

A blue-tinted photograph of the Toronto skyline, featuring the CN Tower and various skyscrapers, viewed from across the water. The image is partially framed by a large dark blue circle.

SOMALI IMMIGRANT AID ORGANIZATION

ANNUAL REPORT



2019 - 2020

CHAIR MESSAGE



This year, we have had success addressing many of the challenges facing refugees and newcomer immigrants which include barriers to family reunification, delays in

processing private sponsorship refugees, the refugee determination system, people without status, newcomers' access to services, and racism. Many of the successes achieved this year are due to the countless individuals who have come together to work to find solutions to help serve our client community, especially during these unprecedented times.

Over the past 35 years, the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization has succeeded in delivering settlement and integration services to newcomer communities in Toronto. We have successfully engaged our clients, volunteers, governments, communities, businesses, academia, and donors in meaningful ways. This year we have increased our organizational capacity by providing governance training to our Board Members and senior staff, reviewed our policies, increased outreach efforts and expanded our programs and services. We have also established new collaborations, networked and made partnerships with both public and ethno-cultural organizations in the city.

While many developments have been made, there are still a number of challenges facing the community and the clients we represent. One of the main challenges this year was learning how to provide our clients with the best service at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent regulations. We continued to help our clients through shifting from in-person services to online platforms to continue our work. Other challenges we faced was the increase in youth violence and homelessness in Northwest Toronto, areas where a large population of refugees and immigrants are located. We are partnering with other organizations and the City of Toronto

to overcome these challenges, but the lack of resources continues to impede our progress.

Our team has consistently made strides to continue being a leader in advocating for, and supporting newcomers to access much needed resources. We work to ensure that all service users, regardless of race, gender, color, country of origin, or length of residence in Canada have equal access to social services, education, employment, skills training and other relevant programs.

Furthermore, we continue to support our clients through providing individualized programs that are designed to meet the personal goal of the individual client. SIAO is further divided into four service areas to meet the needs of the community; Settlement Services, community Development Services, Community Economic Development and Organization Support and Services. These programs include: Settlement Counseling, Pre-Employment, Mental Health, Language Training and Literacy classes, Advocacy, Information and Referral, and interpretation services to clients.

This year's accomplishments would not have been possible without the commitment, hard work, and outstanding governance of our Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, and student interns. We want to thank each person as well as acknowledge all of our partners, sponsors and funders who have supported the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization in serving the immigrant and refugee population. We would like to give special thanks to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Public Health Agency of Canada, Service Canada, the City of Toronto, Child-minding Monitoring, Advisory and Support (CMAS), the Macaulay Child Development Centre, York University, Humber College, Seneca College, and Midaynta Community Services.

Thank you,

Ariij Sharif
Chair

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE



I am happy to report that the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization has succeeded in delivering settlement and integration services to newcomer communities

in Toronto over the past year. We have successfully engaged our clients, volunteers, governments, communities, businesses, academia and donors in meaningful ways. We have increased our outreach efforts, expanded our programs and services, established new collaborations, networked and made partnerships with both public and ethno-cultural organizations in Canada.

Somali Immigrant Aid Organization is committed to building lively newcomer communities in which social and economic development are central to all aspects of individual and family life. Our primary objective is to improve communication, settlement, integration in Canada, and provide access to settlement resources for newcomers by delivering culturally sensitive services responsive to their needs.

Despite the fact that many developments have been made, there are still a number of challenges facing our clients and the community we serve. One of the main challenges this year was learning how to provide our clients with the best service at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent regulations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further isolated our already vulnerable newcomer community, and it has made it difficult to reach and support our most high-need clients. Many challenges seemed to arise in their day-to-day life, feelings of confusion and distress arose when navigating their way through finding settlement and immigration support during these unprecedented times. Most clients reported that they were uncertain of the requirements and options needed to find support and services through the IRCC. Some other issues also included their financial status due to unemployment,

food security, racism, safety issues due to the increase in youth gun violence in Northwest Toronto, accessibility to health care as well as additional mental health related issues compounding the stress of worrying about their family members overseas. The relocation of immigrants and refugees to neighborhoods with high levels of youth gun violence has had a negative impact on the mental health of these individuals. In order to combat these issues, SIAO continued to help our clients through shifting from in-person services to online platforms to continue our work, which was possible due to the years of experience we have dealing with this community.

Our team has consistently made strides to continue being a leader in advocating for, and supporting newcomers to access much needed resources. We work to ensure that all service users, regardless of race, gender, color, country of origin, or length of residence in Canada have equal access to social services, education, employment, skills training and other relevant programs.

This year's accomplishments would not have been possible without the commitment, hard work, and outstanding support from our Board of Directors, staff, student interns, and volunteers. We want to thank each person as well as acknowledge all of our partners, sponsors and funders who have supported the Somali Immigrant Aid Organization in serving the immigrant and refugee population. We would like to give special thanks to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Public Health Agency of Canada, Service Canada, the City of Toronto, Child-minding Monitoring, Advisory and Support (CMAS), the Macaulay Child Development Centre, York University, Humber College, Seneca College, and Midaynta Community Services.

Thank you,

Mahad Yusuf
Executive Director

SETTLEMENT

Somali Immigrant Aid Organization provides a lifeline of needed services for newcomer communities in the Greater Toronto Area. The Settlement program is designed to assist immigrant and refugees in overcoming barriers specific to their needs, so that they can participate in social, cultural, civic and economic life in Canada. The services strive to serve immigrants and refugees with information required to make informed decisions, language skills adequate to their settlement and integration goals and the support they need to build networks with their new communities.

SETTLEMENT WORKSHOPS:

- Introduction to Canada
- Rights & Freedoms
- Housing
- Education
- Health Services
- Financial Literacy
- Legal Services



OUTCOMES

- Appropriate information on services to address settlement needs
- Referrals to community resources
- Effective tools to build life skills

SUCCESS

- Positive adjustments to Canadian Life
- Opportunity to learn and practice English language skills
- Cultural interactions & engagement with people from diverse backgrounds
- Increased service enrollment

Needs
Assessment

975
Clients Served

Information
&
Orientation

2450
Clients Served

YOUTH SETTLEMENT

SIAO'S newcomer youth program supports youth aged 15-24 years old. Services are tailored to assist newcomer youth with their settlement and integration process in Canada. Through this program, youth gain life skills, academic guidance, one-on-one counseling and youth centered activities that are interactive and culturally sensitive in a safe space.

Similar to the Settlement program, the youth are provided Orientation on supports, skills and training they need during their settlement process. Staff facilitate a detailed Needs Assessment to account for their specific needs and experiences. The findings are the basis for developing an action plan to better provide information, resources and knowledge to help them adept, settle, and integrate into Canadian life successfully.



HIGHLIGHT

The Youth Settlement Program along with the Mental Health Program hosted a series of conversation circles called "Shaax iyo Sheeko". Participants discussed various topics in an informal setting. They connected with one another on common experiences in Canada and back home. Conversations were held in both English and their native language.

They all identified feeling isolated upon their first year of arrival to Canada. They expressed the importance of community and building friendships. Many stating that SIAO has been impactful in addressing their sense of isolation as many of the friendships formed are as a result of programs and services at SIAO. Participants emphasized the lack of understanding of pre-migration trauma and the impact it had on their mental health.

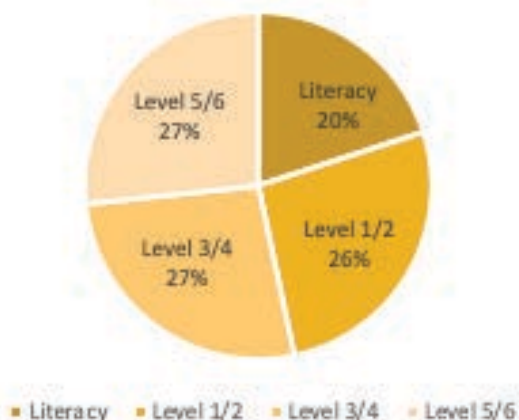
The exchange of dialogue between staff and participants displayed the necessity of creating a Newcomer Advisory Group. This group in collaboration with SIAO staff would be responsible in ensuring the newcomer perspective is visible in the service delivery and program implementation process.

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR NEWCOMERS (LINC)

LINC is an appropriate programming with a curriculum-based approach focused on providing comprehensive language and skills learning opportunities for newcomers in the Northwest area of Toronto, in a setting which facilitates quick integration into this long-time newcomer community. Besides teaching Language, LINC is the vehicle for cultural and social cohesion and is essential to gaining employment.



Enrollment
(Ongoing)



HIGHLIGHTS

- Delivered English language training oriented to newcomers needs with curriculum-based approach for LINC levels 1 to 6 and one full time literacy class.
- Continuous intake and provided 3,880 hours of language and 70 students monthly.
- Maintained a monthly class attendance of 70%.
- Provided course content on Canadian services, systems, life, and culture.
- Evaluated student progress.

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR NEWCOMERS (LINC)

Clients have the official language skills needed to function in Canadian society. English language training was provided from Literacy to CLB 6 through classroom settings. The majority of clients passed three levels of language over the course of the project. The students had opportunities to learn about Canada and the Canadian way of life; the outcomes of these activities were as follows:

- The students learned and practiced English language skills, including Canadian dialect, expressions, etc.
- Students interacted with people from different cultures; the relationships/friendships with and social support from fellow LINC students who faced common challenges in adjusting to life in Canada.
- Newcomers felt much more isolated without this support; language is an essential means to gain employment. Therefore, some of our students have improved their language skills and received Pre-Employment Training on how to prepare résumés, interview techniques and finally they successfully were able to get jobs in the labour market.
- The cultural diversity of the students at our program have expanded, increased in the enrolment rate, and overall improvements in attendance.
- Our students learned about life in Canada, including laws, rights, responsibilities and how to access community resources. Through the language classes our students learned about Canada especially about Canadian geography, government, and history. Through the Canadian Theme, learners learned about becoming a Canadian Citizen. They learned about the Canadian charter of rights and freedoms, they learned about laws in Canada, they learned about their rights and responsibilities.
- Our clients learned what resources are available to them and how to access them. At the library they learned about what types of services the library offers in their community. This was the one of the community resources which was available and accessible to them for free for the entire family. Our clients have the life skills needed to function in Canadian society.
- Through language training the clients are able to learn the vocabulary and language necessary to do everyday tasks such as going grocery shopping, shopping for clothing, going to the doctor, renting an apartment, paying the rent, dealing with housing problems, banking, using the telephone, customs and social behaviour, understanding Canadian law (such as employment laws, landlord laws, and tenant laws), and learn about the community resources which are available to them in Canada.

CARE FOR NEWCOMER CHILDREN

The Care for Newcomer Children (CNC) program focuses on helping children see exciting new possibilities around them as they grow and experience life. The staff assesses children's developmental needs and design a curriculum to address children's needs, stages of development and interests. Staff plan programs and environments for play and activities that help children make developmental progress. We provide children with consistent routines and unlimited learning opportunities, and provide parents with the security of knowing their child is in a safe and nurturing environment while they learn. We help prepare children own their course and use our time together to create the building blocks of learning. Our team is dedicated in designing stimulating programs to provide a safe and happy environment to bring out the best in every child.

We have a strong emphasis on creative programming that keeps children in any level engaged. Programs are divided into age groups: infants, toddlers & preschoolers. All activities allow each child to have a grasp on their critical thinking, problem solving and self-awareness skills. Programs are developed with the focus on five key areas of development:



Another aspect is creating healthy living options both children and parents. Nutrition plays a critical role in a child's development. Adequate nutrition is necessary for normal brain development and thus, the CNC programs ensures that children are given fresh, balanced, nutritious meals that adhere to Canada's Daily Food Guide. Parents are also given information on healthy meal options for their children that are cost efficient.

Our CNC facilities offer a welcoming environment, fully equipped with learning materials, toys, washroom and kitchen area. The CNC program was in full compliance with the National CNC requirements, and is monitored by Child-Minding Monitoring, Advisory & Supports (CMAS).



HEALTH & NUTRITION

Health Promotion and Nutrition Program at SIAO has a partnership with Program Without Walls (PWW). PWW is a coalition of six agencies working together to support the health and development of children aged birth to 6 years in the former city of York. Programs are funded through the Community Action Program For Children (CAPC) under the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The SIAO Community Nutrition Programs assist the community in implementing a variety of information sessions on nutrition, cooking, budgeting, etc. The project also coordinates with community parents, volunteers and staff of other programs within PWW. It also provides support and referral services to families living in high-risk situation. In addition to that, it educates and assists parents in performing duties such as food handling, preparing, portioning and storing as well as introducing entire families to the Canada Food Guide and the importance of healthy eating and physical activities.

Participants gain a better understanding of healthy child development and the importance of nutrition. Lastly, our students, clients, and staff have all benefited from topics covered in the workshops below:

- **Diabetes**
- **Stroke**
- **Managing High Blood Pressure**
- **Child Nutrition**
- **Heart Health**

Delivering community-based nutrition education programs to help newcomers and immigrants make informed choices about food and lifestyles throughout the year.



MENTAL HEALTH

Newcomers to Canada struggle from a multitude of issues. Indeed, newcomers not only have to contend with leaving their families in their home countries behind, but they also have to struggle to fit into their new environments. More and more mental health supports are required for vulnerable newcomer groups such as Somali immigrants, given their preexisting trauma as well as the additional stress that reallocation creates. For instances, newcomers may not have a good grasp of the English language, they may not have any savings, and they likely do not know anyone here. Moreover, they are unlikely to be able to locate affordable and safe housing, they often feel isolated from their culture and traditions, and they are also more likely to experience violence and crime.

Therefore, the immigrants' experience is guided by a plethora of stressful factors, which can further impact their mental health. Indeed, it is a cycle which is very hard to break through. Therefore, given the fact that newcomers likely already have mental health

struggles due to their experiences in their home countries, and coupled with the immigration process in the new country, it is imperative to provide for increased support services such as one-on-one and group mental health counselling sessions.

Much of the work that SIAO does is centered around providing one-on-one and group counselling sessions with newcomer youth. These groups are highly vulnerable and these sessions are absolutely critical to making them feel as if they have some form of support in the new country. Indeed, the sessions help people see the strength that they have, and they help them become more confident in their new lives. Moreover, it provides a focal point of support for them in this new landscape. They feel like they have someone to turn to, and this is absolutely critical as many newcomers are here all alone. These sessions are critical to arming newcomers with tools for their immigration.



PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING

The Pre-Employment Training Program, which began in 2018, includes a series of workshops and sessions held weekly. Each client received valuable information and learning possibilities to help them find employment in the shortest amount of time. The program offered Information, Referral and resources to employment. We collaborated with Career Foundations, Tropicana and COSTI to connect newcomer youth to the Youth Job Connections program.

This program is not designed with the framework of only finding jobs, but rather making transformational changes to ensure a broad range of training/support to include housing, financial stability, and emotional wellness. The overall goal is to combat the reduction of barriers newcomers face when it comes to employment. Our focus is also surrounded around continuing education and daily life skills to achieve the development of independent living skills. Clients work on strengthening their commitment to change the path they are on to achieve their goals in Canada.

In expanding and diversifying methods of the Pre-Employment program we built a connection with Weston Collegiate Institute by connecting with the school Guidance Counselor to further build relationships in the community. SIAO tabled at Weston C.I on two occasions during their Parent Teacher Night to promote program and services to connect with parents, teachers and students.

In March 2020, youth attended a Mindfulness + Money event with over 500+ students from across Ontario where they learned tools to enhance financial literacy and economic awareness, while promoting positive behaviour change for young leaders. They focused on:

- The interconnection between emotional and financial wellbeing
- The neuroscience of decision making
- Sustainable economics
- Mindfulness tools & fundamental money skills
- Understanding big data, social innovation and financial technology

In the coming year the Pre-Employment program is focused on two key areas that will strengthen service delivery and better serve clients. First is growing a broader partnership network as well as strategic community relationships.

Secondly, advancing the economic contribution of immigrants and incorporating an Economic Development component to this program. Recognizing that immigrants have long shaped and reshaped the City of Toronto from new businesses opened up by immigrant entrepreneurs, to new ideas and diverse experience in contributing to the source of prosperity, it is important to focus on equipping newcomers with entrepreneurial tools.

YOUTH CONNECTIONS

In keeping mind SIAO's aims & objectives of establishing employment training skills, one key target was employing young people to advance in job training and development. A Youth Mentorship framework in connection with employment, fostered enhanced work experience for 30+ youth who were hired through initiatives such as; Canada Summer Jobs, and the Youth Jobs Connections program through Career Foundations, Tropicana and COSTI. Youth were expected to detail an individualized plan in areas of improvement or development in which they aspired to advance in.

SIAO encourages our youth to put forward creative, fresh and innovative ideas to broaden service delivery to newcomer clients. They showcased their digital savviness and expertise by engaging clients to look beyond the norms of learning and navigating the web to staying informed. Youth employees also gained in an exchange for cultural dialogue with clients. This two-way method information exchange allowed for a cultural understanding between groups.

Summer youth employees also participated in the Annual Somali Festivities by partaking in soccer events held at Weston Lions and Centennial Park. They provided assistance to coaches and participants, organizing schedules, outreaching, fundraising and engaging with fellow peers. Students on the Events Committees organized both the 2019 Flag Raising Day at Queen's Park and the 60th Union & Independence Day of Somali/ Eid-Al-Fitr celebrations.

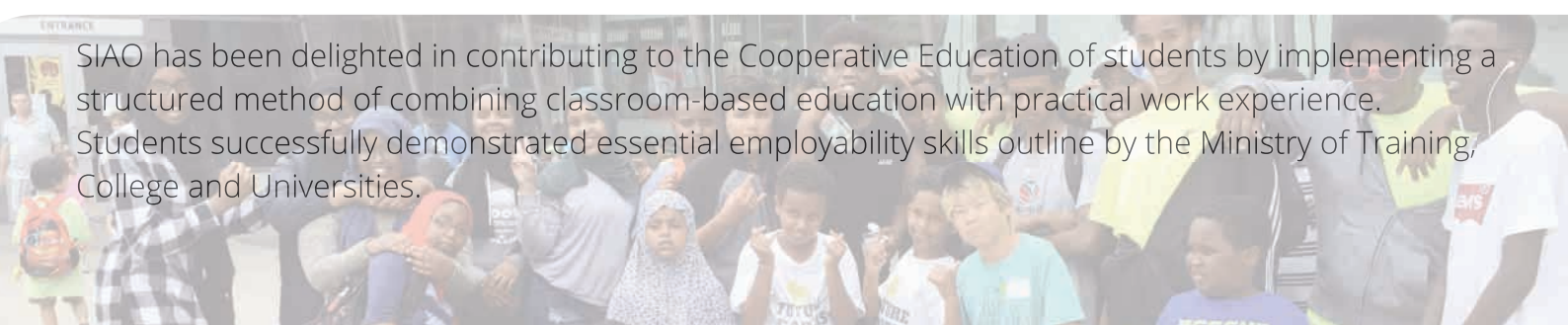
The organizations mentorship objectives for youth employees include:

- Developing and fostering increased learning and development opportunities by encouraging and supporting them to contribute, steer initiatives and lead their own youth-led projects
- Building strong relationship with youth and community serving agencies, thereby further increasing the capacity of the youth to build on their skills and aptitudes for their own personal advancement and communities long term success and development
- Generate a sense of responsibility and ownership in the involvement of their communities

Placement Students

SIAO's collaboration with Seneca College has allowed for 8 Field Placement Students in the Social Work program to develop on the job training support. This year we were also approached by a Guidance Counselor at a Secondary school to support their Cooperative Education Program by offering a high school student to earn credits through the completion of a semester of work placement opportunity. The students were assigned to a Settlement Worker, Mental Health Counselor and Pre-Employment counselor.

SIAO has been delighted in contributing to the Cooperative Education of students by implementing a structured method of combining classroom-based education with practical work experience. Students successfully demonstrated essential employability skills outline by the Ministry of Training, College and Universities.



TESTIMONIALS

“The presentation about employment strategies was very helpful for us. I learned a little bit about volunteer job. It was an interesting topic. I think getting a volunteer job it will help me to get experience while I find a good job. Furthermore, I can interact with other people to improve my speaking skills. Anyway, this can help me to achieve a lot of things.

- Olga

“I came to Somali Immigrant Aid Organization for LINC school, but I also got help with my families Permanent Residence application. I am very happy I found this organization.”

- Farhia Mohammed Ali

“The Settlement staff at SIAO is very helpful. I have been coming to this office for the past five years. They are very experienced individuals.”

- Fathiya Ibrahim

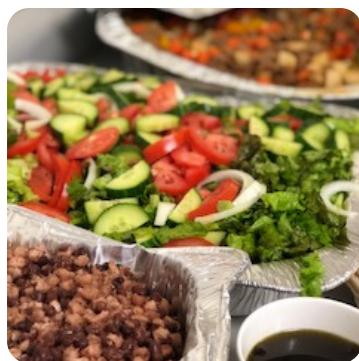
“Thank you very much for your presentation. I really like how you explain how to get jobs & volunteers, you did a great job yesterday and hope everyone get advantage of it.”

- Maxamed Gure

“The Nutrition Program has been a tremendous help in providing the information I needed to improve the health of my family. I am glad that I had the opportunity to volunteer at the nutrition Program last year. I would definitely recommend to my friends to join this wonderful and informative program about healthy eating and physical activities. I would like to thank the staff, particularly the program Coordinator, Habon Farah.”

- Luula. A (Volunteer)

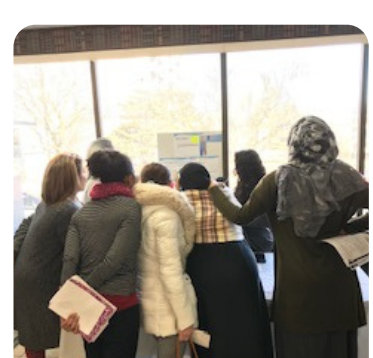
GALLERY



GALLERY



GALLERY



GALLERY



GALLERY



SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Somali ImmigrantAid Organization would like to graciously thank the funders, partners, local businesses, volunteers, staff and larger community for the support of our programs and services this year. Your continuous support and outstanding contributions received have allowed us to deliver needed care to our newcomer community.

Board of Directors

Arij Sharifabow- Chair
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Abbas Jama- Director
Mariam Abud Mohamed- Director
Ebyan Hassan- Director
Duale Hussein- Director
Zahra Abukar- Director
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SIAO STAFF

Mahad Yusuf- Executive Director
Osman Duale-LINC Coordinator
Tariq Mohamoud- Bookkeeper
Nafisa Hussein- Intake Worker
Christine Wiseman- LINC Instructor
Samya Radwan- LINC Instructor
Elizabeth Eiras-Vieira- LINC Instructor
Lina Al-Tabbaa- LINC Instructor
Maritza Martins- CNC Supervisor
Althia Skyers- CNC
Asha Tolba- CNC
Muna Moallim- CNC
Habon Farah- Health Promotion Coordinator
Jamila Jimale- Settlement Intake Worker
Ilham Bana- Settlement
Amina Salad- Settlement
Hodon Farah- Youth Settlement
Afnan Salim-Mental Health
Yasmin Yusuf- Mental Health
Faduma Abdulle- Pre- Employment

Partners

Child-minding Monitoring Advisory & Support (CMAS)
The Macaulay Child Development Centre
Midaynta Community Services
Tropicana Community Services
COSTI
Career Foundations
York University
Seneca College
George Brown
Humber College
Northwood Neighbourhood Services

Funded by:



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Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
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