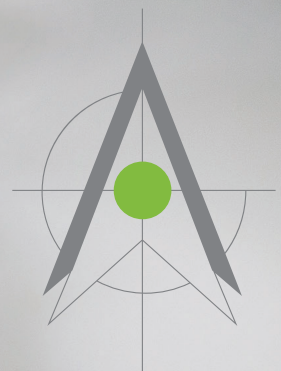


# Life Beyond Refuge

2024–2025  
Annual Report



**COMPASS**  
REFUGEE CENTRE

# Our Year In Review

*Letter from Executive Director*

## **Shelley Campagnola**

What began as a year full of anticipation became one of both courageous steps forward and persistent apprehension as the world grew chaotic, uncertain, and increasingly unwelcome to people forced to flee.

The long-envisioned refugee hub finally came into view, and the launch of our social enterprise, COMPASS Immigration Solutions, transformed a wistful thought in 2022 into reality. Yet, each day also brought the lingering question of sustainability. Economic turmoil affected charities nationwide, with 88% citing financial uncertainty as a major concern. COMPASS felt the impact firsthand.

We kept grounded in the steady stream of people seeking help. Dads and moms-to-be, wide-eyed children, and isolated individuals all needed guidance and encouragement to navigate complex systems, settle into new communities, and hold onto hope for life beyond refuge.

I am humbled by our staff, interns, and volunteers, who served over 2,400 people this year. With their work supported by generous funders and donors, they celebrated successful hearings and families reunited, persevered through uncertainty, and ensured that those we served experienced welcome, dignity, and respect in every interaction.

**Thank you isn't enough.**

# The Path to Refuge

**Entering  
Canada**



## Impact in 2025

**405**

new people  
arrived

**2,400**

people served  
this year

**90**

positive  
decisions

## *Letter from Board Chair*

### **Jim Pankratz**

2025 was a challenging year for refugees coming to Canada and for the agencies and people who serve them. The new administration in the United States significantly shaped global conversations, attitudes, and policies related to refugees, immigrants, temporary workers, and international students. This had a great impact on Canada.

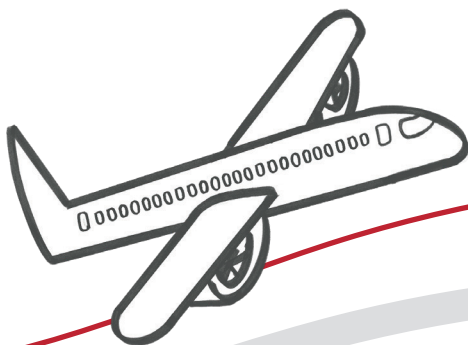
COMPASS and similar agencies across Canada were active in public advocacy in response to proposed federal legislation that would limit refugee access and make all newcomers to Canada more vulnerable to arbitrary interruption of their approval processes. As 2025 ended, this advocacy does not seem to have had a noticeable impact on the legislation as it nears final approval.

These changes in public policy are reflected in practices at our borders. The Canada-US Border Rights Clinic was especially important this year. We are grateful to the staff who advised refugees and advocated for them when their entry to Canada became complicated.

The Board is deeply grateful to the staff, consultants, advisors, and donors who created COMPASS Immigration Solutions to serve a broader group of newcomers who need trusted and affordable assistance to maintain their status in Canada. It was a remarkable achievement to design and operationalize this social enterprise within a few months.

The statistics in this report reflect relationships and human stories. Every day our Executive Director, Shelley Campagnola, and all COMPASS staff engage with people who hope for safety, welcome, and a future where they can thrive. The compassion, commitment, and expertise of our staff make this possible. Thank you.

COMPASS is completely funded by donations and grants. We are grateful for the supporters who sustained us and provided the resources for us to take new initiatives to increase our impact. Thanks also to the Directors who serve on the Board with me. They generously offer their commitment, experience, and skills to guide and serve COMPASS.



# What Does Life Beyond Refuge Look Like?

At COMPASS, life beyond refuge means supporting people fleeing real threats, guiding them to safety, and helping them reunite with their families, ensuring that no one faces this journey alone. COMPASS is here to walk alongside refugee claimants and protected persons, offering:

- Guidance and clarity to make sense of complex systems
- Connection to supportive communities and the resources needed to build a new life
- Advocacy and action to help remove the unjust barriers that stand in their way

## OUR VISION

That every person seeking refuge in Canada has unhindered access to justice, and opportunity to thrive in welcoming communities.

## OUR VALUES

Empathy

Inclusion

Respect

Empowerment

We show up with authenticity and humility, believing in the dignity and worth of every person. We create a safe, welcoming space where stories are heard and strengths are celebrated. With respect, care, and generosity, we empower people to take hold of their own journey, offering guidance where needed and encouragement and connection along the way.

**61**

countries  
of origin

**40**

different  
languages

**11**

families  
reunited

# Bonny's Journey of Hope

**Bonny's story begins in Colombia, where she proudly served her community as founder and fundraiser of an organization dedicated to helping families and children in need.**

For eight years, her work brought joy and purpose, until the past resurfaced. Decades earlier, her father had been killed by violent individuals. Though Bonny and her siblings had built peaceful lives in another city, those same individuals still threatened the family, bringing intimidation and fear into their lives.

In 2017, everything changed. For the safety of her children, Bonny made the heartbreaking decision to leave the foundation she loved. Her brother's family fled first, supported by the Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church and Amrita, a dedicated COMPASS caseworker. Ten months later, Bonny and her children arrived in Canada, stepping into a new life filled with uncertainty.



“How do you kill your old life?” Bonny recalls. “You don't feel sure (of anything), (mentally) there was no peace and quiet. Life is hard when you don't know the language.”

“But in that state of worry, Canadian people were so kind. COMPASS helped me so much! Furniture from Miss Janet — so much help! I now have peace and quiet.”

In Colombia, nights were sleepless. In Canada, Bonny finally found rest. Over time, she built a new life surrounded by friends, a job, and safety. Her resilience inspired her cousins to seek refuge in Canada.



**Bonny's journey reminds us that life beyond refuge is possible, with courage, community, and hope.**

# Support to Navigate the Journey with Confidence

## Programs At a Glance

**Tony Van Giessen**

Operations and Program Manager

COMPASS has been a vital part of the refugee claimant experience for thousands of individuals over the years. We know that the refugee claim process is one difficult chapter in a much bigger life for those we serve. We have an amazing team, well-equipped and with big hearts, ready every day to come alongside. Our programs continued to evolve to address the urgent and changing needs that first bring families and individuals to our doors, while also keeping life beyond refuge firmly in view.

Through our ASSIST program, clients receive personalized, empathetic support and referrals designed to empower and help build a strong foundation for their future lives in Canada.

The Canada-US Border Rights Clinic provides critical information and expert advice, equipping claimants with the knowledge and referrals they need to ADVOCATE for themselves with confidence.

Our ACCOMPANY initiatives create opportunities for connection, helping clients build vital networks and begin to feel at home in their new communities.

The majority of COMPASS clients will get their “yes” — a positive outcome for their refugee claim — and go on to live safe, meaningful lives in Canada. We remain committed to delivering programs that respond to today’s challenges while helping clients work toward their hopes and dreams for tomorrow, a full life beyond refuge.



Above: Josi working at the COMPASS office

Below: Employment Readiness Program



## Canada-US Border Rights Clinic

**Jenn McIntyre**  
Clinic Coordinator

The Canada-US Border Rights Clinic (BRC) is a COMPASS Refugee Centre initiative that provides legal information, summary legal advice, and targeted representation to people seeking refugee protection at the Canada-US border. **We focus on the earliest, and often most precarious moment in a refugee journey: the border.**

Through a fully virtual model, the BRC takes COMPASS' services national, reaching people across the full length of the border. This early intervention helps individuals and families understand their rights, prepare for border processes, and avoid unlawful turn-backs that can separate families and place people at serious risk in the US.

Just six months into operation, the BRC experienced a massive increase in demand beginning in January 2025, driven by shifting US political conditions. In response, the team expanded from one to two staff lawyers, allowing the clinic to better meet the growing demand. In the past year, the BRC received 1,400+ inquiries and provided summary legal advice or representation in 151 cases, supporting at least 381 people — one third of them children.

Our biggest wins are reunified families. When families are together, people are safer, stronger, and better able to rebuild their lives and become part of their communities. We were sustained by messages that our clients have been reunited with their family in Canada:

**“We have crossed the border and are all safe. We are deeply grateful for all your help, guidance, and kindness throughout this process.”**



**1,400+**

inquiries to  
BRC

**151**

cases

**381**

people  
supported at  
the border

# Services to Navigate the Journey with Confidence

## COMPASS Immigration Solutions

**Carolyn Watson**

Lead Immigration Consultant

2025 marked an important year of foundation-building and early impact. In June, we launched COMPASS Immigration Solutions, to empower people already in Canada to navigate the immigration system with clarity, dignity, and confidence.

We began establishing a consistent public presence through blog content and LinkedIn engagement. We strengthened our role as a community resource by delivering presentations on economic immigration to local organizations and developed a referral partnership with the Workplace & Immigrant Network, creating more coordinated immigrant supports for professionals.

As anticipated, extended processing times for in-Canada immigration applications meant that most files remain under review. Despite these delays, the year also delivered a meaningful outcome: Temporary Resident Visa application for the family of a temporary worker, previously refused and widely considered unlikely to be approved, was successfully finalized in just 10 days!

The temporary worker was thrilled with the outcome and said:

“I’m still speechless from last night’s incredible news! I’m overwhelmed with gratitude, and I couldn’t have asked for a better birthday gift.”

**“I’m not sure whether to cry tears of joy or laugh with gratitude. Either way, thank you from the bottom of my heart!”**

The approval will allow the family to reunite temporarily and serves as a powerful reminder of the real-world impact of effective advocacy and careful preparation.

In 2026, our priorities are to deepen strategic partnerships, grow our services, and continue to do the rigorous work required to achieve positive outcomes — listening closely to clients, tracking policy direction, and advancing well-prepared applications.

We welcome introductions and referrals of clients or industry partners in need of our services.

**3**

referral partners and growing

**6**

months established

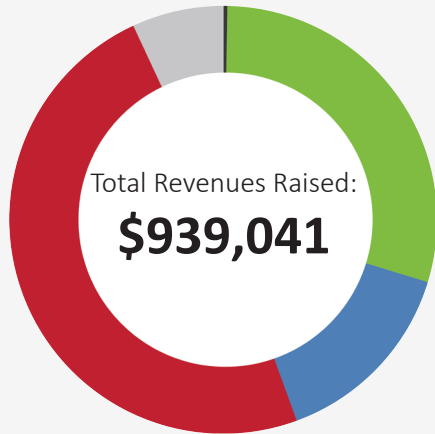
**30**

clients served



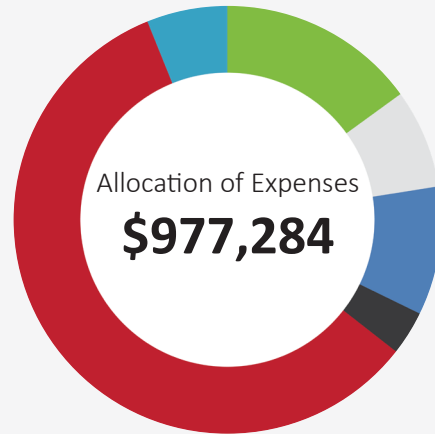
# Stewardship of Your Gifts

## Where Support Comes From



- **48%** Grants & Foundations
- **30%** Individuals & Businesses
- **15%** Churches & Other Charities
- **6%** COMPASS Immigration Solutions
- **>1%** Other

## What Your Support Does



- **58%** Programs
- **15%** Admin and Amortization
- **10%** Fundraising
- **7%** Facilities
- **6%** COMPASS Immigration Solutions
- **4%** Professional Fees

## Treasurers Report

I am pleased to report that our auditors delivered another clean audit report, a statement of confidence in COMPASS policies, practices, and controls. Thank you to the staff for their excellent stewardship of COMPASS financial resources. The largest change to the financials was the addition of COMPASS Immigration Solutions. This social enterprise started as a pilot project, providing immigration services to non-refugee claimants, such as work permits and student visas, on a fee-for-service basis. Initial launch funding was provided by a generous grant from a private donor, and COMPASS Immigration Solutions is now generating revenue. Related revenue and expenses are shown on separate lines in the financial statements for transparency.

Revenues for the fiscal year 2025 were higher than the prior year, with additional grants being received across all program areas. Expenses were also higher as program delivery costs increased. Overall, we ended the year with a deficit of \$38,000, which was covered by reserves. In the coming year, we have plans to replenish reserves to increase organizational resilience.

We are excited for the year ahead as we continue to provide welcome and essential support to those seeking refuge in Canada. We remain deeply grateful for the generosity of donors who partner with us in this impactful work. **Together, we are changing lives.**

**Karen Martin Schiedel**  
Treasurer, Board of Directors

# With Gratitude

As we look back on 2025, we are reminded that every life impacted by COMPASS was made possible by people who chose to care. Supporters, partners, and friends stood with us, and because of you, hope for a life beyond refuge became real.

We know that giving was not always easy this year. Many churches, businesses, families, and individuals gave generously while facing their own financial uncertainty. We do not take that lightly. Your willingness to give, even when it required sacrifice, sustained this work and the people we serve.

The stories shared in this report represent many others who found hope. These stories were made possible by **you and 741 other donors and grantors** who supported COMPASS throughout 2025. Thank you for being part of this mission and for continuing to walk with us.



## 685 individual donors as well as:

- 21 Businesses,
- 18 Family, private, and public Foundations,
- 18 Churches

## 298 volunteers serving 5000+ hours:

- RIDE 2024
- Interpreters
- Translators
- Office and Volunteer Support
- Casework Interns
- Community Support Interns
- Good Neighbour Teams
- Jazzy – well-being support dog



# Ways to Give



Donate Today!

## Financial Donations

**Online:** Scan the QR code to our website to donate today

**Call:** (519) 571-1912 ext.1015

**Mail or drop off at:** 230-675 Queen Street South, Kitchener

**Securities:** Email or call Dawn (519) 571-1912 ext.1015, dawn@compassrefugee.ca

## Volunteer

We are grateful for donations of time! We are regularly looking for support with translation, shared expertise, and participation in our annual RIDE for Refuge. Visit [www.compassrefugee.ca](http://www.compassrefugee.ca) and select the volunteer drop down to learn more.

## Gifts in Will

By remembering COMPASS in your estate plans, you become part of a story that continues — one of welcome, justice, and hope for those seeking refuge. Let your legacy be the quiet light in someone’s darkest moment.

To learn more, contact Dawn at (519) 571-1912 ext.1015 or dawn@compassrefugee.ca

**Consider a Monthly Gift!**

When you give monthly, you become a constant source of welcome for families rebuilding their lives, knitting together a stronger circle of safety for people seeking refuge. Scan the QR code for more information and to sign up.

# Courageous Welcome in a Changing World

## **We are living in a time when the meaning of welcome is being tested.**

The systems once designed to offer refuge are shifting. In Canada, proposed changes such as Bill C-12 signal a tightening of access to asylum, narrowing pathways for people seeking safety and placing greater barriers in front of those already living with uncertainty. Public rhetoric has grown harsher, and political conversations increasingly frame refugees not as neighbours, but as problems to be managed, or worse, avoided.

In the United States, the situation is increasingly stark. People fleeing violence and persecution face heightened risks of detention, deportation, and prolonged limbo simply for asking for protection. For many, approaching the Canada–US border, what was once seen as a pathway to hope, now carries fear of being turned away, detained, or sent back into danger.

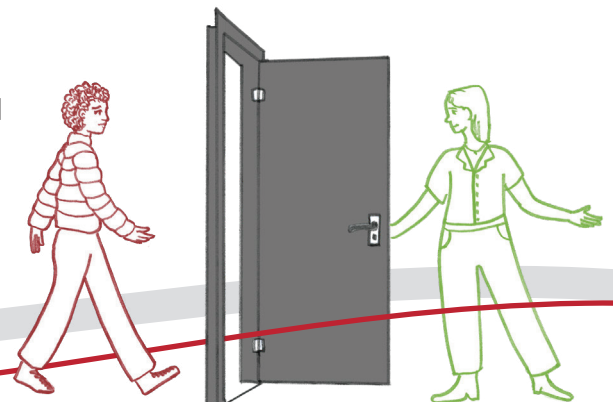
## **And yet, hope is not extinguished. The quiet voice of courageous welcome remains steady.**

At its heart, courageous welcome is not about policies, it is about people. It is about choosing to see the human face behind every claim, every journey, every story of loss and resilience. It is about recognizing that dignity does not depend on status, and that compassion is not weakened by complexity.

For people of faith, this call runs deep. Biblical justice reminds us that welcoming the stranger is not optional or conditional. Throughout the scriptures we are urged to protect the vulnerable, to love our neighbour, and to build communities where mercy and fairness walk hand in hand. Courageous welcome means holding these values steady, even when fear is loud and the path forward feels uncertain.



**“Thank you for everything. We can’t end this year without remembering that you are part of our success story!”**





As we look toward 2026, courageous welcome invites us to act with both realism and resolve. It calls us to advocate for fair and humane systems, to support refugee claimants as they rebuild their lives, and to stand against narratives that dehumanize or divide. It asks us to invest not only in programs, but in a vision of local community and the Canada we believe in as a whole, that remains rooted in hospitality, justice, and hope.

**Welcome is never passive. It is a choice renewed day by day to open doors, to walk alongside those seeking safety, and to affirm that every life carries God-given worth.**

Thanks to the generosity and commitment of donors like you, courageous welcome is taking shape in real and tangible ways through the work of COMPASS. Together, even in a changing world, we are choosing compassion over fear, ensuring that welcome endures.

As we look toward 2026, we are deeply grateful for every expression of generosity. For those who give monthly, your faithful commitment carries welcome beyond headlines and hard moments, turning compassion into lasting impact.

And for those who give through one-time gifts, thank you for believing in this work and in the lives it supports. We invite you to consider monthly support as one act of courageous welcome, helping to create safe, sustaining pathways for refugee claimants as they rebuild their lives.



# Life Beyond Refuge

## The Path Doesn't End Here

### About the Illustrator, Blue M.B.K.

“I was able to receive support from COMPASS when I was applying for a Refugee Travel Document. When navigating systems in a new country, we are far more vulnerable, especially when it comes to paperwork and bureaucracy, because there is less room for error and much less familiarity with how these systems work. For this reason, I deeply believe that the work of immigration and refugee organizations such as COMPASS is extremely important, and I truly appreciate the support I received at that time. Working as illustrator on this report and being part of the organization in a new way was a great pleasure, as well as a highlight of my career. **It feels like life sometimes gives us a full-circle story.**”

Blue M.B.K. is an animator, illustrator, and director born in Türkiye and based in Toronto. Blue studied Film Design and Animation and, in her final year, had to flee the country. After a long journey, she came to Canada as a refugee and built a freelance career as a multidisciplinary artist. Blue is currently strengthening her storytelling skills and exploring new creative ways to document her journey.



Blue teaching animation to a class of High School students



## Bonny's Life Beyond Refuge

In 2024, Bonny and her children proudly became Canadian citizens. Today, she is enrolled in school and has launched a new charity, fittingly named Hope for a New Future Foundation. **Thank you for opening the doors for Bonny.** The hope you gave her is being paid forward as she inspires new futures for others —Bonny's new life!



**Life Beyond  
Refuge in  
Canada**



Bonny sharing her story with COMPASS Development Manager, Dawn Gill



# COMPASS

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Assist • Accompany • Advocate

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