

# MCHB Coop Annual Report 2022-2023

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## The Year in Context

The work of the Multicultural Health Brokers is impacted by global, national, provincial and municipal events, changes in those who hold power in government and the consequently changes in policies and priorities.

### War in Ukraine

The beginning of 2022 was marked by the invasion of Russia of Ukraine on February 24. The invasion has killed tens of thousands on both sides, with thousands of Ukrainians fleeing their country and seeking refuge across the world. Canada has been providing sanctuary to many Ukrainians where Edmonton is one the cities of destinations.

### COVID Pandemic

With significant decline of COVID cases, all remaining mandatory public health restrictions were lifted on June 14, 2022 in Alberta and across Canada in October 2022. Health Canada encourages Canadians to be vaccinated to protect them from new variants of the COVID virus, especially those who are most at risk of infection.

### Increase in Canada's Population

Our population increased by more than a million people for the first time in history in 2022, almost entirely due to a surge in immigrants and temporary residents according to Statistics Canada. Total population grew by a record 1.05 million people to 39.57 million in the 12 months to Jan. 1, 2023, and about 96 per cent of the rise was due to international migration.

### Economic Forecast for 2022-2023

Statistics Canada reported that unemployment is down yet like much of the rest of the world, Canada is facing historically high rates of inflation. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the grocery store. The federal government recently announced grocery rebates to qualified Canadians.



### Alberta Context

A new United Progressive Conservative (UCP) was elected in May 2023. Alberta is forecasting a surplus of \$12.3 billion for the 2022-23 fiscal year after it pulled in a record amount in natural resource royalties. It was one of the biggest economic turnarounds in the province's history. The current provincial priorities are modernizing health care, investing in the economy and improving infrastructure. Notably missing are investments in new affordable housing, anti-racism work and social support for vulnerable populations.

### Civil War in Sudan

In April 2023, the vicious war between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) hit the two-month mark, with hostilities showing no signs of winding down despite a dire humanitarian situation that has left more than half the country in desperate need of aid.

The impact of these events and changes could impact the Coop in terms of increased community needs, access to federal and provincial funding for programs and services and support for equitable policies and programs.

As the MCHB Coop celebrates its 25th Anniversary, we are keeping our hopeful optimism in the midst of a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world!

# Our MCHB Annual Report: Serving Edmonton's culturally diverse communities for 25 years

## 1998

Canada's population was 30.1 M with 12% reporting ethnic origins other than British, French and European and Indigenous. Canada welcomed 174,200 that year; newcomers mostly from China, India and HongKong. The Kosovo war broke out which brought 7,000 Kosovar refugees to Canada.

Canada's economy was just recovering from the recession in the early 90s with a slow increase in jobs and overall productivity. The minimum wage in Alberta was \$5/hour.

Alberta was still experiencing the impact of the broadest health care restructuring in 1994 where 250 local hospitals and health care facilities were merged into seven health authorities resulting in the deepest cuts in health care staff and preventive programs. The Edmonton region was now called Capital Health Authority

Edmonton's population was 894,000 with an ethnocultural population of about 15%. It was at this time that the Multicultural Health Brokers Coop was formally registered as a workers' coop with 15 multicultural health brokers serving first time pregnant immigrant moms through the multilingual Perinatal Health Program.

## 2023

There are now 40 M Canadians in 2023; Edmonton has now reached 1.2 M people. The proportion of people who indicated their ethnic origins other than those European or Indigenous is close to 30%. This population increase is largely fueled by continuing immigration from mostly non-Western countries. In 2022, Canada once again welcomed an unprecedented 437, 180 newcomers from over 100 countries.

### *Our Greatest Strengths...*

*We have the capacity to accept that everyone is different and has different capabilities. We are a unique organization where each of their members have a strong sense of belonging due to possibility to be heard and valued. (Norma)*

*MCHB is a welcoming place for all. Kindness and compassion are some of our admirable strengths. (Magda)*

*The most important strength of the Coop is having dedicated Brokers and employees who continue to make a difference by serving the people in our communities. (Susan)*

*My first summer working with MCHB, I could see how the work and relationships would transform and shape me, and, for the first time in my work life, I felt able to fully embrace the changes I anticipated might come. More than talking about an alternative world, MCHB whispers this alternative into being, through fostering transformative relationships within and between ourselves, families, and partners. (Hannah)*

unrelenting advocacy for equity and inclusion in public policy are compelling forces for the MCHB Coop as it moves forward in the 21st century with promise and potential.

This 25th year MCHB Coop Annual Report is special and significant as we highlight our accomplishments!

### *Our Best Memories...*

*When we all took (Perinatal Education) course at Macwan to be cultural brokers at the Coop, we all felt part of the family you were accepted no matter where you come from or how well educated you are or how are living in Canada. We were respected in our community. It is the same feeling we all have today. MCHB Coop is a home to all of us! (Tigist)*

*We didn't come from the same country or speak the same language, but the sense of belonging was immediate, it was then, as it is today, like being with longtime friends, being with family. I remember the early meetings at the Alberta Health Services Plaza 124 board room, being part of planning and discussing what was ahead for MCHB and how we were going to help our communities, I also remember the deep feeling of being part of something meaningful. (Susana)*

*It took us months and months of discussion to decide if we want to be workers coop. Yvonne untiringly facilitated these long meetings from 7:00 - 9:00+ p.m. Nonetheless, we made a good decision of becoming a Workers Coop. (Nasreen)*

## Overview of Governance and Operations

At the Coop, we elect a Board of Directors every year responsible for stewarding the organization on behalf of the members. Their primary roles are:

- Oversight - sees to it that Coop is doing what it is supposed to do such as ensuring that the vision mission and financial health of the Coop are fulfilled. Important to this role, the Board is responsible for bringing the cooperative values to practice in the organization through continuing cooperative education and members recruitment
- Strategy - guides the Coop in adapting to changes in the environment through participatory strategic planning.
- Policy - engages members to develop the operating policies of the cooperative and ensures that these policies meet emerging needs and conditions.

### MCHB Board of Directors 2022-2023

Nasreen Omar	Chair
Lucenia Ortiz	Vice Chair
Arlyn Jones	Treasurer
Mulki Ali	Co-treasurer
Rta Loteka	Co-treasurer
Irene Dormitorio	Secretary
Susan Azarcon	Co-Secretary
Members at large	
Nadia Farhat	Lyn Belle

### Board activities in 2022-2023

The Board continues to perform its primary roles through regular updates profiling programs and initiatives to increase the Board understanding of challenges and opportunities and provide support when needed. Coop Education for members is now a regular Board program. A few highlights of Board activities include the following:

#### Oversight

- Supported Board committees work in responding to issues and concerns from membership such i.e. monthly vs bi-monthly salary payment from the Personnel Committee, draft budget development from the Finance Committee
- Supported the development of the 2023-2023 MCHB Coop Budget for approval by membership
- Engaged membership in the 25th Anniversary Celebration planning

#### Policy

- Stewarded the development and approval of the Coop's Wellness and Sick Leave Policy
- Conducted a survey among the workers of their awareness of the Coop's Personnel Policy which led to the recommendation of a Human Resource Assistant position in the 2023-2024 budget
- Presented an initial draft of the Health and Safety Policy for further revisions

#### Strategy

- Review progress of 2020-2023 Strategic Plan
- Designed a process for members to be engaged in conversation about transitioning to a non-profit status

The Board are also workers at the Coop and are part of operating units that provide support to the workers such the Core Communication Team, which enables them to be grounded on issues and concerns that matters to workers and bring these insights to the Board. As a new Board is elected in the 2023 AGM, the work will continue in its three key roles of oversight, strategy and policy ensuring that members and workers are engaged in decisions that matter most to them.

## Operations

The MCHB Coop continues to implement a wide range of programs, projects and initiatives which serve people from birth to older years, a cross-section of issues and levels of complexity. The wide diversity of our programs and services can be described as:

### Anchor programs

Foundational programs that make our core values come alive, demonstrate the cultural brokering practice at its fullest and provide stability, consistency and security for the Coop even at its most difficult times.

### Population-Centred Programs

Population-centred programs aim at responding to specific needs and challenges of populations with common characteristics that require the appropriate care and support responsive to their conditions and context.

### Health-Empowering Initiatives

This group of initiatives tackle issues and challenges that impact health and well being of individuals and families. These initiatives focus on specific health issues such as mental health or address broad social determinants of health such as employment.

### Legacy Projects

Legacy projects offer an approach or a model that demonstrates achieving equity and inclusion in service provision, meeting a basic need or fulfilling one's hopes and aspirations. These are projects that the MCHB Coop works in collaboration with other organizations that will leave a significant impact nationally, a sector or in the municipality.

### Social Enterprise Initiatives

As a cooperative, the MCHB Coop undertakes initiatives that bring revenues to the organization by offering a service or a product that individuals and organizations are willing to pay for.

## Program Accomplishments

2022-2023 was indeed a banner year at the MCHB Coop with 25 programs, projects and initiatives serving close to 4,000 individuals and over a thousand families served by 150 cultural brokers. Before or after the COVID Pandemic, the work of the Coop has remained unabated and continues to grow.

The table provides a quick glimpse of the level of service and program activities.





## MCHB Coop Programs/Projects/Initiatives by the Numbers: a quick glance

Program/Initiatives	Individuals & Families Served/ Program Participants	Cultural Brokers
<b>Anchor Programs</b> Perinatal Health Outreach	<b>617</b> moms	<b>33</b>
Intercultural Family Resource Networks	<b>43</b> families (Early Childhood Development) <b>48</b> families (Home Visitation) <b>490</b> families (Multicultural Family Connections)	
Collaborative Intercultural Practice Initiative -Child Intervention & MCHB	<b>290</b> Families referred <b>709</b> Children within these families	<b>52</b>
Early Childhood Development Program	<b>3</b> communities providing first language ECD sessions <b>2</b> ECD research projects	
<b>Population-Focused Programs</b> Multicultural Family Support for Children with Disabilities	<b>219</b> children with disabilities <b>184</b> families	<b>39</b>
Multicultural Seniors Program	<b>367</b> seniors <b>15</b> ethnocultural communities <b>30</b> volunteers	<b>12</b>
Immigrant and Refugee Youth Program	<b>335</b> program participants <b>135</b> youth served <b>15</b> communities	15 youth brokers
Brokering Supports for Ukrainian Evacuees	<b>687</b> individuals	<b>3</b>
<b>Health Empowering Initiatives</b> Employment Program	<b>60</b> newcomers attended classes; <b>35</b> accessed employment supports	<b>5</b>
Mental Health & Wellness Program	<b>102</b> families <b>65</b> children and youth <b>101</b> caregivers	<b>39</b>
Public Legal Education and Information	<b>70</b> community leaders	
Permanency Project	<b>30</b> community members <b>3</b> communities	
Culturally Responsive Access to Justice (CRAJ)Project	<b>120</b> families	
Food Dignity Program	<b>520</b> families receiving food <b>3200</b> individuals in urban farms	
<b>Social Enterprise</b> Journeys Program	<b>13</b> workshops <b>260</b> participants	

## The MCHB Coop Programs: stories and insights

The MCHB programs, initiatives and projects are more than just numbers! The essence of these endeavours are found in the stories of the individuals, families and communities we serve and the rich insights we have gathered to inform our work in the future.

The programs, initiatives and projects are profiled in this report in terms of their objectives and aspirations, various supports and activities, challenges and opportunities and the insights gained from our experience. Most of all, stories are shared from the voices of those who have participated in the programs, initiatives and projects.

A companion document called “MCHB Program Accomplishments” comes with this report which provides more details on each of the program, initiative and project as prepared by the coordinators and teams.

### Perinatal Health Outreach Program

The Perinatal Health Program provides meaningful, high quality, culturally relevant, and evidence-based support to newcomer immigrant and refugee families in four critical areas of service: prenatal, labour, postpartum, and parenting education. Pregnancy and childbirth are often a family’s entry point into the healthcare system and our first point of contact with newcomer families for cultural brokers since we began as a Coop.

#### Program Highlights

- 617 women directly engaged in prenatal and parenting supports
- 33 brokers provided holistic and family-oriented perinatal support to mothers
- 25 different languages in which care was provided
- 386 new registrations logged

#### What we are seeing...

- An increase in high-risk pregnancies, gestational diabetes, hypertension, pre- and post-partum depression, C-section and miscarriages
- Families are struggling with limited financial resources especially those newly arrived, and unable to meet basic needs such as lack of food and shelter.
- More newly arrived moms, many are single parents with children from Ukraine, Afghanistan and Yemen are faced with multiple challenges such as language barriers, limited employment opportunities, mental health, lack of access to housing and food insecurity
- Some communities are still not very receptive to information about COVID vaccinations which is a cause for concern for many cultural brokers who are returning to seeing clients in-person

#### Success means...

- More communities are now getting vaccinations for COVID and for pregnancy
- More families are becoming more comfortable with using digital technology. Communities are running virtual prenatal classes and weekly parenting groups giving them more options with in-person and virtual groups to accommodate the needs of different clients.

*I was so inspired by the brokers. I want to become a social worker so I can also help other newcomers in the future.  
(A Mom)*

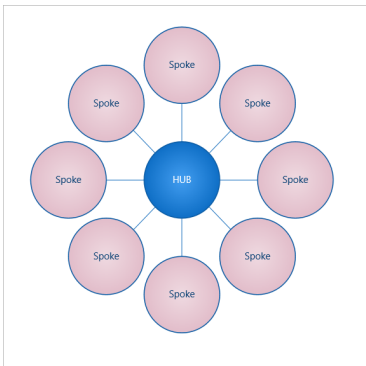
- Some doctors have been very supportive, especially with newly arrived moms.
- Cultural brokers doing the best they could despite heavy caseloads relying on each other to support families and each other.

### Looking ahead...

We will continue to develop strategies to promote our perinatal program in the immigrant and refugee communities, so that more expectant moms will benefit from our services.

### Intercultural Family Resource Networks (FRN)

As a part of the provincial Family Resource Networks (FRN), the MCHB Coop is the **hub** for the Edmonton Area Intercultural Family Resource Network. As a **hub** means we are a resource centre for service providers and agencies needing support working with culturally diverse families.



We are the **spokes** where we provide direct family support through our Multicultural Family Connections and Home Visitation teams. Our Early Childhood Development program supported some of the parenting groups this last year. And, our

Cultural Supports Spoke in south east Edmonton is a collaboration with Family Futures to support increased culturally responsive programming.

#### Program Highlights

- 43 families accessed Early Childhood Development programming
- 48 families participated in our Culturally-Responsive Home Visitation supports
- 490 families participated in Multicultural Family Connections
- 250 families were new to our programs and supports
- 101 families moved on from active broker support

#### A Story to Share:

The MCHB Coop was contacted by a rural Northern Region FRN, regarding a family who was not fully engaged in their universal programming because of cultural and linguistic distance or differences until the children were taken into care by Children's Service (CS) Intervention. The FRN reached out to the IFRN Hub for support. The IFRN Team coordinated a set of culturally matched supports: a cultural broker, a parent educator from ASSIST-an IFRN partner. From then on, a service team composed of the Northern Region FRN and CS, ASSIST and MCHB began to meet weekly, providing the mom with one-on-one parent education and in-home cultural brokering support for the mom with the CS team. Within three weeks of this support, CS began planning for the children to transition home, after five and a half months in care.

This story highlights a dramatic shift in the family situation with the introduction of culturally and linguistically

matched supports in the key areas of liaison brokering and parent education. These include:

- highly experienced, culturally- and linguistically-matched staff able to support parent education and the relationship between mom and CS;
- willingness of the Northern region's CS and FRN staff to reach out and partner with the IFRN; and
- regular and effective communication amongst service team members.

This level of support resulted in increased understanding between mom CS staff and

mom's readiness to engage supports once accessible to her. With the children having transitioned home, the team continued to meet together and with the family to work towards sustained safety and wellbeing of the family. This includes bridging the relationships that have been built with staff at the local FRN, with hopes that deeper connection to the FRN will link mom to supports and programs offered at the centre and facilitate mom's wish to build natural support within her local community.



### **What we are challenged with...**

- High volume and increased complexity of family needs without commensurate increase in resources to support families, as evident by an increase in total caseload of 149 families from last year
- Increasing numbers of Ukrainian evacuees, privately sponsored Eritrean refugees, and Afghan refugees without adequate supports in place upon arrival
- Persistent financial challenges for many families, leading to housing and food insecurity
- A high number of referrals due to system gaps in being able to serve families with linguistic and cultural distance.

### **Our reflection and insights...**

With a steadily growing newcomer population, the importance of MCHB's work is increasingly being recognized. Our work with the provincial FRN and our partner Family Futures offered opportunities for us to build experience in supporting more culturally responsive and intercultural practice within mainstream organizations. As we develop our "toolbox" in how to support increased Intercultural practice from front-line work to boards, we work towards a more truly intercultural society.

### **Looking Ahead...**

MCHB was offered a two-year grant along with Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA) in Calgary to address a gap in culturally-responsive support for immigrant, refugee, and other newcomers in early intervention and prevention. We are looking forward to this work to achieve the following:

1. Establish a provincial network to provide specialized supports for newcomer, immigrant, and cultural minority families - where we hope to make visible the existing strengths of Alberta's communities (e.g. ethnocultural community organizations, settlement sector agencies) and facilitate connections to amplify these strengths
2. Develop and implement collaborative strategies to expand access to culturally relevant supports in rural communities - where we hope to work closely with FRN and other agencies to build local intercultural practice capacity
3. Report and communicate with the Ministry, activities and issues facing access to culturally relevant support in rural communities - where we hope to partner with our Calgary and ministry colleagues to illuminate the life realities of immigrant, refugee, and other cultural minority families across the province to increase the effectiveness of supports for these families

### **Our Program Strengths and Key Outcomes**

- Increased positive bi-cultural identities, catalysing healing, for caregivers, children, and youth
- Increased caregivers' sense of confidence and competence in raising children and youth in a bi-cultural context
- Families have increased social bonds, social bridges, and social links
- Partnering agencies increased their intercultural capacity

### **Collaborative Intercultural Practice Initiative - CS Child Intervention & MCHB**

The Collaborative Intercultural Practice Initiative is a partnership between Childrens Services (CS) Child Intervention & MCHB Coop. This initiative involves cultural brokers working jointly with the CS Intervention Team to support children and families going through child protection issues.

## Our program strengths...

- *Holistic family support over the long-term* from cultural brokers helps families address the underlying issues that led to the child protection concerns. This reduces future risk through parents gaining knowledge both about the Child Intervention system and parenting norms, as well as drawing on their cultural strengths to parent their children in Canada.
- *Co-location* continues to support relationship-building between Liaison Brokers and Child Intervention colleagues. The return to in-person work facilitates stronger collaboration.
- *Positive, collaborative relationships* with many child intervention workers means, in many cases, cultural brokers are included as trusted partners and team members working with families and contributing to decision-making processes. These child intervention workers are able to see cultural gaps, recognize brokers' cultural expertise, and value the support provided by cultural brokers.
- *Good support* from peers, liaison brokers, support team members, community teams, and groups that meet regularly strengthen cultural brokering, collaborative practice and broker wellness.

### Program highlights

- 290 Families referred by Child Intervention Workers
- 709 Children within these families
- 510 Active intervention files as of March, 2023
- 52 Brokers provided holistic and family support to families
- 157 Different Child Intervention workers consulted or engaged in collaborative practice
- 59 Different countries of origin among families referred
- 38 Different primary languages spoken by families referred
- 8 Presentations to Child Intervention, Police, and social work students

## Twin Vignettes of Success

### **Holistic, culturally safe and relevant family support**

When a family who had their children returned to them from foster care moved to Edmonton, the BC Child Welfare Authority requested the Children's Services Edmonton Region to provide courtesy services. The Assessor consulted with Liaison Broker to visit the family. After listening to the family story, they developed a safety plan for the family that included:

- registering the children in school with parents consent for school to contact brokers if there are any concerns with parents or children;
- introducing the parents to supports within their ethnocultural community;
- finding a family physician and a psychiatrist for the mom who spoke their language
- applying for Income Support
- participating in 6 two-hour Parenting in Two cultures sessions at home; parents agreed to 6 – 2 hour sessions of in-home from an experienced

With this plan in place, the Assessor said, *"I am so glad MCHB is in Edmonton. It is saving the government and families. It is a comfort and gives me peace."*

### **Community embedded practice diverting families near the door of child intervention**

A mom experiencing severe violence from her husband contacted a cultural broker from a number given by a community member. The cultural broker developed an immediate safety plan with mom to stay in a hotel instead of going home and getting an Emergency Protection Order. The mom refused to go to a shelter because she'd heard stories from other women about how difficult shelters are. Within 5 days, the mom obtained permanent housing for herself and the children through the Supported Referral Program. The brokers, with mom's permission, also reached out to the husband who agreed to go counseling, domestic violence education, and parenting instruction. Both are following through, and are working towards healthy family reunification without needing to have costly child intervention services involved.

### **What we are challenged with...**

- *Caseload exceeds our capacity.* There are 510 active intervention cases which means a caseload of 26 families per frontline FTE. This is way more than an ideal caseload for a full-time cultural broker which should be 8-15 depending on complexity, severity and intensity.
- *Complexity of cases is increasing.* We are seeing a marked increase in cases involving mental health, addictions, financial and housing difficulties, and sexual abuse in addition to referrals that involves issues relating to children's sexual orientation or gender identity. These cases often require time intensive and highly skilled support, including coordinating multisectoral supports.
- *Criminalization of migrant, immigrant, and refugee parents.* Parents from migrant backgrounds who use corporal punishment or physical pain to discipline their children are misinterpreted as physical abuse by the police. Charges are laid immediately, parents are separated from their children causing financial hardships to maintain two households. At this point, the case becomes more complex for cultural brokers to navigate as they work through the difficult intersections of criminal, family and immigration law.
- *Relational difficulties with some child intervention workers.* Child intervention workers do not fully understand the role and capacities of cultural brokers, often regarded as interpreters and were not trusted as full partners in decision-making processes around legal statuses and case closures. The high turnover of child intervention workers means a continual need to build relationships and re-explain the role of cultural brokers and best practices in collaborative practice.
- *Lack of opportunities among cultural brokers to learn from each other.* Limited in-person meetings or interaction among colleagues are missed opportunities to share wisdom, informal learning, and quick case consultations.

### **Our learning and insights: Missed opportunities for preventive work**

When does prevention begin and end? Our data on our child intervention work shows that when cultural brokers are involved, we are reducing the chances of re-entry of children into the child intervention system within a one-year period. However, this is called tertiary prevention or restorative practice. We want to influence primary prevention - where a child does not have to be involved in the child intervention system. There are many social forces that impact our ability to enhance prevention efforts.

The first one is how the Alberta Ministry of Services values primary prevention. Their 2022 Budget allocates 51% to Child Intervention and only 6% to Early Intervention and Prevention for Children and Youth. This does not reflect the realities reported in the 2008 Alberta Incidence Study: only 13% of the families served required core protection services while 87% needed family support to mitigate poverty, social isolation, family relational difficulties, and mental health issues.

Second, there are differences between culturally relevant and context informed practice and the way police officers are taught to investigate and decide around laying charges. Police investigators are focused on being methodical and objective, focusing on the facts that relate directly to reasonable and probable grounds to believe a crime has been committed. Context is essential when working with culturally diverse families which Crown Prosecutors tend to consider when proceeding with prosecutions where there is a reasonable prospect of conviction and where it is in the public interest.

Third, primary prevention is a worthy option. In a joint meeting with Children's Services, Edmonton Police Services and MCHB, there was a consensus that broad primary prevention should be pursued although difficult because of limited resources. Migrant families reported to child intervention could be prevented through early intervention programs including caregiver education, holistic family support, social connections, and system navigation. Instead, our referrals were mostly first encounters with Children's Services with criminal charges. This comes with many negative consequences including: extended family separations, risks of deportation, and financial hardship (from legal fees, missed work attending court, employment barriers if getting a criminal record, and having to maintain an additional residence due to no contact orders).

We hope to bring these learnings to higher levels in Children's Services, Alberta Justice, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to encourage more adequate resources to support prevention in this area.

### **Looking ahead...**

- Increased resources to for frontline brokering and support team to meet demand, reduce caseload, and increase support for frontline brokers
- Increased relationships with multiple systems - i.e. legal system, mental health system, addictions treatment both to build capacity within these systems to serve multicultural populations, and also to support brokers in dealing with the increased complexity they are seeing in family situations
- Evaluation that harvests family voices to ensure these voices are at the centre of ongoing innovation and identification of best practices.
- Conduct research on child intervention

### **Early Childhood Development (ECD) Program 2022-2023**

The Early Childhood Development Program has three key components:

1. First language ECD education sessions for children 2-12
2. Knowledge building on understanding early learning in culturally diverse families
3. Capacity building on ECD measurement tools

### **ECD programming for children aged 2-12 years that promote cultural wealth and home languages**

Co-designing of curriculum lesson plans with cultural brokers for children ages 2-12 years that include sessions with culturally diverse themes such as: Celebrating Seasons, Adventure with Animals, It's Food Time, Music and Movement, Emotions and Families Stories and values like Respect for Elders that are central to many cultural communities. These once a week sessions introduced children to learn and celebrate cultural cuisines, folk and popular stories and songs from home culture in a safe and engaging environment to appreciate their cultural wealth and their native languages.

An ECD celebration workshop was organized with a hybrid in-person and online session in April 2022 to showcase the ECD curriculum created and implemented with the Filipino and Chinese communities to encourage other communities to use the learnings in their work.

## Promoting Home Languages to Foster Preschoolers' Sense of Identity and Well-Being

A research study funded by Child and Youth Refugee Research (CYRRC) and in collaboration with University of Alberta, Multilingual Lab, and MCHB was implemented with preschool children and their parents with a refugee background to promote home language maintenance strategies. There are two phases in the research.

Phase 1 consists of a series of eight language in-person stimulation sessions for Eritrean and Ethiopian communities from March-June 2022 to support children from the community in the acquisition of their first languages, Amharic and Tigrigna and when relevant, the learning of their second language, English.

Phase 2 took place virtually in November-December 2022 with Kurdish speaking community preschool children and their parents. In addition to the cultural broker support, to recruit participants and manage the weekly engagements, a community youth also participated from the conception/designing of the sessions to the delivery of the program.

## Journey Through Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC): The Experience of Cultural Minority Families.

MCHB partnered with the Edmonton ELCC Council and the University of Alberta, to gain a deeper understanding of how ethnocultural families experience the Early Learning and Care sector in Edmonton, what their needs and aspirations are and to imagine solutions to gaps and barriers. Blending narrative and human-centred design approaches, the study created three composite semi-fictionalized stories that illustrated the complex experiences of parents.

Parents from seven ethno-cultural communities: Spanish-speaking, Bhutanese, Arabic speaking/Kurdish, Ethiopian and Eritrean, Somali, Filipino and Chinese speaking were interviewed one-on-one and as a group.

The research report was launched in April 2022 with a media event. The report can be viewed at:

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f170b16bf7d977d587e43c4/t/63d0315373b26008b8f48655/1674588509947/Journeys+Narrative+Report\\_Dec2022\\_.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f170b16bf7d977d587e43c4/t/63d0315373b26008b8f48655/1674588509947/Journeys+Narrative+Report_Dec2022_.pdf)

Five pathways to improve early learning and care for ethnocultural families and their children

1. empowering parents
2. supporting language and culture
3. facilitating inclusion and belonging
4. improving access and navigation and advancing equity

## Building Capacity in Early Childhood Measurement Tools for Home Visitation Brokers

The MCHB Home Visitation Team participated in a training in December 2022 on evidence-based curriculum of "Promoting First Relationships" that helps parents and other caregivers meet the social and emotional needs of young children. The training grounded in attachment theory and reflective practice highlighted that "Parents exhibit their cultural priorities in their parenting behaviour and that there is no one particular best way to parent".

### What we are challenged with...

- Availability of Eritrean and Ethiopian families and the research team together was challenging that resulted in fewer number of participating families.



- Virtual sessions led to inconsistent participation of families every week despite accommodations by the Multilingual Lab. Many children missed not getting the full benefit of this eight-week long, home language promotion and acquisition
- Only two communities participated in the uptake of the co-created ECD curriculum to promote cultural wealth and home language. It would have been wonderful to have more cultural brokers and communities involved in it.

### **Our reflection and insights...**

- The ECD sessions empowered the first generation to share their cultural wealth with the young ones and helped see the learning of home language as a shared experience. It was heart-warming to see grandparents singing songs from their own childhood and rolling bread alongside their grandchildren as they shared songs in their home language and learned about the cultural food.
- Having a parent from the community who was bilingual and modelling their own bicultural parenting, encouraged other parents to look up to a positive role model who they could relate to in many ways. The home language project, CYRRC Phase 2, involved a parent champion from the community for content designing and helping the research team facilitate the sessions with parents and preschoolers.

#### **A Vignette of Cultural Strength**

As part of the ECD sessions with the University of Alberta's multilingual lab, the preschool children and their family learned to introduce themselves as, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am bilingual/multilingual and I speak \_\_\_\_\_ and English. It was simple, child friendly and yet very empowering and culturally honouring for children that were 3-4 years old being confident in who they are and proudly showcasing their bilingualism as a strength.

### **Looking ahead ...**

- Design and pilot test a Parent Manifesto to aid parents culturally introduce their child to early childhood and care educators to learn more who the child is, what their hopes and aspirations for the child are and how the child's home culture and language can be honoured in the classroom.
- More community-university collaborations are being planned to have other communities participate in the CYRRC project by the multilingual lab at UoA that promotes home language and home culture.
- Share the five pathways and the learnings from the project with key Early Childhood Sector partners, organizations and relevant ELCC leadership for deeper understanding of this unique population, hear their voices and feedback and their experience and challenges at an individual, community and system level.

## **Multicultural Family Support for Children with Disabilities (2005 to present)**

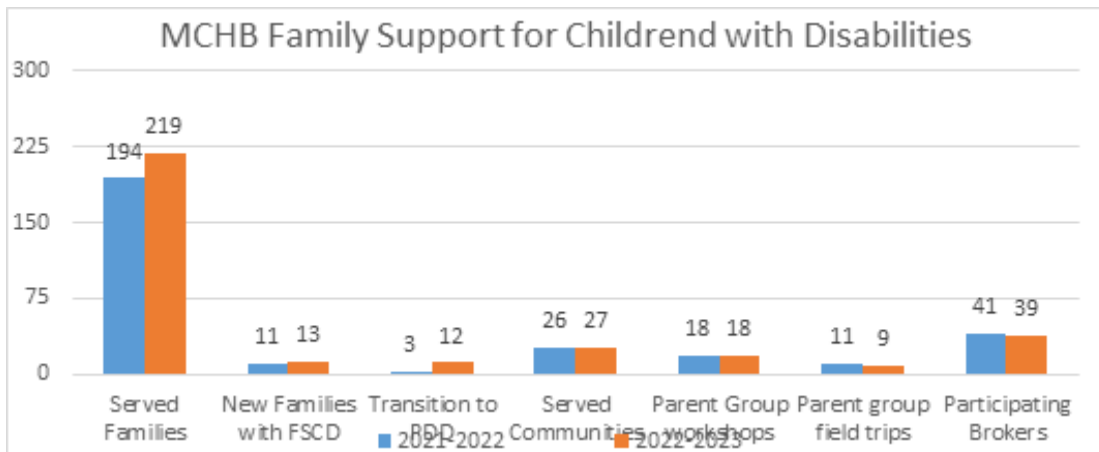
This program is a unique collaboration between three organizations: Edmonton & Area Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD), Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL, renamed Inclusion Alberta lately), and Multicultural Health Brokers Coop (MCHB). It is intended to develop a service model for providing culturally related family supports to the most underserved populations, as our vision has been to serve the marginalized ethnocultural minority families in Edmonton & area.

### **Services and supports provided to the families:**

- Helping families to understand and apply for various FSCD funding and programs that are suitable for disabled children and their families
- Supporting families' access to a wide range of disability resources and services

according to different stages of the children's growing and developmental needs

- Supporting families' access to mental health programs for the siblings and parents who have been impacted by the special needs children of the family
- Assisting parents to explore available schooling options, agents and profession service providers
- Helping parents to meet with FSCD caseworkers, teachers, doctors and service providers and providing necessary interpretation services
- Liaising with a wide range of partners and service providers including FSCD caseworkers, teachers, Physicians, and clinicians of different disciplines. The bridging activities have facilitated stronger mutual understanding and collaboration between these partners and us.



### Success looks like...

- The long-established Chinese Community parents group continued to play an integral role in providing strong peer support through educational workshops, learning sessions and mutual supporting activities. Some parents from the Chinese community have been able to gain strong knowledge and skills to get employed as Education Assistant in schools.
- The parents group of the Ethiopian community has substantially grown and delivered various educational webinars on Zoom, benefiting both local families and overseas audiences.
- Our parent groups organized various meaningful and beneficial field trips and activities, aiming to provide educational and socialization opportunities for the families and the disabled children.
- Families were able to access needed services, engaged their children in beneficial services and increased their confidence and abilities to take care of their disabled children.
- Families trust the cultural brokers and turn to the brokers for help and support solving various problems, such as finding culture-specific respite care workers, applying for AISH, Guardianship

#### A Story to Share...

A 7-year-old son with ASD had no sense of safety and was non-verbal as well. Communicating with him was extremely challenging for the family. After FSCD approved specialized services for the boy, MCHB broker identified suitable service providers for the boy, and worked closely with the family to ensure the boy received the appropriate interventions. The boy showed improvements in his safety awareness, starting to understand the concept of holding his parents' hand when crossing the street. He has also learned how to use devices and pictures to communicate with his parents. The greatest progress is that the boy has started to speak, even just a few words. Along with improvements of these capacities, the boy liked to participate in more activities and showed greater happiness and engagement.

and Trusteeship, as well as preparing invoices for claiming funding for FSCD services.

- Families value and appreciate the program and our services and support. The client survey results indicate that over 95% of the served families are very satisfied with our services and support.
- Our brokers worked extra hours to provide the best possible services to the families that led to an increased funding from FSCD for the future years.
- More brokers received internal training on FSCD resources, funding, programs, and available disability services which enhanced their capacity to assess families' needs and seek relevant programs for the children with disabilities.
- Using Zoom maintained active operation of the parent groups through online gathering and activities which lessen the families' isolation and promote the parents' peer-to-peer connections and support.
- Professionals with different expertise delivered various workshops and seminars to continuously enhance the parents' skills and capacity to parent their disabled children.
- Collaborative relationships were built with FSCD caseworkers and service providers helped mitigate cultural gaps, minimize potential misunderstandings between the families and FSCD and FSCD funded service providers, and facilitate as they learn more about pre-migration and post-migration context of the families, including pre-migration trauma and post-migration adaptational struggles.
- Gateway Association has adopted our culturally responsive model of family support for children with disabilities to explore ways to overcome their struggles with delivering services to the immigrant families with disabled children.

### ***What we are challenged with...***

The biggest challenge to the program are service gaps in the disability sector and insufficient FSCD funded hours for cultural brokers who often fill this gap because they are the only ones that are readily accessible for families with children with disabilities. These include service gaps that are often

- Lack of resources for the respite and community care workers was a huge burden on the families. Some agencies refused to provide respite service to the families because of the complex health condition of the disabled children.
- Limited support for families that have multiple disabled children with multiple mental and physical health conditions
- Families have financial hardship and seek financial support for things like applying fees for Guardianship and Trusteeship.

### ***Our key learning and insights..***

Building a comprehensive set of knowledge about the disability sector and understanding the families' situation is key to ensuring that we provide the services and support that meets the needs of children and parents' expectations. This include:

- A thorough understanding of the related FSCD policies, application procedures, requirements and channels of communications.
- The range of services and resources available for disabled children and families can help families to get the best possible services and assistance.

### ***Looking ahead...***

- Continue to seek more collaboration with relevant organizations, and explore more funding from relevant sources.
- Continue to increase understanding of FSCD colleagues and other relevant

services providers about the pre and post migration relations of the families we serve, including the pre-migration trauma of many refugee families.

- Increase support for cultural brokers to understand the importance of gathering necessary client information and recording them appropriately in CASIS to fulfill our reporting obligations under the FSCD contract.
- Advocate for increasing our service capacity through additional funding in light of the increasing rate of newborns with disability and a growing number of newcomer families with children with disabilities.
- Increasing awareness and understanding of cultural brokers with FSCD colleagues as well as improving the cultural brokers knowledge and skills in working with children with disabilities.

## Multicultural Senior Outreach Program

2022-23 marks the 17th and final year of our current partnership with SAGE, the Multicultural Seniors Outreach Program (2005 to 2023) with funding from the City's FSCC and United Way. This year, we are starting three new programs:

- Social Prescribing Edmonton 55+ (November 2022),
- Community Animation (January 2023) and
- Coordinated Seniors Outreach July 2023).

The **Multicultural Seniors Outreach Program (MSOP)** uniquely taps into strengths of SAGE and MCHB Coop to provide holistic support to deeply isolated immigrant seniors to illustrate a model of collaborative care and community development. A team of now 12 cultural brokers work with seniors and their families within the Kurdish, Korean, former Yugoslavian, Spanish-speaking, Eritrean communities, Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian, South Sudanese, Oromo, and Syrian. They work closely to lift migrant seniors from deep isolation as a result of language, cultural, and economic barriers.

### Program Highlights

363	Seniors in Multicultural Seniors Outreach Program
15	Ethnocultural Communities Reached
30	Volunteers
1270	Volunteer hours
3	Seniors Programs

The **Community Animation** specifically seeks to build and support the leadership skills and initiatives of the seniors in our program.

The **Social Prescribing Edmonton 55+** is part of a pilot program with Alberta Health Services to develop pathways of community support for seniors, that service providers in the health system recognize, have non-medical needs related to the social determinants of health.

The **Coordinated Seniors Outreach** pilot will continue to serve the extremely vulnerable seniors of the MSOP program. This time we will expand our collaboration with more organizations while maintaining our unique partnership with SAGE. We will also seek additional funds from other funders to expand seniors' outreach in Edmonton. Over the next year, we will be exploring our new role helping to provide support to ethnocultural seniors in Edmonton.

We will continue to be members of the **Seniors Equity Collective (SEC)** with SAGE, Drive Happiness and GEF Housing. This collective was set up to improve our abilities to work with our partners, to improve our understanding of each other and to articulate in a unified voice, the needs of vulnerable seniors.

### **Our program strengths...**

We are proud to see vulnerable migrant seniors report decreased levels of stress and isolation with the support and connections they get through their cultural brokers as well as build their skills and capacities to:

- Navigate and access the services they need with the help of their cultural broker.
- Have Confidence to see others regularly in person and appreciate the joy of each other's company.
- Help others that they know need help such as carpooling, accessing Edmonton Transit and visiting homebound seniors.
- Maintain connections to family and community supports through limited cell phone plans provided by the MCHB Coop

#### **A story to share...**

*"Before I connected with MCHB, I lived with my daughter's family, helping them take care of their children. I did not know where to go, or how to access resources. I always felt alone, hopeless and always under stress. When I connected with the MCHB cultural brokers, they connected me to a gathering of others who spoke my language. They helped me get subsidized senior housing, weekly groceries, access government income support, get paperwork done on time and access other services. Now, I am so happy, hopeful and feel free."*

### **What we are challenged with...**

- Inflation has caused great hardships to our seniors as both food and rent have substantially increased.
- Mental health continues to be an ongoing theme. Cultural brokers continue to promote mental wellness through creating positive group connections, helping seniors address immediate needs, and involving them in gardening and other outdoor activities.
- Seniors who are Ukrainian Evacuees have limited access to seniors' support because of their temporary status and are unable to find employment. The current resources for cultural brokers are inadequate to meet their service needs.

### **A key learning, insight or reflection**

The Social Prescribing Pilot has great potential to provide the kind of services that ethnocultural seniors need - one that is responsive to their overall health and well being from loneliness and isolation to income and housing. Once it is adopted by the medical community, it will demonstrate that providing support to help seniors age at home is their most affordable option.

### **Looking ahead...**

We will soon be piloting a data entry system that can be accessed by smartphone to make it easier and faster for brokers to track the seniors' needs and the ways the brokers have helped.

## **Immigrant and Refugee Youth Program**

The Immigrant and Refugee Youth Program provides youth programming ranging from individual youth-oriented brokering, to group programming focused on academics, recreation and athletics. This program consists of two initiatives: AHS (Alberta Health Services) Immigrant and Refugee Youth Mental Health Project and the Youth-Oriented Brokering Initiative.

### **AHS Immigrant and Refugee Youth Mental Health Project**

This program recognizes the value of nurturing natural, youth-oriented leaders who are embedded in the community and well-positioned to identify relevant strategies to



bring young people together. Program activities include that uplift literacy, reduce cultural distance, and increase engagement with education through sports clubs, art projects, capacity building through training, homework clubs and an array of other cultural based programming designed and implemented by youth leaders of those communities.

### **Our strengths...**

- Youth is the centre of programming - from their community context, the challenges they encounter and solutions they see to be responsive to their realities. The Program continually identifies and connects youth, and at times their families, with professional support to build and address mental health issues through culturally sensitive therapy where and when there is need. While the Edmonton Intercultural Centre is the base location, program activities are done in other parts in the city such as community centres, and natural areas of gathering such as city parks, recreation centres and facilities, as well as private business that offer unique experiences for the youth (Telus Space and Science Center, Rabbit Hill Snow Resort, etc).
- The MCHB Coop's longstanding connections with these communities provide opportunities to find mutual support and to celebrate and affirm the youth's cultural identity and sense of self-worth, and to provide crucial opportunities for capacity building, fundamental elements of mental health promotion.
- We have continued to challenge ourselves to promote creative and positive ways to stay connected while creating a mutual net of support within groups to take care of youth at most risk. As COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd both exacerbated pre-existing racial inequities, our youth leaders and mentors recognize the value of nurturing youth, who are then able to be embedded within their communities to create positive change.
- Youth participants in our program have been active in using their learnings to advocate for change in the broader community. They have the ability to bring voices of lived experience to policy makers. We recognised that this is a crucial moment when systems seem poised and alert to the imperative to change to a more equity-based policy, and our programs remain a major contributor to this discussion.

#### **Program Highlights**

**335** unique clients served by youth programming

**70++** youth served by one-on-one support

**415** therapy sessions for youth

**443** therapy sessions for youth and families

**7** healing dialogue

**6** communities participating

**9** community group program

### **Youth-oriented Brokering Initiative**

The Youth-oriented Brokering Initiative develops youth cultural brokers who bring their lived experience, an understanding of youth culture, coupled with a deep understanding of pre- and post-migration contexts, to provide holistic intervention among young people. They build trusting relationships with families, utilising their understanding of trauma-informed concepts and frameworks to offer holistic, culturally responsive support and engage the cultural wealth of communities, including aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, linguistic, and cultural capital.

### **Our strengths...**

- We continue to provide holistic, one-on-one brokering support in 5 ethnocultural communities through our WRAP-ED collaboration, and our own Celebrating Culture, Celebrating Life program. Youth brokers work across the spectrum from front-line support to engagement with service providers to dialogue with

decision-makers within systems toward policies that effectively respond to upstream social determinants of health.

- Youth-oriented brokers now have seamless channels for referral support for youth and families. Families/caregivers were supported in navigating schools, and judicial courts, with financial literacy, securing work opportunities, finding stable housing and responding to food security issues.
- Youth-oriented brokers were able to uncover unique insights from the lived experiences of youth on risk and protective factors by applying our learning on brokering frameworks and models such as ADAPT and RAISED. This enhanced our ability to develop strategies to reduce risk factors and strengthen protective factors.
- We also engage the Celebrating Culture, Celebrating Life project's Knowledge Development and Exchange hub connecting with colleagues and projects all over Canada. This kind of sharing helps to build the capacity of youth and communities to speak directly to systems as they develop a better understanding of the relationship between the risk and protective factors and their underlying causes, including social determinants and structural violence.

### **What we are challenged with..**

- We have continued to struggle with the disproportionate harms of the COVID Pandemic and racism (interpersonal, institutional, and structural) on marginalised, refugee communities which have a direct impact on migrant youth everyday lives.
- Referrals for youth have increased, possibly tied to the amount of youth experiencing extreme social isolation in our communities since the COVID Pandemic. Community leaders and our own youth brokers are seeing this with critical issues, such as children without consistent meals (or suffering from poverty), risk of family violence, and depression and substance abuse. Programs connecting youth with natural supports such as ours will be more in demand and valuable since professional supports continue to become unavailable as the needs grow.

### **A key learning, insight or reflection..**

- We also firmly believe that when communities feel heard, they naturally build the capacity to mobilize more effectively around these areas of concern and improve their ability to interact with systems. These are moments where we are able to shift the perspectives of decision-makers and give agency to marginalized communities in these conversations.
- We adjust our own work to better serve the interests and needs of our communities. If there are gaps in housing support, we pivot our interests there. Whether it is about the yearning for employment possibilities, an increase in local hate crimes, or discourse in politics that is driven by hatred, we respond accordingly. This is a learning moment to advance understanding of immediate issues to the level of political and economic systems. It's a chance to encourage

#### **Twin Vignettes of Success..**

##### **Healing Dialogues**

a safe space to come together and to relive their experience and to create a bond among others to lessen the impact of racism, to work toward restorative dialogue where people are open-hearted, open-minded and have an open-minded experience together. The vision of the project is to ground project ideas in youth voices and to support these emergent ideas through a team of adult mentors.

##### **Bridging support for children who are victims of gang and gun violence**

Youth cultural brokers helped secure emergency housing and acted as a bridge between families and police. Intervention in these cases required comprehensive support from multiple stakeholders coordinated by youth-oriented brokers

a change in perception and support, mobilize our communities, stakeholders, and young people to interact with systems and contribute firsthand knowledge to these discussions.

### Looking Ahead..

- Healing dialogues have been fully developed that could be shared with youth communities.
- Our continued funding will enable us to invite more youth to participate in our programs.
- We are also looking forward to more knowledge translation activities with systems including Edmonton Public School Board, Alberta Health Services, Edmonton Police Services, and Public Health Agency of Canada.

### Settlement and Integration Brokering Supports for Ukrainian Evacuees

#### Program Highlights

687 Ukrainian evacuees supported Edmonton, Beaumont, Leduc, Nisku, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, and Sherwood Park  
46 clients provided Psychological counselling  
3 Brokers involved  
213 CASIS files opened, approximately 50% are single parent, female headed families;  
23 women are receiving perinatal supports;  
30% of families have 3 or more children; many are inter-generational including 36 seniors.  
8 Connections were made with community, school (ECSB), government, university, legal, public health, obstetric, pediatric, and dental services. provided tos, including individuals, children and families.  
800 participants in two in-person workshops on immigration law organized, with approximately  
200 participants in Two workshops on Canadian workplace culture and employment organized with approximately  
8 partnerships initiated (MFRS, ECALA, Catholic Social Services, ELIP, Children's Services, City of Edmonton, and University of Alberta - Faculty of Nursing)

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in March 2022, over 250,000 Ukrainians have arrived in Canada through the **Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET)** program (3 year, temporary resident visa and work permit). To date, approximately 35,000 have settled in Alberta with 12-13,000 in the Edmonton area.

The three brokers working with Russian speaking communities immediately mobilized to provide settlement and other holistic support to families in the Edmonton and surrounding area. Between March and November 2022, the team worked with limited hours to support approximately 300 new clients, many of which were single parent, inter-generational families dealing with significant trauma.

In December, the MCHB received 7 months funding (December 2022-June 2023) through a one time grant (Government of Alberta funds

administered by AAISA) to provide holistic brokering support for Ukrainian evacuees framed within the social inclusion framework developed through COSI. The grant included a 0.3FTE position for a dedicated therapist to support early access to counselling for evacuees seeking help with pre-and post-migration trauma.

The MCHB also partnered with the Rural Development Network (AAISA grant) to deliver on-line workshops to build the capacity of rural communities (Alberta, BC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba) to better support Ukrainian evacuees. Three workshops were developed and delivered between February and April 2023: *"Providing a Context for Settlement: The Crisis in Ukraine and Canada's Response - Safe Harbour"*, *"Supporting Ukrainian Evacuee Settlement through a Social Inclusion Lens"*, and *"Understanding Trauma-Informed Care and Rural Settlement of Ukrainian Evacuees"*.

### **Our strengths...**

- Ability to learn quickly and to provide immediate settlement, emotional and psychological response to meet evacuee needs in first language and with a trauma informed approach.
- Relationship building with newly arrived evacuees addressing social isolation and longer term family and community social inclusion strategy building.
- Ability to provide early and trauma informed psychological counselling to families to address emerging individual and family emotional and psychological needs.
- Participation of therapists in team meetings supported emotional/psychological client consultation and team well-being.
- Partnerships for resource, referral, information sharing and advocacy with a wide range of settlement provider organizations through participation in the CSS/AAISA provincial network to support Ukrainian evacuees.
- Advocacy and information sharing relationship with key community-based organizations including Ukrainian Canadian Congress - UCC, Ukrainian Canadian Social Services - UCSS, Edmonton Hosts Ukrainians Facebook Group, Displaced University Students Society (DUSS), and Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies (CIUS).

#### **A story to share...**

A family of two seniors fled Ukraine to Edmonton to be with their daughter who is studying at the University of Alberta. They were referred to the MCHB Coop. Neither of them spoke English and needed help with initial settlement: appropriate documentation, AB Health Care Cards, opening a bank account and applying for the one time \$3,000 federal grant. We worked with CIVIDA to find affordable housing- a challenge with their limited funds and connected them to UCC for furniture, household items, clothing and to the Food Bank. As temporary residents, they are not eligible for seniors benefits and the federally funded English classes. We connected them to the local Ukrainian community where they have an ESL class at a church and as well as employment possibilities. The husband finally found employment after a few months but they are still struggling with financial precarity. The important thing is that they are connected to their community which can be source of social support and access to a network of services they need.

### **What we are challenged with...**

- Current excessive and rapid caseload increase (approximately 200 per broker).
- Lack of continuing and stable funding to maintain and build a brokering team to meet a growing client base.
- Lack of continuing funding to provide psychological support.
- Significant challenges for evacuees arising from the accelerated process of settlement necessary under CUAET (e.g., limited one-time financial benefit from the Federal Government); housing (temporary and affordable housing), employment, financial and food security and access to ESL programs.
- Temporary resident status excludes access to provincial or federal benefit programs for evacuees who arrive pregnant, persons/families with disabilities or seniors, thus increasing financial and overall vulnerability.

### **Looking Ahead...**

- Proactively plan to address existing and potentially expanding caseload (CUAET arrivals until March 2023) and increasingly complicated client needs.
- Seek opportunities to partner with sister agencies to seek ongoing funding for brokering and counselling needs.
- Develop and deepen collaboration and cooperation with settlement serving agencies and community organizations.
- Contribute to policy and program decisions affecting those with Temporary Residence status through continuing participation in CSS/AAISA network,

collaboration with the UCC, and information sharing with provincial and municipal governments.

## Mental Health Program

The MCHB Coop's Mental Health Program has a unique ensemble of programs and services intended to provide a culturally relevant holistic and interconnected support to individuals and families from ethnocultural communities. This includes:

- Mental Therapist Team
- Mental Health and Wellness Screen Program (MWS)
- Family Resource Network Province-Wide Mental Health Program
- South Asian Project Mental Health Project

### Mental Health Therapist Team

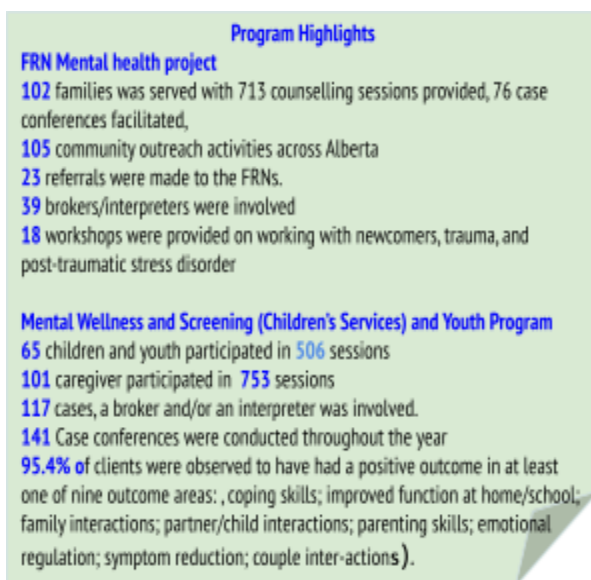
MCHB Co-op has a small unique group of therapists with diverse lived experiences, allowing us opportunities to meet the needs of families and individuals while considering the most optimal therapist-client match. Our team is committed to collaborating deeply and working side by side with the Brokers in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges and barriers encountered by clients; together, we seek to address issues around familial relationships as well as mental health and well-being.

The Therapists team consists of 11 therapists (3 FT and 8 PT), all from different cultural backgrounds and clinical orientations. Therapeutic support is in the form of couple's counselling, family therapy, individual therapy (adults, adolescents) and play therapy to children, through the following funded programs: Mental Wellness and Screening (Children's Services), Youth Program (Alberta Health Services), Province Wide Mental Health Program (Family Resource Network), and the South Asian project which was recently concluded.

Each therapist uses unique approaches in working with clients while considering the impacts of systemic barriers and cultural nuances/differences on family's overall functioning and adaptation, and aims to be mindful of both the risk factors faced and the protective/resilience factors inherent in the communities we serve. The Therapists team is supported by a Registered Psychologist) and a Canadian Certified Counselor Supervisor, who provide therapists with guidance, leadership and case consultation.

### Mental Health and Wellness Screen Program (MWS)

The MWS program aims to provide increased access to Mental Health therapists for assessment and interventions, and to help mitigate barriers ethnocultural families face in accessing mental health services. Our therapists work closely with the Cultural Brokers' team to support children and caregivers referred to MCHB by staff of the Edmonton Region Children's Services (CFS), and to support relationships between CFS and ethnocultural families. The MWS Team consists of a Canadian Certified Counselor and three Clinical Social Workers. They all come from culturally diverse backgrounds (Somali, Nigeria, Nepal) speak multiple languages, and are



**Program Highlights**

**FRN Mental health project**  
102 families was served with 713 counselling sessions provided, 76 case conferences facilitated,  
105 community outreach activities across Alberta  
23 referrals were made to the FRNs.  
39 brokers/interpreters were involved  
18 workshops were provided on working with newcomers, trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorder

**Mental Wellness and Screening (Children's Services) and Youth Program**  
65 children and youth participated in 506 sessions  
101 caregiver participated in 733 sessions  
117 cases, a broker and/or an interpreter was involved.  
141 Case conferences were conducted throughout the year  
95.4% of clients were observed to have had a positive outcome in at least one of nine outcome areas: , coping skills; improved function at home/school; family interactions; partner/child interactions; parenting skills; emotional regulation; symptom reduction; couple inter-actions).



well-experienced with mental health problems of many immigrants and refugees such as domestic violence, addictions and children and youth issues. They bring a nice blend of cultural grounding and Canadian experience that are valuable in working with migrants and with Canadian mainstream practitioners.

### **Family Resource Network Province-Wide Mental Health Program**

The province-wide mental health program is a newly funded program through the Family Resource Network (FRN). The primary objectives of the FRN Province Wide Mental Health program are to provide mental health support to immigrant and newcomer families throughout Alberta, build capacity for FRNs across the province to work with newcomer families, and make supported referrals for newcomers to access FRNs.

The FRN Province-wide Mental Health Program makes available five mental health therapists who are clinical social workers and certified counsellors. They also come from culturally diverse backgrounds (South Asian, Zimbabwe, Philippines, China, Ukraine), speak multiple languages and have experience with a wide range of age groups.

### **South Asian Project Mental Health Project**

The South Asian Mental Health Project grew out of a grant from Covenant Health's Sister's Legacy Fund to provide mental health and addictions services to the South Asian community, while mitigating barriers to accessing these services in May 2019. The South Asian Network partners are Savera Medical Centre, Multicultural Health Brokers (MCHB), Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) (Edmonton Region), and Covenant Health. The project ended in October 2022 after serving 390 clients from the South Asian community, providing 3137 therapy sessions and 241 case conferences.

The therapists provide workshops in parenting and youth groups on parenting and mental health topics as well as training and webinars for other agencies and service providers to enhance their capacity in working with newcomers.

In April 2023, an initiative began to provide wrap-around mental health and addictions support to the South Asian community through a multidisciplinary team approach. The Savera Health Clinic offers access to Psychiatrists and Family doctors for quick referrals to psychiatric services, CMHA service coordinator and AHS provides to a nurse and addictions counsellor, and the Multicultural Health Brokers providing brokering support by directly engaging and making supported referrals for families impacted by addictions.

### **Our program strengths...**

- Our team grew from 5 to 11 therapists and the scope of our work expanded to the provincial level.
- Language matching between clients and therapists continues to have a positive impact on the therapeutic relationship and client progress.
- Strong collaborations with MCHB Brokers as well as other therapists provides clients with a much more holistic approach, that is culture informed and seeks to understand clients within their lived experience.
- Services are largely delivered in a hybrid fashion in response to the ongoing restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Clients are seen in

#### **A story to share... (Excerpts from the therapist's notes)**

*A family of 3, with a father, mother, and a two-year-old child, was referred by Edmonton Child and Family Services (CFS) to Multicultural Health Brokers Coop. Child and Family Services' main concerns were domestic violence and its impact on the child. The couple had a No Contact Order and were involved in the court system. The couple has been living together for eight years. The husband had alcohol problems. During the pandemic, the couples grew apart from each other as the wife had a baby and she was busy with the newborn. They used to fight and were physically violent, and the husband turned to alcohol or withdrew from the relationship. The parents attended individual counselling sessions separately. The parents were committed to therapy and were engaging well in the session while using all available resources in the community such as their family and social networks. It helped that they were financially stable.*

*As I worked with this couple, I observed the development and growth in this couple's awareness of problematic behaviours, able to identify recurring patterns in their marriage that appeared not to trigger them anymore.*

*They came to understand and appreciate that empathy is built through sharing what didn't feel safe for them as children, as youths, and as young adults and what helps them to feel safe now in their relationship. They were able to link their parenting and the well-being of their child to the newly redefined relationship.*

person when it is geographically feasible, however, there seems to be an increased preference for show virtual services.

### **What we challenged with...**

- Challenges related to unfamiliarity with technology as therapy continues to be offered through tele-health despite a large number of families reached
- Need to increase capacity for working with young children and limited resources allocated towards training.
- Slow uptake of clients province-wide mental health programs; majority of the referrals are from the Edmonton area
- Reluctance to access FRNs by ethnocultural families. Very few referrals involved ethnocultural families
- Our waitlist continues to outpace our capacity; long wait times can make it difficult to offer timely counselling services especially with the arrival of Ukrainian evacuees

### **Looking ahead...**

Our therapist team continues to engage in training that informs our work through a trauma-informed lens as well as working from a strength/resiliency-based approach and contextual framework; these training sessions are accessed externally, in house and/or as part of our collaborations with EMCN. We are seeking funding, and partnership opportunities with other service providers including Settlement Services to meet the expanded scope of our services.

## **Employment Programs**

The MCHB Coop's Employment Programs aims to extend access to employment opportunities for immigrants and refugees for those experiencing multiple barriers. The program has three initiatives:

1. First Steps to Integration: Language, Culture and Employment Supports for Newcomers and their Employers
2. GEDI- Hub
3. Spiral Up to Success

### **First Steps to Integration: Language, Culture and Employment Supports for Newcomers and their Employers (2016-present)**

This program began as a pilot project that started with the question: ***What supports would need to be in place for immigrants/refugees who face multiple barriers to employment and have low English language skills to achieve their employment goals?***

This innovative approach to language learning and employment support employs a community-based, non-formal learning model. It is user-centred building on what we have learned from ethnocultural community leaders and has the fluidity inherent in non-formal education that allows for ongoing input and modifications by the learners themselves. From this experience, we have learned much about the nuanced ways in which people more accustomed to non-formal learning can find success in a classroom setting.

#### **Program Highlights**

60 newcomers attended classes;  
35 more accessed employment supports  
72% were employed after the program  
5 staff (brokers and teachers) provided English for Employment program and wrap-around employment supports  
13 different cultural groups accessed the program  
640 hours of program delivery

The *First Steps to Integration* Program seeks to address a gap in current settlement programming in Edmonton. This program provides language and employment programming for vulnerable newcomers, who face complex barriers and have very low levels of English. More specifically, program participants are those who urgently need an income to support themselves, cannot spend a long time in traditional English classes in order to gain entry-level employment and are usually unfamiliar with traditional Canadian learning environments.

The program provides program participants with holistic support, language training, workplace culture training, skills training specific to the work context and job shadowing. This combination of support and training enables participants to access and retain a job. The program involves a partnership between MCHB and an employer.

### **GEDI- Hub (February 2022- present)**

In February 2022, MCHB joined Gateway Association and Community Futures-Treaty 7 to launch a new concept to support employers and service and providers in building capacity to better serve job seekers from equity-seeking groups. The GEDI-Hub (Gateway to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Hub) is the first and only free workplace EDI hub in Alberta.

The GEDI-Hub is a cross-sectoral, employer resource centre which promotes and offers Workplace EDI Resources and capacity building. The GEDI-Hub delivers project services through group/individual training and consultations delivered by a team of Diversity and Engagement Consultants working out of Edmonton and Calgary - and virtually across Alberta - as well as through web-based resources, tools, information, and an EDI-app. Through this 'single point of contact' resource centre, the project builds employer awareness and capacity in workplace EDI - and connects employers directly to job seekers from underrepresented groups through our GEDI-Hub service provider network.

The GEDI-Hub is an initiative held by Gateway Association (whose mandate focuses on serving persons with disability) and operates in partnership with two other organizations that support job seekers from equity-seeking groups: MCHB brings the intercultural lens to this work; Community Futures - Treaty 7 in Calgary, provides the Indigenous insight. MCHB supplies one full time Diversity and Engagement Consultant to support this work.

### **Spiral Up to Success (January 2023- present)**

This is a project designed to enhance the capacity of two civil society organizations, MCHB Coop and Gateway Association, to deliver employment connection services to immigrants and refugees with multiple barriers to employment and living with disabilities. MCHB Coop works with Gateway Association to use an intersectionality and pan-disability inclusion lens to understand and address the vulnerabilities of each of our client groups as we pilot a transformational approach to service delivery.

This project includes an innovative evaluation model that will add depth to an understanding of "what works" for organizations working across these two sectors of vulnerable populations. In partnership with *The Illuminate Partners*, this project employs an innovative evaluation tool that captures qualitative data in the form of micro-narratives and converts that to quantitative data.

The activities of the project include:

- Staff development
- Liaising between organizations

- Clinics for staff at both agencies
- Supported Employment supports for 20 participants
- Development of employer connections
- Consultation with employers about strategies to create more expansive work culture and accommodating workspaces
- Consultation with employers to connect with GEDI-Hub, Audit and revision of workshops and staff training at both agencies
- Support for staff, clients, and employers in gathering micro-narratives for the *Illuminate* evaluation tool
- Dissemination of the *Illuminate* evaluation report.

The pilot project will be completed in January 2024 and findings of the evaluation will be shared with stakeholders across the province.

## The Permanency Project

The “Permanency Project” represents MCHB Coop’s ongoing effort to recognize and nurture a group of community members who are eager to care for children in their cultural communities, in situations where children are not able to remain at home with their parents (often in cases where when there is Children’s Services involvement).

Many Aunties, Uncles, Grandmothers and other kin are eager to step into formal kinship, foster, or respite and are able to provide children with loving environments that ensure cultural, linguistic and religious continuity- something Children’s Services and other stakeholders highly value. The community caregivers desired to work formally with children’s services by providing foster or kinship care. In some cases, these community members were stepping into informal caregiving roles (often as “Aunties” or “Grandmas”) when parents had reached out for help.

### Program highlights

**30** community members participated in workshops

**30** community members provided one-one support to increase their caregiving capacity for children in their cultural communities

**3** communities (Somali, Sudanese and Sierra Leone)

**14** workshops completed

There is a need to bridge and build capacity both on the side of these caregivers, and on the side of Children’s Services. For these caregivers, they need relevant information, guidance and financial support. For Children Services, they need to understand the cultural nature of caregiving in ethnocultural communities and how it could contribute to children’s well being. This is the outcome that the Permanency Project intends to achieve.



During spring and fall of 2022 the first round of workshops in our “Building Caregiver capacity” (BCC) series were completed. These were funded by Edmonton Community Foundation. The workshops covered a wide range of topics, for example “Children’s Experience of Trauma, and Child Development”, “Parenting/Caregiving in Two Cultures”, and “Internet safety”. While the BCC workshop series was offered online, a final in-person graduation celebration was held at the EIC at the end of November.

A long term goal of our program has always been to have a pool of caregivers, known to MCHB, who are ready to provide care for children from their cultural communities as needs arise. Ideally these caregivers have had some initial training and are well supported by brokers. Over the past year, some of the program participants have moved closer to this state of readiness: at least three are currently in or on track for foster care training, five are currently providing informal care within their communities, and several more are eager to step into kinship or respite roles.

#### **A story to share...**

A family facing complex challenges, including mental illness and addictions, reached out to a cultural broker when there was children's services involvement and their baby needed to be placed in care. They knew the broker from her work with them over many years and they wanted their baby to be kept within the cultural community. Through her contacts and knowledge of families within the community, the broker was able to engage a family willing to provide care. The broker worked with Children's Services, the couple, and the caregiving family for several months, often meeting with all three, fostering trust, supporting communication, and fostering cultural understanding (in all directions). In the end, the baby was very well cared for, and was able to remain in an environment of cultural and linguistic continuity until he was returned to the father.

#### **Our program strengths...**

- The deep reach of the cultural brokers within their communities enables us to engage eager and capable caregivers who would otherwise encounter too many cultural and linguistic barriers to navigate resources/ systems or participate in "mainstream" training.
- Our collaborative partnership with "Mountain Plains Family Resource Society", with their knowledge and many years of experience in caregiving and related systems proved to be valuable as we blended our cultural expertise, we developed an effective and culturally relevant model to engage, capacity build, and support culturally diverse caregivers.

#### **What we are challenged with...**

- Finding resources to continue this work into 2024- 25 will be a major challenge. There is a need for sustainable funding to refine and implement the model of support we are developing.
- Making this program, and especially the value of the work of informal caregivers, visible to Children's Services and other stakeholders is an ongoing challenge.

#### **An insight and reflection...**

The cases we worked on were not without its challenges and the team learned a great deal about the kinds of resources , financial and otherwise, that are available to caregivers, and some of the gaps and frustrations they experience in this regard. A useful program activity would be to more rigorously develop our understanding of resources that caregiving families might be entitled to and map these out, given the complexity of navigating the systems involved. We have also learnt that clear communication with caregivers and understanding their expectations is an important part of this permanency work.

#### **Looking ahead...**

- In 2023, we were happy to learn that Edmonton Community Foundation would provide funding for a second round of BCC workshops (2023-24) . From our lessons and experience last year - we are now ready to refine and better focus our capacity building activities on the actual needs and aspirations of those in caregiving roles. Our focus during this second year of funding will be more on refining our culturally responsive model of support and addressing expressed needs of those currently providing care.



- This second year of funding will provide more opportunities for us to walk side by side with program participants, understand each individually in terms of their caregiving aspirations, and more broadly begin to identify and address the systemic barriers they face in accessing relevant and equitable employment opportunities within the caregiving sector.

## Public Legal Education and Information

The Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) project aims to provide culturally safe and relevant public legal education and information complemented by culturally-rooted, holistic family support and system navigation. Our focus will be on 3 communities: Arabic/Kurdish Speaking, Eritrean, and Hispanic Latin American communities. This selection was informed by our intervention intake statistics, as these communities are of the highest numbers of referrals. The project objectives is to provide Public Legal Education and Information to:

- enhance the capacity of leaders and members of racialized communities to understand intersections of criminal, family and immigration law and prevent and constructively intervene in situations of family violence and support community members to navigate legal matters;
- enhance the capacity of justice system stakeholders to effectively support racialized communities.

### Our program strengths..

- Increased trust and willingness amongst community members to gather and discuss sensitive topics related to legal issues and family violence.
- A momentum is growing with consistent and increasing attendance in community meetings among members who are eager, genuine, and engaged.
- Cultural brokering complements the community meetings as the families from the Intervention referrals continue to inform us of the prevalent issues and needs in families to be addressed in the larger community.
- Strong internal team of brokers and staff who support and learn from one another's skills and experience.
- The project draws from years of experience of cultural brokers to address family violence.
- Adopted a community development approach to bring people together, build trust and commonality in addressing the prevalent issues within the community. The teams have found successful ways to make these conversations accessible and engaging, despite the sensitive and stigmatized topics.

#### Program Highlights

70 community leaders and members participated in 16 meeting

3 communities (Arabic/Kurdish, Eritrean, and Hispanic).

2 legal training workshops for cultural brokers  
Workshops include the Canadian legal system, the possible pathways of a 911 call, and the intersections between criminal, family, and immigration law.

Community meetings include mental health, addiction, family wellness, identity, parenting, and exploring other prevalent issues in the community.

### What we are challenged with...

- The lack of known culturally and linguistically-specific counsellors/professionals in the community makes it difficult to readily extend our network of people to bring into the project and refer our clients to for support.
- COVID has widened the gaps in social networks for some communities because of limited in-person meetings while strengthened connections through accessibility of online meetings.

- Limited resources hinder our ability to involve more people who may contribute to the breadth of our knowledge and activities in the project. It prevents us from providing accommodating support such as transportation and childcare, or providing enough honorariums to proportionately compensate people's time for their participation in this project.

### **A key learning, insight or reflection...**

- Our 3 focus communities are very diverse and are at different places in terms of organization and connectedness. Some have been able to bring community leaders and legal stakeholders to address key issues including family violence work; others are still trying to identify who the key stakeholders were. Another was very diverse and divided, needing to build a foundation of trust to nurture new collaborations and find interested community leaders to join the project. Despite the differences, we have consistently seen people in the community find common ground and continue to gather with a common goal in mind of working together to address the prevalent issues that they see.
- Real and meaningful legal education in the community goes beyond information sessions and resources, though effective in enhancing our cultural brokers' and participants' knowledge. It encompasses community development work, building capacity to address long standing issues and prevent involvement in the legal system. Ultimately, legal education is an empowering learning experience for newcomers to recognize their rights and power to effect change in their communities and truly feel that they belong..
- Bridge the generational divide between parents and their children to understand as new perspectives (eg. gender identity and LGBTQ+ issues) create tensions in the family that could contribute to stress and family violence.

#### **A story to share...**

A cultural broker received a referral from Children's Services of a family with a father who was served an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) by the police and was sent out of the home. The mother is experiencing a high-risk pregnancy. The broker learned the priest of the couple's church was interested in continuing to support the family as he did marriage counselling with them. The priest wanted to bring the couple together, however, he did not understand Children's Services' involvement or the EPO. The father was remorseful, wanting to reconnect, and the mother wanted to lift the EPO. The cultural broker connected the father with counselling; prepared the mother and father for court and fortunately was able to get the EPO lifted. The Children's Services caseworker closed the file as they were convinced the case was in good hands. The priest and the cultural broker went to the couple's home together to mediate and the couple was able to sit down and reconcile.

The priest said, "I didn't know all this, but I want to work on this together with the broker," as he wanted to provide additional support for the family. He also shared that encounters this couple's situation often, so he will come to the broker if he needs further information or guidance.

### **Looking ahead...**

During the short time that we have been implementing the project we have established a strong foundation in the 3 communities to continue providing legal education and information to our community members and creating opportunities for them to increase their knowledge on these topics. We hope to:

- Continue to build partnerships with professionals in the legal field (eg. Legal Aid, EPS, Children's Services, ECLC, Crown Prosecutors, etc.) to invite them to meet with our brokers and community members - maybe have more regular, consistent involvement.
- Increase the cultural capacity of these future legal stakeholders to better understand the populations we work with and improve their practice to better support them in addition to increasing our knowledge of the legal system and capacity to navigate it in our brokers and community members.
- Highlight the role of how public legal education can be used for community development. Our teams' approaches to providing legal education have been done in a welcoming way, introducing topics of things like wellness, identity, and safety, to get to more challenging topics like parenting, generational gaps, and family violence. Some team members have even started doing leadership

training with their participants, hoping they can be trained to support families affected by family violence.

- Explore a way to continue the project in the long term and find more permanent solutions as we acknowledge that the problems in our communities are so large and deep-rooted, they require more than a single term of funding to be addressed.

## Culturally Responsive Access to Justice CRAJ Project

The CRAJ Project is a collaboration with the Edmonton John Howard Society's Nalah Centre which provides support to victims/"complainants" and to advocate for their voices during the docket court process. CRAJ aims to:

1. Support survivors of family violence with information and support to effectively navigate the criminal court system.
2. Build capacity of MCHB brokers to support survivors to navigate and participate in the court system.
3. Build capacity of workers in the court system to respond to survivors of family violence in culturally safe and responsive ways
4. Generate learning to inform systems change through recommendations for practice, program and policy shifts.

### Our program strengths...

- Edmonton John Howard Society's (EJHS) Nalah Project have included the cultural brokers in the process and ensure more seamless service delivery to clients, even when they fall outside the scope of their program's mandate (eg. Nalah's Justice Support Workers have handed clients to their Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program (DVCAP) as cases go to trial so that EJHS may continue supporting the client).
- The flexibility of the project allows for support to continue to go beyond the South Asian community and Nalah. As we've built capacity in our brokers, a pleasant and unexpected outcome is that our reach has grown beyond Nalah. We have introduced many other ways to support survivors to access the justice system and have grown to benefit multiple communities beyond the South Asian community. We have greatly expanded the community partners and resources to include the Edmonton Police Service, Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' Blueprint Project, Lurana Shelter, and the Edmonton South Asian Legal Clinic.

### Program highlights

**120** families supported by our South Asian Intervention brokers

**3** cultural capacity-building workshops to Lurana Shelter.

**Legal and domestic violence workshops** for cultural brokers to enhance their capacity to support families experiencing domestic violence.

### Story to share...

A cultural broker received an intense domestic violence referral involving a mom who newly arrived in Canada with her son and met her husband for the first time here from an arranged marriage. About a month after she arrived, she experienced domestic violence and mental health issues. Her husband sponsored her and the client feared that if she left the marriage, her sponsorship would be compromised and she would have to return home. She also felt the pressure from her parents to stay in the relationship and make it work. The Justice Support Worker (JSW) had trouble contacting the client through phone calls. The client never answered because she didn't know who was calling. The client was very confused about what was happening and the charges. The cultural broker explained to Nahlah that the client was confused by the calls as there was a significant language barrier and explained the role of a broker. Then, the client provided consent for the broker to speak to the JSW about her case and the broker helped the client connect to Nalah's support.

Together, the MCHB broker and JSW discussed with the client the process of the Canadian criminal justice system throughout the docket court stage, including legal jargon eg. "EPO", "3rd-party contact". They also worked on safety planning to make sure the client understood the options within Edmonton such as shelters, second-stage homes, and Alberta Works. The broker helped the client with her practical needs which is beyond the JSW's scope, such as providing winter clothes to her and her son to prepare for their first winter in Canada, teaching her how to take the bus, and connecting her to a temple for social connection.

At the end of Nalah's support, the matter had been booked for trial and a referral was sent for the client to be supported by EJHS' Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program (DVCAP). MCHB continued to support the client to getting an Alberta Works for her own income and the client was volunteering and having job interviews at that time to find independence.

- The project provides a dedicated focus and resources on supporting families affected by domestic violence and increasing our capacity to navigate and access the legal system.
- With the MCHB Coop's Public Legal Education and Information and CRAJ, we are continuously increasing our internal capacity to support families in legal areas and the capacity of our families to understand and access the legal system. Such that, we are exploring our sphere of influence in advocating for systems to increase their capacities in supporting diverse ethnocultural communities and educating them.

### ***What we challenged with...***

- The project has experienced the challenge of inconsistent collaborative practices between Nalah's JSWs and MCHB brokers. For example:
  - Nalah JSWs not keeping brokers in the loop with court updates
  - Brokers having challenges connecting clients to Nalah due to their clients' language barriers
  - Clients reject support from Nalah due to pressure from their community to not seek help e.g. Community leaders will sometimes pressure women to drop the case, saying it will ruin their life.
- One factor affecting this challenge may be due to staff turnover, making consistent practice and relationship-building difficult.

### ***A key learning, insight or reflection...***

Collaborative practice becomes stronger and more consistent over time as the cultural brokers and Nalah JSWs become familiar with one another after initial contact between them. This collaboration has been productive with many clients having received support from Nalah throughout the court process. JSWs are diligent when they are connected with the client. Nalah has been very helpful and thorough in explaining and guiding us through the process and the possible outcomes in court.

### ***Looking ahead ...***

- Have more meetings with Nalah to improve our working relationship and explore ways to continue our partnership beyond March 2024 when our funding contract ends.
- Host a community sharing event to share learnings from the CRAJ project in Spring 2024 with organizations and individuals who are also in this area of work.
- Increase capacity amongst brokers to learn more about navigating the legal system and encourage more collaborations with Nalah's staff to better support our families.
- Continue building relationships with other key groups who work with and support our families, such as Legal Aid. We will participate as observers in the Early Case Resolution table. We will explore areas of advocacy that we can influence to build capacity in the systems to support our families better.
- We will continue building capacity within legal agencies and related supports in the community to be more responsive to the populations we serve.

## **National Cultural Brokers Project**

The National Cultural Brokers Project is a partnership involving the MCHB Coop Manitoba Possible, Laurentian University, the Umbrella Multicultural Health Co-op, and the Community Health Workers Network. It is a three-year (2022-2025) project funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

The National Cultural Brokers Project seeks to connect people across the country whose work involves the cultural brokering practice and create a movement where cultural brokers can name their achievements, joys, challenges, and hopes, while strengthening their ability to create change for themselves and our communities.

### **MCHB Coop's Activities**

#### 1. Cultural Broker Curriculum Development

During the first year, the MCHB Coop Team created a participatory action model to engage a national team of Cultural Brokers in naming the core values and competencies of cultural brokering practice and co-developing curriculum on the essence of the practice. Through this process, we hope to engage cultural brokers to articulate the nuances of their work and develop a shared language as well as collective identity as cultural brokers. In honouring the cultural brokering principles and values, we are using a Community of Practice model where natural mentorship and relational learning happens through discussing the lived experience of their work.

#### **National Project Overview**

- Incorporate an organization that seeks to Unify and support Cultural Brokers (Manitoba Possible)
- Conduct a National Environmental Scan and Case Study Research Project on Cultural Brokers (Laurentian University)
- Develop a Digital Learning Network (Manitoba Possible)
- Develop a national training curriculum for Cultural Brokers (MCHB Coop)
- Explore Professional Recognition for Cultural Brokers (MCHB Coop)
- Host Regional and National Gatherings (Umbrella Coop)

The end results of this activity will be a series of written modules and a train-the-trainer manual that lays out the process for sharing this way of learning through a community of practice model. The intention is that those on the current team will take this process of relational, experience-based learning back to their own and other organizations, and continue developing and expanding the practice of cultural brokering.

#### 2. Exploring Professional Recognition for Cultural Brokers

The MCHB team plans to work with members of the Curriculum Team to begin to identify some supportive organizational structures and processes and name some of the challenges that cultural brokers experience, and make recommendations to guide future in-depth work on how organizations that employ cultural brokers can best support and nurture them.

We will also create a systems-facing module that could be used across sectors to communicate the fundamental role and need for cultural brokers in Canada. The aim of this module would be to increase recognition of the term cultural broker and a deeper understanding of the role and practice.

### **Our program strengths...**

- Co-developing the curriculum through a participatory learning process. We honour and embody the values of cultural brokering practice of being learner centred, rooted in equity and justice and recognizing cultural ways of knowing in the way we do our work. The MCHB works with a team of 19 brokers from across the country with varying experience who will meet regularly over 18 months and explore and articulate their practice together. The curriculum that we co-develop together will be rooted in the lived experience of those whose lives are devoted to this practice.



- Honouring Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. This work brings two Indigenous Cultural Brokers, one in a facilitator role and one as a participant recognizing that the history of cultural brokering is rooted in the colonization experience of Indigenous peoples. In each session we are building a relationship and deeper understanding of the lived experience of Indigenous people in Canada, and the colonial history of our systems. As cultural brokers continue to advocate for equity and social justice for their communities, we have also committed to stand in solidarity with the Indigenous people of this land, who also seek a different and more just relationship with the Canadian state and systems.

### **What we are challenged with...**

The curriculum development phase of the National Cultural Brokers Project is grounded on a participatory learning process where learners, in this case the National Broker Team, is leading and guiding the work. This means that we need to be flexible and responsive to the emerging discussions and directions. With the IRCC funding, timelines and budget do not lend itself to changes during the project timeline. This is a constant challenge for the MCHB Coop Team to be adaptable to the evolving needs while keeping in step with IRCC's requirements.

### **A key learning, insight or reflection...**

We recognize the importance of time and flexibility, in building trusting and respectful relationships cannot be stressed enough. Relationships allow for eliciting the deep knowledge and expertise of each of the brokers on the team, so that they can articulate the sophisticated art of how they mediate between families they serve and the systems in which the families engage.

### **Looking ahead...**

We are looking forward to:

- Co-developing more content areas and sharing our work with a wider group of cultural brokers at the regional and national gatherings
- Increasing knowledge and strategies of how to advocate for systems to serve families in a more culturally relevant and meaningful way
- Strengthening community of practice amongst people doing cultural brokering work across the country
- Deepening our conversation with our Indigenous colleagues and hoping to connect with Indigenous colleagues across the country to align our work.

#### **A story of healing and solidarity**

Our Indigenous colleague shared his personal experience in Indian Residential Schools and the impact of these schools on his community. This sharing impacted the cultural brokers as they expressed their learning about the trauma that Indigenous people have gone through for generations, and beautifully reflected back not just his experience and the depth of what he was sharing, but also the way that he shared it. They named his strength, and the peace he spoke from. They named the immense healing he had clearly done along his journey.

It became a discussion about the power of forgiveness, the different ways people think about justice and reconciliation, and about noticing connections with colonial violence and genocide in other parts of the world.

Many in the group expressed gratitude and acknowledged that when they first came to Canada they were told a negative narrative about First Nations people, and that their communities do not have this understanding of the reality and history of Indigenous people.

### **Newcomer Housing Project**

The Newcomer Housing Project is a partnership involving the MCHB Coop, Right at Home and Communitas supported by the City of Edmonton. It grew out of the in-depth research done by the MCHB Coop in 2015 where it identified a group of newcomer migrants who are experiencing a precarious housing situation. In 2021, City Council supported the development of a housing model that would engage newcomers with housing precarity in designing housing that meet their needs and hopes for a secure and stable housing in Edmonton.

In the summer of 2023, an architectural firm will be designing this housing model with the full engagement of potential residents. The participants to the engagement process are:

- Large multigenerational families
- Single parent-headed households
- Seniors ineligible for housing
- Low income single individuals
- Families with members with disabilities
- Individuals with precarious immigration status

We have a vision of hope for newcomers who have made Edmonton their home!  
 It is a collective aspiration guided by authentic engagement, people-centred design, community cultural wealth and financial sustainability.  
 We believe that housing is more than just a physical structure but truly a home that nurtures hope and belonging!

The Newcomer Housing Project engagement process which began on June 17 engaged 30 individuals from 8 cultural communities and will be working with the architects for about six design sessions.

### Our strengths...

The Newcomer Housing Project is rooted in the most fundamental principle of participatory planning and human-centred design: those impacted by the plan should participate in the planning process. It takes inspiration from people and what matters most to them as individuals, families and communities. The design process for developing the housing project for vulnerable newcomers will be framed from the needs, sentiments and aspirations of people impacted by housing insecurity. It will utilize processes that resonate deeply with the diversity of cultures represented among the intended project participants; demonstrate a creative blend of design thinking and grassroots engagement; and most of all, empower individuals and groups to create solutions that address the core needs of those who experience the problem.

Visioning Sessions	What does home mean to you?
Uses and Spaces Sessions	What are my needs and wishes for spaces?
Affordability Discussion Sessions	What can I afford to be able to live in the housing units?
Operations & Management Discussion	How do I want to participate in operating and managing the housing facility?

### Looking ahead...

The Newcomer Housing Project partnership looks forward to the final product of the participatory design process: a housing model that truly resonates with people's needs, hopes and aspirations for housing - one of their pathways to a secure and better future in Canada. The challenge that lies ahead is securing funding for building the housing project.

## Food Dignity Program

MCHB created the Food Dignity Program which features a dynamic suite of food security strategies: Feed, Grow, Innovate, Advocate.

Our approach reframes food as not just an issue of scarcity and a basic need for survival. We use food as an anchor to engage the cultural wealth and aspirations of racialized communities and as an opportunity for socio-economic inclusion and well-being. We understand and honour the role food plays in our well-being, sense of self and dignity, and connection to culture and to others.



There are four initiatives under the Food Dignity Program:

- Grocery Run - provides weekly, essential grocery hampers to MCHB clients experiencing household food insecurity & chronic poverty.
- Growing Opportunities Program - provides access to land and other supports for newcomers to grow culturally appropriate foods and practice familiar, culturally meaningful practices of growing food can support families in food access, and connect people to familiar ways of life and the land.
- Khair for All - is an affordable food box social enterprise created by and for the ethnocultural population. It is operated in partnership with a large network of cross-sectoral partners including: immigrant serving, social justice and equity-oriented and food security-focused agencies as well as a for-profit corporation Gud Box (Parent Company Organic Box).

### ***Our reflection and insights***

- Sustainability of the Grocery Run is a core concern. We are caught between increasing service demands and reduced resources. The scale is difficult for us to sustain both financially and operationally, especially the high service level during the height of the pandemic. Factors to consider when planning for this kind of initiative include: clear long-term vision and short-term objectives and strategy for recruiting staff with the unique skill set e.g. the physical demand associated with coordinating an emergency food program, and soft skills requirements required when working with diverse populations. This would prevent a high staff turnover rate which results in high recruitment and training costs, also making it costly to sustain.
- While income remains an important obstacle to newcomers' food security, creating conditions that facilitate access to culturally appropriate foods presents a means to redress financial barriers, as well as opportunities to facilitate and strengthen newcomers' ties and contributions to their new communities, supporting the successful settlement.
- Despite our best efforts and hard work, Khair for All has not been able to generate the sales needed to sustain the social enterprise model thus its conclusion in 2022. We realized that what was offered were not aligned with the needs of the ethnocultural population and the communities
- Ultimately food insecurity is related to chronic poverty and material deprivation, thus short-term, individual-based solutions must always come with systemic-level approaches and advocacy efforts.

### **Program Highlights**

#### **Grocery Run**

**520 families**

**3200 individuals**

**10,374 lbs. food donated**

**381 volunteer hours**

#### **Growing Opportunities Program**

**143 families connected to 7 growing sites in Edmonton and area**

**8 cultural communities participating**

### ***Looking ahead...***

- It Takes a Village: comprehensive assessment & complex case management by a collective team is required to move families out of chronic food insecurity
- We are now focusing on collecting learnings from the pilot to generate a lesson-learned report for knowledge mobilization and sector learning.
- We need to invest in long-term, systemic-level approach research. We are working with a research project on the food security experience of BIPOC immigrants in Edmonton at the University of Alberta.

- We became a Good Food Organization in 2023. The Good Food Organizations (GFO) program is a program with Community Food Center Canada, which connects like-minded organisations around the Good Food Principles and become part of a national movement fighting food insecurity and poverty.

## Journeys to Intercultural Wisdom and Equity (Journeys Program)

The Journeys Program has a long history of knowledge sharing started by the Coop in the early 2000s. It is grounded on the wealth of knowledge and experience built over the years by cultural brokers in serving and working with families and communities from culturally diverse backgrounds. These learning opportunities were called by many names and evolved over time until in 2021, a group of MCHB intercultural facilitators developed the Journeys Program.

### Program Highlights (2021-2023)

**13 workshops**  
**\$36,000 revenues**  
**10 organizations**  
**55% Net Profit**

The Journeys Program is a Coop's social enterprise that serves as the Coop's platform to share the wealth of knowledge we have built over the years. It is a vehicle for change as we shift perspectives and behaviours of those we engaged at our intercultural learning workshops.

The Journeys Program offers two types of workshops:

- Foundations of Intercultural Practice - which focuses beginning concepts of intercultural learning and development and learning to be culturally aware of oneself and of others
- Skills Building Workshops - which aims to enhance skills in Intercultural communication, intercultural engagement and practice-specific workshops such as early childhood development or family violence from an intercultural context.

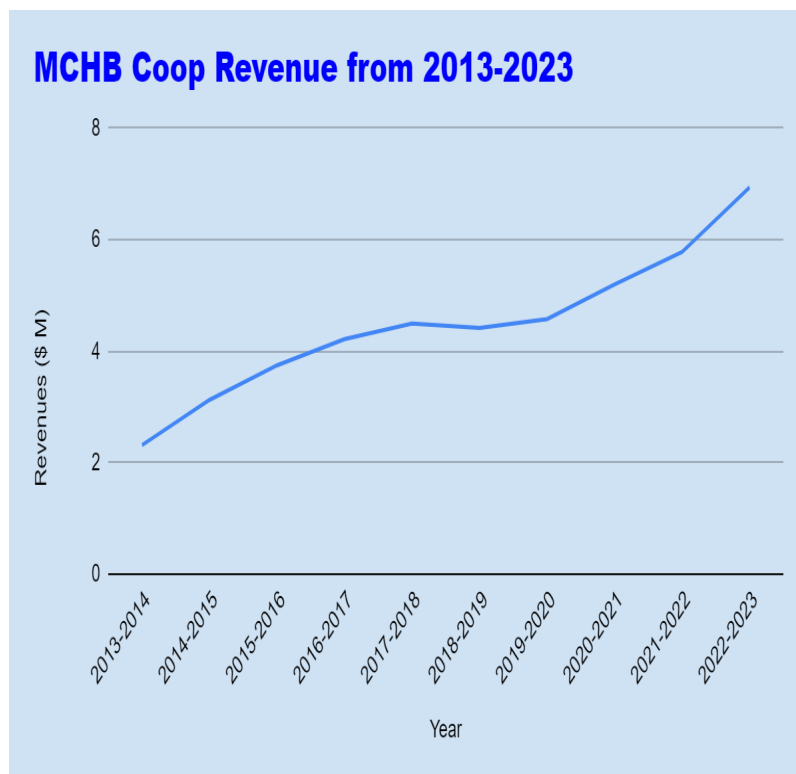
### **Looking forward...**

The Journeys Program has not fully reached its potential in the knowledge sharing area and revenue generation for the Coop. We hope that we can invest in a fulsome promotion and marketing strategy to maximise the promise of being a vibrant social enterprise for the MCHB Coop.

## Growing our Financial Resources

Over the last ten years, the MCHB Coop's revenues have grown three times since 2014. This is an incredible financial performance to be proud of. The table below and the chart shows this upward growth of the Coop from a \$2.32 M in 2014 to a \$6.94 M in at the end of March 2023.

Year	Revenues (\$ M)	Number of Workers
2013-2014	2.32	65
2014-2015	3.13	
2015-2016	3.75	
2016-2017	4.22	
2017-2018	4.5	
2018-2019	4.42	
2019-2020	4.58	
2020-2021	5.2	
2021-2022	5.78	
2022-2023	6.94	150



This remarkable financial growth was a response to emerging and increasing needs of the community we serve and opportunities for new sources of funding. The MCHB Coop's major source of revenues are service contracts to deliver a range of services to the community. In other words, we spend as we earn. These revenues are mostly spent on full time equivalents of workers who are providing services to individuals, families and groups. This chart also corresponds to the increase in the Coop's number of workers as our revenues rose.

With the economic and social challenges that migrants face whether they are newcomers or long-time residents, regardless of gender, age, education, race and ethnicity, the current public resources will never be adequate to solve the immediate and symptomatic issues experienced by individuals and families we serve.

The important thing to remember is that public and private funders have a high level of trust and confidence in the MCHB Coop to deliver services to the community thus entrusting us with its public funds.



## Looking Ahead...

The MCHB Coop has to believe that there is a hopeful future that awaits us. The programs/projects/initiatives in this report shows a panorama of what an organisation that is grounded in its love for and belief in people can do in the midst of tight resources, polarizing perspectives and systems and institutions unyielding to change.

From a strategic vantage, the Coop is exploring the idea of transitioning into a not-for-profit cooperative - a move designed to expand our ability to generate diverse sources of revenues while remaining to be a democratic and equitable organization.

With the World Health Organization declaring that the COVID Pandemic is over, the MCHB Coop is thrust into a new world - different from what it used to be as evolving ways of doing things have emerged during the pandemic that will remain. Our 2021-2023 Strategic Plan was a short-term plan to map our course while we cope with COVID. We need to examine our evolving environment and check whether our current assumptions about the economy, the political context and the social norms are still valid and how will this changing world impact the work of the Coop in the next 3-5 years.

We remain committed to our democratic and egalitarian ideals as a cooperative. How do we nurture ourselves and our organization so that we can make these values alive in our work everyday, in how we lead and in how we structure ourselves as a collective? We need to deepen our understanding of cooperatives among members and workers through a vigorous and engaging cooperative education and learning.

We move forward with a commitment on taking genuine good care of all of us, during a time of unprecedentedly high number of referrals coming into our organization, with so many of us are at a point of exhaustion.

We will look at organizational level of strategies that include striking meaningful collaboration with other relevant immigrant-serving organizations to share the load, negotiating for more sustainable and respectful level of funding from Children Services and other system partners, and bringing direct support to colleagues whose health and mental health have been compromised given the chronic stress since COVID.

We continue our promise of upholding the wellbeing of our families, many of whom are experiencing deepened financial struggles given the impact of COVID and the inflation. This would be done through relentless pursuit of innovative collaboration with key partners in the area of housing and food security and internal capacity building re: complex case management support with financial hardship at the centre.

We will move forward into our 26th year with the acute awareness that in our struggles would come the collective strength to transcend these hard times together and bring light to ourselves and others. Many are seeking inspiration from us, locally and nationally!