

April 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Executive Director's Report



The truth, which lives *faithfully* within all of us and will be with us for all eternity, is the basis for our abounding love. May grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Jesus the Anointed, the Father's own Son, surround you and *be with you always* in truth and love. *1 John*

Last year was a year of many highlights, along with challenges that demonstrated again how the services provided by Mennonite Community Services (MCS) are a joint effort. With Eddy Rempel still on medical leave, I remained in the Interim Executive position for the year.

Highlights involved celebrating 20 years of radio programming, which included hosting the Low German Media Conference (*Plautdietsche Medienkonferenz*) here in Aylmer during July. Six countries were represented and the whole conference was done in Plautdietsch, the one language uniting us. In August, because of the approval of a community

grant, we were able to replace the radio transmitter along with some other radio equipment, preparing us for many more years of being on air.

Another highlight was the opportunity for a couple staff to participate in a learning tour to Bolivia, visiting several Mennonite colonies. The learning provided us with insight on how to better welcome newcomer families when they choose to move to Canada.

At the banquet we celebrated our Ukrainian roots; during Mennonite Heritage Week we had a community sing along (*Singstund*), discussed our roots and served traditional *Sommaborscht*. The annual Food Fest made a comeback with a location change and a silent auction instead of live auction.

In January we received the sad news that Eddy Rempel had passed away, causing everyone to pause and reflect on this loss for MCS and the wider community.

Eddy had a passion to connect with people, especially newcomers who shared his Mennonite background.

In March the MCS board of directors appointed me to the position of Executive Director, a calling I took with humility and honour, being keenly aware of the responsibility of leading us into the next year. MCS has seen many changes, along with growth, in all the programs. This inspires us to keep sharing our resources with faithfulness.

By Anna Bergen



Anna Bergen
Executive Director



Volunteer Driver Margaret Harms and Diana Peters, Front Desk



Staff Christmas Party



Food Fest

DE BRIGJ RADIO PROGRAM REPORT



Susie Peters with daughter Samantha, Helen Bergen and Diana Peters



PKM Radio Workshop



Maria Friesen Recording

De Brigj radio had a year marked by significant milestones, achievements and challenges. This report highlights the key events, accomplishments and developments that have shaped the program's journey in 2023.

One of the most notable achievements of the year was the successful hosting of the Plautdietsche Medienkonferenz, (PMK) which had been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference, held from July 12-14, 2023, brought together representatives from Canada, Bolivia, Paraguay, Mexico, the United States, and Germany. The three-day event featured workshops, training, and networking opportunities. The conference was held at the Aylmer Christian Reformed Church.

The radio studio underwent a significant renovation, resulting in improved soundproofing and acoustic paneling. The new studio has enabled better-quality recordings. In addition, the program was fortunate to receive a grant to purchase new equipment, including a 300-watt transmitter. Staff training is ongoing to ensure a smooth transition to the new equipment.

De Brigj is currently producing six programs, catering to a wide range of audiences and interests.

The radio program was on location at the annual MCS Food Fest, playing music and providing live commentary. On August 18, 2023 we celebrated the 20-year anniversary of De Brigj, hosting a drop-in Open House event. Local mayors attended the event along with the Aylmer Express covering the celebration.

While advertising sales were lower than expected, the program's Christmas song and greeting sponsorship was a success. Kindred Credit Union, a long-time sponsor, renewed their annual sponsorship and added a financial program called "Ask the Money Lady". The program faces the ongoing question of its purpose and objective of it

being a social enterprise expected to generate a profit or a service to the community? This question will continue to be explored and addressed in the coming year.

In conclusion, radio De Brigj has had a remarkable year. We look forward to the continuing service of our audience, while exploring new ways to grow and thrive.

*By Abe Wall,
Director of Social Enterprise and Facilities*



PKM Group

Board of Directors

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

Helen Reimer *Secretary*
Peter Wiebe..... *Director*
Cornelius Knelsen.. *Director*

Jacob Giebrecht ... *Director*
Dave Blatz *Director*
Anna Bergen..... *Director*

Lisa Klassen..... *Director*

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REPORT

The 2023-2024 year has been a year of constant changes and adjustments.

For the past 15 years, Employment Services funding contracts were held directly with the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. In February of 2019, the Province of Ontario announced that employment services would be transitioning into a new way of program delivery. This new delivery model aims to "integrate social assistance employment services, as well as other government employment services, into Employment Ontario. This new system will be more responsive to the needs of job seekers, businesses and local communities." This means working even more closely with Ontario Works, ODSP and other priority populations.

In January, 2024, MCS, along with all employment service providers in Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties were mandated to switch to a Service System Manager (SSM) model. Under the new system, MCS, as an Employment Ontario service provider, now holds a contract with London Regional Employment

Services (LRES), a division of the City of London. New guidelines and processes were implemented on how funds were used to serve clients.

All these modifications created a variety of challenges in the administration and tracking of the program for the funders. For example, we had 3 fiscal year-ends in one year! This created extensive reporting requirements and increased administration and paperwork. There was also extensive and mandatory training for staff to become familiar with new funding model and how to deliver employment services. Training included sessions with Ontario Works caseworkers, with City of London staff, along with many other service providers who were going through the same challenges.

MCS continued to strengthen its community partnerships as a part of providing exceptional services. To further enhance these relationships, we hosted a Business After 5 Event, presented at schools, attend employer events, joined the Chamber of Commerce and the Elgin/St. Thomas Workforce Development Com-



Employment Staff Training

mittee and increased our overall presence at community events.

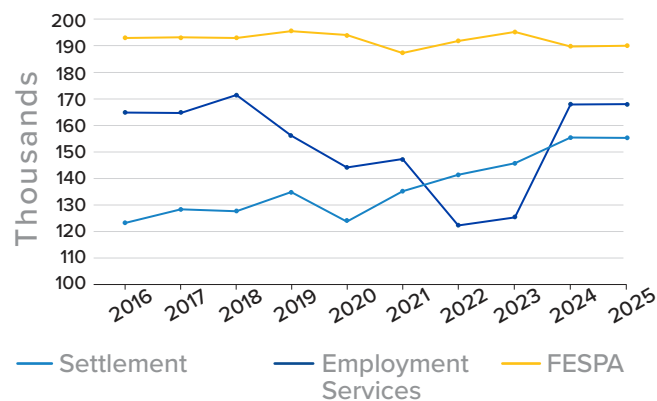
During all of these challenges, employment services continued to be provided to clients in a respectful and helpful way, meeting the majority of its targets. Clients continued to receive support with resumes, cover letters, job searches and connections to employers. Clients were blissfully unaware of the adjustments happening behind the scenes.

By Susan Loewen,
Employment Manager

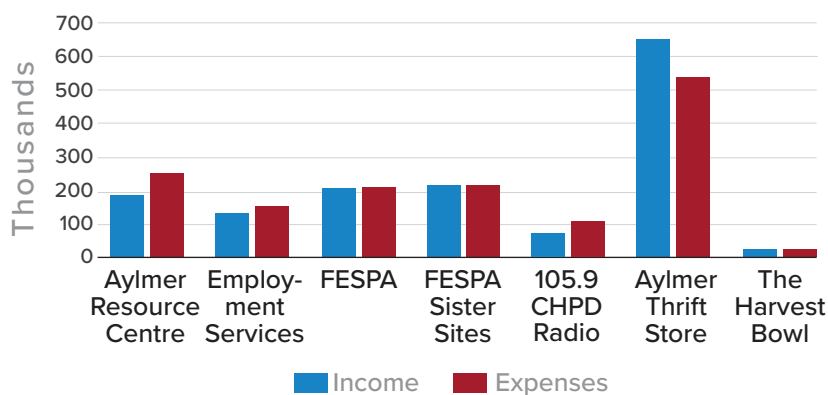


FINANCIAL REPORT

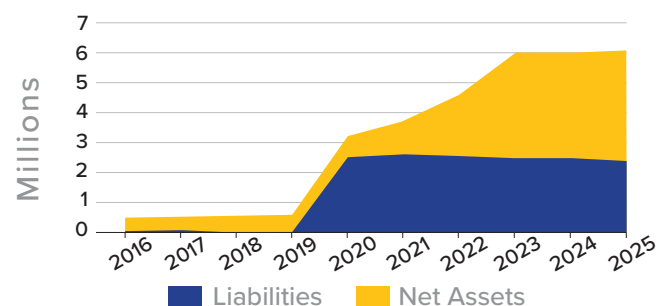
GRANT FUNDING FOR PROGRAMS



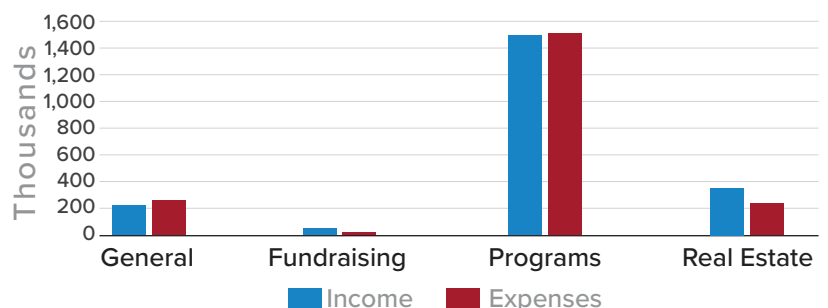
PROGRAM INCOME & EXPENSES



REAL ESTATE ASSETS



OVERALL INCOME & EXPENSES



MCS had **41** staff in total this last year which includes **10** seasonal staff and **1** summer students.

FESPA PROGRAM REPORT

This year the Family Education and Support Project of Aylmer (school program) celebrated 30 years of programming!

FESPA refers to three distinct, yet connected programs:

- ▶ **FESPA School:** 19 weeks of life skills education and English as a Second Language for women, and a preschool readiness program for their children 0-6 years;
- ▶ **Mom & Baby:** year-round teaching and support for pre- and post-natal women and their babies;
- ▶ **Family Support:** year-round assistance with appointments for registered participants.



Cookie Making

When programming for newcomer women and children started in the Aylmer area, it began with education for women and their children. As new funding became available, it grew to include the Mom & Baby program. At one point a teen program was also offered. Together these programs became known as the

Family Education (and) Support Project of Aylmer.

Over the course of 30 years there have been many changes. Some portions of the program are no longer offered (i.e. the teen program); other parts remain but have been adjusted to fit the needs, along with available funding. The ability to adapt is one of the primary reasons FESPA continues to be relevant; it remains a core strength of the program.

This past year we were informed of a planned change to the existing FESPA funding, with significant impact potential. This change would require a full reapplication and the reality that some projects would no longer be subsidized. After 30 years of funding of more than a hundred similar projects across Canada, this elicited strong reactions. In response, meetings were held, information was gathered and, eventually, news came that the changes would not be immediately implemented. Instead, contracts would be renewed until March of 2030. It is a temporary reprieve. However, the reality of funded programs is that financial support may be lost and ultimately jeopardize the program. Our hope is that MCS will continue to receive financial support and have the opportunity to celebrate many more milestones.

This past year included a variety of other challenges and highlights, from the need to hire and train new staff to the excite-



Finger Painting

ment of participants receiving their permanent resident status. There was always something happening and something to celebrate.



FESPA Participants

Ultimately, as we look back over the past 30 years, we are grateful for God's faithful provision through all the struggles and triumphs. We also look forward in anticipation of all that God will continue to do, in and through the FESPA program.

By Netti Wall, FESPA Manager

Mom & Baby Stats:



in Grocery Cards Distributed



Home Visits



Women



First Time Moms



Babies Born



Family Support Stats:



Appointments



Kilometers Traveled

FESPA School Stats:



Women in Attendance



Children Ages 0-6 years



AYLMER RESOURCE CENTRE REPORT

Newcomer Settlement Services staff seek to provide supports to newcomers so that they can successfully establish themselves in Canada.

The newcomers we serve are predominantly Low German Mennonites. There were 113 new families this past year, 49 who had not been in Canada before and 42 who have been in Canada less than five years. Mostly it is young couples from Mexico, pursuing employment opportunities. In fact, most have a job offer before arriving.

Of those who were brand new to MCS, 28 indicated they were from Canada. This may surprise the reader. This group includes adult children of previous clients, who travelled back and forth as teen-

“Some people quit and get a new job as soon as there’s no Low Germans working where they’re working, but you should never do that ‘cuz you won’t learn English that way.”

~ Isaac

agers. Once independent they decide to stay in Canada. However, many are still struggling with language and need support to navigate the initial stages of setting up house and registering for available services. One gap in services is helping older teens adapt and learn English.

Including both brand new clients and those who have been in Canada longer, we served a total of 752 families this past year. Top activities included: helping to understand and communicate with citizenship and immigration; passports;

financial questions; health; government benefits; and, birth certificates.

We also provided group sessions and informational audios on WhatsApp and De Brigj radio. Topics included: fraud prevention, Remembrance Day information and a 12-part series about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, Canadian symbols, government and geography.

We also ran the Volunteer Driver program. Diana matches volunteers with people in the community that need transportation to medical appointments. Of late, participants have mostly been seniors who have lived in Canada for a long time. There were five volunteers who donated more than 334 hours. The biggest challenges were: limited volunteer availability and the cost of fuel. Unfortunately, the United Way funding supporting this program was not renewed. We are re-focusing our efforts to supporting Low German Mennonites at medical appointments who need interpretation.

Another big change happened with the Mennonite Post outlet store closure. Previously the books and music CDs sold at MCS belonged to the Mennonite Post store in Manitoba. MCS retained a small portion of the sales. When the bookstore closed in Manitoba, MCS applied for funding to purchase a selection of material in the hopes of continuing this service to the community.

Overall, it was a busy year with a number of adjustments and changes. At the heart is still a strong staff who want to help. We know that ‘what we do for the least of these, we do for him who sends us.’

By Helen Bergen,
Settlement Services Manager



David and his wife Aganetha

“Jo, ekj saj uk välmol dankscheen fa dee goode Oabeit waut jie jedonen han. Ekj frei mie doa werkjlich sea too. Daut haft bloos väl bosja jegonen, väl bäta jeschaufft aus waut ekj jedocht haud.”

~ David Wiebe Teichroeb

Many of the people we help are like David and Aganetha; young newly-married, excited to begin life together in Canada.



Jacob Helena Redecop, Herman, Christina, Willy



5

Volunteers Drove
8940 km



Volunteers Assisted with
146 Appointments
334 Hours Donated

Top 5 Places of Origin:



Mexico
538 Families



Bolivia
39 Families



USA
29 Families



Belize
17 Families



Paraguay
12 Families

AYLMER THRIFT STORE REPORT

The 2023-2024 year was an exciting, busy year for the Aylmer Thrift Store, with a significant increase in donations during the spring and summer months. Staff and volunteers worked diligently to curate selections, making it easier for shoppers to find quality items and to divert used items from landfills.

As we reflect on the past year, we are reminded of the rewarding experience of helping others, while being good stewards of the items that come to us. We encourage everyone to consider visiting our store before buying new, as it saves you money, and supports our community.

We made a positive impact in the community by donating much-needed items to families affected by a massive fire in downtown Aylmer in March 2023. The store served as a conduit for the community to give, providing support to multiple families and individuals affected by the fire. We also supported families through our Compassion Note program, allowing them to receive essential items at no cost.

Overall sales increased 12% from the previous year with clothing and housewares as the top two sales categories. The Christmas season was another big

success, with special events contributing to amazing sales and happy customers decorating their homes thriftily.

The store implemented some changes in order to make it easier for customers to shop and donors to donate. This included changing donation receiving from three days a week to daily receiving. Additionally, the store made a small change to the retail floor layout by acquiring eight new clothing racks to accommodate customer preferences.

One ongoing challenge was the need for more volunteers, particularly from younger demographics. We appreciate all the help that volunteers give and are respectful and mindful of their time and ability. Especially our long term seniors who volunteer faithfully year after year.

We are also thankful for our Canada Summer Jobs student, Melissa Hiebert, for her contributions to the store during the summer months along with other students who volunteered.



Margaret Reddekopp Christmas Shopping



Ryan Wall at the register

As we look to the future, we are committed to continuing our mission of helping others while being good stewards of the items that come to us. Thank you for your support, and we look forward to another successful year.

*By Abe Wall,
Director of Social Enterprise and Facilities*



\$29,200

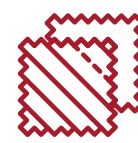
Christmas Sales

57 Compassion
Notes Ranging from
\$5.00 to \$595.00
for a Total of
\$8,294



15,781

Volunteer Hours



122,000 lbs.

Textiles Recycled

MCS 2023-2024 HIGHLIGHTS



Soup Cook-off Winner, Helen Bartsch, Serving Soup



Annual Banquet

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
- ▶ City of London
- ▶ Community Services Recovery Fund
- ▶ Canada Summer Jobs
- ▶ Kindred Credit Union
- ▶ Faith Communities
- ▶ Individual Donors