

April 1, 2021 - March 31, 2022

# ANNUAL REPORT



## Executive Director's Report

A year ago I hoped to assume my role unencumbered by the health risks, health restrictions, policy changes, and the sharp divisions in our community that challenged my predecessor. Yet it was advantageous for me to experience the last chapter of that story with other staff. Amazingly, despite substantive challenges throughout the pandemic, our staff has proven resilient, offering services in new ways that our funders approved. Meanwhile, emergency measures by the federal government kept our books balanced in the face of cancelled fundraising events and Thrift Store closures.

Since my mid-year commencement, I have focused on building organizational capacity for future needs and opportunities. In the fall, Abe Wall assumed the role of Director of Facilities & Social Enterprise while retaining management of the radio, permitting Anna Bergen, Director of Programs, to focus on our funded programs and Human Resources.

Early in the fall, I was introduced to the cadence of grant-funded social service agencies. My fall focused on grant applications to ensure funding in the ensuing years. The winter shifted to year-end process including reconciliations and final reports while preparing for the new fiscal year. Traditional MCS fundraising events, namely the fall giving challenge, spring banquet, and summer auction, raise funds and build community.

This fall, it was evident that heightened inflation threatened to consume more FESPA and employment programs funding power than in previous years. Settlement funding, which had kept pace with inflation at \$40,000 below costs, may lose ground in this hyper-inflation era.

The need to enhance the non-grant funding stream was recognized long before COVID shutdowns. In 2019, MCS purchased the ICS Plaza at 300 Talbot and renovated a 12,000 square foot Thrift

Store, only to be shut down 4 months later. We expect the Store to realize its potential in the coming years as the new manager utilizes the Point of Sale system to evaluate opportunities. The plaza has increased our gross rental income to \$225,000.

In March, the board invited staff and community members to join them in strategic planning. A rejuvenated Thrift Store, program reviews, and revitalization of our downtown office are key goals for the next year as we complete the strategic plan.

*By Eddy Rempel*



*Trudy Wiebe, winner of the dress-up contest at the staff Christmas shopping event at the Aylmer Thrift Store.*



*Katharina Bueckert, client, and Helen Bergen, staff, at the online Citizenship Ceremony. Katharina wore the headband to show her happiness of becoming a Canadian.*



*Abe & Anita Harms at Abe's Retirement Celebration.*

# AYLMER RESOURCE CENTRE REPORT

Settlement Services connected with 607 families this year, despite many challenges and restrictions. Thankfully, staff were able to offer a hybrid of in-person and remote services for the better part of the year. MCS leadership and all funders, including Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Newcomer Settlement Program, and United Way Elgin Middlesex, recognized the need to continue services as much as possible.

Overall, the highest number of activities included information and support about primary status documents in Canada, life events such as births, accessing health services and government benefits, financial resources, and services for the disabled. Top activities revealed how the pandemic impacted programming.

**“Even though I’m not a Mennonite the drivers are all really kind. Everyone I talked to at the “Mennonite Centre” is always so kind. I am so grateful.”**

*~ Coleen, Volunteer Driver Program*

For example, the number of sessions about Ontario birth certificates almost doubled to 430 sessions in this fiscal year compared to 233 in the previous year. Only 61 of these specifically included a newborn registration. Therefore, the increase is not a result of a higher birth rate among newcomers. Rather, more parents needed help with amendments and referrals to translation services. Amendments were necessary in-part because while we were closed to in-person services, some families had help from friendly neighbours who were less accurate. Parents were motivated and wanted to ensure Canadian birth certificates would

be valid for use abroad. Although no official count was recorded about the number of families choosing to return to their country of origin, it was a noticeable trend.

Travel restrictions impacted the time of year newcomers arrived in Canada. Atypically, the fewest number of families entered Canada in March through May. Of the 87 new families, 34 came to Canada from June through August and only 15 in the spring months. The top country of origin was Mexico, with a concentration coming from the States of Durango and Campeche. Other countries of origin were mainly Bolivia, USA, Belize, and elsewhere in Canada.

We partnered with FESPA and Employment Services to offer eight group sessions, although fewer people participated because of gathering limits. Topics included: information on Personal Support Worker training, skilled trades, renting, and navigating the health care system.

The Volunteer Driver Program arranged 84 separate trips for a total of 14 individuals. There were five volunteer drivers, donating 195 hours and driving 5,976 kilometers. All but one of the participants in this program lived in Aylmer and Malahide. Participants were very grateful for the kindness of volunteers.

The Mennonite Post consignment store sales in books, music, and the newspaper itself were slightly higher than the previous year. Advertising on De Brigj about available books and music was effective. More people asked for Low German reading material.

Clients and staff were very willing to adapt to new ways of connecting when necessary and together we had a successful year.

*By Helen Bergen, Settlement Manager*



*Heinrich Bueckert family*

## Quick Facts

- Average family size of families who were new to Settlement Services this year is 3.6
- Staff facilitated access to computers and internet so that 13 immigrants could attend virtual citizenship ceremonies
- Settlement services assisted 1,828 individuals
- 57 seniors were helped with pension applications
- 75 families were helped with child benefits applications and/or correspondence



*Sue Thiessen assisting the Martens family with online ceremony in the MCS classroom.*



*Aganetha Loewen Penner attending virtual ceremony with help of staff so she didn't have to leave her home or wait for in-person services at IRCC*



## THRIFT STORE REPORT

2021-22 was a year of transition. Already having a full year of COVID challenges “in the books”, the staff and volunteers at the store were now tasked with the challenge of returning to a version of “normal” as safely and effectively for everyone as possible. There was another mandated store closure from April 8th to June 14th. During that time, we focused on online sales which did reasonably well (all things considered). In June, when we were again able to open our doors, we found creative ways to keep within our store capacity limits. Thankfully, we had many volunteers able to come in before the store opened so that more customers could be in the store during operating hours.

We were able to hire two summer students, Madison Wall and Rachel Wall, through the Canada Summer Jobs grant. They helped alleviate some of the work that built-up due to our limited number of volunteers. We continued to experience volunteer shortages. Both in the

number of volunteers and in the amount of time volunteered. Because the majority of our volunteers are considered “vulnerable” to COVID, we confidently see the pandemic as the reason for the decline.

In November, Abe Wall added another hat to his job title as he stepped in as the temporary General Manager. With Abe’s help, we were able to sell two vehicles: the store-owned van and a donated GMC Denali. November was also a record sales month, with over \$49,000 of sales.

We had a metal awning installed over the outside receiving area in December. This was a much welcomed development, as it helped reduce the amount of rain, snow, and sun our team faced when receiving donations.

In March, we hired Brianna Dyck as the Processing Associate and purchased a Point of Sales (POS) system, just in time for our new fiscal year. Staff and volunteers worked hard to prepare for this big



change and we are pleased that it was implemented in April 2022.

As you can see, 2021-22 was a start, stop, and start again year. It had its challenges, but none of it was a surprise to our God. Through His providence we are able to continue to serve the Aylmer and surrounding community. And we trust that he will continue to lead us as we face 2022.

*By Dave Guenther, Thrift Store Manager*

**\$49,000**  
Record Sales  
in November



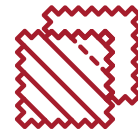
**\$17,129**  
Christmas  
Sales



**28,496**  
Annual  
Customers



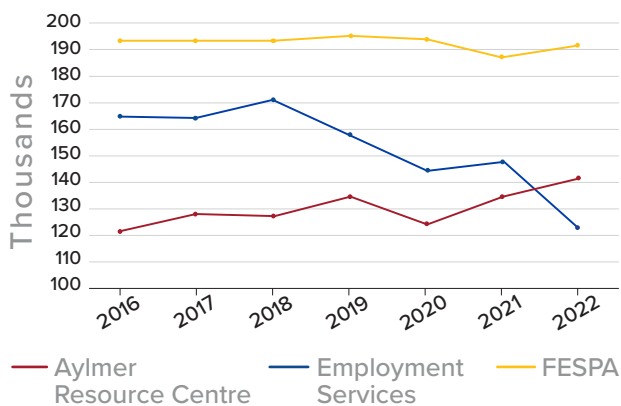
**5,622**  
Volunteer  
Hours



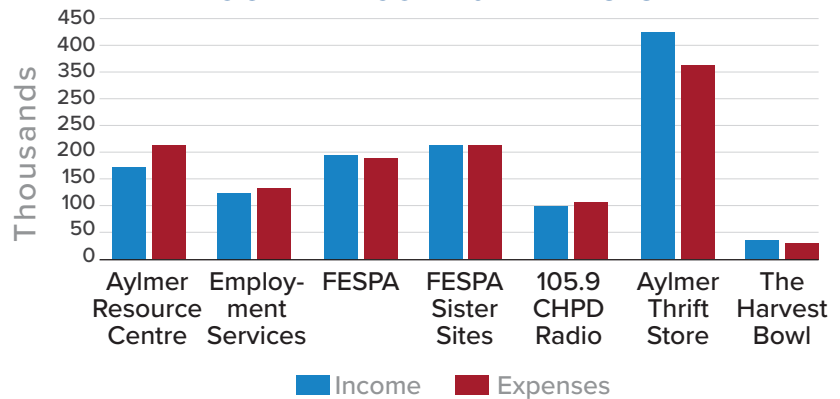
**132,564 lbs.**  
Textiles  
Recycled

## FINANCIAL REPORT

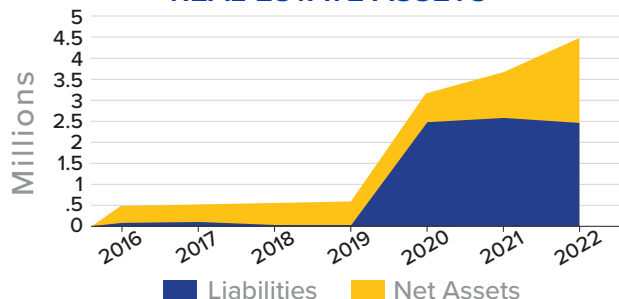
### GRANT FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS



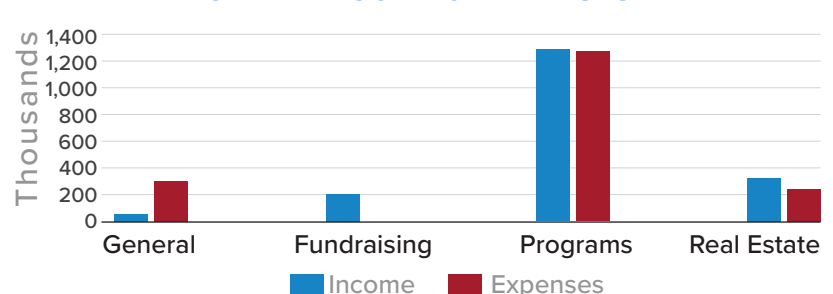
### PROGRAM INCOME & EXPENSES



### REAL ESTATE ASSETS



### OTHER INCOME & EXPENSES



**MCS had 38 staff in total this last year which includes 10 seasonal staff and 2 summer students.**

This past year, during ongoing pandemic restrictions, the Family Education and Support Project Aylmer (FESPA) served the community through:

► **FESPA School:** 17 weeks of English as a Second Language and life skills education for moms and a preschool readiness program for children 0-6 years

► **Mom & Baby:** year-round teaching and support for pre- and post-natal mothers and their babies

► **Family Support:** year-round assistance and support with appointments for enrolled participants

Changes and adaptations were still the norm this year as pandemic restrictions necessitated continuous adjustments to the services we were able to offer. The mandates and goals of the program remained the same. However, the ways in which they were accomplished changed to reflect the evolving stages of the pandemic.

Within the FESPA School program the decision was made to provide two 2-day-a-week programs. A group of 16 women with their children were registered to attend the Tuesday-Wednesday program, while 11 women and their children registered for the Thursday-Friday program. This was the first time that classes were divided in this way, yet we noted several benefits including the fact that it allowed the same amount of class time for each person. The Tuesday-Wednesday group

was larger as there were two teaching staff those days, while on Thursday-Friday only one instructor was provided.

Full days were offered again this year, and that included providing a lunch and a morning snack for adult participants as well as children enrolled in the FESPA program.

It was a challenging year in many respects, with frequent changes. One language instructor chose to resign her position a few weeks into the start of classes for personal reasons. Fortunately, a new instructor was able to step in and teach the remainder of the year.

Other staffing positions fluctuated as well, often due to illnesses or as a result of pandemic policies. There were numerous occasions when supply staff were called in to cover an absence; some coming in for a few days, others for several weeks at a time.

Staff absences and illnesses, as well as poor weather days resulted in classes being cancelled for a total of eight days within the year. Additionally, in January the decision was made to cancel classes for two weeks because COVID case counts were on the rise.

During these two weeks, staff prepared care packages and delivered them to the families to offer support and to stay connected.

Within the Mom & Baby program, all group sessions were cancelled during

the year, however other supports were ongoing. Home visits were prioritized when possible, otherwise the Outreach Worker 'visited' via the phone. Additionally, staff were able to provide transportation, interpretation and support at the majority of births and appointments throughout the year. On a few occasions they also delivered care packages to those within the Mom & Baby program.

We experienced staff turnover in both of the frontline staff positions during the year. Mary Froese stepped into the Family Support Worker position on April 1st, and Lisa Klassen was hired for the Outreach Worker role in November.

We are grateful for the excellent work of both the outgoing and incoming staff and wish to express appreciation for each person who gave of themselves to serve this community during a difficult year.

*By Netti Wall, FESPA Manager*



## Mom & Baby Stats:



\$4,650  
in Grocery Cards  
Distributed



490  
Home Visits  
and Phone Calls



22  
Women



6  
First Time  
Moms



13  
Babies  
Born

## Family Support Stats:



188  
Assisted At  
Appointments

## FESPA School Stats:



32  
Women  
in attendance



47  
Children  
ages 0-6 years





## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REPORT

During the continuous ups and downs of the ongoing pandemic situation, Employment Services adapted and adjusted throughout 2021-2022, ending the fiscal year achieving targets above the provincial average!

MCS continues to partner with Fanshawe Career & Employment Services and Academic Upgrading, the YWCA, Ontario Works, and Service Canada to provide services at Aylmer Community Services.

We continue to have a positive relationship with our funder, Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development (MLTSD), and we were well above the provincial targets in our overall service quality and commitment.

In spring of 2021, we participated in the #aylmersignwars, generating some positive and uplifting community interactions.

In April and May of 2021, we were still in lockdown with our office closed to the public, serving people virtually or over the phone. Appointments for in-person services were on a strictly scheduled basis with extensive screening of each client, and carried out in a designated meeting room. This was successful and well-received and continued until March 2022.

We returned to limited in-person appointments in June. We partnered with Service Canada to offer information sessions for workers and employers, to provide answers to questions and insights into different financial options.

As of July 23, we have been in our new location for an entire year! No "official"



*Mary Giesbrecht opening the doors when restrictions lifted.*

celebrations have taken place due to continued restrictions. Doors were finally able to open to walk-ins on August 4, 2021.

November marked a change to the hours of operation. We are open until 6:00pm on Wednesdays instead of Tuesdays.

MCS successfully offered two Personal Support Worker (PSW) information sessions in January and February 2022 at the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Aylmer.

This past year, we assisted individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic who had difficulty navigating the online and phone application system for income supports such as Canada Response Care-giver Benefit.

We also supported employers. Many had difficulties finding enough employees to fill vacant positions and are looking for welders, factory labourers, farm workers, servers, office administrators, customer service reps, and construction workers.

During the past year, we created processes and procedures that allowed us to fully serve clients either by phone or virtually, and this will continue as we move forward. COVID taught us to learn and adopt innovative ways to serve the community, even without meeting in person.

*By Susan Loewen,  
Employment Services Manager*

## Recognition to Abe Harms

Last August, Abe Harms retired from his position as Executive Director of MCS after serving for 22 years. During these years, Abe led with integrity, creating many opportunities for growth and change. In the early years, while still under the umbrella of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), he ensured that the organization become incorporated, and, at the same time, prepared for the long process of becoming independent of MCC. Programs were added, like Mom&Baby to FESPA, and the Low German Radio. In 2012, MCS received charitable status, allowing even more growth and funding opportunities. Then most recently, he oversaw the plaza purchase, expansion of the Thrift Store, and the repurposing of the vacated space for Aylmer Community Services. Abe is a visionary leader who connected MCS to the community. Abe's efforts were recognized by many awards, including the Diamond Jubilee Award in 2012 and, most recently, the Aylmer Chamber of Commerce Community Spirit Award. MCS continues to thrive utilizing Abe's strong network with our local social and medical agencies, churches, and the Aylmer area Mennonite-owned businesses. We wish him a marvelous retirement.



## 6,226 People served in partnership with Aylmer Community Services

38% of all persons connecting with Aylmer Community Services were assisted by the 2 MCS Employment staff members specifically:

<b>2,373</b>	+	<b>177</b>	+	<b>128</b>
Served by MCS Staff		New Jobs Posted		Employers Served



## Board of Directors

Jacob Berg..... Chair  
Jacob Penner..... Vice Chair  
Anna Unger..... Treasurer  
Sueann Wiebe..... Secretary  
Jake Bergen..... Director

Sara Wiebe..... Director  
Rodney Klassen..... Director  
Cornelius Knelsen..... Director  
Isaak Peters..... Director  
John Wall Sr..... Director

# RADIO CHPD 105.9 FM REPORT

This year will mark Radio De Brigj's 19<sup>th</sup> year since it first went on the air. There have been many changes over the years at De Brigj, but its value and necessity to the community has not changed nor diminished. Something else that has not changed over the years is the popularity of De Brigj's weekly staple program, Waut Passieet. Hein Rempel created the program when De Brigj was in its infancy and there were not many programs available to air. When Hein Rempel retired, Helen Bergen took up the challenge of producing the weekly program and she has done an excellent job. Numerous radio stations are broadcasting the program Waut Passieet, and it airs in over six countries.

The radio did not see significant growth this year as the pandemic restrictions made it difficult; however, there was some progress. One achievement is we did a live offsite broadcast for the first time in August at Abe Harms' retirement celebration and it went well. This means that we can now do live broadcasts offsite if there is an event that we need to air. Dare I quote astronaut Neil Armstrong, "That's one small step for

radio, one giant leap for De Brigj," loosely translated.

The radio continued to produce the weekly programs *Tus em Heim (In the Home)*, *Mom to Mom*, *Kjinjastund (Children's Hour)* and, of course, *Waut Passieet (What's Happening)*. *Kjinjastund* is another program that is very popular with our listeners, both young and old. Susie Peters is translating and recording a new children's story called, "*Lucy's Entdeckungen*," (*Lucy's Discoveries*) for this program.

Six volunteers, Anita Dyck, Tina Dyck, Helen Reimer, Maria Friesen, Anny Guenther and Linda Thiessen, continue producing the weekly Mom-to-Mom program.

The radio continues to help and be involved within the community. This year, Terrace Lodge started their fundraising campaign for their expansion and De Brigj helped with community awareness. Looking for opportunities to build relationships within the community is something De Brigj is continuously looking to grow.

Maria Friesen is now hosting three mornings and works a full day on Wednesday. This gives the radio program 1.88 FTE



in staff, Nellie Neufeld full-time (100%), Maria Friesen part-time (28%), Helen Bergen part-time (20%), and Susie Peters part-time (15%).

De Brigj was going to host the PMK (Plautdietsche Medienkonferenz) this past year, however, with the global pandemic and restrictions just beginning to ease, the committee decided to postpone this event until July 2023. The PMK is where all the Low German radio station personnel and others involved in Low German media gather to hold training seminars and share information.

The radio program had a good year and although the income was slightly under budget, the expenses were a little under budget as well.

By Abe Wall,  
Radio Manager



## MCS 2021-2022 HIGHLIGHTS

FULLY  
OCCUPIED

MCS Plaza is fully occupied as of December 2021. The last tenant to be added was Abby Mae's Gluten Free Bakery.

A shelter was added to the Thrift Store receiving area for better donation drop off.



Yolanda Hiebert volunteering with Ten Thousand Villages Sale.

MCS continued to support this project in 2021-22.



## Thank You To Our Funders:

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- Ministry of Children and Youth Services
- Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
- Newcomer Settlement Program
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- United Way Elgin Middlesex
- Canada Summer Jobs
- Kindred Credit Union
- Faith Communities
- Individual Donors