



## Dear Friend of the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto,

I do hope that this letter finds you and your loved ones safe and healthy during these unprecedented times. The COVID-19 outbreak, being one of the most threatening global health crises of our time, has affected communities across the world in many ways and has challenged us to find new ways of connecting and supporting each other. **It has been a tough year and now, more than ever, we need your help.**

In past years, your contributions created a safe place of welcome for those who immigrate to Canada and call it home. You see that newcomers are whole human beings with lived experiences and global perspectives. You have donated your time and financial resources to support programming that honours newcomers as individuals who feel, think, have agency and contribute to their communities. You are a visionary who understands that an inclusive Canada is a stronger country because of its diversity.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has had heartbreaking effects on the lives of newcomers, immigrants, and refugees. We know the pandemic disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups in ways that deter their integration process. Joblessness, homelessness, and illness are compounding effects of this global pandemic. For instance, imagine a newcomer family at your doorstep desperately in search of shelter because they cannot pay rent. Or a father, who values himself as the “breadwinner”, seeking employment after months of searching in vain. Or a refugee, who had escaped a life of exploitation, only to be confronted with another kind of suffering – despair.

**The need is great – much greater than it has ever been in the Centre's history – to find ways to help community members. Resources are needed to help those who are:**

- struggling to feed and shelter their families because of income insecurity
- coping with grief, loss and illness due to the pandemic
- managing feelings of isolation and sadness because of physical distancing and isolating in their homes
- lacking access to technology such as computers, tablets, and cell phones which prevents them from being connected and receiving services online.

As the COVID-19 pandemic persists, the need to provide ongoing, critical services rises. **Your past financial contributions allowed Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto to shift and modify its operations to connect with people** – whether online, by phone, or through the continuation of in-person services – despite the isolating effects of the pandemic. This includes critical mental health counselling to individuals and groups, language programs, and support to those under stress facing settlement and unemployment uncertainties.

To ensure we continue our efforts in assisting the many people in dire need during these challenging times, we are counting on you in every way possible. **Your contributions will make a big difference by helping us provide critical funds that can directly support vulnerable newcomers now and in the long weeks and months to come.**

### HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP:

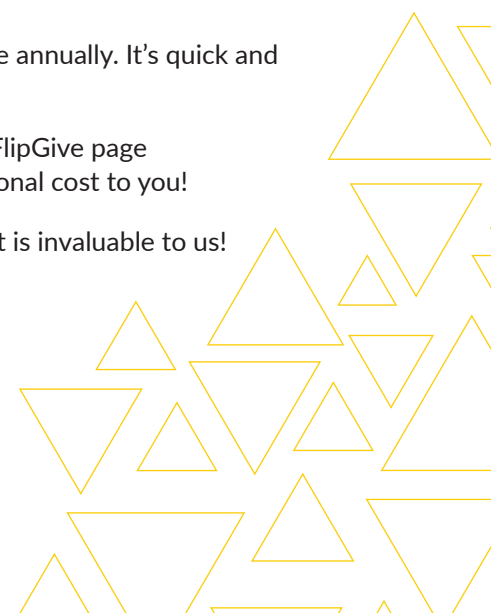
You can donate directly through a one-time donation, a monthly commitment, or even give annually. It's quick and easy – see the back page for your options.

You can also use FlipGive when you shop online at selected stores. By going through our FlipGive page ([mnclct.org/flipgive](http://mnclct.org/flipgive)), you will direct a portion of your spending to the Centre – at no additional cost to you!

Thank you in advance for your contribution and for being part of our journey. Your support is invaluable to us!

Be well and stay safe,

Shelly D'Mello  
Executive Director  
Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto



# CLIENT STORIES

## AKINMADE

Place of origin:  
Ondo, Nigeria



"Canada gave me a new life. I am two years old," says Akinmade. As a government-sponsored refugee from Nigeria, Akin had high expectations but the journey has been a struggle.

"You don't experience the real Canada until you live in it. People are warm and friendly; the government and people are helpful. Beyond that, there are harsh realities," says the 40-year-old.

Like many newcomers with no credit history and no Canadian experience, finding a job and a place to live made his life even more difficult. He was getting conflicting advice.

"I was so overwhelmed. We were in a shelter, trying to get a place. We just had a baby. Some people advised me to get a place first and then get a job. Others said focus on the job first, then worry about a place later. We ended up living in Ajax and working in Toronto! I had no car and was working customer service shifts sometimes until two in the morning. I went through hell," he recalls.

With a wife at home and three kids, Akin really felt the heat. "Customer service is not for me. I made a sacrifice and tried changing my career, but that didn't go as planned. My passion is in media and communications, so I made a risky decision to quit my job and study," he says.

With 12 years of graphic design and advertising experience, Akin wanted to up his game and study user experience (UX) design at a private school but couldn't afford the \$13,000 tuition fees. So he opted for the \$3,000 ten-week certification course instead. He is still unable to land a job in his field and has had to resort to odd jobs, such as delivering groceries.

Earlier this year, he heard about MNLCT's media and communications bridging program, BEMC, which he is enrolled in. "I love this program and I am meeting wonderful people. The instructors made me comfortable, and have opened my eyes to a Canada I haven't yet seen." He is looking forward to placement in a company where he can work on product designs, user experience and mobile applications – his passion.

"I want to feel settled. I want to start my life. I have always been someone who creates solutions, to help people. I am very optimistic and see a lot of opportunities."

## AMANDA

Place of origin:  
Fuzhou, China



When Amanda moved to Canada as a permanent resident eight years ago, she

could barely speak a word of English. Having lived her entire life in Fuzhou, an old port city in China's southeastern province of Fujian – famous for its tea plantations and exports – she clearly didn't need to.

Her son was two years old when she settled in Toronto and she found herself consumed with motherhood, especially given her husband's rigorous work schedule. By the second year, she started taking English language classes; but when she had her second child a year later, she had to quit.

For some time, she was employed at a Chinese travel agency in Markham alongside predominantly Mandarin-speaking employees but was laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "Living and working in a Chinese community, we speak Mandarin all the time. Communicating in English is my biggest challenge and I know without proper language skills I won't achieve much," says Amanda.

"I hardly spoke to anyone who couldn't speak Chinese. I had to ask my husband to do things on my behalf that required speaking English. I would even ask him how to pay the cashier when I went shopping. I didn't feel confident at all," explains the 37-year-old.

In 2017, a friend introduced her to MNLCT which helped her with settlement needs and government applications. "I was happy to know that their LINC classes provided free childminding so I didn't need to look for a daycare centre."

Since then, Amanda has progressed to Level 6 and she is confident she can take on a job in an English-speaking environment. She hopes one day she will launch her own business – a boutique jewelry store. Despite the challenges, Amanda and her family have come a long way. "My fear was my kids would end up not speaking English too. I now enjoy reading books to them – in English! I feel fortunate that we own our own house and car, and my husband runs his own renovation company."

## ERIKA

Place of origin:  
Estado de Mexico,  
Mexico



"If someone told me I was going to become a chef 15 years ago, I would have told them they were crazy." Cooking was never Erika's forte, at least not when she was working as an accomplished surgical nurse at a government hospital in Mexico.

Erika and her husband came to Canada in 2008 as refugees – the first four months being the toughest time of their lives. "We had to deal with the refugee process with our poor English. We spent all our savings within a month, so we depended on food banks, community support, and all the available free resources. We could only afford secondhand clothes. We had lost everything," she recalls, adding that MNLCT helped her in some of her settlement needs.

But she refused to let all the hardships get in the way, and she focused on transforming obstacles into opportunities. "We were experiencing such a difficult time, especially my husband. So I felt the urge to do something, and that's how I discovered cooking."

While she managed to work as an assistant nurse for eight years at St. Michaels Hospital, she realized that she had developed a passion for the culinary arts, particularly Mexican food. She studied culinary management at Humber College, and in 2017, launched her own catering company.

"Cooking inspired me to focus on the good things Mexico has to offer and I started to feel prouder of my roots. Like other emigrants, I want my memories to live on – through recipes that will pass on through generations. I found my place in this country; and as an immigrant, I feel I can give back something unique and special," Erika explains.

The 40-year-old is focused on promoting traditional Mexican food and culture to the younger generation. Her advice to newcomers is to find their own way and pursue their dreams. "The journey takes time and sacrifice; but anything is possible. The challenges I faced helped me start a new life in a wonderful country, and launch an exciting career which brought my family closer together. It redefined me as a Mexican and gave me a purpose in life. Food brings people and communities together."

## SHAHOUD

Place of origin:  
Hama, Syria



Shahoud, 38, considers himself one of 35,000 lucky Syrians who were initially chosen to resettle in Canada in December 2015. With more than 5.6 million Syrian refugees scattered around the globe, and twice as many within Syria desperately in need of humanitarian aid (according to UNHCR), Shahoud is "truly blessed" to have escaped a 10-year civil war that has left over 400,000 dead.

"We saw the worst of misfortunes before we came here," says Shahoud. He was about to be drafted into the Syrian army in 2013, when he fled to Lebanon and took refuge for a year-and-a-half trying to make ends meet. "It was not my war in the first place. Imagine, we were not allowed to speak any language other than Arabic," says Shahoud, who belongs to a Christian minority sect that have maintained their Syriac Aramaic language for centuries.

"Many of our people are thrown in jail and tortured by the government when caught talking in Aramaic. We speak it only at home and teach it to our kids in secret."

Shahoud was overwhelmed with the welcome he and his family received when they first arrived in Canada. "At Pearson Airport, people were handing us clothes and gifts, while [Prime Minister Justin] Trudeau personally went to fetch the right shoe size for my son. Where in the world would you find a head of state who will greet you with such love and compassion?"

Shahoud, who was a truck driver in Syria, says settling in Toronto with his wife and six kids is frustrating. He has had to resort to unskilled labour to survive. He wants to drive trucks again but can't afford the \$7,500 certification course; and learning English is a struggle, although taking LINC courses at MNLCT has enhanced his language skills. "We are so grateful for the warmth we have received – for the church that sponsored us and for Mennonite New Life Centre, which helped us translate documents and research jobs."

Shahoud has been on the job hunt for the past six months. "I am determined to do whatever it takes to secure a good future for my kids. What Canada has done for us is beyond belief. My family and I owe our lives to this country. This is our home now."



## HOW DOES YOUR DONATION HELP?

Stable income sources allow us to plan programs and services to support emerging needs of newcomers.

**\$25** can reduce isolation by helping a newcomer learn how to use technology and connect to online support systems



**\$120 (\$10/month)** can give an individual, couple, or family a sense of hope through a series of counselling sessions



**\$300 (\$25/month)** can prepare newcomers to find meaningful work through regular employment coaching sessions



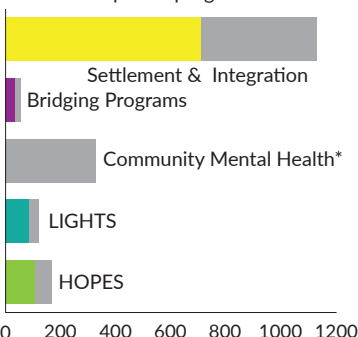
**\$1000 (\$83.33/month)** provides ongoing language training and mental health support for a vulnerable newcomer to overcome trauma and integrate into society



## MEETING GROWING DEMANDS

Our programs and customized settlement plans are successfully helping newcomers transition more easily into their new lives in Canada.

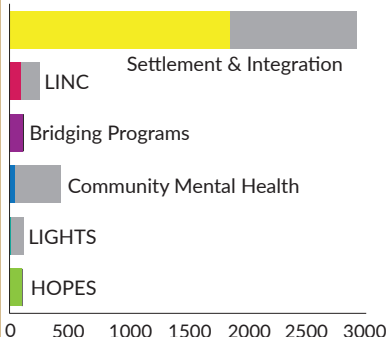
Number of clients who followed through with their settlement plan and/or completed their skills-development program



Number of clients who received a Settlement Plan

Number of clients who progressed through their Settlement Plan

Number of clients who received at least two different services and/or referrals that met their various needs



Number of clients served by the program

Number of clients who received two or more services

\* We are just beginning to track this data, and will have numbers for next year.

*“When I realized that I could donate on a monthly basis, I knew I had to sign up. Instead of only helping once or twice a year, I can help all year round and know that MNLCT can continue the excellent work they do.”*

– Stéphane Levac, monthly donor

## You can help more by setting up monthly donations

These are the ways you can give:



[mnlct.org/donate](https://mnlct.org/donate)

[LLopez@mnlct.org](mailto:LLopez@mnlct.org)

[LLopez@mnlct.org](mailto:LLopez@mnlct.org)

To donate by cheque, please complete and mail this section to the address below, along with a cheque payable to the **Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto**.

Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto  
1774 Queen St East  
Toronto, Ontario M4L 1G7

I would like to make a one-time donation:

☐ \$500 ☐ \$200 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$25 Other \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to contribute monthly:

☐ \$50 ☐ \$20 ☐ \$15 ☐ \$5 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Please put me on the MNLCT email list to receive periodic updates.

On behalf of your newcomer friends and neighbours, thank you for your generous support of MNLCT's vital programming!

