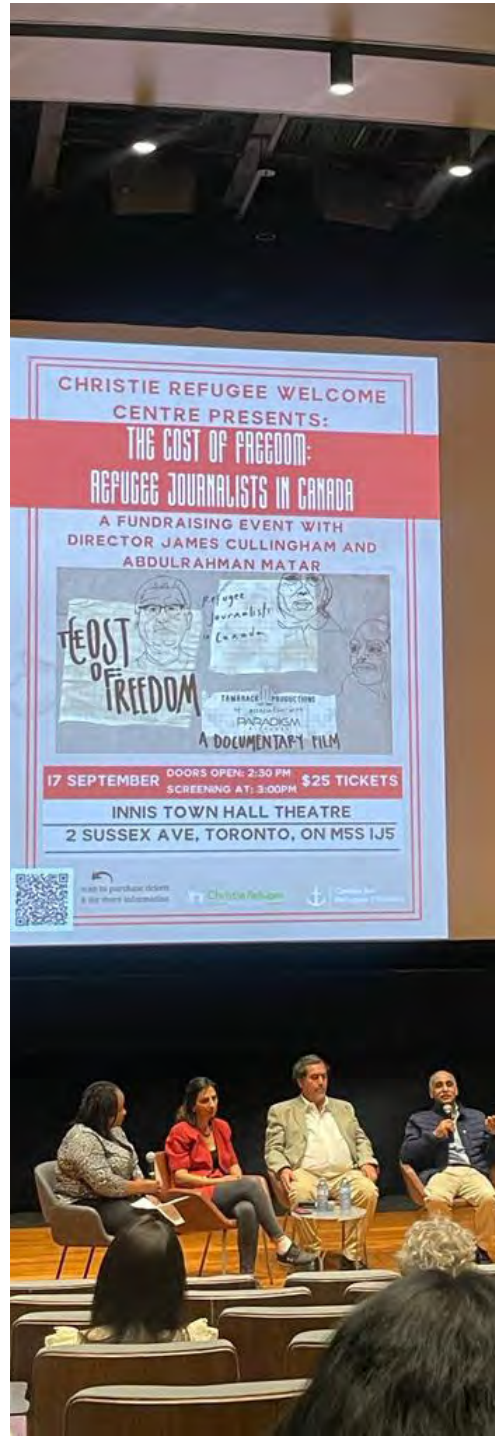
children held in US Federal Custody with their family members in Canada



The Centre for Refugee Children staff team.



CRC's Youth Leadership Committee



During CRC's film fundraiser screening of "The Cost of Freedom" with filmmaker James Cullingham and journalist Abdulrahman Matar

2023 Programming in Pictures



Women's Wellness Program's Fall session



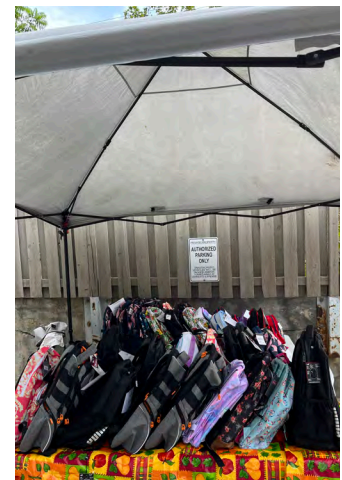
Staff before the begin of Christie's Multicultural Day celebrations, where families provide samples of food from their home country for all to taste and try.



Canada Day celebrations



Children's Program March Break programming with the PowerPlant Art Gallery



Back to School backpacks provided by the Outreach program



Christie's Housing staff organized a community basketball tournament



Back to School BBQ for shelter residents



Women's Wellness Program's spring session

RIDE for Refuge

Summary

Every fall, Christie participates in The Ride for Refuge, a family-friendly fundraising bike + walk in support of local charities serving refugees seeking hope, safety, and freedom.

This year, Christie Refugee Welcome Centre's RIDE for Refuge raised an astounding \$158,143 thanks to our very generous and enthusiastic supporters including the Flynn Group of Companies, FreeChurch Toronto, North Toronto Chinese Alliance Church and Christie Refugee Welcome Centre staff.

Mason Di Pierdomenico, who was a member of the Flynn Group of Companies team raising funds for Christie's RIDE campaign, alone raised well over \$20,000 through a combination of fundraising events, silent auctions, and private donations.

"I've strived to raise money by having a lot of people contribute just a little bit," *Di Pierdomenico shared* last fall about his more

than 260 generous donors who collectively helped him raise well over \$20,000 for Christie Refugee Welcome Centre.

"Refugee centres are key to integration and are so important in Toronto because... they provide refugee-specific support. Currently, 30% of shelter users are refugees," *says Di Pierdomenico* about why he fundraised with RIDE for Refuge in support of Christie Refugee Welcome Centre.

Christie staff also fundraised for RIDE for Refuge, participating in a walk around Christie Pits Park followed by a community barbecue with the residents of Christie. The staff team raised close to \$2000.

We thank all those who generously donated their time and funds to our 2023 RIDE for Refuge campaign. Save the date! The 2024 Ride for Refuge takes place on October 1, 2024.



FreeChurch Toronto RIDE for Refuge participants on RIDE day



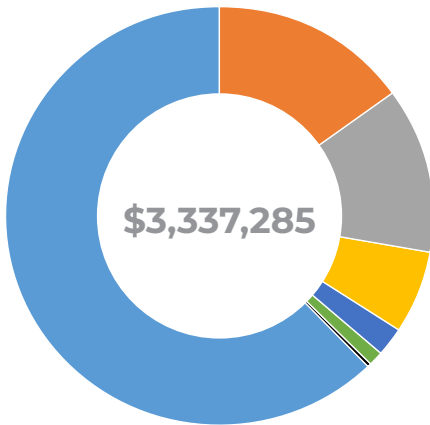
Flynn Group of Companies on RIDE day










Christie staff on RIDE day, ready to BBQ together with residents

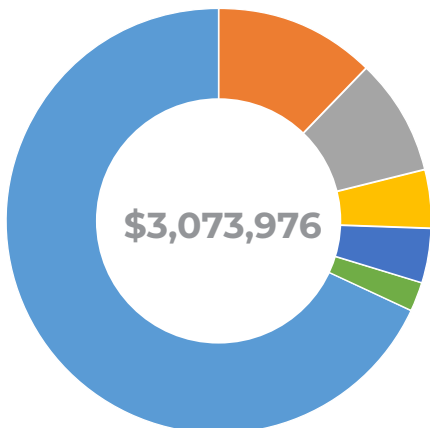
Financials







2023 Revenue



 City of Toronto \$2,071,619 62.1%	 Government of Ontario \$508,906 15.2%	 Grants \$424,051 12.7%
 Donations \$211,264 6.3%	 Amortization of deferred capital contributions \$73,978 2.2%	
 Interest & other income \$38,332 1.1%	 Government of Canada \$9,134 0.3%	

2023 Expenses



 Staffing \$2,087,859 67.9%	 Food & Client Care \$379,527 12.3%
 Facilities \$271,947 8.8%	 Depreciation of capital assets \$141,779 4.6%
 Operations \$129,773 4.2%	 Administration \$63,092 2.1%



A hibiscus blooms in Christie's community garden, a project funded by Landscape Ontario.



Staff from TriCon Residential participate in a corporate volunteer project at Christie, painting and sprucing up out resident hallways.

Christie Refugee Welcome Centre Board Members

Alex Sancton
Chair

Peter Hopkins
Treasurer

Helton Achaye

Stephen Gordon

Taya Cook
Vice-Chair

Tracy McManus
Secretary

Bruce Cameron

Charity Kabango-Lowe

Mission Statement

We are a Christian organization serving and advocating for refugee families by providing safe, temporary housing, initial settlement services, and follow-up support. We influence and engage the broader public through education and advocacy networks.

Core Values

Christian

Motivated by our Christian faith and responding to God's call to pursue justice and offer compassion, we welcome and shelter refugees, offer hope and dignity and act with integrity in all our endeavours.

Dignity & Respect

We respect and engage refugees as full participants in our programs and services. We are intentional in creating and building a fair and supportive community that offers a sense of belonging, embraces cultural diversity, respects each person's individual journey, and celebrates the capacity to survive and thrive.

Advocates

We advocate for equitable access and fair treatment of refugees. We promote just, public policies that protect the rights of refugees.

Partnering

We work with governmental and non-governmental organizations, churches, corporations and individuals to provide better access to resources and services.

With our partners we exchange knowledge and resources that increase understanding and build mutually beneficial, sustainable partnerships.

Resilient

We respond to the unique needs of the ever-changing refugee populations who come through the Centre. We are resilient and adaptive to the changing environment, both within the broader Canadian culture and within the refugee community.

Children & Families

We value families and support family reunification. With our belief that that individuals are best supported and thrive in a healthy family environment, our housing complex supports the family by providing units that allow families to dwell together and build community rather than institutional settings.



43 Christie Street
Toronto, ON M6G 3B1



416-588-9277

**Want to volunteer with us? Email us at
volunteer@christiestretrc.com**