

CENTRE FOR CIVIC RELIGIOUS LITERACY
LE CENTRE DE LITTÉRATIE RELIGIEUSE CIVIQUE

Annual Report

2024



Message from our Board Chair



As you read the 2024 Annual Report, it becomes clear that CCRL has had a flourishing year. There are exciting projects underway, and a few have been brought to completion. Special thanks go to our Executive Director Alice Chan for all her hard work, dedication, and leadership in moving its endeavours forward.

While many of us experience rich blessings in Canada, it is not the same for everyone here or in other places in the world. The year 2024 was again marked with racism, violence, division, and conflict in many places, a good deal of which results from a lack of civil discourse and in turn a lack of civic religious and worldview literacy. These need to be reversed to achieve peace and justice at home and abroad and CCRL works toward that end, in uniquely linking education and justice.

As an organization we approved at the 2023 AGM a new CCRL Governance Framework with its various committees to streamline the work of the Board. Board members serve on these committees, and committee work is now being done between Board meetings. CCRL continues to benefit from a breadth and depth of insight from its Board members who have expertise in a variety of areas, academic and otherwise. CCRL also continues to partner with, is supported by, and has membership in a wide range of organizations.

Our dedicated team has been involved in unique projects, some of which ended earlier in the year, but others that are ongoing, such as the Civic Literacy Youth Network (CLYN) and “Spirituality among individuals with cognitive and developmental disabilities” projects. These projects are often done with project partners, whom we appreciate greatly.

My deep thanks go to our advisors, donors, CCRL team members and CCRL Board members for all their work this past year. I look forward with great anticipation to a new year that lies before us, as we embark on civic religious and worldview literacy projects that promote peace and understanding.

Dr. John Valk

Message from our Executive Director



In 2024, we mimicked three notable Canadian animals – the beaver, prairie hare, and arctic wolf. Like beavers, we diligently focused on concluding four projects in a strong, sturdy, and clear fashion. Like prairie hares, we acutely listened and adapted to new terrain in our project on the intersection of spirituality and intellectual and developmental disabilities. Like arctic wolves, we worked keenly with partners to complete our projects but also to explore ways to further some of them. It has been another full year. I expect 2025 to be even more robust.

Polarization linked to wars, the climate crisis, and more persist, as does the need for reconciliation. Addressing these challenges as they relate to religious literacy is clear. Our project evaluations and conversations indicate that dialogue about these matters is much needed, but the knowledge, skills, words, and lenses to approach such complex realities are lacking.

Despite these challenges, hope remains.

In October, in a visit to Italy, I learned that the construction of the Duomo di Milano began in 1386 with a vision but few resources. Some of the technology needed to complete the building had not even been invented. Yet, the people began with a vision and continued to build for 600 years. Some say the current structure was completed in 1965. Others say that it is a living entity, where each restoration creates a new iteration. Persistence brings much hope, as it does also for our CCRL mission and vision, and what 2025 may bring.

Supporting individuals and groups to live, work, and engage better together is not easy, especially when it relates to a “taboo” topic or a part of life that is often publicly ignored or excluded. However, knowledgeable, practical, strategic, human-centred, and locally relevant approaches, informed by local voices, can bring us there – together.

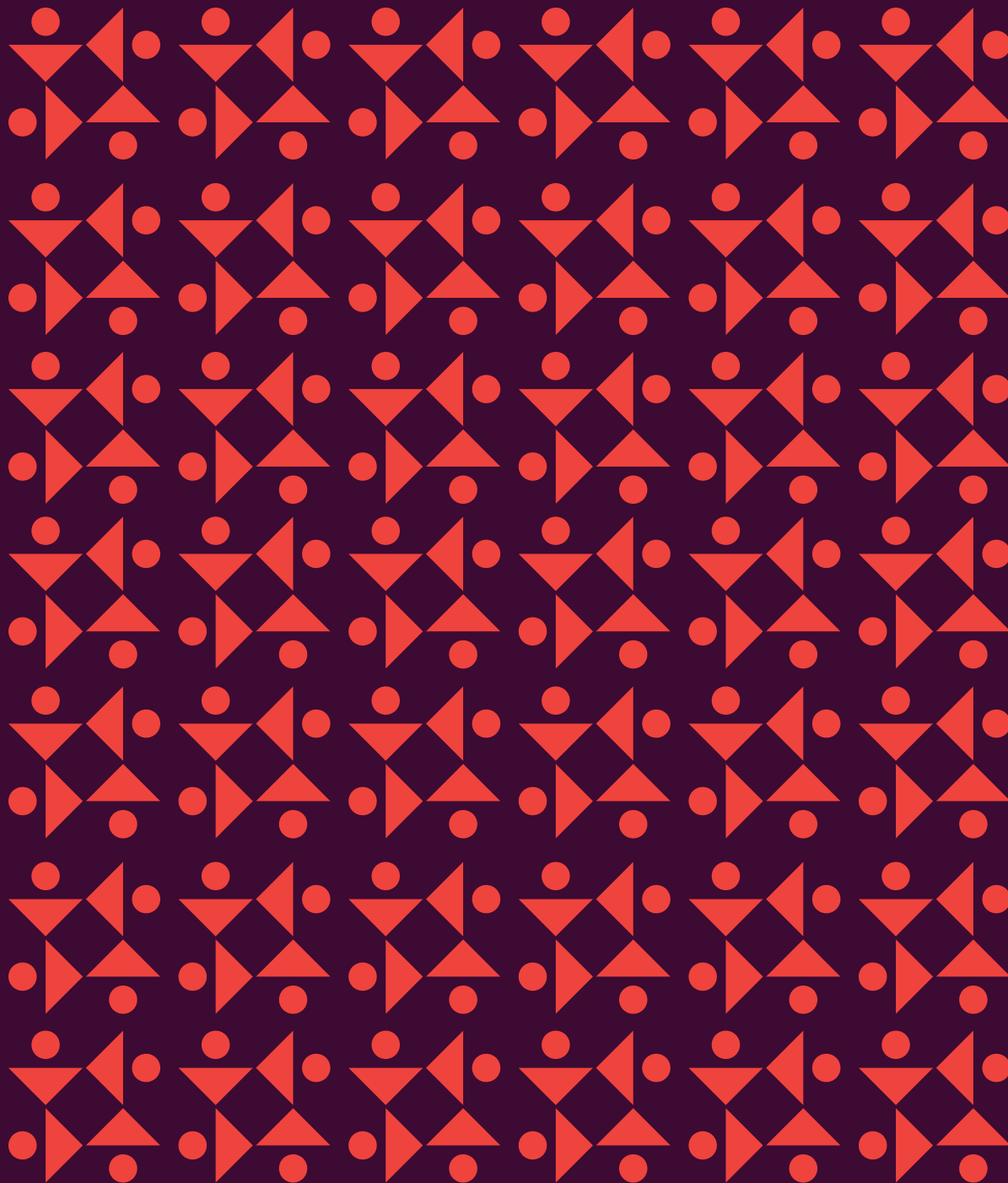
The beaver, prairie hare, and arctic wolf also remind us that in the midst of changes, it is important to stay focused, alert, adaptable, and to care for one another. In 2025, we will do likewise with the strength of our team, partners, Board of Directors, advisors, Friends of CCRL, and valued donors. We will continue to unfold our common vision and mission for civic religious literacy, and seek the resources to do so.

If you haven’t already, please consider joining us and supporting us in this endeavour.

Dr. W. Y. Alice Chan

Our Projects

Religious literacy is a practical knowledge and skill set that can help us live, work, and engage better together. Our projects reflect the various ways to make this happen.



The Civic Literacy Youth Network (CLYN)

Reach

National

Duration

Ongoing

Amount funded from 2022–2024

\$130,000 CAD; Seeking additional funding for 2024–2025

Funders

Canadian Heritage (2022–2024), Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2024–2025)

The Civic Literacy Youth Network (CLYN) is a pan-Canadian online network and community for youth and young adults (Grade 7 to undergraduates, inclusive). It is facilitated by CCRL educator-researchers with exceptional experience discussing controversial topics and engaging youth. It promotes leadership development through an engagement with diversity and inclusion by encouraging interaction among community groups, skills development, and dialogue, which can proactively prevent and intervene against discrimination that happens at the intersection of religion and other identities.

Relevance to religious literacy

Each meeting is centred around a specific principle of religious literacy. Through this intersectional lens, participants have the opportunity to hear guest speakers discuss topics related to religious and racial discrimination and to develop the skills needed to equip them to address these challenges.

Needs we are addressing

- A space for youth to learn and express their concerns as they are eager for civic change and political activism against social injustices today.
- An opportunity for youth and young adults to talk with peers across Canada who are outside of their typical circles, and discuss contemporary issues related to religious, spiritual, and non-religious views.
- Helping youth understand the intersection of worldview identities and other aspects of identities, including race and sexual orientation.
- Helping youth gain leadership and mentoring skills, as a number of participants from our first cohort became junior mentor-facilitators for our second cohort youth.



2024 Cohort

Outcomes thus far

- Cohort 1 (2022–2023 school year) and Cohort 2 (2023–2024 school year) had 9 participants from five provinces certified (Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and B.C.) and 8 participants, respectively. They gained exposure and engagement with 14 CCRL partners, who joined as local and international guest speakers
- 3 participants from Cohort 1 returned as mentor-junior facilitators to deepen their religious literacy and leadership skills, and support Cohort 2. These 3 participants also had the opportunity to do formal academic presentations with us.

Next steps

Cohort 3 begins in 2025. We have a new partnership with the Christian Jewish Dialogue of Montreal. Together, we have created a new opportunity to provide CLYN participants in Quebec the possibility of securing a small amount of funding to create their own projects in their own communities for the Building Bridges Youth Initiative.

Details shared by project lead Dr. Erin Reid, CCRL co-founder.



HIGHLIGHT

Religious literacy matters: A young adult's perspective

Karol Gabriela Bernal Saenz's Thought Corner



In 2022, when I was in grade 11, a speaker came to my school to talk about CCRL's Civic Literacy Youth Network (CLYN), inviting students to join that year's cohort. I had already seen a poster about CLYN that piqued my interest, but his presentation reminded me to sign up. At the time, I was not familiar with the term "religious literacy," but I understood that CLYN essentially promoted understanding and respecting diversity in society, and that stood out to me.

Over time, however, I have come to better understand the role of religion in society, and the relationship of religion to social identities. Likewise, I have better understood the principles of religious literacy and learned the value of taking part in dialogue.

MY EXPERIENCE

From the first meeting, CLYN's facilitators provided a safe, welcoming space to share our thoughts and experiences meaningfully, which was fundamental. For example, in the first session, during a circle sharing activity, facilitators talked about times when they had

held prejudice against something in society, relating it to their relationship with religious literacy or diversity in society.

Therein, I understood that we were all coming to this space as products of our experiences, backgrounds and from where we were in our learning journeys.

Since then I have come to appreciate this as a key consideration when engaging in discussions and in religious literacy. In addition, the activity reassured me that as humans we can change our minds as we continue to learn and that even people with PhDs (like the CLYN facilitators) once misunderstood or misjudged a situation, and that there were reasons for that.

RELIGIOUS LITERACY CHANGED ME

In CLYN, I have learned the **principles of religious literacy** to the point where it seems like common sense, and therefore, something that everybody should have access to learn.

It changed my thinking

For instance, one of my favourite principles that I learned is that internal diversity exists in religions. Internal diversity in religions is recognizing that the beliefs and practices of members of the same religion differ. Similarly, internal diversity acknowledges that an individual's relationship to their religion is deeply personal.

For instance, it is illogical, harmful, and unfair to label all members of a religion in a specific way just because of their religious membership. I

have also learned the important distinction between culture and religion, which people often mistake for the same thing, leading to false, stereotypical narratives about a group.

It changed my attitude about myself and others

Furthermore, through participating in CLYN's discussions, I have gained more confidence in sharing my ideas and engaging in dialogue about complex topics with others. At first, I used to feel intimidated by being in a discussion with facilitators with PhDs who had so much more knowledge and experience on the subject at hand. However, over time, through talking with facilitators and participants, I have become more comfortable and confident in humbly saying what I think about a topic despite knowing that I do not know it all.

It changed my approach to others

This experience has also taught me to value engaging individuals who are at a different point in their learning journey, so that we may enrich each other's learning from the unique perspectives we speak from.

Through participating in discussions at CLYN, I have become more open, considerate and understanding of listening to people that may not know what I know or understand my perspective. Now I seek to patiently understand where another person's viewpoint is coming from, keeping in mind that there are reasons behind it.



WE NEED TO MOVE BEYOND OUR BUBBLES

After this experience, I see that the CCRL's CLYN program is important for young Canadians and Canadian society because it provides an opportunity to engage with people of different backgrounds in terms of knowledge and experience. This opportunity exposes us and helps us understand the perspectives and realities of people across Canada.

Even though Canada is such a religiously and culturally diverse society, it is easy to stay within our bubbles and not engage with people of different religious/spiritual, and cultural backgrounds; even people from a different province or territory. As a result, it is no surprise that we see the perpetuation of hate crimes, hate speech and stereotypes based on religion in our society; this is connected to religious illiteracy.

As Canadians, we would benefit from having opportunities to engage with people outside of our immediate circles, and most importantly learn from and about people that are different from us.

To me, the work of CLYN is an effort to learn about and understand the experiences and perspectives of people different from us, which are worth taking time to understand.

CLYN's work is powerful not only through the impact it has on the knowledge of participants, but through the potential for participants to use the skills and knowledge they learn and spread religious literacy and cultural awareness in their lives.



CLYN FEEDBACK

For specific details, contact erin@ccrl-clrc.ca

To read more thoughts from our CLYN participants, visit

ccrl-clrc.ca/clyn

Karol Gabriela Bernal Saenz is a second-year student of sociology at the University of Regina. She was a mentor-junior facilitator in CLYN's 2023–2024 cohort, helping to facilitate dialogue around religious literacy.

Preserving Griot Project

Reach

National

Duration

April 2022 – June 2024

Amount funded from 2022–2024

\$150,000 CAD, for all partners over two years

Funders

Canadian Heritage,
Ecclesiastical Insurance's
Community Impact Grant

Conducted in strong partnership with

Westhaven-Elmhurst
Community Recreation
Association, West Island
Black Community
Association

The Preserving Griot Project, launched on June 15 at the Westhaven Community Centre, was a resounding success, drawing attendees from multiple communities. This project is dedicated to capturing and preserving the stories and contributions of Afro-Canadians through the oral tradition of *griot*, ensuring their heritage is immortalized for future generations.

Relevance to religious literacy

Historically, Black communities have often placed the church and community at their core, making this project significant in understanding and preserving cultural and religious heritage.

Needs addressed

- Amplifying Afro-Canadian voices and experiences
- Helping youth understand their identity and place within Canada
- Fostering intergenerational connections
- Revealing the diverse, often underrepresented contributions to Canadian culture



above and right June 15th celebration



Outcomes achieved

- Presence in 5 provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia
- Engagement in 6 cities: Hogan's Alley/Vancouver, Amber Valley, Campsie, Clarksburg, Montreal, Africville/Halifax
- Secured external funding
- Strengthened connections among Afro-Canadian communities
- Created a central database documenting Afro-Canadian presence and contributions in each province via [Afroheritage.ca](https://afroheritage.ca)

Next steps

Secure additional funding to expand across Canada and establish a dedicated project team.

Details shared by project lead Dr. Sabrina Jafralie, CCRL co-founder.

HIGHLIGHT

Afroheritage.ca

Afroheritage.ca is an online resource that gathers all the pieces of the Preserving Griot Tradition project. In doing so, it illustrates the unstated deep connections inherent in many Afro-Canadian communities – spiritual connections with one another and ancestors, embedded in history and preserved through oral storytelling.

The website

- Clarifies: What is a Griot?
- Provides six lesson plans for K-12
- Includes links to over 100 additional resources across the Canadian provinces and territories
- Highlights Afro-Canadian music contributions
- Documents 27 video interviews with elders, leaders, and community members across 5 provinces



clockwise from top
Sylvia Wilson and Carolyn
Wilson; Ashley Yeates and
Debbie Beaver; Corey Ross
and Coleman Howe

Supporting Rural Employers

Reach

Temiskaming Shores and Area, ON

Duration

December 2021 – May 2024

Amount funded

\$216,500 CAD, for all partners over two years

Funder

The WES Mariam Assefa Fund

Conducted in strong partnership with

City of Temiskaming Shores, Temiskaming Shores & Area Chamber of Commerce, Keepers of the Circle Indigenous Hub, One Light Diversity Centre, Rural Development Network, Religious Freedom & Business Foundation

This partnership supported employers, immigrants, and refugees in the region by establishing a faith-related employee resource group (ERG) and a faith-friendly workplace certification for rural employers. Its aim was to support employers' recruitment and retention goals aligned with the settlement and integration of new and potential employees.

Relevance to religious literacy

The Interbelief ERG (IERG) and "Faith and Belief Friendly" Workplace certification were co-created with partners and locals, focused on promoting understanding about religious, spiritual, and non-religious staff, colleagues, and clients in the workplace.

Needs addressed

- New and free professional development, as most locals had not received prior diversity, equity, and inclusion training
- Community building and reconciliation efforts during monthly IERG gatherings and group dialogue during training
- A way for employers to show staff that they welcome and value all identities, supporting retention, client/customer care, and encouraging recruitment in the area

Outcomes achieved

- 10-monthly IERG sessions, with regular attendance and transition of program to be locally owned and renamed "Inter-Faith Temiskaming," now led by the One Light Diversity Centre
- 18 individuals/organizations "Faith and Belief Friendly" Certified over two cohorts
- Opportunity to share project in 4 conference settings
- Invited to lead workshop on "Recruitment, retention, and revenue generation via religious literacy" at a local learning symposium, hosted by Northern College

Next steps

- Discussions to offer this locally in 2025 are underway
- Seek ways to extend these initiatives beyond Temiskaming Shores

Details shared by project lead Dr. Alice Chan.



Spring 2024 Cohort

HIGHLIGHT

From the field

CCRL evaluates each program for successes and areas for improvement. Here is some survey feedback from the Faith & Belief Friendly Workplace training and I-ERG gatherings.

“Currently my work environment has expanded to include people of many different faiths and beliefs. This is a change from my historical working career. This course provided an avenue to explore how to engage with others about their beliefs...with tools to understand my coworkers better, leading to more effective communication, and a harmonious workplace.” — Barry

“It had always been challenging for me to be faith and belief-friendly in my career but this training helped me learn how to be a better leader (in my role as HR).” — Tammy



TESTIMONIALS

Listen to Carrie and Vimla's experience with our program.

“What is/are one/some of the most significant takeaways from our training overall?”

- Listening
- New friendships
- Lots of challenges in making accommodations in some sectors
- Trying is important. Faith is important. Every individual is important
- Dignity, Respect and Acceptance for our Differences
- That people bring their whole selves, including their faith and beliefs into the workplace already. Communication and recognition of this can improve the workplace and people's lives since we spend so much time there.
- How to engage with people to understand their needs
- Pluralism
- Understanding my unconscious bias and how it will help me better understand how others feel uncomfortable or unsafe in certain situations.

“What valuable thing(s) have you learned or gained from attending I-ERGs so far?”

- Reasons behind some beliefs
- Better understanding and better application in the workplace
- Learning about the various cultures and backgrounds within our Northern community
- Making new friends
- There are a lot of different religions but many have similar beliefs.



88%

said they agree that this initiative will be helpful for other smaller and rural communities in Ontario.
12% (2 among 17 people) said they are not sure.

We also try to ascertain longitudinal changes. A survey sent four months after the training asked the following:

Q: Has this training increased your willingness to engage on other challenging topics of diversity in the local community? E.g. topics related to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, language, immigration, etc.

53%
Yes, very much

47%
Yes

Q: Since we last met, what challenges or successes arose related to creating a faith and belief friendly workplace? (e.g. in interactions with staff/colleagues, or programs and policies you tried to implement, etc.)

- Convincing in house. Went ahead anyways and is appreciated now.
- Still getting push back from employers who feel that their employees should work within their current policies and guidelines. Will take time and experience to change perceptions.
- Personally - a more full-rounded knowledge and approach and have been able to share that with my colleagues at meetings and personal interactions. As well as build on the understanding in local community groups I participate in.
- The staff members have been very supportive during communications about religious literacy. We have weekly staff meetings where there is opportunity to discuss a number of different topics.

Spirituality among Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Reach

Metro Vancouver,
British Columbia

Duration

January – December 2024,
extending into 2025 for
project completion

Amount funded

\$84,480 CAD

Funder

Redleaf Foundation

Conducted in strong partnership with

posAbilities, Burnaby
Association for Community
Inclusion, Kinsight,
Curiko, Montreal Mission
Internship

right Reuben Jentink (Curiko), Margie Patrick (CCRL), Tanya Auton (Curiko), and Alice Chan (CCRL) invited community members into the project at the Inclusion BC conference, May-June 2024, Nanaimo. Each are holding the four avenues of spiritual connection as outlined by [Michaelson \(2020\)](#).

This four-phase project explores two key questions:

1. How do adults with cognitive disabilities learn about and engage in spirituality?
2. How do agencies (and their staff) understand and enact their role in spiritual literacy and support?

Relevance to religious literacy

We know that all people are capable of engaging with their spiritual life, and may have interest in developing their religious literacy alongside their spiritual development (religious or non-religious). Our literature review confirms this. Thus, this project offers an opportunity to explore how spirituality is understood or engaged upon by a variety of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Canada (as most studies are published from the US), and is one step closer to outlining ways to promote religious literacy in this community.



Needs addressed

Our project partners have observed that the social service sector focuses primarily on supporting the external needs of people served, e.g. skill-building, activities, and recreation, rather than the internal needs. This project aims to bridge that gap by understanding the perspectives, questions, and concerns of staff and people served. Findings are shared directly with staff, agencies, and people served.

Outcomes achieved

- 133 survey responses, across three agencies with approximately 1,300 staff
- Six focus groups with 17 individuals, including Board of Directors, CEOs, senior leaders, managers/supervisors, and staff
- Co-analysis meeting with five staff across the three agencies
- Research development skills for a two-month summer intern, supported by the Montreal Mission Internship program

Next steps

- Discussions with people served and Curiko program facilitators
- Peer-reviewed publication of findings
- Share findings in relevant blogs and newsletter
- Video presentation to staff and people served
- Exploration for further study to hear from family and other network members in the life of a person served

This ongoing project presents new insights at each turn. We are excited for the new knowledge and relationships that will develop in the near future.

Details shared by project lead Dr. Alice Chan.

Resources from Past Projects

In 2024, we completed two projects that can support other communities in their local development. Read the reports to learn more.

Resource to Address Racism in Rural Canada

Reach
National

Duration
Apr 2022 – July 2024

Amount funded
\$130,000, for all partners

Funder
Canadian Race Relations Foundation

Partners
FCSS Strathmore, Keepers of the Circle Indigenous Hub, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, Rural Development Network

This collaboration consisted of surveys, interviews, and community dialogues to understand how to tackle various forms of racism and discrimination in rural Canada. We listened to and collaborated with community members in Strathmore, Alberta, and Temiskaming Shores, Ontario. Our process and lessons learned are documented in a report called “Growing Culturally Inclusive Communities,” which we offer as a reference guide. This resource presents ways to practically and locally engage about a challenging and ongoing reality.

[+ Read the full report here](#)

Intergenerational and Intercultural Dialogue in Rural Communities

Reach
Kirkland Lake, Ontario

Duration
December 2022 – December 2023

Amount funded
\$25,000, for all partners

Funder
Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada

Partners
Kirkland Lake Multicultural Group, Dr. Crystena Parker-Shandal from the University of Waterloo

This project supported the Kirkland Lake Multicultural Group (KLMG) in documenting, analyzing, and disseminating information about potential service gaps in their work to address Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action #93 and #94, focused on increasing understanding among newcomers about Canada’s colonial history. The report documents our contribution in understanding the local dynamics and Dr. Crystena Parker-Shandal’s recommendations for the Group.

[+ Read the full report here](#)

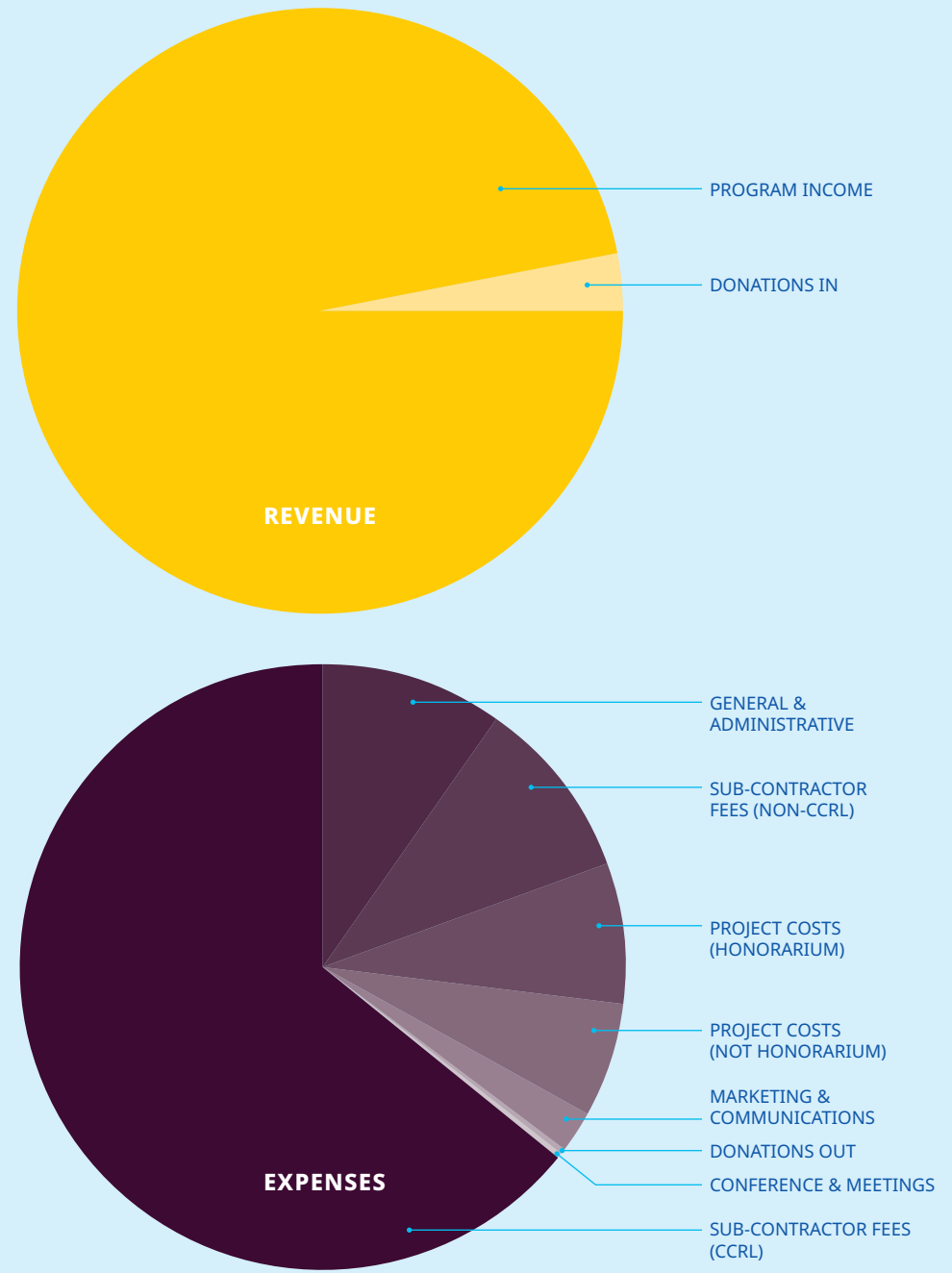
Financials

Revenue

	JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2024	JULY 1, 2022 – JUNE 30, 2023
Program income ¹	\$153,745	\$268,523
Donations in	\$4,703	\$3,464
Total Revenue	\$158,448	\$271,987

Expenses

Sub-contractor fees (CCRL) ²	\$101,385	\$188,046
General & Administrative ³	\$15,546	\$7,359
Sub-contractor fees (non-CCRL)	\$15,196	\$60,190
Project costs (honorarium)	\$12,086	\$6,610
Project costs (not honorarium)	\$9,434	\$12,048
Marketing & Communications	\$3,648	\$5,798
Donations out	\$400	\$0
Conference & meetings	\$295	\$303
Professional development	\$0	\$0
Total Expenses	\$158,115	\$280,353
Excess of Revenues over Expenses	\$334	-\$8,366
Net assets (beginning of year)	\$3,546	\$11,912
Net assets (end of year)	\$3,880	\$3,546



¹ 2022 revenue was restated to recognize grant amounts received in 2022 for programming in 2023
² Totals prior July 2022 consolidated CCRL and non-CCRL sub-contractor fees
³ General and administrative expenses are for WordPress, bank fees, insurance, business address, Intuit QuickBooks, and our accountant. GSuite email and storage use payments were made until we received charity status.

Thank You

To our donors, thank you for contributing to this important work. Your support encourages and sustains us.

Anonymous
Bryan Hillis
Dilmurat Mahmut
Dwight Newman
Erin Reid
Franz Greifenhagen
Jennie Ferris
John Valk
Jonathan Tang
Margie Patrick
Patricia Bell
Rob Caucci
Shauna Van Praagh
Willie Chey



Where we work

In addition to our projects, we promote religious literacy through individual or short engagements. As before, we engaged the public, academics, and students in workshops, conferences, etc. this year across Canada and in the US.

- 
- 1 | Inclusion BC Conference**
Nanaimo, BC
 - 2 | Burnaby Intercultural Planning Table Community Forum**
Burnaby, BC
 - 3 | University of Northern British Columbia**
Environmental Studies
Prince George, BC
 - 4 | Saskatoon Open Door Society**
Saskatoon, SK
 - 5 | Luther College, University of Regina**
Religious Literacy and Multiculturalism class,
Regina, SK
 - 6 | The Summit to Counter Antisemitism & Islamophobia and Related Forms of Hatred and Bias in Rural America**
Omaha, Nebraska, USA
(Engaging in local conversation and not as a presenter)
 - 7 | Northern College**
Inspiring Collaboration '24 Learning Symposium
Temiskaming Shores, ON
 - 8 | North York Community House**
Toronto, Ontario
 - 9 | Metropolis Conference**
Montreal, QC
 - 10 | Egale Canada**
The Enchanté Network, and Rainbow Faith & Freedom's Speaker Series,
online

Our Team

CCRL Team

Dr. W. Y. Alice Chan
 Dr. Erin Reid
 Dr. Hicham Tiflati
 Joseph Ching
 Dr. Margie Patrick
 Dr. Sabrina Jafralie
 Dr. Sivane Hirsch

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