

CWICE Annual Impact Report 2024/25:
Exploring Connectivity and Movement Across Borders



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CWICE



Child Welfare Immigration
Centre of Excellence

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Foreword

The Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE) at Peel Children's Aid Society (Peel CAS) is dedicated to addressing the intersection of child welfare and immigration. This report provides an overview of the impact achieved through outreach, partnerships, research, training, and service delivery this past year. We are grateful to our partners, staff, and stakeholders for their contributions toward ensuring positive outcomes for children and families.

Immigration issues are increasingly present in child welfare work, requiring centralized knowledge and resources. CWICE serves as a thought and systems leader, offering guidance, insights, and recommendations that impact services and meet the unique needs of refugee and immigrant families. This report reflects our continued efforts to foster equity and inclusivity in child welfare practices.

Compiled by Danielle Ungara; contributors to this report include Aissatou, Mary Beth Moellenkamp, Prasad Nair, Liz Okai, Claudia Obreque, Celistine Frampton, Alicja Grabarczyk, Fatima Mukai, Rosario Elmy, Thomas Abraham, Mohamed Shaw, Gillian Tennyson, Abimbola Fajobi, Mandisa Sifelani, Abimbola Oyeyinka, Roya Nang, Loubna Zouggari, Ghezal Wallid, Zrinka Buric, Nadia Drepaup, Susan Katumba, and Danielle Ungara.

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Introduction

CWICE Managers Liz Okai, Nadia Drepaul, and Danielle Ungara

As we reflect on 2024-25, we are profoundly grateful for the collective efforts that have helped propel our clients and CWICE forward. We've had the privilege of witnessing many outcomes and successes achieved for children, youth, and families. We have seen the positive impact of new regulations and policies in place, and we have built new opportunities such as embarking on outreach nationally and completing community-based research regarding digital equity initiatives.

The collaboration between compassionate service organizations and dedicated professionals has been a testament to the power of working in unity for those we serve. We will need this to continue, to help us navigate the challenges ahead and thank Peel CAS and its staff for their continuous support.

"CWICE continues to lead the way in addressing the complex intersection of immigration and child welfare, ensuring that every child and family—regardless of status—receives equitable and compassionate support when they need it.

At Peel CAS, we are proud to champion this essential work and the innovation CWICE brings to our sector. Our strong partnerships across communities, agencies, and government are central to CWICE's success and help us drive meaningful change for children, youth, and families."

-Mary Beth Moellenkamp, CEO, Peel CAS

As CWICE continues its work, this past year highlighted policy changes across many borders impacting children, youth, and families in Canada. These changes have raised concerns for the welfare of refugees and immigrants around the world and we recognize that, globally, there remain socio-political and environmental factors causing displacement and the largest number of people on the move in history. Amid these challenges, there remains many successes to celebrate, a collective hope and strength which is important to recognize, and there continues to be determination within our partnerships and coalitions.

We want to take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to success this year. To our partners and supporters, let us continue to innovate together! Our dedicated team members will briefly introduce themselves at the end of the report; they show their belief in our vision every day, with excellence in service and unwavering commitment. They have been the cornerstone of our successes this year, as you will see in Aissatou's first-person account in the next section. Together, we've addressed systemic challenges and championed the rights of those we serve. We look forward to standing together with those who need us most and are inspired to continue fostering collaboration. We are excited for the possibilities that lay ahead.

CWICE IMPACT: A First-Person Point of View

L'histoire d'Aissatou (en Français):

“Je suis arrivée au Canada à l'âge de 12 ans. Quelques années plus tard, je suis entrée dans le système de la protection de l'enfance. À ce moment-là, je n'avais que mes papiers de réfugiée. Mon parcours dans le système n'a pas été simple : j'ai dû changer de maison à trois reprises, ce qui a considérablement retardé ma demande de résidence permanente. Pendant longtemps, dans les maisons d'accueil où j'étais placée, la majorité des autres enfants avaient déjà obtenu leur statut. J'étais la seule à encore dépendre de mes papiers de réfugiée, ce qui me faisait sentir très différente et isolée. Ce processus a été très difficile pour moi : on changeait constamment mon avocat et mon intervenante sociale, ce qui rendait tout encore plus compliqué. Je n'en garde pas de très bons souvenirs.

Mais après avoir reçu ma carte de résidence permanente, j'ai attendu la période requise avant de pouvoir faire une demande de citoyenneté. J'en ai parlé à mon intervenante sociale, qui m'a alors référée au service d'immigration et Loubna m'a contacté peu de temps après. Honnêtement, après tout ce que j'avais vécu, je n'avais pas beaucoup d'espoir. Mais cette fois-ci, les choses ont été complètement différentes. Loubna a été très présente pour moi. Loubna m'appelait, me rassurait, me tenait informée à chaque étape du processus. Je me suis vraiment sentie soutenue. Les démarches ont été rapides et efficaces. Nous avons soumis la demande en octobre, j'ai reçu ma convocation pour l'examen de citoyenneté en décembre, et mes papiers en février. Tout s'est déroulé de manière fluide, ce qui a été un immense soulagement pour moi. Tous les frais ont été couverts par le service d'immigration ce pour quoi je suis extrêmement reconnaissante. Aujourd'hui, j'ai ma citoyenneté, mon passeport canadien, je peux voter, et je prévois même de voyager. C'est un vrai tournant dans ma vie, et je remercie profondément Loubna et toutes les personnes qui ont travaillé sur mon dossier.

Je pense que tous les enfants issus de l'immigration devraient avoir droit à ce genre de soutien : être écoutés, accompagnés, compris. C'est essentiel d'avoir une intervenante sociale à nos côtés, quelqu'un qui nous guide et nous soutient moralement. Mais dans un pays comme le Canada, où les papiers sont nécessaires pour presque toutes les démarches — études, travail, santé, logement —, l'aspect immigration est encore plus crucial. Ce sont les services d'immigration (CWICE) qui nous accompagnent dans les processus les plus importants : demandes de statut, renouvellements, citoyenneté, etc. C'est pourquoi je suis profondément reconnaissante envers Loubna et le service d'immigration de l'aide à l'enfance pour leur engagement et leur efficacité”.

Aissatou's Story (translated to English):

“I arrived in Canada at the age of 12. A few years later, I entered the child welfare system. At that time, I only had my refugee papers. My journey through the system wasn't easy: I had to change homes three times, which significantly delayed my application for permanent residency. For a long time, in the foster homes where I was placed, most of the other children had already obtained their status. I was the only one still relying on my refugee papers, which made me feel very different and isolated. My lawyer and social worker were constantly changing, which made everything even more complicated. I don't have very good memories.

I waited for the required period before I could apply for citizenship. I spoke to my social worker, who then referred me to CWICE, and Loubna contacted me shortly after. Honestly, after everything I'd been through, I didn't have much hope. But this time, things were completely different. Loubna was there for me. Loubna called me, reassured me, and kept me informed every step of the way. I really felt supported. The process was quick and efficient. We submitted the application in October, I received my invitation to take the citizenship test in December, and my paperwork was done in February. Everything went smoothly, which was a huge relief for me. Today, I have my citizenship, my Canadian passport, I can vote, and I even plan to travel. This is a real turning point in my life, and I sincerely thank Loubna and everyone who worked on my application.

I think all children of immigrant origin should have the right to this kind of support: to be listened to, accompanied, and understood. It's essential to have a social worker by our side, someone who guides us and provides moral support. But in a country like Canada, where papers are required for almost everything—study, work, health, housing—the immigration aspect is even more crucial. Without CWICE support, many young people like me risk remaining stuck despite the system's help. That's why I'm deeply grateful to Loubna and the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence for their commitment”.

Impact of Capacity Building

While we work to re-envision child welfare services across Ontario, we are focused on ensuring children, youth, and families are visible and heard in a meaningful way. Within CWICE, we are committed to shifting practices, shaping policy, integrating data and equity, and influencing positive outcomes within our sector. Yet we recognize we do not do this work alone, and it must be done in partnership and with community.

We have continued, this past year, to deliver messages about our work and the intersection of child welfare with immigration, settlement, and border-related issues. To raise awareness about these issues, we have continued to engage others in their work and find new ways to collaborate together. We continue this in service to children, youth, and their families.

Outreach Presentations

Since 2018, we have presented to **10,455 individuals**, with the intention of raising awareness of these intersectionalities and complexities of our work. This year, **we offered 37 presentations, engaging 1,536 individuals**. CWICE staff met with newly arrived families living in temporary shelters and hotels. As well, we provided presentations to child welfare professionals, social work students, immigration officers, and settlement staff across the country. We participated in webinars, panels, spoke at conferences, and launched a national outreach project outlined later in this report.

CWICE offered presentations during Pathways to Prosperity, International Youth Homelessness Prevention, and Metropolis Canada conferences. Another highlight from the year includes CWICE Manager Liz Okai speaking with OACAS' One Vision, One Voice panel *The Well-being of African, Caribbean and Black Families*. Leaders from OACAS shared their feedback on the importance of the continued partnership with CWICE:

“CWICE continues to be a beacon of hope and knowledge as they help the child welfare sector to better understand the impact of immigration and settlement issues on the children, youth and families we serve. OACAS, as a co-founder and partner of CWICE since its inception in 2018, is beyond proud to stand shoulder to shoulder in this critical work. Let us deepen our connectivity to one another and continue to embrace progress towards lasting change for the communities we serve”

– Solomon Owoo, CEO of OACAS

“As we continue to work within the ever-challenging scope of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the child welfare sector, I draw upon the wisdom shared by our friends at CWICE. When we feel that this work is impossible towards lasting progress, CWICE demonstrates commitment, expertise and action through their broad and deep knowledge where child welfare intersects with immigration. I am forever grateful for the work of CWICE, our long-standing partnership at OACAS, and their commitment to always stay grounded in the lived realities of community”

- Kristin Roe, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Lead at OACAS

We are proud of our continued partnerships, as well as new capacity building opportunities this year.

CWICE Conference

Susan Katumba, Training and Event Coordinator

The first CWICE national conference was a huge success, boasting **270 registrants from 79 different child welfare, immigration, and social service organizations**. All participants came together on June 12, 2024, to dive into the issues facing children, youth, and families.

Hosted at Pearson Convention Centre, in Brampton, presentations included a panel of women with lived experience. They shared their impactful stories of the immigration challenges they faced, with some speaking of the services received from CWICE. Line Patry discussed survey data from Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada (IRCC) about Canadians' evolving perceptions and attitudes toward immigration. This was followed by keynote speaker Debbie Douglas, of Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, offering a passionate appeal for system change.

Within the lived experience panel, Antonella Tersigni from Maple Star Services, spoke about the incredible impact CWICE had with 2 teen brothers who had been in care since a young age without citizenship or identity documentation. This meant that getting a job, travelling or university applications were not possible. Ms. Tersigni felt the system had failed them. After connecting with CWICE they were given a different approach for citizenship, and she shared CWICE helped every step of the way. Within months the boys had citizenship and she expressed her sincere gratitude to CWICE:

"The boys were so happy; the weight was lifted off their shoulders. What had taken us years to do, but couldn't, they made look easy."

In the afternoon, conference attendees chose from four national workshops topics and four international topics. This resulted in a full and rewarding day of learning and connection. Attendees were left hungry for ongoing training and connection. For additional information about the conference, to view an illustrated summary of the event, related video and photos, please visit: [Conference¹](#)

Communications

For ongoing awareness CWICE shares critical information with the sector and professionals in a variety of methods. CWICE uses e-newsletters, develops website content, sends sector-wide issue notes, and shares information on social media. Over the past year, we distributed nine newsletters featuring 58 articles to **1,598 subscribers**.

Our website - www.cwice.ca - received **15,000 page views from 6,800 unique users**. Most visitors were from Canada (65%), followed by the USA (26%) and China (1.5%). Website visitors showed particular interest in the conference, about us section, referral, and training pages.

The CWICE team also published 19 original articles, with the most popular being "*A Landscape of Change in 2025*". This article, published in January 2025, had nearly four times more views than the next most-read article. Most users seemed to locate the CWICE website through Google searches, with smaller numbers arriving via links from other websites. **Did you know? CWICE has a French website too!**²

Success Story: Supporting Families Newly Arrived

Rosario Elmy, Immigration Specialist

This year we had an increase in settlement organizations requesting outreach presentations for new families entering Canada. We continued to deliver these presentations, in collaboration with Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services, specifically for the refugees they support arriving in Peel Region. During our presentations, we highlight information about child welfare and social services in the province of Ontario. We also engage in discussions with settlement staff and families directly, remaining on site to complete consultations after presentations. Sometimes this leads to joint advocacy to assist families accessing specific services they need. One of the barriers we've continued to see over the past year is that families are remaining at the reception centers much longer than anticipated due to a lack of affordable housing. Additionally, we've seen an increase in families arriving with children who have disabilities, health, complex, and special needs. These families often require more coordinated services for their children in the first month of arrival. Families have told me they find this dialogue helpful as they begin settling in Canada. As we move into the upcoming year, CWICE will continue delivering presentations both in person and virtually, supporting and guiding newly arrived families.

A recent success - A family with six children, all under 10, recently resettled in Canada. Of the six children, four have significant special needs, including one child with a physical disability requiring a wheelchair. Through the collaborative advocacy efforts of settlement staff, various community organizations including CWICE, we worked together to expedite this process. The family was effectively integrated into necessary medical services, provided with essential resources for transitioning to permanent housing, and access to the assisted devices needed. In addition, we assisted the family in receiving clothing, cleaning supplies, and grocery gift cards to support their settlement process. Though the family did not receive or require direct child welfare services, as there were no concerns with the care of the children, CWICE played a crucial role in helping the family and service providers navigating the complex systems with community partners. Ultimately, the family successfully secured housing, established connections with appropriate medical professionals, and began their journey of acclimating to their new community.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Collaboration with organizations continues to strengthen our ability to serve refugee and immigrant families. We've maintained several key partnerships this year, and are grateful for our work together:

"CBSA officers are on alert for minors who need protection and pay extra attention to children as they enter Canada, following specific procedures in cases of suspected child abduction. Officers will conduct a further examination whenever they have concerns about the purpose of a child's trip to Canada, their welfare, or the parental relationship of an accompanying adult.

CBSA is proud to partner with organizations, like CWICE at Peel CAS, that help ensure that resources are provided to vulnerable groups, including women, children and young adults fleeing abuse. It is through such collaborations that we are able to help protect our communities in long lasting and enduring ways"

-Colleen Murphy, Intelligence Officer, Canada Border Services Agency



This past year, CWICE Managers Liz Okai and Danielle Ungara joined a community of practice with professionals across the United States of America. As Canadian representatives, we are proud to be the only non-American professionals in the network. The community of practice meets bi-monthly to share news, research, and best practice approaches. Leaders shared their feedback recently:

“The Center on Immigration and Child Welfare Initiative (CIMMCW) coordinates an Immigration and Child Welfare Practice Network to connect a diverse group of child welfare practitioners and administrators, legal practitioners, and policy advocates who work with immigrant children and families who touch the child welfare system.

We appreciate the attendance and participation of colleagues from the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence in Canada, as they bring a unique international perspective to the group, offering new opportunities for peer-learning and resource and information-sharing on issues impacting immigrant children and families who touch the child welfare system”

– CIMMCW, School of Social Welfare, University of California, Berkeley

As CWICE continues to evolve in Ontario, we have been keen to enhance partnerships and research which expands our understanding, collaboration opportunities, as well as reach and impact.

National Outreach Project

Nadia Drepaul, CWICE Manager

Fatima Mukai, Child Welfare Immigration Specialist

In 2024, CWICE launched its National Outreach Project; through the generosity of our funders, the Northpine Foundation, and in collaboration with Children’s Aid Foundation Ontario. The National Outreach Project has kick-started an exciting capacity-building venture that will support child welfare professionals across six provinces, equipping them with the tools and resources needed to better serve refugee and immigrant children and families.

CWICE is excited to report a positive response during the initial outreach phase, with provinces engaging in meaningful conversations, sharing common challenges, and exploring opportunities for collaboration. CWICE training will begin in 2025 in two provinces in the Atlantic Region, with CWICE actively working with other provinces to schedule additional training sessions throughout the country.

We are thrilled about the impact this project will have nationwide in the coming year, helping to foster more inclusive and informed child welfare practices across Canada. Please see a quote from the first province to join the project:

“Nova Scotia’s Child and Family Wellbeing division (CFW) is excited to partner again with CWICE, this time as part of their National Outreach Project. CWICE has become a well-utilized resource for CFW in Nova Scotia over the past years, as they have provided training to promote increased staff awareness of the impacts of immigration matters when children and families are in receipt of child and family wellbeing services. We look forward to collaborative learning, incorporating leading practices, improved supports, and positive outcomes for the children, youth and families”

-Stacey Greenough, Director, Child Safety, Family Preservation & Children in Care, Nova Scotia

Research Update

Ghezal Wallid, Data & Research Coordinator

As a Centre of Excellence, we remain committed to innovation and research. This year, we have continued to work with key academic and community-based research partners. Here is a brief summary of these projects.

1. Digital Equity and Inclusion in Settlement Services for Newcomers in Peel Region

In 2024, CWICE successfully completed a community-based research project in collaboration with the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group and the Peel Multicultural Council. This project was funded by IRCC and the Region of Peel. To complete the research team, CWICE hired a Research Assistant to support the initiative.

The study analyzed both individual and organizational perspectives on digital access challenges, with a particular focus on digital literacy within the settlement sector. The project involved in-depth data collection, including 25 interviews with newcomers and 17 surveys with service provider organizations. Through these efforts, the research team explored the barriers newcomers face in accessing digital services and identified potential solutions to improve this access.

Key findings from the research highlighted several significant barriers to digital access. Based on these insights, the study put forward a series of actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing service delivery and digital inclusion for newcomers. The research and findings were presented at the P2P National Conference 2024 and at the Toronto Metropolis Conference in 2025, underscoring the importance and relevance of the research within the broader community and policy-making landscape. For more information: [Digital Equity in Settlement Research Report 2025.pdf](#)³

2. Connecting Child Welfare and Immigration Systems: The Role of CWICE

Since 2018, CWICE has been in a research partnership with Henry Parada at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) and the Rights for Children and Youth Partnership (RCYP). The ongoing partnership explores the critical intersection between child welfare and immigration. During a RCYP project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), TMU conducted interviews and focus groups with professionals to better understand the experiences of those receiving service with child welfare and immigration sectors. The research project delved into the experiences of front-line workers supporting individuals with immigration status issues, capturing insights through interviews with 14 social service and child welfare professionals. The findings highlighted many had experiences with CWICE, and participants felt CWICE bridges gaps in support for children, youth, and families facing immigration challenges.

A key outcome of the project was the development of a system map, which visually represents the interconnected support systems at play at the point of entry, highlighting the important role of CWICE in linking child welfare and immigration systems. This map demonstrates how CWICE's work leads to positive outcomes for children and youth, emphasizing the organization's vital role in fostering collaboration between these systems. For more information about findings related to CWICE: [cwice_tmu-report.pdf](#)

3. We Are in A Position of Power: Front Line’s Workers Experiences at The Intersection of Child and Immigration.

In partnership with Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), CWICE Manager Danielle Ungara published an article in 2024 based on research findings from the RCYP 2021/22 research. The article, related to the above-described research, focused on the compounded systemic issues that children and families face when involved with immigration and child welfare. It explored the systemic gaps in recognizing and addressing the needs of refugee children and families within the Canadian child welfare and immigration systems. The findings speak to the need for training for child welfare professionals. For more information: [“WE ARE IN A POSITION OF POWER”: FRONT-LINE WORKE... – Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social – Érudit](#)⁵

4. Border(ing) Practices

CWICE Managers Liz Okai and Danielle Ungara continued to participate on the Advisory panel of this multi-year project. Led by researchers at the University of Toronto (Rupaleem Bhuyan) and University of Victoria (Mandeep Kaur), this research has entered its final phase and year. Funded by SSHRCC, the research team recently planned arts-based workshops for participants in both provinces who have lived experience with the immigration and child welfare system in Canada. For more information: [Home | BorderingPractices: Systemic Racism, Immigration, and Child Welfare](#)⁶

Innovation Corner: New opportunities and requests

This year, CWICE managers responded to nearly **200 non-service additional inquiries**. This continues to demonstrate the growing demand for immigration-related expertise in child welfare and beyond. Examples of new opportunities presented include meeting requests for others to learn about CWICE and vice versa, requests to attend events, provide media interviews, or partner in research projects. As in previous years, the requests have also included access to data requests and invitations for policy/protocol development.

An example of advocacy and policy influence this year was CWICE’s leadership in the ongoing coordination of support for Bill S-235. This Bill proposed amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Citizenship Act. The Bill was followed through the Senate of Canada in 2024 and introduced in the House in October 2024. However, the Bill was not passed before the legislature was prorogued in January 2025. As a result, the Bill ceases to exist in its current form. We will continue to advocate for changes that intend to have a positive impact on the youth and young adults we serve. We commit to continuing to collaborate with a coalition of other advocates on the issues outlined in Bill S-235 as these efforts underscore CWICE's dedication to equity in outcomes. As well, these changes would hold an important impact for children and youth in out-of-home care across Canada. For more information: [S-235 \(44-1\) - LEGISinfo - Parliament of Canada](#)⁷

CWICE Training

Claudia Obreque, Immigration Specialist

Child Welfare Certificate Series

CWICE remains committed to strengthening capacity within the child welfare sector through specialized training initiatives. In 2020, CWICE introduced a Certificate Program comprising of eight courses, designed to address the complex intersections of child welfare, immigration, settlement, and border-related issues.

Tailored for child welfare professionals, the program had total attendance of 125 this year and has reached **a total attendance of 1,473 since 2020⁸**. This year, participants joined training from 9 child welfare organizations. Attendees across the years include child welfare professionals from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. Between 2022-2025, **60 individuals received the certificate**, completing the full series (outlined below). These graduates joined us from 6 child welfare organizations across Ontario.

CWICE Certificate Program (Course List)

- ⑤ Introduction of the Canadian Immigration System & Intersection with Child Welfare
- ④ Refugees Part 1: Asylum Seekers & Denied Claimants
- ④ Refugees Part 2: Unaccompanied and Separated Children
- ④ Humanitarian & Compassionate Grounds Applications for Permanent Residence
- ④ Refugees Part 3: GARs and Privately Sponsored Refugees
- ④ Placements Across Borders, Family Sponsorships and Economic Immigration Streams
- ④ Temporary and Unresolved Immigration Status
- ④ Creating & Ensuring Equitable Outcomes in Child Welfare

Building and Bridging Together

We see safety and well-being of children, youth, and families as a collective responsibility. Acknowledging the importance of collaboration, in February 2024, CWICE introduced a specialized training course, *Building and Bridging Together: Child Welfare, Immigration, and Settlement Sectors*. Designed for professionals in settlement, health, education, legal, and social service sectors, this course enhances awareness of the intersections between child welfare, immigration, settlement, and border-related matters. Through cross-sector collaboration, this training fosters relationship-building and partnerships, ultimately supporting equitable outcomes for children, youth, and families. In 2024/25, staff from 12 organizations joined this course, representing five sectors in Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Ontario. The sectors include: child welfare, education, social services, housing/shelter system, settlement and resettlement sectors.

Summary

CWICE now offers 10 courses: 8 for child welfare professionals (certificate series), 1 course for allied professionals (Building & Bridging), and 1 course for foster caregivers. Across our training portfolio, we've now had **a total training attendance of 1603 since 2020** (table 1).

Table/chart 1: Fiscal year (2024/25) and Five-year summary (2020-2025)

Training Data	Fiscal Year 2024/2025	Five-Year Summary 2020 – 2025
Total Sessions	11	115
Total Hours of Training	77	801
Total Attendance	166	1,603

Training Evaluation Highlights

Claudia Obreque, Immigration Specialist

We remain proud of the many successes of our robust training program. Highlights of feedback from participants includes:

- 📍 92% training participants felt training enhanced their understanding of the intersection between child welfare, immigration, and settlement
- 📍 92% felt the trainers were knowledgeable
- 📍 90% found information presented relevant to their role
- 📍 86% felt training content was easy to understand

Within training for child welfare professionals, participants shared valuable insights. They emphasize the program's relevance in their work and impact on the sector:

- ❖ *"As a child protection worker, having clear guidance on handling cases involving unaccompanied minors is incredibly valuable."*
- ❖ *"This training is extremely relevant to CPWs and their role in supporting families. Many of my cases involve families with varying immigration status, and this training has significantly enhanced my ability to support them."*
- ❖ *"The instructors were amazing."*

The *Building and Bridging Together: Child Welfare, Immigration, and Settlement Sectors'* participants provided overwhelmingly positive feedback:

- ❖ *"This was such a rich training – especially the history of immigration segment. It offered a refreshing and illuminating perspective on Canada's history."*
- ❖ *"Please continue to offer these trainings; a wide reach is necessary and valuable."*
- ❖ *"The training was very informative and detailed. The presenters were highly knowledgeable and well-prepared."*
- ❖ *"I hope to see more training sessions in the future."*

The overall feedback continues to underscore the value of CWICE's training program and the ongoing demand for continued learning opportunities in this field.

Success Story: A Community Response to Support Newcomer Youth Mental Health

Liz Okai, CWICE Manager

Mandisa Sifelani, Immigration Specialist

In Fall 2024, CWICE participated in a cross-sectoral training initiative aimed at supporting newcomer youth and international student mental health. This initiative was part of the Region of Peel's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan under the Mental Health and Addictions Action Table. The training, *Fostering Culturally Safe First Interactions with Newcomer Young Adults and International Students*, was developed and delivered in collaboration with the University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine. It was co-designed with several community and academic partners including Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin, Punjabi Community Health Services, Roots Community Services, Trillium Health Partners, Sheridan College, COSTI, and Algoma University, with leadership from the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group (PNSG) and support from CWICE.

The training focused on building the cultural competency of frontline staff who serve as initial points of contact for clients. A key feature of the training was the use of standardized patients (SPs) -trained actors who simulate real-life scenarios. This innovative approach, commonly used in medical education, provided a dynamic environment for participants to practice and refine culturally safe intake and communication skills. We aimed to enable participants to initiate culturally safe and responsive intake interactions and foster awareness of critical issues related to mental health intakes. We focused on building rapport through reducing bias and stigma.

The training was delivered in two phases: a virtual introductory session followed by an in-person experiential training hosted at Peel CAS. A total of 80 frontline professionals from various sectors, including settlement, healthcare, mental health, education, and child and family services attended the sessions. Participants were grouped into smaller teams to work through simulated scenarios, each facilitated by a sector expert. CWICE proudly contributed eight team members to support the facilitation of the in-person training: Claudia Obreque, Celistine Frampton, Mandisa Sifelani, Abimbola Fajobi, Rosario Elmy, Abimbola Oyeyinka, Danielle Ungara, and Liz Okai.

The training initiative received participant feedback about its impact:

- 🌱 Participants reported that the training offered a safe and supportive space for open dialogue, self-reflection, and bias awareness.
- 🌱 The inclusion of simulated client scenarios allowed for practical skill-building and meaningful feedback. Beyond individual learning, the training strengthened cross-sector collaboration, resource sharing, and referral pathways.
- 🌱 During a concluding forum in October, participants expressed strong interest in continued collaboration and in expanding this training to reach a broader range of frontline professionals.

We are proud this initiative reflects CWICE's commitment to culturally safe, trauma-informed, and inclusive service delivery for newcomer communities. We are further grateful for the opportunity to partner with the other organizations who offered leadership and innovation in practice⁹.

Impact of Service

This year, we have noted increasing complexity in service requests. These trends demonstrate many systems were simply not designed for the ways people live their lives, particularly across borders and in the globalized and post-pandemic world. As experts in service, our staff understand the unique needs and vulnerabilities of those who experience the intersection of child welfare with immigration, settlement and borders. **This year, CWICE received 687 referrals.** In total, and since our launch in 2018, CWICE has now received over **4,029 total referrals for service**⁸.

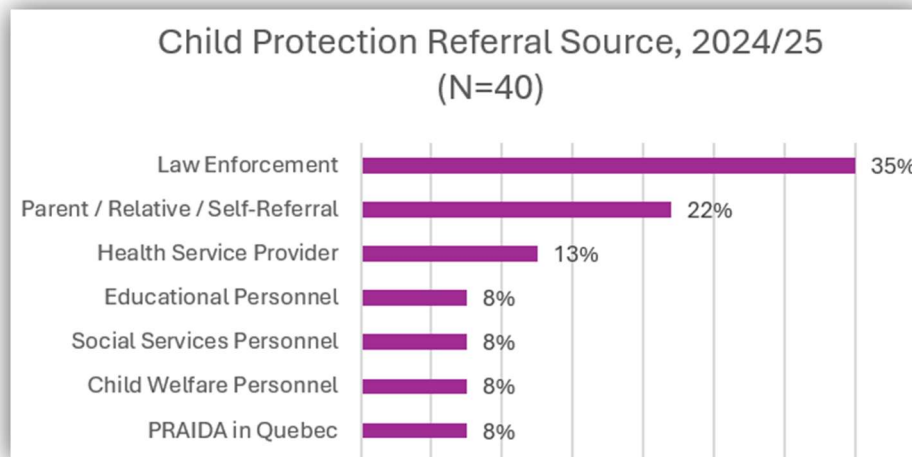
Child Protection Services

Liz Okai, CWICE Manager

Roya Nang, Immigration Specialist

Ghezal Wallid, Data & Research Coordinator

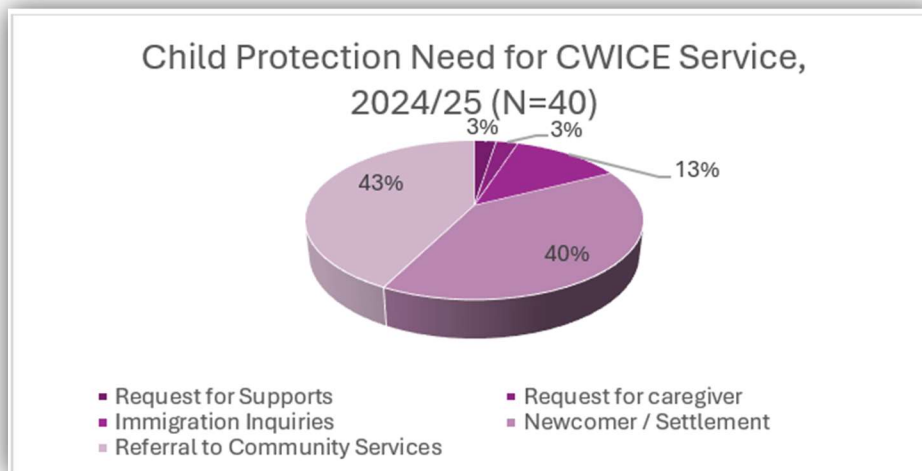
This year CWICE staff supported **40 new child protection cases in Peel Region** involving intersecting immigration complexities, ensuring child protection services align with legal and cultural considerations. This resulted in new services provided for 122 individuals, and referrals were received from a range of sources, outlined in Table/chart 2 below.



Table/chart 2

The primary child welfare concerns, at the time of referral, included risk of separation of child/youth from parent/caregiver (30%), risk of physical/sexual harm (27.5%), request for assistance (12.5%), concerns related to caregiver capacity (12.5%), request for counselling (10%), and concerns related to risk of emotional harm (7.5%).

This year, we continued to support clients with a broad range of intersecting service needs and immigration status. Referrals to community services represented the highest proportion of requests (43%), followed closely by newcomer and settlement needs (40%) – Table/chart 3. This speaks of the multitude of needs faced by families in the community, and their request for help in navigating systems and services.



Table/chart 3

As in the previous year, Asylum seekers made up the largest group of service recipients (30%), followed by Permanent residents (20%), Temporary residents - including work permit holders, international students, and visitors (18%), Canadian citizens (16%), and Convention refugees (9%).

Success Story: A Family Planning Permanency

Gillian Tennyson, CWICE Child Protection Worker

In July 2023 we received a call from the community for a family consisting of a mother and her 4 children. At that time, they were residing in temporary shelter and upon interviewing the mother, she revealed she has stage 4 cancer. The father had already passed away before the family migrated to Canada. The mother shared she made a Will and would request her aunt take custody of her 4 children however her Aunt would need to be able to come to Canada to care for them.

During our involvement, we supported the family to obtain housing and get settled in the community, including in schools and a church community. The family attended their refugee hearing in February 2024, and received a positive decision. As this is a time sensitive matter, I supported the family along with my colleague Mandisa Sifelani to quickly submit the family's PR application. While this mother continues with her cancer treatment, there have been numerous school and other issues to support the family navigating. The Mother advised that she is very grateful for the support from the agency, and indicated she no longer feels alone in her struggle to build a life for her children in Canada. The mother speaks highly of Canada being a safe place where her children can thrive and avail of all the opportunities here for their future success.

I feel privileged to walk alongside this family during an incredibly difficult time in their lives. I share in their hope for a bright future for each of the children who have sought and received refuge in Canada.

Success Story: A Youth's Return to Canada

Mohamed Shaw, CWICE Child Protection Worker

CWICE received a heartfelt email from a 16-year-old youth in Pakistan. This youth, a Canadian citizen, was preparing to return to Canada after living abroad since infancy. The youth had left Canada at just one year old with his parents and was now returning alone, without any family members in the country to support him. In collaboration with our partners, CWICE provided pre-arrival services to help prepare the youth for his transition. Upon his arrival, he was placed in foster care due to the absence of available caregivers in Canada. Like many newcomers, the youth faced significant settlement challenges, adjusting to a new culture, climate, and way of life, all while being separated from his family.

At our first meeting, the youth asked, “Mohamed, how can I adjust to this big city?” I reassured him that many newcomers go through a similar adjustment process, and that he was not alone. Since then, the youth has made significant strides. He has formed friendships at school and is actively building a support network. While he initially found the food in Canada very different from what he was used to, he now enjoys local fast-food favorites like KFC and Popeyes. With CWICE’s ongoing support, the youth has become more comfortable navigating life in Canada. He is aware of nearby mosques and the prayer rooms available at school, which support his cultural and religious practices. After several months, he has shared that he feels well-supported in these areas and is beginning to feel at home.

This youth’s foster parents have also been instrumental in his re-integration to Canada. They have explored pathways for him to pursue his dream of becoming a police officer, including local cadet programs. Importantly, the youth remains in regular contact with his family in Pakistan, maintaining vital emotional connections while building a new life in Canada.

CWICE Consultations

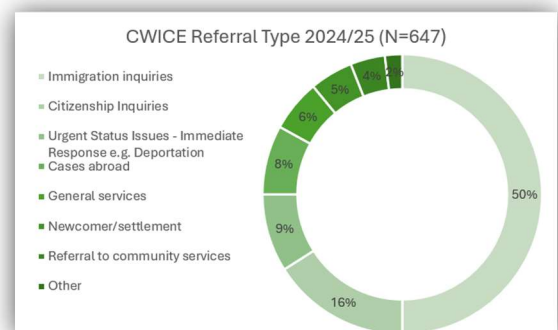
Alicja Grabarczyk, Immigration Specialist

Celistine Frampton, Immigration Specialist

Ghezal Wallid, Data & Research Coordinator

This year, CWICE we received **647 consultation requests**, which is a 3.19% increase from last year⁸. Most referrals were from Ontario child welfare organizations (69%). This year, we received referrals from 29 child welfare agencies across Ontario. Combined with other requests child welfare professionals across Canada (BC, Nova Scotia, and PEI) and abroad (UK, USA, Austria), we’ve seen an overall increase of child welfare agencies referring to CWICE by 13%. While still varied, other top referral sources include federal partners (11%) and parent/relative/self-referrals (7%).

The main reasons for CWICE consultations include Immigration inquiries (50%), citizenship inquiries (16%), Urgent Status Issues, (9%), and cases abroad (8%). Urgent immediate responses are provided for responding to unaccompanied and separated children or for anyone facing deportation. There were also requests for general services and settlement/newcomer needs- see Table/chart 4.



When individuals are referred to CWICE, we seek to better understand their current child welfare status. The largest group of referrals were for clients already receiving investigation services in Ontario (26.5%), followed by individuals not currently involved in child welfare services (23%). Other referrals were for children in care (15%), clients receiving ongoing child welfare services (12.5%), and young adults receiving Ready Set Go services (8%). Smaller percentages accounted for those receiving Voluntary Youth Service Agreements, or those receiving kinship and adoption services. The referrals at the investigation phase demonstrate that child welfare professionals are recognizing the importance of early intervention and they are asking identity and immigration-related questions. As CWICE has offered capacity building programs and consultations for several years now, this may be confirmation of an increased awareness in the sector.

This year there was also an increase in child welfare referrals pertaining to children in both interim and extended society care, as well as youth who are receiving Ready Set Go services¹⁰. This may be related to new regulations¹¹ in place that request professionals obtain identity documents for children, as well as verifying immigration status, and ensuring permanent immigration pathways exist. We observed that some youth lack knowledge of their immigration history, may have limited contact with parents or others who are gatekeepers of critical information. Some youth lack the identity documents necessary for immigration applications or even identity document replacement. Some parents and caregivers whose children are in out-of-home care also face immigration-related issues themselves and may place them in precarious situations or impact reunification planning.

Lastly, we recognize there were 21 referrals from settlement service agencies across Canada, which could be a result of our new training *Building and Bridging Together: A focus on Child Welfare, Immigration, and Settlement Sectors* and the national outreach initiative^{12,13}. As well, we noted many referrals by parents, self-referrals and relatives. Often people are looking for resources in the community, and some discover our services from the website and through word-of-mouth.

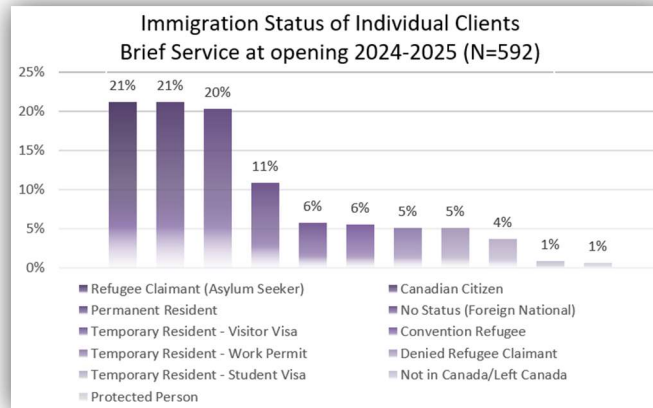
Brief Services

Celistine Frampton, Immigration Specialist
Alicja Grabarczyk, Immigration Specialist
Fatima Mukai, Immigration Specialist
Danielle Ungara, CWICE Manager

This year, **375 new brief services** were opened to support requests requiring ongoing support. This resulted in service to **592 individuals**. While the needs are varied, some are highlighted as emerging trends. We noted there were several requests exploring the possibility of placing children in care with family members abroad or determining if families can relocate to Canada to care for children and youth in care. These cases abroad require a comprehensive immigration assessment and careful planning. Referrals can be complex, as children in care may have precarious immigration status or lack identity documents. Also, we are reliant on the immigration system in terms of requirements, processing times, and decision making.

There were gains in 2023 when IRCC processed a total of 7.4M applications for permanent residents, temporary residents (excluding electronic travel authorizations) and citizenship. This was an increase in final decisions of 42% compared to the 5.2M processed in 2022¹⁴. Mid-year in 2024, there was a backlog noted in proceedings including refugee hearings before the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada¹⁵.

This year, 88% of those receiving service involved individuals who had some type of temporary or permanent immigration status in Canada at the time of referral (Table/chart 5). In some cases, people needed to further their status due to opportunities for employment, further education, or even to have a chance of competing as an Olympian.



Table/chart 5

In many instances, service wait times, lack of resources in both formal and informal supports, are leading more families to seek support from outside of Canada. This might mean having family members come to Canada on temporary basis to help with childcare requirements, supervision or respite. We also see referrals in ongoing services and investigation stage where families need support and advocacy from a child welfare organization to ensure that children can remain in the home. Whether we are working on permanent residency or citizenship applications, accessing services using the new immigration policies for children in care, responding to support someone facing deportation, supporting unaccompanied and separated children, or reunifying children/youth with families in placements across borders, we work towards positive outcomes for our clients.

We've heard feedback from colleagues about the impact of our services and hope to share their perspective:

“Working with our diverse population in Peel Region, many questions and concerns come up daily regarding immigration matters. The CWICE team has been nothing short of phenomenal when it comes to supporting clients. In my personal experience with CWICE, I have seen the immigration specialists go above and beyond to share all their knowledge with families to help them make informed decisions. The immigration specialists I have worked with have offered to come out and meet families with me, have joint phone calls where they can share their expertise with families directly, and share resources/recommendations for the family based on the information they receive. Thank you so much to the CWICE team for all your supports. We could not do this work without you!” -Olivia Paredes, Family and Intimate Partner Violence Team, Peel CAS

As well, upon case closure, many of our clients express gratitude and a renewed sense of purpose. Take, for example, a young woman who received her citizenship certificate and, after many years of separation, finally visited the grandparents who cared for her as a child. Or the young person who was able to participate in pre-qualifying trials for the next summer Olympics. We aim to understand the needs, tailor our services, and ensure our clients have supports and plans for their permanence.

CWICE Service Evaluation

As with previous years, we evaluate our services on an annual basis. This year, our closed files survey response rate was 20%. The majority of survey respondents were child welfare professionals (79%), followed by child/youth/family members (14%), and community professionals (7%). Most had heard about CWICE from a colleague, though one found CWICE online. In terms of satisfaction with CWICE services, 93% felt the CWICE team member was knowledgeable, and services were helpful; while 86% felt the services were offered in a timely manner.

Respondents were asked about the impact of CWICE services. Here is what they shared:

“The CWICE service made an instrumental difference to the family and child allowing them to move on with their lives as any other family and not have the child be tied to the CAS any longer”

“Thanks to CWICE assistance, the youth was able to resettle in Canada. CWICE also went above and beyond with their assistance to the youth on his way to Canada when he encountered some issues in transit”

“CWICE helped with connecting to the parent in the other country and remained involved with the matter while our agency got familiar with the case and were there to answer questions and attend the first court appearance”

“The CWICE worker provided guidance with writing a support letter to advocate for a caregiver's extended stay in Canada to continue caring for the child on our file. Her extended stay in Canada was recently approved”

“It was extremely beneficial for me as a CPW to service the family more appropriately due to acquiring knowledge from CWICE about what the immigration processes are, what services the newcomer family was eligible for, asking questions about the family's immigration process, etc. The family was also grateful for receiving guidance from CWICE relating to their refugee status”

“CWICE helped a youth in care attend an oath ceremony and receive his Canadian citizenship”

When asked if there was anything else they would like to tell us about their experience, one person recommended reducing administrative time seeking consent. This is helpful feedback that will be used to enhance our service responses moving forward. Other feedback was overwhelmingly positive, including:

"Thank you for existing!!!"

"You rock! Glad to have your expertise"

"We love this service, keep it coming!!!"

"Wonderful workers that are passionate about the families they serve"

"Keep at it! Your service is so very important and extremely beneficial especially in the changing times in Canada"

Success Stories: Ring the Bell Moments

Ghezal Wallid, Data & Research Coordinator

Over the past year, I tracked the successes mentioned by colleagues. CWICE staff mentioned 33 significant "Ring the Bell" moments, each symbolizing a milestone in our ongoing mission to support and guide our clients throughout their immigration journey. These moments of success reflect the dedication and expertise of our team as we provide personalized solutions to navigate the complexities of the immigration process. A key highlight of this year's achievements includes CWICE's direct involvement in helping individuals successfully finalize their path to citizenship. Additionally, we celebrated the approval of permanent residency for individuals/families and supported others in receiving their citizenship certificates. Another impactful achievement was assisting those going through refugee hearing, particularly when it resulted in a positive decision that changed their lives.

While our impact extends far beyond the cases we directly oversee, we continue to receive feedback from workers/clients. For example, one assessment/investigation worker expressed their deep appreciation for CWICE's involvement:

"Thank you so much. I'm glad you reached out—your support was invaluable. The mother was so appreciative of the information you provided. It gave her much-needed clarity and hope. I honestly feel that I couldn't have assisted her as effectively without your support. Thank you again."

Another example was a CWICE staff sharing a 'ring the bell' moment with the team:

"I want to share with you some good news. Our 21-year-old client came to Canada at age 14 as an UASC. She has no family in Canada and made a refugee claim upon her arrival. Her claim was denied by the Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada, and she appealed this decision. She later became a Convention Refugee. She currently works to support women victims of domestic violence. This young person is the epitome of strength, bravery, patience, and perseverance. She recently became a Canadian citizen and will be finally able to call Canada her forever home"

– Loubna Zouggari, Immigration Specialist

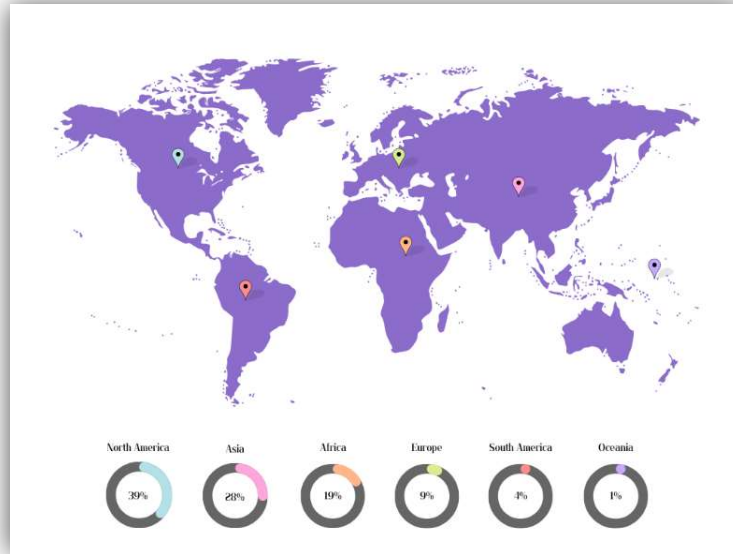
These success stories are just a few examples that reflect not only the tangible milestones of citizenship, residency, and refugee hearing victories, but also the lives positively impacted by CWICE's ongoing commitment and unwavering support to those seeking to build a brighter future.

Service Projects

There are various service projects the team supports each year, which are summarized below. The previous section informs us about some of the reasons for CWICE referrals, as well as the experiences of those receiving service, and the trends staff have observed. We continue to see variances and diversity in the clients from many vantage points - their current connection/service with child welfare, to their immigration status or other personal identities features/intersecting identities of our clients.

This year we supported **a total of 714 individuals across all service types**. As a way to honour the diversity in our clients, we can share that they are connected to **84 countries of origin, across 6 continents** (Table/chart/image 6).

CWICE Clients by Continent of Origin 2024/25 (N=714)



To further understand the unique experiences and needs of our clients, please see service project information outlined below.

Repatriations with Global Affairs Canada

Thomas Abraham, Immigration Specialist

Zrinka Buric, Immigration Specialist

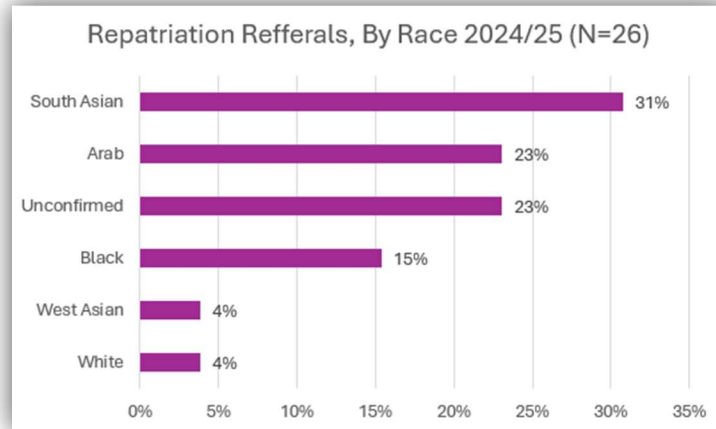
“CWICE is an invaluable partner in efforts to provide support to Canadian children abroad who need help in facilitating their safe return and reintegration to Canada. Our strong collaboration is instrumental in ensuring the safe return of these children to Canada” – Global Affairs Canada/GAC

CWICE has continued its long-standing collaboration with GAC to ensure the safe return of children, youth, and families facing precarious and unsafe circumstances abroad. Building on its now decade-long partnership with GAC, CWICE continues to provide expertise and support in managing the repatriation and reunification processes. As in previous years, CWICE continued to offer pre-arrival, arrival, and post-arrival planning and services. A key aspect of this process is ensuring that post-arrival needs are met through coordinating with other partners, such as the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), community organizations, and other child welfare agencies. These collaborations ensure that essential services—ranging from education and health care to identity documentation and housing—are in place for the Canadian children, youth, and families upon their arrival in Canada.

This year, CWICE received **14 referrals relating to 26 individuals**. These referrals, similar to those in previous years, were diverse in both the geographic regions and circumstances of the individuals/families involved. At the same time, the data for this year revealed an interesting trend: 10 referrals involved individual youth needing assistance overseas, and the other 4 referrals related to families requiring assistance. Youth and families referred were located all over the globe, including Afghanistan, Columbia, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia, Sri Lanka, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, and the United Arab Emirates. This highlights the broad global scope of CWICE's services, and the range of cultural experiences considered when planning

pre-arrival, arrival, and post-arrival services. Slightly more than half of the clients referred were boys/men, and the race of those referred were diverse as well (Table/chart 7).

Table/chart 7



Over the course of the year, a total of 11 individuals were successfully repatriated to Ontario. Two families returned together, another sibling group arrived together, and several youth arrived unaccompanied. The reasons for repatriation include: concerns about forced marriages, individuals being in unsafe living conditions abroad, and concerns about the ongoing immigration status of individuals while in the other country. In every situation, clients requested to return to Canada and were eager to participate in service.

Overall, CWICE's work in 2024/25 involved providing vital support to a diverse group of youth seeking safety and reunification in Canada. The continued collaboration with GAC, CBSA, and community partners ensures that the transition for these children and youth is as seamless as possible, with services tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual.

Success story: A Youth Safely Repatriated

Zrinka Buric, Immigration Specialist

CWICE successfully assisted a 15-year-old Canadian citizen with her repatriation to Canada. GAC notified that she was unsafe and not being adequately cared for abroad. Furthermore, this youth was residing in a country where she held no immigration status other than a visitor's visa for a short-term stay that had already expired. The youth had been taken abroad and left by her primary caregiver, and there was indication of parent-child conflict in Canada prior to the trip abroad.

Soon after the referral, both GAC and CWICE collaborated to develop a plan for this precarious situation. The youth had come to the attention of local authorities due to the conditions of where they were staying. She was ordered to leave the country within seven days, and there needed to be a plan for repatriation. It was critical that pre-arrival services be expedited and we ensure her safety during the long journey back to Canada.

Initiating the safe arrival program, GAC informed CBSA and a tailored plan was developed. Several stakeholders were involved in the youth's arrival at Toronto Pearson International Airport. Child Protection

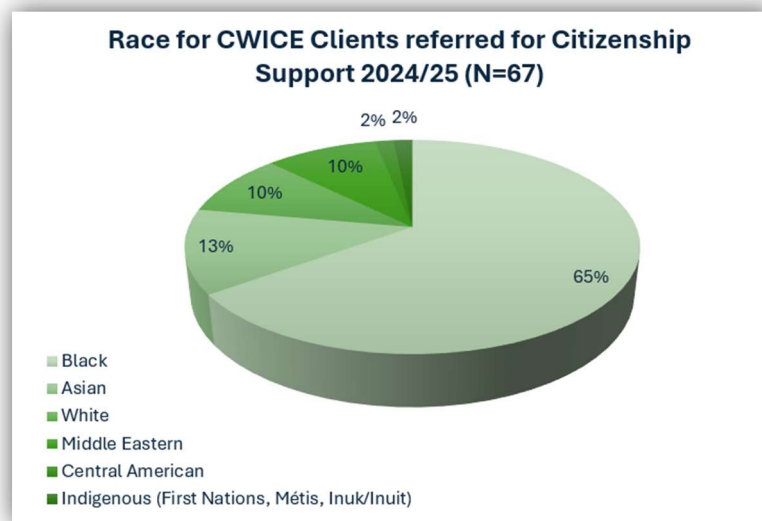
Services were also involved to ensure the youth's safety and well-being upon her return to her home community. We are happy to report she's been safely reunited with family in Canada.

Citizenship Project

Abimbola Fajobi, Immigration Specialist

Abimbola Oyeyinka, Immigration Specialist

In 2024-2025 CWICE received **67 new citizenship inquiry referrals** from across the province. Of the 67 referrals received, 55% were for citizenship applications for individuals under 18 years old and 45% were for individuals over 18 years old. Other than age, these individuals are very diverse in a number of other ways. There was a near equal mix in self-identified gender, with about half self-identified as women/girls (49%), about another half self-identified as men/boys (49%), and smaller number who self-identified as non-binary (1%). There was also diversity in the race of our clients, however the majority of our clients (65%) identify as Black (see Table/chart 8).



Table/chart 8

The CWICE Citizenship Project focuses on identifying the most effective ways to support children, youth, young adults, and individuals obtaining citizenship. We work with current and past clients, who have/had involvement with agencies across Ontario. Referrals typically come from Ontario's child welfare agencies, followed by community professionals for individuals who need support in navigating their citizenship process. This year, CWICE continued to assist children in care, as well as youth receiving voluntary youth service agreements.

Since April 2024, many individuals supported have successfully completed their citizenship knowledge tests, attended immigration interviews to verify identity documents, and many have participated in their Canadian citizenship oath ceremonies. In most cases, the oath ceremonies were completed virtually while some were held in-person. With the virtual ceremonies, the Affirmation of Citizenship was sent to Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada immediately, by CWICE, which resulted in Citizenship Certificates being available for download within 2 to 5 business days. For those who attended in-person ceremonies, the Citizenship certificates were provided immediately following the event.

Since the inception of CWICE in 2018, **we have now responded to a total of 303 requests** to support individuals seeking Canadian citizenship. CWICE is committed to continuing this and understands it can be complex for some individuals. Delays may arise when individuals lack original identity documents, or they are involved in legal issues, or they have complex health/emotional needs that require waivers from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. In our work, we continue to collaborate with our community partners to remove these barriers with the ultimate goal of obtaining citizenship, which we continue to promote as part of permanency planning for children and youth. We continue to work collaboratively with our IRCC Liaison in Ottawa, who assists us in the timely approval of citizenship applications for those we serve.

Success Story: Proud Canadians

Rosario Elmy, Immigration Specialist

Over the last 6 years, a courageous mother and her four children arrived in Canada as refugees, seeking a safe haven. Their journey has been fraught with challenges, especially in finding stable housing in Canada and even in accessing mental health services. Despite these obstacles, the mother's determination never wavered. After a period of uncertainty, they were granted protected person status in Canada. This provided a sense of security for the family. They truly began to settle into their new life in Canada, though the path was still difficult.

Over the years CWICE supported the family, and they gradually adapted to their new environment. They learned to navigate the school system for the children; they accessed mental health services; and obtained added support from settlement sector. The family started to build a community around them. Finally, after years of perseverance and hard work in Canada, the family achieved a significant milestone. This year they became Canadian citizens. Their story is a testament to resilience, the power of support networks, and the promise of a new beginning.

The Child and Youth Worker and mother shared their discussion on the meaning and impact of the family members becoming Canadian citizens:

“Since obtaining their Canadian citizenship in November 2024, the family has felt a profound sense of relief and happiness. The mother expressed her gratitude, saying, ‘I feel grateful and safe knowing that my children have a country that welcomes and accepts them.’ She also appreciated the support provided by PCAS, which had been instrumental in their journey. The mother shared her children now had the freedom to travel without any worries. The children voiced their feelings of inclusion in Canadian society and look forward to the opportunities ahead, proudly saying they are ‘**proud Canadians**’”



An image drawn by another child client after attending their virtual Oath of Citizenship ceremony in the CWICE office

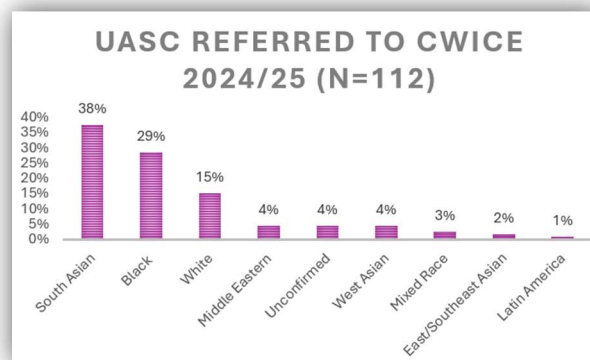
Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC)

Mandisa Sifelani, Immigration Specialist

Loubna Zougari, Immigration Specialist

Between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025, we received **a total of 112 referrals for UASC**, underscoring the ongoing increase in the number of vulnerable children arriving in Canada without a parent or legal guardian. This year was the third year in a row with more than 100 UASC being referred to CWICE. We believe this continues to reflect the global crises contributing to migration, with a significant proportion of UASC arriving from Asia and Africa, primarily due to ongoing conflict and instability in regions such as Afghanistan and Ethiopia¹⁶.

In terms of gender identity, 62% of UASC identified as boy/man, 38% as girl/woman, and 1% as gender non-conforming. Their immigration status was diverse as well, with the vast majority (72%) being asylum seekers/refugee claimants. However, in smaller numbers, we also served Canadian citizens, permanent residents, denied refugee claimants, CUAET visa holders, Convention Refugees, as well as those with work permits and no status. In terms of race, there continues to be diversity in our UASC clients, outlined in Chart 9.



Table/chart 9

This information highlights both the diversity of UASC and the global scope of the challenges facing displaced children and youth. The range of client needs also varied, with some needing help to locate safe housing/a place of safety while others arrived in Canada with plans and networks that could keep them safe in the community.

For the first time in CWICE history, our colleagues and CWICE Managers Liz Okai and Danielle Ungara presented at an International Youth Homelessness Prevention Conference about UASC¹⁷. The focus was the particular vulnerability of young people who are unaccompanied, being separated from family and community networks, and needing to find safe housing. This was an opportunity to share more about this unique and small client population, whose needs are as varied as their stories. We hope to continue to build awareness in the next year of the successes UASC experience as well as challenges they face.

Success Story: A UASC Planning Her Future in Canada

Roya Nang, Immigration Specialist

I began working with a 17-year-old youth who arrived in Canada as an unaccompanied and separated child. They were from Africa and trying to navigate the refugee claim process. This young woman has very limited supports in Canada and was grateful to receive assistance from Peel CAS. We helped her connect with an immigration lawyer and a designated representative, people who will guide her through her refugee claim process.

Throughout our work together, I was thrilled to learn that her refugee claim was approved, and she was accepted as a protected person in Canada. Following this positive decision from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada Refugee Protection Division, we submitted her permanent residence application. After patiently waiting for a response, this young woman was overjoyed to receive her permanent residence status. With her immigration status no longer a concern, her focus shifted to her future. She now aspires to continue her post-secondary education and eventually open her own business. Her long-term goal is to become a Canadian citizen, and we will be there, when the time comes, to continue supporting her throughout the process once she is eligible to apply for her citizenship.

Success Story: Assessing for and Disrupting Human Trafficking of UASC

Zrinka Buric, Immigration Specialist

I worked with a 17-year-old youth, a young woman who arrived in Canada from an Eastern European country. Upon arrival, she advised CBSA she was visiting her aunt and uncle, who live in Canada. Even though she had a letter from a parent giving her permission to stay with that family member, CBSA was unable to contact them. Shortly after, a man arrived to pick up the young woman however he was a stranger to her and did not have identification to prove his identity. When asked where they would be residing, he told CBSA he did not know the address. Given this information, CBSA was concerned that this young woman was at risk of or may be a victim of human trafficking¹⁸. She was also an unaccompanied and separated child so CBSA alerted Peel CAS and CWICE based on our protocol.

A child protection worker attended at Toronto Pearson International Airport and interviewed the young woman. Our client shared she did not have a safe place to go, and it was confirmed she was at high risk for human trafficking. Our colleagues supported her to attend a place of safety and they continued to support her in her plans. She was, at that time, still a visitor in Canada. A safe plan was developed with her and her family abroad. For me, this situation highlights how the collaboration between CBSA, Peel CAS, and CWICE can help interrupt human trafficking situations involving unaccompanied and separated children at Canadian ports of entry.

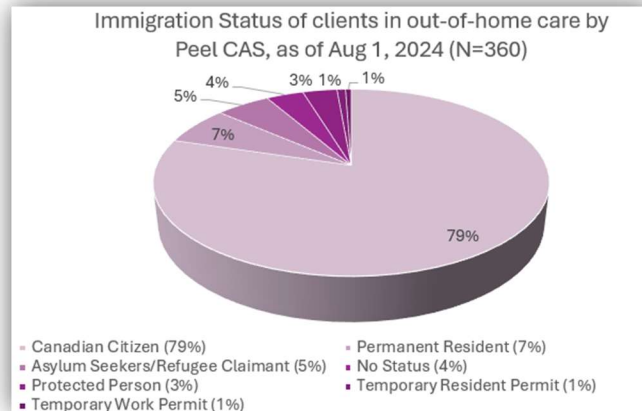
Immigration Status Project

Fatima Mukai, Immigration Specialist

Roya Nang, Immigration Specialist

In Ontario, the overrepresentation of First Nations, Inuit, Metis, Black, Latino, and Middle Eastern children in Ontario's investigation cases persists¹⁹. Peel CAS has made continued efforts to address these issues, and notably continues to have the lowest number of individuals in out-of-home-care across Ontario²⁰. Peel CAS also remains committed to examining the identities of children and youth in out-of-home placements.

The following section refers to a point-in-time CWICE analysis of immigration status for children/youth/young adults in out-of-home care served in the 2024/25 fiscal year by Peel CAS. Mid-year, on August 1 2024, Peel CAS had 360 children, youth, and young adults receiving a range of out-of-home services. This included Adoption, Children in Care, Ready Set Go, Home for School, Formal Customary Care, and Voluntary Youth Service Agreements. The majority of these individuals are Canadian citizens (79%), and the remaining 21% held a range of immigration status in Canada – see Table/chart 10.

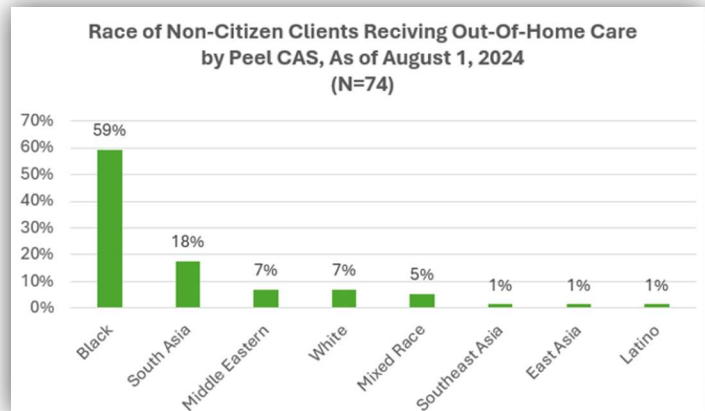


Table/chart 10

Of the non-citizen clients receiving out-of-home care, just over half are boys/men (52.5%), followed by girls/women (46%), and gender non-conforming individuals (1.5%).

According to Canada's 2021 census, 23.0% of the country's residents were born outside Canada – the highest proportion in over 150 years²¹. In Ontario, the Region of Peel houses 18% of the overall immigrant population in Ontario²². Known for, and celebrated for, its own diversity, 69% of residents in the Region of identify with a racialized group²³ and just over half were born outside Canada²⁴. For service providers, this presents amazing opportunities in terms of supporting and strengthening services for individuals, families, and the community at large.

As in previous years of this project, we remain committed to understanding the needs of our clients through this project. We note the majority of non-citizen clients, receiving out of home care, identify as Black (59%). This client group is followed by South Asian clients (17.5%), and smaller percentages of clients identifying with other races; see Table/chart 11.



Peel CAS and CWICE staff continue to work with children and youth who seek permanency and safety in Canada, including those separated from their parents. These clients, sometimes especially vulnerable, may require out-of-home care at or after arrival in Canada. This year, we again saw continued dedication, compassion, and commitment to support our citizen clients and non-citizen clients alike. We really want to honour and thank all Peel CAS and CWICE staff for their contributions and support this year to complete this project.

Introducing CWICE professionals:

We really want to honour all CWICE staff for their contributions and introduce a little about them.

Looking Back on the Year 2024/2025

Liz Okai
CWICE Manager

"At CWICE, we don't just show up—we step up to create meaningful, lasting change in the lives of children, youth, and families"

Born in Ghana

Claudia Obreque
Immigration Specialist

"Empowering and supporting others through knowledge-sharing to drive meaningful, positive change is at the heart of my work at CWICE"

Born in Chile

Nadia Dripaul
CWICE Manager

"Collaboration is the compass—because navigating child welfare and immigration takes more than a map, it takes a team"

Born in Canada

Thomas Abraham
Immigration Specialist

"My work at CWICE reminds me of my life as an immigrant in Canada and to be empathetic to others"

Born in India

Celstine Frampton
Immigration Specialist

"I'm passionate about helping every eligible young person apply for citizenship. It's incredibly rewarding to see them succeed and know I played a part in their future."

Born in Dominica

Alicja Grabarczyk
Immigration Specialist

"I handle the initial consultation on cases that reach our centre, involving child welfare and immigration. I'm known for saying 'this case is interesting'—the analytical lens is locked in."

Born in Poland

Fatima Mukai
Immigration Specialist

"I always think you can get more bees with honey so be kind"

Born in Brazil

Aroya Nang
Immigration Specialist

"Countless moments of growth. One incredible journey together."

Born in Afghanistan

Mohamed Shaw
Child Protection Worker

"I'm never bored helping deal with a challenging situation"

Born in Sierra Leone

Abimbola Oyeyinka
Immigration Specialist

"Things will always work out"

Born in Nigeria

Rosario Elmy
Immigration Specialist

"When I provide outreach presentations, for me, it is all about supporting others"

Born in Mexico

Zrinka Buric
Immigration Specialist

"I'm passionate about creating lasting roots for kids and youth by helping them achieve Canadian citizenship and a true sense of permanency."

Born in Croatia

Gillian Tennyson
Child Protection Worker

"Ongoing work is my passion—relationship building with clients to work towards permanency and settlement in Canada."

Born in Ireland

Ghezal Wallid
Data and Research Coordinator

"Please enter your data - my most-used phrase of the year. But honestly, this team turned those reminders into results"

Born in Afghanistan

Abimbola Fayobi
Immigration Specialist

"I empower youth on their path to citizenship—a profound gift that opens doors to safety, belonging, and opportunity"

Born in Nigeria

Loubna Zauggari
Immigration Specialist

"I always seem to ask 'is the client Francophone?'"

Born in Morocco

Mandisa Sifelani
Immigration Specialist

"That's if - we did it, despite the difficulties. Now, let's play a game!"

Born in Zimbabwe

Sumed Shergill
Placement Student

"My experience as a placement student has exceeded my expectations—I've learnt more than I ever thought I would."

Born in Canada

Additional CWICE members:
 Prasad Nair and Mary Beth Moellenkamp
 Yvonne Dewornu-Keys (on leave)

Closing Summary

Prasad Nair, Director, Youth Success & Innovation, Peel CAS

As we close another year at CWICE, I want to take a moment to reflect on what this work truly means.

Behind every statistic in this report is a real story—of a child, a youth, or a family navigating systems that were never designed with their realities in mind. Immigration status continues to shape access to safety, belonging, and opportunity. That’s why CWICE was created, and why our work remains urgent.

This year, we supported children in care and youth transitioning out of care who faced precarious or unresolved immigration status—ensuring they had a path forward. We responded to referrals from across Ontario and beyond, helping those who needed clarity, connection, and often, someone to simply walk with them through uncertainty.

We also took seriously our mandate to build capacity across the sector. Through training, consultation, and partnership, we equipped hundreds of fellow child welfare professionals across the province—and across Canada—with tools to recognize and respond to immigration-related needs early and effectively.

What I continue to be most proud of is how our team shows up: with knowledge, with compassion, and with an unwavering commitment to justice. Whether advocating for policy change or supporting a youth at a citizenship ceremony, they never lose sight of the people at the centre of this work.

To our team—thank you for leading with heart and skill. To our partners—thank you for your trust and collaboration. To the children, youth, and families—thank you for letting us be part of your journey.

And to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services—thank you for your continued support and for funding this important work. Your investment allows us to do more than respond; it allows us to lead, to innovate, and to build a stronger, more equitable system for those who need it most.

There is more work ahead, and we are ready to meet it—together.

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