



**Newcomers Employment & Education Development Services
(N.E.E.D.S.) Inc.**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER FINAL REPORT

April 1, 2021 – March 31, 2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On behalf of the agency, I would like to thank:

- All the staff for their ongoing dedication, hard work and profound impact on our clients;
- Executive and Management teams for sharing their expertise and providing exceptional support;
- Volunteers for their impact and commitment to our agency;
- Board Members for their guiding vision and invaluable contribution; and,
- Funders for supporting our mandate and making this year such a success.

Despite another full year amid the COVID-19 pandemic, with their hard work, guidance, and support, we were able to provide essential and quality settlement services to 2,570 newcomer children, youth, and their families. We are extremely proud to have the opportunity to support our young clients and see their growth, successes, and contribution towards building a more diverse Canada.

Special thanks to Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Province of Manitoba, Service Canada, and the Winnipeg Foundation for their financial support.

Sincerely,

Margaret von Lau
Chief Executive Officer



TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW	3
AGENCY STATISTICS	4
SERVICE REPORTS	10
SETTLEMENT WORKERS IN SCHOOLS (SWIS) SERVICES	10
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES	16
PARTNERSHIPS	19
SUCCESSSES & PROMISING PRACTICES.....	22
CHALLENGES & ADAPTATIONS	24
CONCLUSION	26

OVERVIEW

In the 2021-2022 fiscal year, we achieved our desired outcomes and provided relevant and appropriate settlement and integration services to 2,570 immigrant and refugee children, youth, and their families.

Our Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) services enabled 1,661 primary clients to access essential school integration supports. We also continued to deliver Employment services to 491 clients seeking to build the necessary skills to successfully enter the Canadian labour market.

A total of 60 full-time equivalent (FTE) IRCC-funded staff plus an additional 20.5 FTE staff (funded by non-IRCC sources), from 20+ countries were employed to facilitate programming for newcomer children and youth. In addition to providing a variety of direct settlement services and supports in the areas of education and employment, additional support services, including interpretation, were provided to ensure clients were able to successfully participate in our programming.

Our Management and Executive teams coordinated specific services at our agency, including developing programming to meet the needs of our clients, supporting front line staff in the delivery of programming, ensuring staff had the appropriate technological resources to provide services to clients remotely, and overseeing program specific data collection and reporting.

136 volunteers and 51 practicum students supported clients accessing SWIS and Employment Services, with a total of 11,284.75 volunteer hours completed.

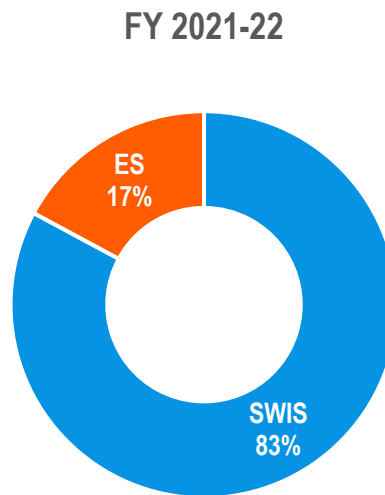
NEEDS staff also delivered 27 presentations to 1,024 participants representing various stakeholder groups including, school divisions, post-secondary institutions, other service providing organizations, ethnocultural community groups, and attendees at conferences, for the purposes of outreach, client & volunteer recruitment, and the promotion of services and supports available to newcomer and refugee children and youth.

While N.E.E.D.S. Inc. continued to deliver services within the global pandemic, we were able to achieve several successes and see continued growth for the Agency.

AGENCY STATISTICS

Table 1: Agency statistics for the 2021-22 Fiscal Year	
Target number of clients	2,020
Total number of clients served	2,570
Total primary clients	1,661
Total non-primary clients	909
Total IRCC eligible clients	1,346
Total non-IRCC clients	717
Total Volunteer contacts	2,412
Total number of Volunteer hours	11,284.75

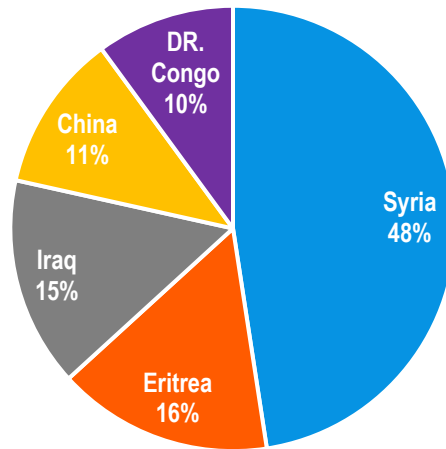
Graph 1: Percentage of Clients by Service



Approximately 80% of our clients accessed Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) services in 2021-2022, with a total of 2,368 clients served.

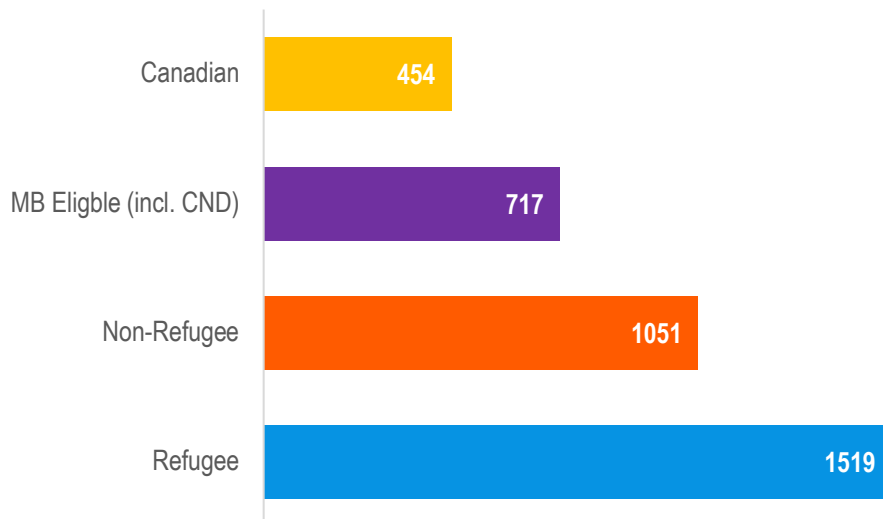
An additional 490 clients accessed Employment Services, making up roughly 20% of Agency clients.

Graph 2: Top 5 Countries of Origin (Clients)



NEEDS continues to deliver services to clients primarily from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq, China, and DR. Congo, with Syria being the top country of origin of our clients since 2015.

Graph 3: Clients' Immigration Status



Clients with a refugee status (GAR, PSR, BVOR, CR), continue to constitute the largest number of clients served. However, children and youth from a non-refugee background (IMM, CND, Visa holders) are regularly accessing services, making up approximately 40% of our clients.

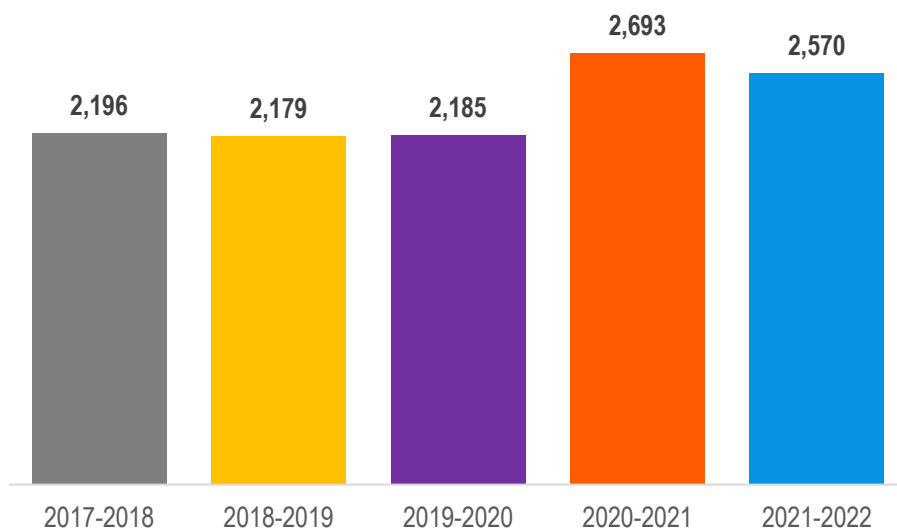
Notable, is the number of clients who have obtained Canadian Citizenship that accessed services in 2021-2022. New Canadians made up 63% of Manitoba Eligible clients served, and 18% of Agency clients overall.

Through the funding received from the Province of Manitoba's Department of Advanced Education, Skills & Immigration for the 5th consecutive year, NEEDS was able to deliver much needed and streamlined educational and employment supports to new Canadians.

Other non-Permanent Residents such as international students and refugee claimants, were also able to continue to receive uninterrupted settlement services through this funding.

Comparison to Past Fiscal Years

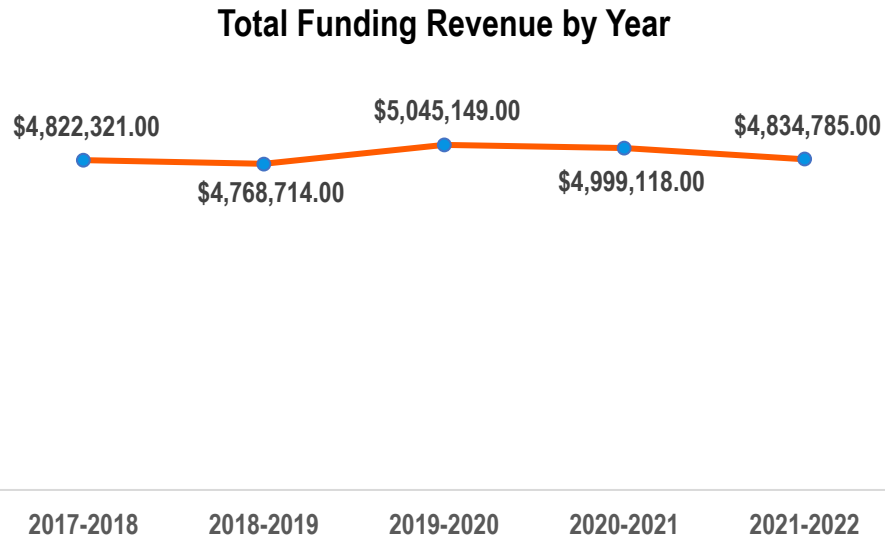
Graph 4: Total clients over the last 5 fiscal years



While there was a slight decrease in the number of clients served this fiscal year compared to 2020-2021, the number of clients that have accessed services since 2017-2018 continues to steadily increase.

We also saw a slight decrease in funding, primarily attributed to the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we received funding for new projects, notable being the Maintaining Effective Volunteer Engagement in Serving Newcomer Youth Remotely project (the Volunteer Hub) funded by IRCC's Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) initiative.

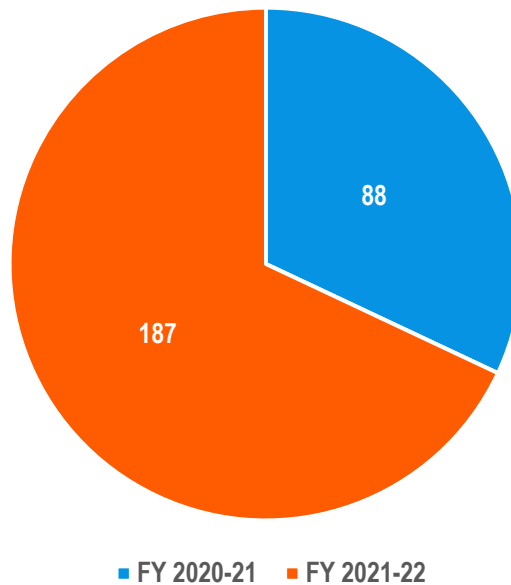
Graph 5: Funding revenues of last 5 years



Volunteers

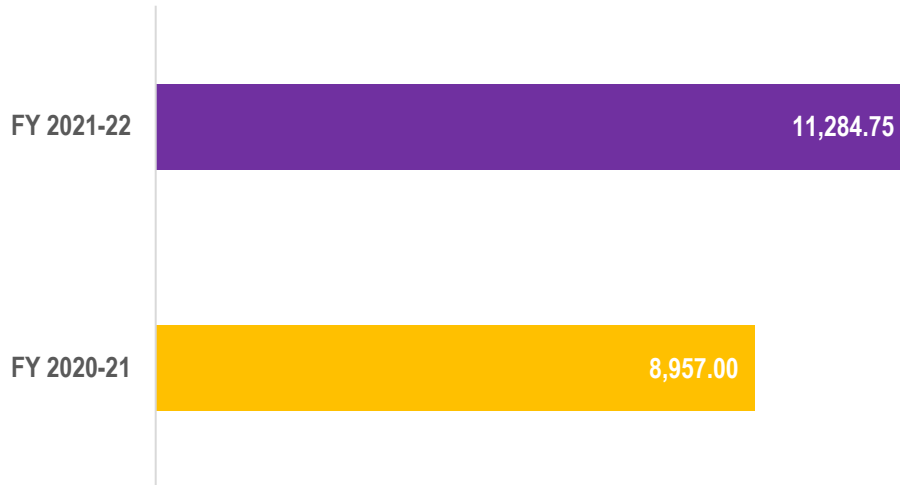
A total of 187 volunteers and practicum students provided Remote Homework, SWIS In-House (INTRO to Canadian Education), SWIS Off-Site, and Employment support to clients. This is an increase of 99 individuals supporting NEEDS activities in a volunteer capacity since 2020-2021.

Graph 6: Total Volunteers & Practicum Students



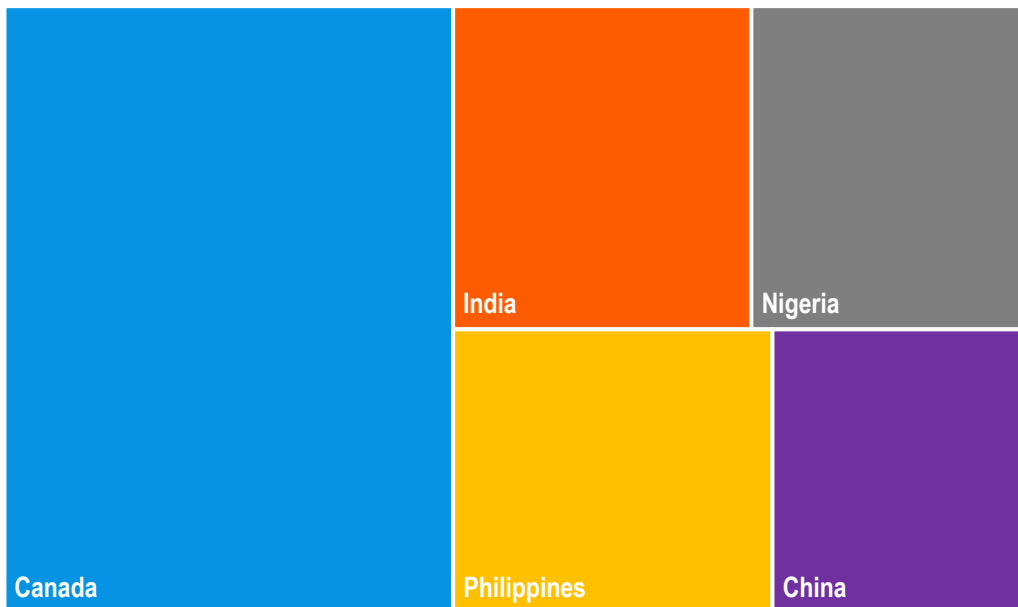
Compared to 2020-2021, the number of volunteer hours increased by 26%. This fiscal year, volunteers and practicum students completed a total of 11,284.75 volunteer hours, compared to 8,957.00.

Graph 7: Total Volunteer Hours



Volunteers and practicum students represented 41 unique countries of origin, reflecting the cultural and linguistic diversity of our clients.

Graph 8: Top 5 Countries of Origin (Volunteers)



Volunteers supported NEEDS activities by:

- Providing interpretation and translation assistance so clients could fully and meaningfully participate in programs and services
- Contributing to group activities and discussions to increase client engagement
- Assisting with the delivery of services, especially activities high in demand such as the Remote Homework Club
- Acting as mentors to clients to enhance their settlement, integration, and sense of belonging in their new communities

Volunteers are integral to maintaining appropriate adult-client ratios and ensuring that clients receive personalized services that meet their needs. As we continue to deliver most of our services to clients remotely, we will continue to recruit, comprehensively screen, and engage volunteers and practicum students so we can meet the educational and employment needs of our clients.

“As a volunteer at NEEDS, I give my help to clients. However, I can also improve my skills in my position. I learned how to get along with different ages of children. And also, my English skills are improved. I will recommend NEEDS to my friends because I have a lot of friends who are new in Canada. I think NEEDS can help their children integrate into Canada immediately. On the other hand, if someone is looking for a volunteering opportunity, I also recommend NEEDS. In my opinion, NEEDS is a good platform for both clients and volunteers.” - Quote from Volunteer

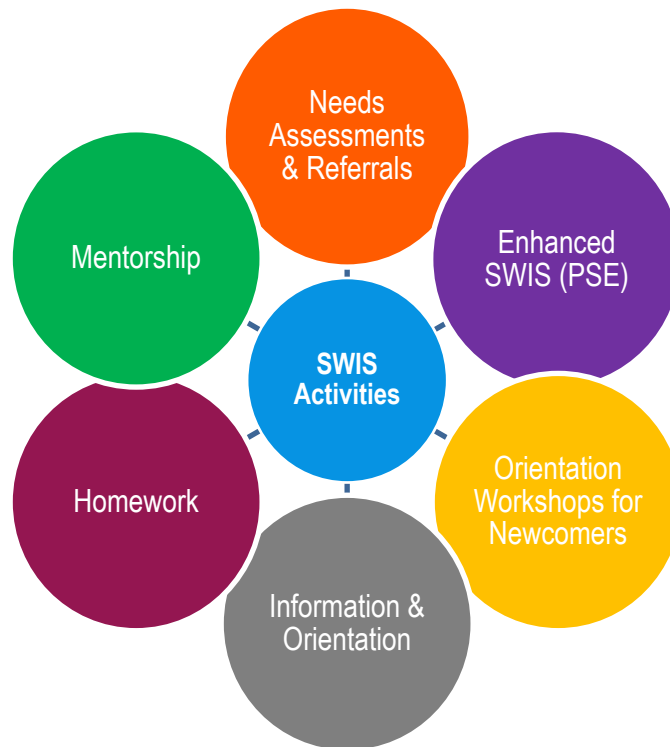
Other Agency highlights in the 2021-2022 fiscal year include:

- Redesign of the N.E.E.D.S. Inc. website to increase visibility to clients and external stakeholders. As an Agency selected by the *Royal Bank of Canada’s 2021 Social Impact Learning Program*, global RBC employees donated their professional skills and experience pro-bono to build our capacity in the areas of marketing and communication.
- The launching of the Volunteer Hub, through the *Maintaining Effective Volunteer Engagement in Serving Newcomer Youth Remotely* project, funded by IRCC’s Service Delivery Improvement (SDI) initiative.
- Procurement of additional funding from:
 - The Bell Let’s Talk fund to enhance activities delivered through the *Enhanced Wellness of Refugee Children, Youth and Families Program*,
 - The TD Ready Commitment Community Grant to deliver activities through the *Promoting Community Connection and Inclusion of Newcomer and Refugee Children and Youth* project and,
 - The Winnipeg Foundation to support the delivery of the *Project for Refugees to Overcome Trauma and Successfully Settle in Canada*, and the *Enhancing Technological Capacities to Serve Newcomer and Refugee Children, Youth and Families* project

SERVICE REPORTS

SETTLEMENT WORKERS IN SCHOOLS (SWIS) SERVICES

Overview of Activities:



Through the delivery of six (6) core activities, SWIS programming provided essential settlement, education, and school integration supports to 1,459 newcomer and refugee children and youth ages 6 – 21 (or until their completion of high school).

In addition to supporting elementary and secondary newcomer students, SWIS services assisted family members of primary clients (parents/guardians, siblings, other extended family members) through referrals, and the delivery of 15 newcomer events that covered topics related to community and seasonal safety and preparedness.

To facilitate the delivery of SWIS activities, NEEDS partnered with 31 schools in the Louis Riel, Pembina Trails, St. James-Assiniboia, and Winnipeg School divisions, so newcomer children and youth had access to SWIS services both on-site at school and remotely through the NEEDS Centre.

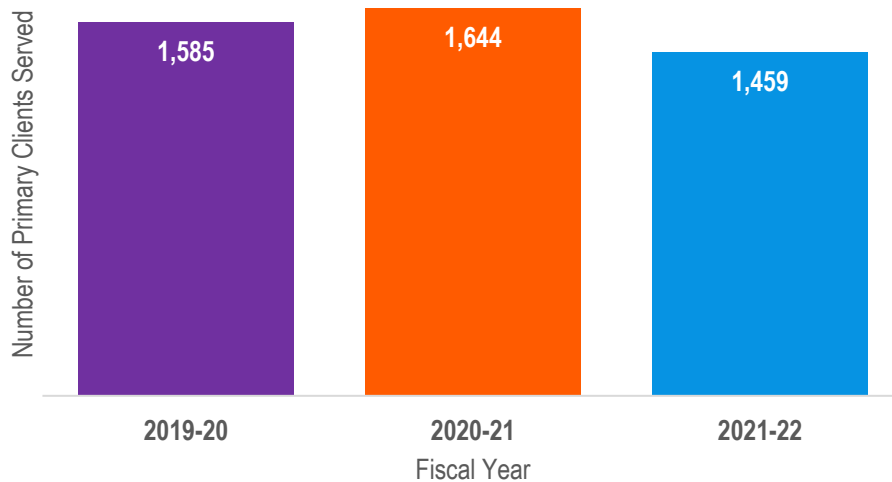
SWIS activities and services also supported school staff (administration, teachers, support workers) in the form of:

- Interpretation supports
- Cross-cultural awareness
- Conflict resolution, and
- Trauma and mental health capacity building

Table 2 presents the summary statistics of SWIS Services for the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

Table 2: SWIS statistics for FY 2021-22	
Target Number of SWIS Clients	1,520
Total Number of Primary SWIS Clients	1,459
Total Number of SWIS Clients (incl. family members)	2,368
Total SWIS In-House (INTRO) Clients	290
Total SWIS Off-Site Clients	1,848

Graph 9: Total SWIS clients over the last 3 fiscal years



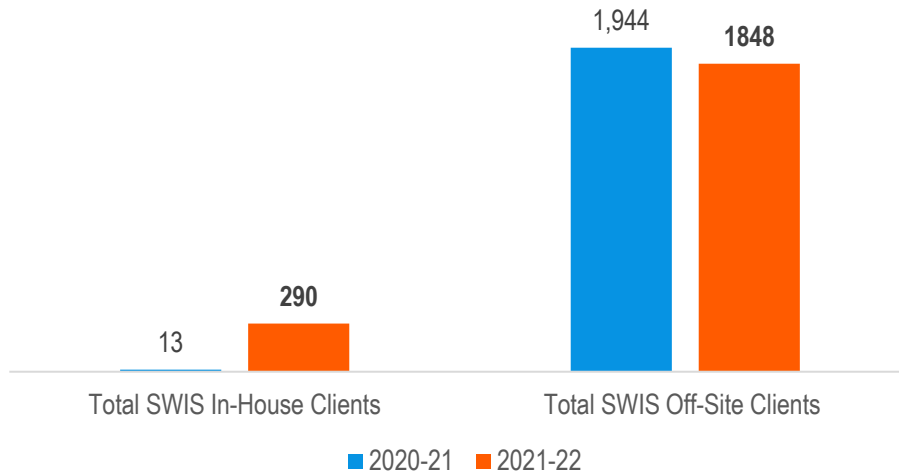
Note: FY 2019-20 includes Community Connections, Mentorship, After School, & INTRO clients.

While the number of clients accessing services SWIS services moderately decreased from last year, we saw a substantial increase in the number of SWIS In-House clients accessing INTRO to Canadian Education programming.

Despite the prolonging of the pandemic, we delivered 586 Information & Orientation and Orientation Workshops for Newcomers (OWN) sessions to 290 newly arrived refugee children and youth.

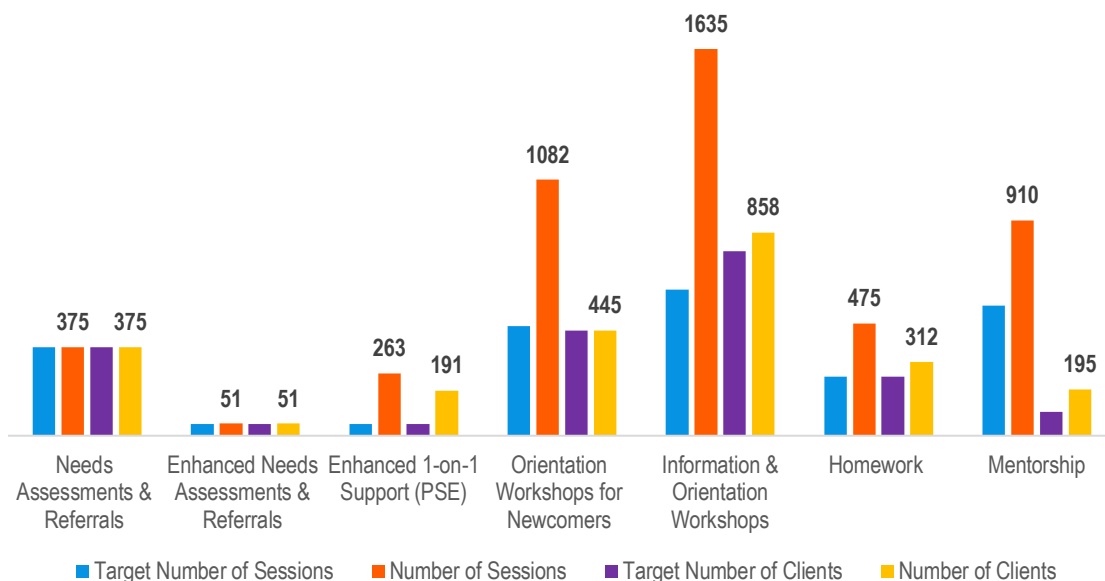
This is in stark contrast to 2020-2021, where only 13 clients accessed SWIS In-House services, due to sudden boarder closures and strict public health measures put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Graph 10: 2021-22 SWIS Clients



SWIS In-House (INTRO) sessions were delivered to clients both remotely and on-site at NEEDS. Topics focused on Education & Employment, Health & Nutrition, Safety & Law, Community & Places, and Pro-Social Skill Development to support clients in meeting their initial settlement needs and prepare them for their transition into the Canadian school system.

Graph 11: SWIS 2021-22 fiscal year outputs



In the 2021-2022 fiscal year, we met or exceeded all SWIS activity targets.

There was a substantial increase in the need for on-the-spot crisis counselling that occurred at schools and during school hours. 263 individualized Enhanced SWIS sessions were delivered to 191 unique clients identified as facing multiple barriers, to help them integrate into their school communities and gain meaningful employment once exiting the school system.

Notable client needs surrounded school disengagement, challenges within the home, familial conflict, feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and anger management. 2 – 3 sessions are usually required before a comprehensive understanding of clients' needs can be determined, appropriate courses of action can be identified, and/or referrals can be made to relevant community resources.

A high number of Orientation Workshops for Newcomers (OWN) and Information and Orientation Sessions were also delivered (1,082 and 1,635 respectively) as clients could receive services both in-person (onsite at NEEDS or at school) and remotely. To foster client engagement, participation, and reduce online learning fatigue, remote sessions were shorter in length and were delivered to a smaller number of participants at a time.

We also saw an increase in the number of clients accessing educational support through our Remote Homework Club. This is due to a large volume of referrals from schools, community partners, and SWIS staff who identified a high need for tutoring and homework support among students at their schools. We also launched the French Homework Club for francophone clients seeking educational support in their official language of preference, or non-francophone clients requiring assistance with their French homework assignments.

Our mentorship activities were also quite popular, with 910 sessions delivered to 195 unique clients who were identified as considerably benefiting from this activity. Sessions aimed to bring together settled Canadian mentors with newcomer children and youth mentees so they could learn more about life in Canada, receive individualized tutoring sessions to improve their literacy and numeracy, and foster relationship building.

SWIS Schools

The following schools hosted full-time SWIS workers by providing workspace, access to Wi-Fi, and classroom resources to support newcomer students in their divisions:

Louis Riel School Division	Dakota Collegiate Frontenac School Glenlawn Collegiate St. George School Victor Mager School Windsor Park Collegiate
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Pembina Trails School Division	<p>Acadia School Arthur A Leach School Dalhousie School Ecole Bonnycastle Fort Richmond Collegiate General Byng School Prairie Sunrise School Shaftesbury Collegiate</p>
St. James-Assiniboia School Division	<p>Bruce Middle School Buchanan School Sturgeon Heights Collegiate George Waters Middle School Golden Gate Middle School Hedges Middle School John Taylor Collegiate St. James Collegiate Stevenson-Britannia School Strathmillan School</p>
Winnipeg School Division	<p>Dufferin School Gladstone School Harrow School Isaac Brock School J.B. Mitchell School Mulvey School Wellington School</p>

NEEDS also worked in partnership with 27 additional schools in the Winnipeg region to provide school integration services to newcomer students and their families.

Through direct requests made by teachers, administrators, and other school staff, SWIS provided:

- Interpretation assistance,
- Supported parent-teacher conferences,
- Facilitated the communication of important information related to COVID-19 school protocols, and
- Provided follow-up assistance for students who stopped attending school and/or were experiencing other school-related challenges

These schools also made direct client referrals to NEEDS so newcomer students in their schools had access to the services and supports available to them through SWIS.

Other activities/services offered through SWIS included:

Post-Secondary Bridge Program sessions that prepared 76 newcomer and refugee youth in grades 10 – 12, and 1 year after high school graduation, with their transition into post-secondary education/training through workshops, virtual campus tours, and mentorship by former participants.

Expanding the client eligibility for the Post-Secondary Bridge Program this year enabled youth to start goal setting, planning, and make more informed pre-graduation decisions once they learned about the entry requirements for their post-secondary programs of interest.

“We Thrive” group PSE sessions for children and youth ages (6-12 and 13-18) that helped them learn about trauma triggers and the brain, coping strategies, emotional literacy, and dealing with big emotions, **Circle of Security** parenting groups, and **Making Sense of Trauma Training** for service providing and educational staff, delivered through the Enhanced Wellness Program.

Stand Up to Racism workshops where youth shared their experiences of racism and discrimination and developed positive messaging to combat racism through a poster campaign and training in graphic arts.

English and French Language Club where clients built their English or French language skills through interactive games, conversation circles, and educational videos.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Overview of Activities:



Through the delivery of five (5) core activities, our Employment Services continued to provide essential employment supports to newcomer youth (ages 16 – 29) so they could successfully enter the Canadian labour market.

Clients received in-depth employability skills training through sector-specific workshops, the Youth Employment for Newcomers: Career-Driven Internship Program, and individual employment coaching that prepared them for work placements. Supports included resume and cover letter development, job searching assistance, interview preparation, and mock interviews.

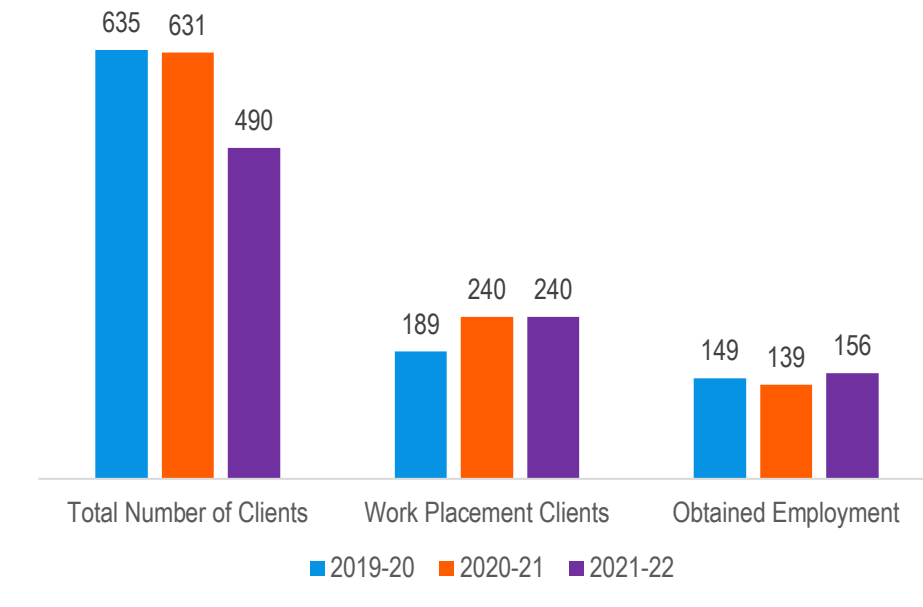
To facilitate work placements, NEEDS partnered with 13 employers at various locations, for the purposes of providing job placements, setting up interviews, conducting workplace monitoring visits, and doing check-ins to support clients' onboarding and transition into their places of employment.

Youth Employment for Newcomers: Career-Driven Internship Program employability workshops were also delivered onsite at 3 partner schools: Fort Richmond Collegiate, Glenlawn Collegiate, and Churchill High School. In collaboration with school staff, workshops were adapted to align with the Province's Lifeworks curriculum and incorporated a unique lens on building employability skills for newcomers.

Table 3 presents the summary statistics of Employment Services for the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

Table 3: Employment statistics for FY 2021-22	
Target Number of Clients	240
Total Number of Clients (incl. Individual Coaching)	490
Number of Work Placement Clients	240
Number of Youth Employment for Newcomers Clients	82
Number of Clients that Obtained Employment	156

Graph 12: Employment Services 3 Year Comparison



While the number of clients accessing Employment Services has decreased since 2019-2020, this is attributed to changes in scope. We have shifted away from drop-in career coaching services and are placing greater emphasis on preparing clients for work placements with industry partners, so they can get hands-on training and practical work experience. The number of clients participating in work placement programs and the number of youth obtaining employment post-work placement has remained relatively stable since 2019-2020.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the number of clients we were able to put into work placements, as youth accessing Employment Services tend to concentrate in the job sectors that were hardest hit by the COVID-19 shutdowns (i.e., retail, food & beverage, entertainment). However, through our established network of employer partners, we helped to fill their staffing needs by matching them to highly trained, employment ready youth.

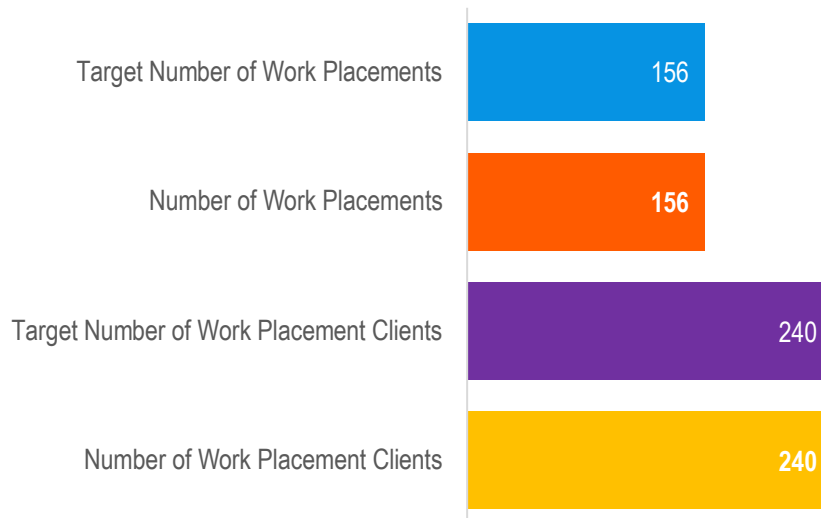
Notable employer partnerships in 2021-2022 included:

- The City of Winnipeg

- Co-Op Grocery
- Safeway
- Fort Whyte Farms
- The Hive Climbing & Fitness

Through mass hiring events, mentorship opportunities, and/or accepting client referrals, employer partners created unique employment opportunities for youth, and allowed them to showcase their skills, talent, and demonstrate the benefits of partnering.

Graph 13: Employment 2021-22 fiscal year outputs



In the 2021-2022 fiscal year, we met our Employment Services activity targets.

Despite the ongoing challenges to the labour market because of the COVID-19 pandemic, 240 clients participated in a work placement program/training and 156 youth obtained employment, either through unpaid work placements or direct hiring.

A notable trend observed this year was the number of employers unable or unwilling to provide unpaid work placements to clients for several reasons, including limited capacity to provide youth with appropriate training and mentorship, the need to prioritize the return of their existing staff to work, and/or liability concerns if a youth contracted COVID-19 while doing a work placement.

A positive impact that this had was many employers wanted to skip unpaid work placements and opted to directly hire youth, while allowing us to provide workplace monitoring supports to increase job maintenance. Many of our partners have expressed that they are experiencing constant labour shortages, and access to a trained and qualified pool of employment ready youth to fill this staffing void has been a huge relief as they struggle to recover from the impact of the pandemic on their businesses.

PARTNERSHIPS

N.E.E.D.S. Inc. continued to partner with various service providing agencies, educational institutions, mainstream organizations, and networks, to provide the best service possible to clients.

Our partnerships with stakeholders such as school divisions, employers, other service providing organizations, and community groups played an essential role in supporting our mandate and allowing us to provide wrap-around support to clients during an extremely challenging time.

The following tables outline some of the key partnerships that facilitated the delivery of our programs and services in 2021-2022.

Networks/Coalitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gang Action Interagency Network Immigration Partnership Winnipeg KAIROS Canada KDE – Hub Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations Mentoring Network MHP-IF/Nation of Wellness Newcomer Education Coalition NOWNIR (formerly Network of Organizations for War-Affected Newcomers of Manitoba) PNT Region Wrap Cap PNT SWIS Coalition Promoting Healthy Masculinities Advisory Committee White Ribbon Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce Youth Agencies Alliance
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Other Immigrant Service Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accueil Francophone Aurora Family Therapy Centre Family Dynamics Immigrant Centre Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council
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<p>Post-Secondary Institutions</p>	<p>Booth University College Canadian Mennonite University CDI College Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology Red River College Université de Saint-Boniface University of Manitoba University of Winnipeg</p>
<p>School Divisions</p>	<p>La division scolaire franco-manitobaine Louis Riel School Division Pembina Trails School Division River East Transcona School Division Seven Oaks School Division St. James-Assiniboia School Division Winnipeg School Division</p>
<p>Other Community Organizations</p>	<p>Boys and Girls Club of Canada Assiniboine Park Zoo Electronic Recycling Association Emmanuel Mission Feast of Africa First Book Canada Fort Whyte Farms Harvest Manitoba Manitoba Children’s Museum Manitoba Indigenous Cultural Education Centre Inc. Materials Distribution Agency Read ON Canada Sport Manitoba Volunteer Manitoba Winnipeg Animal Services Winnipeg Chamber Orchestra Winnipeg Police Services</p>

We continued to partner with employers who provided paid and unpaid work placements, so clients could increase their employability skills and acquire the hands-on experience needed to be successful in the Canadian labour market.

Employer partners represented a range of job sectors including community organizations, food & hospitality, personal care work, retail, and sports & recreation.

The following tables highlight the key employers that we partnered with this fiscal year.

Employers	<p>City of Winnipeg Co-Op Grocery Comforts of Home Dairy Queen Fort Whyte Farms Kiwanis Retirement Home McDonald's Pancake House Pro-Care Health RHS Childcare Royal Bank of Canada Safeway The Hive Climbing & Fitness YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg</p>
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In addition to the above partnerships, N.E.E.D.S. Inc. also received financial and in-kind support from the following funders:

Federal Government	<p>Canada Student Summer Jobs Program Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada Public Health Agency of Canada</p>
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Provincial Government	<p>Advanced Education, Skills, and Immigration Lighthouses Program (Manitoba Justice-Crime Prevention) Manitoba Multiculturalism Urban Green team</p>
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Charitable/ Community Organizations	<p>Central Neighbourhoods Winnipeg Harvest Manitoba Spence Neighbourhood Association Winnipeg Foundation</p>
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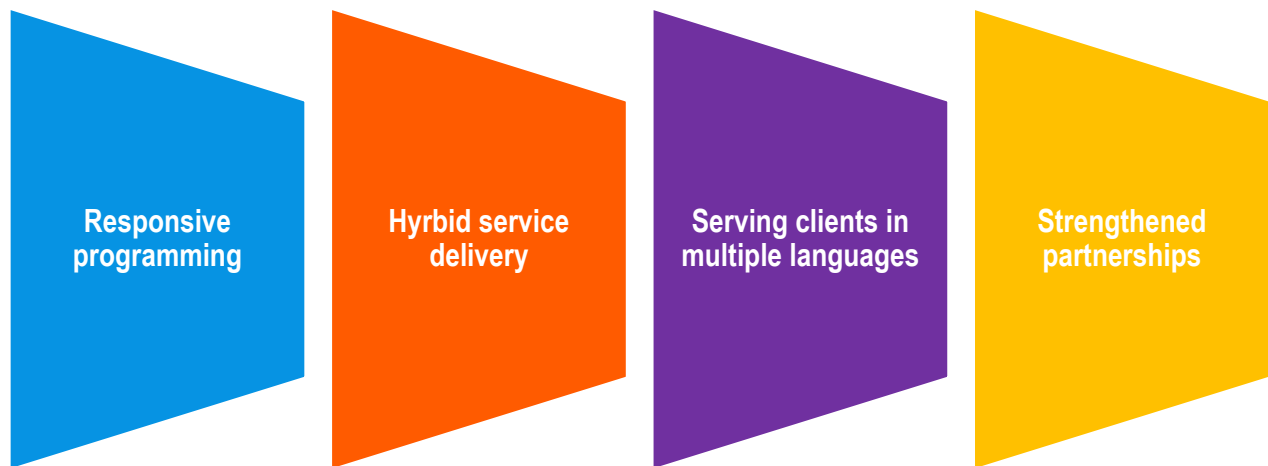
Private Sector	<p>Assiniboine Credit Union Telus Community Board Bell Let's Talk TD Ready Commitment Community Grant</p>
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SUCCESSES & PROMISING PRACTICES

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, NEEDS experienced many successes in 2021-2022.

In addition to achieving all our program goals and targets, we offered programming to clients that allowed them to make decisions about their lives in Canada, acquire essential employability skills so they can enter and participate in the labour market, and successfully settle by expanding their social networks and foster a sense of connection to their community.

Specific factors that allowed for these successes included:



Responsive programming

NEEDS continued to creatively respond to the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, by ensuring clients had access to services that met their needs. This fiscal year, we increased our collaboration with our school partners and other service providing agencies to better identify how each respective organization could play their role in ensuring clients were receiving services based on mutual areas of expertise. This was demonstrated by an increase in the number of internal and external client referrals that were made by our school partners, other immigrant serving agencies, and our networks/coalitions.

Hybrid service delivery

We adapted the delivery of services to a hybrid model, where both remote and in-person services were available throughout the day and during critical hours to meet the unique needs of our clients. Staff connected with clients using a host of options depending on clients' preference, such as instant messaging, email, phone, and videoconferencing tools (e.g., Zoom). Feedback solicited from both clients and their parents/guardians was that they appreciated the option to access our services either in-person or remotely, depending on their unique needs/circumstances.

Serving clients in multiple languages

NEEDS Centre launched the Volunteer Hub in September 2021, which included recruiting volunteers from the community to provide interpretation supports to clients. New languages NEEDS accessed from interpreters through our Volunteer Hub included Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Oromo, and Malay. NEEDS also hired new staff to provide language support to newly arrived Afghan clients. These staff speak several languages, including Pashto, Dari, Farsi, and Urdu. Clients have tremendously benefited from receiving interpretation and translation supports in their first language so they can fully articulate their needs and staff can provide them with the best possible service.

Strengthened partnerships

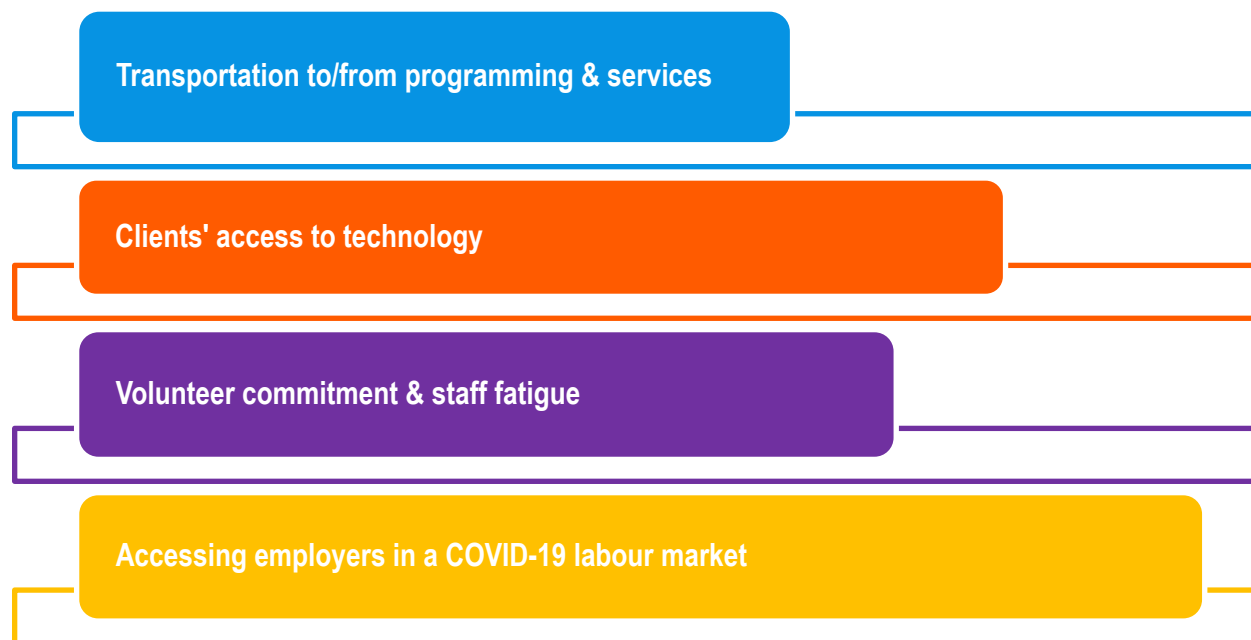
Comprehensive service delivery for SWIS and Employment Services are dependent on well-established partnerships with schools and employers. NEEDS has made ongoing efforts to strengthen our school partnerships by working collaboratively to establish memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with school divisions. These MOUs reflect the best interests of both parties and clients, promote ongoing transparent communication, professionalism, and quality services. They helped to strengthen relationships with our school partners and expand the number SWIS schools.

Our employer partners have shared their struggle to find candidates who are a good fit with their company and indicated that many new hires do not successfully make it through the probation period. Despite having previous experience in the Canadian labour market, employers have indicated that many new hires lack the essential employability skills that youth accessing Employment Services possess. Based on the feedback from our partners, the difference in maturity and level of employability of NEEDS clients accessing Employment Services (compared to employees who have not accessed prior training) is evident. The employability skills workshops and individualized career coaching sessions delivered to clients continues to enable us to fill this void in talent for employers, as NEEDS clients are significantly more prepared for the world of work upon accessing our services.

CHALLENGES & ADAPTATIONS

The challenges encountered this fiscal year continued to directly stem from the impact that the COVID-19 public health crisis has had on clients and service delivery.

Below is a summary of the notable challenges that arose for clients, staff, and the delivery of SWIS and Employment services in 2021-2022.



Transportation to/from programming & services

While most services were delivered remotely because of COVID-19 restrictions, transportation impacted the delivery of in-person services, specifically in-person summer SWIS programming at partner schools. EAL and LAL programs are oftentimes housed in specific schools across the city and are not necessarily within walking distance of clients' homes. Transportation was also a challenge for clients participating in work placements in our Employment Services. In some instances, youth could not afford the cost of transportation to get to their place of work, and in others, youth could not accept a placement due to limited-service routes to certain locations in the city.

The result of COVID-19 closures since March 2020 has resulted in clients and their families having limited opportunities to build their confidence in navigating the public transportation system. Where possible, staff facilitated transportation training sessions to explain routes, accompanied clients to bus stops, and distributed bus tokens to make programming more accessible. Employment staff also did their best to market and recruit employers with better transportation access, and when possible, place youth as close as they could to their homes. While recruiting employers who fit these criteria is more time consuming, it ultimately sets the stage for a more positive experience for both the youth and partner employers.

Clients' access to technology

Access to technology continued to be a challenge that arose for many clients, as it either limited or prevented them from accessing remote services. To ensure that our remote programs remain available and accessible to all clients, staff continued to connect clients/families to their schools who have device lending programs, or when this was not an option, referred clients to organizations that offered refurbished devices at a reduced cost.

Other technological barriers included, volunteers, staff or clients losing their Internet connections during sessions and clients' difficulty using online applications like Zoom. To better navigate these challenges, staff were flexible in the length of the sessions if technological interruptions occurred, and volunteers and clients were supported by staff so they could better navigate online applications and become more knowledgeable on how to use them.

Volunteer commitment & staff fatigue

Volunteers were utilized in multiple service delivery areas however, because we heavily relied on volunteers to support high demand activities, such as the Remote Homework Club, last minute cancellations and/or sudden changes in volunteers' availability impacted service delivery. Clients either waited until we had enough volunteers to support them, or they were grouped with other clients who had similar homework or tutoring sessions.

The lasting impact of the pandemic was also felt by staff who supported clients. SWIS staff delivering programming on-site at schools had to routinely navigate sudden changes to provincial restrictions which impacted service delivery at their schools. They also regularly dealt with the stress of COVID-19 outbreaks at their school sites. While NEEDS staff are highly professional, client-focused, and resilient, staff like clients are experiencing pandemic fatigue and the Agency is doing its best to ensure that staff are connected to appropriate resources, so they are more equipped to perform their duties and carry out necessary services.

Accessing employers in a COVID-19 labour market

The success and retention of newcomer youth entering the labour market heavily relies on the benefits of the mentorship and on-the-job training that employers provide to youth as interns. During the height of the pandemic, it was a challenge engaging employers because they were not able to predict their business and staffing needs due to fluctuating public health restrictions. Employers had to frequently lay off their existing staff during closures and did not have the capacity to properly train youth as interns as they would have prior to the pandemic. Many employers were willing to accept employable youth as direct hires but were unwilling to take on unpaid interns that still needed on-the-job experience. As pandemic restrictions ease, many of our employer partners indicated their interest in revisiting unpaid internship options for youth not ready to make the immediate leap to paid employment, as they see the benefits of work placement programs and longer-term employee retention.

CONCLUSION

While the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact our Agency in the areas of service delivery, staffing, and employer recruitment in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, we managed to achieve all our programming targets and desired outcomes.

By offering in-person and remote service options, we delivered flexible and responsive programming that met the evolving needs of our clients, expanded our pool of qualified volunteers and practicum students, and increased our visibility in Winnipeg schools through strengthened partnerships. We also filled a significant gap for employers struggling to retain talent in a pandemic-ridden labour market, by preparing, matching, and placing highly trained and employable newcomer youth in their businesses.

Though our shared vision, mutual efforts, and commitment to providing accessible settlement services and supports to newcomer, children, youth, and their families, over 2,500 clients who now call Canada their home, received relevant and appropriate services that met their educational and employment needs.