

Annual Report

2024 – 25

We help
change lives.

Connected People, Decent Work, Inclusive Communities.



Messages

To everyone in the KEYS community,

Looking back on the last year at KEYS, I am struck by how much has changed at KEYS, in the lives of those we serve, in our community and beyond. We have had both a provincial and federal election as well as a new government for our neighbours to the South causing unprecedented geopolitical strife. At KEYS, we have had significant changes in leadership with a new Executive Director, internal growth, new Board members, and the introduction of an HR Manager in our leadership team. Those we serve go through profound changes, navigating the many stresses and pressures of unemployment, transitioning to work, moving to a new country, growing up, developing businesses and workplaces, and so much more. Our commitment to service, to the inherent dignity of everyone who comes through our door, and to contributing to expanding connections, decent work, and inclusive communities, is everlasting through all these changes.

While for many, change brings feelings of fear and discomfort, we know change also brings excitement and possibility. To me, knowing that change is ever-constant is a source of great hope. Supporting individuals at moments of change and transition is what we do best at KEYS, with compassion for the challenges of change, excitement for the possibility, and deep respect for the bravery and determination of those we work with. To everyone who has given us the opportunity to accompany you on your journey, thank you for trusting us.

Julio Numhauser is a Chilean author and musician. In 1973, he was forced to leave his home country due to the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. While in exile, in 1982, he wrote and recorded the song *Todo Cambia*, meaning Everything Changes, and it reflects the beauty and possibility of change, even in the context of the pain that accompanies being uprooted from your home:

*“Cambia lo superficial
Cambia también lo profundo
Cambia el modo de pensar
Cambia todo en este mundo
Cambia el clima con los años
Cambia el pastor su rebaño
Y así como todo cambia
Que yo cambie no es extraño”*

*“The superficial changes
The profound also changes
The way of thinking changes
Everything in this world changes
The climate changes with the years
The shepherd changes his flock
And just as everything changes
That I change is not strange”*

With gratitude for every step we take towards a better tomorrow.



Sincerely,
Madeleine Nerenberg
Executive Director



Messages

A heartfelt goodbye.

As I conclude my term as Chair of the Board, I want to convey both the immense pride I feel for all that KEYS has accomplished in our community, and my sincere gratitude to everyone who has supported this truly wonderful organization. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as Chair and it has been an absolute pleasure to work with the other members of the board. I am especially grateful to our longstanding board members who offer such wonderful insight and expertise, and it is has been exciting to welcome new board members who bring such innovative and fresh perspectives.

The KEYS staff are a truly wonderful group of people who make the organization what it is. Your dedication and professionalism were evident in every step of the transition following the departure of our long-term Executive Director, Michael Harris. Navigating leadership change is challenging, yet you handled it with resilience, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to our mission. Your support was instrumental in ensuring a smooth and successful transition for Madeleine Nerenberg, our new Executive Director, and your efforts did not go unnoticed. And thank you to Madeleine for embracing the role with such alacrity!

Throughout the many changes and challenges of the past few years of my tenure, KEYS not only endured — you thrived. Together, KEYS achieved remarkable successes that have strengthened the fabric of our organization and the community we serve.

These accomplishments are a testament to the spirit of collaboration, innovation, and shared purpose that defines our work.

To our valued community partners and funders— thank you for walking alongside us. Your trust, collaboration, and shared vision have been essential in advancing our mission and expanding our impact.

To our outstanding staff — your compassion, skill, and commitment continue to inspire. You are the heart of this organization, and I am in awe of all that you do.

And, to the job seekers and newcomers who put their faith in our teams — thank you. Your courage, determination, and dreams are what drive our work. It has been a privilege to support you in your journeys, and your stories continue to shape the future of this vibrant and inclusive community.

After working at KEYS for 18 years, and then joining the board, it has been a career highlight for me to serve as Chair and to continue to be part of this wonderful organization — one that plays such a vital role in making Kingston an ideal place for people to live, learn, play, and work. I leave this role with a full heart and tremendous optimism for what lies ahead.

With sincere gratitude,
Wendy Vuyk
Outgoing Chair of the Board



About us

Our Vision statement, our ENDS statement and our Brand statement perfectly describe KEYS. Here is some more information about us...

KEYS is the largest provider of comprehensive employment services in Kingston, Gananoque, and the surrounding region. Initially focused on helping job seekers, KEYS has also become the leading provider of services for newcomers. Founded in 1983, KEYS is a not-for-profit organization and registered charity, offering free programs to registered clients.

We are dedicated to supporting our community through compassionate action and mutual respect, and we believe in the importance of networking and partnerships. We take pride in our strategic alliances with local and global partners that help us meet the needs of those we serve.

KEYS offers a range of dynamic employment programs and services, including English training and settlement assistance for newcomers to Canada. Our expertise extends to a diverse population, serving three main groups: job seekers of all ages and abilities, employers, and newcomers. Through our efforts, we aim to help individuals attain their employment goals and enhance their integration into the community.



Every individual realizing their full potential within an economically and socially vibrant community.



Connected People, Decent Work, Inclusive Communities.



We help change lives. KEYS helps job seekers of all ages and abilities, employers of all sizes, and newcomers from all walks of life. With very few exceptions, our programs have no cost. KEYS is a registered charity. We welcome the valuable contributions of our community through volunteer opportunities across many program areas.

Did you know these Facts from this Year

- 1.) KEYS invested \$1,426,140 into the local economy to support labour market need and employee training.
- 2.) Over 100 volunteers contributed 3000 hours to supporting youth and newcomers.
- 3.) KEYS delivered 4078 hours of English Language Training to over 600 individuals.
- 4.) KEYS ran 3 cohorts of the In Motion & Momentum+ program and recruited almost 30 individuals to help them gain motivation, build goals and get on the path to their preferred future! (see pg. 8 for more news).
- 5.) Over 80 local business, including 32 new business this year, committed to the Workplace Inclusion Charter.
- 6.) The Harbour Community Kitchen onboarded 8 new users, reflecting KEYS commitment to support women's entrepreneurship in the food sector (see pg. 6 for more HCK news).
- 7.) 458 newcomers participated in KEYS employment and settlement services. Since 2016, we are celebrating the milestone of supporting 1500 individuals – 400 Refugee Families (see pg. 7 for the story).
- 8.) KEYS and the City of Kingston celebrated National Disability Employment Awareness Month on October 17th, 2024 (find out more about NDEAM on pg. 9).
- 9.) KEYS staff provided 1,120 of hours of pre-employment and skills development training to youth in our community.

Highlights from 2024–25

Empowering Women in Food-Based Businesses.

The **Harbour Community Kitchen Initiative (HCK)** is dedicated to empowering women-led food-based businesses in Kingston by providing essential resources and support. **Our vision** is to enable women to launch, develop, and grow their enterprises through means-tested access to commercial kitchen space, along with entrepreneurial training and guidance.

Our mission focuses on creating a safe and clean environment for women to cook and prepare their products while offering direction toward business support. Starting in October, 2025, we plan to hold quarterly workshops to address gaps in programming and meet the evolving needs of our clients.

HCK aims to remove barriers for women, particularly targeting BIPOC individuals, newcomers to Canada, and those who self-identify as having disabilities. We offer low-cost kitchen access to our primary demographic and market-rate access to the wider community, ensuring inclusivity in our services. Approved by Public Health to operate as a commercial kitchen, we assist clients in obtaining necessary health inspections and insurance.

Launched in May 2023 through a lease agreement between the City of Kingston and KEYS, **HCK functions as a social enterprise**. Initially aimed at supporting participants of the YourWay program at KEYS, **HCK addresses the critical shortage of affordable commercial kitchen space** for women who have outgrown their home kitchens.

Since our opening, **HCK has successfully served 19 unique businesses, with five alumni and 12 current clients**. We are also **onboarding eight new users**, reflecting **our commitment to supporting women's entrepreneurship in the food sector**. Our model is being evaluated to develop a sustainable social enterprise that not only assists low-income women but also generates revenue through a user-pay system, allowing us to open our facilities to small businesses that require kitchen space.

Through HCK, we are not just providing a kitchen; **we are creating a community of empowered women ready to transform their culinary passions into thriving businesses**.

Current Businesses

Cravin' – Cadue First Foods – Bread by Elise – Adelitaz
Thai Street Food – Lovebugs – Toz Foods – Ella's Cuisine
Victoria's Cakes – Nigor's Cakes – Ukrainian Delights
ADHD Donuts – Potato Noodles

ALUMNI Businesses

Cat House Chaing Mai – Knifey Spooniey
Syd's Fine Foods – Mo's Dainty Bites – Macarol's
Stone Bridge Farms – Syrian Delights

Countries of Origin for our Businesses

Canada – Thailand – Mexico – Nigeria
China – Syria – Ukraine – Argentina
Uzbekistan – Korea – Iran – Azerbaijan



Highlights from 2024–25

KEYS

A Milestone of Hope: Supporting 400 Refugee Families Since 2016.

This year, KEYS proudly celebrates a remarkable achievement—our Refugee Services team has supported over 400 refugee families since 2016, representing more than 1,500 individuals who have embarked on the journey of rebuilding their lives in Canada.

Behind this milestone is a story of tireless dedication, quiet strength, and deep compassion. Our small but mighty team has shown what it means to walk alongside newcomers with care and purpose. From the moment families arrive to the moments they begin to thrive, the team's work—**built on trust, respect, and genuine care** for others—has made a lasting difference.

Each step of this journey has been shaped by wraparound supports in settlement, **finding safe housing, navigating different services healthcare and school systems, accessing employment and language programs**, and simply being present during moments of uncertainty and transition. **These aren't just services—they are lifelines, provided with dignity and heart.**

We are proud not only of the number reached but of the values embodied through **every family we've welcomed**. It's a collective success, **made possible by the collaboration across KEYS and the community.**

As we look ahead, we remain inspired by the resilience of those we serve—and motivated to keep building a community where every newcomer feels safe, seen, and supported.

Here's to the next 400.



Highlights from 2024–25

We are helping young adults who are ready for their dream career but don't know where to start!

In Motion & Momentum+ is a 10-week pre-employability training program aimed at **helping those furthest away from the labour market overcome barriers, learn to set goals and feel re-connected to their communities.** This past year, we ran 3 cohorts of this program and recruited almost 30 individuals!

Throughout this training, participants build their preferred path forward, gaining self-confidence, motivation and learning to network along the way. Participants are given the chance to select and participate in six different one-day workshops during the final three weeks of the program, catered to their needs and that align with their career & education goals.

Some of the workshops we've completed this past year include Budgeting 101, Music Therapy, Gardening in small spaces, Kingston's Recycling & Sustainability, A Thai Cooking Class, A Pottery Workshop and so many more! These one-day workshops provide participants with valuable hands-on skills for moving forward and allows them to build their resume.

Another key component of the program is to have the participants showcase their ability to make a difference where they live, by completing a community project. **This year IM&M participants raised awareness for the Homeless Population in Kingston and Raised donations for the Brockville SPCA!**



Highlights from 2024–25

KEYS

KEYS is a proud supporter of National Disability Employment Awareness Month!

The Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) celebrates October as the Disability Employment Awareness Month (DEAM) and has a variety of resources and activities happening during the month.

DEAM is a great opportunity for employers to showcase their dedication and support with hiring persons with disabilities and assisting with **breaking down barriers that persons with disabilities experience when actively job searching.**

For the past 5 years the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) celebrated **Light it up for NDEAM** (National Disability Employment Awareness Month) which is a coast-to-coast collaboration that illuminates the nation purple and blue for one-night, **spotlighting disability-inclusive employment.** In recognition of this activity, **KEYS, and the City of Kingston celebrated NDEAM with staff wearing Blue or Purple on October 17th, 2024.**

This was a **great opportunity for staff** to get involved and to gain additional resources and information for employers who may or may not be aware of **DEAM and the benefits of inclusive hiring.**



Our report

Our Funders: KEYS is a multi-funded, registered charity and we are grateful for the support we receive from:



Statement of Revenue & Expenditures

REVENUES		
Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development	\$2,007,026 2024	\$708,631 2025
Employment and Social Development Canada	\$1,333,974 2024	\$1,204,033 2025
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada	\$3,627,630 2024	\$3,669,442 2025
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services	\$266,705 2024	\$370,267 2025
SERCO Canada	\$1,048,671 2024	\$2,438,215 2025
West Coast Group	\$765,316 2024	\$842,539 2025
Women & Gender Equality Canada	\$322,791 2024	\$241,203 2025
Other	\$1,014,348 2024	\$1,171,107 2025
TOTAL	\$10,386,461 2024	\$10,645,437 2025
EXPENSES		
Salaries and Benefits	\$6,237,272 2024	\$6,062,295 2025
Operating	\$2,711,845 2024	\$2,597,264 2025
Participant Supports	\$455,016 2024	\$501,595 2025
Employer Subsidies	\$752,177 2024	\$792,254 2025
Participant Wages	\$13,463 2024	\$251 2025
TOTAL	\$10,169,773 2024	\$9,953,659 2025

We help change lives

“What I really liked about the Opportunities Fund project was all the help and support I received. It made a big difference in helping me find a job that fits me—working outdoors and using my hands, just like I wanted. I’m really happy with everything I do at work. I’ve even been able to pick up more hours, which I really like. It feels good to be in a placement where I’m doing well and growing. I would recommend this program, especially to people who need support and accommodations at work. The support I received made such a difference. It’s helped me feel confident that this could be a long-term job because they understand what I need to be successful.”



Nicolas Standen,
KEYS program participant



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Contact us

KEYS.CA

KEYS



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