



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

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER FINAL REPORT

April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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

- All the staff for their dedication and profound impact on our clients;
- The Executive and Management Teams for their expertise and exceptional performance;
- Volunteers for their ongoing commitment to our agency;
- Board members for their invaluable contribution;
- Funders who helped make this year such a success.

Despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, with their hard work, support, and guidance, we were able to provide essential and quality programs to 2,693 newcomer children and youth and their families. We are extremely proud to be able to provide a wide array of services to our young clients and see their growth and successes in the areas of education, employment and overall contribution to Canadian society.

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

Sincerely,

Margaret von Lau
Chief Executive Officer



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OVERVIEW

The 2020-2021 fiscal year was a unique in that we spent the entire year in the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite COVID-19 restrictions easing in the summer, which allowed limited, in-person services to be delivered to clients, both at partner schools and at the agency, we spent the large portion of the year delivering services to clients remotely due to public health restrictions.

In April 2020, we officially launched our Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) services which enabled 1,644 primary clients to access essential school integration supports. We also continued to deliver Employment services to 631 primary clients seeking to build the necessary skills to successfully enter the Canadian labour market.

A total of 65 full-time equivalent (FTE) IRCC-funded staff plus an additional 6 FTE (funded by non-IRCC sources) were employed during this fiscal year 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 our clients to ensure that they were able to successfully participate in our programming. Our Management and Executive teams also helped to coordinate 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.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic created an unusual strain on our existing staffing resources, where the bulk of our programs and services were required to be delivered remotely. To support remote programming, the number of group sessions for both SWIS and Employment services had to be increased to ensure that clients stayed engaged and received the individualized support that they needed. This fiscal year, a total of eighty-eight (88) volunteers and practicum students provided remote homework, and information and orientation support to clients, with a total of 8,647 volunteer hours completed. An additional seventeen (17) volunteer mentors provided three-hundred and ten (310) hours of mentorship support to newly arrived refugee clients. Though mentorship was primarily done remotely this fiscal year because of the pandemic, this activity was completely made up of individuals who volunteered their time to support newly arrived refugee children and youth during their initial settlement period.

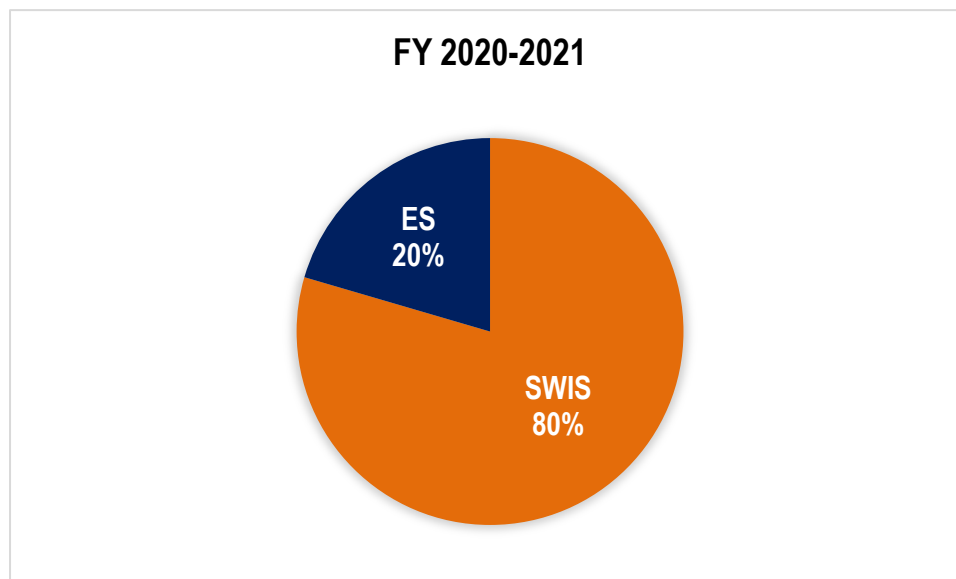
While the opening of this fiscal year was extremely atypical, especially amidst a global pandemic, we were able to achieve several successes and see continued growth for the agency. Overall, we met our desired outcomes and provided relevant and appropriate settlement and integration services to 2,693 immigrant and refugee children, youth, and their families.

AGENCY STATISTICS

Table 1 provides a summary of the Agency statistics for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

Table 1: Agency statistics for the 2020-2021 Fiscal Year	
Total number of Clients Served (incl. RCs, etc.)	2,693
Total number of Refugee Clients	1,617
Total number of Syrian Clients	916
Total number of Yazidi Clients	176
Total Number of Refugee Claimant Clients	48
Total Number of Other Non-IRCC Clients	704
Total number of Volunteer Hours	8,957.00
Top Countries of Origin	Syria, Eritrea, DR. Congo, Iraq & China

Graph 1: Percentage of clients by service



Notable trends that arose this fiscal year were directly related to the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis and the ensuing barriers to services, including:

- Newcomer and refugee children and youths limited, or no access, to technology to fully participate remote services
- Limited space in the household for family members to undergo Needs Assessments and/or receive Enhanced SWIS (PSE) supports, in a confidential environment was a challenge

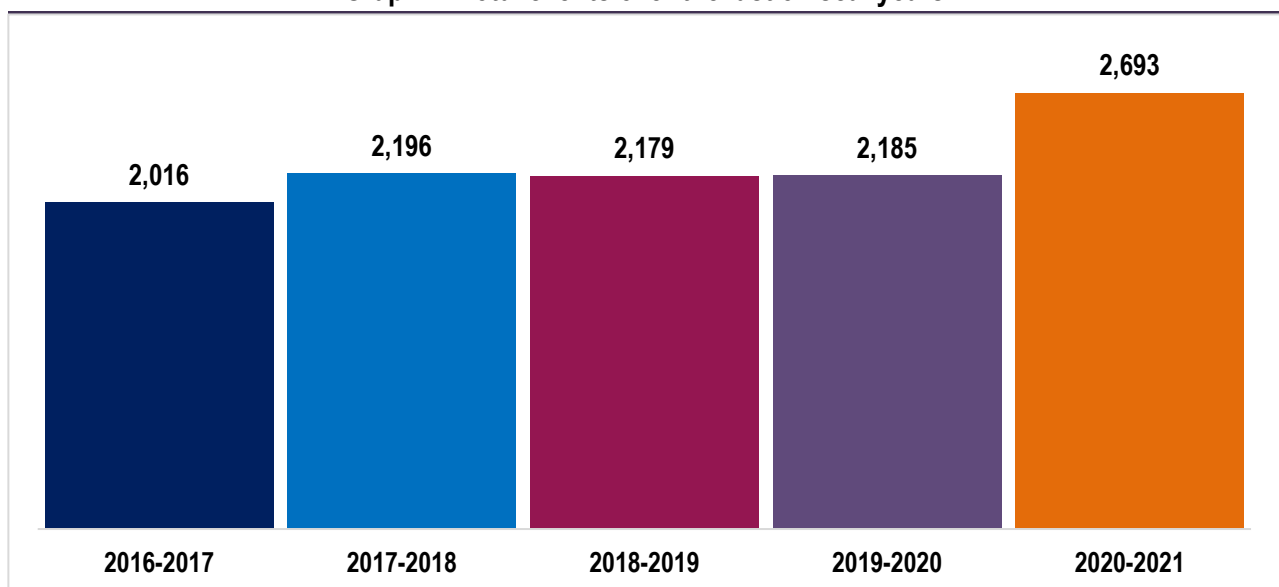
- The number of newcomer children and youth who required additional support with education, recreation, school engagement, and integration increased
- A growing need for clients to have support with remote learning, such as help with class assignments and the overall navigation of an online school environment
- Feelings of isolation and disconnection from peers and community was frequently expressed, which resulted in an increased sense of anxiety and uncertainty amongst clients and their families

Other service specific trends observed this fiscal year included:

- An ongoing need for multi-barriered refugee children and youth to have access to Enhanced SWIS/psychosocial supports to be successful in NEEDS programs
- The need for increased access to interpreters, so clients can fully understand, comprehend, and benefit from remote orientation information, as well as communicate their unique needs and challenges
- Increased demand for pre-employment training for refugee youth with lower English language and literacy skills who require significant coaching and support before they are ready to participate in a work placement

Comparison to Past Fiscal Years

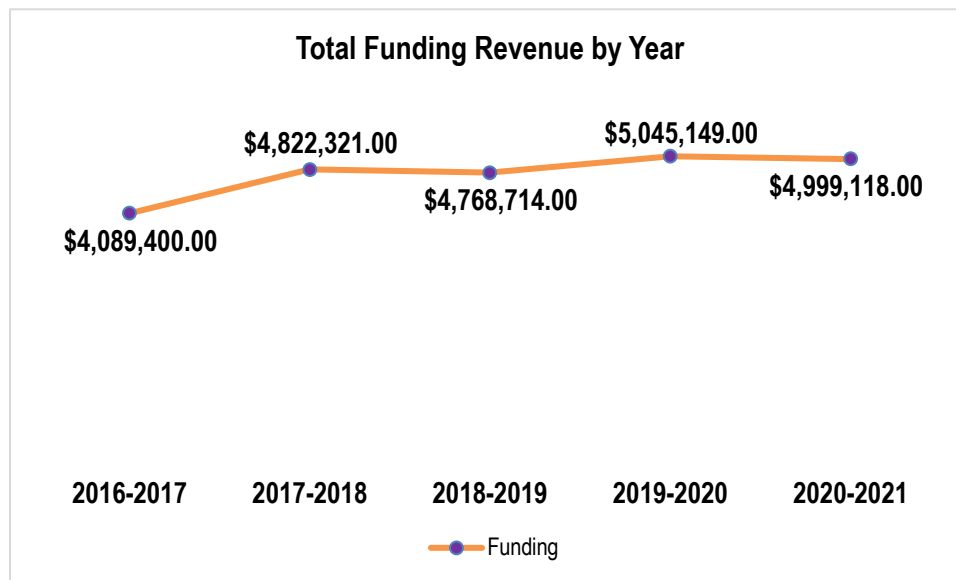
Graph 2: Total clients over the last 5 fiscal years



In comparison to the last five (5) fiscal years, the agency once again saw an increase in the number of clients accessing our programs and services (Graph 2). While our funding revenue decreased compared to last year,

primarily because of the pandemic, we continued to see increased diversification of funding including a new Anti-Racism project funded by the Telus Community Board (Graph 3).

Graph 3: Funding revenues of last 5 years



Other agency highlights include:

- On-site SWIS programming was delivered at twenty-four (24) schools in four (4) school divisions in Winnipeg (Louis Riel School Division, Pembina Trails School Division, St. James – Assiniboia School Division and Winnipeg School Division). Seventeen (17) additional schools were also provided interpretation support so newcomer children, youth, and families regardless of their school, were able to receive vital information and updates regarding their education and the quickly changing school protocols in response to COVID-19.
- The Enhanced Wellness Program, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada continued to deliver activities to increase the mental health of refugee children, youth, and families through the development of trauma-informed curriculum, delivery of PSE groups for refugee children and youth, the facilitation of Circle of Security parenting groups, and Making Sense of Trauma Training for service providing and educational staff.
- The continuation of the Post-Secondary Bridge Program enabled eighty-four (84) newcomer and refugee youth to acquire the knowledge and resources necessary to enhance their accessibility to post-secondary education.
- The launching of the Deconstructing Racism and Racial Injustice and Enhancing Mental Wellness of Newcomer Youth project, funded by the Telus Community Board in winter 2021 received significant



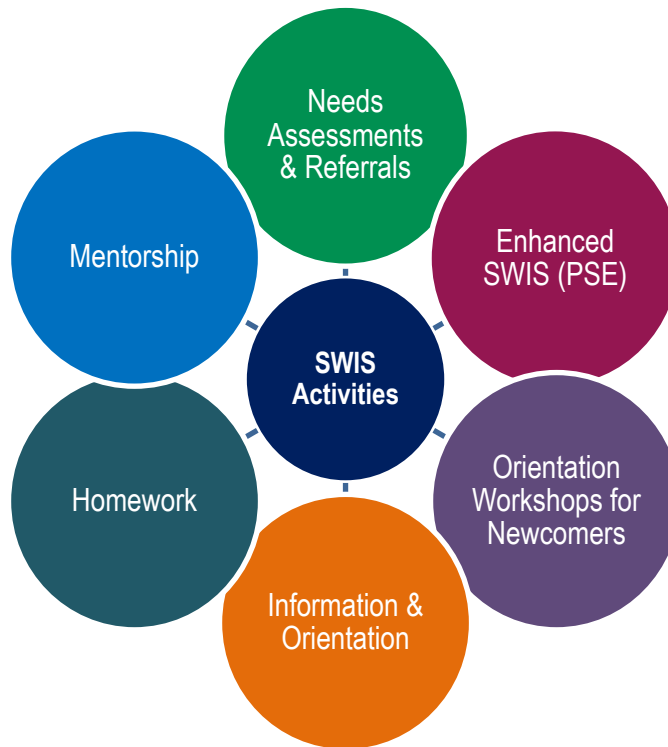
media coverage and a letter from the Mayor, Brian Bowman acknowledging the work that NEEDS is doing in the community to combat racism.

- N.E.E.D.S. Inc. was nominated as a participant for the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) 2021 Social Impact Learning Program, where global RBC employees will donate their professional skills and experience pro-bono to build our capacity in the areas of marketing and communication.

SERVICE REPORTS

SETTLEMENT WORKERS IN SCHOOLS (SWIS) SERVICES

Overview of Activities:



Incorporating components of our former Introduction to Canadian Education (INTRO), Community Connections, After-School, and Mentorship and Outreach Programs, our Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) is a new service that N.E.E.D.S. Inc. launched in April 2020. Through the delivery of six (6) core activities, SWIS provided valuable settlement, education, and school integration supports to 1,644 newcomer and refugee children and youth ages 6 – 21 (or until their completion of high school).

To facilitate the delivery of SWIS activities, NEEDS partnered with a total of twenty-four (24) schools in the Louis Riel, Pembina Trails, St. James-Assiniboia, and Winnipeg School divisions to deliver services to clients, both on-site at schools and remotely.

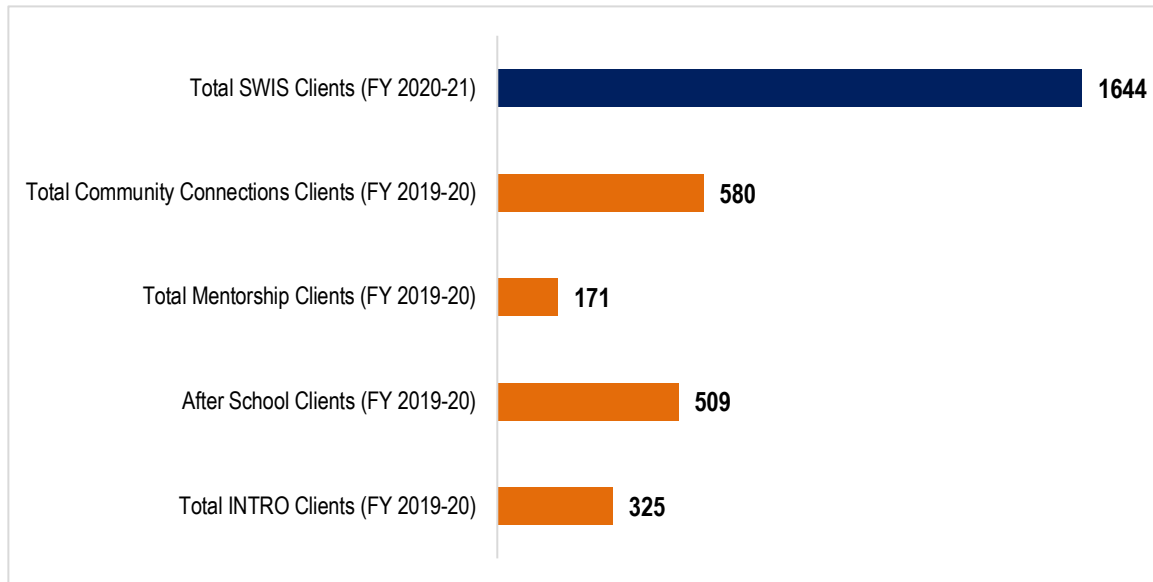
Table 2 provides a summary of SWIS statistics this year.

Table 2: SWIS statistics for FY 2020-21	
Target Number of SWIS Clients	1500
Total Number of Primary SWIS Clients	1,644
Total Number of SWIS Clients (incl. family members)	2,483

Total SWIS In-House Clients	13
Total SWIS Off-Site Clients	1,944
Total SWIS Critical Hours Clients	813

Despite an entire year within the COVID-19 pandemic, SWIS provided services to more clients this year compared to the combined total of clients (1,585) accessing INTRO, Community Connections, Afterschool, and Mentorship programs (Graph 4) last year.

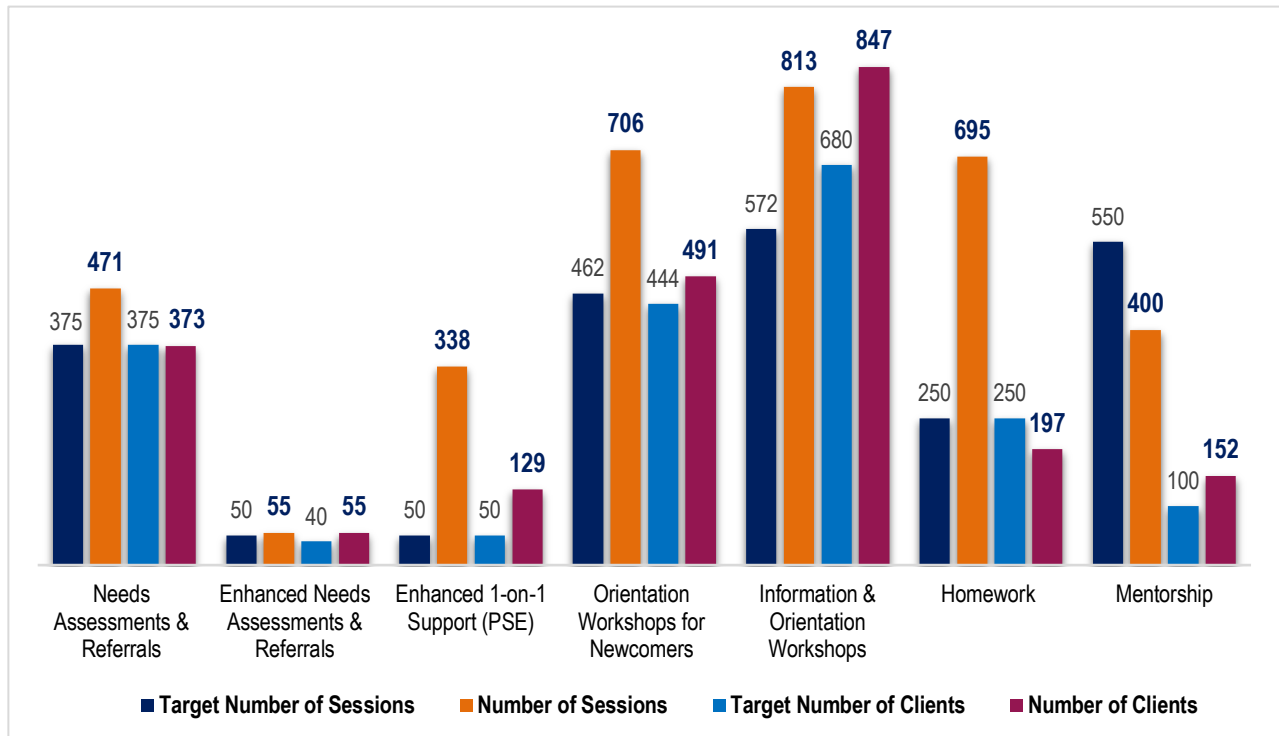
Graph 4: Comparison of number of clients served FYs 2019-20 & 2020-21



Newly arrived Government Assisted and Privately Sponsored Refugee children and youth attending SWIS-In House programming received on-site Orientation Workshops for Newcomers sessions that focused on Education & Employment, Health & Nutrition, Safety & Law, Community & Places, and Pro-Social Skill Development to meet their initial settlement needs and prepare for their transition into the larger Canadian school system. SWIS Off-Site services also assisted children and youth with their initial settlement needs by providing Needs Assessments & Referrals to community resources. Clients identified as having more complex needs and requiring additional support with their settlement and integration into the school system were referred to our Enhanced SWIS services, where they received a more in-depth needs assessment and ongoing 1-on-1 PSE support.

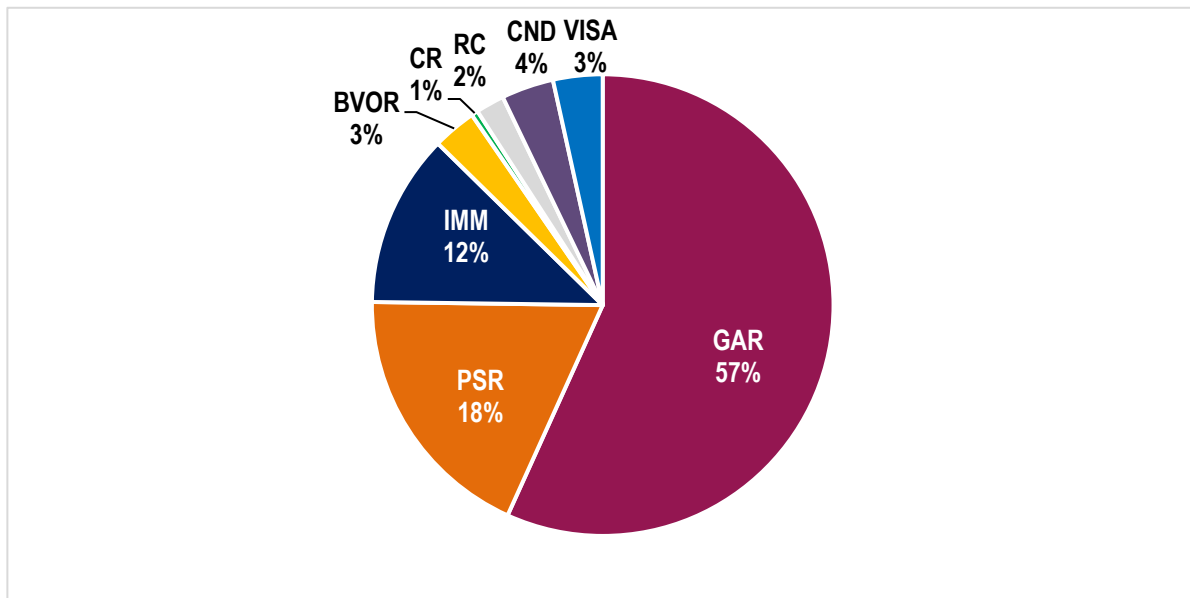
SWIS Critical Hours programming also delivered Orientation Workshops for Newcomers and Information & Orientation sessions to children and youth both on-site at partnering schools or remotely. Group sessions focused on broadening clients' understanding of life in Canada and enhancing their integration into the larger Canadian school system. Clients also had an opportunity to receive remote Homework support through our Remote Homework Club to increase their educational success. Finally, through Mentorship activities, vulnerable refugee children and youth were able to build social connections and increase their sense of belonging to their new community through Tutoring and organized virtual networking sessions with settled Canadians.

Graph 5: SWIS 2020-21 fiscal year outputs



Though we were slightly under target for the number of Homework clients and Mentorship sessions, due to the challenges of connecting remotely with all our clients, we met or exceeded the rest of our SWIS targets this fiscal year.

Graph 6: SWIS Client Types in FY 2020-21



Like previous fiscal years, most clients (75%) accessing SWIS services are Government Assisted and Privately Sponsored Refugee children and youth. However, this fiscal year saw an uptake in the number of non-IRCC eligible clients accessing SWIS services (approx. 150 children and youth), notably remote Homework activities.

Non-Permanent Residents have historically had limited access to resources upon arriving in Winnipeg due to their ineligibility for IRCC-funded services. Through continued funding from the United Way and the Province of Manitoba, for the fourth consecutive year, NEEDS was able to provide SWIS services to Refugee Claimant, VISA, and children and youth who have obtained Canadian Citizenship, but still require settlement services. This funding also enabled us to provide uninterrupted services to 143 children and youth who had expired PR cards.

This fiscal year, NEEDS established a new connection with the Chinese ethno-cultural community who started to refer children and youth in their community to our Agency. Several clients from the Chinese ethno-cultural community began accessing our remote services in extremely high numbers, particularly our Remote Homework Club and evening group activities such as English Language Club that took place over Zoom. Likewise, a higher number of clients who recently obtained Canadian Citizenship accessed our services, primarily to get help with homework, improve their English language skills and access Enhanced SWIS (PSE) supports. This could be due to the heightened educational and socio-emotional needs of clients due to the impacts of COVID-19 and the uncertainty surrounding changing restrictions and remote learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted newcomers in a disproportionate way and increased their need for educational, recreational, and socio-emotional supports across all immigration categories. Since many agencies and programs for children and youth were closed due to the pandemic this left a gap in services that NEEDS was able to fill.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Overview of Activities:



The Employment Program continued to deliver essential employment supports to newcomer and refugee youth (ages 16 – 29) so they can successfully enter the Canadian labour market. Despite the challenges this fiscal year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, one-hundred and thirty-nine (139) youth obtain employment, either through work placements or direct hiring. A notable trend observed this year is the diverse range of job sectors where clients found employment. Typically, our clients are concentrated in job sectors such as retail, restaurant and fast-food. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, NEEDS had to expand its range of job sectors/employers to include community support work, healthcare support work, cleaning, and maintenance.

NEEDS reached out to three-hundred and fifty (350) employers in Winnipeg for the purposes of marketing and recruiting partners to provide work placements, setting up interviews, conducting workplace monitoring visits, and doing check-ins with clients to support their initial transition. Individual employment coaching and support was also provided to help clients prepare for work placements including resume development, job searching support, and interview preparation.

Clients gained Employability Skills Training and Work Placement assistance through sector-specific workshops (grocery and fast-food) and our Youth Employment for Newcomers: Career-Driven Internship Program. Funding from the Province of Manitoba through the Manitoba Adult Language Training Initiative (MALTI) allowed us to continue our Increasing Employment Success for Multi-Barriered Refugee

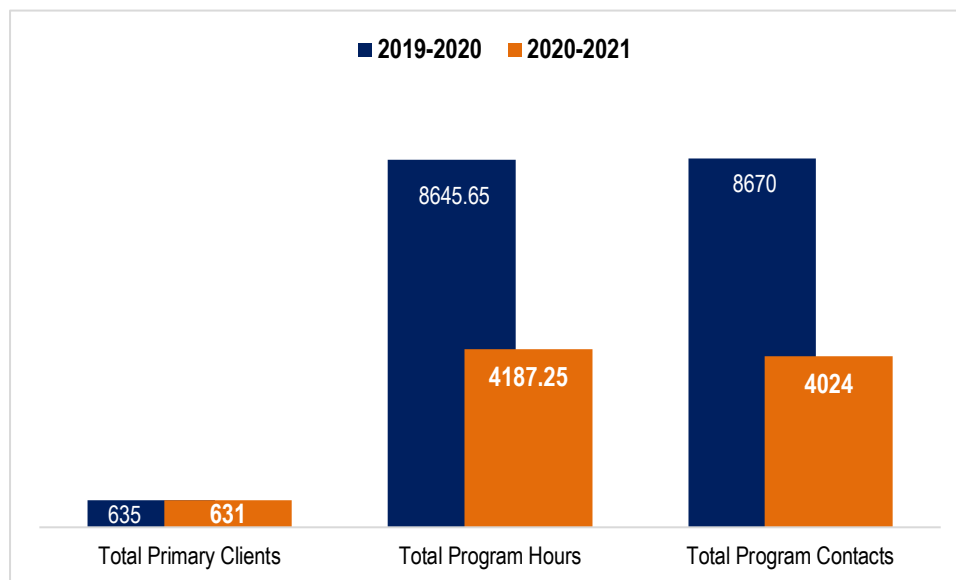
Youth Program for youth with higher psychosocial needs and lower English language. Clients received a PSE Assessment to identify needs, gaps in support, and necessary referrals, and as needed, ongoing Individualized PSE Support sessions to increase their mental wellness and employability.

Table 3 presents the summary statistics of Employment Services for the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

Table 3: Employment statistics for FY 2019-20	
Target Number of Clients	400
Total Number of Primary Clients	631
Total Number of Clients (incl. family members)	639
Total Number of Work Placement Clients	240
Number of Youth Employment for Newcomers Clients	106
Number of English for Employment Clients	103
Number of Individual Employment Coaching Clients	*408
Number of PSE Assessments Completed	65
Number of Psychosocial Support Contacts	462
Number of PSE Hours	339.00
Number of Program Contacts	4024
Number of Program Hours	4187.25
Number of Clients that Obtained Employment	139

**all clients registered in Individual Employment Coaching stream upon registration

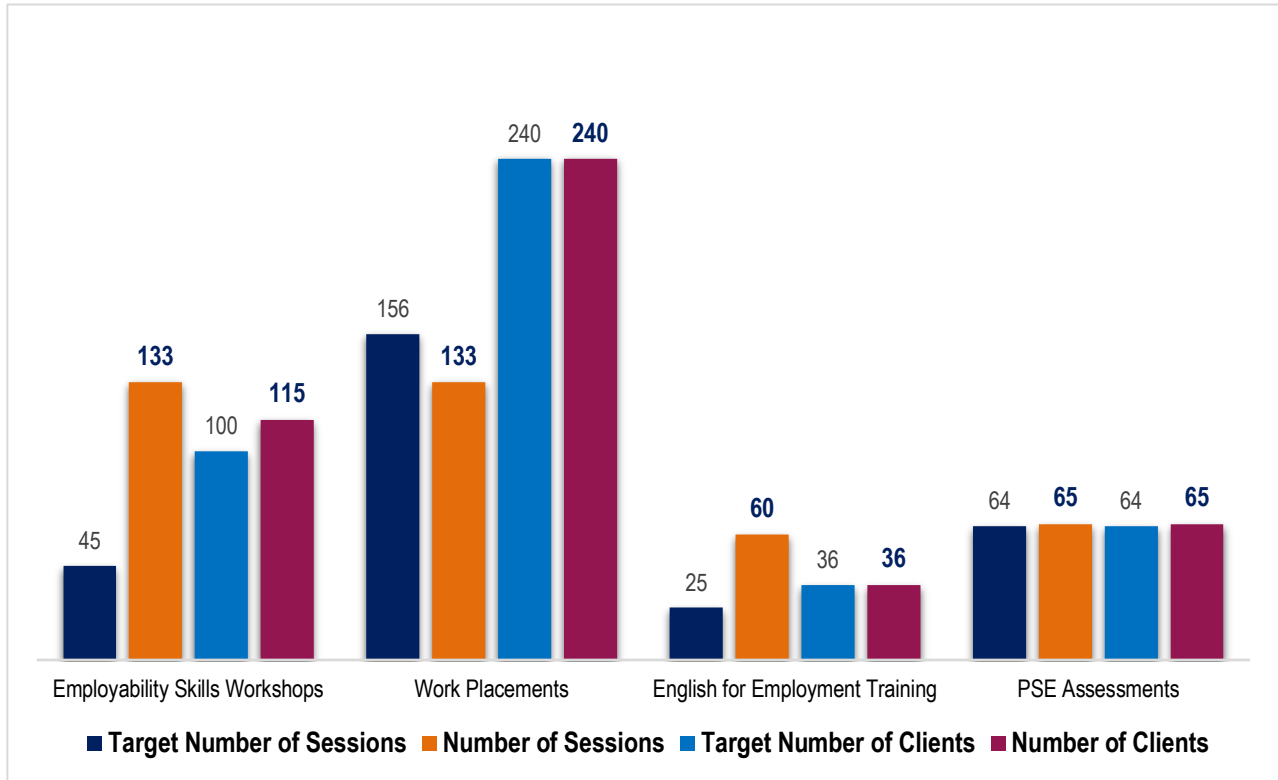
Graph 9: Comparison of ES activities between FYs 2019-20 & 2020-21



While it is evident the program hours have significantly decreased this year compared to last year, this is largely due to the fact that Employment services were delivered to clients almost exclusively online because of COVID-19 restrictions. Also, a result of the pandemic, we were unable to run Employment

workshops on-site at partner schools, where we have been able to expand our reach to larger numbers of clients in previous fiscal years. However, the number of clients who received Employment services remained the same.

Graph 7: Employment 2020-21 fiscal year outputs

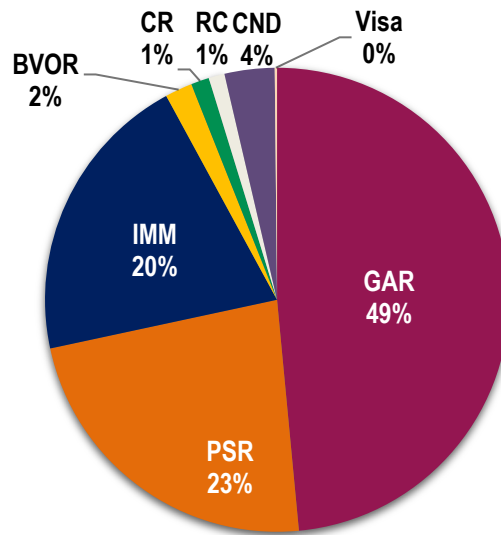


Though we were slightly under target for the number of clients who were placed in Work Placements, due to the economic closures related to the pandemic, we met or exceeded the rest of our Employment targets this fiscal year.

While we normally would have tapped into high hiring seasons such as spring and fall in preparation for seasonal hiring, we have provided clients with the foundational knowledge and skills needed to be employment ready, which has enabled them to independently apply to businesses that have hired our clients in the past. We have also managed to continue to work closely with employer partners such as McDonald’s, Subway and Food Fare, that allow staff to provide remote workplace monitoring and job maintenance support to newly employed youth during their probationary period.

The number of refugee youth accessing Employment services continues to increase. This year, approximately 75% of clients were either Government Assisted or Privately Sponsored Refugees, a large portion who have been identified as having lower English language and literacy skills (Graph 8).

Graph 8: ES Client Types in FY 2020-21



This trend is significant, because to be successful in a work placement, clients are first required to have basic employment skills under their belt including, understanding what accountability looks like in the workplace (punctuality, norms around absenteeism, initiative), time-management (prioritization, efficiency), and understanding Canadian workplace culture (positive work behaviours, norms, rights, and responsibilities of workers).

For newcomer job seekers preparing to enter the labour market, these foundational skills are acquired through targeted and structured pre-employment training that creates a simulated work environment and allows newcomer youth to begin practicing these skills with Employment staff through one-on-one appointments and workshops, and eventually employers. However, for youth to be successful and make a swifter leap to a work placement, it is vital that they have a good handle on their English communication and literacy skills, so they can assimilate the content being delivered and meet the demands of employers.

On the other hand, refugee youth with lower English language and literacy skills are unable to keep up with targeted workplace or sector training as they require tailored, language for employment training that not only helps them build their English communication skills but allows them to acquire the abovementioned pre-employment skills, so they are fully prepared and equipped to enter work placements. The resulting barrier to not having targeted English for Employment training (through programs such as MALTI) is that highly motivated youth are unable to access employment services, because they are not ready to undergo the necessary training to participate in a work placement.

PARTNERSHIPS

N.E.E.D.S. Inc. partnered with many different service providing agencies, educational institutions, mainstream organizations, networks, and community members to provide the best service possible to its clients. Our partnerships with stakeholders such as school divisions, employers, other SPOs, and community organizations continued to play 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 this year.

Networks/Coalitions	Other Immigrant Service Providers
Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO) Inc. Immigration Partnership Winnipeg Youth Agencies Alliance Gang Action Interagency Network Newcomer Education Coalition Canadian Council for Refugees Winnipeg Suicide Prevention Network Ryerson Hub SWIS Coalition PNT Region Wrap Cap	Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (Welcome Place) Accueil Francophone Family Dynamics Aurora Family Therapy Centre Immigrant Centre 7-Oaks Adult Learning Centre
School Divisions	Other Community Service Organizations
Louis Riel School Division Pembina Trails School Division St. James – Assiniboia School Division Winnipeg School Division	Fort Whyte Farms Harvest Manitoba Volunteer Manitoba Youth Employment Services Big Brothers Big Sisters of Winnipeg Electronic Recycling Association
Post-Secondary Institutions	Other Organizations
University of Manitoba University of Winnipeg Université de Saint-Boniface Booth University College Red River College Robertson College MITT	Assiniboine Park Zoo B'nai Brith Canadian Lutheran World Relief Computer for Schools First Book Canada Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals Manitoba Children's Museum Winnipeg Police Services Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Even within the context of a pandemic many employers were still willing to partner by providing 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 cleaning and yard services, food & hospitality, health and disability support work, personal care work, retail, and other service sectors.

Other employers contributed to Holiday Hampers that were donated to high needs clients and their families during the winter holiday season.

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

Employers	Employers Cont.
Best Buy Brock White Construction Food Fare GDI Cleaning (3 location) Injury Clinic KGS Group Once Upon A Child McDonald's (7 locations) Once Upon A Child Pulford Community Living Services	Safeway (3 locations) Scotia Bank Theatre Shawarma Khan Special T Shirt company Starbucks Subway (3 locations) Tarboosh Middle Eastern Specialty Foods & Cuisine The Hive Climbing & Fitness Winnipeg Thrive Thrift Store Winners

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	Provincial Government
Canada Student Summer Jobs Program Canadian Heritage Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada Public Health Agency of Canada	Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration Lighthouses Program Urban Green team
Charitable/Community Organizations	Private Sector
Canadian Red Cross Central Neighbourhoods Winnipeg Harvest Manitoba Spence Neighbourhood Association Winnipeg Foundation United Way	Assiniboine Credit Union Telus Community Board

SUCCESSES/PROMISING PRACTICES

Despite an entire fiscal year in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, NEEDS experienced many successes in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. In addition to achieving most of our program goals and targets, we were able to meet the needs of our clients and help them successfully settle into the community. Specific factors that allowed for these successes included:



Flexible & adaptable programming

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered the way we deliver services to clients. In some instances, where clients have limited access to technology, services have become more restricted. However, in other situations, clients who have sufficient access to technology have had even better access to services. This fiscal year, many newcomer children and youth who live outside of Winnipeg have been referred to our remote services such as Remote Homework Club (RHC) and Group I&O sessions, where they would not have had access prior. Our ability to fill gaps in services and provide support to clients in these areas is directly related to our availability of remote services. Additionally, clients who live in Winnipeg suburbs such as St. Norbert and Charleswood have also had much better access to online services due to limited newcomer supports in these neighbourhoods and longer bus routes from these areas to downtown Winnipeg. Even in a remote environment, many of our programs and services are drop-in (while still structured) which allows for more flexibility for our clients. Services have also been available to clients through a variety of times and delivery methods including online (Zoom, Teams, Google Classroom), by phone, modified in-person (1-on-1, small groups when restrictions eased in the summer), and critical hours such weekends, over the summer months and during winter and spring break.

Transition to delivery of remote services

Technology was the primary vehicle that facilitated clients' access to services this fiscal year during the global pandemic. Software such as Zoom, Teams, and Google Classroom were integral to connecting with clients,

as well as keeping them engaged in online learning. Both SWIS and Employment lessons, activities and curriculum were swiftly modified to fit an online platform. Likewise, applications that were rarely used prior to COVID-19 such as Zoom, Teams, Google Classroom, and email are now used frequently by staff to connect with clients and offer services. Many SWIS clients built up substantial digital literacy skills that they may not have acquired sooner, because of their need to routinely use connectable devices such as computers, tablets, and their cell phones to access services such as Homework and Group Information & Orientation sessions. Likewise, Employment clients also increased their digital literacy and learned new professional skills related to job searching during the pandemic such as online presentation of self, conducting remote job interviews, and communicating with employers through virtual means.

Support from partners

This fiscal year, SWIS received a lot of support from schools and divisional staff regarding the diverse range of supports that we provide to clients within schools. This support allowed SWIS staff to physically enter schools when other community programs were not allowed, which enabled us to provide enhanced educational and settlement supports to clients. NEEDS also expanded its reach of employer partners this fiscal year who provided work experience opportunities to youth. Employer partners represented sectors high in demand such as grocery, disability support work, health support work, cleaning, and maintenance services.

Volunteers & practicum students

Volunteers continue to be vital to the operation of our agency and assist in the delivery of several different services for newcomer children, youth, and families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers were essential to the success of the Remote Homework Club (RHC) and were critical for us to maintain adequate adult-client ratios and keep up with the high number of sessions that were delivered under this activity. RHC successfully utilized an average 5-6 volunteers per evening, which allowed us to provide more support to clients who were seeking assistance with homework assignments and tutoring. Our Mentorship activities would also not be possible without the commitment of dedicated volunteers. If there were no volunteers, there would be no 1-on-1 mentorship to help newcomer youth build positive and lasting friendships with settled Canadians in their new community. Practicum students also contributed to the success of our project by providing higher level support to our programs and assisting in the completion of intakes and needs assessments. This allowed our staff team to focus on delivering other aspects of the project, including supporting multi-barriered/high risk youth.

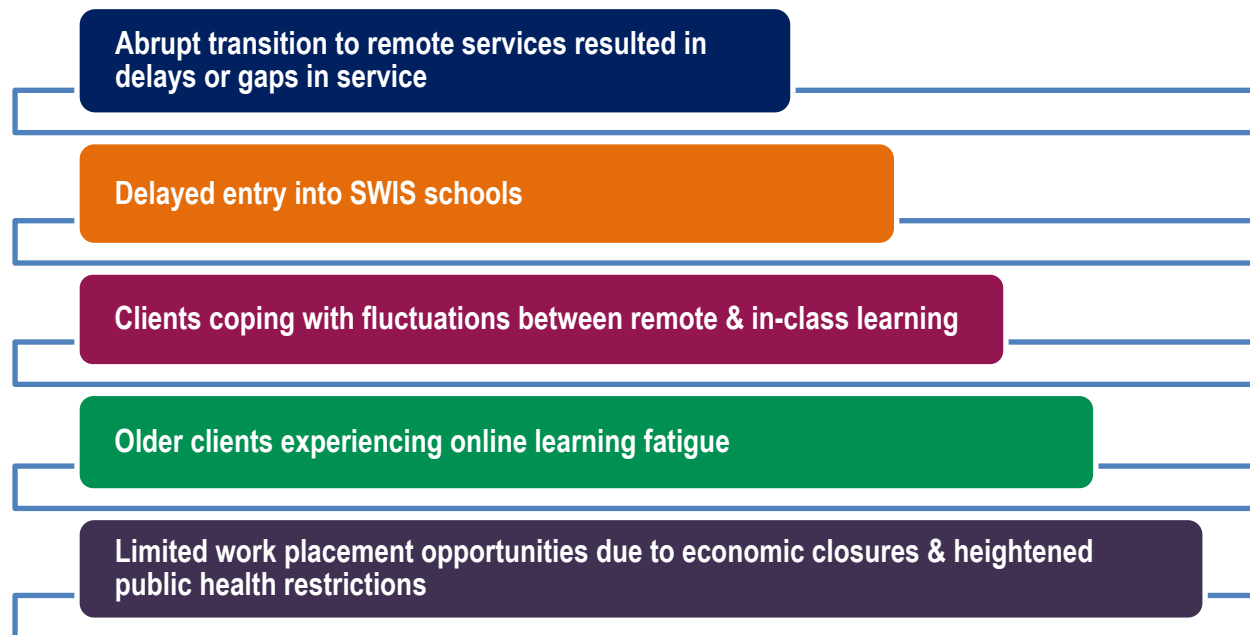
Staff

Staffing resources were crucial to the overall success and function of our agency this fiscal year. Despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing resources allowed us to provide services and supports to 2,693 clients. Staff were also able to enhance their digital literacy, and explore new skill sets such as creating remote friendly program resources, workshops, activities, and building meaningful connections with clients remotely. As a team, we developed and delivered both in-person and remote programming that met the goals and objectives of our agency and contribution agreement.

CHALLENGES & ADAPTATIONS

Most challenges encountered this fiscal year continue 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 and the delivery of SWIS and Employment services in the 2020-2021 fiscal year.



Abrupt transition to remote services resulted in delays or gaps in service

While we had lot of success delivery remote services, access to devices (cellphones, tablets, or computers) and/or the Internet came up as a major challenge for several clients and families we work with. Not only did this preclude their ability to access SWIS and Employment services in a timely manner, but it also resulted in major barriers to these clients being able to complete their school assignments remotely. In other instances, large families often shared a single device (sometimes a single cell phone) among the entire household, and parents/guardians and older family members would have priority so they could access essential government resources such as CERB or EIA. To address this, NEEDS continues to assess clients' access to the Internet, devices, and applications, so staff can more easily identify how to support clients. Where clients lack laptops, computers and other devices, staff made referrals to school divisions and other organizations that can either donate or loan these devices to clients and families.

Delayed entry into SWIS schools

The COVID-19 public health crisis delayed the entry of SWIS workers into partnering schools. Due to the extensive policies and protocols schools and school divisions had to enact to return students to class in the

fall, Off-Site SWIS activities were delayed almost two months. This delay prevented some higher needs clients from accessing and benefiting from our services sooner, because the physical presence of SWIS staff within schools serves a great benefit in terms of contacting clients and promoting our services and activities. The physical presence of SWIS staff within schools also enables staff to start building the rapport necessary to connect clients to our services and activities. Staff looked for alternate ways to engage SWIS clients virtually while awaiting entry into schools by creating an online educational program via Zoom, where breakout rooms were used to run a series of orientation sessions, Mon-Thurs evenings. Clients were able to attend programs that best suited their needs and interests. This approach worked, as several clients were still able to receive SWIS services while staff awaited to be placed in-person at schools.

Clients coping with fluctuations between remote and in-class learning

Structure, routine, and consistency are essential elements for clients learning to integrate into the Canadian school system, especially those who have experienced trauma. Many clients, particularly older clients who transitioned back and forth between in-class and remote learning schedules, struggled with attendance. This constant change in routine resulted in several clients being absent from class on the days that they were scheduled for in-person learning. To address this challenge, SWIS staff worked in partnership with school administration and acted as a liaison between the schools and clients' families to provide further clarification of the rotation and the importance of in-person learning for their child(ren).

Older clients experiencing online learning fatigue

A decrease in the level of engagement in virtual SWIS critical hours programming was observed. This is because many older clients' days are spent online for remote learning purposes for school. After spending several hours during the day engaging in remote learning, clients have indicated that it is difficult for them to participate in additional online learning sessions in the evening. Online learning fatigue is something felt and expressed to staff by clients. In the early stages of the pandemic, older clients were more eager and enthusiastic to make connections with their peers and classmates through video-conferencing apps such as Zoom, because of the abrupt school closures and resulting sense of isolation. To address this in the interim, staff proactively contacted clients to remind them of activities, inquire about what clients would like to focus on to garner their interest, and use NEEDS' social media to advertise sessions. However, as virtual communication has become a part of clients' daily educational and extra-curricular routine, staff will have to continue to strategize ways to keep older clients engaged, until pandemic restrictions ease and more hybrid forms of learning (mix of in-person and remote) can take place.

Limited work placement opportunities due to economic closures and heightened public health restrictions

Most of our clients concentrate in service sector jobs (such as retail and restaurant) which have been most significantly impacted by the public health closures. Employers have voiced that the heightened COVID-19 restrictions have greatly affected the stability of the current workforce, and the ability for them to consider new interns or even job applicants, is tenuous or simply not possible. Many employers who are still able to be open in a limited capacity are struggling to keep existing staff on their payroll, and even essential employers who are open for business, are focused on managing the safety and well-being of their current staff. Consequently, many internships that were set-up for clients were abruptly cancelled, as employers scrambled



to adapt to the new restrictions. Liability, training, and mentoring shortages have been the largest barrier to clients entering work placements this fiscal year. To address this, Employment staff are focused on employment preparation training, so youth are in a better position to be competitive once the economy re-opens. Employer Liaisons have been forging partnerships with employers in other sectors such as community support work and daycare, as well as referring youth to our past partners in the grocery sector (Safeway and Food Fare) and fast-food (Subway and McDonald's) for direct hiring.

CONCLUSION

This fiscal year saw the continued growth of our agency, staff team and programming. Although we experienced several challenges, including those unprecedented challenges related to the COVID-19 public health crisis, we remained committed to meet our desired outcomes and provide relevant and appropriate settlement and integration services to our clients. Whenever needed, we took necessary measures and adopted appropriate strategies to program delivery and ensure that the needs of clients are properly addressed and met.

SWIS received glowing feedback from our divisional contact in the St. James-Assiniboia School Division who stated that during her cross-divisional meetings, NEEDS center always came up as a positive highlight and that all school divisions have found NEEDS to be the “difference maker” for many of their students; they are thrilled to have SWIS staff supporting clients, and filling in gaps that arose during the pandemic. McDonald’s was also a strong partner this year, who provided numerous employment opportunities to our clients accessing Employment services. Not only did McDonald’s take the time to mentor and coach youth doing work placements so they can be successful, but they have also prioritized the training of their staff to prepare for and properly train our clients. McDonald’s has shared that our clients who enter work placements at their restaurant have been among the strongest and most dedicated employees they have trained, and they appreciate the work NEEDS puts into helping develop strong future leaders at their restaurants.

Despite an entire fiscal year in the COVID-19 pandemic, overall, we were able to meet our desired outcomes and provide relevant and appropriate settlement and integration services to over 2,000 newcomer children, youth, and families.