Impact Report 2025-2026

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS)

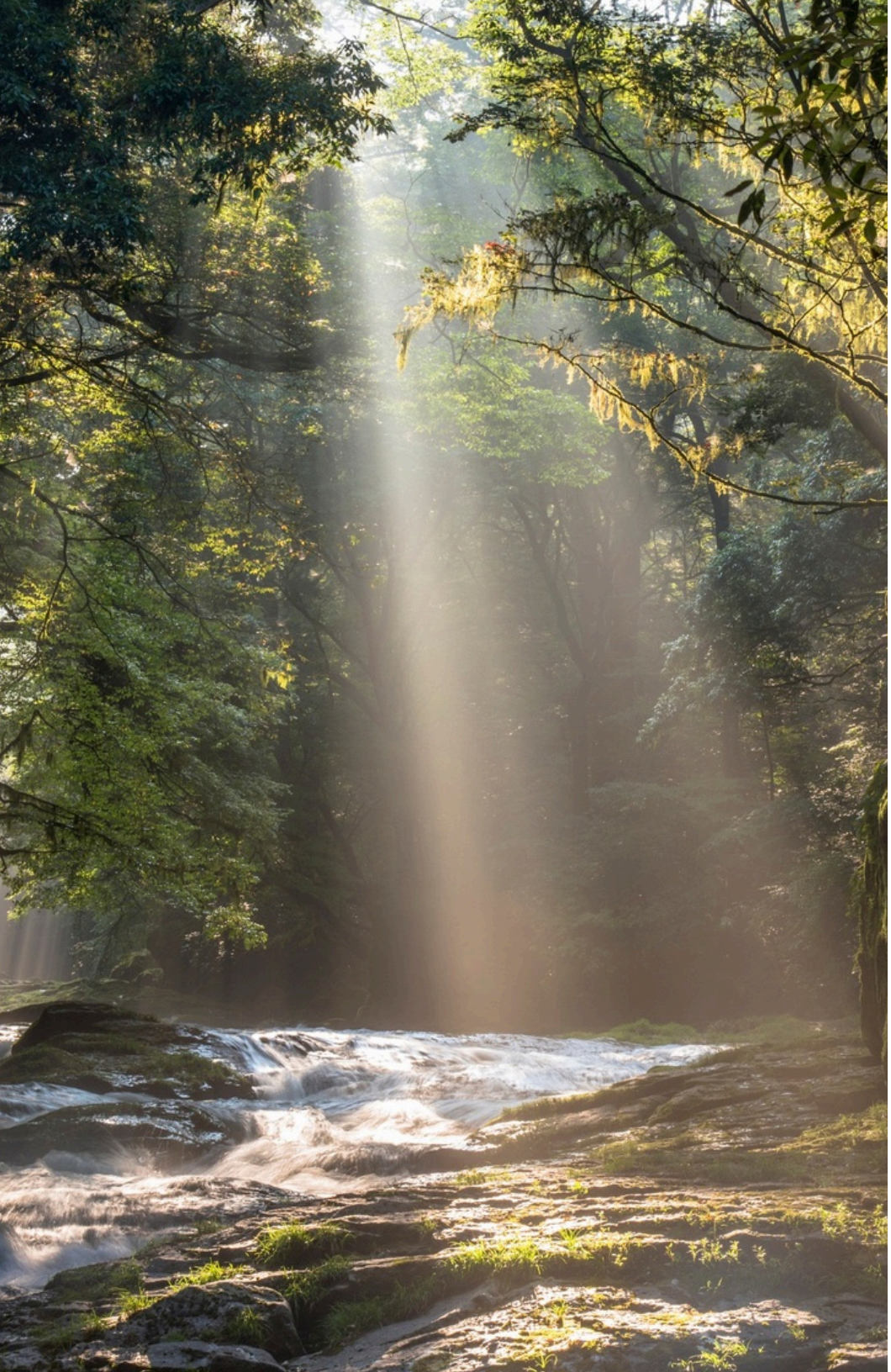


Photo Credit: Athena Pimentel



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Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect that our work at VIRCS takes place on the traditional territories of the Lək^{w}əŋən (Lekwungen) Peoples known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations.

These lands, we call Greater Victoria, have long been a place of gathering and home to the original families who made their home a long time ago. As we continue our mission to assist those new to this region, we recognize the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge of the Lək^{w}əŋən (Lekwungen) traditional families' territory.

We are committed to learning from and respecting Indigenous peoples rich history, culture, and wisdom as we support our staff to provide services and help clients build their new lives as guests on these unceded lands.

We are also committed to respectfully contributing to the ongoing mutual learning and healing process needed by acknowledging Indigenous peoples suffering under colonization and its devastating effects to date.

Message from the Board President & the Executive Director

Over the past year, VIRCS has continued to demonstrate resilience, adaptability and a strong commitment to the people, families and communities we serve. During a period of important change and renewal, the organization has remained focused on its mandate, creating a welcoming environment where immigrants and refugees can access support, build connections, pursue new opportunities and belonging.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the staff and volunteers whose compassion, professionalism and dedication are at the heart of VIRCS. Their work, often carried out in response to complex, urgent and changing needs, continues to strengthen the organization, our relevance and the community around us.

We are equally grateful to our funders, donors and community partners for their trust and continued support. Their collaboration allows VIRCS to respond meaningfully to community needs, innovate and develop services and opportunities that foster inclusion, participation and belonging.

We also recognize our professional and committed Board of Directors for the integrity, knowledge and thoughtful governance they bring to VIRCS. Our sincere appreciation goes to Bruce McGuigan, whose support during a crucial period of transition helped the Board and the organization establish renewed leadership and a stronger foundation for the future.

VIRCS is stronger today because of this collective effort. As we look into the future, we do so with gratitude and hope for everyone who has contributed to the organization's renewal and with confidence in what we can continue to accomplish together.



James Wallace
Board Chairperson



Luis G. Aguirre
Executive Director

VIRCS acknowledges the support of our generous Funders and Donors



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Victoria Foundation





vancouver foundation





Vancity

REACH Isolated Seniors

Saanich · Volunteer Victoria · VICCIR · Family Caregivers of British Columbia · Silver Threads · VIRCS · Saanich · West Shore Parks & Recreation · CRD · City of Victoria · Victoria Native Friendship Centre

FIRSTWEST FOUNDATION

Island Savings

GVSCU Legacy Foundation

Thank you to our individual donors!

About VIRCS

Our Team

Board of Directors
James Wallace
Crystal Buchan
Aaron Hall
Álvaro Moreno
Jane Taylor-Lee
Masoud Manzouri

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Cindy Tanguay
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Michael Luk
Nahlah Jabrah
Rashed Alsadek

Administration
Yoko Izawa
Neil Bhoondpaul
Hammuda Abdulsalam
Simplicio "JR" Sumauang
Wayne Ridley
Luis G. Aguirre

Our Services

- Settlement & Integration Services
- Community building and belonging services
- Employement servies
- Youth Employement and Training
- Child, Youth and Family services
- Health, Wellness and non-clinical counselling
- Food security and wellbeing
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- English Language Training
- CELPIP Testing

Mission

Support immigrants and refugees in settling and integrating through comprehensive services for their evolving needs

Vision

Empowered newcomers flourishing in their communities with a sense of belonging.

Values

These values drive our relationships with clients, funders, community partners, staff and volunteers:
Fairness
Inclusion
Trustworthiness
Commitment
Respect & Dignity

4000+ Clients served

1000+ Workshop Hours

200+ Partners & Employers

235+ dedicated volunteers

1,500+ Practicum Hours

Program Highlights

- Delivered settlement support through one Hub and four Spoke locations across the region.
- Supported newcomers with housing, healthcare, benefits, employment, and community services.
- Provided English language learning, workshops, and information sessions.
- Connected newcomers with employers and community resources through activities including the BCNSP Job Fair.

Helping Newcomers Build a Place to Call "Home"





BC Newcomer Services Program

Throughout 2025–2026, the BC Newcomer Services Program (BCNSP) continued to provide responsive, client-centred settlement services that helped newcomers successfully establish their lives in British Columbia. Delivered through one Hub location and four Spoke locations, the program supported individuals and families as they navigated unfamiliar systems, accessed essential services, and built meaningful connections within their communities.

This year, many newcomers sought support with housing, healthcare registration, taxation, government benefits, employment resources, immigration information, and community referrals. Rising housing costs, language barriers, unfamiliarity with Canadian systems, and limited social networks continued to present significant challenges for many clients. Through personalized settlement support, workshops, outreach activities, English language learning opportunities, and coordinated referrals, BCNSP helped newcomers overcome these barriers while building the knowledge and confidence needed to thrive in their new communities.

The program served a diverse population, including temporary foreign workers, international students, refugees, CUAET visa holders, permanent residents, naturalized Canadian citizens, and newcomer families. Services were tailored to each individual's unique circumstances, ensuring clients received practical, culturally responsive, and strengths-based support throughout their settlement journey.
One of the program's greatest strengths this year was its ability to connect newcomers with trusted community resources through strong partnerships with organizations including the VIRCS Immigration Law Clinic, WorkBC, Greater Victoria Public Library, School District 62, Pacifica Housing, ICA, and many other community agencies. These partnerships strengthened referral pathways and ensured newcomers could access specialized supports when needed. Community engagement initiatives, including the BCNSP Job Fair, further created opportunities for newcomers to connect with employers, service providers, and local resources while fostering a stronger sense of belonging.

The impact of BCNSP is best reflected through the experiences of the people it serves. One newcomer family shared that the guidance they received with child benefit applications, school registration, and immigration referrals made their transition to Canada significantly less stressful. They described the settlement team's support as kind, patient, and reassuring, emphasizing how having a trusted professional to explain unfamiliar processes helped them feel confident and welcomed in their new community.

By reducing barriers to essential services, strengthening community connections, and empowering newcomers with knowledge and confidence, BCNSP continues to advance VIRCS' mission of creating welcoming, inclusive communities where newcomers have the opportunity to succeed. The program's impact extends beyond service delivery, it helps individuals and families build stability, independence, and a lasting sense of belonging in British Columbia.

Program Highlights

- Engaged 300+ youth across BC in civic engagement and leadership.
- Delivered wraparound support to women, youth, and families.
- Supported BIPOC seniors in navigating the digital world.
- Delivered education, wellness, and social connection activities.

Strengthening wellbeing, connection, safety and belonging across our community.



Community Resilience Program

Throughout 2025–2026, Community Resilience responded to interconnected challenges affecting children and youth, women, seniors, families, and the broader community. Social isolation, discrimination, violence and safety concerns, mental health and wellbeing, barriers to accessing services, and limited opportunities for meaningful community participation continued to affect many of the people we served. Our work focused on creating accessible, welcoming spaces where individuals could find support, build connections, develop skills, and strengthen their sense of belonging.

Through a diverse portfolio of projects, we provided wraparound case management, advocacy and referrals, youth civic engagement and leadership opportunities, educational and recreational activities, women's wellbeing and violence-prevention supports, senior digital literacy, mental health and wellness activities, community education, practical supports, and anti-racism initiatives. Together, these initiatives allowed us to respond to needs across different ages and stages of life while creating multiple pathways for people to participate in and connect with their communities.

Throughout the year, our programs created opportunities for young people to build confidence, leadership, civic awareness, and positive relationships through youth nights, educational supports, recreation, civic engagement, and community activities. Women accessed individualized support, system navigation, education, and resources related to safety and wellbeing, while seniors strengthened their digital skills, independence, and social connections. Community-based wellness and educational activities brought people together around mental health, healthy living, inclusion, and belonging. Our anti-racism initiatives provided healing circles and mental health and wellbeing supports for individuals impacted by racism and hate, creating safe and supportive spaces for healing, connection, and recovery.

Across the portfolio, our focus extended beyond participation in individual activities. We worked to create continuity of support, connecting participants to resources, community services, learning opportunities, and one another.

The strength of Community Resilience lies in these interconnected approaches: individual support when someone needs help, opportunities for learning and prevention, spaces for connection and belonging, and pathways for people to participate and lead. Together, our projects contributed to a community where children, youth, women, seniors, and families can feel more supported, connected, informed, and empowered.

Program Highlights

- Removed barriers to access urban spaces to grow cultural preferred food for immigrants, refugees and racialized communities.
- Provided thousands of gardening resources, nutritious culturally preferred food to hundreds of individuals experiencing food insecurity.



"Equity in our food system begins with recognizing the knowledge, experiences, and contributions of every community. I honour the diverse cultures, generations of wisdom, and the traditions that connect people each other. Through this work, we nurture a future rooted in equity and a shared responsibility for the land that sustains us."

Cenit, Welcome Gardens Manager

Welcome Gardens

The program responded to increasing food insecurity, rising living costs, social isolation, and barriers that immigrants, refugees, seniors, women, racialized communities, and other equity-deserving populations face in accessing affordable, culturally meaningful food. Access to spaces where our communities can grow food has become even more difficult, while the prices of nutritious, fresh food continue to skyrocket.

We have seen an increased rate of food insecurity, racism, and anti-immigrant sentiment in Canada. The impacts of these unfortunate trends have affected the well-being, mental health, and access to resources for racialized individuals and families who contribute their work, knowledge, and expertise in collaborative ways across Canada.

Welcome Gardens has a mission to equip immigrants, refugees and racialized communities with access to spaces where they can grow food in urban settings. The program mission is to provide a safe space where individuals can share their knowledge and expertise while growing nutritious and culturally preferred food.

This initiative is unique in Greater Victoria. Welcome Gardens provides equitable access to gardening spaces, tools, materials, education, culturally preferred food, fresh and nutritious harvest and leadership opportunities for seniors, women, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, immigrants, refugees, Black and People of Colour. At the same time, the program promotes environmental stewardship by caring for the land and recognizing that we are visitors on the unceded territories of the Indigenous Peoples who have cared for these lands and resources since time immemorial.

Throughout the year, Welcome Gardens delivered hands-on workshops, community gardening activities, volunteer opportunities, and environmental initiatives that promoted food sovereignty, climate resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable food production. Participants learned practical gardening skills, including seed starting, soil health, composting, water conservation, native plant gardening, pollinator habitat restoration, food preservation, and seasonal growing techniques adapted to Vancouver Island.

Beyond education, Welcome Gardens increased access to fresh, culturally preferred food by distributing produce grown in its gardens alongside food received through community partnerships. The program also worked closely with municipalities, community gardens, environmental organizations, food security partners, and volunteers to expand equitable access to gardening spaces, strengthen local food systems, and create meaningful opportunities equity-deserving communities to connect, learn, and lead.

Program Highlights

- Delivery of four cohorts and supported 57 participants with consistent participant engagement
- Participants earning three industry-recognized certifications
- · Participants successfully secured employment, pursued education or training to gain credentials for their chosen careers, and accessed volunteer opportunities that supported their professional development.
- Increased job readiness, confidence, and understanding of Canadian wor

Building Futures Through Employment







Pathways to Professions, Trades & Entrepreneurship (P2PTE)

Throughout the year, P2PTE continued to address significant barriers that newcomer youth in Victoria face when entering the workforce. Many participants arrived with limited Canadian work experience, language challenges, few professional networks, and difficulty navigating the local labour market. In addition to employment-related barriers, many required trauma-informed and culturally responsive support to build confidence, stability, and readiness before pursuing meaningful employment opportunities.

To respond to these needs, the program delivered an eight-week cohort-based employment training program complemented by individualized career coaching, job search assistance, and employer engagement. Participants attended workshops focused on workplace readiness, communication skills, resume development, interview preparation, and effective job search strategies. They also benefited from direct connections with local employers, while ongoing case management and wraparound supports helped address individual barriers and promote successful employment retention.

The program served newcomer youth from diverse cultural, educational, and employment backgrounds, including many recent immigrants and refugees with varying levels of English proficiency. Employers also benefited through access to a supported talent pool and available wage subsidy opportunities. By increasing access to meaningful employment, reducing social isolation, and promoting economic participation, the program played an important role in supporting newcomer integration. Through a trauma-informed, client-centred approach, it also contributed to building a more inclusive, welcoming, and resilient community.

This program makes a tangible difference by helping newcomers move from uncertainty to meaningful employment and community connection. Continued investment in employment pathways is essential to support long-term integration and to meet local workforce needs while strengthening inclusive communities.

P2PTE Stories of Impact:

· **"Before joining the program, I was unsure how to find work in Canada and lacked confidence in my English. The support I received helped me understand the job market, improve my communication skills, and find a job. I now feel more confident in my abilities and excited about my future career."**

Workforce Training and ESL

Workforce Development

During 2025–2026, VIRCS established Workforce Development as a new strategic area in response to two connected challenges: newcomers and other community members seeking stable employment often face financial, credential, experience, and systemic barriers to entering the workforce, while employers across Greater Victoria and British Columbia continue to experience shortages in essential occupations.

With funding from the Province of British Columbia, VIRCS connected eligible unemployed, underemployed, and precariously employed individuals with occupationally focused training aligned with regional labour needs. Working with educational institutions, employers, and community partners, the program supported training in community and social services, mental health support, and health care, while providing individualized financial supports to reduce barriers to participation and completion.

During the year, almost participants took part in three workforce training initiatives, including newcomers, refugees, youth, older workers, persons with disabilities, and other community members experiencing barriers to employment. The first cohort of 20 participants achieved a 100% training-completion rate, with eight graduates securing employment by the time of reporting. Two additional cohorts, serving 37 participants, continued their training beyond the fiscal year-end.



English Languge Training (ESL)

Every year, we welcome hundreds of participants at our Headquarters, the Victoria Public Library Network and online, to support them at building confidence in their exciting, and at times intimidating task of communicating fluently in English as a second language.

English language proficiency is one of the main barrers newcomers face when they begin their settlement journey in Canada. VIRCS's ESL program provides accessible and supportive English-language learning for newcomers, immigrants and refugees at the different stages of their settlement journey. Through practical instruction and a welcoming, culturally respectful learning environment, participants strengthen the communication skills and confidence needed for daily life, employment, education and community participation. Beyond language development, the program helps reduce isolation, build meaningful connections and support participants as they navigate life in Canada while maintaining pride in their cultures and identities.

The program offers a clear learning pathway from introductory support through beginner and intermediate levels, complemented by pronunciation classes available at no additional cost to VIRCS students. With an emphasis on speaking, listening and practical communication, classes respond to the needs of learners seeking greater independence and confidence in workplaces, services and everyday interactions. This accessible approach creates opportunities for learners from different backgrounds and language levels to progress at a pace that reflects their individual needs.

Belonging, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion





From Commitment to Action

Anti-racism remains an active and ongoing organizational commitment at VIRCS. During the year, VIRCS supported community engagement for British Columbia's Anti-Racism Action Plan, working with the Province's Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Branch to administer agreements and funding for community-led engagement. This work helped create opportunities for racialized communities to share lived experiences, identify systemic barriers, and contribute ideas for more equitable government policies, programs, and services. It also built on VIRCS's experience and administrative capability in supporting provincially directed anti-racism initiatives.

VIRCS also partnered with Sanath Training to offer Anti-Racism Response Training to staff and community partners. The two-part program combined learning about the history and language of racism in Canada with practical exercises in responding to racism, discrimination, bias, and microaggressions. Twenty-nine unique participants took part, with 25 attending each session. Among those completing the pre-training survey, 78.3% had not previously participated in anti-racism training. Feedback highlighted the safe learning environment, practical scenarios, increased awareness, and useful tools for moving from passive witnessing to active allyship.

To extend the impact beyond the workshops, VIRCS made Sanath Training's Anti-Racism Response Training Resources & Toolkit freely available through our website. The resource supports continued community learning about intersectionality, allyship, implicit bias, microaggressions, active witnessing, and practical responses to racism. By making this resource publicly accessible, VIRCS transformed a time-limited training initiative into an ongoing opportunity for learning and action. VIRCS was also represented in AMSSA's Anti-Racism Working Group for Decision-Makers, contributing an immigrant- and refugee-serving perspective to broader sector conversations.

The organization was represented at the B.C. Office of the Human Rights Commissioner's *From Hate to Hope* reception and immersive exhibit at the Royal BC Museum, which encouraged dialogue about the impacts of hate and our shared responsibility to strengthen dignity and belonging. VIRCS also supported the launch of the Black & Here Community Centre, led by REP Here in Canada and the BC Black History Awareness Society, helping advance a new community space for Black arts, culture, storytelling, connection, and participation.

Financial & Sustainability Highlights

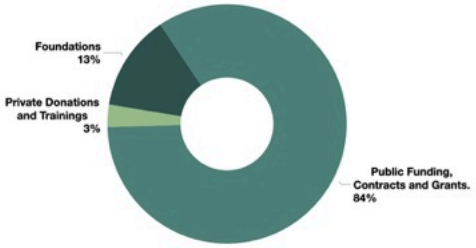
Responsible stewardship Sustainable impact

In 2025, VIRCS managed approximately $2.9 million in revenue, with most funding coming from public sources, contracts, and grants. These resources supported settlement, community resilience, language, employment, and community-building programs, with 83% of expenditures directed toward programs and services. To better align our financial reporting with the cycles and requirements of our principal funders and the Canada Revenue Agency, VIRCS changed its fiscal year-end from December 31 to March 31.

*Detailed financial information is available to members upon request: accounting@vircs.bc.ca

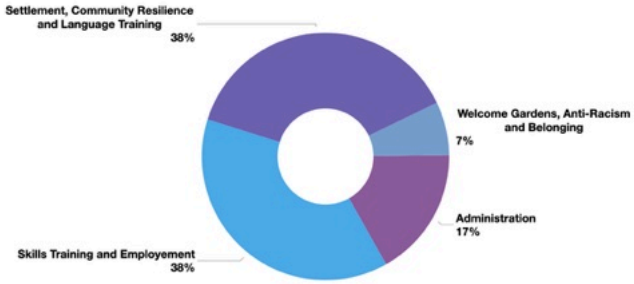
This resulted in a three-month transition period from January 1 to March 31, 2026, during which VIRCS reported $810,515 in revenue and $793,045 in expenditures, with 90% directed toward programs and services. These results reflect our continued commitment to responsible financial stewardship, transparency, and maximizing the impact of our resources in the communities we serve.

Revenues 2025



Total: $2,913,814

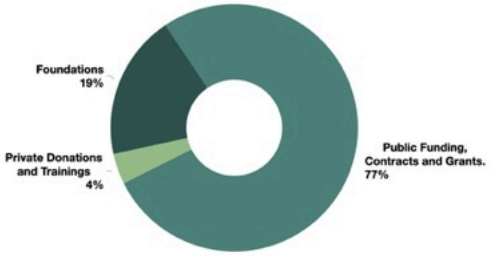
Expenditures 2025



Total: $2,899,196.85

Revenues 2026

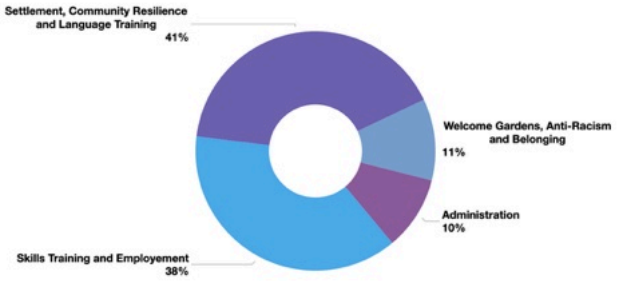
Three-month fiscal transition period: January 1–March 31, 2026



Total: $810,515

Expenditures 2026

Three-month fiscal transition period: January 1–March 31, 2026



Total: $793,045

A Legacy of a Welcoming Community









As we mark 37 years of serving our community, we reflect on VIRCS' journey of growth, resilience, and commitment to welcoming and supporting newcomers, immigrants, and refugees.

1989–2026 | Our Story

Founded in 1989 by Carlos, Deb, Viet, and Hereity, VIRCS began with a vision of creating a welcoming and supportive community for newcomers. Over the years, VIRCS expanded its settlement, language, employment, youth, family, and community programs in response to changing community needs. Key milestones included the First Step multiculturalism project, the launch of Enable and Welcome Gardens, becoming Vancouver Island's first CELPIP testing site, and moving to 637 Bay Street. In 2018, VIRCS expanded its capacity and, together with Family Services of Greater Victoria, formed the Victoria Social Innovation Centre. During the pandemic, VIRCS adapted its services, expanded emergency supports, and strengthened its anti-racism work as the provincial hub for the Resilience BC Anti-Racism Network. Today, VIRCS continues to build on this history through new programs, partnerships, and opportunities for community connection.

Growing Together at the Victoria Social Innovation Centre

Collaboration continues to be one of the greatest strengths of the Victoria Social Innovation Centre. Through the shared stewardship of Family Services of Greater Victoria and VIRCS, the Centre remains a welcoming nonprofit home where organizations can work alongside one another, exchange knowledge and better connect clients and families with support.

Over the past year, renovations and facility improvements have created more comfortable, welcoming and functional spaces for clients, children and staff. The renewed multipurpose area is supporting programming and shared activities, while the continued care of the building reflects our joint commitment to well-being, safety and long-term sustainability. This collaboration was further strengthened by a $30,000 Victoria Foundation grant supporting programming for the *Collaborative Community Programming Hub for Newcomer and Family Support.*

Our partnership with Family Services has continued to grow under the leadership of Jan Ference, who joined the organization as Executive Director in 2025 and has brought renewed energy to our collaboration and shared stewardship.

Little Phoenix Child Care also continues to thrive under the leadership of Ilyambabazi Sebyeza, who has guided the centre since its beginning. Together with the Early Childhood Education team, she has helped create a warm, trauma-informed environment where children and families experience safety, belonging and community.

Together, VSIC, VIRCS, Family Services and Little Phoenix demonstrate how collaboration can strengthen organizations while creating more responsive and caring spaces for the communities we serve.

Building on Our Legacy Through a Shared Vision



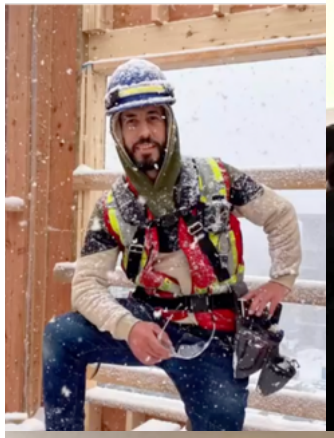
Looking ahead and into the future

Looking ahead, VIRCS remains firmly committed to serving newcomers, immigrants and refugees with empathy, solidarity and professionalism. The strength of our work lies in our staff, Board and volunteers working together as a team with a shared commitment to providing settlement, belonging and humanitarian supports with care and compassion.

We remain attentive to the evolving needs of our clients, continually seeking thoughtful and innovative responses that bring dignity, hope and peace of mind to their individual circumstances. At the same time, we continue to adapt to emerging challenges, changing economic conditions, new technologies and the complex public policies shaping immigration pathways.

While modernizing our approaches and service models, we remain faithful to our grassroots origins and to our belief in the power of community partnerships. Gratitude and respect guide our work alongside children, youth, women, seniors and families as they build a sense of belonging in a new cultural environment.

We value the many languages, identities, perspectives and life stories that enrich our communities. We are committed to support adaptation without requiring assimilation, we honour what each person brings while helping them navigate the culture, systems and structures of their new home. In doing so, we contribute each day to a more welcoming Greater Victoria, a stronger British Columbia and a better Canada for all.








CIBC

VICTORIA IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CENTRE SOCIETY

Together, we advance an inclusive and thriving Canada.

Be part of our Impact

Every connection strengthens our work. Your support, partnership, and involvement help us continue building communities where everyone can belong and thrive.

vircs.bc.ca/donate

https://www.vircs.bc.ca

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