Executive Directors Report

March 2025

IRCC/Federal: Regional & National

- There have been no new developments regarding the amounts of the notional budgets awarded to RODS for the pending 3 year contracts, all of the required lay off notices and end of contract notifications have taken place, with several affected positions in Settlement able to transition into other vacant roles effective April 1, 2025.

- The Management Teams and Finance have been overwhelmed by IRCC requests as we work to finalize the 3 year contracts at the determined notional budget amounts. The nature of the inquiries and directions received have been challenging to say the least, at times requiring the organization to respectfully redirect the requests back. We sincerely appreciate the support of the Board in passing the motion to approve the new salary grid and corresponding cola increases. The requirement for Board approval, out of sequence with normal practice, was as a result of the divided opinion between our negotiating IRCC Officers regarding the necessity of prior approval as well as the grid and cola increases itself.

- One officer was supportive and was prepared to forward our final 2 contracts to IRCC Management including the new grid and cola for the 2 contracts they were overseeing, however the other officer stated that they would not recommend the new grid for the one contract they were overseeing. After explaining the absolute inappropriateness of 2 levels compensation within one organization, and the HR risks with potential wrongful dismissal claims and possible human rights claims, not to mention the inappropriateness of the funder micromanaging the organizational compensation structure, the funder agreed to take to IRCC Management a global salary grid for consideration. The following the morning, one officer changed their position back to refusing the increases in the new grid for one program contract, which led to my conversation with the Acting Supervisor, their support for our concerns, and an agreement that immediate Board approval would be sufficient, which led to our email to you.

- We anticipate that all IRCC contracts will be signed by Friday, March 21st, pending any last minute IRCC requests. Given that notional budget amounts have been secured already, there doesn't appear to be any risk associated by a potential election call, but it would be nice to be signed prior to such an announcement.

Update on IRCC/Provincial Funding/Federal

- LINC has been able to finalize the details of the closure of classes and impact on learners:
  - As of April 1, 2025 here will be 274 seats at the lone LINC site at the Donahue Building, compared to our pre budget cut number of 418 seats.
  - 144 Learners were asked to leave class effective April 1, 2025 due to the budget cuts. There were 35 learners were referred back to Language Assessment for possible new class opportunities, 67 learners were added to the waitlist and 42 learners were graduated from LINC Stage 1. With the closure of LINC Stage 2 across Canada, there will be no higher level LINC classes available after June 30/25.
  - RODS will have 390 learners on its waitlist as of April 1, 2025
- As mentioned previously, the Language Team has been busy pulling together a cost recovery language program to offer to Learners who either have completed Stage 1, are on a wait list, or may be affected by the pending closure of LINC Stage 2. The new program, **ENACT (Empowering Newcomers through Access to Community and Training)** is hoped to launch in May 2025. Given the expertise within the Language Department with Tatiana and Ricardo, the objective of the program is to provide professional language classes, at a cost recovery rate, equal to and better than those at other local post secondary institutions.
- We will begin to look at relaunching volunteer taught language classes in the new fiscal year.
- One of the significant changes in the current negotiations with IRCC was the new process around requesting ongoing advances on contract funds. The funder has historically been supportive of RODS and other agencies in the sector receiving advances, however this CFP there was an application process, and RODS was advised that given our financial standing we would only be eligible for an initial 4 month advance and would be required to submit 3 claims for reimbursement during the year. This may affect our ability to invest RODS reserve funds.

Update on IRCC/Provincial Funding/Federal

- With the reductions in the RAP budget we have lost some significant capacity in supporting our GAR arrivals. The position of Housing Coordinator was cut by IRCC. This will impact the RAP Team as they work to support complex need clients with their initial settlement needs, adding housing on to their list of duties. The position of Afterhours RAP Caseworker was also cut by the funder, affecting our ability to support clients in the 6 reception suites with their needs after work hours and on weekends.
- On March 19th, the Government of Saskatchewan announced the new budget, and within the budget it referenced pending cuts to service providers funded by Immigration and Career Training. This pending reduction is a result of the Federal Government reducing the Labour Market Transfer Agreement Funding by $17.6 million dollars in the current fiscal year, backfilled by the Province for one year only. The impact of the Federal reduction will now affect some service providers. We should be advised in the new several days.

Reception House, Smith Street Properties & Daycare

- As mentioned, we have finalized our discussions with IRCC regarding the closure of the RODS Reception House and imminent sale. IRCC has now formally agreed to reallocate the funds provided to rent and cover some operating costs at the Reception House to the rental of 3 additional suites with Devereaux Developments, giving us a total of 6 furnished suites under a one year lease. We are waiting for IRCC approval for asset disposal, staff have assessed the furniture and equipment in the Reception House, some items were purchased with IRCC capital funds and need to be reused, donated or destroyed, and other assets need to be relocated to the leased suites or to our offices.
- As mentioned earlier, with closure of LINC classes at Smith Street and relocation of SSWIS and OSN activities from Smith, and the recent end to the Enhanced Career Bridging operating out of Smith, the remaining lone tenant of Smith will be the RODS Daycare. The organization has been subsidizing the Daycare with lower cost per square foot rates since the licensing of the childcare, as well as with the provision of additional free space. With the loss of program revenue/rent at Smith, and the Daycare as the only tenant, RODS will face a significant financial burden to continue operate the structure, having to absorb up to $115,000 in annual operating costs. The average cost per month to operate Smith Street is $15,000 net of depreciation & amortization. The loss of programs and corresponding rental income, combined with the significant capital investment (engineers report) that would need to be made to continue to operate the facility, make its ongoing operation not financially viable.
- The Finance Committee and Property Sub Committee will be meeting with Linely Schaefer from Avison Young on March 24th to discuss the possible sale prices of the Reception House and 1855 Smith Street. Linely has shared that the Smith Street sale price, $1,550,000, will be considerably lower that when the property was valued when donated, and will require the adjacent parking lot to be included with the building for sale. His advice is that it will be even more challenging to sell the building if there is not dedicated parking attached. Linely believes that an asking price in the $360,000 to $380,000 for the Reception House is appropriate.

Reception House, Smith Street Properties & Daycare

- Given the possible sale of the Smith Street property, we have viewed the vacant 2nd floor space directly next to the Donahue Building, the Woodbine Building, as a possible new location for the RODS daycare. We were that last tenant of that entire 2nd floor area, which has undergone a demolition of 5,000 sq. ft. of space on the south side of the building, creating an ideal window rich environment area for a daycare. It is reasonably priced at $13.65 psf gross, and would require a kitchen and storage to be built, demising of open space and bathroom renovations. Given that we require a daycare location very close to our LINC classes at the Donahue Building to facilitate students dropping off their children and attending class without additional bus trips or driving, we are limited in our options for available leased space. While there are a few properties in the area of the Donahue Building, they are either to expensive or just too far away from RODS operation. The significant subsidization provided by RODS to the daycare at Smith Street, shared at the last meeting, now presents a challenge when looking a new standalone location.
- Given that the current daycare funding model from the Provincial Government has not yet been updated to support those daycares established when the new $10.00 a day Fed/Prov agreement was initiated, the RODS daycare finds itself in a challenging financial position when looking at a new location. During an onsite meeting with RODS Daycare Consultant Tara Jors about opportunities for RODS to secure additional funds in an effort to support a move, RODS was encouraged to make a special submission to the Provincial Daycare Branch requesting an increase in fees to support the pending relocation. Work is underway building budget scenarios for special application to the Provincial Daycare Branch with the scenarios including status quo childcare seats as well as the addition of 25 new childcare seats, at a higher rate, as well as an addition of 25 seats under the current funding model seats
- In spite pressure from the sector, the Province of Saskatchewan is one of 2 provinces not yet agreeing to sign a new $10 a day daycare agreement with the Federal Government.

RODS Update

- RODS continues to explore external grant funding to establish a refugee employment track within the Employment Services Team. Given the literacy needs and low language levels of many of our GAR clients they tend to not qualify for the LINC Benchmark Level 4 requirement of the current program. RODS will be re-engaging with the NorthPine Foundation (NorthpineFoundation.ca). The Foundation is interested in funding a refugee employment program, and wants to include ICT and Social Services in the discussions to leverage opportunities for program sustainability.
- Unfortunately due to a bad infection following hand surgery, I was not able to attend the Metropolis Conference in Toronto. We did have 3 members of our Senior Staff in attendance, Tatiana, Ricardo and Getachew. I will be able to provide a verbal update on their findings and experiences at the conference
- GAR Arrivals Update

  A total of 232 GAR clients arrived between April 1, 2024 – March 18, 2025 (201 were GARs + 31 were secondary GAR migrants)

  A total of 33 GAR client arrivals have arrived from January 1/25 to March 18/25

  There are 15 GAR client arrivals pending to the end of March

Other Information of Interest

- Prime Minister Mark Carney has appointed Rachel Bendayan and the new Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

https://immigration.ca/what-to-expect-from-new-canada-immigration-minister-rachel-bendayan/

- The Province of Saskatchewan has yet to sign the new $10 a day daycare agreement with the Federal Government.

Daycare workers want Sask. government to sign federal funding agreement | CBC News