

# Dear Friends,

Now that we have passed a significant milestone **providing exceptional services to the newcomer community for 40 years**, we are focusing on deepening our impact. The goal is to strengthen our role in helping newcomers to settle in this beautiful country.

In our drive to reach more clients, more families, and more communities, we are **consolidating our extension of services to Simcoe and Oxford counties**, still committed to providing a range of services that support newcomers, including employment services, language training, bridging careers, mental health, and healthcare support.



For over 10 years, we have been offering **mental health services to clients of Aurora House – a transitional home for survivors of human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse**. Most recently, we began offering specialised counselling to victims of abuse at this home which provides services like trauma counselling, basic needs, and housing primarily to individuals who identify as women. A partnership like this allows us to extend services to those in urgent need.

We offer the Employment Readiness, She-Covery and Helping Our Newcomers Prepare for Employment Success (HOPES) programs to support newcomers to find meaningful employment. Through training, career development, and personalized support for newcomers, **our self-paced courses, one-on-one employment counselling and workshops have already supported close to 600 clients this year, to prepare for and find work**.

We now aspire to include specialized **employment support for much-needed industries like construction and agriculture and introduce a new bridging program focussing on careers in nursing**, to meet the growing need of healthcare professionals in our communities.

As we continue to adapt to the needs of newcomers, **we cannot do this without YOU**. Your support through donations, volunteering or spreading the word, has helped us support more clients every year. Together we are making a real difference in the lives of newcomers.

Most organizations like us have lost funding from some major funders, and could potentially lose more. **Your donations are critical at this moment to support us to continue our work**. Yet again, I humbly ask for your assistance as we work to create even more opportunities for those who need them most. I invite you to read on, to see how your generosity has impacted our programs and services offerings.

Thank you for being such an important part of our journey. We are profoundly grateful for all that you do.

Sincerely,

Dwayne O'Connor  
Executive Director

P.S. **You can give a one-time donation or set up regular contributions**. It is quick and easy – see below for your options.

# STORIES OF IMPACT



## Empowering Newcomers Through Exploring Nature: BEAR Hikes Program

By Trudy Tumusime

In the spring of 2024, Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto (MNLCT), started a new, fun and exciting experience for newcomers. Building Empowerment And Resilience (BEAR) Hikes for Newcomers, offers newcomers a chance to step out of their daily challenges and connect with the beauty of Canada—helping them overcome isolation, support their mental health, and connect with others.

“When I lost my father, the first thing a close friend did for me was taking me out for a walk.” Marla Marquez, MNLCT Mental Health Counselor recalls. **“Looking at the amazing colours of the fall and feeling the breeze, this deep pain that I felt at the time, somehow felt different when I was outside on this experience.”**

This personal healing experience inspired Marla, an immigrant herself, to draw from her own journey of adapting to life in Canada to start an outdoor program to introduce newcomers to Canada’s stunning parks and support their mental well-being.

Since inception, the program has taken 146 newcomers on five unforgettable excursions to Hilton Falls Provincial Park, Mono Cliffs Provincial Park, Earl Rowe Provincial Park; and Darlington Provincial Park. The trips are in partnership with Parkbus’ NatureLink program that provides subsidized transportation to newcomers to outdoor spaces. MNLCT covers any extra costs as may apply, despite not having specific funds for the program, to ensure the hikes are free for newcomers.

“There are people that have lived in Canada for a few years and never had the opportunity to venture beyond the GTA,” says Jorge Silvestri, MNLCT’s LINC Manager and a facilitator of the program. “Having the free service of Parkbus taking you an hour or an hour and a half away from Toronto is great.”

Participants hike at their own pace. Activities include walking, wildlife watching and canoeing. All ages and fitness

levels are welcome. The youngest participant so far has been 6 years old and the oldest, 70.

Olga Potikha, MNLCT’s Mental Health Counselor and BEAR Hikes facilitator says, “People were so excited about this program” and that some participants wish the program to expand to other cities.

One participant, Martha, said her hike was “like a spiritual journey” that left her feeling more energetic and at peace. **“Everything was a treat that helped soothe my soul and clear my mind,” she said. “By the time I returned to Toronto, I felt like a different person.”**

The name BEAR is Marla’s mum’s nickname. “It reflects providing support, encouragement, care and the ability to build ourselves strong and capable of fighting or facing life challenges.” Marla explains.

As the program grows, slots fill up quickly and waitlists are long. The facilitators – Marla, Olga and Jorge – and the participants are excited to continue the hikes next year.



## Resilience and Opportunity: Janet’s Journey through the BESIP Bridging Program

By Youdon Tenzin

If Janet were to describe her journey since moving to Canada in one word, it would be “resilience”. As a single parent, Janet has faced various challenges since uprooting her life in Uganda in 2021.

Janet’s move was not a choice, rather, an urgency to flee her country. In Uganda, she was a program officer, creating gender inclusive bills and legislations to be presented in the Parliament. She got in unsafe situations with the Government and had to flee for safety.

**For Janet, moving to Canada meant new opportunities in all aspects.** When she heard about the Bridge to Employment in Services for Immigrant Populations (BESIP) program at Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto (MNLCT), from her Ontario Works case worker, Janet



decided to apply for BESIP's first cohort, but had to take childbirth leave, putting her plans on hold.

When registration for the second cohort began, the MNLCT reached out to Janet.

"I looked at my own experience of working with communities," says Janet, talking about why she decided to pursue the BESIP program. **The three words "immigrants serving immigrants" stuck with her as she made her way through the program.**

From her personal experience, Janet paid a lawyer expensively to apply for permanent residence. At that time, she had no idea that settlement agencies offer the same service for free. Therefore, one of the most enriching aspects of the program for Janet was how deep it went into the intricacies of the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

"They took us through almost every single document," says Janet "and then rigorously, the documentation of the IRCC which I really think is very important to a settlement worker." Janet adds.

Janet also appreciates that instructors allowed her to make presentations, boosting her confidence in becoming more tech-savvy. The program provided an opportunity to meet and interact with people with unique experiences.

Janet recently graduated alongside several others from the BESIP program. In the future, she hopes for the program to have a mentorship arm where current students can connect with graduates, learn from them, and support each other through their professional journeys.

## A Mother-Daughter Journey: Hanna & Kateryna's path to success through the LINC program

By Youdon Tenzin

Hanna, her mother Kateryna and 11-year-old daughter Viktoriia, fled Ukraine due to the recent Russian invasion. They settled in France for three months before coming to Canada in June 2022.

Hanna recalls, "it was so hard to live in France because we didn't understand the language," and that her daughter had a hard time coping having been schooled in English back in Ukraine.

The family decided to move to an English-speaking country. **Arriving here, they realized a need to improve their English language skills.** Then Hanna and Kateryna enrolled in the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto (MNLCT)'s Language Instruction for Newcomers in Canada (LINC) program.



For 68-year-old Kateryna, learning a new foreign language "was hard," however, she hastily rose from level 0 and is now in the Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) level 2 class. She says that her instructor makes her feel welcome in class and ensures she can follow her lessons properly.

Hanna has been taught by several instructors since she started at MNLCT. She is appreciative of her first instructor at her CLB 5 class, who besides being a teacher, guided her in learning about the multi-faceted Canadian life. She learnt from him about the law, and she got information about acquiring a driver's license.

When Hanna's English improved to CLB 6, her instructor helped her to get information about bridging programs. She is currently attending York University's Bridging Program for Internationally Educated Professionals (IEPs).

In her CLB 7 class, Hanna's general and academic English improved a great deal.

**"I see a big difference between when I started and my situation today. It is much easier for me to read and speak English."** Hanna explains.

The pair enjoyed the friendly environment, diversity in topics and flexibility of the LINC class schedules.

Kateryna has started speaking English more in her daily life, a "big deal" for Hanna because her mother is "more independent now". Although she still finds some difficulty, Kateryna can hold a conversation with her granddaughter's tennis coach. Viktoriia often helps her grandmother with her homework.

Kateryna also participated in MNLCT's fitness lessons, the Mental Health Support Group for Ukrainians, and the whole family enjoys the BEAR Hikes for newcomers.

"Sometimes it is very hard [for newcomers]. So, I wish for you to continue to be a very high-quality centre," says Hanna with a smile.

Want to find out more? Read full versions of any of these stories at [mnlct.org/whats-your-story](https://mnlct.org/whats-your-story)





## HOW DOES YOUR DONATION HELP?

**\$24 (\$2/month)** can offer community resource referrals to a newcomer through one session with an intake worker



**\$60 (\$5/month)** can provide interpretation services to help newcomers receive and understand their health care needs



**\$150 (\$12.50/month)** can provide tech solutions for newcomers with high need to access classes, programs and services across the country

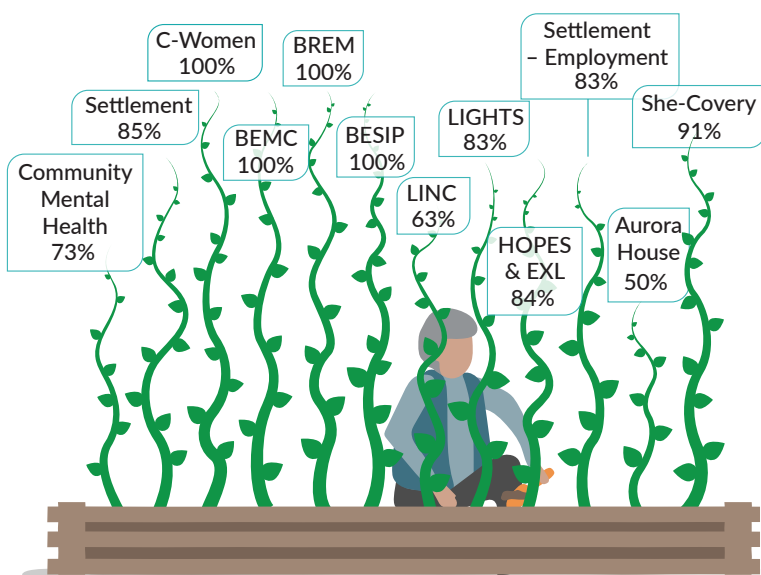


**\$300 (\$25/month)** can prepare newcomers to find meaningful work through regular employment coaching sessions



## YOUR DONATIONS IN ACTION

Our data shows that newcomers are aware of the benefits of holistic settlement services, and they access them according to their needs.



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

\*All infographics reflect 2023 data

*“Coming from a family of immigrants, I understand the importance of community in supporting a new life in Canada. With rising costs, it’s more important than ever that people can get the support they need and I’m happy to contribute and champion MNLCT for all the work that they do.”*

– Kenric Leung, annual donor

## Three easy ways to give



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

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

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

**TIP: Scan the QR code below for quick access to these options**



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

You can help more by setting up monthly donations. Predictable income gives us flexibility to support emerging needs.

To donate by cheque, please complete and mail this section along with your cheque to the address below.

**Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto**

1774 Queen St East  
Toronto, Ontario M4L 1G7

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