

April 1, 2025 - March 31, 2026

# ANNUAL REPORT

## Executive Director's Report



This past year marked another meaningful year of serving the community. MCS continued to fulfil its vision of assisting newcomers by connecting them with resources and opportunities that help them participate fully in community life.

Achieving this vision is possible because of the dedicated staff and volunteers who walk alongside families as they begin their settlement journey. Once again, all the programs operated at full capacity throughout the year, serving over a hundred new families, in addition to families who remain connected from previous years. While newcomers are often expected to fully integrate within a year or two, the reality is settlement takes a minimum of five years. Even so, there is a noticeable difference when families have access to the resources and support they need.

Women who participate in life skill programs, such as learning English, are far more likely to achieve independence than those without access to such programs. Children who attend our preschool pro-

gram transition more easily into kindergarten and are better prepared for school. Participant feedback continues to highlight the positive impact of these programs.

In addition to our core programming, MCS hosted several fundraising events that created opportunities for learning, engagement, and connection. The Food Fest Fundraiser in June continues to be a highlight, offering traditional foods for everyone to enjoy, including the famous apple fritters.

The year also included various educational & cultural initiatives such as the showing of the film "Where the Cottonwoods Grow" retelling the 1874 migration of Mennonites from Imperial Russia (Ukraine) to North America; the Low German Networking Conference for service providers and the Plautdietsche Medienkonferenz.

Rising costs of living have increased financial pressures. While grants once made up to 70% of our budget, now it is around

35%, underscoring the growing importance of community donations.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to welcoming those who walk through our doors, embracing the opportunity to journey with them. With the continued support of staff, volunteers and donors, MCS plays a vital role in the community where newcomers are valued, supported and empowered to thrive.

*By Anna Bergen,  
MCS Executive Director*



**Anna Bergen**  
*Executive Director*



*Anna Heide and Anna Bergen making breakfast at the Food Fest Fundraiser*



*Stitched Together Event MCS staff with author Aimee Reid*



*Traditional Rollkuchen served with watermelon at Swim Safety workshop*

# DE BRIGJ RADIO PROGRAM REPORT

De Brigj 105.9FM continues to operate and broadcast to the Low German speaking populations both on air and online.

Staff produced eleven programs including the well-loved *Waut Passieet* program, *Norechten von De Brigj*, *Mom 2 Mom*, *Tüs em Heim*, *Kjinjastund*, *This Week at MCS*, and daily bible readings. Various programs were shared within the Low German media network. In May 2025 two staff attended the Plautdietsche Medienkonferenz (PMK) which took place in Bolivia, strengthening and learning from other Low German content creators. While there, they also visited the Bible Arche, various schools, medical clinics, orphanages and businesses in the Mennonite colonies.

Throughout the year, we focused on collaborating with community organizations to inform the listening audience on topics such as, water safety, victims services, understanding police services, and fire safety which included twelve amazing give aways (valued at \$95 each), provided by the Fire Marshal's Office.

De Brigj promoted children's literacy through a fun event, with local author Aimee Reid and her book *Stitched Together*, which staff translated into Plautdietsch and shared on radio. We also continued

to promote local artists as well as accomplished musicians producing Low German music in Canada and abroad.

Advertising and sponsorship rates were reviewed and updated to offer more competitive pricing. Although growth was slow, advertising and sponsorship income increased over the past year. Radio revenue also exceeded radio expenses, marking the first time in several years without a deficit.

Maria Friesen took the Interim Radio Coordinator role, while the search for a permanent hire continues. The radio remains a source of hope and encouragement for many faithful listeners. For example, one older woman shared she found comfort in having it play throughout the day, stating that without it, the house was simply too quiet after her husband's sudden passing. Another listener reached out to us from Beach County, USA. She shared her gratitude for the program, *Mom 2 Mom*, and its role as a "steady voice of encouragement." Messages like these serve as a reminder for the purpose of the radio, which is to foster integration and inclusion through information and education.

*By Maria Friesen,  
Interim Radio Coordinator*



Host Maria Friesen sharing photos with Bolivian girls while touring local cheese factory as part of PMK in Bolivia



Briar McCaw, Maria Friesen, Nate MacIntyre recording radio interview about water safety and drowning prevention



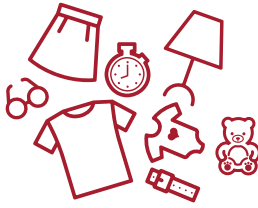
Winners of the fire safety promotional drive

# AYLMER THRIFT STORE REPORT

**62,537**  
Clothing Items Sold

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**76,000**  
Household Items Sold



**29,866**  
Books Sold

**12,388**  
Volunteer Hours



Staff setting up racks in new expanded space

At the Aylmer Thrift Store, we concentrated on improving our process and increasing our space to boost efficiency, productivity, and revenue.

The start of the new fiscal year saw us renovating to enlarge the women's clothing area. This expansion improved both the flow and display of products, keeping this category among our top sellers.

In June, we ceased accepting furniture donations and repurposed that floor space by installing shelving to display books, dishes, and household items. These categories experienced quicker turnover, which helped maintain strong overall revenue.

October brought the installation of a new receiving ramp, designed to facilitate safer and quicker movement of donation carts for our staff and volunteers. Donations unsuitable for sales in our store were re-

directed to other organizations, therefore keeping them out of landfills. To make this process more effective, we ordered custom crates that significantly streamlined and sped up loading during pickup days, cutting down the total time required.

Our community involvement continues to grow. The store began hosting youth groups on Wednesday evenings to promote volunteerism and local engagement, something we expect to continue.

Our Compassion Notes program is another meaningful way MCS supports the community. Shortly after Christmas, a young mother visited the store with her daughter to obtain essential items through the program. During their visit, staff learned that the little girl had not received any Christmas presents because the family could not afford any. She was

invited to choose a toy from our toy room, and the joy on her face as she excitedly picked out her gift was a heartwarming reminder of the impact of the program.

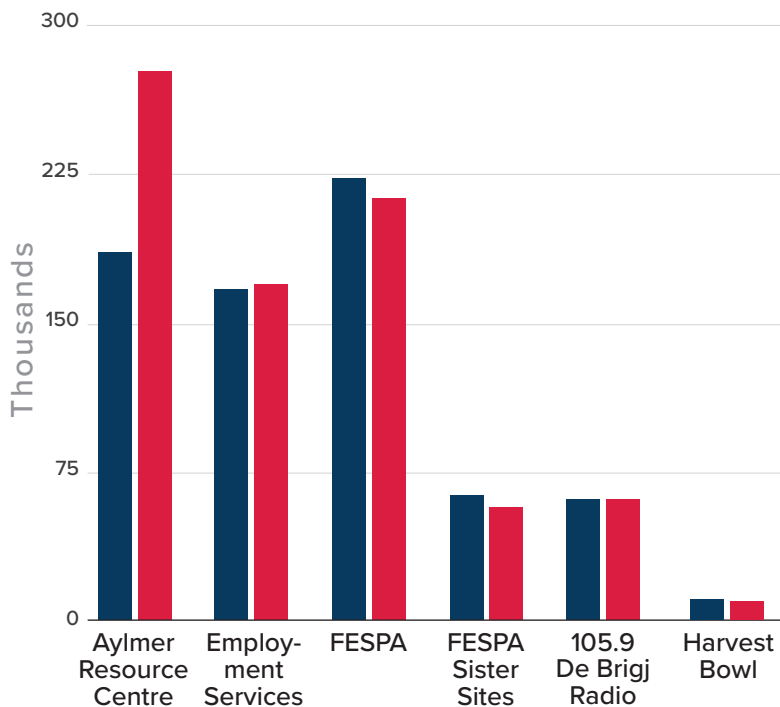
In August, an outdoor tent sale attracted strong community participation and generated an additional \$2,000 in sales that day. The year ended with sales surpassing budgeted expectations.

Looking ahead, we will continue to focus on improving the store layout, on donor relations to ensure a consistent inventory, and expanding events that enhance sales and foster community connections. We express our heartfelt thanks to our staff, volunteers, and donors for their flexibility through the renovations and transitions throughout the year.

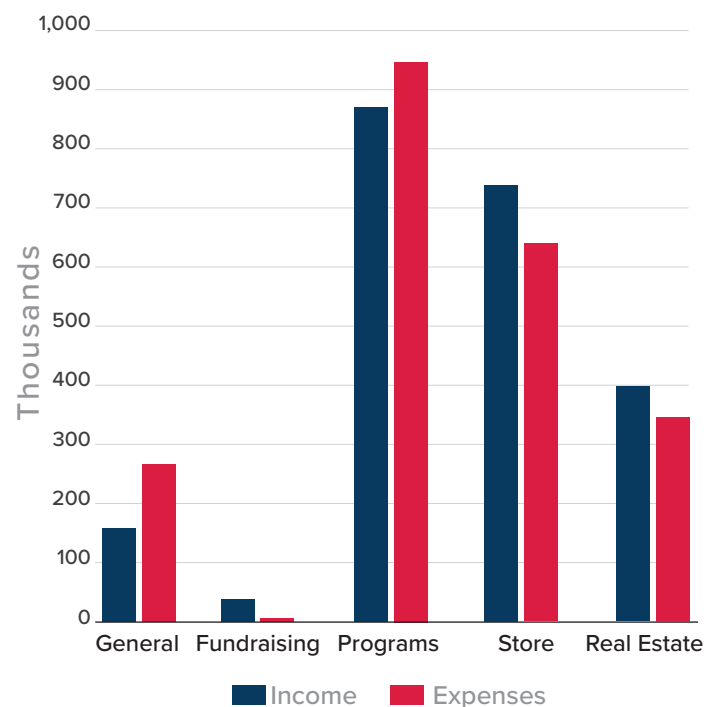
*By Agatha Neufeld & Margaret Klassen  
Thrift Store Supervisors*

## FINANCIAL REPORT

### PROGRAM INCOME & EXPENSES



### OVERALL INCOME & EXPENSES



On average, MCS has **22** permanent staff, both full and part-time; plus **10** seasonal and **1** summer student.

# FESPA PROGRAM REPORT

The Family Education and Support Project provides three core services to women, children and their families in Aylmer, Chatham, Norfolk and St. Jacobs.

- ▶ **Education:** English Language Learning (ELL) and life skills education for mothers, along with childminding and preschool readiness activities for children aged 0–6.
- ▶ **Mom & Baby:** Year-round education and support for pre- and postnatal women and their infants.
- ▶ **Family Support:** Ongoing assistance with appointments for registered participants.



Annie Banman in Baby Room

After a two-year partnership with FESPA, the Aylmer site, Fanshawe regretfully informed us that they could not provide a teacher for this year. This created a significant gap, as it left us with only one instructor through our long-standing and

much appreciated partnership with the YWCA. With some diligence and effort, we secured one-time funding for two years from the Low German Community of Practice and began the process of hiring a second instructor.

Trudy Driedger, who attended the Norfolk Moms & Tots program as a child with her mother, was a perfect fit for the role. Trudy's life trajectory changed as her parents realized the benefits and opportunities presented through education. As a result, they encouraged their children to pursue education. Trudy's desire became for other women and children to also experience those benefits, so she worked hard to create an optimal learning environment for the women in her class. The students frequently commented on their improvement in learning English language and life skills as well as a growing independence.

The Mom & Baby and Family Support programs also continued to offer teaching and support services to women and children. They supported families who experienced heartbreaking losses and health situations, those who excitedly welcomed new additions to their families, and those who needed help navigating routine appointments and paperwork.

When participants were asked how they had benefitted from the three core ser-



Preschoolers during circle time

vices, they expressed appreciation for all the help received as well as the opportunity to improve their English language and life skills. Another theme that surfaced repeatedly was the improvement of their mental health as a direct result of the teaching, support and community provided through the FESPA programs. One student stated *"I feel more sure in my community. I feel better about my future."* Another student commented that this program *"helps a lot with women's mental health and to learn and feel more confident in the community by speaking and understanding more English."*

We are grateful to hear these responses and remain committed to serving women and children in Aylmer, Chatham, Norfolk and St. Jacobs so that more families may be positively impacted.

By *Netti Wall*,  
FESPA Manager

## Mom & Baby Stats:



in Grocery Cards Distributed



Home Visits



Women



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 provided direct and indirect services to 848 families in the last fiscal year. It was a year marked by a sense of urgency from clients anticipating upcoming changes to citizenship eligibility resulting in impractical service expectations. Staff responded with reliable information to alleviate fears and manage expectations.

Consistently, clients inquired about changes to the Citizenship Act that removed the first-generation limit to citizenship by descent. Calls related to this topic more than doubled from previous years.

**“Thank you to all of you for your help and for what you do in helping people. You were a source of comfort and assurance when I needed it and am grateful that MCS was there when needed. I was blessed by the help.” ~ interpreted from PD message on phone**

Changes were enacted more slowly than newcomers anticipated, resulting in high levels of anxiety compounded, in part, by misinformation spread on social media by unqualified individuals. Staff reframed expectations and accessed reliable sources to clarify by explaining how a Bill becomes law in Canada. Overall, the Low German Mennonite (LGM) community is more informed about the process than they were at the beginning of the fiscal year.

Indirect orientation information was distributed on *De Brigj* radio station on topics such as filing income tax, workplace behaviour, registering for school, family



*Arlie Peters – in the office helping a client with some documents*

benefits, dressing for the cold, driving in Ontario, Remembrance Day, and municipal elections. Staff also offered in-person group sessions on water safety, health, connecting with others in the community

and interacting with police services. One group session included a visit with published author, Aimee Reid. She permitted MCS to translate her book *Stitched Together* into Plautdietsch which was told to the children attending an event.

While indirect and group orientation targets were met, most clients preferred personalized one-on-one sessions with settlement workers. Top enquiries related to citizenship, accessing health services and financial services, registering births, applying for and maintaining family income benefits, pension and income

assistance. The trend towards self-directed online applications resulted in seniors and newcomers asking for help who are otherwise independent. This need is likely to continue.



*Swim Safety group session in park with Sue Thiesen presenting*

Individual or family orientation sessions included assessing the needs of 130 families who accessed settlement services for the first time. As expected, 75 of these originated from Mexico. Another 19 new families came from Bolivia; 7 from the USA; 4 from Belize; 2 from Paraguay and 1 each from Peru and Nigeria. In addition, 21 new intakes were families from Canada. To clarify, most were young adult children of existing clients or immigrants from elsewhere in Canada. Significantly, the needs of young LGM adults leaving home were similar to brand new immigrants.

Additionally, staff and 4 volunteers supported 7 vulnerable persons with interpretation and advocacy at medical appoint-



*Citizenship virtual ceremony teens Heinrich and David becoming Canadian citizens in virtual ceremony on May 13th; with parents Aaron & Anna Giesbrecht*

ments. The need for reliable professional interpretation remains largely unmet due to the lack of trained LGM interpreters and the cost of such a program. MCS provided a day of training to interpreters to address this need.



**2,089 INDIVIDUALS SERVED**

MCS also sells a small selection of books especially relevant to the LGM community. The most requested resources were books in Low German. At the most recent count, we counted 72 different books in Low German.

In spite of the high volume, settlement staff supported newcomers effectively because each person we serve is valued as made in the image of a loving God.

*By Helen Bergen,  
Settlement Services Manager*

## Board of Directors

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Alvien Penner..... *Director*

# EMPLOYMENT SERVICES REPORT

The 2025–2026 fiscal year continued to be a year of transitions. With London Regional Employment Services (LRES) becoming the organization that delivers our employment funding and whom we report to. We also moved from one case management system to another, which caused large upheavals and increased administrative tasks for staff. As the Integrated Employment Services program develops, there is increased emphasis on consistency, accountability, and measurable outcomes across all service providers within the LRES Employment Ontario network.

MCS continued to deepen its understanding of the system, which integrates employment services more closely with other social services under a coordinated Employment Ontario system. This approach reinforces responsiveness to the needs of job seekers, employers, and the broader community, while strengthening collaboration with Ontario Works and other community partners. Over the last fiscal year, approximately 65–75% of clients served were identified as belonging to priority populations, such as Newcomers, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. Clients with higher barriers to employment require more intensive and individualized case management, resulting in longer service durations and increased staff involvement.

Employer engagement remained a key focus. MCS established and maintained relationships with employers, resulting in job trials/placements and work experiences. These efforts contributed to improved alignment between client skills and local labour market needs. We actively promote and participate in employer engagement by utilizing the Employer One Survey, which assists us in determining needs and challenges faced by employers.

MCS continued to strengthen community partnerships through active participation in local initiatives. Over the year, staff attended community events, job fairs, employer engagement activities, and delivered presentations to local schools and community groups. MCS remains an active member of the Aylmer Chamber of Commerce and the Elgin/St. Thomas Workforce Development Committee, contributing to regional workforce planning and labour market discussions.

The fiscal year was marked by continued administrative demands, including enhanced case-noting, milestone tracking, and compliance requirements. MCS completed approximately 596 services/appointments per month.

Despite the challenges, MCS maintained a strong focus on client service. Clients continued to access individualized supports,

including resume/cover letter development, job search assistance, interview preparation, and direct connections to employers. Client satisfaction remains strong and 85% of registered clients achieved positive employment or training outcomes.

MCS successfully achieved 94% of overall targets, while continuing to adapt services to meet evolving system requirements and the complex needs of the community.

*By Susan Loewen,  
Employment Manager*

## Reasons Why Positions Are Hard To Fill



Scan QR code for Employer One survey

## MCS 2025-2026 HIGHLIGHTS



MCS Food Fest Breakfast and Apple Fritters



MCS Annual Fundraising Banquet

### Thank You To Our Funders:

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