

ANNUAL REPORT



2024

LEADERSHIP REPORT



Manny Wong
Executive Director



Bruce Cameron
Board Chair

Christie Refugee Welcome Centre is now in its 35th year of service and we are proud of the impact that's been made on thousands of refugee families over that time. There has always been an ebb and flow to the number of refugees passing through our doors but in 2024, the number of asylum claims in Canada set another record. Other issues like the lack of affordable housing and the suspension of the rent subsidy program for the homeless has had a major impact on the work at Christie. Our clients are now staying longer (as our cover page family depicts) and this affects our clients in that they feel they are not moving forward and are stuck in neutral. It causes fear, anxiety and frustration.

Christie's staff have risen to the challenge and implemented several new initiatives to accommodate this change. Creativity and perseverance have been the driving forces in implementing new youth programming, conducting field trips in and around Toronto, expanding employment supports and introducing more social events at the Centre. The staff have met every resident's needs with empathy and thoughtfulness, while remaining focused on the best possible outcomes for our refugee families. We remain laser-focused on housing and settlement for refugees and continue to refine our service model, hence optimizing overall impact.

While our buildings are the "shelters," it has always been and always will be, the compassion and energy of our team that provides a "home." Creating a sense of home is the beating heart of Christie. Our staff brings life and love to something that would otherwise be static. In another year of record refugee numbers, Christie's staff have exemplified dedicated client-centred service.

There are many people to thank who have helped further the work of Christie. Over these last 35 years, many staff and volunteers have cared for our clients. In this Annual Report you can hear from Linda Tripp and World Vision's role in establishing Christie. This work we do would not be possible without all of the volunteers, donors, foundations and partners who have so generously donated funds and services to Christie.

We are pleased to report that in February 2025 the Centre for Refugee Children opened Anchor House. This is the first emergency home for unaccompanied and separated refugee youth in Canada. We are so excited for the Centre for Refugee Children to further expand its services to now include a refugee house for 12 unaccompanied refugee youth. Christie has also been in conversation with the City of Toronto with the aim of partnering to open additional accommodations for refugees. Lastly, feasibility studies have been completed as we look ahead to the redevelopment of our property, which will enable us to expand the number of beds available and introduce transitional housing for refugee claimant families.

Thank you for taking the time to read our Annual Report. We couldn't do this without the support and generosity of so many who volunteer and those who support us financially. Please spread the news to others so that together we can realize our goals and continue this important work.

Sincerely,

Bruce Cameron, Board Chair
Manny Wong, Executive Director

AT THE SHELTER



A rare sight at Christie: an empty room.

In 2024, with the highest numbers of refugee claimants to Canada ever recorded (171,900), and more than half of all claims (90,110) received in Ontario, the number of refugee claimants arriving to Toronto in need of emergency shelter remained high.

Christie Refugee Welcome Centre continued to play a key role in keeping refugee claimant families safe, housed, and with access to vital settlement services. **In 2024, 50 families or 127 individuals passed through Christie's doors seeking a place of welcome, safety, and support.**

Upon arriving at Christie, refugee families are welcomed with key, on-site services including support with their refugee claims, assistance with school registration, connections to healthcare and social services, provisions of basic needs and Presto cards, and referrals to recreation programs, language classes, financial assistance and more. Christie's shelter staff begin supporting

families with their housing search as soon as possible, very shortly after arrival, ensuring families can quickly get started with the challenging process of securing permanent housing in one of Canada's most difficult housing markets.

Onsite services such as three healthy meals and snacks per day, our after-school Children's Program, a health clinic, employment support, a Women's Wellness Program, various special events, and support after moving out (via our Outreach Program) are additionally provided to all families.

This year, Christie's staff team particularly felt the impact of the inconsistent availability of the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit. The portable housing benefit, which assists families living in emergency shelters with rental costs in the private housing market, was available at the begin of 2024, suspended throughout the summer, then re-instated again in the Fall, albeit with a different format and restrictions. Before it's suspension in early 2024, the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit helped four Christie families per month to move out. After its reinstatement in Fall 2024, the program could only help two families per month to move out.



Young people having fun at Friday night youth programming.

As a result, this volatility has greatly hindered families from quickly moving out of Christie and as a result, in 2024, the average length of stay increased to **6 months**. This has impacted all aspects of Christie Refugee Welcome Centre's departments and capacities.

For the shelter team, core services needed to be expanded. To respond to families' longer stays, shelter staff regularly pivoted to provide on-site programming and events, doing their best to keep families motivated, occupied and engaged. Weekly parenting workshops, after-school homework help, Friday night youth programs, resident ping pong tournaments, and community garden programs were newly formed. During warmer months, shelter staff engaged residents by hosting several new outdoor events - from Canada Day celebrations to Multiculturalism Day gatherings and Wednesday afternoon BBQs.

With a housing benefit not reliably available to most families living at Christie in 2024, employment became the key pathway out of shelter and into permanent housing. Our on-site Employment Program ramped up services to help connect families ready and willing to work with employment. This included developing the *Career Entry Pathway Program*, a pilot program for Black youth living at Christie that connected them with employers and meaningful employment trainings.

Families living at Christie for an average of six months has also had a significant impact on Christie's maintenance resources and projects. In 2024, preventative maintenance plans were implemented by Christie's maintenance team so that mattresses, dressers, and wardrobes in rooms were regularly repaired and/or replaced due to increased wear and tear. Mini fridges were also bought and placed in each resident room to make families' longer stay in a communal shelter setting more comfortable and dignified.

Finally, 2024 was the first year that the majority of families referred to Christie did not come directly from the airport. For the first time, 2024 saw most families arriving to Christie after having already been in Canada for some time, having lived many months in temporary hotels across the GTA and Ontario. This year, because of the lack of available family shelter



New dressers and mattresses for residents thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

space across Toronto, most families arriving to Christie had spent months waiting in a hotel for an available family shelter space. Finally referred to Christie, the shelter team received refugee families with highly impeded and paused settlement journeys.

While the shelter team has very much felt the impact of families staying at Christie longer, and receiving families who have been in Canada longer, it is the families we have served who have felt this impact most.

Christie's shelter, food and housing services are funded by the City of Toronto. We also gratefully acknowledge additional shelter project support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Ontario REALTORS Care Foundation, Shum Vourkoutiotis Fund at Toronto Foundation, Rod & Betty Wade Endowment Fund, and the Arthur and Audrey Cutten Foundation.



A housing and budgeting workshop for residents.

2024 Shelter Statistics

Individuals served

127

Families served

50

Number of source countries

19

Top countries of origin

**Kenya, Nigeria,
Mexico, Uganda**

Average number of days in shelter

184
days (6 months)

Female-headed single parent families

68%

Children (0-17 yrs old)

48%

Children served by the After-School Children's Program

30

Youth served by Friday night youth programming

20

Current and former residents seen by Christie's on-site health clinic

148

Appointments held at Christie's on-site health clinic

966

Women's Wellness Program sessions offered:

13

Pregnant women supported

5

Babies born at Christie

3

Average number of new residents admitted per month

5

Families reunified

2

Walk-in families supported to find shelter space

26

Average time spent with a walk-in family to secure shelter space

6-7
hours

LIVING LIKE A BIRD; DAMARIS' STORY

It took Damaris five long months to find Christie Refugee Welcome Centre after arriving in Canada.

In five months, Damaris and her young son, bounced between hotel rooms, McDonald's, Good Samaritan's homes, church basements, shelters, and AirBnBs before finally being referred to an available shelter space at Christie Refugee Welcome Centre.

The constant state of motion, the moving, the back and forth was unfortunately nothing new to the family.

"We did a lot of moving when I was going through the things I was going through back home. One day we're here, the next month we're in another place; the longest we stayed anywhere [in Kenya, before leaving for Canada] was three months," remembers Damaris about her endless state of movement in her native Kenya, with her young son –aged four – by her side.

"I was living like a bird," Damaris explains.

Arriving to Pearson International Airport in the Fall of 2023, Damaris paid for three nights at a hotel in Mississauga hoping that after a few days a shelter space in Toronto would soon be available. It wasn't, and with her funds dried up, she and her son found themselves at a bus stop with their suitcases, uncertain where to go or whom to turn to. Her young son hungry, they turned to the McDonald's across the street. A Good Samaritan found them stranded and offered to pay for one night at a hotel. He then connected them to a church where they stayed for a few days after which they were connected to a hotel-turned-family shelter in Scarborough, which accommodated them temporarily.

From there the family was moved to yet another over-capacity shelter where they were provided with temporary camping beds to sleep on the floor for one night. Then they were moved again: this time to another shelter hotel in Vaughan. From there, the family was

finally connected to financial assistance so that they could afford an AirBnB, temporarily, while they continued to await a family shelter space opening. The family lived at the Air BnB for four months before arriving to Christie.

Damaris admits that when she and her son arrived to Christie, this too was a shock.

"Dylan cried for two days saying he wanted to go back home. Then he was not speaking at all. That was hard for me to experience as a mother," explains Damaris, who left two other children back home in Kenya and remembers raising her family in a large house.

"I've come to understand that when you are going through trauma, it also affects kids. We've never experienced homelessness."

Her family's story highlights the world of difference emergency shelter spaces like Christie can have for just one refugee family.

"When I arrived to Christie, submitting my refugee claim was first on my mind," tells Damaris.

At the time, she did not yet have a lawyer for her claim, even after almost half a year in Canada. Her search for emergency shelter had taken priority over her refugee claim.

With the support of Christie's immigration worker, Damaris was connected with a refugee lawyer through Legal Aid Ontario, and corrected the errors in her refugee submission.

Christie's Child and Family Worker connected Damaris' son with Junior Kindergarten so that Damaris could begin volunteering, attending employment trainings and starting to look for work. Damaris quickly found employment thanks to the childcare support.

In April 2024, Damaris even qualified for the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit and started looking for housing but the program was quickly suspended so she refocused her efforts on upskilling and continuing to work.

“[Even without the prospect of housing] I’ve been quite busy. I just finished my Personal Support Worker training and I’m waiting for my placement now. I work on the weekends,” tells Damaris who worked as a gender-based violence activist back in Kenya.

After the flurry of finding childcare for her son, attending employment training, and having found work, Damaris also recognized she needed to be connected with mental health services.

“By the time I came to Christie, I was a broken person.”

Christie’s Child and Family Worker together with Christie’s on-site clinic doctor, Dr. Rashid, connected Damaris to counseling services and in 2024 Damaris made a concerted effort to improve both her mental and physical health.

She got involved with the organization *Colour of Poverty, Colour of Change* and in November 2024, Damaris shared her refugee story in front of an audience of thousands at the *Colour of Poverty, Colour of Change* Provincial Summit, titled *Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty*.

Although Damaris is currently uncertain of her permanent housing prospects, the space, support, and resources to heal is what makes Christie Refugee Welcome Centre more than just a shelter.

“The fact that I am here today and sharing my story; this too is progress.”



Damaris and her son.

IN OUR KITCHEN

The words *adaptation and change* most aptly describe 2024 for Christie's Food Services and Shelter Support team. Like other Christie staff and departments, they have delicately navigated the challenges of working with families living at Christie for longer. With families living at Christie for an average of six months – some, upwards of one year – Christie's Food Services and Shelter Support team has evolved to more regularly meet the changing needs of longer staying residents and their palates.

"One of the challenges we faced this year was that some clients who had stayed longer at the shelter were simply growing tired of the meals," explains Food Services and Weekend Supervisor, Folashade Ajiboye. Ajiboye oversees a team of 12 full-time and part-time staff who help to feed Christie's 76 residents with 148 meals daily.

In 2024, the Food Services team has been finding creative ways to encourage children and families to eat at Christie, much needed in a shelter setting where there is a real loss of independence and freedom that occurs for refugee families who do not have their own kitchens to cook their (cultural) foods. This is due to Christie's set-up with an on-site kitchen, staffed 24 hours, whereby all meals and snacks are provided.

"Many of us with our own homes take for granted the ability to cook our own meals, set the table, and sit together as a family for dinner. For families living at Christie – for six months to over one year – having to eat communal meals and share space can become tiresome and challenging," explains Ajiboye.

And so, in 2024 the Food Services team has responded by offering more regular change in their weekly meal plans in addition to having more offerings of culturally appropriate foods available, reflecting the diverse cultures and countries of origin represented by the families living at Christie.

"Some of the meals we've served this year include jollof rice, jambalaya, ugali, injera, Mexican rice, rice and peas, jerk chicken, cornbread, shawarma and grits. It's not always easy, but we continue to work with the families to ensure that we are meeting their dietary needs," explains Ajiboye.

Food prices in 2024 continue to be expensive and so Christie's Food Services has continued to rely on 20% of its food from donations, including from partner agencies such as Second Harvest and the Daily Bread Food Bank. Second Harvest alone donated upwards of 15,000 pounds of food to Christie in 2024. The dedicated effort to incorporate more culturally-appropriate meals in weekly meal plans has also meant that Christie has faced some challenges sourcing local ethnic foods and ingredients, which can be costly and difficult to find.

Encouraging refugee families to eat meals prepared for them on-site, by implementing a more culturally appropriate menu, also gave the Food Services team an opportunity to develop and implement a food policy this year that reinforced Christie's commitments to its residents and Toronto Shelter and Support Services standards.

The Food Services team is optimistic that although many refugee families will continue to live at Christie for longer, families will continue to see new and lasting relationships nourished around the dining table at Christie Refugee Welcome Centre.

2024 Kitchen Statistics

Average # of
meals provided
per day:

148

% of food that comes from
donations (Second Harvest,
Daily Bread):

15-20%

Pounds (lbs) of food
received from Second
Harvest in 2024:

14,800+



A select sampling of dishes for Black History Month.



Chef Joana's coveted cornbread.



Ugali, a staple food of East Africa.



Colourful foods, fruits, and vegetables.

AFTER-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

Listen to each other; let each other be heard; trust and respect one another; empower and celebrate each other. These are the guiding principles of Christie's After-School Children's Program, an on-site program for children aged 6-12 living at Christie. Staffed by a team of six dedicated Children's Program staff in 2024, the program is offered five days per week, including on Saturday mornings, and includes music, literacy, fitness, STEM, arts and crafts, social, and field trip programming. Full-day March Break and summer camps are also offered every year.

In 2024, 30 young people experienced Christie's Children's Programming which included trips to museums and indoor playgrounds, celebrating birthdays in big and special ways, swimming and gardening and playing at Christie Pits playground throughout the summer months, and even experiencing their very first solar eclipse whilst making DIY solar eclipse glasses. This year, the Children's Program continued its tradition of trick-or-treating in the neighbourhood to celebrate Halloween, observing and learning about National Day for Truth and Reconciliation alongside Indigenous families and children at a local pow wow and with the dedicated support of our Music Worker, played a special musical performance at our annual World Refugee Day celebration.

In 2024, the Children's Program leaned heavily on volunteer support including from teen residents living at Christie who have been invaluable in helping guide children with special needs children during programming. There has been a noticeable uptick in the number of children with special needs admitted to Christie. Special needs have largely included children with varying levels of diagnosed and undiagnosed autism and children experiencing hearing loss. The teenagers living at Christie who have offered their invaluable volunteer support to the Children's Program have special relationships with many of the children also living at Christie: after all, they are each other's neighbours here at the shelter.

Their ability to guide, encourage, explain, and supervise some of the five children with special needs served by the program in 2024 has been treasured and we are so grateful for their support. Each youth is provided with volunteer hours as needed for high school graduation. Additionally, the Children's Program team undertook trainings in working with children with autism, trauma-informed care and refugee rights to provide added support to this group.

The Children's Program continued its tutoring program offered on Tuesdays after school. Staffed by volunteer students from the University of Toronto's Temerty Faculty of Medicine, the program has given young people living at Christie an on-site space to get help with their schoolwork. Younger children without homework have benefitted from the extra reading and writing practise.



Plasticine fun at Palmerston Library.



A visit to the Art Gallery of Ontario.



CRWC Kids at Dufferin Grove Park's Annual Community Pow Wow.

The marked increase in the average family's length of stay at Christie has had ripple effects on Christie's After-School Children's Program. While in 2023, the program saw a total of 40 children participating, less children participated in 2024 and so the team made regular pivots throughout the year in attempts to regularly welcome and engage younger children (4-5 year olds) on field trips and other special programming. While these attempts haven't always been successful, the outreach demonstrated that Children's Program staff are also responsive to the changing needs of families living at Christie for longer.

Living in any congregate setting is hard, especially in a shelter setting like Christie, where children live beside one another sharing common spaces like the dining room and washrooms. Families become neighbours, and neighbours become like siblings. As families live at Christie longer, a large responsibility of our Children's Programming team, especially during our full-time summer camp program, has been encouraging positive communication and conflict resolution skills between young people, including holding space for difficult conversations. This too has been foundational to the work of our Children's Programming in 2024.

Christie's After-School Children's Program is generously supported by the United Way of Greater Toronto, and additionally by the ETFO Humanity Fund, MusiCounts, Unifor Social Justice Fund, and the Gay Lea Foundation. We continue to be grateful to the Canada Summer Jobs Program for their generous staff funding during the summer months.

Our partners in programming this year included the IBBY Reading Program, PowerPlant Art Gallery, the Children's Book Bank, Palmerston Public School and the Toronto Public Library.

After-School Children's Program Statistics

Total # of participating children in 2024

30

Average number of children at an after-school program

9

Average age of child

8

Field trips taken

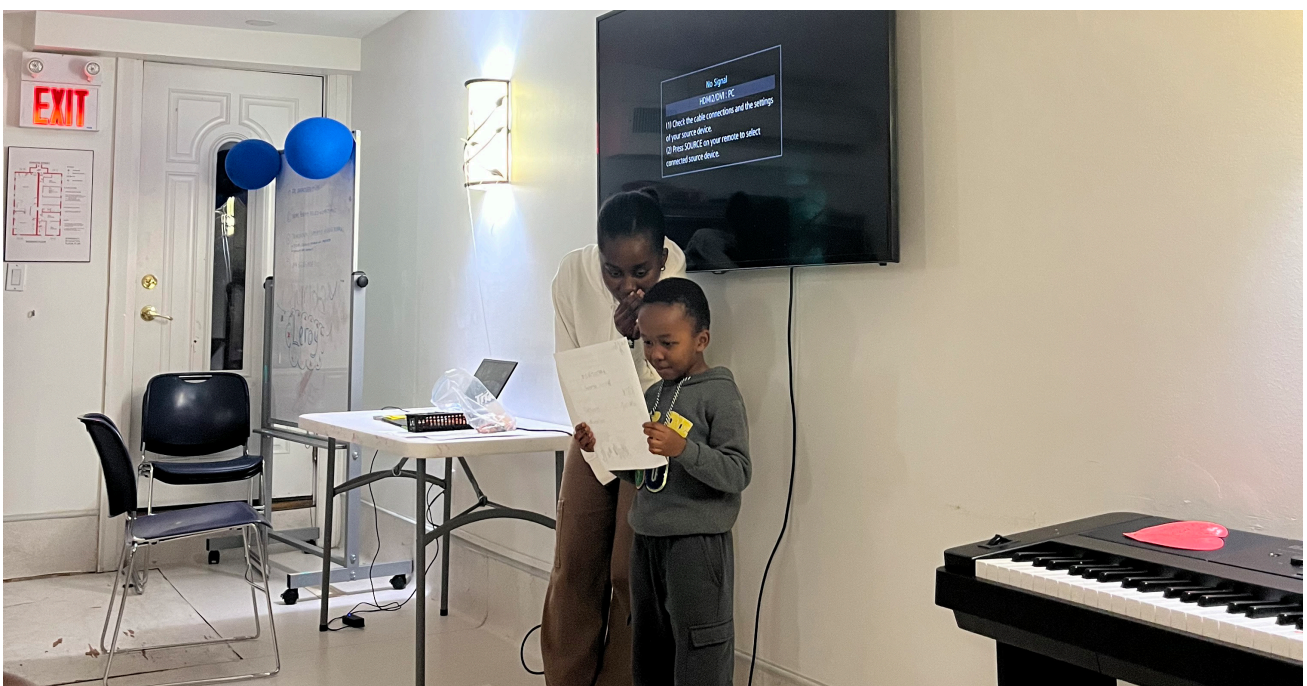
20



Summer birthday celebrations.



Painting is a forever favourite for CRWC Kids.



Reading our stories out loud.

CENTRE FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN

Supporting unaccompanied and separated refugee children

Brothers Mohamed* and Ahmed*, from Chad, traversed Africa, South America and the U.S.A before arriving to Canada in July of 2024 to make a refugee claim, first arriving to Montreal and then making their way to Toronto. The brothers made the journey alone, just 16 and 17 years old without knowing any English.

Ali*, from Sudan, arrived to Canada as a refugee alone at just 17 years old, escaping the regional violence and conflict that took his brother's life. Like brothers Mohamed and Ahmed, Ali arrived after a long journey through multiple countries that included Chad, Turkey, Colombia, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

In 2024, young people like Mohamed, Ahmed and Ali continued to be able to have the support of a lifeline in the Centre for Refugee Children.

The Centre for Refugee Children, a specialized program within Christie Refugee Welcome Centre and started in 2021, has continued to provide immigration and settlement supports to refugee children residing alone in Ontario. In 2024, the program served 179 newly arrived unaccompanied children (up from 104 children the previous year) assisting them with vital services such as navigating complicated immigration and refugee processes, finding housing, registering in school and addressing their basic needs.

When the program hired a dedicated Housing Worker in 2023, it quickly became clear that shelter and housing support would be a fundamental area of settlement for the unaccompanied and separated refugee youth who often found their only housing options to be youth shelters, foster care placements, or living with distant relatives/acquaintances. In 2024 this fact was further made clear as the housing crisis continued to impact most major cities across Ontario. Like Christie Refugee Welcome Centre's refugee families, finding housing became the biggest upfront settlement need for unaccompanied and separate refugee children and youth.

In response, the Centre for Refugee Children began developing a plan for building an emergency housing site dedicated to housing unaccompanied refugee youth – the first of its kind in Canada. Christie leveraged its longstanding partnership with the City of Toronto and by the end of the year a site had been secured, and a service agreement had been signed between Christie Refugee Welcome Centre and the City of Toronto. The emergency housing program, aptly named Anchor House will be able to house up to 12 unaccompanied refugee youth and will open in early 2025.

In addition to developing the idea for Anchor House, the Centre for Refugee Children also expanded its core settlement services in 2024. Thanks to generous funding from the Newcomer Settlement Program, mobile youth settlement services were provided during the 2024 calendar year to over 180 unaccompanied and separated refugee youth aged 18-24 years of age. Normally, the Centre for Refugee Children only works with young people up to age 18.

The Centre for Refugee Children's Child Representative Program, which pairs trained staff and volunteers with unaccompanied children as they go through the legal proceedings of the refugee claim process also continued in 2024, although to much higher demand. This past year, the program participated in 134 admissibility hearings with unaccompanied children and youth. Admissibility hearings are interviews between a refugee claimant and the Immigration and Refugee Board which determine if a person can enter or remain in Canada to pursue a refugee claim.

In 2023, the Centre for Refugee Children's Child Representative Program provided designated representatives at 55 admissibility hearings.

Since the Centre for Refugee Children's launch in 2021, the Centre's staff are now connected to almost every unaccompanied and separated refugee young person in Ontario, thanks to strong referral partnerships with the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) and local Children's Aid Society agencies. At the end of 2024, the IRB even implemented a pilot program, proposed by the Centre for Refugee Children, which would replace an in-person admissibility hearing interview with written proceedings, removing an element of immense stress for young people going through the refugee process.

Similar work was guided this year by the Centre for Refugee Children's A Roadmap to Justice, a project led by refugee and migrant youth to identify changes needed in the immigration system to better serve children and youth. In 2024, A Roadmap to Justice wrapped up the research phase of their project. In upcoming years, their findings will inform changes that have been identified as beneficial for young people navigating the refugee claim process.

With more people in need of refugee protection across the globe, challenges remain especially for unaccompanied and separated young people seeking refugee protection.

"With the number of refugee claims [this year], the system becomes a little bit stretched and the supports aren't as easy to access especially for children and youth," explains Steve Meagher, Director of the Centre for Refugee Children, who surmises that approximately

400-500 unaccompanied and separated children arrived to Canada this past year seeking refugee protection.

"When the refugee claim process or immigration process gets more difficult for everyone, it's especially true for unaccompanied children and youth. They're still made to meet the same deadlines that adults are made to meet, access legal support, lawyer referrals, etc. These are all systems that weren't set up for children who are here on their own without their parents. Which is why we have the case management support here to help them navigate through [the many] obstacles and barriers [in front of] them."

The Centre for Refugee Children is made possible through generous grants from the Law Foundation of Ontario, Ontario Trillium Foundation's Youth Opportunities Fund and Resilient Communities Fund, Newcomer Settlement Program, Gordon & Ruth Gooder Foundation, Hodgson Foundation, Unifor Social Justice Fund, Beutel Goodman Charitable Foundation, Sonor Foundation, Air Canada Foundation, Tippetts Foundation, J.P. Bickell Foundation, Catherine & Maxwell Meighen Foundation, McLean Foundation, Henry White Kinnear Foundation, Alice & Murray Maitland Foundation, St. George's Society of Toronto, World Education Services, and the Home Depot Foundation.

The Centre for Refugee Children is grateful for its community partners in 2024 including FCJ Refugee Centre, Downtown Legal Services, and the Ontario Coalition of Service Providers for Refugees.

Centre for Refugee Children Statistics

Average age of CRC client

15-17

years of age

New unaccompanied and
separated children and youth
served in 2024

179

Number of children served
since 2021

520

Admissibility hearings
attended in 2024

134

Top 10 countries of origin of CRC youth served

- | | |
|------------|----------------|
| 1. India | 6. Mexico |
| 2. Turkiye | 7. Venezuela |
| 3. Nigeria | 8. Colombia |
| 4. Iran | 9. Pakistan |
| 5. China | 10. Bangladesh |

CONTINUING TO WORK WITH FAMILIES IN OUTREACH

With a team of housing, settlement, employment, and donations/basic needs staff, Christie's Outreach team works to support Christie residents after they have moved out from the shelter. The Outreach team works closely with families to develop settlement and career plans based on needs assessments and provides one-on-one client centered case management supports on settlement, housing and employment-related issues. This work can include everything from ensuring refugee families can maintain and afford their rental units to renewing daycare and housing subsidies, resolving Legal Aid complications, looking for work, filing income taxes and navigating other important immigration and social service applications and processes.

Fewer families moved out from Christie in 2024 and as such, fewer families have transitioned through to Christie's Outreach Department for post move-out services. As a result, the Outreach Team (together with the Shelter Team) shifted focus to better preparing families for employment.

Two new programs were developed within the Outreach Team in 2024.

The first program worked with Christie's current shelter residents. The *Career Entry Pathway Program* was a 6-week pilot program for Black youth living at Christie that helped connect them to employers and valuable employment-training programs. The program successfully matched one quarter of participating youth with paid employment.

The second new program was a women's program, developed and led by former female residents of Christie. The program, in its very beginning stages, was established after it was identified that there was a real need to have more community support among former residents of Christie. Women make up the majority of Christie residents. Developed at the end of 2024, the women's program will launch in 2025 and hopes to combat social isolation in the community as identified by and for former residents.

Outreach Manager Kerri Sylvester admits 2024 has been a complicated year for the Outreach Department who served families facing compounded systemic barriers after their protracted stay at the shelter. Having lived at Christie for longer – sometimes upwards of one year – involves refugee families contending with frustrating delays in many aspects of their settlement journey. Most significant is the overwhelming toll an extended time stay in shelter can have on mental wellness.

The Outreach team has responded by providing more intensive and regular case management services to former residents, working hard to empower sometimes disheartened clients to re-imagine their continued settlement journeys as a clean slate; a fresh new start. The Outreach team has continued to rely heavily on close partnerships with community legal clinics, lawyers, refugee houses, walk-in clinics, community healthcare providers, mental health providers and employment agencies to advocate for Christie families and ensure they may continue to move quickly forward in their settlement journeys.

This year, the Outreach team also furthered their work and campaigns providing basic needs support to former residents of Christie. Basic needs support for families can come in varied forms: gift cards, diapers and baby items, Christmas toys, winter clothing, back to school backpacks and/or hygiene products. The added support is vital to families who are often making ends meet with little social assistance funds. As part of these efforts, the Outreach Program was able to host two social events in addition to their usual Back to School BBQ event and Christmas Party, all of which provided a total of 78 families with basic needs items and personal care packages to take home.

In 2024, the Outreach team also helped over 100 clients file their income taxes by hosting an income tax clinic at Christie in partnership with accountants from North York Community House, the second year of this successful partnership. Workshops, especially income tax workshops, continue to be an important way for Outreach staff to ensure that clients are receiving information and education regarding their initial settlement in Canada.

The Outreach Team has received generous funding this year from the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Social Development, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

2024 Outreach Statistics

Former residents served in 2024

239

Consultations provided
(in-person, email, virtual, telephone)

1367

Workshops provided

24

Total # of workshops attendees in 2024

475

Most highly attended workshops

**Work Permits, Financial Issues,
Refugee Hearing Preparation**

Welcome Packages provided

20

Diapers provided

1400

Backpacks provided

30



Staff and former resident pose for a picture at Outreach's annual Christmas gathering.



Income tax clinic



Advisory committee of Outreach's newly developed women's program.

2024 PROGRAMMING IN PICTURES



Families shared their cultural food with each other and staff during Christie's annual Multiculturalism Day this summer.



Our on-site health clinic team provided flu vaccinations to residents and staff in Fall 2024.



A workshop providing families with information about housing and housing programs.



Residents at Christie's annual Christmas celebrations.



Staff set-up for Christie's annual Thanksgiving dinner.



Christie Staff Christmas party.



Women living at Christie participate in a vision board workshop as part of Christie's 6-week Women's Wellness Program this Fall.



Residents participate in a budgeting workshop in March.



The Christie staff team in May at our annual two-day staff retreat in May.



Residents carry plants they selected for Christie's community gardening, in early summer.



Summer camp kids love their ice-cream, even in miniature.



Back to School BBQ.



World Refugee Day celebrations.

CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF CHRISTIE REFUGEE WELCOME CENTRE: OUR ORIGIN STORY

In 2024, we quietly celebrated 35 years of Christie Refugee Welcome Centre. We met with Linda Tripp (one of Christie's founding members) this year to uncover our origin story; an origin story which begins somewhere on the choppy waters of the South China Sea.

In the late 1970s, World Vision Canada was heavily involved with the Vietnamese boat people. These were refugees who were fleeing their homes in Vietnam by boat and ship to places like the Philippines, Singapore and Hong Kong following the end of the Vietnam War. At the time, Linda Tripp, former Vice President of International Programs and Government Relations at World Vision Canada, was aboard the Sea Sweep, the first rescue boat in the region stewarded by a humanitarian organization.

"There was a clinic on the boat, water, fuel, boat motor parts," explains Tripp who is now retired.

"When [we] would meet a boat [of refugees], [we] would make sure they had enough fuel and water to get to the closest port. If the boat was not seaworthy, people would be taken aboard and [we would] take care of their medical conditions and take them to a neighbouring country."

This was 1978. Fast forward ten years: Saigon had fallen, communism had taken over Vietnam, and many from South Vietnam were desperate to escape communist rule even if it meant travelling by boat to as far as Canada, where refugee resettlement programs were newly established between the federal government and World Vision Canada. Tripp too, had returned to Canada.

"In 1989, I remember Immigration Canada came to our [World Vision Canada] offices and offered that we set up a refugee centre in Toronto for government-sponsored refugees," Tripp recalls.

At the time, World Vision Canada was already heavily involved in the establishment and roll-out of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program, a program (still in existence today) whereby church groups and other private groups financially support refugees from abroad to come and settle in Canada. A proposed refugee centre for Government-Sponsored refugees would temporarily house refugees who would be financially supported for a period of time by the federal government as opposed to private citizens.

World Vision Canada agreed to the offer and in 1989 the idea for the World Vision Reception Centre, a refugee centre housing government-sponsored refugee families, was born.

It took tireless work over several months to get the refugee centre up and running. A real estate agent was hired, and the team found a location encompassing three buildings, side by side.

"We found these buildings which at the time were rooming houses. But we didn't just come in and evict people; we helped all the residents [those living in the rooming houses at the time] find alternative housing before we moved in," remembers Tripp.



The very first family welcomed to Christie.

Without an on-site kitchen at first, hot meals had to be delivered via the support of a catering company. Renovations and large maintenance projects also proved a major challenge as the centre had to meet safety codes.

“You’re dealing with government, regulatory groups, fire and safety, food and safety, protection of children, clients many of whom are broken and wounded and traumatized so [we were] like an emergency ward in many ways,” detailed Tripp.

Tripp credits knowledgeable and dedicated staff with settlement expertise as well as community partners including other refugee houses for the success of World Vision Reception Centre’s early days. Public support also proved vital.

“We had tremendous support,” explains Tripp. “[Canadians] were sponsoring Vietnamese refugees across the country; there was an openness. Canada was not part of the Vietnam War so did not have to send family members, [but we] all watched the Vietnam War; [we] all saw the atrocities. We watched Cambodia being carpet bombed and watched the people adrift... There was a great compassion and open heartedness.”

“If we were doing it today, I think there would be a big pushback because there is a much more vocal element in the public and the struggle between lack of housing and bringing immigrants and refugees in ... it’s a different world than it was 35 years ago. A very different world,” says Tripp.

In 2001, World Vision Reception Centre transitioned from working with Government-Assisted Refugees in partnership with the federal government to serving refugee claimants in partnership with the City of Toronto – at the time, refugee claimants made up a large percentage of the City’s unhoused population. In 2007 World Vision Reception Centre became independent from World Vision Canada and was renamed Christie Refugee Welcome Centre.

It has been 35 years of Christie Refugee Welcome Centre and Tripp still vividly recalls her most poignant memory at Christie.



Linda Tripp pictured with shelter staff, during a visit to Christie in Fall 2024.

“There was a woman from Africa. We were sitting in the dining room and we were talking and she kept grabbing my hand and she kept kissing my hand and thanking me and I didn’t want her to,” remembers Tripp, holding back tears.

Tripp recalls how back on the Sea Sweep, off the choppy waters of the South China Sea, World Vision Canada’s rescue boat had docked at Kuku Refugee Camp and the team were helping Médecins Sans Frontières with vaccination campaigns for Vietnamese refugees. Tripp had met an elderly Vietnamese man.

Tripp recalls asking him, “How do I go back to Canada and somehow communicate to people what it takes to vote with your feet – to leave everything behind?”

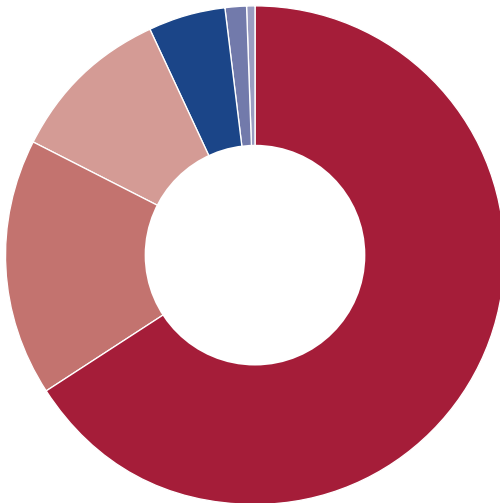
“Tell people in Canada never take your freedom for granted because you can lose it,” he responded.

“We are so close to losing our freedom with the way things are going here and, in the south [US]... you see a trajectory,” Tripp says, reflecting on the political climate of today.

“It was so stark when that woman grabbed my hand, she was thanking me and I had had no idea what it had cost her to leave everything behind.” For freedom.

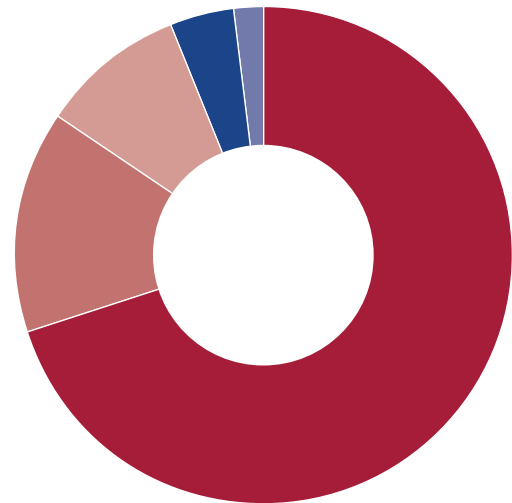
FINANCIALS

2024 Revenue \$3,469,299



<div></div> City of Toronto \$2,294,907 66.1%	<div></div> Government of Ontario \$568,881 16.4%
<div></div> Grants \$366,027 10.6%	<div></div> Donations \$175,523 5.1%
<div></div> Interest & Other Income \$53,681 1.5%	<div></div> Government of Canada \$10,280 0.3%

2024 Expenses \$3,200,593



<div></div> Staffing \$2,245,170 70.1%	<div></div> Food & Client Care \$462,975 14.5%
<div></div> Facilities \$305,925 9.6%	<div></div> Operations \$130,474 4.1%
<div></div> Administration \$56,047 1.8%	

THANK YOU

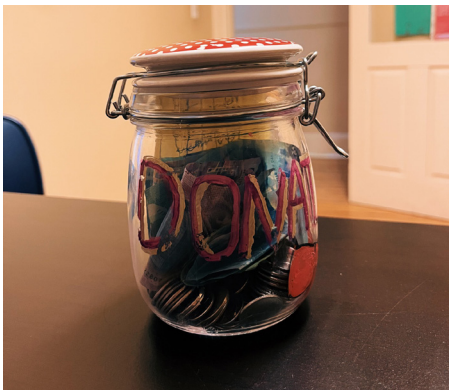
Thank you to our generous supporters and friends this year, especially our RIDE for Refuge teams who helped us raise close to \$150,000 for Christie Refugee Welcome Centre.



Thank you to the Liberty Christian Center for the generous donation of Mother's Day gift baskets.



Thank you to Montgomery Sisam Architects, Christie staff, Centre for Refugee Children, Palmerston Public School and Royal St. George College for raising over \$15,000 for Christie as part of this year's RIDE for Refuge.



Thank you to the young person who donated \$35 from their allowance to Christie families.



Thank you to John Neil's team, Wheelers, for raising almost \$2000 as part of this year's RIDE for Refuge.



Thank you to Tricon Residential for painting our resident buildings and parking lot!



Thank you to Flynn Group of Companies, FreeChurch, Crosswalk Communities and team Fritz and Maria Victoria for raising \$130,000 as part of this year's RIDE for Refuge.



Thank you to the Royal Ontario Museum for the regular free tickets for Christie's youngest residents.

Christie Refugee Welcome Centre Board Members

Bruce Cameron
Chair

Alex Sancton
Past Chair

Taya Cook
Vice-Chair

Peter Hopkins
Treasurer

Tracy McManus
Secretary

Helton Achaye

Stephen Gordon

George Halatsis

Charity Kabango

Michelle Michalak

**Lemlem
Woldermariam**

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

Charitable No:
10822 2266 RR0001.

Want to volunteer with us?
Email us at
volunteer@christiestreetrc.com