

Mennonite  
**new life**  
centre

# Annual Report 2019

# Message from the Executive Director



## COMMUNITY: LEADING WITH LOVE

Dear MNLCT Community,

The chance to share with you the myriad of accomplishments and the ways in which we responded to the needs and wants of our communities has always – and will always be – one of joy. Reflecting on all that was achieved in 2019 is an opportunity to reflect on how we used our strengths as an organization to serve our newcomer community. More importantly, it provides us with a moment to celebrate the agency, assets, and contributions of our clients as they make Canada their home.

As I sit here and begin to share these reflections with you, I recognize that I do so through the lens of a world ravaged by the effects of a global pandemic and one that is awakening (again) to the devastating darkness caused by systemic racism, discrimination, division and unchecked privilege. While these global shockwaves have regional impacts on the newcomer communities we serve across the Province of Ontario, the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto remains a place of welcome and one where we share the journeys of our newcomer clients.

For example, the Centre held a number of community events in 2019 – a huge thank you to those who participated! – including the Integration Through Recreation Celebration, a Volunteer and Donor Appreciation Concert and Luncheon, a Community Picnic in High Park, the Giving with Love Fundraiser and the Holiday Crafts and Food Marketplace. Each of these events brought together participants from across our city and allowed us to share the joy of our newcomer and non-newcomer communities laughing, singing, playing, and simply being together. We intrinsically know that love, compassion, and kindness are the ways to combat darkness and it is this spirit that is the foundation of every program offered at MNLCT.

MNLCT is most certainly a key contributor to the well-being of newcomers and the shaping of a Canadian landscape that values diversity and growth, yet we are not naïve to think that love and kindness are the panacea that can solve the discrimination and divisiveness that exist in the systems that are meant to help



newcomers. Nor are we naïve to think we can make these changes alone. In 2019, we served 3993 people from 100 countries, totalling more than 24,000 client visits over the year. We accomplished this because of the talents and skills of staff, board, placement students, and volunteers, but equally as important, because of the unwavering support we receive from partner organizations and our MNLCT community.

Our program offerings have been strategically designed and implemented to address client needs as well as gaps in service delivery across the sector. Clients find suitable homes and jobs through our settlement and employment services; they acquire the confidence and communication skills to integrate into their communities through our language programming; and they are empowered to face their myriad of challenges with a sense of hope for their future through our mental health and wellness supports.

The path ahead, as we navigate program provisions during a global pandemic and the need for us to remain diligent in addressing systemic racism and discrimination, is one we will approach from a place of kindness, compassion, and – dare I say it – love. We envision a Canada that values diversity and growth for all who make it home and we continue to live the Mission, Vision, and Values of the Centre through every aspect of our work.

I am honoured to be on this journey with a strong and passionate team of staff and volunteers that possesses a positive spirit which resonates throughout the communities we serve. And I am grateful to all our valued stakeholders, funders and partners for their support and interest in MNLCT – the journey ahead is exciting and I am happy to have you be a part of it. Thank you all for your love, devotion, and generous contributions!

**Shelly D'Mello**  
Executive Director of MNLCT

# Strategic Plan

“Walking Together  
with Newcomers”

## OUR MISSION

Our mission is to facilitate newcomer settlement and integration through holistic services and community engagement, carried out within a gender justice and anti-oppression framework.

After nearly four decades of presence in the community, MNLCT continues to be an agile and resilient organization that is constantly listening and learning – from clients, volunteers, community partners, funders, and the sector as a whole – as we grow and change our programming to reflect the multifaceted and ever-changing needs of vulnerable immigrants and refugees.

## OUR VISION

We envision a society in which all people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds participate fully in all aspects of Canadian life. We have modelled an approach that brings together community engagement and community services, working together with newcomers to reduce insecurity and reach integration, strengthen voices, and increase social equality.

In 2019, MNLCT’s previous Strategic Plan drew to a close and we began developing a new plan to support the current and future needs of our communities while ensuring people continue to be served within a gender-justice, anti-oppression and social justice framework and in accordance with our Mission, Vision, and Values.

MNLCT spent the better part of 2019 developing and articulating a Theory of Change – a road map for how the organization and its stakeholders can foster meaningful and long-term systemic and social change. By shifting to capture how we contribute to the social change in the communities we serve, we will build a meaningful springboard from which to develop a new five-year Strategic Plan.

## OUR VALUES

- Respect
- Community building
- Participation and voice
- Equity and integration
- Peace with social justice



# Building a Resilient Organization

While fostering an effective leadership guided by a sound governing body, we work collaboratively with traditional and non-traditional stakeholders to adapt programming and develop new initiatives in response to an ever-changing environment.

## A Framework for Sharing Our Story of Impact

Effective leadership has major impacts on both individual staff development and organizational effectiveness. By encouraging the personal and career growth of our team members, we are investing in the future success of our Centre. Through thoughtful planning and ongoing guidance, we have imparted positive change in our organizational culture and structure, and we continue to build relationships, promote open communication, and embrace collaboration to help us better fulfil our Mission.

An ongoing component of this leadership is elevating our focus from individual programming to an integrated Centre-wide approach to supporting clients. In 2019, we developed a Theory of Change for MNLCT as a whole which will help us to articulate how we want to participate in social change, and more importantly, to share clear evidence of the Centre's story of impact and how we walk together with our program recipients as they live, work, play and learn in our communities.

Based on our Theory of Change, we drew upon the expertise of staff from across the Centre to create a Performance Measurement Framework (PMF) of strategic performance indicators which will give us the opportunity to measure the ways the Centre is helping newcomers navigate their settlement and integration journeys.

With the PMF, we move from program outputs to organizational outcomes. In other words, instead of just quantifying the number of clients each program is serving, we now have a better comprehension of how effective these programs are in transforming people's lives.

- Are clients achieving their goals?
- Did they embark on the meaningful careers they desire?
- Were their settlement needs met?
- Are they feeling better after mental health counselling?

In this report, we will share with you some highlights of these performance outcomes which illustrate the impact the Centre, its staff, and its programs and services are having in the communities we serve.

## Well-Being and Self-Care

The capacity of an organization to tackle social change while remaining resilient and creative in the face of dwindling resources requires it to value the well-being of its staff. The Centre has a long history of practice respecting the mental health of its stakeholders. In 2019, we hosted a Centre-wide Wellness Day for staff, board, and placement students. The aim of the day was to provide well-being tools to promote positive mental health, engage in self-care, and create a space where participants could explore their well-being together.

As part of the relationship between the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto and the Toronto New Life Wellness Place (TNLWP), the activities were led by the TNLWP's mental health practitioners. Participants engaged in activities that targeted the mind, body, and spirit as interconnected ways to support positive mental health. From mindfulness, meditation, and art therapy to yoga, tai chi, and therapeutic Indian dance, the 2019 Wellness Day gave the organization a chance to breathe, learn, and share our experiences with one another.

The Toronto New Life Wellness Place is a sister organization of the MNLCT and operates as a social enterprise. TNLWP provides multicultural, multilingual, therapeutic wellness and mental health counselling services to people from across Ontario. As a social enterprise, the Wellness Place provides an opportunity for internationally trained mental health professionals to practice counselling while working towards building their own practice.

## Our Programs

MNLCT provided effective, tailor-made programs and services that empowered individuals and their communities to live, work, learn and play in Canada.



### SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION

Services that assess and support individuals' immediate needs and future goals



### HELPING OUR NEWCOMERS PREPARE FOR EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS (HOPES)

Career exploration combined with emotional and social support



### LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR NEWCOMERS TO CANADA (LINC)

English-language training for adult learners from literacy to intermediate level



A few of our staff walked in the Free-Them Walk to help counter human trafficking.

PHOTO:  
@AWESOMEPHOTOGRAPHY.CA



### LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION GIVING HOPE TO TRAUMA SURVIVORS (LIGHTS)

Alternative English-language training paired with mental health supports for vulnerable newcomers who have trouble learning in traditional classroom settings



### COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH

Individual counselling and group programs that reinforce resilience, strength, and well-being



### BRIDGING PROGRAMS

Training and support for internationally trained professionals to help bridge their international career experiences to the Canadian labour market. Two programs are available: Bridge to Registration and Employment in Mental Health (BREM) and Bridge to Employment in Media and Communications (BEMC).

# Designing Responsive Programs

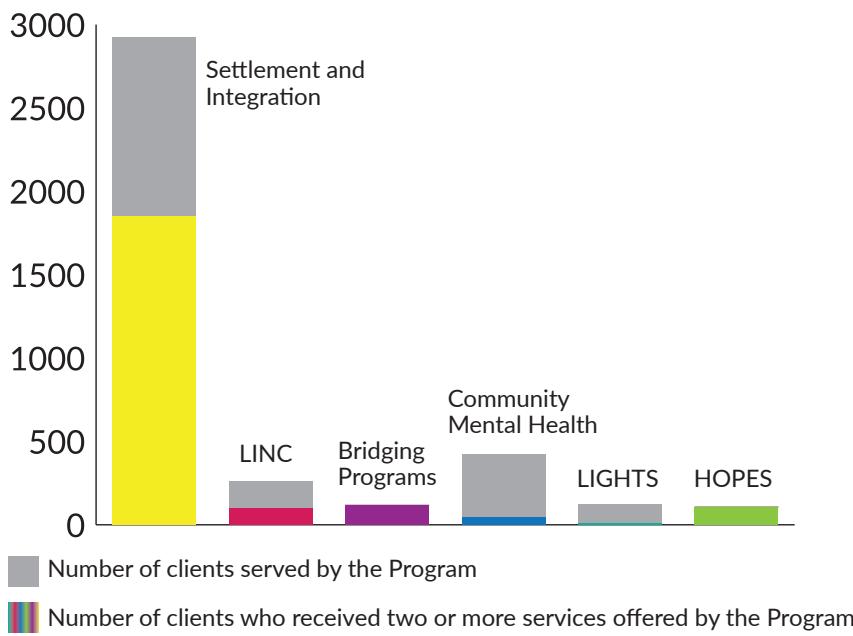
Agility, creative thinking, and the incorporation of new technologies in service delivery are at the core of our organization. By introducing programs and initiatives that support the economic and social integration of newcomers – while investing in data analysis to stay abreast of emerging trends – we are better able to help communities in need.

## Accessing Holistic and Responsive Services

MNLCT's programs were developed and implemented to provide program recipients with the most effective tools and resources for creating a meaningful and contributory life in Canada. Over the course of 2019 – as we have done in previous years – we have closely evaluated the outcomes of our services and enhanced our programs to better meet the integration needs of our clients.

Year over year we experience an increase in services to immigrants, refugees, and vulnerable newcomers. It is especially heartening to see our programs resonate with newcomers who are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of holistic settlement services, and the efforts they make to access them. A testament to our organizational efforts, most clients seeking services at MNLCT have received at least two different services or referrals.

Number of clients who receive at least two different services and/or referrals that meet their various needs



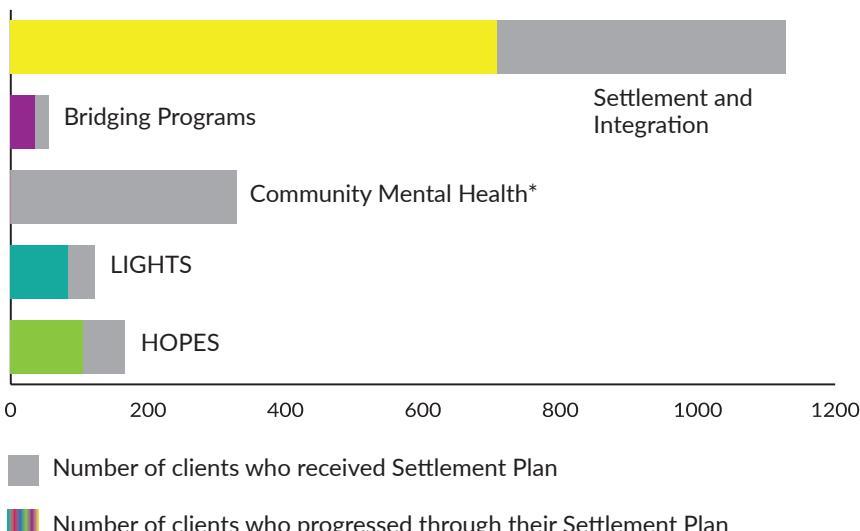
Centre programs have played a crucial role across the board in determining the needs of clients, particularly in identifying their settlement issues. Our main goal is to encourage clients to develop a "road map" that outlines their integration goals – a fully informed settlement plan to ease their transition into the Canadian way of life. As a result, half of our clients, across all programs, created a plan for their integration journey which has proven to be a vital tool in their integration success.

Of the nearly 4,000 clients served in 2019, **44% opted in to develop a settlement plan that would map out their goals and milestones towards making Canada home.** The settlement plan creates step-by-step, action-oriented tasks that help newcomers identify and overcome barriers to integration. Over half of the clients who developed a settlement plan made progress achieving one or more milestones as indicated in their plan. As a result, it is inspiring to report that **more than 80% of newcomers feel more confident in implementing the skills they acquired at the Centre**, and thus can recognize the skills and experiences they offer their communities while they continue to develop competence to participate in Canadian life.

We felt it was crucial to assess how 'vulnerable newcomers' recognize the skills they bring and their level of motivation that allows them to identify and overcome their unique barriers. We are proud to share that

**70% of Settlement clients were able to follow through on their settlement plan and complete their skills-development program, and 80% of BEMC, BREM, and HOPES participants were able to identify and pursue their realistic occupational path in Canada as a result of MNLCT's services.**

Clients who followed through with their settlement plan and/or completed their skills-development program



\* We are just beginning to track this data, and will have numbers for next year.

## Accessing the Labour Market

Of the many programs and services MNLCT offers its program recipients, each and every one of these programs has a vested interest in providing tools and resources that facilitate the economic integration of newcomers. From being able to communicate effectively, to navigating a specific career path when faced with mental health barriers, to bridging international experience to the Canadian labour market, the skills we teach our clients are important for accessing the labour market and positive socio-economic outcomes.

We have devoted resources to initiatives that would propel immigrants into the local and regional workforce. For example, the 2019 Opening Doors Job Fair served exactly that purpose – connecting newcomer talent with employers who would benefit from hiring from a diverse talent pool.

The event proved to be a huge success, drawing in more than 220 job seekers – twice the number of attendees from the previous year's event. Job seekers had an opportunity to demonstrate their skills, share their résumés, and make connections with employers from various industries. The fair hosted 15 employers and a community partner who offered entrepreneurship support.

## Gaining Meaningful Employment

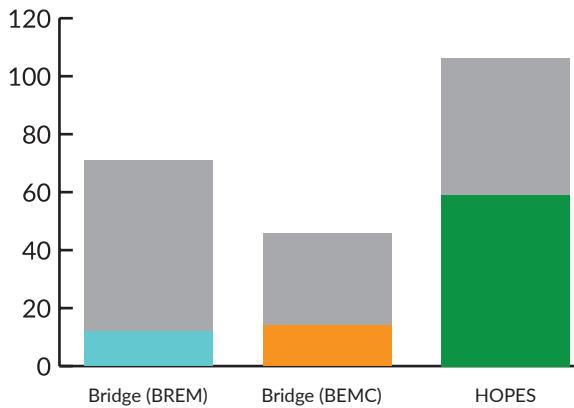
In the last year, we were decisive in wanting to better understand what it meant to be pursuing meaningful employment. Through our work in Settlement, Bridging, Language and Mental Health, we clarified that meaningful work meant that our participants were working in or towards a field of their choosing – a field that represented the engagement of their skills and talents and that honoured the education and training they received in their country of origin. Then we went a little further and said that while it made sense to think of work from an asset-based approach, we also felt that it was important that participants were being meaningfully paid for their talents and skills and that they were not experiencing precarious employment.

In order to test our thinking more thoroughly, we examined our career-oriented programs using the lens of what it meant to achieve meaningful employment. Of the programs at MNLCT that focus on employment and assist clients in pursuits to enter the labour market, in 2019, the Bridging and HOPES programs collectively served 223 clients and reported that approximately **70% of graduates gained employment or a career they consider meaningful** within a year post-program. Then we consulted with approximately 190 clients from our Bridging and HOPES programs and determined that approximately **20% of these clients were employed in a job that was in a field of their choosing and that they remained in for over a year**. Likewise, these same clients affirmed that their new jobs sustained their financial needs.

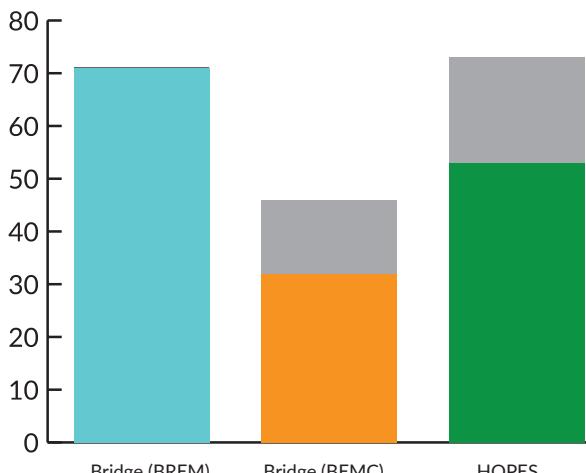
We also tackled underemployment, where people have 'survival jobs' far below their level of experience or precarious jobs such as seasonal or contract work. From across the organization, clients self-reported that because of their participation in an MNLCT program, they were working towards upgrading their current employment by seeking a promotion, a better job, and/or enrolling in education or training programs. **We had set a 70% target which was successfully achieved by the HOPES programs, and the Bridging Programs exceeded expectations with 80% reporting**

their success stories. Plus, nearly **two-thirds confirmed that they are employed in meaningful positions that pay a living wage or higher; and that they landed meaningful positions in their desired career fields**, which is testament of their achievements and the positive impact of our Centre's programs.

Program participants who gained employment or obtained a meaningful career upon completion of the program



Program participants who obtained employment that sustains their financial needs within 1 year post-program



Program participants who obtained employment that sustains their financial needs within 1 year post-program

Number of clients served during reporting period

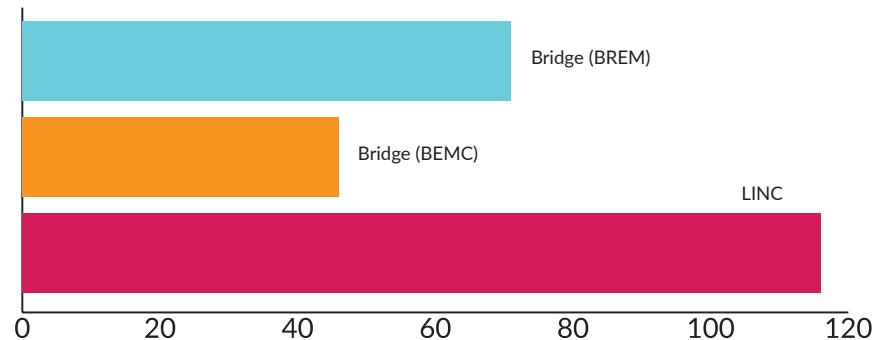
Number of clients who obtained employment to sustain their financial needs within 1 year

## Improving Communication Skills

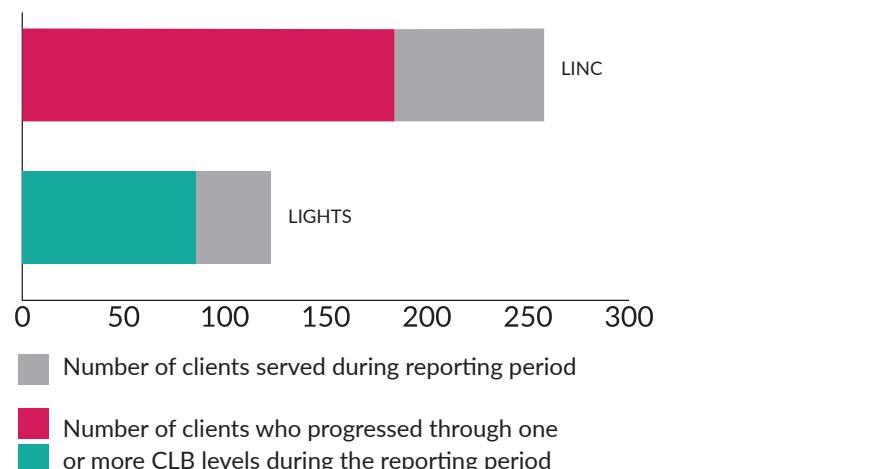
Being able to communicate effectively in one of Canada's official languages remains the number one barrier to integration for immigrants. In response, MNLCT provides pathways for newcomers to acquire the language skills they need in order to navigate the places where they live, work, learn, and play. All of the Centre's language-oriented programs – specifically LINC, Bridging, and LIGHTS – help newcomers improve their proficiency in English and facilitate their successful integration into Canada, allowing them to become fully independent. We attempt to cover the spectrum of the needs presented by language learners. On one end of the spectrum, the LIGHTS Program focuses on helping trauma survivors and vulnerable language learners acquire functional language skills; on the other end, the Bridging Programs offer workplace and occupation-specific communication skills. The LINC Program fills in the middle by offering comprehensive language training.

Language acquisition is measured by determining a participant's Canadian Language Benchmark level. In 2019, **62% of clients attending programs with language learning components achieved a CLB of Level 4 English or higher**. A real measure of success is seeing students move from one language level to the next as their confidence is built and sustained; **half of the language learners who attended these programs progressed through CLB levels on an annual basis**, meaning that their language skills improved by one level or more.

Number of clients who have CLB level 4 or higher at the end of the reporting period



Number of clients who progress through CLB levels on an annual basis



# Maximizing Community Impact

We promote active civic participation in immigrant communities to help address barriers that result in social exclusion – the outcome is an inclusive and globally minded community.

## Stories of Us

Our LINC and LIGHTS programs collaborated with the Department of Imaginary Affairs (DIA) on the Stories of Us project. This IRCC-funded initiative hosts storytelling workshops for adult ESL learners to empower newcomers to learn English through their own personal immigration stories. The students have the option to write their story in their native language or in English, and they are then translated into English (at various levels) or to their native language.

The final storybook pages display the English translation side-by-side with the native language. The stories are collected and stored in DIA's ESL library, available for ESL educators and learners to download and share in classrooms across Canada. DIA also shares the stories via their social media platforms. These journeys have proven impactful for many: for students, who may see themselves or their families reflected in their learning materials; for teachers, who resonate with the hard-hitting personal accounts of students like theirs; and the general public, who learn more about the experiences of people who could be their neighbours, colleagues, or friends.

## Community Events: Leading with Love

As part of our commitment to increasing awareness and understanding of newcomer communities and encouraging newcomer and host-communities to get to know each other, we hosted several well-attended events that brought communities together. These engagements increased awareness in both newcomer communities and the public at large about civic participation, social change, and the value of newcomers to our economy and society.

### MARCH – INTEGRATION THROUGH RECREATION CELEBRATION

We wrapped up the Let's Play Ultimate (Frisbee)! Project with a celebration of community at the Dance Annex in downtown Toronto, where we honoured the achievements of our participants – newcomer and non-newcomer youth – who built relationships by sharing their stories while they engaged in this fun sport. The event featured food, music, dancing, and stand-up comedy performed by volunteers. More than 40 people – newcomer and non-newcomer youth, staff, and



community members – from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds attended, and athletes were awarded prizes donated by generous community members. The project was designed to support vulnerable newcomers and youth by using organized sport as a vehicle to promote inclusion and integration into their communities.



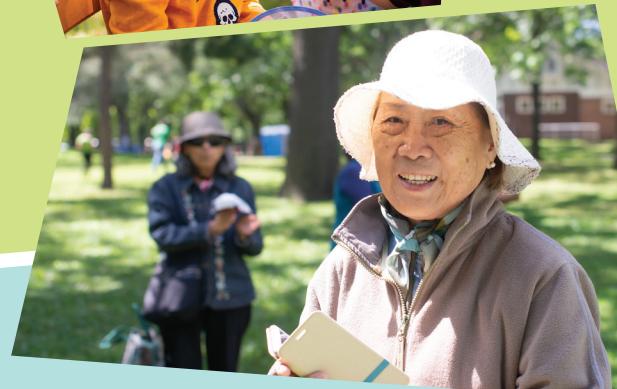
#### **JUNE – DONOR AND VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION CONCERT**

Staff and clients showed off their diverse artistic talents through music and dance performances for close to 70 donors and volunteers at our Queen St site. After the show, performers and audience members alike joined together for a sumptuous lunch prepared and served by longstanding supporters of the Centre.



#### **AUGUST – PICNIC IN HIGH PARK**

More than 150 people congregated for a family-friendly picnic in one of Toronto's most popular parks. MNLCT staff, volunteers, family, friends, and passersby joined in for some food and fun activities. Program participants from across many of the Centre's Settlement and Integration programs performed and shared their singing, dancing and artistic talents while those who love recreational activities showed off their soccer prowess and competitive spirit in bean bag races, just to name a few. What a way to come together in such a beautiful natural environment!



#### **NOVEMBER – GIVING WITH LOVE FUNDRAISER**

This exciting and successful fundraising event was held at our Keele location, where donors offered a wide selection of gently used clothing, household items and electronics that were sold. Food counters, live music, karaoke, dance performances and face painting for kids kept the venue buzzing with energy and guests were treated to cuisines from different cultures - falafels, tamales, and traditional Mexican hot chocolate drinks.

## DECEMBER – HOLIDAY CRAFTS & FOOD MARKETPLACE

We wrapped up the year with our third annual Marketplace. Our Queen Street location was alight with holiday cheer as local vendors worked alongside immigrant and refugee artisans to market their creations. With more than 30 vendors setting up an array of artisanal products – home utility items, hand-made furniture, jewellery, clothing, winter attire, skincare and bath products, and on-the-spot massages – the event offered plenty of options for avid shoppers. Hourly raffles, door prizes, a well-contested silent auction and a 50/50 draw also took place. This free marketplace was the perfect opportunity for new artisans to learn from established artisans and to embark on building their own businesses.



In support of Aurora House, our staff participated in the Free-Them Walk, a fundraiser to help counter human trafficking.

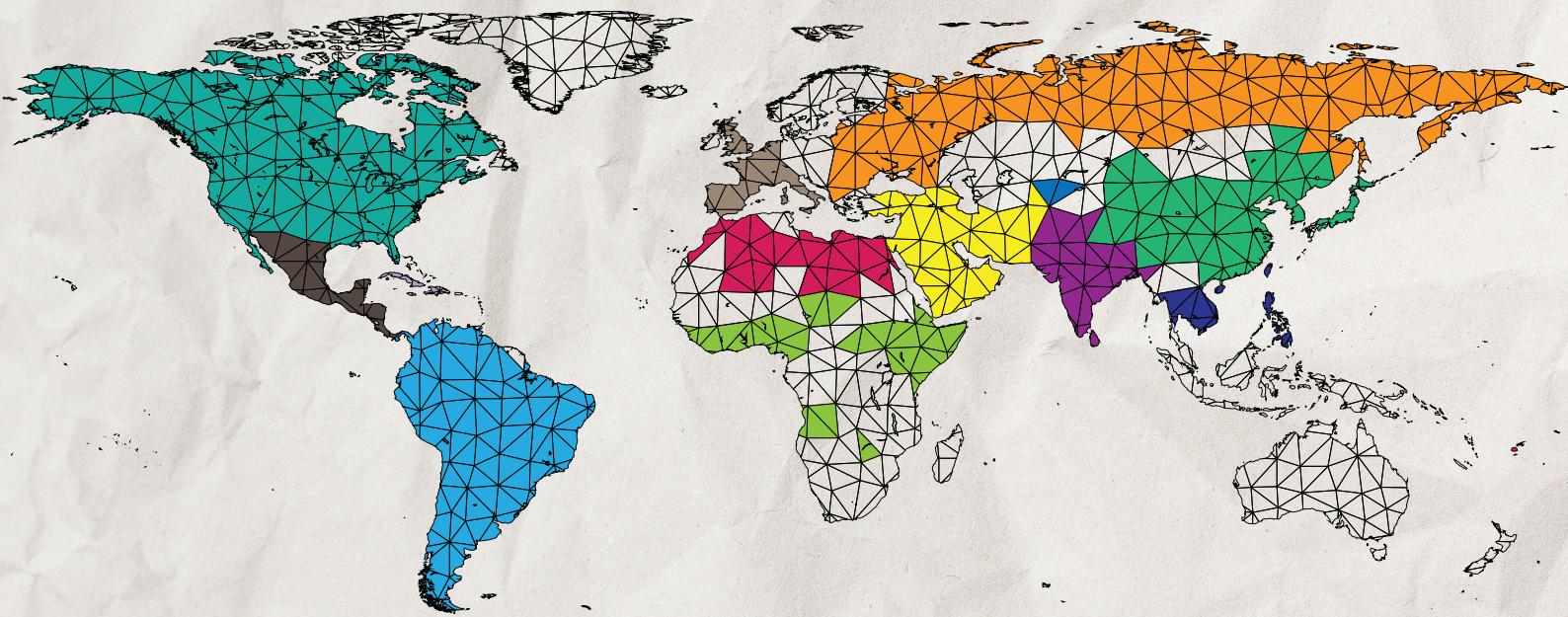
## Supporting Trauma Survivors

MNLCT is partnered with Aurora House, a transitional house in Toronto that provides shelter, long-term trauma counselling, basic needs and essential support services to individuals who have been trafficked or exploited in Canada. Our clients can include individuals who have experienced any form of human trafficking, including labour trafficking, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage. We have worked with both men and women clients who are as young as teenagers and who hail from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such individuals face multiple hardships: isolation, lack of family support, poverty, and various forms of abuse.

Our staff are engaged in ongoing training on violence prevention and trauma-informed care in order to be prepared to work with clients with complex needs. We use the Comprehensive Human Trafficking Assessment Tool to identify people who are vulnerable and likely to become victims of human trafficking. By providing them with case management support to assist with their various needs, including housing, financial, employment, legal, educational, emotional, and social, we aim to support these vulnerable individuals and prevent them from becoming victims of trafficking or exploitation. Furthermore, our training has led us to instill trauma-informed practices throughout the Centre's programming, and we approach all clients with the sensitivity that they may be victims of trauma.

# Our Clients' Countries of Origin

Our clients hail from diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, and exhibit a wide range of education, skills and talents. In 2019, we served nearly 4,000 people from 100 countries around the world.



MAP: GORDON JOHNSON FROM PIXABAY  
CRUSHED PAPER BACKGROUND: KATINKAVOMWOLFENMOND FROM PIXABAY

# Our People

MNLCT engages amazing talent from across a wide range of fields, including mental health, education, social services, information technology, finance, communications and human resources. As at the end of 2019, more than 50 employees were working at MNLCT's four office locations across Toronto – the head office on Queen Street, plus the Keele St, Victoria Park Ave, and Finch Ave West sites.

We have invested in programs and teams from across the Centre by incorporating the use of technology to better support inter-program collaboration and resource sharing. As a result of the ethnic diversity and multicultural composition of our staff, board, volunteers, and placement students, we are proud to serve clients in many languages including Arabic, Farsi, Mandarin, and Spanish. One of the biggest benefits of having a diverse workplace is our ability to connect with diverse communities and newcomers from different backgrounds.

We aim to continually improve our engagement with communities and our client service as we streamline our operations and adapt to changing expectations. Our employees are critical to our organizational success and having them more engaged in our decision-making processes ensures our clients' needs are better met. Empowering staff with the leadership skills needed to make the best decisions creates an atmosphere of trust, allowing employees to feel more valued, supported, and motivated. Inspired and empathetic, they share a deep passion for fulfilling the Centre's Mission and Vision. For all of this and more, we thank them for everything they do!



# Board of Directors



Rochelle Fine and Miriam Reesor at our 2019 Holiday Crafts & Food Marketplace

The Board of Directors ensures the proper and good governance of the Centre while providing the guidance and support needed by the Centre leadership to carry out the Mission and Vision of the organization. They have provided a clear and strategic direction for the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto that has allowed it to remain an agile and responsive organization, while monitoring progress in achieving key goals and priorities. As volunteers, Board Members offer external expertise and oversight to ensure compliance with legal requirements, as well as effective and responsible use of resources.

MNLCT thanks its Board Members for their contributions to creating a place of welcome where all program recipients receive the services and care they need to make Canada home.

## Board Chair

Miriam Reesor

## Vice Chair

Edgardo Romero

## Treasurer

Sam Sivarajan

## Secretary

Miriam Wiebe

## Board Members

Leanne Buck

Rochelle Fine

Julia He

Evan Heise

Kathy Luan

Jennifer Rajesakar

Leanne Buck was a vendor for the Aphasia Institute at our 2019 Holiday Crafts & Food Marketplace



# Summary of Audited Financials

## REVENUE

Government

2018

3,028,132

Donations

2019

3,316,148

Foundations + Other

2020  
(estimate)

3,018,631

**TOTAL**

36,633

36,633

3,140,907

117,111

3,172,375

## EXPENSES

Staff

2018

2,158,642

Building

2019

378,628

Program

2020  
(estimate)

405,198

Office + Other

221,066

188,634

**TOTAL**

145,504

3,131,102

119,992

Excess of revenues  
over expenses

3,450,776

9,805

3,053

0

# Appreciation to our Funding Partners and Donors

By successfully diversifying our funding streams, we have strengthened our financial sustainability and ability to continue serving our communities.

Partnering with new resources has opened doors to collaboration between us and other industry leaders and expanded our influence and impact on more communities. Aside from the benefits of financial support, we were able to broaden our philanthropic footprint across the Great Toronto Area and to remote regions in Ontario.

We are honored to gain the support of so many caring and dedicated private and public entities, including governmental organizations (federal, provincial, and municipal), foundations and private institutions. Equally important, we are ever so grateful for the benevolent contributions and actions of donors and volunteers for their unwavering commitment to MNLCT's Mission and Vision.

## **List of funders**

Aurora House

Catholic Children's Aid Society

City of Toronto

Government of Canada,  
Immigration, Refugees and  
Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

Mennonite Central Committee

Province of Ontario,  
Ministry of Children,  
Community and Social Services

Province of Ontario,  
Ministry of Labour

United Way of Greater Toronto

Wallenstein Feed



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   mnlct @officialmnlct | [www.mnlct.org](http://www.mnlct.org)

Have you seen our MNLCT Newcomer Support App?

Download it here: [mnlct.org/app](http://mnlct.org/app)