

Connecting Communities

CULTURELINK.CA

2024-2025 A N N U A L R E P O R T





Land Acknowledgement

We at CultureLink acknowledge the land we are on is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Letter from the Chief Executive Officer and Board Chair

"Connecting Communities" has been the foundation of our work this year — a commitment embedded in all of our programs and services. Guided by our five-year strategic plan launched in 2023, CultureLink continues to gain momentum as a leader and innovator in the settlement and community service sector. Here are some of this year's highlights:

- Welcoming and supporting Ukrainians through crisis and change. CultureLink has assisted more than 4,000 Ukrainians fleeing conflict. Through tailored guidance, resources, and community connections, we help families navigate life in Canada to ensure that they feel supported and equipped to make informed decisions about their future.
- Platforming mental health at the Royal Ontario
 Museum (ROM). Through our Newcomer Mental
 Health Program, we hosted a series of Art and Wellness
 Workshops at the ROM. These sessions showcased
 the power of art in fostering resilience, healing, and
 connection. By creating safe and non-judgmental
 spaces, the program helps participants build strength,
 peace, and community support.



- Launching innovative programming. Over the course of 2024-2025, we launched three new programs. *ON Indigenous Land* connected racialized youth with Indigenous leaders, culture, and stories, and inspired them to develop a petition for culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families. We celebrated this achievement at Toronto City Hall in February 2025. *Seniors Online and Ready (SOAR)* addressed digital literacy gaps by pairing seniors with youth volunteers. The intergenerational exchange not only reduces loneliness but also strengthens community ties and improves seniors' access to essential services. *Mothers on Initiating the Vote and Equality (MOtIVAtE)* is actively focused on empowering immigrant mothers to engage with the school system and advocate for their children's needs, a vital effort given that over 60% of Toronto District School Board's students are from immigrant households.
- **Looking ahead.** While we celebrate these successes in connecting communities, we remain poised on the road ahead. We aim to grow our Indigenous-focused programming and deepen our support for the 2SLGBTQI+ community through inclusive, affirming services and initiatives.

None of this work would be possible without the people who make up our CultureLink family: our staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to support Toronto's newcomer community every day, our Board of Directors who provide vision and guidance, and our donors and funders who believe in our mission. Every contribution ensures that our people-centred programs can thrive.

As we look to the future, we are proud of the progress we have made and remain committed to addressing the evolving needs of newcomers. With resilience, creativity, and collaboration, we will continue to "Connect Communities" and create pathways for belonging in the years ahead together.

Jemima SabapathyChief Executive Officer

Sean Pimenta Board Chair

GETTING STARTED

Layers of Support Help Ukraine's Refugees Call Canada Home

When people are forced to flee their homes, safety and certainty vanish in an instant. For thousands of Ukrainians escaping conflict, Canada became a place of hope and stability. From the very beginning, CultureLink has been there to welcome them, helping refugees navigate settlement and rebuild their lives.

Since 2022, CultureLink has supported over **4,000 Ukrainian refugees**, providing guidance, services, and community connections essential for long-term stability. Through settlement support, employment services, mental health and counselling programs, and child and youth initiatives, our Ukrainian-speaking professionals have helped families navigate a complex transition with confidence and

CultureLink has delivered 833 information and orientation sessions, 1,440 community connection groups, 354 employment workshops, and

5,853 one-on-one support sessions

for Ukrainian refugees.

Our programs have had a tangible impact: newcomers gain language skills, access employment, integrate into

hope.

schools, and build community connections.

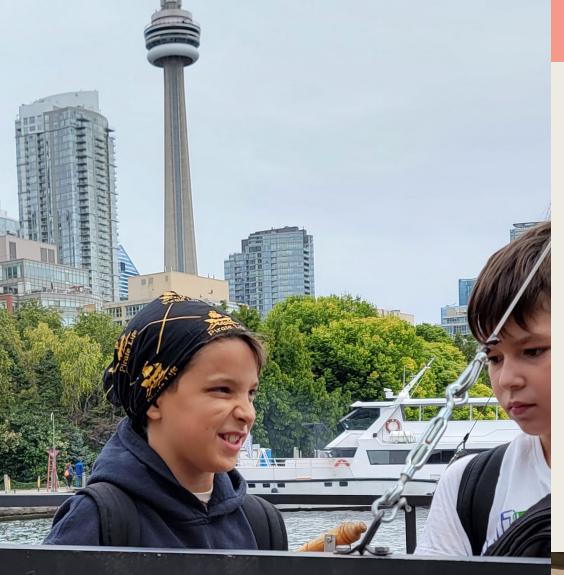
"I was looking for help adjusting to a new life in Canada, improving my English, finding a job, and [making] new friends," says Karyna Novikova, a recently settled Ukrainian refugee. "CultureLink helped me settle in Canada and my new school. They help with language difficulties, provide trips, and inspire us to learn and visit places in Toronto and Canada."

School-based initiatives have been especially impactful, as they created safe spaces for children and youth,

allowing them to regain confidence, process trauma, and form friendships. "We are deeply grateful for your support in creating the Ukrainian Club at school, which started

in October 2023," reflects a Toronto District School Board vice-principal.
"There was a real need for a space where Ukrainian students — many of whom had escaped war — could find emotional support, regain their confidence, and rebuild their strength."





A Summer of Support

CultureLink's Summer Settlement Program (SSP) helped 767 newcomers build confidence and independence through 39 workshops tailored to seasonal needs. Families learned how to navigate housing and transportation, access government services, and strengthen skills for daily life in Canada. By the end of the summer, participants reported feeling more informed, connected, and ready to take the next steps in their settlement journey.





BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Therapeutic Programming Supports Healing and Connection

This year, over 300 newcomers found pathways to healing, resilience, and belonging through CultureLink's Newcomer Mental Health Program. By offering 23 wellness sessions, from art-based workshops and mindful walks to nature outings and short-term one-on-one counselling, we created safe, non-judgmental spaces where participants could process grief, stress, and uncertainty while building connections with others.

The impact was clear: participants reported greater confidence, reduced feelings of isolation, and

stronger emotional tools to navigate life in Canada. Group sessions fostered peer support, while one-on-one counselling addressed unique needs, leading to 81 referrals to additional services for needs that might otherwise have gone unmet.

In response to the emotional toll on Ukrainian refugees, CultureLink partnered with

Ukrainian-speaking psychotherapists and community partners, including schools and libraries, to ensure continuity of care and culturally responsive support.

A highlight was our collaboration with the Royal Ontario Museum, where art and wellness workshops

demonstrated the power of creative expression in restoring hope and stability.

"Starting over in Canada is very challenging — and having someone to talk to makes a huge difference."

Newcomer Mental Health
 Program participant

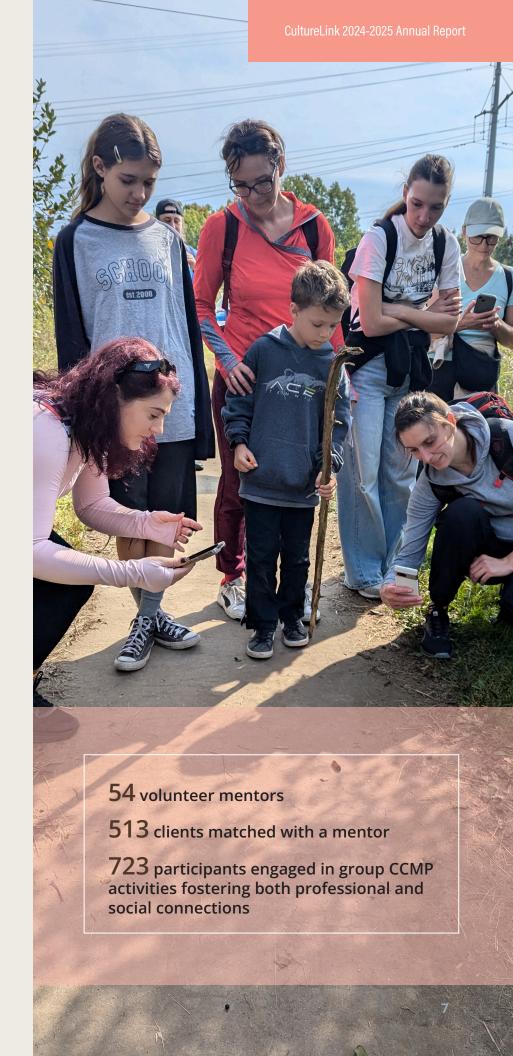
At its core, the Newcomer
Mental Health Program fosters
connection: to self, to others, and
to community. The outcomes
highlight the truly transformative
role of mental health supports,
helping newcomers not only
navigate the challenges of

displacement but also take meaningful steps toward healing and belonging. We are committed to extending this impactful program to even more newcomers in the years ahead.

Building Belonging, Confidence, and Career Pathways

The Community Connections Mentorship Program (CCMP) helped newcomers move beyond initial settlement toward belonging and success in Canada. By matching participants with mentors in their professional fields, CultureLink provided access to career guidance, industry insights, and professional networks that are otherwise difficult to access for newcomers. Many participants reported increased confidence in navigating the Canadian job market and feeling more hopeful about their career prospects.

Beyond professional development, the program also created spaces for social integration. Guided by mentors in English Conversation Circles, Citizenship Education Circles, and NEAT (Newcomers Explore and Appreciate Toronto), participants built language skills, expanded friendships, and gained a sense of community. These connections not only strengthened communication but also reduced isolation and helped newcomers feel at home in Canada.





CONNECTING TO EMPLOYMENT

Young Professionals Learn Career Fundamentals and Gain Lifelong Skills

When Olena Yatsura joined CultureLink as a program worker, she wanted to help newcomers gain confidence, build skills, and secure employment. The Youth Employment Skills and Strategies (YESS) Program did just that — by empowering newcomer youth to build the confidence, skills, and professional networks needed to succeed in Canada's workforce.

Through one-on-one employment counselling, 26 workshops, job fairs, and networking events, more than 420 youth (60% aged 15-24 and

40% aged 25-30) gained the tools to navigate their career pathways. "Many of the youth we served not only found part-time or full-time work but also developed lifelong employability skills and professional confidence," Yatsura says. "The program helped reduce isolation, built community connections,

and offered a sense of purpose during a crucial transition period in their lives."

Staff played a key role in these achievements by adapting materials, providing resume and interview coaching, and connecting youth with community resources. As Yatsura explains: "We focused on building trust and tailoring services to each individual's needs. We adapted materials and

communication styles to be more accessible, partnered with community organizations for additional support, and ensured that every client felt heard and empowered."

Though YESS came to an end on March 31, 2025, its legacy lives on in the skills, confidence,

and community connections built among participants. CultureLink will continue to meet the needs of newcomer youth through the Newcomer Youth Success Program, ensuring that the momentum created by YESS continues to shape brighter futures.

"I am grateful for the support and attention given to me by CultureLink. I especially appreciated the help with interview practice, resume building, and finding a job."

— YESS Program participant

Hands-on Skills in a Growing Job Sector

As part of CultureLink's **Empower Your Future** hands-on training series, newcomer participants came together in October 2024 to gain practical skills in e-bike maintenance, a rapidly growing field in Toronto's transportation sector. This two-day, 12-hour program covered e-bike safety, diagnostics, battery and motor systems, electric theory, and customer service, equipping participants with the technical knowledge and confidence to pursue careers as e-bike technicians. Funded by the Metcalf Foundation and delivered in partnership with the Canadian Electric Bicycle Association (CEBA), graduates also receive one year of ongoing mentorship and support from CEBA, helping them transition from training to employment.

Through CultureLink,
Empower Your Future
participants gained not
only technical skills but
also hands-on experience,
professional confidence,
and valuable networking
connections, preparing them
for meaningful employment in
a high-demand sector.



"The supportive learning environment and the opportunity to collaborate with others who shared a passion for cycling made the experience even more rewarding."

— Ichwani Lubis, E-Bike Training Graduate



BUILDING COMMUNITY

Racialized Youth Honour Land, History, and Indigenous Peoples

Land acknowledgements are only the first step toward truth and reconciliation. CultureLink's ON Indigenous Land program fosters meaningful connections between racialized youth and Indigenous peoples. As part of our ongoing commitment to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, the program explores Indigenous identity, resilience, the impacts of colonialism, and the importance of taking action. Through dialogue, learning, and advocacy, participants deepen their empathy and strengthen their commitment to creating lasting bridges between communities, advancing CultureLink's dedication to reconciliation.

Organized in partnership with Indigenous leaders, facilitators, and artists, ON Indigenous Land used arts and storytelling to empower communities of colour and create critical social change. The program featured three core activities: Training, Community Mobilization, and Knowledge Sharing. Workshops on Indigenous beadwork and dance offered hands-on engagement with culture and history, and participants attended the Na-Me-Res Pow Wow at Fort York to experience Indigenous traditions in person.

The Training component consisted of a six-week intensive led by the Centre for Indigenous Research and Policy and the Institute for Change Leadership, teaching participants about Indigeneity, anti-racism, and the use of storytelling as a tool for advocacy.

In Community Mobilization, participants translated learning into action. Guided by Indigenous elders, youth, and organizations, participants developed a petition for culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Indigenous families. Rooted in the 12th Call to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Report, the petition calls on Employment and Social Development Canada to update the National Progress Report for Early Learning and Child Care to reflect and acknowledge the needs of Indigenous cultures within the educational system. To date, the petition has 974 signatures.

For Knowledge Sharing, CultureLink collaborated with Mixed Company Theatre to bring social change to life through Forum Theatre. The youth co-created scripts imagining futures of Indigenous respect and sovereignty, and staged readings helped translate ideas into shared experiences and dialogue.

As the program concluded on March 31, 2025, participants are now equipped as community leaders, ready to bridge divides, advocate for Indigenous causes, and foster more connected and vibrant communities.

Advancing Digital Literacy and Community Connection for Seniors

The Seniors Online And Ready (SOAR) program, CultureLink's digital literacy initiative for seniors, exceeded expectations this year, nearly doubling anticipated participation. Through a series of targeted workshops, seniors gained practical skills to navigate the online world, access vital resources, increase digital confidence, and protect themselves against fraud and misinformation.

The program also had a strong social impact, helping seniors reduce isolation and build connections in their community. At the same time, youth volunteers developed leadership, communication, and mentoring skills, fostering intergenerational relationships and a deeper sense of community engagement.





Empowering Mothers to Advocate for Children's Education

Funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada, CultureLink launched MOtIVAtE (Mothers on Initiating the Vote and Equality), a workshop series designed to equip newcomer mothers with practical advocacy skills and build networks of mutual support. The mothers will mobilize by presenting a petition that calls for more inclusive practices in TDSB schools.

This initiative will amplify the voices of newcomer women as well as lay the groundwork for educational policy change to reflect the needs of diverse families.



A Year of Programming in Review

From summer bike programs to online training for seniors, here's what we accomplished in just one year.

2024

April

SOAR Program begins

May

Career Mentoring Event with Mastercard

ON Indigenous Land begins

June

Wellness Art Hub

July

Canada Summer Jobs

Summer Wellness Trip with ParkBus

Work-Ready Week: Intensive Employment Workshops

Afternoon Monday Program for Seniors

August

Summer Mindful Walk Series

September

Learn-to-Ride Program for Children

Back-to-School Bike Repair Event

Career Mentoring Event with RBC

The Art of Entrepreneurship Workshop

Annual General Meeting

October

Empower the Future: E-Bike Training

CultureLink's Annual Celebration

Library Settlement Partnerships Week Celebrations

November

MOtIVAtE launches

Career Mentoring with TD Insurance & McKinsey

December

Career Mentoring Event with Scotiabank

2025

January

Al Training for Black & Indigenous Students with Vector Institute

February

Free tax clinic begins

Mini NOW (Newcomer Orientation Week) for Students

Wellness Art Workshops Series at Royal Ontario Museum

ON Indigenous Land concludes with closing event at City Hall

March

Information Sessions: Preparing Ukrainians for the Next Chapter

Multi-Sector Job Fair

Health Fair for Seniors

SOAR concludes



2024-2025 CultureLink Awards

At CultureLink, we focus on connecting communities. Serving thousands of newcomer clients a year can only be done with the help of staff, mentors, and employers. Every year we acknowledge exemplary individuals who are bringing our mission to life and lifting community members up around them.

Client of the Year: Khalid Saeed

Graduating from the Cybersecurity Training Program five years ago, Khalid has since become an esteemed professional in the field. He has returned to CultureLink with his practical, real-world experience to teach and mentor other hopeful cybersecurity professionals. Khalid demonstrates a strong commitment to this community and the cybersecurity industry.

"I am truly honoured and humbled to receive the Client of the Year Award. CultureLink provided me with my first training course and guided me through the steps of building a strong resume and applying for additional certification. Their support has been a cornerstone of my career growth.

I would also like to take a moment to thank my wonderful wife and daughters. Their daily encouragement, support, and belief were instrumental in pushing me forward. They have been my greatest inspiration.

Giving back to the community has always been my passion. I came as a student, and now I stand here as an instructor and mentor. Thank you to CultureLink and the dedicated team for making this possible."

-Khalid Saeed

Mentor of the Year: Julianna Drexler

Over the last 12 years, Julianna has been a supportive presence for newcomers from various backgrounds and lived experiences. Committed and compassionate in everything she does, Julianna continues to be a pillar for newcomers as they settle in Canada.

"I no longer remember what brought me to CultureLink! I must say though, it was one of the best decisions I could have ever made.

I have mentored over 100 newcomers from all over the world. That is a lot of interesting, motivated, and bright people who have already — or will soon — become the newest Canadian citizens. It brings me joy to see them learn and find out that Canada is not just a big, cold, rugged country, but one which welcomes them and wants, above all, to help them settle and integrate into their new environment."

—Julianna Drexler



Employer of the Year: Toronto Fire Services

Providing information regarding employment opportunities, career pathways, and training at job fairs and networking events, Toronto Fire Services is a committed partner to the CultureLink community.

"We are thrilled to have been chosen as the 2024 Employer of the Year. Over the last year, my staff and I have had the pleasure of working with the dedicated CultureLink team.

We have gained a deep understanding of the extraordinary impact they have on newcomers across the city. Offering meaningful employment information and opportunities to diverse and qualified applicants is something that both Toronto Fire Services and CultureLink are very much aligned on.

Toronto Fire Services looks forward to a continued partnership with CultureLink."

—Ricky Brooks, District Chief, Recruitment and Outreach, Toronto Fire Services

Staff of the Year: Rubina Afsar

For 20 years, Rubina has been a part of the CultureLink team. Putting the community above all else, she's always eager to help, even across departments. You'll often find Rubina training new staff and leading her own Career Mentorship sessions. Always kind and willing to share, Rubina is a precious wealth of knowledge and compassion for staff and community members.

"I have been working at CultureLink for 20 years, and during my time here, I've had the privilege of growing not just professionally but personally. The opportunities I've been given to work on different teams have allowed me to learn from my talented coworkers, and, most importantly, from our clients. Each individual I've worked with has taught me something new, and their resilience continues to motivate me every day.

Working at CultureLink means being part of a community that values diversity, inclusivity, and compassion. It's about creating a safe space where everyone can feel supported and empowered to thrive."

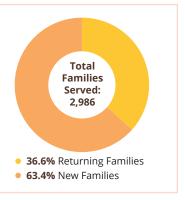
-Rubina Afsar

CultureLink By the Numbers

Since 1988, CultureLink has offered newcomers the programs to help them feel at home in Canada. As demands change over time, we listen to community voices and provide services that have lasting impacts on newcomer lives, such as community connection, digital literacy, employment, systems navigation, mental health support, Indigenous studies, and the arts.



57.6% identified as women.



PROGRAM USAGE BY UNIQUE CLIENTS

DIRECT SERVICE PROGRAMS 1-on-1 services

6,820 Information and Orientation
5,949 Needs Assessments and Referrals
665 Community Connections
629 Employment Services
553 Connected with Mentors

GROUP ACTIVITY PROGRAMS

4,338 Information and Orientation1,696 Community Connections529 Employment Services

NUMBER OF GROUP ACTIVITIES

880

Information and Orientation Sessions

1,515

Mentorship and Community
Connections Events

196

Employment Events and Activities

DEMOGRAPHICS

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES NEWCOMER SETTLEMENT PROGRAM Labour Market Assistance Program, Youth Refugees & Protected Persons account for 55.6% of NSP clients **Employment Skills & Strategy Program** 20.9% Hungary • **18.8%** Slovakia • 14.0% Uganda • **38%** 15-24 years old 7.2% Czech Republic • 45% 25-44 years old • **5.5%** Kenya • **15%** 45-54 years old • **4.9%** Nigeria • 2% 55+ years old **4.2%** Turkey 4.2% Ukraine • 20.3% Other countries

Thank You to Our Funders, Partners, and Volunteers!

As an organization that's driven by community, we would not be able to deliver impactful newcomer programs without the support of our volunteers, donors, and partners. YOU make it possible for CultureLink to be there for folks who are settling into life in Canada. Thank you for your time, energy, and contributions. You've created a foundation for us to stand on!

Funders

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Employment and Social Development Canada

Canadian Heritage

Women and Gender Equality Canada

Ministry of Sport Ontario

Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development of Ontario

United Way

City of Toronto

Clean Air Partnership

Earth Rangers

Metcalf Foundation

Partners

Better Life Counselling Centre (BLCC)

Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)

Catholic Crosscultural Services (CCS)

Cecil Community Centre

Centre for Immigrant & Community Services (CICS)

COST

The Stop Community Food Centre

TNO - The Neighbourhood Organization

Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB)

Toronto Community Housing

Toronto District School Board (TDSB)

Toronto Public Library

Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)

Collaborators

Arts Reach Ontario

Bikes Without Borders

Blake Angeconeb

BrandedT0

Brands for Canada

Casa Cultura Colombiana

CIBC

CIN Labour Committee

Corporate Speech Consultants Inc.

Cotee Harper

Daily Bread Food Bank

Delta Family Resource Centre

East Scarborough Storefront

Equal Voice

For Youth Initiative

George Brown College

Hispanic Development Council

Institute for Change Leaders (ICL)

ISACA

Kababayan Multicultural Centre

Katrina Matheson

Kensington-Chinatown Network

Kids Up Front Toronto

Laraine Hale

Luminato

Mastercard

McKinsey & Company

Mennonite New Life Centre

Metrolinx

Mixed Company Theatre

Museum Shevchenko

Natasha Shakespeare

No Man's Land Theatre Collective

North York Community House

Parkbus

RBC

Region of Peel

Rhonda Belous

ROMA - LAO

Royal Ontario Museum (ROM)

Scadding Court Community Centre

Scotiabank

Stonegate Community Health Centre

TD Insurance

The Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT)

The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC)

Toronto South LIP

Toronto Youth Cabinet

Vector Institute

Women's Cycling Network

Woodgreen

YMCA of Greater Toronto

Employers

ACCES Employment

Canadian Beauty College

Centennial College

Hrycyna Law Professional Corporation

Hyatt Regency Toronto

Network for Access to Education

Ontario Public Service

Ontario Securities Commission

Paragon Security

Seneca Polytechnic

Sharp Bus Lines Limited

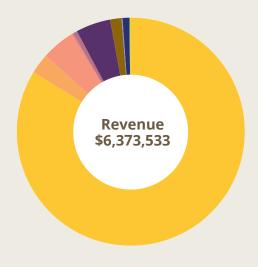
Skills Ontario

Toronto Fire Services

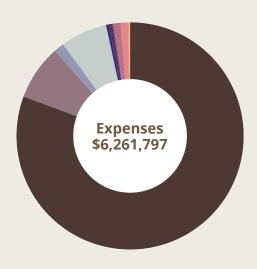
World Education Services



Financial Report







ΨU,201,797	\$0, 71 3,640
	\$6,443,840
	78
	1,919
	764
	13,834
	79,983
61.898	89,294
9,816	13,510
33,468	14,802
23,355	26,007
416,838	389,130
90,188	71,454
492,496	543,155
5,049,249	5,199,910
	492,496 90,188 416,838 23,355 33,468

The Federal Government is the largest funder of CultureLink and provides 77.55% of the agency's revenues. The Federal Government funds are mainly received from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

These funds are used for the Settlement of Newcomers to Canada.

Other sources of funding include the Province of Ontario, United Way Greater Toronto, and the City of Toronto.

Breakdown of Admin Overhead		
Office Equipment	129,439	117,329
Office Supplies	61,657	87,745
Telephone	39,875	46,395
Professional Fees	177,052	194,640
HST	41,094	59,124
Travel	27,168	22,119
Membership Fees	9,336	7,507
Bank Charges	4,843	3,386
Postage	2,032	4,910
Total	\$492,496	\$543,155



VISION FOR TOMORROW

Where We're Going Next

At CultureLink, connecting newcomers to community is more than our mission, it is the impact we strive for every day. As we continue to grow as an organization, remaining people-centred ensures that the outcomes of our work directly transform lives and communities.

This year, empowerment was the heart of our operations. Through the ongoing MOtIVAtE program, newcomer mothers gain the tools and confidence to advocate for their children's unique needs. Their collective action resulted in a petition calling for greater inclusivity in schools, an initiative that has the potential to shape policies and positively affect the educational experience of thousands of newcomer children across Toronto.

With Empower the Future programming we are preparing newcomers for meaningful careers by focusing on skills that align with the evolving job market. By exploring opportunities in STEM, trades, transportation, and health, we are equipping clients not just with training but with pathways to stability and economic independence.

Our upcoming Equity and Inclusion Assessment and Strategy will strengthen our ability to remove barriers within our own organization, ensuring that CultureLink grows as a model of equity. In partnership with Indigenous and 2SLGBTQI+ leaders, we are expanding programming that fosters belonging while also working to bring more diverse employers into our career fairs and professional development initiatives. These efforts create inclusive opportunities that will shape the future of workplaces and communities alike.

As we enter the third year of our five-year strategic plan, we continue to build our role as leaders and innovators in the settlement and community service sector. Looking forward, we see CultureLink continuing to grow as an incubator of hope, security, and resilience for newcomers seeking to make Canada their home.

Join us.

Our Vision

At CultureLink, we envision diverse, inclusive, and thriving communities.

Our Mission

At CultureLink, we inspire newcomers and their communities through innovative programming that promotes well-being, elevates skills, and contributes to and fosters community connections and belonging.

Contact Us

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WINTEGRATION AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

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COMMUNITY BICYCLE HUB

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