

AGM REPORT 2023 - 2024

Established in 1982, RIWC is a registered charity founded with a mission to empower racialized, immigrant and refugee women and their families. As a community-based organization, we are working to create a more equitable and inclusive Canada by addressing systemic barriers to women's equality.



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Executive Message

The Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre experienced a surge in demand for our services in 2023/24, with many of our programs exceeding our targets for participation. Collectively, we served over 529 clients representing over 44 countries! As always, our program and project teams rose to the challenge. They came up with practical solutions to ensure responsive programming and timely service delivery and provided referrals to essential supports through our extensive network of community partners, ensuring our clients' well-being remained a top priority.

Our VAW program expanded its eligibility criteria to include those who identify as non-binary and gender non-conforming, thereby making the program more inclusive. The intake process was streamlined to ensure swift engagement and retention. Clients are now transitioned out of counselling through 'gentle closures', giving them more agency in their decision to close the therapeutic relationship.

In 2023, the employment training programs responded to an influx of refugee claimants by providing them with information on employment and educational opportunities to gain the experience needed to succeed in the Canadian workplace at levels that corresponded with their qualifications. We also received a significant increase in referrals of refugees to the Wrap Around program. Due to the lack of shelter accommodation and the steep rise in the cost of living, housing support became the focus of this program.

Our popular 2SLGBTQ+ BIPOC Wellness Group came to an end this year; however, the toolkits we developed and positive feedback from participants will encourage more gender-based wellness programs and services in the future.

We expanded our seniors' programming by launching a 2SLGBTQI+ drop-in initiative this year. Through intergenerational mentorship support and workshops, seniors were able to perform day to day tasks easier and access new community services with the digital literacy skills they acquired.

In 2023, our Anti-Racism Action Project (ARAP) introduced education workshops, conversation groups and in-person crisis and referral supports to address rising rates of anti-Muslim hate-motivated incidences and hate crimes in the city.

We continued to strengthen our capacity to deliver our services with funding from WAGE and Toronto Foundation. Through a strategic planning process, we updated our mission and mandate to reinvigorate our purpose and direction. We developed a fundraising strategy to inform our grant seeking activities. We also updated our policies and procedures to ensure continued compliance with applicable legislation and regulations. With these infrastructure improvements, we will be better able to respond to stakeholder needs.

We love hearing stories from our clients who 'felt heard and empowered' and "extremely motivated and enthusiastic about starting a first job in Canada", or how a counsellor's "kind words gave them strength". We are grateful to be a part of our clients' journey towards achieving their goals and to our staff, placement students, and volunteers for accompanying them with the dedication and compassion that we have come to rely upon.

Our Programs

Violence Against Women

Program Description:

The Violence Against Women (VAW) program provides community-based counselling, support and referral services for women and their dependents who have experienced abuse and/or sexual assault, so that they may live free of violence.

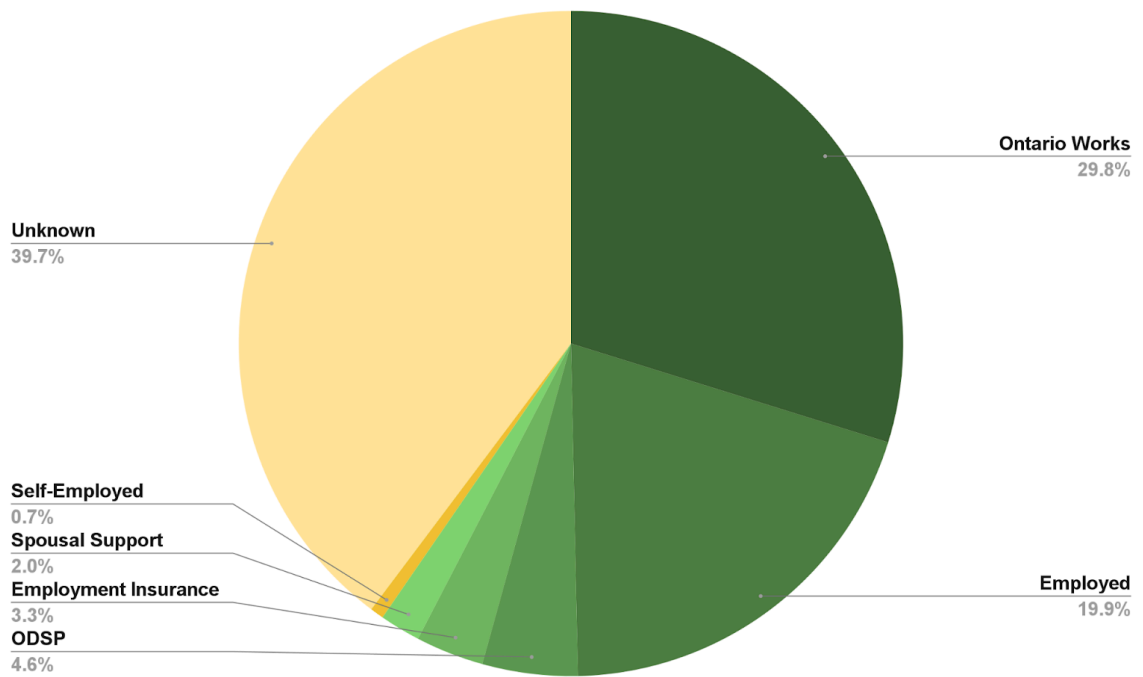
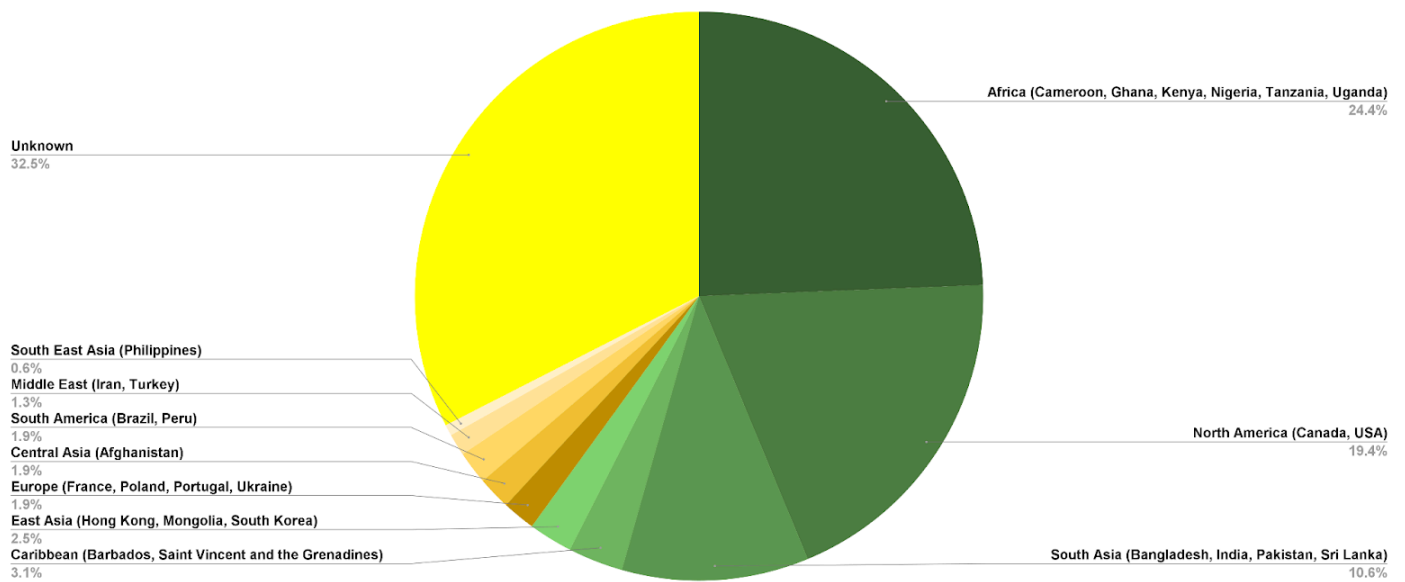
Summary:

VAW Counsellors worked with clients to navigate complex social challenges from a trauma informed approach that was anti-racist, gender-based, and feminist. Common client issues addressed in sessions this year included immigration status appeals, obtaining meaningful employment to support families, and gaining confidence to connect with networks of support as they rebuild their lives. Clients also sought support to address historical trauma and abusive relationships related to domestic violence. Others needed support in dealing with co-parenting dynamics, especially in high conflict situations or after separation from an abusive partner to both heal and ensure that children were supported during the process.

Statistics:

81	172	15	33
Intakes	Clients	Referrals (service at capacity)	Referrals (to appropriate services)

- 81 intakes were conducted.
- 172 women were served.
- Over 48% of clients identified their country of origin as outside of Canada.
- Over 30% of clients were Refugee Claimants or Convention Refugees.
- Over 35% of clients were on social assistance (i.e., Employment Insurance, Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program).



Key Successes:

- The eligibility criteria was expanded to all those aged 16+ who identify as a woman, non-binary, and/or gender non-conforming and have experienced any form of violence, thereby making the program more inclusive.
- The intake process was streamlined by having the Intake Coordinator schedule the first session with the client's assigned Counsellor immediately following an intake session so as not to lose contact with the client.

- VAW Counsellors implemented “gentle closures” to support clients who were ready to end counselling, but benefitted from an ongoing therapeutic rapport to further gain confidence in the newly learnt skills and tools they were applying. Reducing weekly sessions to bi-weekly or monthly follow-ups as needed helped clients gain agency towards their decision to close the therapeutic relationship. This approach also allowed us to accommodate new clients while managing the waitlist.
- As the RIWC VAW program offers flexibility with respect to the number of sessions, our outreach activities were focused on organizations without long-term counselling as an option. We also expanded our outreach to areas throughout the GTA as we continue to provide virtual services with a hybrid service delivery model.

Client Stories & Testimonials:

- Jane (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) is a survivor of sexual violence and long-term domestic abuse. She showed immense dedication towards her sessions and practised cognitive skills as discussed. The weekly sessions with the client resulted in improvement of cognitive abilities, healthy behavioural patterns, and positive thought process. The client’s challenges towards initiating a task and setting life goals were also addressed during the counselling sessions. She is presently enrolled in a course at George Brown College and volunteers at a shelter on a part-time basis.

“You were an amazing help in my recovery. I got to speak to you about all my trauma, not just the rape, because when I look back, the rape was just a small thing that happened to me. It won’t define me. I’m strong and I am a survivor. You helped me in such a crucial moment. I was about to give up, but you listened. Your kind words gave me strength. I’m in school now and I will keep on practising what you taught me. You are wonderful! Thank you for all your help.”

- Mariam (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) struggled with a broken relationship, which affected her psychological health. She was in between careers when she began her counselling sessions and so required guidance regarding her future prospects as well. Sessions focused on building her self-confidence so that she could overcome low self-worth and self-esteem. Career counselling was a significant part of the counselling relationship and allowed her to challenge apprehensions about her future.

“I have been actively searching for a job. I have gone to interviews, but there are ups and downs. I guess this is normal. I haven’t yet found a full-time job. I am also looking at training programs as I try to decide what my best career path should be. My mental health is strong sometimes and at other times weak; however, all my counselling sessions helped me realize that I am able to face my current situation maturely. I appreciate your time and support and definitely will reach out if I ever need counselling again.”

- Anna (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) was a survivor of human trafficking and sexual abuse. The sessions comprised of intense emotional validation that allowed the client to feel safe. Counselling was provided to help the client overcome fear of authority figures and severe depression as well as resolve relationship concerns with her partner. A variety of therapeutic techniques were practised with her to treat post-traumatic symptoms. The client is now living a happy married life with her two children and works full-time on a farm in the suburbs with her husband. She is currently on the lowest dosage of her antidepressant medication, which is an indicator of immense improvement.

“My experience sharing my problems/thoughts/feelings with you at first was not easy. Throughout the process, you made me trust you and I felt relaxed talking to you. You were very understanding and you always listened carefully. Towards the end of our sessions, I felt like we became friends. You were always very professional and explained a lot of things on how to better my way of thinking and improve my life. I will never forget this! Without RIWC, people like me might never get the help needed. Job well done! Thank you”



**Ministry of Children,
Community and Social Services**

Essential Pathways to Employment

Program Description:

The Essential Pathways to Employment (EPE) program is an eight-week pre-employment program for adults 18+ who are receiving social assistance through Ontario Works.

Participants set their own goals and work towards achieving them by completing the following activities:

- **Career plan;**
- **Daily computer classes;**
- **Employment-readiness and life-skills workshops;**
- **Résumé writing;**
- **Customer service course.**

Participants continue to receive support for job search and retention as well as referrals to resources and job opportunities during a **six-month post-program support** period.

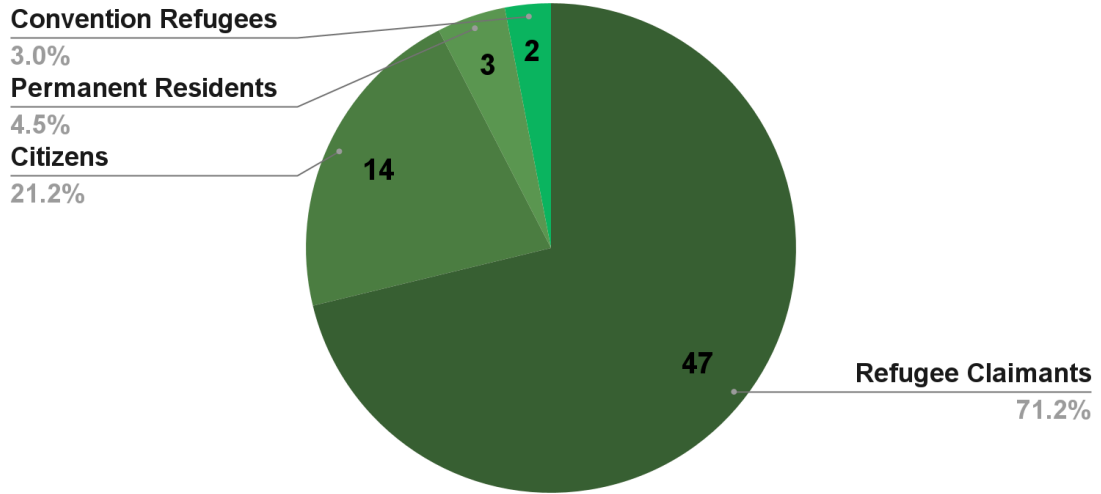
Summary:

In 2023/2024, there was an influx of refugee and immigrant communities, who expressed an interest in acquiring information on employment and education opportunities. A large number of these referrals had emigrated to Canada within the last 3 to 6 months and faced barriers to securing employment, especially in similar professions to those held in their country of origin. In addition to facilitating workshops on Résumé writing, interview skills, networking, and the hidden job market, program staff referred participants to bridging programs where appropriate.

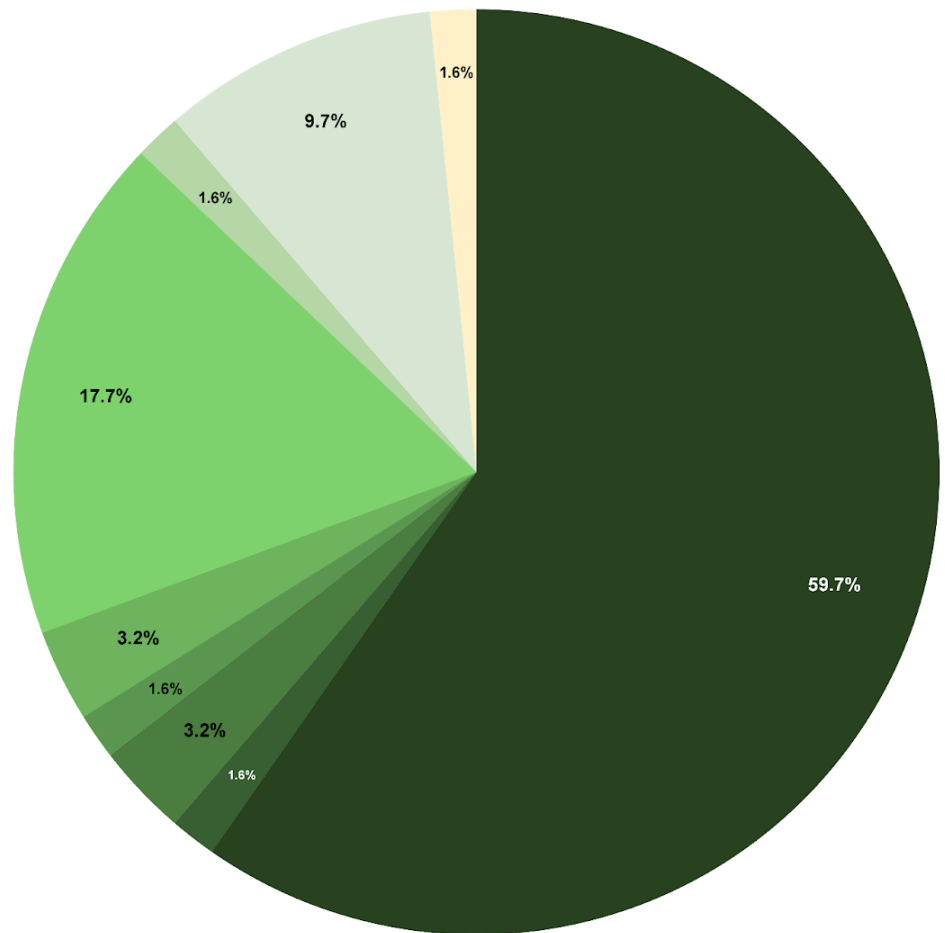
Statistics:

- **66 participants** enrolled in the program in 2023/24.
- **Approximately 70% of participants identified as women or non-binary.**
- Participants spoke over **29 different languages** (other than English).
- Over 50% of participants indicated African countries of origin.
- **Over 70% of participants were Refugee Claimants or Convention Refugees.**



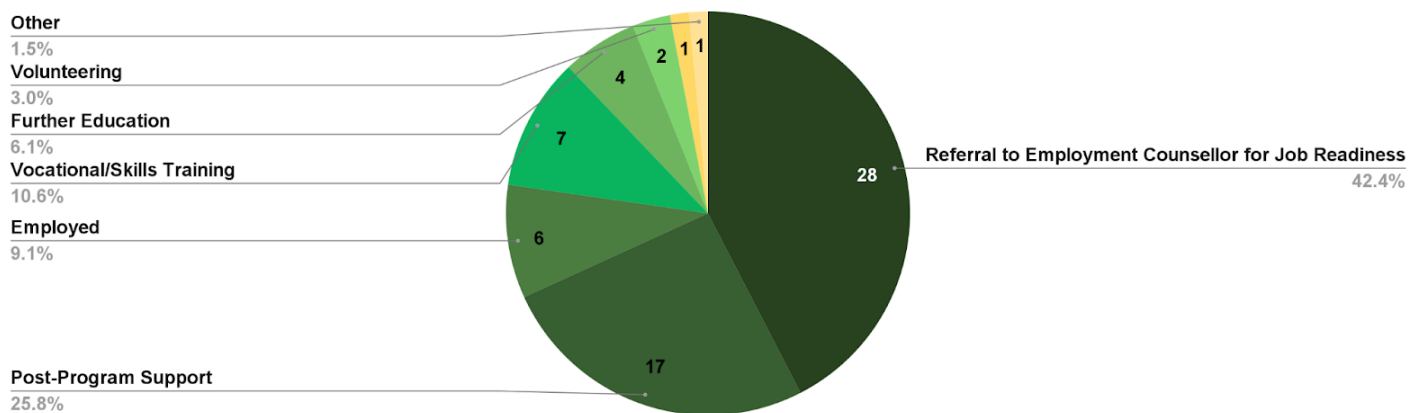


- Africa (Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda)
- Caribbean (Jamaica)
- Central Asia (Afghanistan)
- Europe (United Kingdom)
- Middle East (Oman, Turkey)
- North America (Canada, Mexico)
- South America (Colombia)
- South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan)
- Southeast Asia (Malaysia)



Key Successes:

- In 2023, we reached our **target of 63 participants** who successfully completed the core program and continued with post-program support.
- **100% of participants** who completed the post-program support period **achieved an outcome** (i.e., referral to employment counsellor for job readiness, employment/self-employment, further education or skills training, volunteer placement or other work preparation experience, addiction or mental health treatment, and/or access to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)).
- By the end of the program, **six participants** obtained jobs as an office assistant, daycare worker, early childhood educator, cook, and other positions in reforestation services and food companies.
- Intake appointments were scheduled within two days of a referral. Following intake, eligible registrants were enrolled in the program on a **rolling basis** to ensure **timely engagement**.
- Program staff provided **in-person technical support** to participants requiring assistance with laptop set-up and training on the Zoom communications platform in response to requests.
- Staff shared **job fair calendars** from partner organizations in advance for preparation as participants demonstrated improved hiring prospects through in-person contact with potential employers.



Client Stories:

- After a participant reported not having the funds to purchase a laptop and pay for monthly internet access, program staff provided guidance on how to connect with Ontario Works to secure technology supports so that they could participate fully in the program. The participant reported that he felt heard and empowered to communicate his needs going forward.
- In response to a Wrap program participant's expressed interest in joining the EPE program, program staff provided him with direction on the work permit application process in the hopes of expediting his EPE enrollment. In the interim, he was invited to participate in some EPE workshops to maintain his motivation level. Upon successfully obtaining his work permit, he formally enrolled in the EPE program.

Partners:

Credit Counselling Canada

PTP Adult Learning and Employment Centre

Achēv Education & Training

Toronto District School Board

Toronto Public Library Life Pathways Psychotherapy

Seneca College

Costi Canada Revenue Agency

Women's Economic Council

Up with Women

iSisters
Dress for Success

Toronto Metropolitan University
(Spanning the Gaps & Gateway Programs)



Food Service and Hospitality Training

Program Description:

The Food Service and Hospitality Training (FSHT) program is a unique 10-week employment program for adults 18+ who are receiving social assistance through Ontario Works and wish to enter the food service and hospitality sector.

Participants set their own goals and work towards achieving them by completing the following activities:

- **Career plan;**
- Daily **computer classes;**
- Employment-readiness & life-skills **workshops;**
- **Specialized workshops on the food & hospitality sector** (i.e., food services, catering, administration, events management, and social entrepreneurship);
- **Résumé development;**
- **WHMIS certification;**
- **Food Handler certification;**
- **Customer service course;**
- **Written assignment.**

Participants continue to receive support for job search and retention as well as referrals to resources and job opportunities during a **six-month post-program support** period.

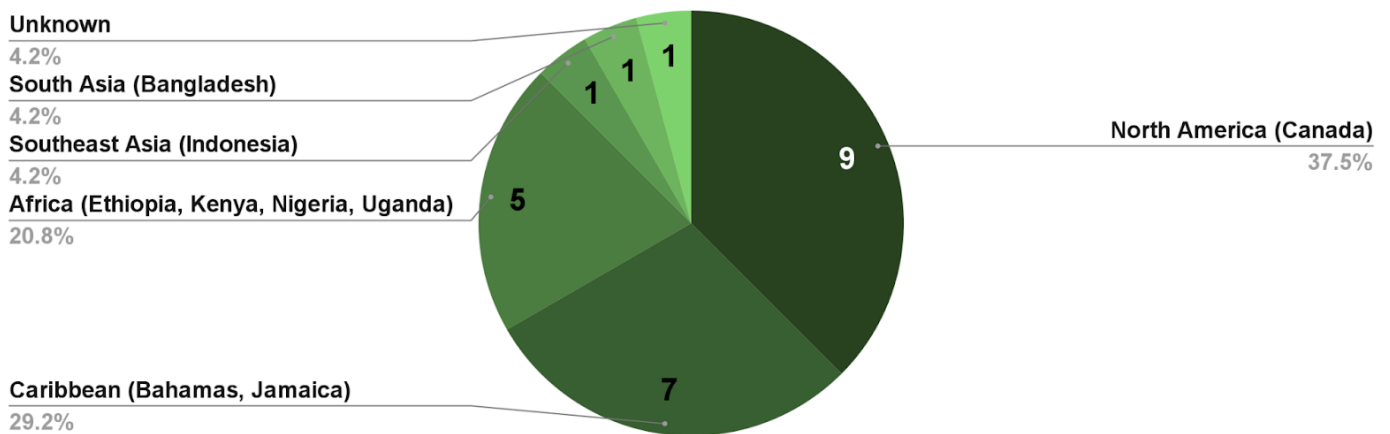
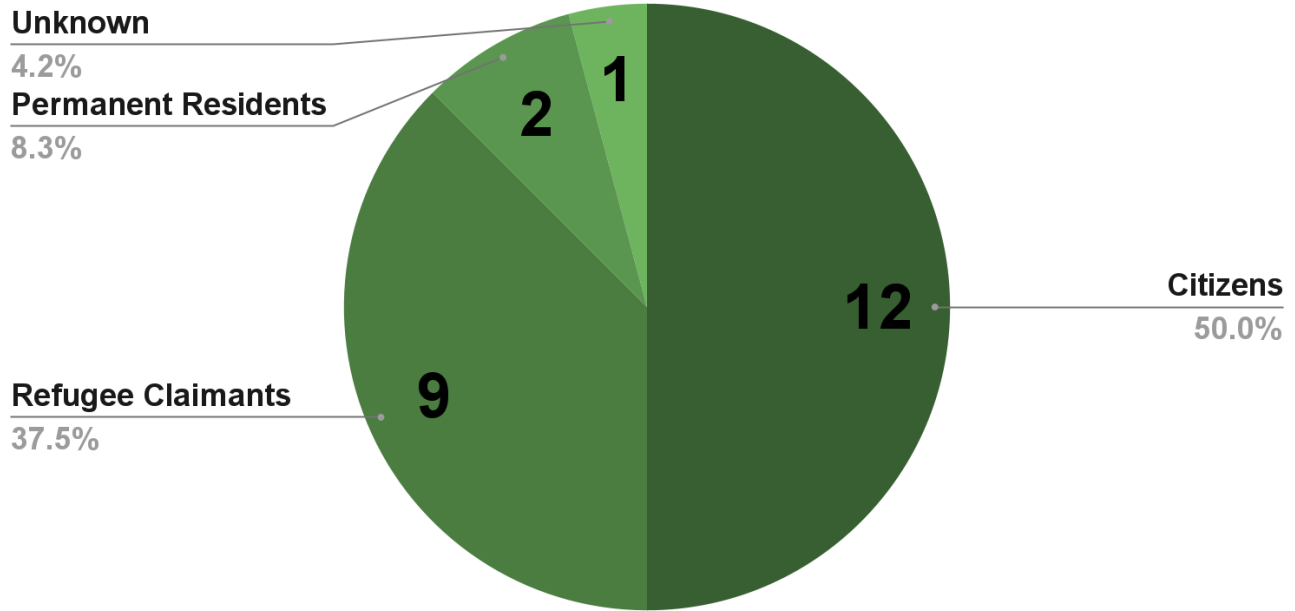
Summary:

The FSHT program remains a popular program due to the high demand for workers in the food and hospitality sector. Consequently, we reached our initial target of 20 participants within the first few months of 2023 and were granted 4 additional seats to accommodate additional referral requests. Many of the participants expressed an interest in becoming entrepreneurs by eventually owning their own catering/restaurant business given previous experience in their country of origin.

2023 Statistics:

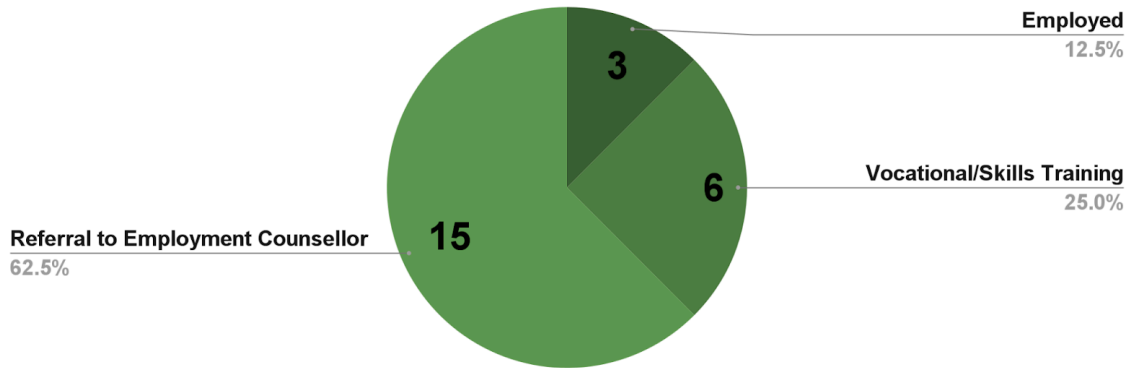
- **24 participants** completed the core program.
- **96%** of participants identified as **women.**
- **38%** of participants were **refugee claimants.**
- Participants spoke **7 different languages** (other than English).
- Participants indicated **10 different countries of origin.**
- A third of participants indicated Canada as their country of origin.

A word cloud of languages spoken by participants. The words are arranged in a roughly circular pattern. The largest word is 'English'. Other words include 'Bengali', 'Spanish', 'Swahili', 'Malay', 'French', 'Yoruba', and 'Arabic'.



Key Successes:

- In 2023, we **reached our increased target of 24 participants (from 20 in the previous year)** who successfully completed the core program and continued with post-program support.
- Participants with limited computer skills were referred to RIWC's digital literacy program for additional support.
- Program staff shared job fair calendars from partner organizations in advance for preparation as participants demonstrated improved hiring prospects through in-person contact with potential employers.
- 38% of participants found employment or enrolled in further education or training programs as an outcome. The remaining participants continue to receive post-program support for their job searching.
- By the end of the program, **three participants** were employed in the food service and hospitality sector as a baker, food prep, and dietary aid.
- 95% of participants successfully obtained Food Handlers' and Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) certifications.



Client Stories:

- A single mother, who initially found public speaking challenging, eventually became one of the most vocal participants after receiving encouragement from program staff. When staff requested volunteers for mock interviews, she was the first person to step up!
- A participant found employment the day after she finished the FSHT program! She attended a job fair upon the recommendation of program staff with her résumé in hand and got hired on the spot. She is extremely motivated and enthusiastic about starting her first job since her arrival in Canada.
- After completing the FSHT program, a participant was referred for further training as a personal support worker, which led to employment in this area. She received support, resources, and additional referrals throughout the program, which she found helpful for navigating her personal issues.
- A participant was having difficulty finding a job in the food service industry. With coaching, she spent three months modifying her résumé for several job applications. Her perseverance paid off and she is looking forward to her newfound financial independence. Program staff have also referred her to Credit Counseling Canada to learn how to manage her finances so that she can become debt-free.

Partners:

A Poetic Health **Credit Counselling Canada**
 PTP Adult Learning and Employment Centre
 iSisters **Achēv Education & Training**
 Toronto District School Board
Up with Women **Toronto Public Library** **Life Pathways Psychotherapy**
 Dress for Success Seneca College **Costi**
 Women's Economic Council Canada Revenue Agency
 Toronto Metropolitan University
 (Spanning the Gaps & Gateway Programs)



Wrap Around Support

Program Description:

The Wrap Around Support program was initiated in July 2020 to assist Ontario Works recipients in dealing with the impact of the pandemic. The program continues to provide eight weeks of online life-stabilization and housing support to participants through the following services:

- **Goal Setting** to prioritize participant needs;
- **Group Information Sessions** on various topics (e.g., renters’ rights, food security, financial literacy, library cards, nutrition, assertiveness training, job readiness, virtual interviews, 211 navigation, Toronto Community Housing portal); and
- **Weekly Check-ins** with coaching, referrals and other supports provided based on participants’ needs (e.g., clothing banks, finding a family physician who speaks their language); and
- **Access to Resources** (e.g., affordable rental housing listings, online resource library).

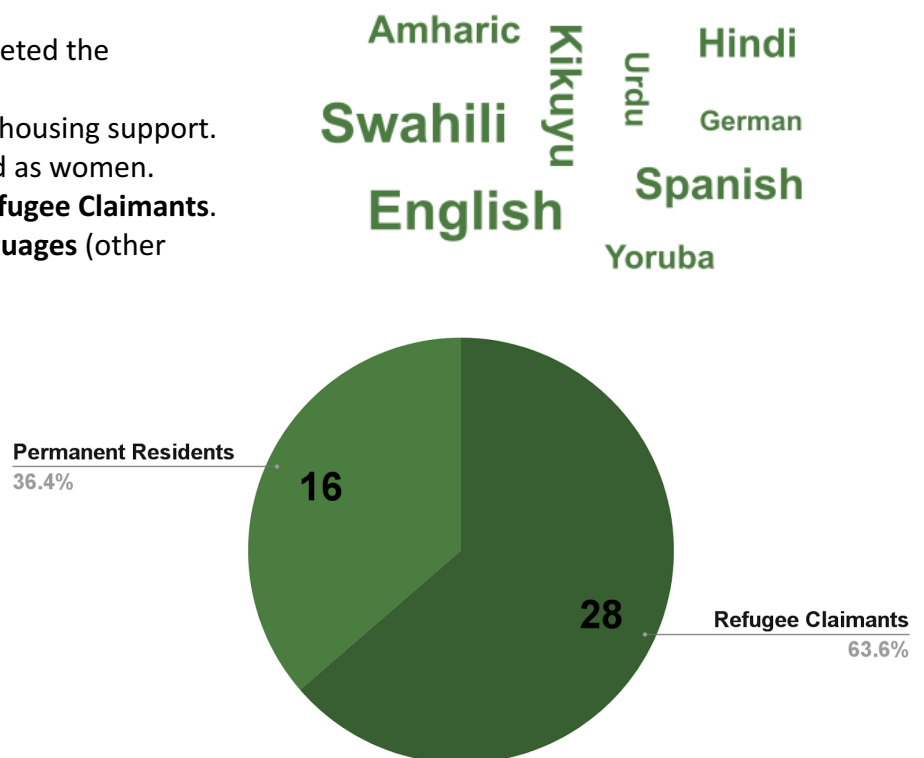
Participants continue to receive resources and information during a **two-month post-program support** period.

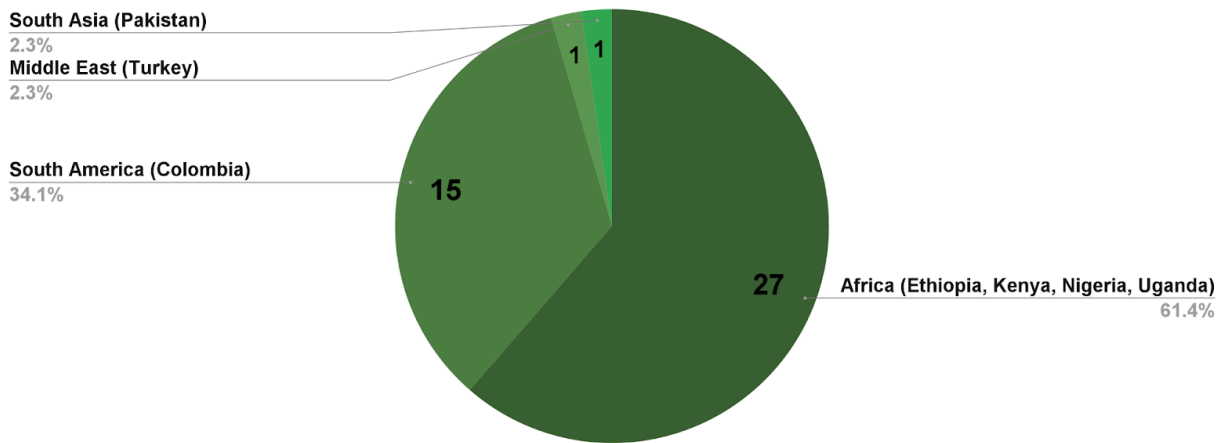
Summary:

In 2023, we received a significant increase in referrals to the Wrap program due to the lack of shelter accommodation for an influx of refugees to Toronto. As 28 refugee claimants became clients, housing support was the focus of our program, which included information on the rental market, Landlord and Tenant Board, and shelter housing resources available. They were also referred to the GLOW program at New Circles and Oasis Clothing Bank for clothing as needed. To meet the high demand for these life stabilization support services, Toronto Employment and Social Services increased the number of participants we could accept in the program from 35 to 46.

2023 Statistics:

- **44 participants** successfully completed the program.
- 26 clients requested and received housing support.
- Over 90% of participants identified as women.
- **Over 60% of participants were Refugee Claimants.**
- Participants spoke **8 different languages** (other than English).
- Participants indicated **7 different countries of origin.**
- Over 60% of participants indicated African countries of origin.





Types of Supports/Resources	Types of Referrals
Computer Classes	Clothing Bank
Employment (Résumé Writing, LinkedIn, Job Searching, Interview Skills)	ESL Classes
Financial Literacy	Food Bank
Healthcare	Furniture Bank
Housing	Further Education/ Skills Training Programs
Immigration	VAW Counselling
Mental Health	Volunteer Bank
Nutrition	
Online Resources (Google, YouTube)	
Technology	

Key Successes:

- We were able to accommodate **44 participants, exceeding the original funder requirement of 35 participants**, in response to increased demand for housing with the influx of refugee claimants during the summer and fall.
- **All participants were 'stabilized'** following completion of the program; three of the participants went on to enroll in the Essential Pathways to Employment program while another felt confident to embark on a job search.

- Several referrals were made to RIWC programs, including the 2SLGBTQ+ Wellness Group and Violence Against Women program, in response to requests for wellness support and counseling services. Clients were also referred to the Essential Pathways to Employment program following WRAP participation for employment training opportunities.
- Program staff introduced flexible scheduling to better support participants who had to attend immigration, housing, and/or medical appointments during the day.
- Participants were encouraged to explore community supports for social connections, including ethnic grocery stores and places of worship. These networks also are an important referral source for housing given the shortage.

Client Stories:

- When a participant was having difficulty navigating and understanding housing supports, program staff provided her with detailed information on housing subsidies as well as additional community resources. Staff also supported her in the drafting of an email and preparation for her meeting with the shelter where she resided to request services and resources available through them. She was eventually granted a subsidy, which enabled her to secure housing.
- A participant residing in a shelter was able to successfully use tools he acquired from the program to secure his own accommodation. The Wrap Coordinator also directed the client to resources for his new place through referrals to the clothing and furniture banks.
- A participant reported feeling 'lost' on how to search for housing. The Wrap Housing Coordinator was able to provide detailed information on setting a budget, online and in-person search options, and available housing subsidies through the shelter where she resided. The participant now has a plan on how to proceed with her search for housing.
- A homeless participant, who was new to Canada and feeling isolated, was connected to food and clothing supports while he waited for shelter space. The Wrap Coordinator contacted community churches on the client's behalf to inquire about a temporary bed given the severe shortage of shelter space in Toronto as a stop gap measure. As he was new to Canada, the Wrap Coordinator sought to address his sense of isolation through regular check-in meetings and additional support.



Our Projects

2SLGBTQ+ Wellness Group 2022 - 2023

The goal of the 2SLGBTQ+ BIPOC Wellness Group project was to create a virtual space to enhance the mental and social health of adults living in the GTA, who were marginalized by race, gender and sexuality. Participants engaged in meaningful discussions and learned valuable information about health and wellness through a queer and anti-racist lens. A key feature of the program was the provision of mental health-related adult education through facilitator-led discussions.

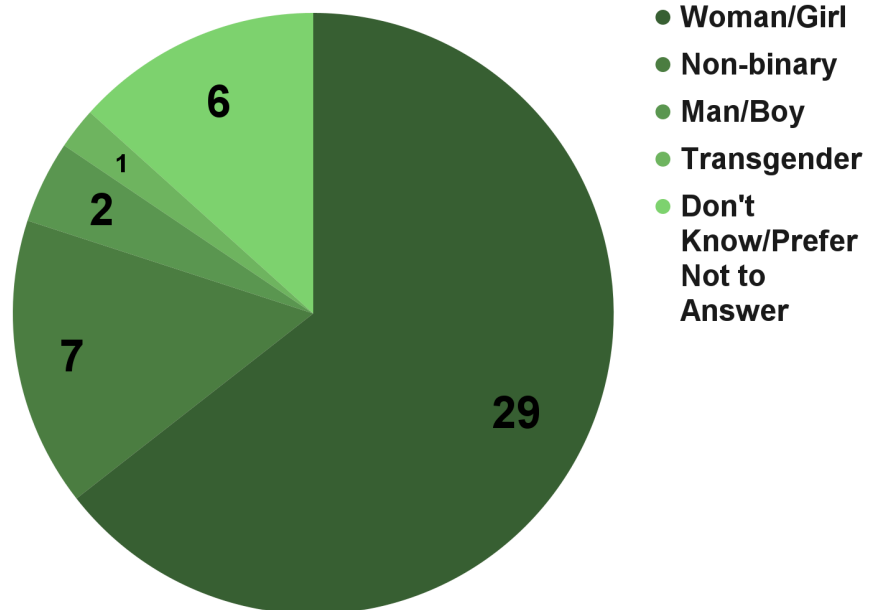
We held weekly group sessions for three cohorts from May 2022 to August 2023. For the final cohort in July/August 2023, each session began with a topic of discussion, followed by a group dialogue where participants shared their unique experiences, asked questions, and provided feedback. The therapeutic modalities used to facilitate the program's topics and concepts were based on Feminism, Marxism, Anti-racism, and Queer theory.

Topics included the following:

- Identify and sexuality
- Intimate partner violence
- Stress
- Emotional regulation

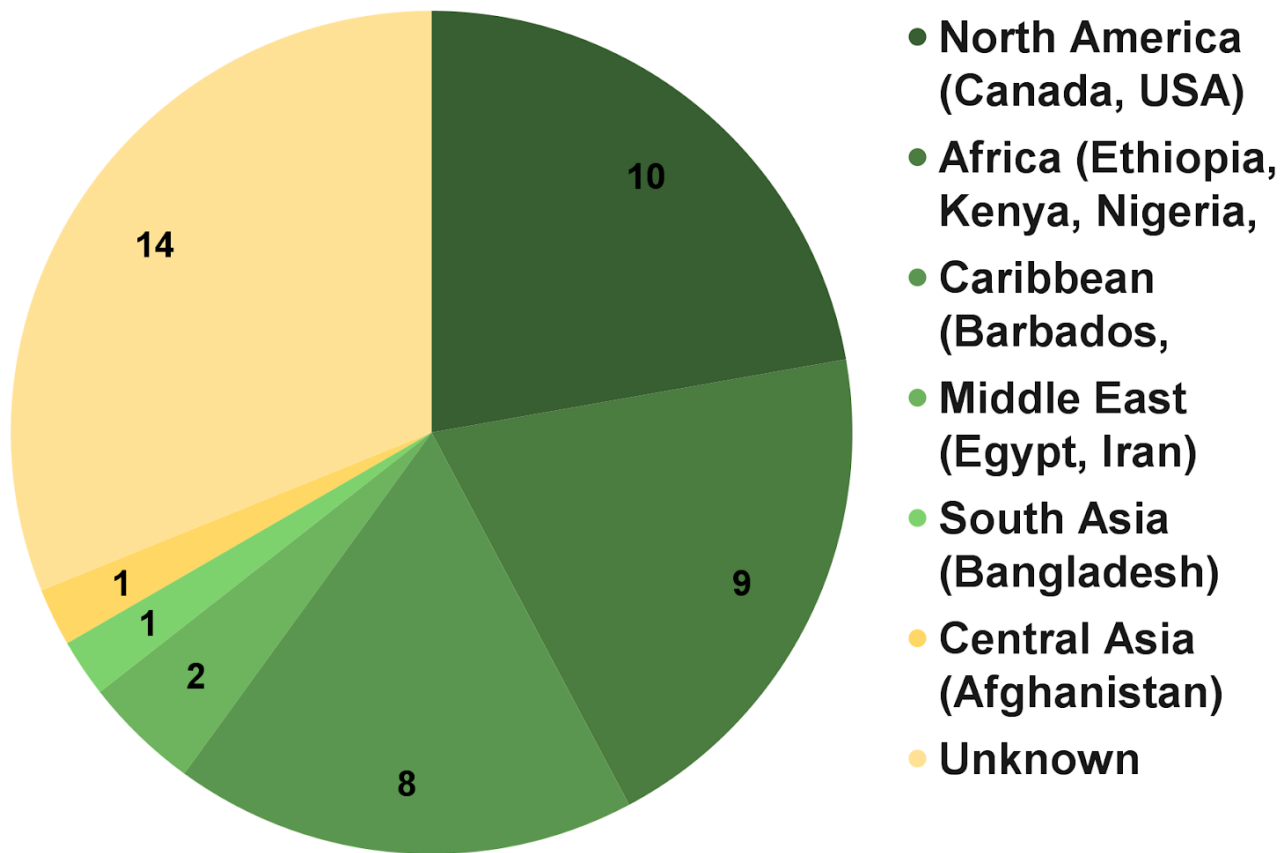
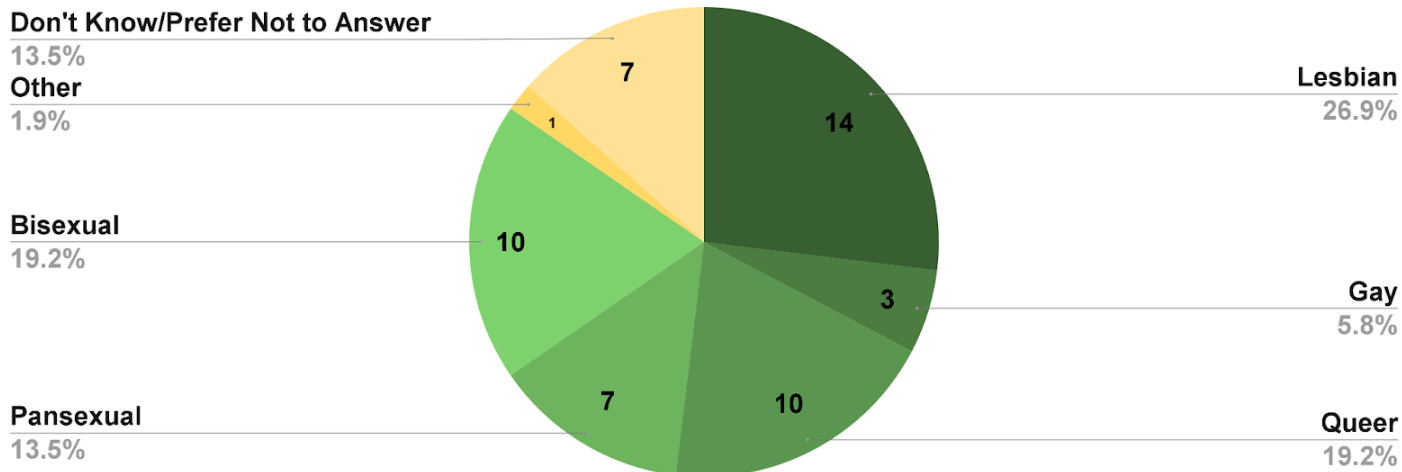
Concepts included the following:

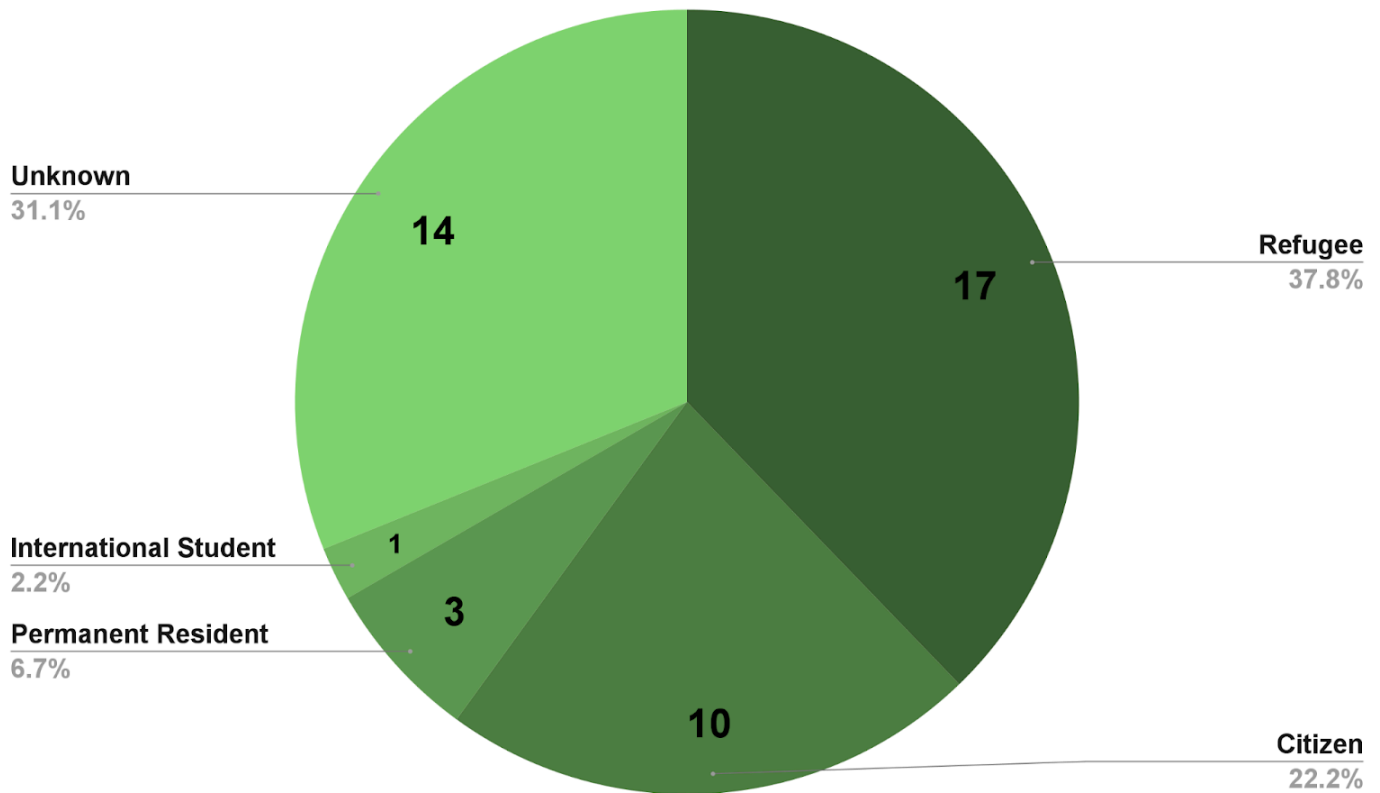
- Racism
- Joy
- Oppression
- Community



Statistics:

- We administered three cohorts with 11, 21, and 13 participants for a **total of 45 participants**.
- 64.4% of participants identified as a woman; 15.6% of participants identified as non-binary; 4.4% of participants identified as a man; and 2.2% of participants identified as transgender.
- 47% of participants identified their country of origin as outside of Canada.
- Over 35% were either Refugee Claimants or Convention Refugees.





Key Successes:

- We hired a consultancy group to develop and implement voluntary, online, anonymous surveys to understand how participants were experiencing the group and what could be improved upon. Overall, respondents provided positive feedback about the 2SLGBTQ+ BIPOC Wellness Group, with some recommending increasing the number of sessions. The findings from this evaluation supported the need for additional wellness workshops as part of our future programming.
- We developed a curriculum and toolkits as well as the capacity to deliver programs and conduct outreach online that can be further enhanced for future gender-based programs and services.

Client Testimonials:

"I attended the group to help me enhance my health and well-being, manage stress, and improve my well-being by raising my self-esteem. The program was beneficial because it gives you a positive effect, as in improved physical and mental health. My favorite session was the first one on stress management and also the one on emotions and feelings. I was able to learn how to handle stress and how to deal with emotions. I came to realize that you are supposed to identify the emotion, take action, and get help. It has helped me to discover myself. I thank the facilitator for the exciting and informative sessions and recommend the program to anyone experiencing similar challenges".

"The facilitator has been great at all the sessions and I'm sad that they are ending."

“The sessions have shown me that I have been beating myself up. They have taught me how to manage my feelings by identifying what I am feeling. I now know to take a step back and look at the bigger picture.”

“So far, I learned that I have more to learn. And I didn’t know this before the group.”

“I attended the group for a space where I can pour out how I feel. My favorite topic in the group was “Emotions: acknowledging, honoring and processing”. I learnt how to understand, process and work with my emotions. I also learnt how to understand myself a lot more. I am looking forward to more programs like this”.

“I attended the group because I would like to connect, interact, and have access to a supportive network of people who build, encourage, and empower me to live a fulfilling life. The comparison between feelings and emotions was my favorite topic along with the meaning of anger, which made a lot of sense. I'm now working on being still and taking the time to reflect rather than "feeling stuck" when I experience anger. I tend to be more assertive when it comes to conflict situations and the past session allowed me to let go and unpack experiences rather than jump straight to working it out there and then”.

“I joined the group because I wanted to work on my mental health. I have to say that I thoroughly enjoyed the sessions I attended. They were all very informative and helped me to understand who I am and why I am that way. I feel as if I have received the tools I need to address the challenges I face. It was a pleasure to have been in your group. Thank you for being so warm and welcoming and informative. I would love the opportunity to attend more of your group sessions”.



Food Service and Hospitality Training (United Way) (2022 - 2025)

The Food Service and Hospitality Training program, funded by the United Way, is a flexible 10-week skills training program for unemployed immigrant and refugee women from Indigenous, Black or other racialized communities in the GTA. Participants set their own goals and work towards achieving them by completing the following activities:

- **Career plan;**
- **Career exploration** through workshops (e.g., personality dimensions, résumé writing & cover letters, interview preparation, LinkedIn profiles, customer service);
- **Customized learning activities** through workshops (e.g., SMART goals, service navigation, basic rental rights);
- **Specialized workshops on the food & hospitality sector;**
- **WHMIS certification;**
- **Food Handler certification;**
- Weekly one-on-one **check-in sessions;**
- **In-house placement** (e.g., cafe, catering, rooftop garden, art galleries).

Participants continue to receive support for job search and retention as well as referrals to resources and job opportunities during a **six-month post-program support** period.

2023/24 Statistics:

28	20	20	15
Enquiries	Intake Sessions	Eligible Applicants	Enrolled Participants

Women were referred to RIWC’s other training programs when appropriate, including those geared towards people who receive social assistance, following enquiries or intake sessions.

OUTCOMES	GOALS	ACHIEVEMENTS
Core Program Completion	80%	87%
Employment/Self-Employment/ Placement	50%	53%
Referral to Training/Certification for Employment	40%	20%
Referral to Other Employment Support Services	10%	0%

- 93% of participants identified as **women**.
- 33% of participants identified as refugee **claimants**.
- Participants spoke **11 different languages** (other than English).
- Participants indicated **8 different countries of origin**.

Portuguese
Mandarin
Spanish
English
Zulu
French
Thai
Swahili
Twi
Cantonese
Hebrew

Key Successes:

- Staff created a **resource library** to specifically address the needs of FHST(UW) participants.
- Participants with limited computer skills were referred to RIWC's **digital literacy** program or public libraries with free in-person computer training classes for additional support.
- The Riverdale Hub and Social Gardener Café continued to serve as a venue for **in-person placements** for participants to put theory into practice. **Six women** assumed barista responsibilities, assisted with food preparation for regular menu items and catered events, and provided administrative and customer service support for the Hub in general.
- By the end of the program, **Eight participants were employed** in the food service and hospitality and other sectors as a baker, customer service/real estate agent, administrative assistant, janitor, and general labourer.

Client Stories:

- A participant left her job as a customer service/real estate agent a few years ago to care for her children. Completing the program gave her the courage and confidence to approach her former employer and resume her position.
- After updating her résumé, learning interviewing skills, and acquiring a food handler's certificate, a participant was able to secure a job as a baker and is excited about her career opportunity in the food service sector.
- A participant who recently moved to Canada was frustrated with her job search as she had a nutrition degree without the financial resources to obtain equivalency. She found workshops on interview preparation and résumé writing particularly helpful. After acquiring her food handler's certificate and completing the program, she was able to find meaningful work in an administrative capacity.

New Partnerships:

- ptp Adult Learning and Employment Programs, Scadding Court, and YWCA Jumpstart provide referrals to the FSHT(UW) program.
- Toronto Metropolitan University provided a workshop on their 'Spanning the Gaps' bridging program, which really resonated with participants.
- Next Steps Employment provided two workshops: LinkedIn 101 and Labor Market Trends.



United Way
Greater Toronto

Capacity Building Projects (2019 - 2024)

In April 2019, we received a five-year grant from WAGE to strengthen RIWC's capacity in response to the needs of our community, thereby further enhancing women's participation in the social life of the country. To date, we have undertaken the following activities:

- Initiated a strategic planning process;
- Conducted gender-based analysis (GBA+) research to identify strategic priorities;
- Developed a fundraising strategy and created training resources to inform our grant applications; and
- Updated policies and procedures, including a COVID safety plan.

In May 2023, we received a one-year grant from Toronto Foundation to update our mission and mandate, policies and procedures, as well as training materials. With these infrastructure improvements, we will be better able to respond to stakeholder needs in a post-pandemic work environment, while promoting staff productivity and wellness.



Women and Gender
Equality Canada



2SLGBTQI+ Seniors Drop-in Program (2023-2024)

We expanded our seniors' programming by launching a 2SLGBTQI+ drop-in initiative this year. A Technology Engagement Coordinator was recruited to train a team of queer social work placement students and volunteers so that they could provide one-to-one and group mentorship support.

The project aimed to close the intergenerational digital divide in accessing and utilizing online community services. Our project was delivered through a hybrid service delivery model, which included **virtual one-to-one mentorship support and in-person workshops** that were co-facilitated by The 519 and the Sunshine Centre for Seniors.

We were able to complete the following project activities:

- One new part-time Coordinator was recruited to lead the development and delivery of project activities.
- Three 2SLGBTQI+ social work placement students were recruited and onboarded to provide intergenerational mentorship support and co-facilitate digital literacy workshops for seniors.
- 46 older 2SLGBTQI+ adults and seniors participated in three Seniors' Advisory Committee meetings to identify program needs and support the development of the project's curriculum.
- 18 older 2SLGBTQI+ adults and seniors received one-to-one assessment and mentorship support.

- 15 digital literacy sessions were hosted, with support from 2SLGBTQ+ placement students, to provide general skills training and information about accessing new community services.

An average of **15 participants attended each session**, and post-program evaluation questionnaires were administered in the spring and winter to assess the impact of our drop-in sessions. The following is a summary of the evaluation outcomes:

- 87.5% were very happy with their participation in our drop-in sessions.
- 89% of participants think that the skills they've learned will make day-to-day tasks easier to complete.
- 94% would recommend our drop-in series to someone who wants to improve their digital literacy skills.
- 94% feel that they have improved their digital literacy skills in some way.



Islamophobia Support Line (2022-2024)

In 2022, RIWC was approved by Heritage Canada to deliver a two-year Anti-Racism Action Project (ARAP) to address Islamophobia in the Greater Toronto Area. Funds from ARAP were used to address one of Heritage Canada's key priorities from the Anti-Racism Strategy – to support and empower communities on the ground who have expertise in addressing various forms of racism and discrimination.

Through ARAP, RIWC aimed to create solutions at the community level to build on existing research and hate crime statistics, create innovative solutions to increase the safety and security of Muslim women and youth, and work with local law enforcement, cultural groups and legal clinics to address systemic racism and religious discrimination.

A Project Task Group was set up to work with RIWC to review existing models and resources, develop culturally and regionally sensitive resources and training materials for volunteers, and oversee the development of the Islamophobia Support Line. The Task Force included representation from the University of Toronto's School of Islamic Studies, Noor Cultural Centre, South Asian Legal Clinic, Toronto Police Hate Crime Unit, Toronto Police Muslim Consultative Committee, Canadian Council of Muslim Women, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians and Salaam Canada.

In the fall of 2022, RIWC launched the support line to provide referrals and counselling support for victims of religious, racial and culture-based violence as well as collect data on experiences of Islamophobia in the Muslim community. The project was expanded in 2023 to include **education workshops, conversation groups and in-person crisis and referral counselling support** to address rising rates of anti-Muslim hate-motivated incidences and hate crimes in the city.

A total of **152 Muslim women and youth** from across the Greater Toronto Area were supported through our support line, virtual peer support groups, and individual crisis counselling. A majority of the project

participants identified as female (76%), heterosexual (90.1%), college-age (66.7% between 18-25 years of age), and college/university educated (84.1%). The following is a breakdown of their ethnic background: 58.1% South Asian, 18.2% Black, 15.5% Middle Eastern, and 8.2% Other (white, East Asian, South East Asian and Mixed).

At the end of the project, online post-project questionnaires were distributed to all of our project participants, with 80 completed surveys submitted (53% response rate). The following is a summary of the **survey outcomes**:

- 81% of respondents Strongly Agree/Somewhat Agree that they have a better understanding of systemic racism and discrimination in Canada.
- 88.6% of respondents Strongly Agree/Somewhat Agree that they have a better understanding of how systemic racism or discrimination can impact a person's life.
- 69.6% of respondents Strongly Agree/Somewhat Agree they are better equipped to address racism or discrimination when they see it or experience it.
- 84.7% of respondents are Very Likely/Fairly Likely to use what they've learned through the project to address racism and discrimination.
- 91.2% of respondents were Very Satisfied/Somewhat Satisfied with the services they received through the project.



Canadian
Heritage

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Thank You to Our Volunteers

In 2023/24, RIWC relied upon the support of **7 placement students, 3 volunteers, and 5 board and committee members** for a **total of 2222 volunteer hours**.

Placement students from **George Brown College, Toronto Metropolitan University, and University of Toronto** were provided a valuable opportunity to apply theory to practice. Volunteers from various backgrounds found a space where they could share their skills and enthusiasm as part of their efforts to give back to the community. We would like to thank all the placement students and volunteers for the contributions they have made to RIWC programs.

Our board members are a great asset to our organization and it would be impossible for RIWC to provide the services that we do without their dedication and support for which we are extremely grateful.

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