

April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023

# ANNUAL REPORT



## Interim Executive Director's Report

**“She opens her hand to the poor, and holds out her hands to those in need.” Proverbs 31:20**

Over the last year I have been reminded repeatedly that MCS exists to serve those around us in need of a helping hand. Our programs offer essential assistance to newcomers when they arrive in the area and are looking for ways to make themselves at home in a new community, a new country, and a new language.

Once again our staff have faithfully served many families through our programs at the Aylmer Resource Centre, the Employment Services and the Family Education & Support Program. Countless people were blessed through our local Radio De Brigj and the Aylmer Thrift Store. In return, as staff, we feel privileged to serve our community.

The focus this year has been divided in serving in a few roles to keep the orga-

nization moving forward during another challenging year. The year began strongly with Eddy Rempel leading us through great brainstorming events in preparation for a new strategic plan. This included a full day of training at the Gay Lea Dairy Museum for all our staff, including our seasonal staff. Eddy led us in an overview of church and Mennonite history, and ended with a brainstorming session. However, due to health challenges, he has not been able to perform his duties as planned. He has been on a medical leave since November and requested an extension for the remainder of the year.

It has also been a year to celebrate as we embarked on a journey of renovations for the building at 16 Talbot Street East. The two grants allowed us to renovate the front end of the building, where our settlement services are provided, a partial renovation of the back room and, with some additional fundraising, the radio

station upstairs. We also celebrated our thrift store's first full year of being open without restrictions and, as predicted, the store hit record sales while also offering many compassionate packages to community members in need.

As we move into the new year we will focus on improving succession planning and long term strategies.

*By Anna Bergen*



**Eddy Rempel**  
*Executive Director, on leave*



**Anna Bergen**  
*Interim Executive Director*



*Staff Development Day*

*Dave serving soup to Abe & Anita at the Soup Cook-Off.*

*Linda showing the first item priced using our new POS system.*

# THRIFT STORE REPORT

Matthew 6:25-27: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?"

2022-23 is the first year the Aylmer Thrift store has operated in its new location without any disruptions or shutdowns due to the COVID-19 outbreak. And what a year it was!

At the beginning of the fiscal year, the store switched over to a new Point of Sale system. Our volunteers had some apprehensions with the new registers but, within a matter of days, most of the worries were put aside for the speed, accuracy and ease that the new system provided.



Store Staff with Eddy, 40<sup>th</sup> Celebration

welcomed addition to our team.

In last year's AGM report I mentioned that we were confident that in 2022 the store would, for the first time, surpass \$50,000 in revenue in a month. By the end of June, store sales were well past the \$50,000 mark! Thanks to our volunteers and staff for their hard work.

Due to our partnership with Fanshawe Career and Employment Services, two Youth Jobs Connect participants began working at the store late summer. It was a mutually beneficial arrangement, where the participants gained valuable work experience and we received consistent help. We were greatly blessed by the impact both Franz (at cash) and Mark (in receiving) had on staff and customers.

In October, the store celebrated 40 years of operation. In attendance were some of the town's dignitaries, staff alumni and many loyal customers. We all enjoyed cake and stories about the store over the years. We also had a wonderful article, printed by the Aylmer Express, highlight some of the milestones the store has experienced during its 40 years in Aylmer.

Christmas was fast approaching and now many Christmas items we had been storing needed to be priced. Thankfully we were able to solicit the help of a small team of volunteers to sort and price all the Christmas items. Before we knew it, we had surpassed \$60,000 in store sales in November. What a surprise!

We greeted January with many unknowns but a lot of faith, knowing that if we put in the work, God would bless the outcome. By His blessing, we were able to divert many thousands of pounds of items and clothing from the landfill to people who could purchase what they need for a fraction of the retail price. With the generosity of the residents of Aylmer and surrounding community, we provided many newcomers and others in need with the items for free.

We are so thankful for the work we do and that we can generate funds to be used to improve our community. We look forward to what 2023 will bring.

*By Dave Guenther, Thrift Store Manager*



Volunteer Appreciation Lunch

As summer approached, we were blessed with the help of two Canada Summer Job students, Madison and Rebecca, a



**\$6,166**

Silent Auction



**\$27,303.62**

Christmas Sales



**38,553**

Transactions (formerly customers)



**12,156**

Volunteer Hours



**144,967 lbs.**

Textiles Recycled

## Board of Directors

Jacob Berg.....Chair  
 Rodney Klassen.....Vice Chair  
 Anna Unger.....Treasurer

Jake Bergen.....Secretary  
 Helen Reimer.....Director  
 Peter Wiebe.....Director

Cornelius Knelsen.....Director  
 Jacob Giebrecht.....Director

# EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REPORT

The April 2022 to March 2023 fiscal year was a “return to normal” as COVID-19 restrictions ended. All partners and staff members returned to the Aylmer Community Services (ACS) office. July 2022 marked the second year of our move to 20 Talbot Street East. We were finally able to celebrate this with an Open House on August 3, 2022! In attendance were members of the public, all partners, staff members and local dignitaries. It was a positive event and we received many encouraging comments.

Employment Services has been very busy in the past year. There was one staff change. Tina Giesbrecht was hired in February 2023 to replace Mary Giesbrecht who is transiting more into the Human Resources role for MCS.

In general, there were more job openings from hiring employers than we had clients to fill them. In order to help employers find the candidates they needed, MCS partnered with Fanshawe to hold three job fairs, giving “an opportunity for prospective employers to find a capable workforce by talking face-to-face with can-

didates and getting to know job seekers who are looking to work for them.” These were held at three different locations within the town of Aylmer. Approximately 350 job seekers attended at least one. There were 24 employers present. They interviewed job seekers on the spot and some were hired immediately. Employers were very happy with the results of these events. Serving employers and business owners as well as job seekers is integral to the services we provide.

Other Employment Services successes included the five Youth Job Connect and three Youth Job Connection Summer teaching sessions in Aylmer to assist youth to overcome employment barriers. Twenty-five local youth participated in these sessions, out of which four completed their placements at the Aylmer Thrift Store.

Another successful event was an in-person Passport Clinic on October 6, 2022, put on jointly by ACS and Settlement Services staff, together with Passport Canada. Both events are excellent examples of programs working together at MCS.



ACS Open House

MCS continues its successful partnership with Fanshawe Career & Employment and Academic Upgrading, the YWCA, Ontario Works and Service Canada under the Aylmer Community Services banner. We exceeded all 2022-2023 provincial targets set out by the funder: the Ministry of Labour and Immigration and Skills Development (MLITSD). This includes serving newcomers, persons with disabilities, Ontario Works participants and students.

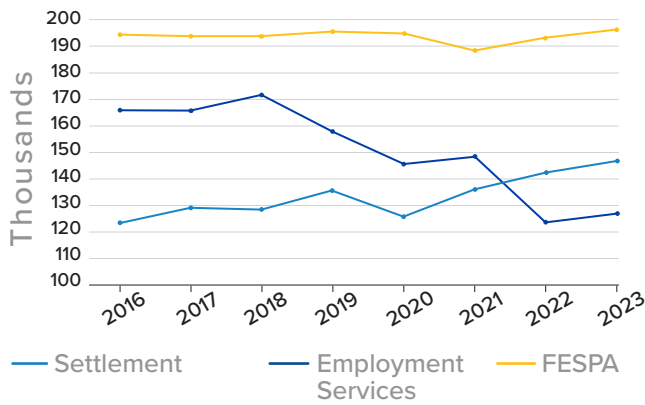
By Susan Loewen,  
Employment Services Manager

**2,507** clients served by MCS Employment staff. + We worked with **142** employers.

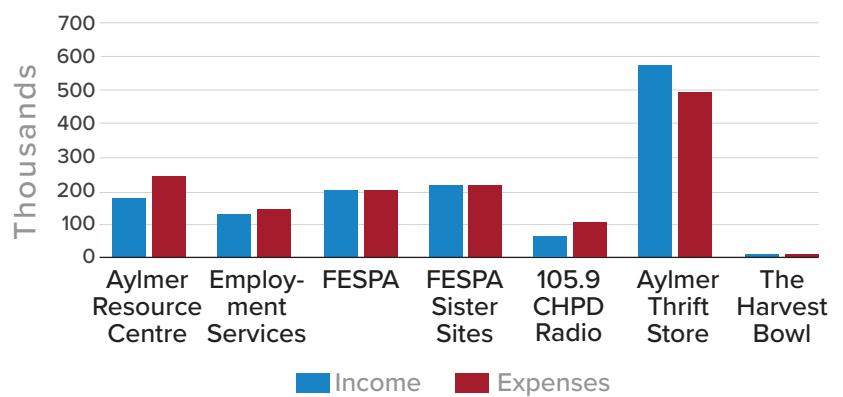


## FINANCIAL REPORT

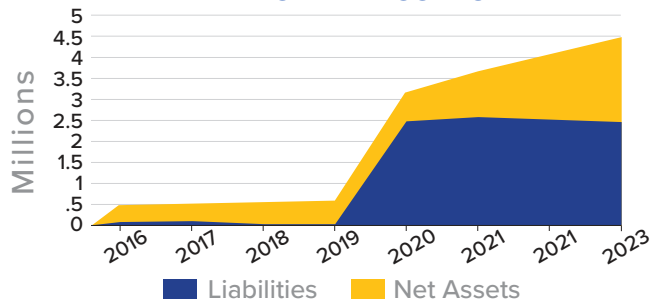
### GRANT FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS



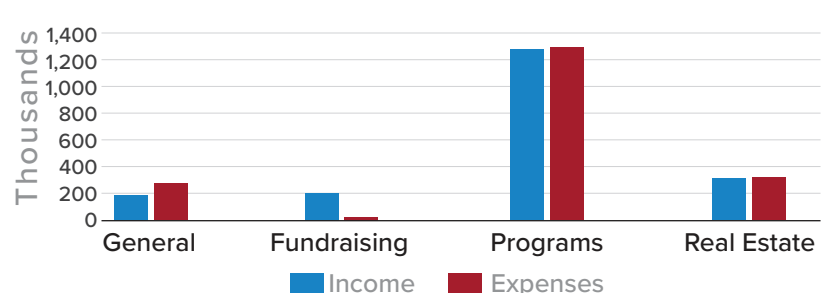
### PROGRAM INCOME & EXPENSES



### REAL ESTATE ASSETS



### OVERALL INCOME & EXPENSES



MCS had **39** staff in total this last year which includes **10** seasonal staff and **2** summer students.

During the 2022-2023 year, the Family Education and Support Project Aylmer (FESPA) served the community through:

- ▶ **FESPA School:** 19 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 babies and their mothers.
- ▶ **Family Support:** year-round assistance with appointments for registered participants.



Baby Room at FESPA

During this first full year without pandemic restrictions, the FESPA programs were able to return to a more normalized style of programming. In October, classes resumed with 26 women, 10 babies and 22 preschoolers registered. Several others were placed on a waiting list. During the year a few of the learners exited and new students were registered, but the program remained at capacity.

FESPA encountered some significant challenges within the year. In August the TVDSB informed us they would not be able to provide an ESL teacher, due to a cut in funding. This was a significant loss and a new partnership needed to be formed immediately. Thankfully, Fanshawe was willing to run a pilot project and provided a teacher for us. Unfortunately, in January that teacher was unable to return. It took four weeks for a new teacher to be placed and, for the first time in our program history, a male teacher was teaching at FESPA. We were very happy to see the women become comfortable in this setting and to continue their learning.

Another challenge was addressing the special needs of a little boy with autism attending the preschool. After several very difficult weeks, he began to adjust and eventually was comfortable enough to let go of his mom and happily enter the classroom. Both the staff and his mom were pleased about the change. His mom could focus on her learning needs.

In the Mom & Baby program, we began with a small group. As the year progressed, however, that number began to grow. By the end of the year we had 19 women registered in the program. Of the 16 women who gave birth, our Outreach Worker was only asked to attend five births. The other couples were able to independently navigate the births.



Netti and Trudy with FESPA Women

Our Family Support Program had some slow months with few appointments. However, as the other programs grew, so did the appointment needs. Many hours were spent at the hospital, midwifery clinic, lab, obstetricians and at dental appointments.

We are grateful for another year of God's provision and faithfulness.

By Nettie Wall, FESPA Manager



Valentine's Day Craft



Preschoolers at FESPA

## Mom & Baby Stats:



in Grocery Cards Distributed



Home Visits and Phone Calls



Women



First Time Moms



Babies Born



## Family Support Stats:



Assisted At Appointments

## FESPA School Stats:



Women in attendance



Children ages 0-6 years



# AYLMER RESOURCE CENTRE REPORT

The Volunteer Driver Program, the Mennonite Post outlet store and Newcomer Settlement and Itinerant Services exceeded all of their targets this past year. Staff are Sue Thiessen, Diana Peters, Arlie Peters and myself.

There were seven drivers in the Volunteer Driver Program, contributing 261 of volunteer hours and driving 8,017 kilometres. All but two of the 22 participants originated in Aylmer/Malahide. Medical facilities in London, St. Thomas or Tillsonburg were the most frequent destinations.

We faced a couple of challenges. There were approximately 26 instances when no volunteer driver was available and the client had to either reschedule their appointment or find their own driver. On the one hand, it reveals participants' other supports. Rescheduling can, however, affect a participants' ability to receive consistent care.

**“It's really hard to not have family for these kinds of things. Without you, I couldn't have done this and I couldn't get better. Thank you for being part of my family.”**

*~ Colleen, Volunteer Driver Program*

The other challenge was the rising gas prices. While the volunteers donated their time, MCS reimbursed them for the mileage. Funding to do so comes from United Way Elgin-Middlesex, participants' contributions and general donations.

The impact of this program is that participants can access care and it encourages cross-cultural understanding. The time spent driving and/or interpreting creates space for an exchange of friendly conversations and mutual encouragement.

The Mennonite Post outlet store provides appropriate material to Mennonite newcomers, such as the newspaper (Die Mennonitische Post) and children's magazine (Das Blatt für

Kinder), as well as books and CDs that are not as readily available in other stores. Sales increased to only slightly less than pre-pandemic levels. Some of the most popular items were Low German Bibles, songbooks, devotionals and Bible stories for children and, surprisingly, English Bibles for children.

Within Newcomer Settlement Services, 1,804 individuals were served this past year. Most of the newcomers served originated in Mexico. Other top countries of origin were Bolivia, USA, Belize and Paraguay and almost all identified as ethnically Mennonite.

Initial needs assessments revealed the top reason for immigrating was to find better jobs than in their home countries. The average family size of the families who had never accessed services before was four and their arrival date was spread quite evenly across the year.

The top activities related to permanent residence, passports, citizenship, birth, health, finances and family benefits. While the number of immigrants served, who were waiting for their permanent residence, was lower than average, there were significantly more applying to become naturalized citizens. The number of clients waiting for citizenship by descent was also higher than average. We did not track the reasons but anecdotally we know that certain regions in Mexico have had poor harvests in the last few years, there is more unrest, and day wages are insufficient to sustain a family. These factors cause people to immigrate. As to the reason for the increase interest in naturalization, the reasons varied when asked as to why they were applying for citizenship after becoming a permanent resident.

Overall, services returned to normal after restrictions were lifted completely. The newly renovated spaces allowed clients more privacy during their visits and the accessible washroom with a diaper changing table is appreciated.

*By Helen Bergen, Settlement Manager*



*Gerhard & Linda Harms*

**“This is Linda. I just want to tell you how glad I am for MCS. I was sponsored into Canada by my husband and we got help through MCS. They were always very kind and helpful. So if I had any questions, I just called in and got them answered. It made the waiting to get citizenship easier to know there was a confident source to go to. And I'm glad to say, that my waiting is over! I became a CANADIAN CITIZEN! Even though it has been a long, almost 6.5 years, since I started paperwork, it has been worth it. MCS is an organization which helps a lot of people.”**

*~ Linda Harms*



*Renovations in the downstairs space at 16 Talbot St. E. made possible through a grant from Ontario Trillium Foundation. Many clients have commented that they appreciate the newly renovated space. We can maintain confidentiality better and staff appreciate a quieter work place. We have also been able to use the extra space, office #4, when clients need to access a reliable internet connection to write citizenship tests or attend in a virtual citizenship ceremony.*

# RADIO CHPD 105.9 FM REPORT

This past year was a time of recovery, as our community emerged from a few years of restrictions. It was also a year of learning as we focused on how to do business in this new environment. The pandemic had caused us to change the way we did our programming but we were now able to change again.

As the community returned to normalcy, we were able to offer more in-person visits and interviews. We helped the local Fair Board promote their Truck & Tractor pull by offering our listeners the opportunity to win free tickets. In an effort to create more awareness, we had a table at the Aylmer Sales Barn on Tuesdays. However, after a couple of months, we felt that the required work force and labour, with no marketable product to expense, could not be justified. In December, De Brigj hosted a concert at the Immanuel Christian School. It was a well-attended event. Eight performers entertained us, six of them being local.

De Brigj will be hosting the Plautdietsche Medienkonferenz (PMK) on July 12-14, 2023, which was originally planned for 2021. The committee has been working

on this project since 2020 but, due to the pandemic, it was necessary to postpone. It is interesting how things work out. In 2023, we will not only be able to host the international PMK, but we will also be celebrating De Brigj's 20th anniversary.

De Brigj continues to produce local programming that we share with other Plautdietsche radio stations. The programs currently produced include Waut Passieet, Tus em Heim, Kjinjastund, News with Helen, Läsen un Lieren and Mom to Mom. We are very blessed to have volunteers helping produce these.

Our advertising sales were down considerably this past year; however, our sponsorship was slightly up. Receipted donations remained like the previous year but un-receipted donations were only about half of the previous year. We also sold several large orders of CD sets of recorded programs, which helped with the bottom line. De Brigj did manage to meet or surpass budget. The forecasted budget did show a deficit but we finished the year with a \$6,200 lower deficit than budgeted.



*Nellie interviewing Lisa Janzen*

In September, we rearranged our programming to make it intentional. We created a two-hour children's programming slot, a weekend children's hour, the daily six o'clock news hour and the evening programming.

As office spaces were shifting in the downstairs portion of the building and De Brigj lost its recording studio to make room for the executive director's office, we converted the unused low space upstairs into a new radio studio.

*By Abe Wall,  
Radio Manager*



## MCS 2022-2023 HIGHLIGHTS



*Annual Fundraising Banquet May 2022*



*Sue at the Staff Development Day enjoying self-made ice cream.*



*Staff Training*



*MCS continued to support this project.*



### Thank You To Our Fundors:

- ▶ 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
- ▶ Ontario Trillium Foundation
- ▶ Canada Summer Jobs
- ▶ Kindred Credit Union
- ▶ Faith Communities
- ▶ Individual Donors