



CultureLink

Your new Canadian life starts here.

ANNUAL REPORT

2018 - 2019

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD & THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Last year, we celebrated a significant milestone at CultureLink—30 years of connecting cultures and welcoming newcomers to Canada. When we started in 1988, we had just one program—the Host Program—which paired volunteer Canadian hosts with newcomers in an effort to ease the transition in their lives. Today, we are proud to be a multi-service organization with over 75 staff and more than 15 innovative programs to guide newcomers on their settlement journey.

We marked our anniversary at a gala last November, highlighted by a performance from our own Nai Children's Choir. As you go through the pages of this report, you will read about this program and how, through music, it empowers refugee children and their families to be future leaders in our diverse society.

As we strive to meet the changing needs of our diverse communities, we focused on continuing our organizational growth. Last year we merged with the services provided by Parkdale Community Information Centre (PCIC) in order to complement our community development efforts in that neighbourhood. Established in 1976 in the Parkdale library to provide information and assistance, PCIC's services fill a recognized need amongst our community offerings.

Our strategic objective to support community development as well as settlement services has led us to establish three Bike Hub locations beginning last year. One program is at 15 Tobermory Drive in North York and the other two are in partnership with sister agencies in Peel and York regions, marking the first time our newcomer services are available outside of Toronto. The Bike Hub advances our Green Settlement goals and strengthens other bike programs, including our vibrant Bike to School Project. It supports community cyclists and fosters a culture of repair and reuse.

For the last five years, our strategic plan, Vision2020, has been our guiding principle and we have met or exceeded every goal. As we look to the future, we will be focusing on creating our next strategic plan. We see our progressive growth continuing, our community programs expanding and those in our community continuing to embrace this vibrant city and everything that Canada stands for.

We will achieve this vision through the continued incredible support of our committed government and community funders who trust us to serve the community, our loyal and inspired volunteers and staff who passionately deliver our innovative programs and services, and our board of directors who guide us with their unwavering leadership. We thank you all for inspiring us to continue transforming, expanding and growing in our goal to help newcomers to Canada on their settlement journey, and to serve the community at large with innovative community development programming.



A blue ink signature of Ruba Bilal.

RUBA BILAL
President of the Board



A black ink signature of Ibrahim Absiye.

IBRAHIM ABSIYE
Executive Director

MAKING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



Julia was 14 years old when she learned that music truly is a universal language that crosses cultural boundaries. Shortly after her family arrived in Canada from Syria, Julia joined the Nai Children's Choir—a unique CultureLink program that empowers refugee children through music and develops them to be future leaders.

The choir offers a safe space for refugee children to learn to express their grief, yearning, love, and hope through singing in their mother tongue and in the official languages of their new home. Since its founding in 2016, Nai has welcomed 322 refugee children aged 5 to 15 from several war-torn countries. The choir has performed a total of 17 times to audiences of over 7,500 people.

“Nai felt like home: being with people from my own country, who spoke my language, and who had been through the same things I had ... it was an amazing experience,” says Julia.

Through the choir, Julia gained incredible opportunities, including performing at the Stratford Festival and participating in a special songwriting workshop with guest musicians Feist and Charles Spearin from Canadian band Broken Social Scene. Since that workshop, Julia has stayed in touch with the musicians and she's now writing a song in Arabic that they're helping her to record.

Today, Julia is 16 years old and currently performs with the audition-based VIVA! Junior Choir in Toronto. She hopes to become an opera singer. Thanks to Nai, she received the foundation she needed to improve her English, gain greater self-confidence, build new friendships, and find a place of belonging in Canada's multicultural environment.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY



Starting at a new school can be nerve-racking, and when it's in a country far from home, newcomer teenagers like Cecilia usually have to overcome a significant culture shock as well. To help her get ready for her Canadian school, Cecilia, who immigrated from Brazil, signed up for CultureLink's Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW) program, a partnership between teachers, our Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program workers and Peer Leaders.

"I was forced to get out of my comfort zone, which was exactly what I needed. My English improved, I made awesome friends, and I learned more about the differences between high school here in Canada and back home," says Cecilia. "The program helped me in so many ways – it was the perfect push to the next chapter of my life."

For one week before a new school year begins, Peer Leaders in the NOW program, along with SWIS staff and teachers, guide newcomer youth through information and activities to help reduce their stress about the transition, and encourage them to actively participate in their new school and community. CultureLink runs four NOW programs which are available to all newcomer youth. Last year, our SWIS program worked with 3,447 newcomers through 398 group sessions, including NOW.

Most of our Peer Leaders were once newcomers themselves, and Cecilia now gives back by volunteering with the same program that first helped her. "I see now that Canada is a place of new beginnings and for finding yourself without losing your identity," she says. "I've learned that everyone has a unique story – that's what makes Canada so beautiful and diverse."

READYING NEWCOMERS FOR SUCCESS IN THE CANADIAN JOB MARKET



When Suhail arrived in Canada from India, landing a good job was his top priority. As a computer engineer and chartered financial analyst, Suhail has a passion for numbers and wanted to work in a profession that allowed him to use his numerical skills to solve complex problems, while bridging the gap between technology and finance. But as a new immigrant without Canadian education or work experience, Suhail needed to learn how to confidently showcase his talents and experience to Canadian employers.

After unsuccessfully trying on his own to find the right position, Suhail joined CultureLink's Interview Squad Newcomers Program. With a focus on mentorship, the program aims to improve newcomers' self-confidence, broaden their professional network, teach them about Canadian workplace culture, and provide them with the right techniques to be successful in interviews.

"I also gained valuable insight into a lot of intangibles that will help newcomers settle into their jobs," says Suhail. "This includes information about the Canadian job market, adjusting to the change in culture and professional environment in Canada, as well as employee and employer rights and responsibilities."

Since 2017, the Interview Squad has run five sessions, with an average of 25-35% of participants finding jobs in their fields upon completion of the program. Less than two months after joining the Interview Squad, Suhail received two job offers, ultimately accepting his dream job at the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation.

"What I loved about the program was that it wasn't just focused on finding me a job that I may or may not like," says Suhail. "We also gained valuable knowledge and feedback that empowered us to successfully navigate through the sometimes gruelling process of finding a job as a newcomer in Canada."

CELEBRATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY



As a young, Arabic-speaking Canadian, Sarah really struggled with how to integrate herself into the local culture. She thought that in order to “fit in” with her Canadian-born classmates, she needed to latch on to their culture as much as possible, fearing that if she was “too ethnic”, she wouldn’t be able to make friends at school.

“I felt really alone last year because I wanted to hide where I’m from,” says Sarah. “If I had a friend over from school, I would cry to my mom to take down our paintings of home before my friends would come. I was worried I would scare them away with my Arab-ness.”

Sarah’s story and fears are common amongst those that come to CultureLink. Through our wide range of community programs, we show that starting a new life in Canada doesn’t mean abandoning your culture, but rather celebrating your diversity in your new home. Sarah finally found that sense of belonging and community connection when she joined CultureLink’s Artegration Program for children, a group that meets regularly to share their experiences and honour their heritage together.

When the group sang songs from her childhood, Sarah started to cry. “I couldn’t believe it. I am in Canada and I am singing this song that my grandma sang to me. I’m thankful for this program. It reminds me that I should not feel like a guest in this country anymore. I am home.”



VOLUNTEERING TO BUILD CONNECTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY



When Eun Jung Lee (Lulu) was studying graphic design at Seneca College, she promised herself that she would use her skills to help others before taking a full-time job. She found that opportunity at CultureLink.

"I was very happy to design the 2017-2018 annual report. I was able to fill every page with happy photos and stories of newcomers growing with CultureLink. I could feel the joy of working with good people who contribute to society," says Lulu.

An immigrant herself, Lulu has been a permanent resident for seven years. She worked hard to learn English before pursuing a career in graphic design. A year into her studies, she fell seriously ill and had to have artificial heart valves and aorta implanted. Fighting sickness, she completed the program.

"The job posting (for a volunteer graphic designer) was unusual because it encouraged immigrants or people with disabilities to apply," says Lulu. "The words were beautiful and comforted my tired mind. Usually sick, disabled or inexperienced immigrants must work much harder to prove our abilities."

CultureLink provides opportunities for individuals, particularly newcomers to Canada, to learn, practice, and utilize their newfound skills and knowledge. Volunteering is one way to obtain valuable local work experience. Volunteering is also an excellent way to gain new references while building social and professional networks and connections in the community.

The day the annual report was printed, Lulu was hired as a newspaper designer. She knows that her volunteer experience helped her get the job.

"CultureLink listens to those who have left their hometown and, despite their broken English, believes in their possibilities."





INNOVATING



For newcomers to Canada, a bicycle is an incredibly useful and affordable way to get around—which is why a group of Syrian newcomers living in transition sites were excited to take part in a CultureLink Bike Hub workshop that taught riding skills and safety guidelines. Upon completion of the workshop, which was conducted in partnership with Toronto Social Services, 20 bikes were given away for free.

For many, this meant an easy way to get to work or school. For others, it even meant being able to take jobs with a food delivery service.

“We have found that bike programs address many interlocking challenges related to individual and community health, and environmental sustainability,” says Michael Skaljin, Senior Project Manager at City of Toronto. Michael led the initiative to establish and support community and bicycle repair hubs in underserved neighbourhoods as part of the City’s Community Reuse and Recycle program, which diverts waste from landfill. “Our Community Bicycle Hub program has brought together city departments in new and innovative ways,” he says.

The CultureLink Community Bicycle Hub opened last summer at 15 Tobermory Drive in North York. Volunteers help residents repair and refurbish bikes for free. In its first nine months, 147 people visited the Hub, 361 bikes were repaired, and 66 abandoned bikes were refurbished and given to appreciative community members. The Hub also partnered with local organizations to deliver bike programming within schools and the community.

Building on this experience, CultureLink has gone on to establish new bike hubs through sister agencies, in Peel and York regions, marking the first time our services have been available to newcomers outside Toronto.

YEAR IN REVIEW

MAY 2018

- Annual Asian Heritage Month Event at St. Maria Goretti Catholic School
- Bike to School Week
- Tree For Me Event

JULY 2018

- Nai Children's Choir performed via livestream at The Kennedy Centre in Washington D.C.
- Opened Bicycle Hub at 15 Tobermory Drive
- Summer Settlement Program
- Youth in Arts trip to The Koffler Centre

SEPTEMBER 2018

- LinkedIn 101 Workshop

NOVEMBER 2018

- CultureLink's 30th Anniversary Gala

JANUARY 2019

- Amalgamation with Parkdale Community Information Centre approved

MARCH 2019

- Nai Children's Choir March Camp
- Cooking and Nutrition Program Appreciation Night

APRIL 2018

- Launched Information Technology Security Bridge Training Program

JUNE 2018

- Mud Girl Run Toronto

AUGUST 2018

- Launched Families and Educators for Safe Cycling project
- Newcomer Orientation Week (NOW)
- Eco-Adventure Field Trip

OCTOBER 2018

- Annual General Meeting
- 10th year anniversary of Library Settlement Partnership program
- Youth Construction Networking Event
- Halloween: Screamers Trip

DECEMBER 2018

- Toronto Star Santa Claus Fund
- Crossways Mall Santa Claus Event

FEBRUARY 2019

- Black History Event
- Nai Children's Choir performed at 80th birthday celebration of former Canadian Governor General Adrienne Clarkson

PROGRAM STATISTICS



NEWCOMER CLIENTS

12,501
CLIENTS

1,778
ACTIVITIES

Community Connections Mentorship Program	942	830
Information Technology Security Bridge Training Program	88	9
Integration and Settlement Support	539	50
Labour Market Assistance	835	16
Library Settlement Partnership / Settlement Workers in Community Spaces	3,024	214
Nai Children's Choir	322	17
Newcomer Settlement Program	2,353	13
Settlement Workers in Schools	3,447	398
Newcomer Youth Programs	951	

COMMUNITY CLIENTS

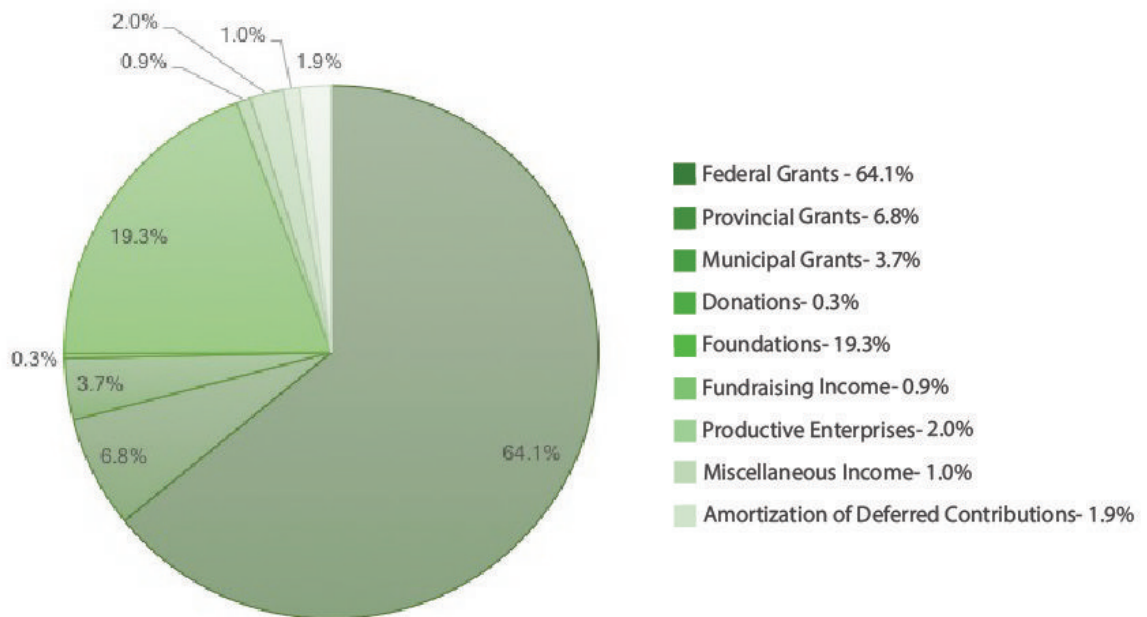
17,561
CLIENTS

231
ACTIVITIES

Community Services	2,489	
Bike to School Project	14,925	88
Community Bicycle Hub + 427 Bikes repaired/refurbished	147	143

FINANCIAL REPORT

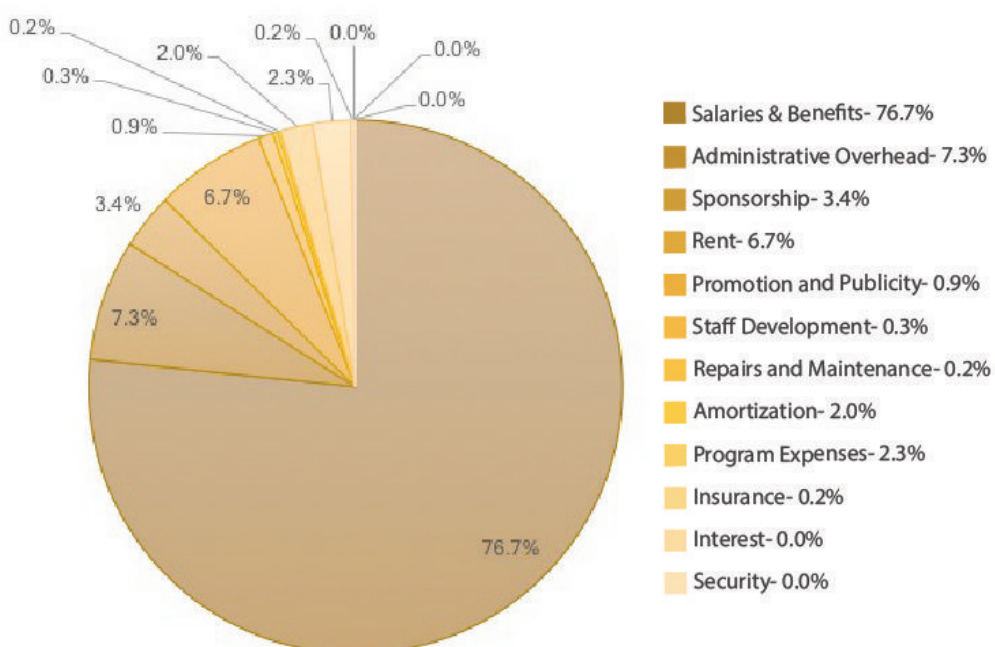
REVENUE SOURCES



The Federal Government is the largest funder of Culturelink and provides 64.1% of the agency's revenues. The Federal Government funds are mainly received from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Other Sources of funding include the Province of Ontario, United Way Toronto & York Region, The Ontario Trillium Foundation and the City of Toronto.

EXPENSES



CultureLink's Expenses are mainly directed to staffing (76.7%) and program related expenses.

LEADERSHIP

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ruba Bilal
Wendy-Ann Horning
Helen Latimer
Golam Ahmed
Elena Jara
Alex Morosovskiy
Claudia Serraino
Cathy Katrib-Reyes
Erich Schafer
Andrew Vassos
Ferzana Chaze
Arlene Clement

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Ibrahim Absiye

FUNDERS & DONORS

Government

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Canada
Employment and Social Development
Canada

Ministry of Children, Community and Social
Services (Ontario)
Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport
(Ontario)
Ontario Trillium Foundation

City of Toronto

Foundations and Corporations

Amici Charities
Discount Car Rental
George C. Metcalf Foundation
Greater Toronto Airport Authority
MEC
Soroptimist Club of Toronto
TD MusiCounts
Theatre Centre
Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation
United Way Greater Toronto

CultureLink's 30th Anniversary Gala Sponsors & Donors

CIBC
Unifor
Creccal

Arab Community Centre of Toronto
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
Cycle Toronto
OCASI
Parkdale Community Information Centre
Sojourn House
Toronto Catholic District School Board
TNO – The Neighborhood Organization

Al and Marie Margis
Curbside Cycle
Modelo Cosmetic Clinic
Longboard Haven
High Junction Gymnastics
Amalia Jewellers
Pollock's Carpet Market
Jerome Photographer
Playing with Fire
Aphrodite Cooks
Via Rail
Royal York Massage Therapy & Osteopathy
Toronto Symphony Orchestra
Canadian Stage
SoulPepper
Tealish

PARTNERS

Accenture
 Access Alliance Multicultural Health and
 Community Services
 Aga Khan Museum
 Arts in the Parks
 Brands Canada
 CIBC
 Canadian Opera Company, Share the Opera
 Program
 Centre for Mindfulness Studies
 COSTI Ralph Chiodo Family Immigrant Reception
 Centre
 Cycle Toronto
 Diversity Institute, Ryerson University
 Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civiliza-
 tions, University of Toronto
 East Scarborough Storefront
 Furniture Bank
 George Brown College Enactus
 Google Canada
 Hart House, University of Toronto
 Information Systems Audit and Control Association
 Kids Up Front
 Koffler Centre

Luminato
 Mercer
 Parkbus
 Parkdale Newcomer Service Providers Network
 Parks Canada
 Project Canoe
 Roma Community Centre
 Royal Ontario Museum Community Access
 Network
 Scadding Court Community Centre
 Settlement Education Partnership Toronto
 Soulpepper
 St. Stephen's Community House
 The Centre for Active Transportation
 The Stop Community Food Centre
 Toronto Catholic District School Board
 Toronto Community Housing
 Toronto Cycling Think and Do Tank
 Toronto District School Board
 Toronto Public Library
 Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership
 West Neighbourhood House
 York University



VOLUNTEERS & STUDENTS

Hundreds of volunteers help us in our mission to facilitate the participation and integration of newcomers and the broader community. Thank you!

VOLUNTEERS

Abanoub Elias
 Abdallah Fattouh
 Adela Belisario Morante
 Ahmad Abu Shaban
 Ahmed Altaweel
 Ahmed Jama
 Aleksandra Stojanovic
 Alex Perakita
 Alfred Gu
 Aman Arif
 Amanda Wen Chi Lau
 Ambika Tenneti
 Amienata Sinera
 Amit Arora
 Andreas Koch
 Andrew Greaves
 Anita Hong
 Anitha Kamalathas
 Anna Koos
 Anna Syed
 Annia Vuthirong
 Antonio Jaramillo
 Armi De Francia
 Arsalan Hamidi
 Arunpairojana, Fon
 Ayyappan Pillai
 Ben McHenry
 Beth Ralbosky
 Beth Wong
 Bhuvaneshwari Logaraj
 Binh Lu
 Brad Bradford
 Brooke Sykes
 Bryant Londono Escobar
 Camryn Foss
 Carol-Ann Sapiano
 Cass Simons
 Catherine Grace Canony
 Cathy Bosnjak
 Cecilia Xavien Monteiro
 Celia Lopez
 Chandan Tamrakar
 Chante Lovemore
 Charles Chiu
 Charran Hetram
 Chelsea Chen
 Christiane Dumont
 Claire Nelischer
 Connie K.
 Corey Helm
 Dainesha Nugent-Palache
 Dana Al Rijjal
 Dana Ivan
 Danny Pivnick
 Debayani Chatterjee
 Debbie Ali
 Diana Brugos
 Diana Howarth
 Diana Molnar
 Diana Shishay
 Dimitry Evenson
 Ebru Kostekci
 Elijah Nangwale
 Elizabeth Rees
 Ellen Chisholm
 Eric Dreyfuss

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 Ezra de Leon
 Fatima Imam
 Fatomata Saho
 Fawzi Nimer
 Feruz Shishay
 Fidel Ortiz
 Fiona Suliman
 Fon Arunpairojana
 Freda Leung
 Gail Miles
 Gerardo Marquez
 Glen Leonard Domingo
 Grant Leigh
 Gyu Kim
 Haitham Zaky
 Haiyang Yu
 Hamza Fasih
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 Helen Latimer
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 Hutaib Bandukwala
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 Lance Clarence Casajes
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 Le Kang Wang
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 Mark Takefman
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 Matthew Kelling
 Maya Kabbani
 Melanie Huang
 Meng Ma
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 Michael White
 Miguel Brito
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 Mohamed Al Haj Ali
 Monica Sue
 Monica Tembo
 Monique Schwarz
 Mosaab Sattouf
 Muna Haibeh
 Murray Lightman
 Mustafa Abdi
 Nancy Davis
 Nasir Zuberi
 Natalie Gil
 Nathan Postma
 Nicholas Seebaran
 Nina Faith Canalita
 Nithya Vijayakumar
 Nolisa
 Noor Al Hamwi
 Oliver Gorman-Asal
 Pamela Brittain
 Pamela Neblett
 Pamela Wood
 Patricia McBrearty
 Patricia Ritacca
 Patrick Bangloy
 Paul Oxley
 Phuong Hoang
 Ping Pang
 Priyanka Mehendiratta
 Rafael Leyes
 Rahaf Ghandour
 Rajmonol Polgar
 Ray Bielaskie
 Rebecca Chua
 Reni Walker
 Richard Vaughan
 Ritney Cox
 Ritva Nosov
 Robin Vale
 Ruth Admus
 Sairam Chinnam
 Sam Elkebbi
 Samara Haver
 Samuel Perry
 Sarah Holmes
 Sawsan Fatouh

Sawsan Fattouh
 Sham Almkaddad
 Sharmarke Dualeh
 Sharron Williams
 Shaza Sattouf
 Silvana mello
 Simone Hube
 Simone Izak
 Sita Welsh
 Soroush Mosavati
 Stephanie Rodriguez
 Stephen Adeyanju
 Stephen Fitzpatrick
 Subalakshmi Karthikeyan
 Swati More
 Tania Pazo
 Tatiana Menendez
 Tiffanee Meyers
 Tom Stavropolous
 Tony Morris
 Trichana Campbell
 Tsuyoshi Mogi
 Valerie Light
 Valerie Taylor
 Véronique Demers
 Vicki McCudden
 Vrat Mehra
 William Webster (Bill)
 Winnie Doyle Marshall
 Yeamlak Woubbie
 Yimen Zhang
 Yvonne Yeldarin
 Zac Filingham
 Zdenka Vozkova
 Zoë Alex

STUDENTS

Carolina Dávila
 Carolina Linh
 Charmaine Walters
 Damesia Antongnanaratham
 Denise Zecchin
 Eniola Oduwale
 Jawara Pedican
 Kayla Jorden
 Mai Thi Do
 Mariama Diallo
 Peter Joznik
 Sagal Elmi
 Tamara Rodriguez
 Victoria Wicks



Your new Canadian life starts here.

We envision a healthy, equitable, inclusive and welcoming society that works together to engage and integrate newcomers and other community members into Canadian life.



Contact us:

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✉ reception@culturelink.ca

🌐 www.culturelink.ca

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LOCATIONS:

Main Office: 2340 Dundas St. W.
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Youth Centre: 3535 Dundas St. W.,
Toronto ON M6S 2S7

Parkdale Community Information
Centre: 1303 Queen St. W. Toron-
to ON M6K 1L6

Community Bicycle Hub:
15 Tobermory Drive, North York
ON M3N 2R5

Mabelle After-School Program: 49
Mabelle Ave, Toronto ON M9A 5B1