



MFRS
Multicultural Family
Resource Society



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

VISION: Immigrant and refugee families are **empowered** and strengthened by knowledge, skills and connections to achieve ultimate health and overall wellbeing.



Mission

To support immigrant and refugee families to thrive in Edmonton through **culturally responsive** and **participant-driven** programs and services that reduce social isolation, enhance knowledge and skills, and increase access to community supports and intercultural opportunities, thereby encouraging health and wellbeing, reducing poverty, and empowering families to confidently walk in multiple worlds.

In the words of the MFRS community, what does this mission look like?

Relational

A way of interaction with and within the community in which we take time to listen, care, connect and love to build mutual support hand in hand.

Participant-driven

Participants identify what's important to them, what they need, and what they want to achieve. Our programs meet participants where they're at and support them in reaching their goals.

Empowerment

Building community and working together to share space, opportunities, skills, and knowledge for mutual learning, self-determination and ultimate well-being.

Culturally responsive

Safe spaces to maintain a home culture and adapt to new connections and diversity; and developing a deeper understanding between cultures that are always changing.



The dedicated staff of MFRS empowers families and communities to thrive in Edmonton through a range of participant-driven, relational, culturally-responsive and empowering programs for seniors, youth and families. Our skillful staff supports newcomers with complex challenges, and continues to build capacity and meet the needs of the growing number of newcomers seeking our services.

The board and staff work collaboratively, learn from our experiences, and focus on the MFRS mission and vision. MFRS is preparing for a future where we can continue to provide holistic, sustainable support to newcomers in Edmonton.

We are committed to our foundational work of enhancing the unique community-based, culturally-responsive, holistic mental health and wellbeing support programs and services. It is an honour to work together for the empowerment of thriving families and community in Edmonton.

*Jacqui Holmes, Board Vice Chair
On behalf of MFRS Board*

Looking back on 2024, the word “reflection” comes to mind as an overarching theme for the past year as it showed up in many of the ways we approached our work.

The MFRS Board/Staff Meet and Greet at the beginning of 2024 set the groundwork of our approach to revisiting and updating MFRS’ Strategic Plan. Our process over the year incorporated time to hear about and learn from the past, listen to and discuss current realities, and envision and strategize for the future. The open and transparent approach by which we moved ahead with this important work helped reset and strengthen MFRS’ foundation as an organization. We are grateful to all who participated directly or indirectly in the development of the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, especially Winnie Chow-Horn, co-founder and former ED of MFRS, who facilitated our process. Our updated Strategic Plan will guide our collective work moving forward.

July 2024 marked my first full year as Executive Director with MFRS. We continue to learn with and from our colleagues and partners, with intentional times of reflection around our programs, partnerships and planning. I am grateful for the wisdom, guidance and ongoing support the Board has offered over the past year. MFRS is blessed with dedicated hard-working staff and volunteers who are grounded in community, and knowledgeable and passionate about the important work we do. What a privilege to work with these great groups of people! Their passion, determination and perseverance have kept MFRS moving forward through the many changes that have come our way. Thank you!

In an effort to strengthen communication and knowledge of our programs and services, MFRS introduced our new website in 2024, www.mfrsedmonton.ca.

In 2025, MFRS marks 20 years since it was founded. Who would have guessed that our story – which grew out of the aspirations of parents from numerous ethnocultural communities coming together to discuss unique challenges of families who live in two cultures – would become the multifaceted organization we are today. We humbly honour and thank all those who have shared their wisdom, ideas and vision since then; giving their time, talents and resources to building MFRS into what it is today. We continue to hold fast to our founding principles while stewarding the organization to be sustainable for years to come.

*Submitted by Valerie Cudmore
Executive Director*

When I first came to Canada not long ago, it was hard for me to find a job because of my poor command of the English language. MFRS offers free English sessions, that I started to attend and it helped me learn English much better for work and general life questions. I like the classes as I can ask questions about English that I need and learn better. I would recommend the class to anyone as it does help.

A single mom came to Edmonton from Ukraine with the CUAET program. Upon arrival to Canada, the woman had very little English skills; however, she wanted to be a strong role model for her 2 children. She enrolled in the Beginner English class where she increased her confidence in speaking English. She was proud to share that one day, while waiting for the bus, she struck up a conversation with another individual at the bus stop. She felt self-confident as she asked for directions and made small talk like asking about the weather.

Helping families THRIVE!



Parenting Program

MFRS Thriving Families Program (THRIVE) is designed to foster healthy relationships of immigrant and refugee children, youth, and caregivers, and improve their well-being. The program offers year-round ethno-cultural language specific parent-child family groups to build participants' capacity in dealing with everyday challenges and managing stressors and risk factors associated with immigration. These groups include educational activities that increase participants' knowledge and skills, and connection opportunities for expanding their social and support network. In partnership with Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative (MCHB), MFRS had 15 ethnocultural parent-child and family community groups.

PARENT PROGRAMS STATISTICS 2024

Unique # of families	1040
Total # of participants	2637
Unique # of volunteers	159
Volunteer hours	3436

“

Through these activities we met even more friends and shared more knowledge, which makes me more confident to nurture my children with special needs.

”

“

My husband and I have more communication in how to raise kids; our kids are more lively, and they have more interactions with other children.

”

“

I made friends; we talked more often about our challenges and where to go for help.

”

“

I feel safe and free to express myself with a group of moms who speak our own language. The program supports us as parents to spend more fun time with my kids and understand them better.

”

“

I feel more equipped to handle challenges or understand my children's needs better.

”

WE TALK ABOUT

Building resilience
Positive mental health
Problem solving skills
Connect and have fun

Most groups meet on the weekends and evenings to accommodate families' availability. Some programs had hybrid programming to suit different needs of families.

- Participants request themes and topics covered
- Presentations by facilitators and guest speakers

THRIVE Carnival

Our annual intercultural event hosted over 750 participants, volunteers, and performers.

95%

(264 out of 277) of survey respondents reported they have improved skills to develop and maintain healthy relationships.

96%

(265 out of 277) of survey respondents reported they have improved relationships and networks of social support.

English for Community Integration (ECI)

ECI provides essential foundational learning to adult immigrants and refugees, helping them navigate their journeys in Edmonton. The learners attending the ECI program have a wide range of English language proficiency. The program focuses on teaching fundamental literacy skills for beginners and lower intermediate classes. Learners build on their existing knowledge and skills and connect with each other in a supportive learning environment which helps to foster confidence as they contribute to their new community.

The ECI program has been one of the successful programs at MFRS year after year, and the demand for free or low-cost English classes continues to rise. Learners who participate in our ECI program often request to increase the number of sessions offered per week. Most of our learners participated in the ECI program for several months. Others have left the program early because they found jobs, many of whom attribute their success in part to the self-assurance they gained from ECI classes.

As an English teacher for intermediate-level students, I've noticed that learning about Canadian traditions and celebrations makes our classes more fun. Students love improving their language skills while exploring the history of events like Victoria Day and Canada Day. This cultural focus keeps them engaged and excited to participate. I've seen their confidence grow as they discuss these topics in English. It's great to watch them connect with both the language and Canadian culture.

ECI PROGRAM STATISTICS 2024

Total # of English language instructional hours	858
Total # of adult learners	315

Welcoming and safe environment

Increased confidence

Increased literacy skills

I heard from one of our relatives that there is an English for community integration class that teach adults. I got so happy and decided to join the class. A few months after joining the class I got the confidence that learning can be possible even if you are old. Now, I am more hopeful and believe that with persistence we can achieve anything at any time.

Greater independence

Reduce barriers to learning

Providing free bus tickets, school supplies and learning materials provide practical support for learners.

Fostering connection

I enjoy our classes because I learn not only English grammar but also about Canadian culture. It's fun to discover things like Thanksgiving and Remembrance Day. I am improving my reading, speaking, and writing skills, which helps me feel more confident in everyday situations, like at work and while shopping. I also want to do well on my English proficiency test, and these classes are helping me prepare.

BOOK CLUB

One-on-One Support

MFRS is recognized for its collaborative support of newcomers. Many come through community referral, drawn by our meaningful, client-centered approach. We walk alongside clients through transitions and challenges, centring their voices, strengths, and goals to find effective solutions to complex challenges together.

474
new and returning
clients in 2024

The Family Support Office provided a total of **2,216** culturally responsive and participant driven Information and Orientation services focused on:

- reducing social isolation and poverty.
- addressing food and housing insecurity.
- enhancing knowledge and skills.
- increasing access to community supports around physical and mental health, employment, and education.
- developing increased confidence and belonging through opportunities for intercultural connecting.
- helping clients connect with the right services at the right time.
- walking alongside clients through transitions, crisis points, and systems navigation.

Family Support Office

Senior Groups

Refugee and immigrant seniors came together in culturally rooted spaces to strengthen their English, share life experiences, and explore life in Canada. Through group learning, conversation, and community outings, seniors found connection, dignity, and a sense of renewal after years of displacement and isolation.

81
SENIORS

Senior exercise and movement

Tax clinic

Senior health (medical)

Agriculture and food security

Transporation Bus/Cab/Car

Social and cultural norms

“
The majority of our cases are complex. People come to Canada with a completely different cultural practice and they are faced with a lot of problems here. You have to give lots of time to that family.
”

“
Coming to live in a country that feels safe is of major importance. I'm relieved my children will have a peaceful life. People here live happily and harmoniously in peace and security.
”

Ready
Learning readiness and achieving early literacy

Set
Staying in school and moving toward school completion

Go
High school completion, pursuit of post-secondary education and/or career-related pursuits

Youth Groups

The youth-led program within MFRS is facilitated and supported by successful young adults who were former participants of our youth program and are now pursuing post-secondary education and continue to be positive role models in their communities. The groups are a multicultural community of young people. The groups meet weekly and offer a variety of year-round programs, summer field trips, and special events. We also regularly welcome guest hosts and facilitators who support and inspire our youth.

YOUTH PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS 2024

Homework Club	15-20	Attend regularly
Activity Club	20-25	Every Wed. evening
Afghan Youth Group	9-10	Sat. and Sun. afternoon

Elk Island National Park Field Trip

“
The greatest service is that we express our problems and difficulties to those who speak our language
”

BOOK CLUB
BOOK CLUB
BOOK CLUB
BOOK CLUB
Youth book club to help bridge learning around major life themes in their native Afghan language and English.

Attend a theatre production at The Citadel Theatre. Thank you, EPCOR!

Presentation by Edmonton Police Service (EPS) on youth registration and community safety

Urban Farm

One of our seniors group participants found herself in a difficult situation due to complications with the landlord. Forced to evacuate from her home, she was unsure of what the future would hold. Through the unwavering support of compassionate community members who urgently came to her aid; their quick action and generosity provided resources to address her immediate needs, offering a glimmer of hope.

Through the utilization of emergency funds from the MFRS, a new path forward began to take shape as we worked diligently to secure a safe and stable living arrangement for her. Through collaborative efforts and a shared commitment to her well-being, our client was enrolled in programs to help address and stabilize her housing needs. Additionally, she also was able to use the food hampers program tailored for seniors, ensuring that nourishment and care were readily available when needed most.

Navigating language barriers proved to be a big challenge as we sought to update her information with government departments. Despite facing obstacles, our client showed strength and resilience as we proactively worked with her to navigate systems, empowering her to manage her affairs independently. Amidst these trials, our client continued to selflessly care for her grandchildren, offering love and support during a time when their mother was managing health concerns. Her unwavering dedication and strength inspired all those around her.

38
families

In 2024, the **Pay It Forward emergency fund** distributed \$12,348.00. Thirty-eight (38) families received temporary support for housing related costs, health related costs and food to help them cope with unexpected crises in their lives. This support, along with staff providing other resources, ensures families can bridge these crises with resiliency to prevent any further vulnerability.

\$12,348
distributed

PAY IT FORWARD
EMERGENCY FUND

2024 Staff and Contracted Program Facilitators

Abera Sirna – Family Support Office
Ada Wong – Ethnocultural Parent-child Programs (THRIVING Families Program)
Ammar Jouma – Refugee Youth Program
Baser Nader – Family Support Office
Bashar Youssef – Family Support Office
Candace Riley – Family Support Office
Faiza En-Nashar – Refugee Youth Program
Eugene Chok – Bookkeeper
Ghada Al Maouad – Seniors Group
Hadil Askari – Family Support Office
Hildy Perez-Robie – Admin/ECI Program Coordinator
Hunter Switzer – Family Support Office
Imran Almousa – Summer Student, FSO
Jina Shirzad – Afghan Seniors Group
June Kon – Ethnocultural Parent-Child Programs (THRIVING Families Program)

Kabele Galgalo – Family Support Office
Karima Delijam – Family Support Office
Laura Martinez-Quintero – Financial Manager
Liza Shirzad – Family Support Office
Lidia Macovei – English for Community Integration
Lori Shortreed – UESP Coordinator
Ludwig Bester – Summer Youth Program (Ukrainian community)
Marvet Hmadeh – Family Support Office
Moataz Alokla – Refugee Youth Program
Mohamad Mawed – Family Support Office
Mohammad Zia Nassery – English for Community Integration
Mustafa Sharif – Summer Student, FSO
Nargis Attai – Refugee Youth Program
Niga Jalal – Program Director, Family Support Office
Nooria Habibzai – Family Support Office

Ramah Askari – Seniors Group
Rimsha Memon – Summer Student, Admin
Sabah Tahir – Family Support Office
Sam Roin – Summer Youth Program (Ukrainian community)
Sedra Sharbaji – Refugee Youth Program
Segen Berhane – Administrative Coordinator
Seyed Hossein Afarani – English for Community Integration
Somoud Sbehat – Family Support Office
Svitlana Yamkova – Coordinator, UESP Coordinator
Tahmina Abduljalil – Family Support Office
Tetyana Polyanytsya – English for Community Integration
Tetyana Palykhata – English for Community Integration
Valerie Cudmore – Executive Director
Yulia Bulakh – English for Community Integration

We would like to express thanks to the following people who have served on the Board of Directors this past year. We appreciate your service and commitment to the mission and vision of MFRS.

2024-2025 Board of Directors

Kathy Toogood – Board Chair
Jacqui Holmes – Vice-Chair
Fahad Shaikh – Treasurer
Fana Tesfay – Secretary
Kathryn Gwun-Yeen Lennon – Director
Shang Dong – Director
Tyler Godard – Director
Ashley MacDonald – Director
Tatiana Shepel – Director

To all the donors, funding and program partners that supported our mission and vision in the past year and beyond, we thank you for your contributions and continued support.

Funding Partners

City of Edmonton, FCSS
EPCOR
Alberta Gaming, Liquor, and Cannabis Commission (AGLC)
Baher Family Fund at Edmonton Community Foundation
Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA)
Edmonton Community Foundation
Foresters Financial
Government of Alberta – Immigration & Multiculturalism
Government of Alberta – Justice
Government of Canada – Canada Summer Jobs
Government of Canada – Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
Participation
RBC Community Togetherness Fund
The Stollery Charitable Foundation
Telus Friendly Future Foundation
United Way Alberta Capital Region
The River Church

Program Partners

Action for Healthy Communities
Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
Alberta Immigrant Women & Children Centre
ASSIST Community Services
Catholic Social Services
City of Edmonton
Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations
Edmonton Intercultural Centre
Francophonie Albertaine Plurielle (FRAP)
Islamic Family
Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative Ltd.
Newcomer Centre
...and more

In 2024, in kind contributions from some of our Thriving Family Program partners reduced our program delivery and venue rental costs by over \$107,000.00. Thank you!

You Can Make a Difference

At MFRS, we believe that working collaboratively creates better outcomes for immigrant and refugee families and strengthens the fabric of Edmonton as a whole. Co-create an intercultural community of support with us by supporting us financially or through partnerships with shared resources.

Give to MFRS

ONLINE: www.mfrsedmonton.org/donate

BY MAIL: Send a cheque made out to the Multicultural Family Resource Society

BY PHONE: Call us at 780.250.1771

Contribute to our ENDOWMENT FUND

MFRS' endowment fund focuses on secure funding in the future, enabling MFRS to better respond to community directions.



MFRS
Multicultural Family
Resource Society

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www.mfrsedmonton.org