



ASSIST Community Services Centre

Annual Report 2019 | 2020

Evolving
for the future



ASSIST Community Services Centre *is a non-profit and charitable organization established in 1977 to address the needs of the immigrant population in Edmonton. Our vision is to Bridge People and Communities, with a mission to enhance the lives of individuals and families through quality programs and services.*

Our primary mandate is to assist immigrants to facilitate their successful integration into mainstream society through support and practical settlement services. We strive to provide integrated and comprehensive programs to promote the health and well being of immigrants of all ages, cultures and ethnic backgrounds.

Message from Games Choy, President, Board of Directors

Maintaining our resolve in uncertain times



2020 has been the most challenging year of the last century for the world over.

Closer to home, ASSIST Community Services Centre faced reduction in staff due to substantial budget cuts from funding sources earlier in the year. This was immediately followed by the COVID-19 pandemic in March that forced our business operations to function primarily on a virtual platform.

It is likely that the upcoming years will remain as uncertain as our current circumstances, but I sincerely hope not.

I am pleased to report that ASSIST has responded and adapted quickly in spite of these new adversities by strategically streamlining all operations. Our staff, volunteers, and Board members have maintained our resolve and confidence that ASSIST will remain strong and resilient in order to continue to provide quality programs and services to newcomers and Canadians.

With patience and persistence, a bright future surely lies ahead for all of us.

We, the Board, are truly grateful for the tremendous support provided by the ASSIST staff, volunteers, and funders to the wellbeing of the organization during these unprecedented

Board of Directors 2019-2020

Games Choy President

Allan Kwan Vice President

John Yee Secretary

Backe Thai Treasurer

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Peter Wong
Volunteer
| Accreditation

Samuel Tam
Human Resources
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Nathan Ip Membership

Kevin Dons Public Relations

Tonu Mitra Public Relations

Honorary Members

Collin Wong
Michael Phair
Andreas Ng

Sarah Chan
Honorary Chair
Fundraising Committee



Message from Fion Lee Executive Director

A year of achievement despite many challenges



Our Finance Minister warned that “boom times were not coming back to the province any time soon”. When the Provincial government announced the budget in October 2019, the spending cuts were the toughest in 25 years. Subsequently, with Alberta’s economic downfall and fewer job opportunities, fewer immigrants chose to settle here. The number of permanent resident landings has continued to decrease. As a result, the settlement sector in Alberta has endured millions of dollars in funding reductions from the Federal government.

Like many non-profit organizations, ASSIST relies heavily on government funding. We had been apprehensive for months, waiting for the difficult news to come, while hoping that it would not be too bad. Eventually, funding cuts were inevitable. Not only did we need to lay off staff in February and March 2020, it also jolted us into thinking about more permanent changes in how we run our services and programs. Luckily, with the fervent support from the Board and the concerted effort of staff, we adapted quickly to restructuring, including reconfiguration of staffing, and development of new policies to support the changes. Our services and programs have been able to run smoothly to meet the needs of the immigrant families we serve. We take pride in our strong desire and resilience not only to survive, but to keep moving and growing as an organization. We will keep evolving to enhance our capacity and readiness to be successful while navigating future challenges.

In terms of growing as an organization, we have been working hard in the past year to revamp our volunteer program to incorporate promising practices for



*“Always ask yourself
if what you’re doing
today is getting you
closer to where you
want to be tomorrow.”*

Paulo Coelho

recruitment, orientation, training, support, evaluation and recognition of volunteers. We are committed to ensuring a safe and inclusive working environment for staff, clients and the community. We continue to review and revise our internal policies to enhance equality and practices in Board and staff recruitment, managing harassment and discrimination, and improved access to services. Most staff have taken training/learning in implicit bias, mental health first aid, anti-racism, and blanket exercise to learn the history of indigenous people in Canada.

We also participated in a number of consultations and discussions with the Canadian Accreditation Council to learn about the process to become an accredited organization, and to gain formal recognition that our services and programs meet established standards of excellence. Our Board has approved internal funding to support this initiative that was planned to start in early 2020. Due to the unforeseen pandemic, this was unfortunately delayed. However, we will continue to move in that direction in the future.

Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has changed everything, and continues to occupy all our thoughts. At ASSIST, we are working hard to provide the safest possible environment for those we serve and those who serve. Our effort and work would not have been possible without the support from our funders, donors, Board members, staff, volunteers, families and friends. We are indebted to all of you.



Insights from ASSIST staff

Staff fearlessly embrace new experiences

ASSIST covers a vast network of programs that fall under four broad pillars: settlement, language, family, and youth. With such a big organization, it can be difficult for any individual staff member to fully comprehend the wide impact ASSIST has. As I listened in on staff describing the ways ASSIST has evolved over the past year, it became immediately clear that everyone was connected by a similar trait: a fearless dedication to embracing new experiences.

Take, for example, the Settlement program who are responsible for helping newcomers to Canada in a myriad of ways. Reading off a list of resources can feel impersonal or overwhelming, so they decided to offer a guided walking tour of downtown Edmonton that showed newcomers all sorts of different services they could utilize. Settlement worker Mei remembers asking a client if they knew where Service Canada was located, only to be told “Of course! I saw it on the tour, I already know where it is!”

Under the language pillar, we have the LINC program providing language classes to help students better engage with the new society and culture they find themselves in. The LINC staff is always working to find new and engaging activities for their students, including a visit from Parks Canada both in the Winter and Summer. In the Winter, many students got to experience snowshoeing for the very first time. Come Summer, they received a crash course on camping, including getting to set up a tent all on their own!

“ASSIST responded to the changes, such as the major budget cuts, in a very caring and empathetic manner. The decisions were taken in a careful way to minimize the negative impact on staff as much as possible.”

**SARAH,
LINC INSTRUCTOR**



The Family program expanded from serving one community to now serving four multicultural communities. Their increased capacity allowed them to host a series of workshops that helped newcomers learn more about healthy approaches to parenting. Participants of a workshop centred on fatherhood were particularly grateful. They felt they better understood why their children were not as close to them as their mothers and how they could develop stronger relationships with their kids. For children, the TANG Youth Program helps youths come out of their shells. Many youths start their time in the program shy, unwilling to participate, but eventually find themselves with a new sense of community and family.

New experiences are not limited to individual programs alone. The implementation of a new computer program, iStedy, completely digitized ASSIST's documentation. Though it was a daunting project that involved cooperation from multiple programs, everyone came to the project ready to make it work - and work it did. The new system has standardized and simplified work, allowing staff to focus even more of their attention on crafting new experiences for clients and staff alike.

Taken as a whole, ASSIST's staff are never satisfied with the status quo. They embrace change with a positive attitude and always seek to enhance the lives and education of their clients.

"I get to see the continuous progress my students make. It is amazing to watch their skills improve from when they join the class to the sad (but joyous) moment when they move to the next level."

**JACKIE
LINC INSTRUCTOR**



"At ASSIST, there is a resiliency and coming together of the team to rally together when needed - and face all challenges."



A story of two grateful clients

A safe and welcoming place to learn and grow

Mari Nasser laughs when I ask how she's doing now. "I'm talking with you and can understand everything you ask! I'm definitely doing better than before." "Before" was September 19th, 2017 when she first arrived in Canada. With the help of a Canadian sponsor, she left her home in Damascus, Syria when the civil war broke out. She arrived with a bit of English and the hope that she had found a safe new home for her family.

Adjusting to an entirely new culture and country is no easy task. Mari remembers feeling that she had lost herself because she didn't know the language or how to do anything in Canada. Mari's sponsor helped register Mari and her family into LINC courses. "I want to give others some advice: study study study!" She has seen many students who study at ASSIST go on to get good jobs. She encourages others to come because ASSIST "is so helpful. I feel like this school is a part of my family." Mari began in CLB 3 and has now advanced all the way to CLB 6. During that time, Mari learned a wealth of useful skills to better navigate Canadian society. She reminisced about how a voice message from a doctor used to be a major problem. Sometimes she was able to understand but responding was a whole other challenge. Now, she can listen and respond to messages with no problem; a skill she credits to her time in the LINC program. "I understand more than my family now. When we get mail from the government, I'm the one who reads it." Mari pauses before adding with a big laugh: "I do everything now— I'm the manager at home!"



"If I could write a song, it would be about Sophia," Thilal Hassan Elbana Hamed explains with deep admiration. "Sophia is like my star." Thilal fled Sudan and arrived in Canada through the US border on August 24th, 2019. Fearing for the safety of her daughters, she brought her family of four to Canada on her own. When asked what her hopes were in coming to Canada, Thilal paused. "To be honest, I didn't think about anything. I just wanted to take my family and come to a safe place." There was no time to think of hopes and dreams. "Canada is safe, but when you are alone in an unknown place, it's, what do I say...lonely."

Fortunately for Thilal, her close friend knew of ASSIST and brought her to get help. After meeting Sophia, Thilal felt like she had a sister fighting for her. Sophia was able to help Thilal get the child allowance supplement. "My kids saw me before crying and sad, but now they see that I am strong and we are strong together." Thilal finally felt hope; she began dreaming of becoming a veterinarian again. "We are grown up, but we need friends. We need support. When I would cry, Sophia always told me do not give up, we will keep going, we will continue, and we will fight together." Thilal now feels balanced. "Before I was a desperate, scared woman, in a strange place. Now, I know this is not the end. I have support, I will continue."



Life changing programs

Family Program

**101 families including
127 adults and 98 children
participated in 23 sessions**

This program offers parenting and child development education to parents and caregivers (often grandparents) of children under the age of 6 years. This 15-hour program covers topics including: body, mind, behaviour, safety, and available parent and community resources. This outreach program is delivered in Mandarin and Cantonese off-site, in different locations around the city. Building on our success, ASSIST will expand this program to serve families beyond the Chinese community— and it will be renamed the Multicultural Parent Education Program in April 2020.

With my wife being a new immigrant to Canada, this program has given her new learnings and an opportunity to adapt to a new environment.

Meeting new parents and engaging in group conversations assists her in becoming better role model for our children.

WILLIAM LE, NOV, 2019

T.A.N.G Youth Program *Towards A New Generation*

213 youth participated in:

- Personal Growth sessions
- Homework Help
- Afterschool Drop-Ins
- Spring Break, Winter Break, and Summer Camps
- School partnerships with:
H.E. Beriault Junior High
Father Michael Troy School

This program supports the physical, social, and mental well-being of youth by promoting positive attitudes, constructive skills, and supportive relationships as a strategy for making safe and healthy choices. Interactive group activities include opportunities for personal development, positive relationship building, and community involvement.

To be honest, I used to be really shy and timid, but I truly feel TANG has helped me by encouraging me to try my best in everything I do.

YOUTH PARTICIPANT



Family Literacy & Adult Learning Program

144 adults and 72 children attended 18 sessions of Raising Children Through Songs & Stories and 6 sessions of Learning English Through Kitchen Fun



In your program we learned new English vocabulary about cooking and food. Attending your program has helped improve our cooking skill and our family life quality. You were very patient and meticulous.

This two-part program includes: Raising Children Through Songs and Stories (RC), and Learning English Through Kitchen Fun Activities (ADL). The RC program helps adults learn English, and enhances the literacy skills of parents or caregivers through songs, reading stories, crafts and games. The ADL program helps participants learn English through reading recipes and cooking. Food safety and healthy eating are also introduced in the class.



Smart Choices Program *Recognizing Problem Gambling*

557 children and 112 adults participated in 22 presentations

This program helps children in grades one to twelve understand the impacts of problem gambling, and teaches them how to avoid becoming a problem gambler. Content is provided in a variety of media including: drama presentation and games, workshops, and display boards.

programs continued

Volunteer Program

276 active volunteers
7,263 volunteer hours

ASSIST provides an opportunity for individuals to learn, grow and develop their own skills by volunteering with us. Our dedicated volunteers help newcomers adjust to life in Canada, and to become engaged community members. As part of this program, each year we recognize outstanding volunteers through an official process using specific criteria.

Being a volunteer at the front desk in the downtown office has been a learning experience for me. I am learning the Canadian work environment even within the Chinese culture. I've even learned a few things in Mandarin, and I've been able to share some of my culture with others.

TOBI ADEBOGUN



Ten Outstanding Volunteers

Andrew Hui	Jordan Ho
Bong Chin	Mirea Lee
David Yi	Shelby Ries
Elena Stolypina	Stephanie Hepas
Fuyan Ma	Xiaoyan Yang

LINC Program *Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada*

695 students (including 141 refugees) 121 clients achieved the language requirement to apply for citizenship

This English language program is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and is open to adult permanent residents and refugees. Students learn practical, useful English for life in Canada at no cost. Some of the themes covered are health, employment, education, community services, housing, and shopping. Students come from all over the world, and can study with us for months or years as they choose to complete language levels one through six.

Settlement Program

Over 3100 newcomers served

Although Employment services ended in 2020 due to funding cuts, this critical program continues to offer comprehensive settlement support to newcomers, facilitating their settlement and integration in Canada. Through one-on-one counselling and group sessions, we provide information and referrals on settlement needs including housing, government programs, legal, health, education and much more.

Connecting Chinese Newcomer Seniors to Mainstream Services

1903 services provided to 1169 clients

This program which ended in September 2020, provided support for newcomers in accessing mainstream services such as Old Age Security, Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, Income Supports and health care. Assistance was provided in-person, by phone, email, and in information

workshops. We helped clients understand and complete forms, and provided interpretation, translation, and referral services. This in-demand program was supported strongly by volunteers that we recruited and trained. We also partnered with other senior-serving agencies including: SAGE, Mill Woods Seniors Association and Northeast Seniors Centre to provide support and services to seniors.



*Thank you so much for
ASSIST in helping me to solve
any problems that I have
encountered.*

YIP WAH WONG

*We are grateful that ASSIST
has organized workshops
to let us have a better
understanding about both
Federal and Provincial
seniors' benefits.*



programs continued

Seniors Drop-in

on average, 120 seniors attended activities each week

In partnership with G.E.M. Seniors Society, ASSIST provides a variety of activities for seniors on Tuesdays and Thursdays.



I am glad that there is a place for me to meet new friends and socialize with old ones.

Children's Summer Camps

267 children participated over 8 weeks from July 2 to August 23, 2019

ASSIST's Summer Camps are for children six to eleven years old. Parents choose fun and educational summer camps based on their child's interest. Camps provide opportunity for children to grow, develop and mature. Campers improve their leadership skills, learn age-appropriate social skills and work towards being independent. Field trips each week to a city attraction help broaden the children's perspective of the world.



Walk & Run Event

350 participants, 62 volunteers \$24,059 total funds raised

This annual walk & run event took place at Victoria Park on June 23, 2019.



Statement of Operations

For the Year Ended December 31, 2019

	2019	2018
Revenue		
Grants and funding	\$ 4,515,220	\$5,386,696
Book sales and other	67,237	83,098
Casino	47,733	53,512
Donations	28,394	24,029
Fundraising	24,059	21,059
Tuition and activity fees	33,732	29,913
Memberships	2,660	2,765
Interest	4,392	4,217
Total revenue	\$4,723,427	\$5,605,289
Operating expenses		
Program costs	4,540,337	5,559,650
Office expenses	270,228	170,362
Salaries and related benefits	226,784	193,476
Reserve expenses	81,546	219,651
Telephone & Utilities	68,397	67,879
Amortization of tangible assets	32,362	31,988
Insurance	24,266	22,624
Repairs and maintenance	18,325	33,807
Professional fees	16,035	12,574
Advertising and promotion	5,830	17,066
Fundraising	4,084	4,084
Donation	3,220	-
Interest and bank charges	3,209	2,599
Renovation - operation	-	378
Recovery of internal allocations	(571,196)	(730,849)
Total operating expenses	\$4,723,427	\$5,605,289
Excess (shortfall) of revenue over expenses	\$ —	\$ —



ASSIST

Community Services Centre

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LINC Office

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ASSIST gratefully acknowledges our funders:

Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Employment & Social
Development Canada

Canada Summer
Jobs (CSJ) Program

New Horizons for
Seniors Program

Alberta Children's Services
- Edmonton Region

Alberta Justice
& Solicitor General

Alberta Culture,
Multiculturalism and
Status of Women

Alberta Labour &
Immigration

Alberta Health Services

The City of Edmonton
Family & Community
Support Services

ECALA