

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion: a framework that aims to ensure that all people are treated fairly and have the opportunity to fully participate.



2024: Year in Review

In 2024, we made significant strides promoting EDI throughout the organization and the communities we serve. Our EDI Committee and Task Forces serve as advisory bodies that guide policies, programs, and initiatives to ensure key principles are maintained across all operations. Some key accomplishments last year include:

- **Hiring an EDI Training and Development Coordinator** to lead The Neighbourhood Group Community Services (TNGCS) in education and foster inclusion throughout the organization.
- **Achieving Recognition as a GTA Top Employer** with a focus on Decent Work by paying a living wage, reversing the trends of precarious work, and successfully hiring program participants for hundreds of jobs this past year.
- **Organizing a successful Youth Employment Symposium** at Toronto City Hall and a campaign calling for 10,000 youth summer jobs with a focus on Black, newcomer, and Indigenous youth.
- **Fighting for human rights** through our merger with Kensington Bellwoods Community Legal Services and our Charter Challenge against the Community Care and Recovery Act that closes supervised consumption services across the province.

These achievements, among many others, demonstrate our unwavering commitment to build a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse organization for staff and the communities that we serve. Read on to find out more!





“<Together, KBCLS and TNGCS> reduce barriers for the most vulnerable people to make it easier for them to get the support they need.”



Legal & Social Justice

In a transformative step that increased our access to justice, Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Services (KBCLS) merged with TNGCS in 2023. “The need is deep and wide and growing,” said Elsie Dickson, KBCLS Director of Legal Services. *“TNGCS has a long history of creatively delivering comprehensive services to those in need. This merger is just another example.”*

A lawyer for 23 years, Elsie was exposed to justice work from a young age. Her mother was a social worker and Elsie, *“grew up believing and embracing that you are a part of a community and we need to look out for people who need help.”* This notion has been intrinsic to her justice career, whether volunteering at an international non-profit, travelling to remote areas of Canada to provide legal aid to women as a part of the International Organization of Women Lawyers, or working at KBCLS.

Elsie knows the merge increases access to legal justice for those in need. *“It reduces barriers for the most vulnerable people to make it easier for them to get the support they need.”* Together, we are creating an integrated approach to justice that addresses systemic inequities.

The merge also strengthened TNGCS’ commitment to equity by combining new resources and new expertise, ensuring community justice needs are addressed through a cohesive and strategic approach to promote anti-racism and equity.

As one entity, we are better positioned to tackle the most pressing legal and social issues people in our community face. Our top legal issues addressed last year were tenant rights, preventing evictions, immigration matters, and access to social assistance.

KMOPS Rally & Charter Challenge

In September 2024, TNGCS held a community rally in support of supervised consumption sites (SCS). Organized in response to the Ontario government's announcement to shut down ten sites across the province, including our very own Kensington Market Overdose Prevention Site (KMOPS).

Neighbourhood support at the rally was incredible from all attendees, whether service users, local businesses, health professionals, or Kensington Market residents. The importance of raising awareness about these life-saving services for the most vulnerable members of our community was essential. Since it's opening six years ago, KMOPS has seen zero overdose deaths, despite a 74% increase in drug overdose deaths in Ontario since 2019.

By advocating for the continuation of these services, TNGCS supports health equity, harm reduction, and the overall well-being of our communities.



Geographic Equity

At TNGCS, we hold geographic equity as part of our mission. All neighbourhoods need community supports and Toronto is seeing a geographic shift where newcomers settle and families living in poverty can find affordable housing. That's why we provide services in over 200 locations across Toronto, like the recent opening of our Downsview Child Care Centre, or the Scarborough youth wellness hub, or holding clinics at 30 locations helping people who are homeless apply for identification like health cards and birth certificates.



Shahanara Khandaker, Women's Settlement Team Lead at TNGCS, spoke about our work on geographic equity at a recent conference. *“Geographical equity is important to better serve and include everyone. By thinking about everyone's needs, no matter where they live, we can be more inclusive and help make the people who use our services more comfortable. They will feel like it's their home.”*

Geographical equity is the belief that regardless of where they live, people should have equal access to opportunities and resources.



Peer Program

At the heart of TNGCS' culture are people who bring their lived experience to work every day. Peers are a critical connection between staff and the people who use our services. But the impact on the peer workers themselves is tremendous. *"We've seen a 97% increase in their confidence and a 96% boost in their knowledge. It's improved their health, strengthened relationships, and built a sense of belonging,"* says Michael Wagley, TNGCS Manager of Community Peer Programs.

Our Peer Program helps people who want to re-enter the workforce the chance to grow and succeed in a supportive workplace environment. It starts with 200 hours of training, followed by a paid work placement.

Peer workers bring both lived experience, and lived expertise, to the table. That knowledge and understanding is essential to help build trust and connection with others who are going through exactly what the peer workers did. That insight makes a huge difference in how challenges are approached.

Equity in Hiring

At TNGCS we also set the goal of finding pathways for equity-seeking groups in our organization to find opportunities and promotion. This promotes equity and is good for business! Local hiring and internal promotions give employees a chance to grow, advance their careers, and feel valued for their contributions. They also promote a workplace culture where diverse skills and experiences are correctly recognized and build teamwork.

In 2024, 25% of our vacancies were filled through internal promotions, and 55% of vacancies were filled through hiring our participants and volunteers – especially into peer trainee roles and youth summer jobs. This greatly exceeds our strategic goal of hiring more local program participants and increasing the diversity of our staff team.

Our commitment to local hiring and promotion supports our belief in our employees' potential and continuously reinvests in their long-term successes.



55% of all positions were filled by participants & volunteers



TNGCS Committees & Task Forces

TNGCS is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of its work by promoting anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and anti-colonial practices, explicitly addressing anti-Black racism. By applying these principles, TNGCS strives to identify and challenge inequities, while fostering inclusivity.

TNGCS addresses these challenges through our:

- **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee:** Works to remove barriers and address historic challenges through our action plan
- **Truth & Reconciliation Committee:** Builds partnerships with Indigenous communities
- **Equitable Hiring Practices Task Force:** Promotes fairness in recruitment
- **Healing & Restorative Justice Task Force:** Focuses on community-based conflict resolution
- **Anti-Oppression Training Task Force:** Enhances staff education on equity and inclusion
- **Accessibility Audit Task Force:** Provides recommendations to improve accessibility

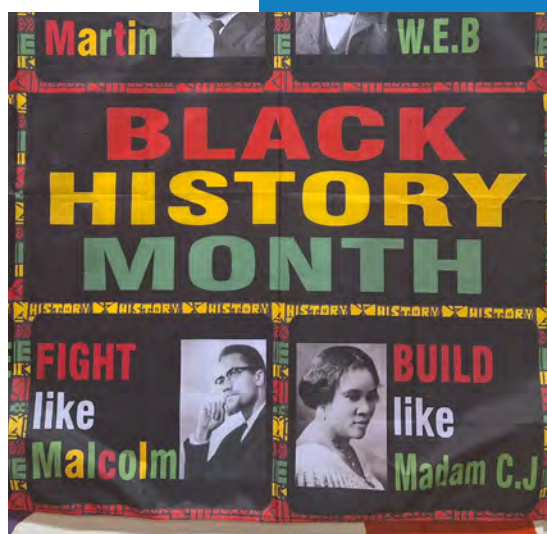
Together, these committees create a supportive environment, drive positive change, and build a culture of equity and inclusion at TNGCS.

EDI Events

TNGCS is committed to fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion through EDI events that celebrate and uplift our diverse communities. Whether cultural heritage celebrations, educational workshops, or advocacy initiatives, we create spaces for greater connection.

We strive to amplify and promote meaningful change through our activities during Black History Month, Pride Month, International Women's Day, and even ongoing activities like Indigenous storytelling, or newcomer services.

We will continue to share our EDI events online, and we encourage all our neighbours, program participants, volunteers and staff to join in!





Improving Benefits for Workers in Childcare & Homecare

At TNGCS, we strive to improve working conditions and stability for our employees, including in the childcare and homecare sectors. In 2024, we achieved a vital equity win by reducing the number of part-time positions and increasing full-time positions. By expanding full-time work, we promote decent work and increased access to paid sick time and health benefits for these critical workers.

Eva Lacson, VP of Childcare, started her career as front-line staff in childcare. She understands how tough and demanding the job can be. *“We raised the bar for full-time work. This change allowed many of our staff members to get paid sick time and other benefits they didn’t have before.”* As a result of these efforts, the percentage of full-time staff rose to 88% for childcare and 94% for homecare. While we may not be able to reach 100%, we are committed to reducing precarious work in the non-profit sector!

Profile: Ranjith Kulatilake

Ranjith Kulatilake, our new EDI Training and Development Coordinator, is a dedicated social worker who spent over a decade supporting LGBTQIA+ refugees through our Rainbow Connect program. In 2021, he received the City of Toronto’s Access, Equity, and Human Rights Pride Award for outstanding contributions to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Ranjith’s dedication exemplifies the importance of EDI’s work in building a more inclusive society within TNGCS and the world at large. In an ideal world, such work wouldn’t be necessary because everyone would be treated fairly and equally. But in the world in which we live, discrimination and inequality make EDI efforts crucial. Professionals like Ranjith play a vital role in promoting acceptance and supporting marginalized communities. His efforts strengthen our organization and push us towards being an ever-adaptable, and increasingly inclusive, place to work.



“EDI work is our collective work because liberation is essentially a collective effort and a collective victory.”
– Ranjith Kulatilake



Equity in Advocacy

The rising volume and severity of youth crime is undeniable. The real question is: Why?

Serena Nudel, Director of Community Programs at TNGCS, emphasized the transformative impact of summer job opportunities for young people, particularly in disadvantaged communities. She stressed that these jobs are a powerful tool for reducing poverty within families and strengthening local neighbourhoods, and connected the lack of youth unemployment to heightened youth violence. *“In many cities across the U.S., research shows that creating summer youth employment programs decreases youth violence.”* Consider the data:

- New York experienced a 23% decline in felony arrests over five years following the implementation of their youth summer employment program.
- Chicago noted a 43% reduction in violent crimes after starting a youth employment program.
- Atlanta saw a 28% drop after opening their program.

Youth who participated in summer employment programs in these cities revealed impressive outcomes: 90% wished to continue working; 88% felt more hopeful about their futures; and 90% acquired employable skills.

To that end, TNGCS has proposed the creation of 10,000 summer jobs by 2026. This initiative seeks to engage non-profits and government agencies to provide essential mentorship, networking, and meaningful job opportunities for youth aged 15-24. This program would be vital for underrepresented groups such as Black, newcomer, and Indigenous youth and would empower these youth and the communities in which they live.



TNGCS has proposed the government create

10,000 summer jobs for youth by 2026



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP COMMUNITY SERVICES

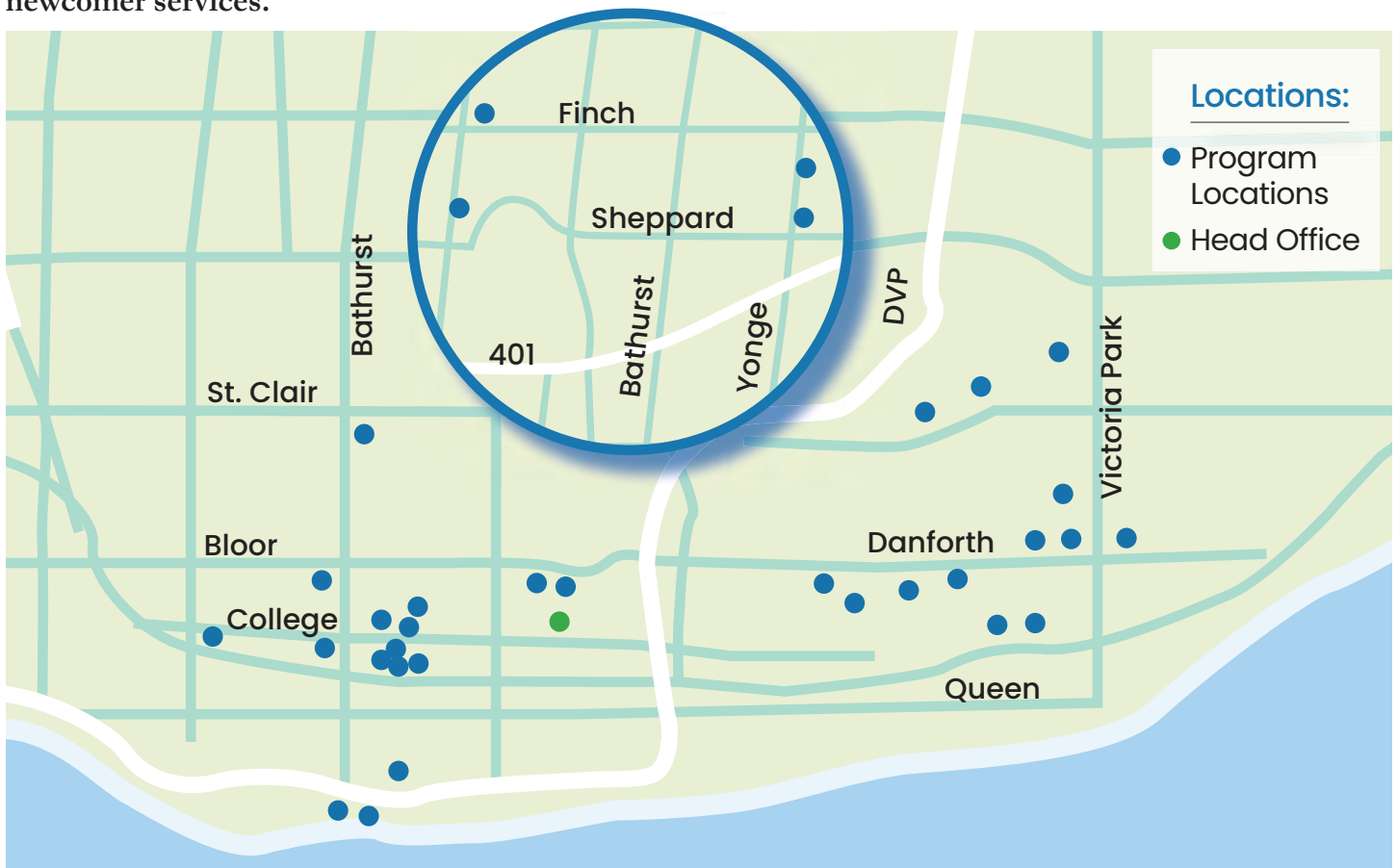
With a history over 100 years, TNGCS provides a wide variety of community services for all ages and across the city in many priority neighbourhoods. Some of our largest services include childcare, homecare, health care, housing, employment supports and newcomer services.

Our Mission

The Neighbourhood Group Community Services works with people at every stage of their lives, providing access to innovative and effective programs, and collaboratively building and advocating for an equitable, just, and vibrant community.

Our Vision

A resilient, inclusive society in which opportunity, empowerment, and social and economic justice create a better quality of life for all.



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