

AGM REPORT 2021 - 2022

RIWC is committed to supporting Asian and South Asian women and their families in taking greater control of their lives. RIWC provides culturally appropriate and linguistically specific settlement support and counselling services with the use of community determined strategies, developed and delivered by immigrant women.



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Executive Message

While the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre (RIWC) is particularly sensitive to the needs of immigrant and refugee women, newcomers, and internationally educated professionals, our services are available to all marginalized populations within the Greater Toronto Area.

Despite ongoing challenges of the pandemic throughout 2021-22, RIWC was able to deliver on many of the goals we set out to achieve thanks to the dedication of our staff, placement students, and volunteers who remained committed to moving forward with our programs and new initiatives. We are so grateful for all of the support we have received from each and every person involved with the organization. In times like these, every contribution makes a difference.

To meet both client preferences and safety precautions, most of our programs continued online. Although there was provision for in-person sessions, VAW counselling services were conducted remotely via phone or video. Over 30% of the participants in our employment training programs received financial assistance to obtain a laptop and/or internet access. Supplemental computer classes were made available to those in need to remove barriers to participation in Zoom sessions. New online workshop content was developed to address the high priority areas of concern amongst Wrap program participants, including housing and health and wellness. We also provided iPad loans and technical support to senior and older adult women enrolled in the Women in the Garden program as part of the digital literacy training component.

Seniors, in particular, were negatively impacted by the pandemic with the loss of community connections. We felt it important, therefore, to launch a Seniors' Digital Literacy & Wellness project in 2021 for racialized senior and older adult women to promote healthy aging and improve access to information and government services through technology training and group webinars. Multilingual volunteers and Social Work placement students were recruited and matched with participants for one-on-one digital literacy training as part of our efforts to encourage social engagement.

Online wellness group sessions for 2LGBTQ+ BIPOC youth in 2021 proved popular with positive reviews from participants. Due to the success of the pilot project, we managed to secure funding in 2022/23 and expanded the eligibility criteria to create a space for intergenerational knowledge sharing.

After developing our strategic five-year plan, we look forward to innovating in fundraising and programming to continue to meet the needs of our community!

Our Programs

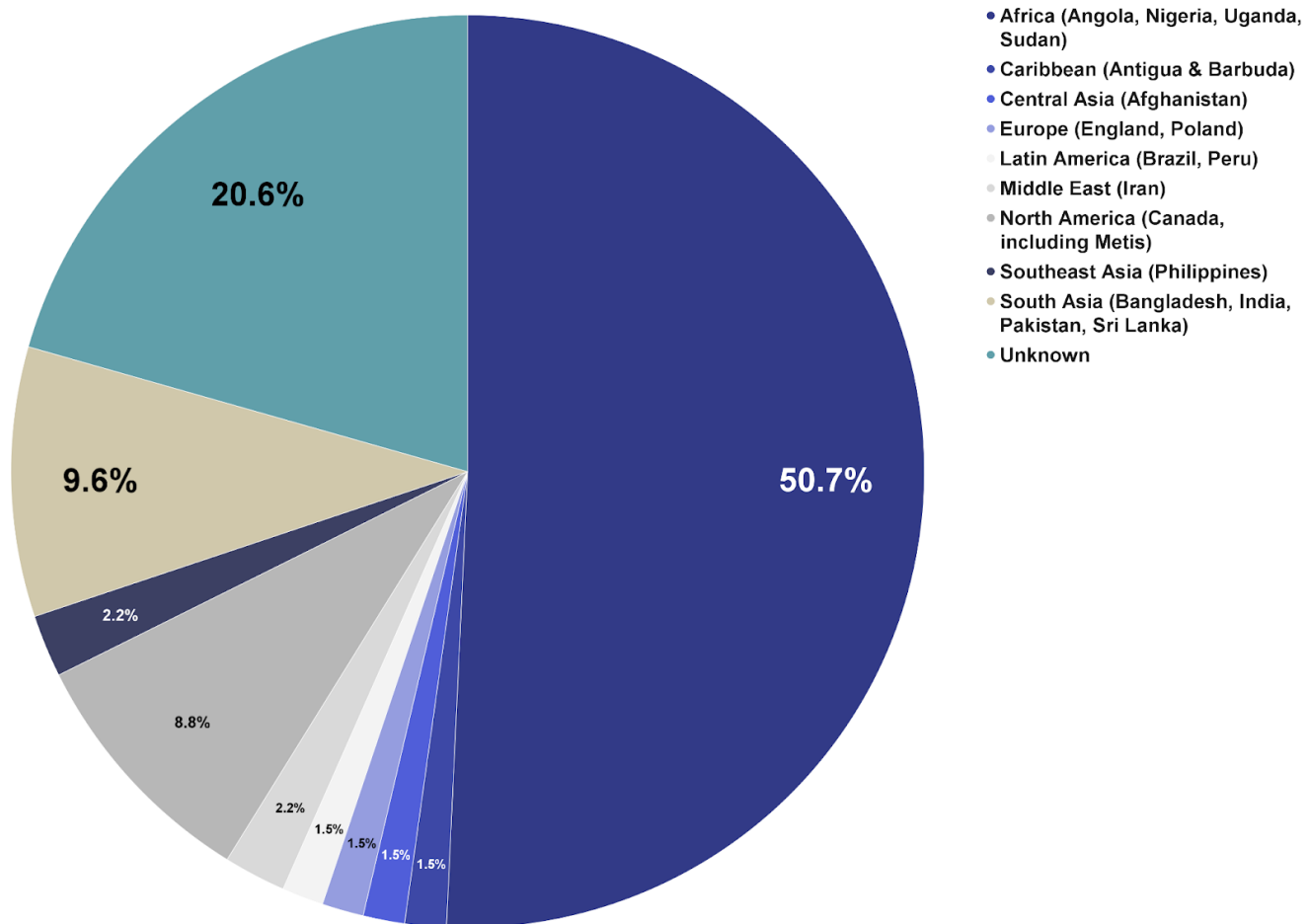
Violence Against Women

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.

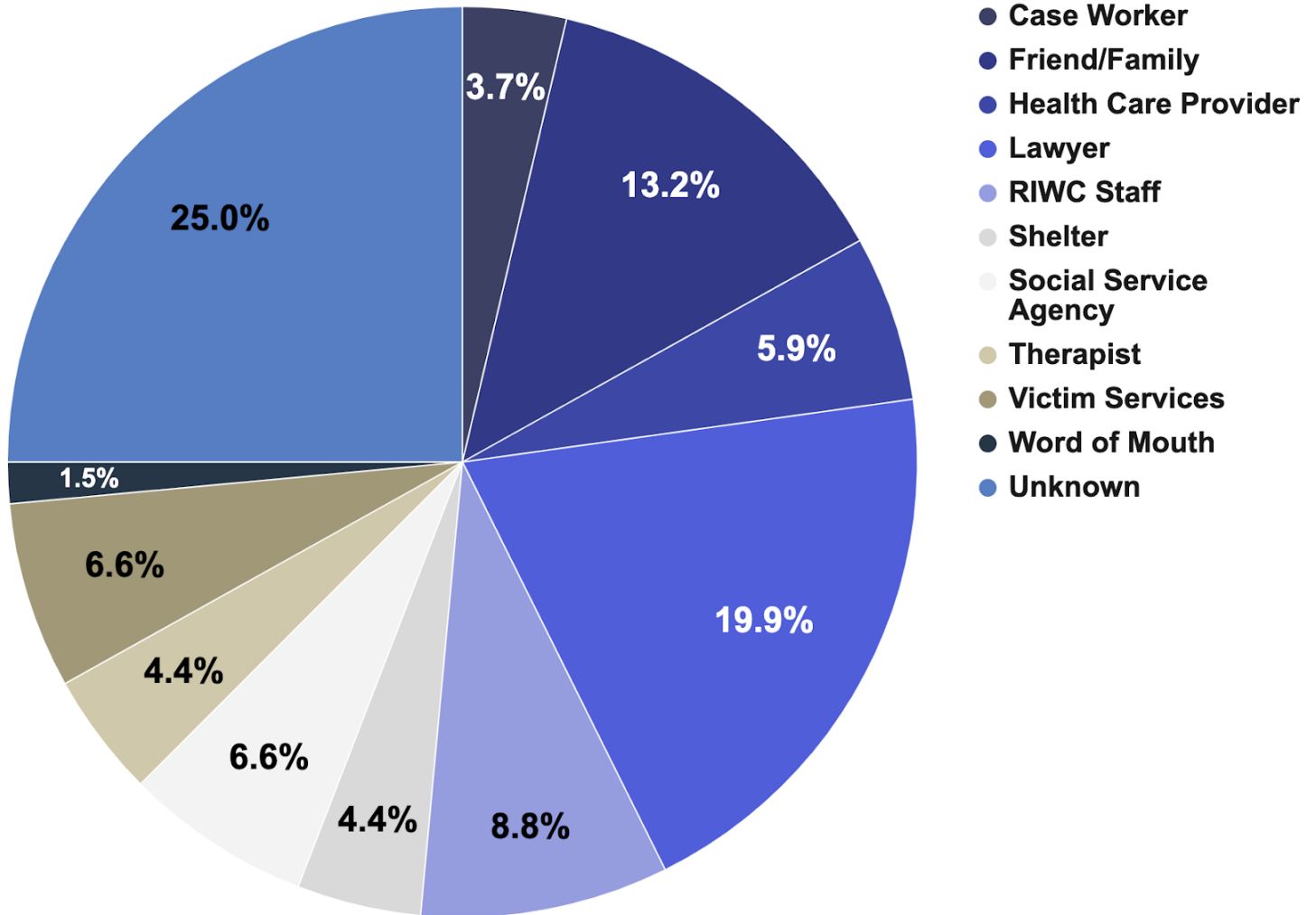
Statistics:

58	43	93	10	15
Intakes	New Clients	Returning Clients	Referrals (service at capacity)	Referrals (to appropriate services)

- 32% of women were new clients.
- Over 70% of clients identified their country of origin as outside of Canada.



Source of Referrals to VAW Program:



Key Successes:

- Intake process was streamlined with the hiring of an intake coordinator.
- During the first quarter, **virtual group sessions** were held so that women could access immediate support while on the waitlist for individual sessions.
- A comprehensive resource database was created so that women could be referred to services specific to their needs.
- We piloted weekly **wellness group sessions for ten 2LGBTQ+ BIPOC youth**, which ran for eight weeks in November and December. As both attendance and interest were very positive, we applied and received funding from the Canadian Women's Foundation for 2022/23. RIWC staff and students will also take part in organizational capacity building workshops on gender/sexual and racial diversity as part of the project.

Client Stories:

Ms. S (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) began counselling at RIWC in January 2020. She fled her country for fear of being persecuted due to her sexual orientation when her bisexual identity was exposed. She came to counselling sessions feeling isolated and depressed and having suicidal ideation. Through counselling, Ms. S was supported with a trauma informed approach using tools from CBT as well as a strengths based approach to develop positive coping strategies. She worked towards her recovery by taking a PSW course and serving the elderly. Ms. S also went through her hearing process and got accepted. She now looks forward to building her career in Canada.

Ms. G (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) and her children are survivors of family violence. During weekly counselling sessions, Ms. G processes the significant negative impacts survivorship of violence and trauma have had on her quality of life and ability to live freely. Counselling services were provided in Ms. G's first language and through a lens of cultural understanding and safety. Alongside counselling support, Ms. G received housing support from RIWC's WRAP Program. Ms. G has education and experience as a paralegal and in education and administration. Ms. G's experiences as a victim/survivor in the family court and criminal court system prevented her from maintaining steady employment. Supported by RIWC staff, Ms. G is actively searching for volunteer and employment opportunities to re-enter the workforce. Ms. G hopes to work in the VAW sector and provide legal and peer support to survivors of violence and abuse.

Ms. M (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) left her country, fearing female genital mutilation (FGM) of her daughter. When she settled in Cape Town, South Africa, she encountered racial attacks, which led to the family business and home being burnt to the ground. Her family then fled to North America - first the USA and then Canada - where she gave birth to a child. She began experiencing symptoms of PTSD from past experiences and lived in constant fear. She reported being hypervigilant and encountering strong feelings of insecurity. At the outset of the pandemic, Ms. M found herself extremely overwhelmed and depressed. Through counselling, we worked on processing her trauma. Specifically, through CBT and trauma-informed lenses, we worked on understanding the difference between thoughts and fears. Also, we used a strength-based approach, to focus on managing social anxiety. The focus on stabilization and mindfulness paved the path to securing employment. Ms. M reports being in a good place and continues to practice mindfulness and grounding techniques.

Essential Pathways to Employment (EPE)

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

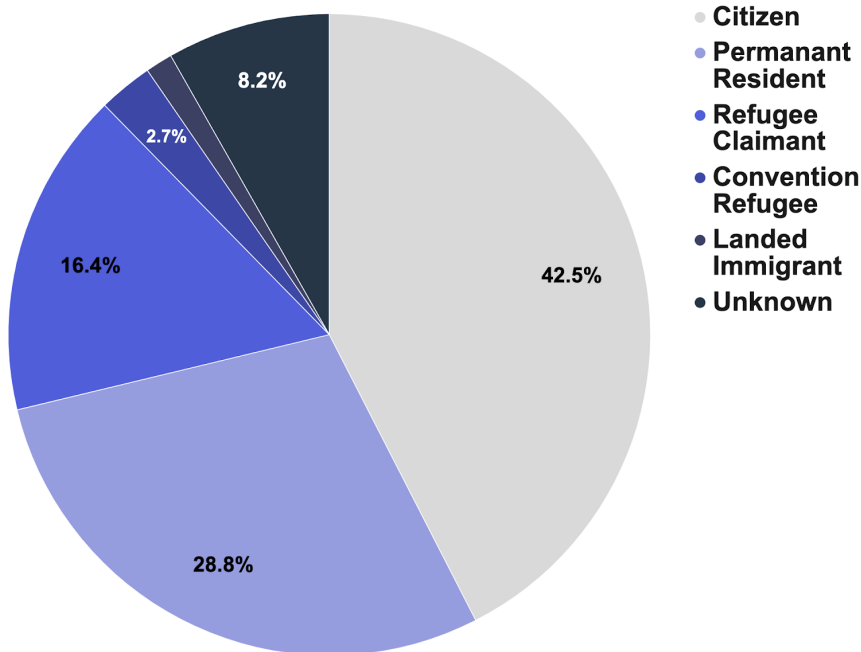
Participants set their own goals and work towards achieving them by completing the following activities:

- **Career plan;**
- Daily **computer classes;**
- Employment-readiness and life-skills **workshops;**
- **Resume writing and interview skills;**
- **Customer service course** (replacement for in-person placement during the pandemic).

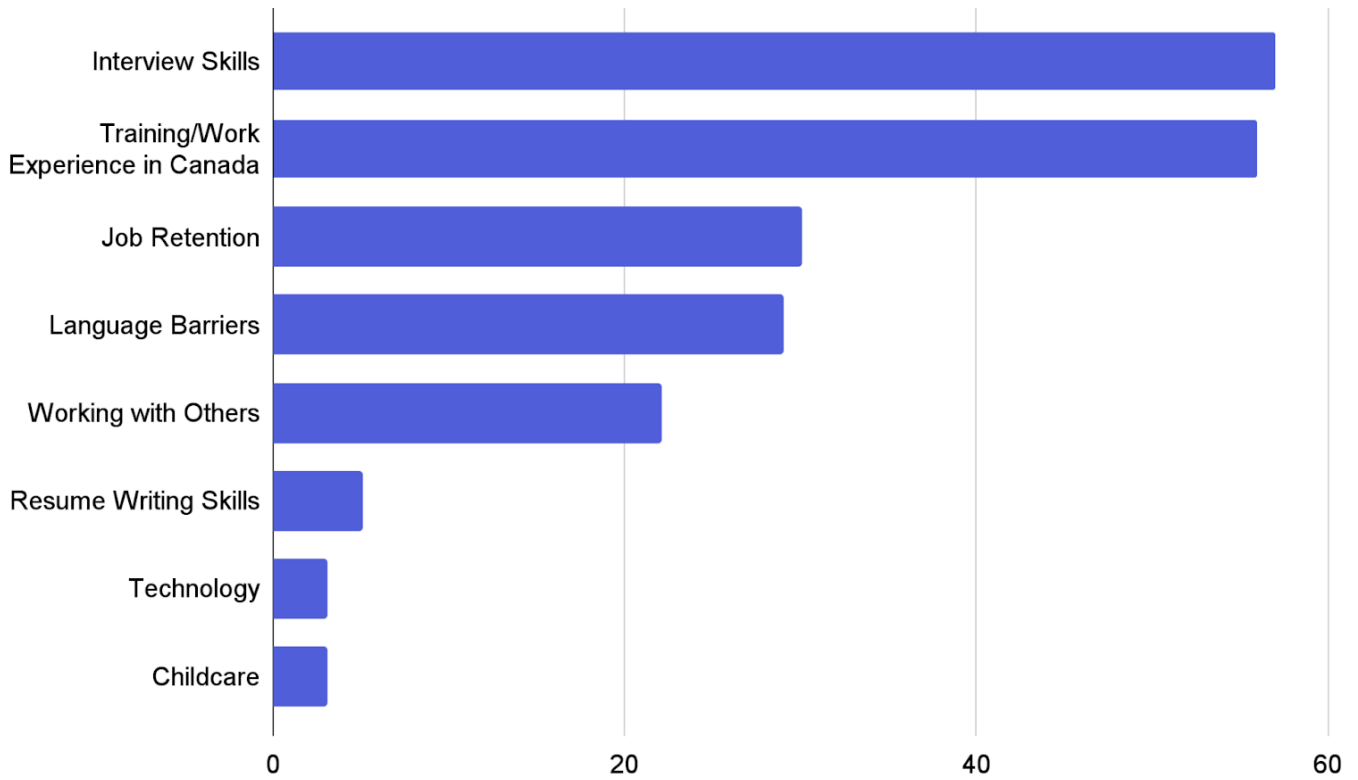
Participants continue to receive support for job search and retention as well as referrals to resources and job opportunities during a **six-month post-program support** period.

Statistics:

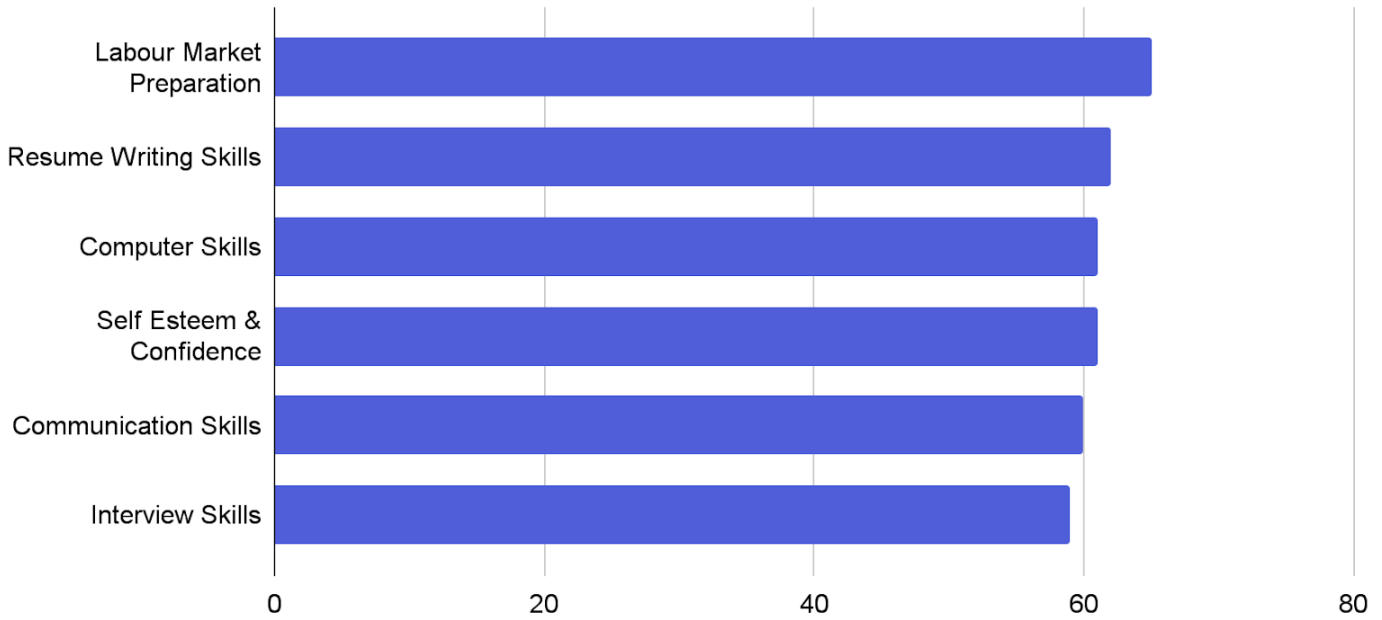
- **73 participants** completed the program.
- Over 90% of participants identified as women.
- Over 50% of participants had children under the age of 16.
- Participants spoke over **29 different languages** (other than English).
- 19% of participants were Refugee Claimants or Convention Refugees.



Key Employment Challenges:

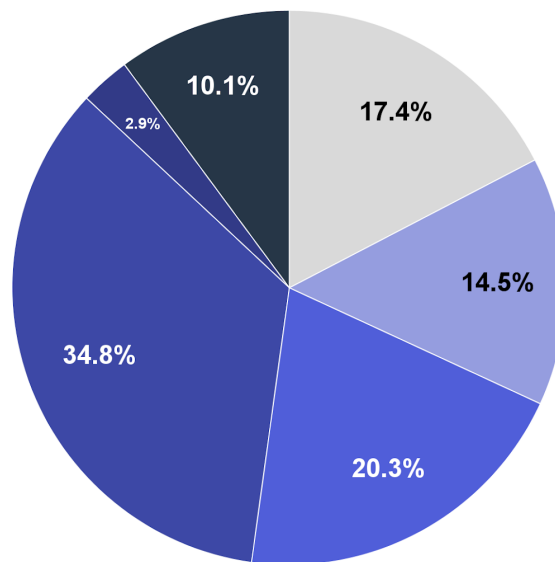


Reasons for Enrolment in EPE Program:



Key Successes:

- We surpassed our annual target of 70 participants.
- Over 85% of participants achieved a **positive outcome**.
- 30% of participants received technology support to secure a laptop and/or internet service.
- Supplementary digital literacy classes were provided to participants as needed.



- Employed
- Job Searching
- Further Education
- Vocational/Skills Training
- ODSP
- Unknown

Client Stories:

Evelyn (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) was very committed to the EPE program from the very beginning. Her attendance was great and she actively participated in classes. She was a true example of “the more you put into something, the more you get out of it.” Evelyn has previous experience in customer service and really wanted to work with people. Her immediate goal was to get some practical training and start a job as soon as she could so that she can look after her children and be a good role model. During the post-program support period, she was accepted into the free Personal Support Worker training program sponsored by the government. She will have three months of virtual classroom training followed by a three month placement. She is hopeful that she will get a permanent job and that at the end of her first year, she will be eligible for the \$5000 bonus from the Province.

When Hope (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) was referred to the EPE program, she reported that she wanted to gain computer skills and improve her communication, interview skills, and resume writing skills to gain confidence. One of Hope's employment goals was to open her own business. While enrolled in the EPE program, Hope attended workshops on professional employment skills, interview skills, interpersonal communications, and resume building. She also received computer training on basic computer skills and MS Office (Word, Excel and PowerPoint). During the six-month post-program support, Hope was provided with computer training resources, active job postings, and information for a Business Accelerator program for new businesses, which she enrolled in by the of the post-program support period.

When Sarah (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) was referred to the EPE program, she reported that she wanted to gain computer skills, improve her resume and prepare for the labour market by enhancing/upgrading her employment skills. Sarah expressed interest in career counselling and general counselling. While enrolled in the EPE program, Sarah attended workshops on professional employment skills, developed a resume based on feedback from staff, and received training on basic computer skills and MS Office (Word, Excel and PowerPoint). During the six-month post-program support, Sarah was provided with resources for improving typing skills, remote ESL learning platforms, remote job listings, and housing search tools. Sarah

was referred to career counselling and RIWC VAW counselling. Sarah is now successfully connected with a career counsellor and is involved in exploring career programs and workshops at ACHEV.

Partners:

In 2022, we formed new partnerships with Credit Canada, Dress for Success, Flash Security Services, and iSisters. Our partners deliver workshops on topics of interest to participants and serve as a valuable resource during the post-program support period.

Don Valley Community Legal Services Seneca College
 Corvetti Education Centre ACCESS Employment
 Windmill Microlending COSTI iSisters
 PTP Adult Learning & Employment Centre
 Achēv Service Canada Redwood Shelter
 Career Pathways for Women Credit Canada
 Toronto Public Library Dress for Success
 Next Steps Employment Centre Ontario Security Hub

Flash Security Services
 Canada Revenue Agency
 Brands for Canada
 Up With Women
 Legal Aid Ontario
 Toronto Fire Services



Food Service and Hospitality Training (FSHT)

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

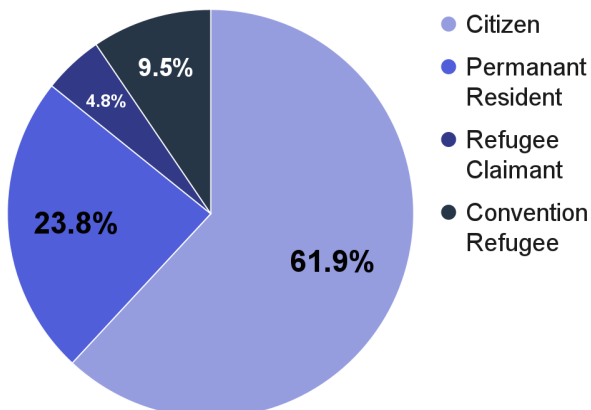
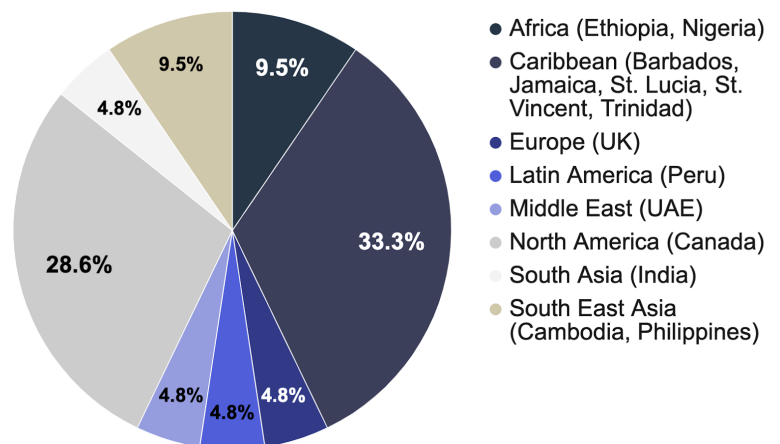
Participants set their own goals and work towards achieving them by completing the following activities:

- **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);
- **Resume writing and interview skills;**
- **WHMIS certification;**
- **Food Handler certification;**
- **Customer service course;**
- **In-house placement** (two weeks) or written assignment (due to COVID-19 concerns).

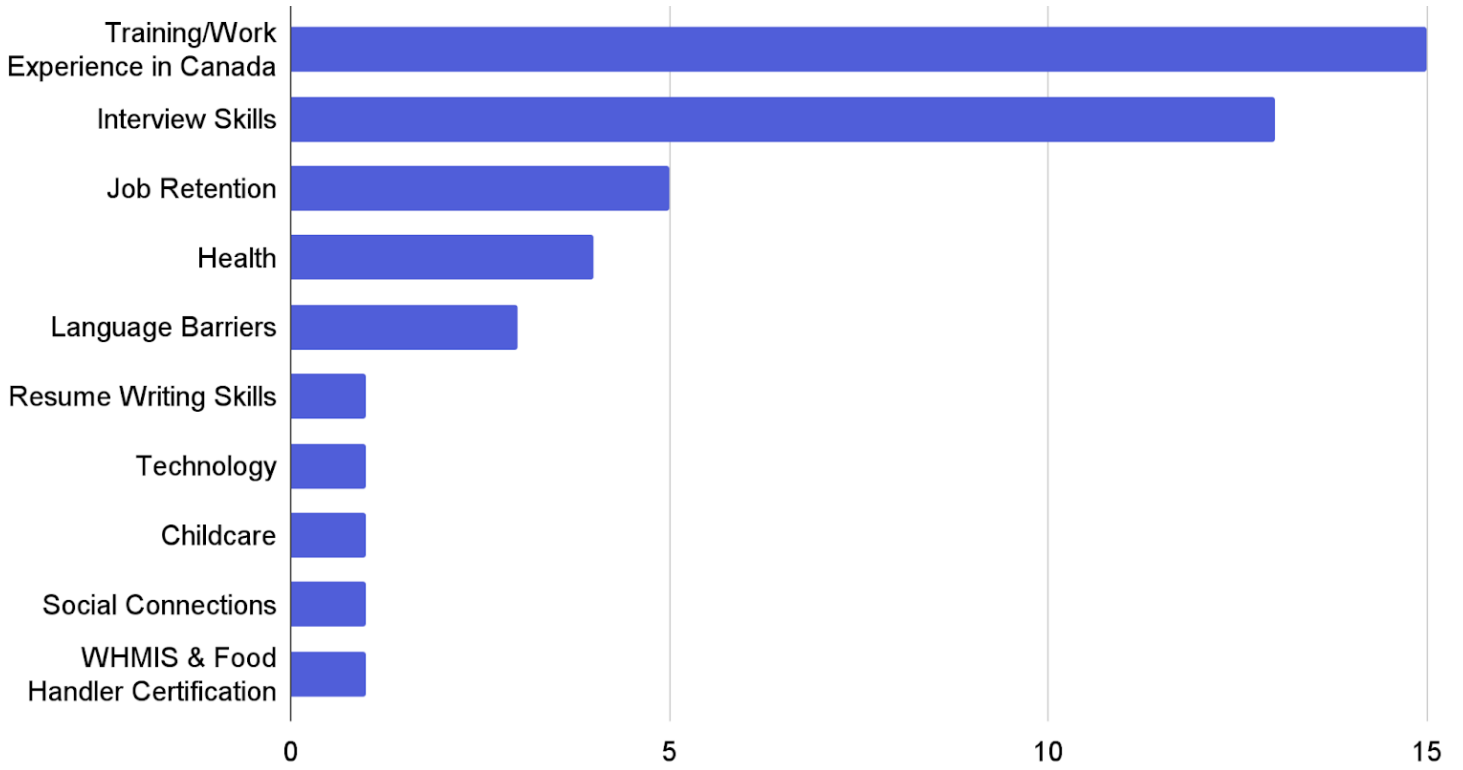
Participants continue to receive support for job search and retention as well as referrals to resources and job opportunities during a **six-month post-program support** period.

Statistics:

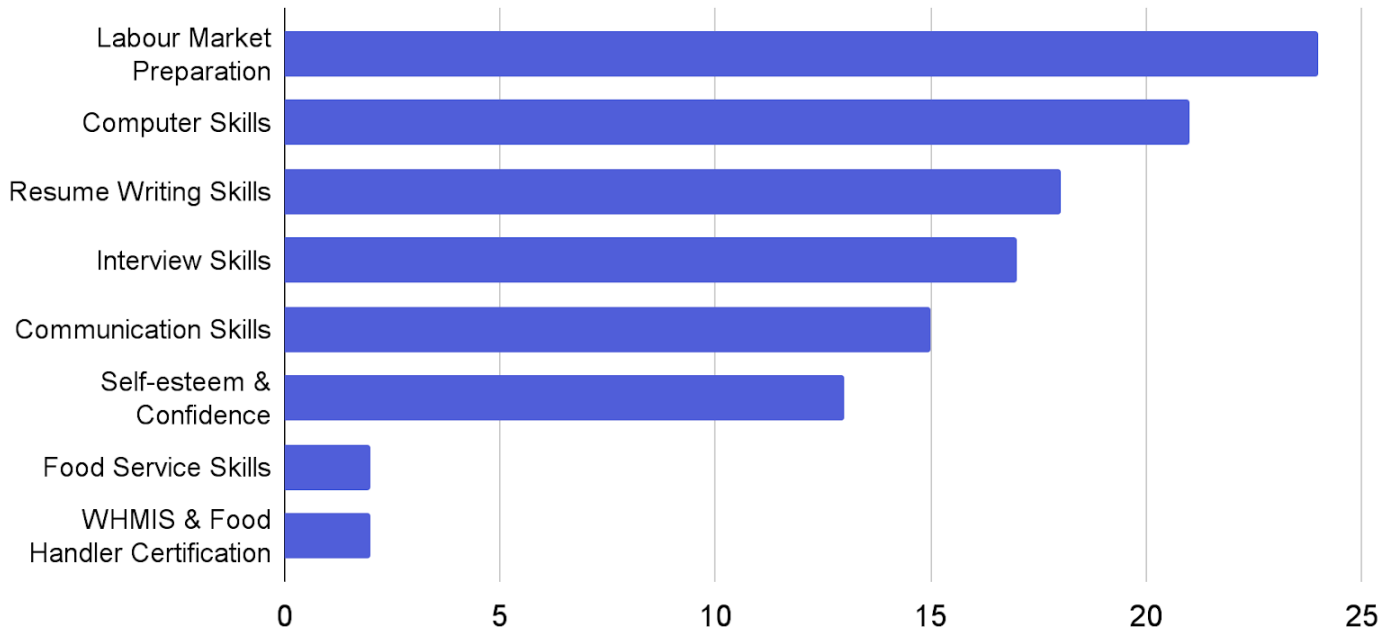
- In 2021, we met our funder requirement with **21 participants** completing the program.
- 85% of participants identified as women.
- Over 50% of participants had children under the age of 16.
- 14% of participants were Refugee Claimants or Convention Refugees.
- Participants spoke **11 different languages** (other than English).
- Participants indicated over **14 different countries of origin**.
- One third of participants indicated Caribbean countries of origin.
- One third of participants didn't have access to a laptop and/or internet.



Key Employment Challenges:

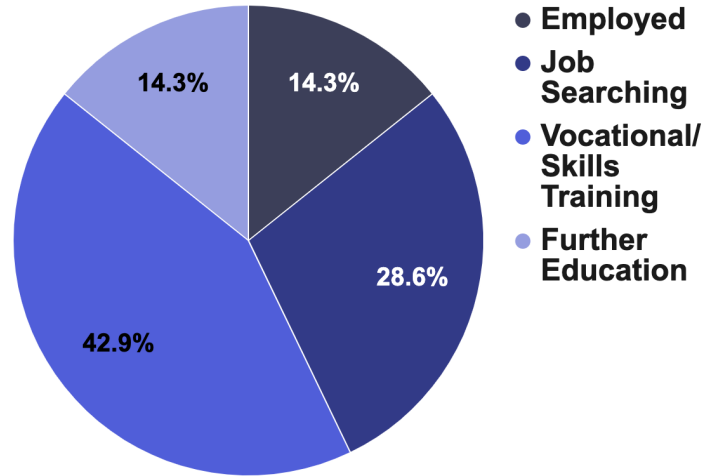


Reason for FSHT Enrolment:



Key Successes:

- In 2021, we surpassed our target of 20 participants who successfully completed the program and continued with post-program support in 2022.
- Over 70% of participants found employment or enrolled in further education or training programs as an outcome.
- One third of participants received technology support to secure a laptop and/or internet service.
- Guided instruction for food handler certificate course led to 100% pass rate on first attempt of exam.



Client Stories:

Ms. S (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) was a participant who had several personal challenges when she was enrolled in the FSHT program. While her attendance was good and she completed her computer assignments, she had difficulty with the certification courses. During the post-program support period, the staff worked closely with her to set monthly goals that included completing her WHMIS and food handler's licenses. Having scored well above average, she is now equipped to continue her search for jobs in the food service industry while enrolled in additional training through the YWCA.

Partners:

In 2022, we formed new partnerships with Credit Canada, Dress for Success, Flash Security Services, and iSisters. Our partners deliver workshops on topics of interest to participants and serve as a valuable resource during the post-program support period.

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Wrap Around

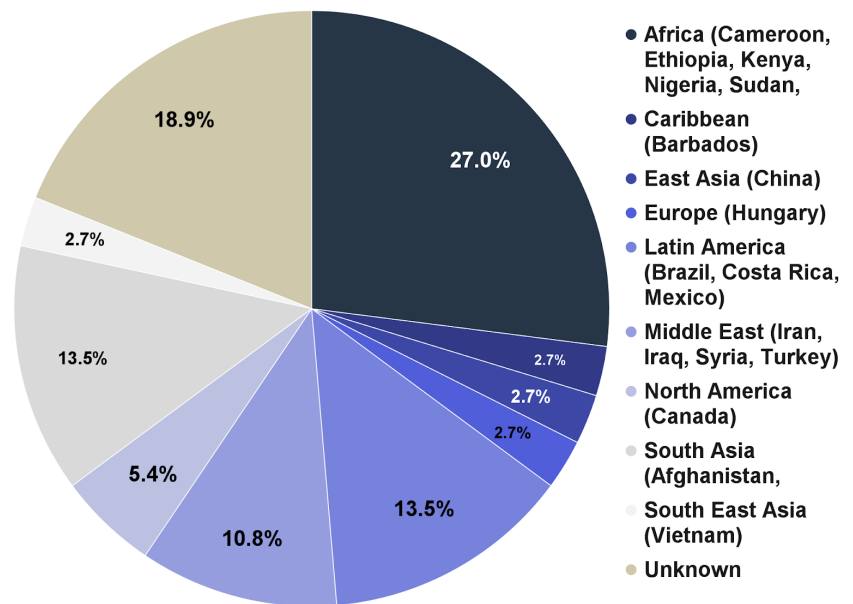
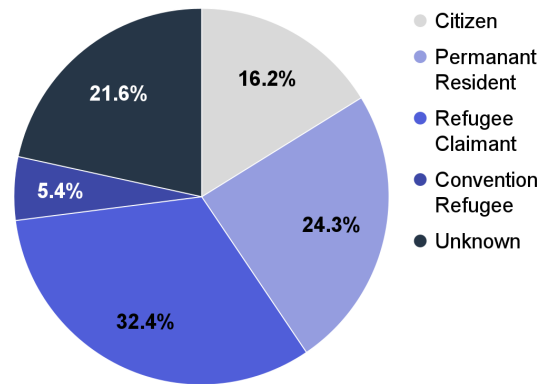
The Wrap Around program was initiated in July 2020 to assist Ontario Works recipients in dealing with the impact of the pandemic. The program continues to provide eight weeks of online life-stabilization and housing support to participants through the following services:

- **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); 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).

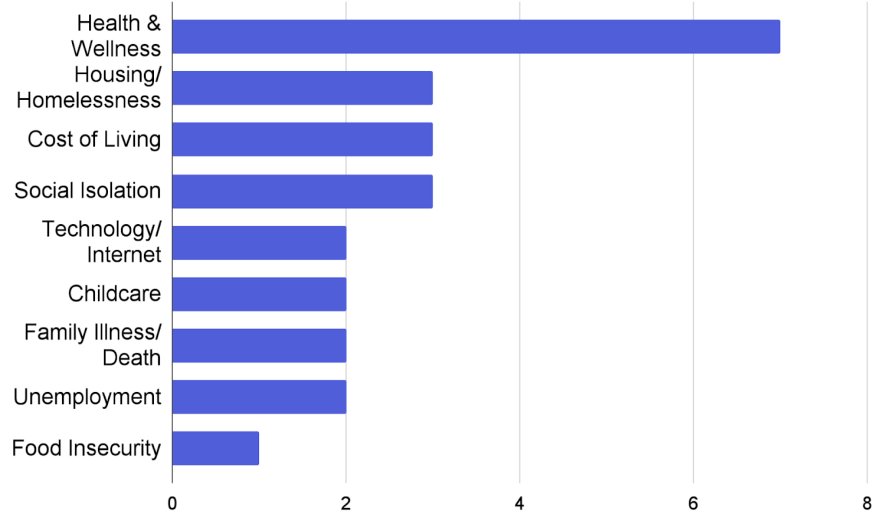
Participants continue to receive resources and information during a **two-month post-program support** period.

Statistics:

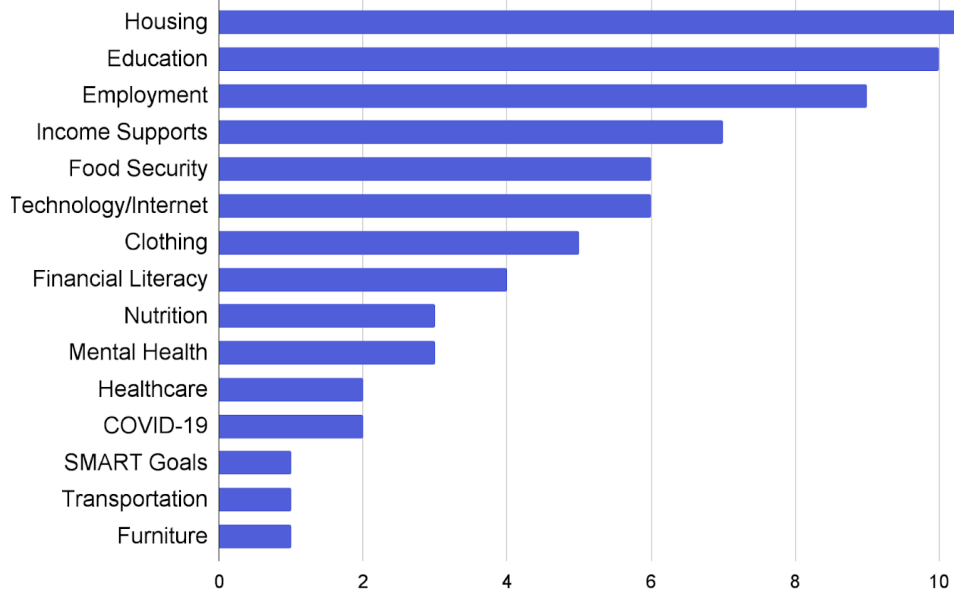
- In 2021, we met our funder requirement with **37 participants** completing the program.
- **20 clients requested housing support.**
- Over 75% of participants identified as women.
- Over 50% of participants had children under the age of 16.
- Over one third of participants were Refugee Claimants or Convention Refugees.
- Participants spoke **17 different languages** (other than English).
- Participants indicated over **19 different countries of origin.**
- Almost a third of participants indicated African countries of origin.



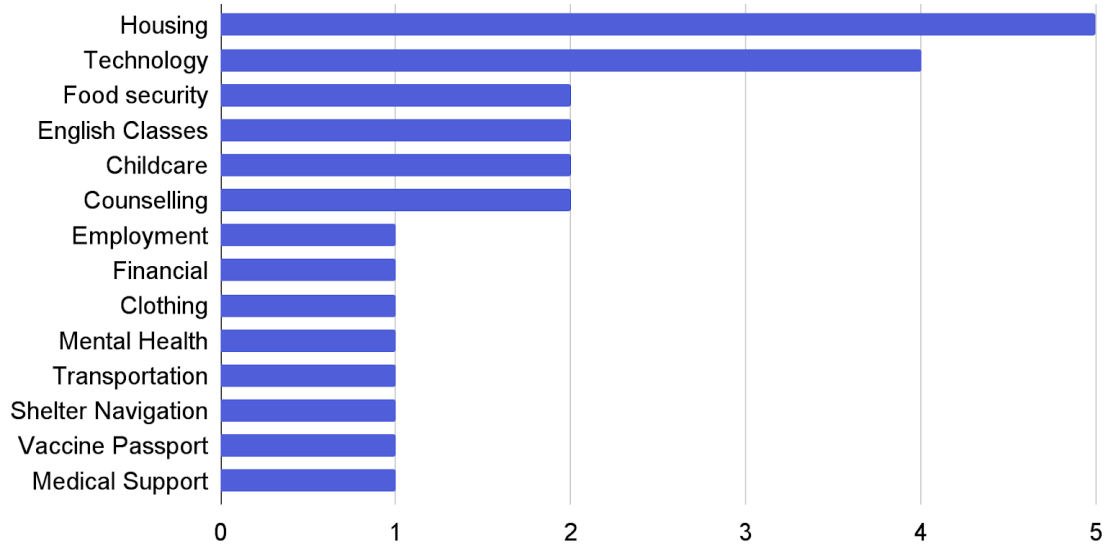
Impact of COVID-19:



Key Challenges:



Supports/Referrals Provided:



Key Successes:

- New content was developed for the following workshops: Service Navigation, SMART Goals, COVID-19 Impact & Management, and Life Skills.
- Staff and placement students introduced mental health-based workshops on the following topics:
 - (1) Coping Mechanisms and Emotions;
 - (2) Mindfulness and Grounding;
 - (3) Self-Esteem and Self-Care; and
 - (4) Mental Health and Culture.
- Internal referrals led to an increased number of participants with numerous needs that could be addressed more comprehensively.
- Intake and exit procedures were streamlined.

Client Stories:

When Maya (name has been changed to protect her confidentiality) was referred to the WRAP program, she had been couch-surfing after leaving an abusive 14-year marriage. The first call from WRAP staff found Maya in crisis. She was sobbing and fearful for her safety and so she was immediately connected to the VAW program.

While enrolled in the Wrap program, Maya received the following support from staff:

- *Secured a bed for respite care;*
- *Transferred to a permanent shelter;*
- *Applied for and successfully received special priority status on Toronto's centralized waiting list for subsidized housing;*
- *Began counselling and art therapy;*
- *Removed name from lease where abuser still lives.*

During the two-months of post-program support, Maya was allocated a one-bedroom subsidized apartment, received financial assistance through the Ontario Disability Support Program, and started mentoring newcomers. This is a great success story and an example of two RIWC programs working together to support a client.



Women in the Garden (WIG) (2017-2022)

Women in the Garden (WIG) is a culturally-relevant intergenerational health and well-being program designed to improve the physical and emotional health of immigrant and refugee women in Toronto.

Interactive online modules included nutritional counselling, gardening lessons, mindfulness and meditation techniques, and age-appropriate yoga exercises. Supplemental Zoom sessions, conducted in real time, created opportunities for connectivity and interaction among participants to alleviate social isolation. Discussions with the facilitators further livened up the workshops and encouraged active participation.

iPad loans and technical support were made available to participants as part of the digital literacy training component. Consequently, participants were guaranteed access to resources to keep informed about the pandemic as well as other health issues.

Statistics:

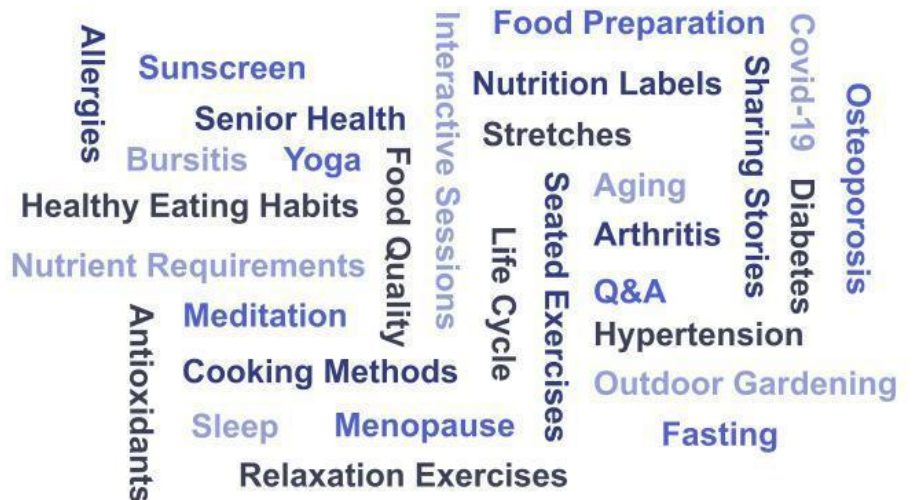
The majority of participants identified as East Asian, South Asian or Indo Caribbean.

51	103	70	29
Participants <small>(25 adult & 26 senior women)</small>	Yoga Sessions	Nutrition Webinars	Gardening Webinars

Key Successes:

Outreach activities and the intake process were streamlined with one Outreach Coordinator conducting interviews to assess the appropriateness of either the Digital Literacy program or WIG program for applicants.

As a result of our outreach activities to long term care facilities, we established a partnership with The O’Neill Centre, which led to the the enrolment of some of their residents into our program.



Meditation sessions with the use of essential oils were introduced, which participants welcomed as a much needed source of rejuvenation.

Client Comments:

“Your demonstration about arthritis was really good. Erica explained everything in great detail within an hour. At times the hour seems short as we want to learn more because you are the ocean of knowledge related to physical problems.”

“I am really grateful for Nitasha who provided the opportunity for healthy benefits through yoga and I am also thankful to Tracy as your steps and stretches for the body are excellent and easy to follow.”



Our Projects

Empowering Women in the Food Service & Restaurant Industry (2018-2022)

We have been working with a consortium of private sector partners to identify and address intersectional barriers that prevent women from achieving economic security within the food service and restaurant industry. Over the project period, three pilot initiatives will be launched and evaluated using a GBA+ framework to support vulnerable racialized women who are currently employed or transitioning to employment in the sector.

To achieve our project objectives, we developed the following:

- A sector-specific anti-violence and harassment training resources, including a PowerPoint presentation and workshop outline;
- Resources to directly access culturally and linguistically appropriate materials; and
- 10-week conversation guide for a mentorship program to support culinary students in Ontario.

With the closure of the colleges and restaurants in 2020 and 2021, our initiatives were delayed. However, we were granted an extension by our funder and will re-engage all project partners to pilot our curriculum and resources in September 2022.



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Capacity Building for RIWC Women's Programs (2019 - 2022)

We aim to complete a GBA+ review of RIWC's programs and develop a new strategic plan, five-year fundraising strategy, results-based management plan, and human resources management policies. Strengthening RIWC's capacity will allow us to better respond to the needs of the community, thereby further enhancing women's participation in the social life of the country.

We have developed a strategic plan identifying **6 pillars** as our priorities for the next five years:

- (1) Foster Cultural Equity for Women in Toronto;
- (2) Improve Health and Wellbeing for Vulnerable Populations;
- (3) Increase Access to Programs and Services;
- (4) Build Stronger Community Connections for Women and Families;
- (5) Improve Economic Security of our Communities; and
- (6) Develop Resources to Promote Digital Literacy and Inclusion.

Based on these strategic priorities, we implemented a fundraising strategy to develop new programming for RIWC.

Over the past year, we were able to secure grants from New Horizons for Seniors Program, Heritage Canada, Toronto Foundation, and the United Way of Greater Toronto to promote gender equity through innovative programming.



Women and Gender Equality Canada

Technology Mentors for Senior Women (2021-2022)

Our project was primarily focused on improving the digital literacy skills of racialized and newcomer older adult and senior women as well as increasing access to information to ensure that knowledge of resources in the community is more equitably distributed in the City of Toronto.

We worked in partnership with George Brown College, Seneca College, Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University), and York University to recruit seven multilingual Social Work placement students. An additional three volunteers were onboarded to assist in delivering all direct service activities. Collectively, our team of mentors spoke **10 languages**:

spanish
tagalog
greek
somali
swahili
shona
urdu
english
french
hindi

Between September 2021 and February 2022, our mentors were matched with **34 older adult and senior women** who received one-to-one support for 4 to 12 sessions.

Group support was also provided to **121 participants** through our webinar series. In addition to general computer upskilling (setting up technology, using video platforms, social media and troubleshooting common technology issues), there were specialized topics to increase access to services in the community: Staying Connected During COVID, Food Security, Post-COVID Support, Virtual Healthcare, and Online Scams & Internet Security.



Seniors' Digital Literacy & Wellness (2021-2023)

We launched a new Seniors' Digital Literacy & Wellness project in 2021 to promote volunteerism among seniors, engage isolated seniors in the community, support healthy ageing, and improve access for seniors to government services.

The curriculum was developed in collaboration with three different cohorts of older adults to ensure that our project addressed emerging community needs during the pandemic. In the first three months, we completed **roundtable discussions with 23 women** (senior women, newcomer women, and older adult women) who required skills upgrading to qualify for employment skills training. Based on our group discussions and intake information, the following priorities were identified by the women:

- Learning common computer terminology used in conversation;
- Learning how to use email, social media and video conferencing tools;
- Accessing online government and healthcare services;
- Navigating online community resources; and
- Learning how to search for information safely online.

A total of **121 participants** attended our webinar series (53 unique attendees) between December 2021 and March 2022. All attendees completed in-depth intake and assessment interviews with our Project Coordinator to identify goals and priorities, attended 4 to 8 sessions of our series, and received additional one-to-one mentorship support to improve their digital literacy skills and access to services in the community.



Thank You to Our Volunteers

In 2021-22, RIWC relied upon the support of **22 placement students**, **16 volunteers**, and **5 board and committee members** for a total of **7,379 volunteer hours**.

Placement students from Cambrian College, Centennial College, George Brown College, Humber College, Oxford College, Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University), York University, and the Toronto District School Board 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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