

2022 SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS



ABOUT THE COVER

Afro-Indigenous artist Jasmine Swimmer was commissioned by Toronto Employment & Social Services to create a visual Land Acknowledgement and African Ancestral Acknowledgement to be displayed in public-facing areas in our offices. The art articulates our collective, divisional acknowledgement of the land and traditional territory that we meet and work on.

The artwork used on the cover of this report is from *Solidarity* by Jasmine Swimmer. According to the artist, *"This piece was inspired by my shared ancestry of both Indigenous and African descent. This artwork highlights the intersectionality of both cultures. In many ways our communities are similar in experiences and symbolism, highlighting both strength and resilience."*

Jasmine Swimmer is an Afro-Indigenous Multidisciplinary artist and mother. Coping with postpartum depression, Jasmine found solace in doodling, leading to her finding her voice. As an OCAD university graduate and ArtworksTO Alumni, Jasmine connects her Arawak Taino First Nation and Caribbean heritage in her work depicting the connection between Community, Identity and Resilience. Jasmine's art unapologetically expresses underrepresented peoples in all their unique forms.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM



Erendira Cervantes-Altamirano



Jennifer Pitt



James Lapierre



Anna Cain



Tom Azouz



Tracey O'Brien

It's hard to believe that it has been three years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, changing almost every aspect of our work and our lives. Looking back, we are extremely proud of how Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) was able to navigate those challenging times with resourcefulness, empathy and diligence, to serve our clients and the broader community, while simultaneously supporting one another.

At TESS, we take great pride in the important work we do to deliver the provincial Ontario Works (OW) social assistance program to Toronto residents in financial need, providing money for food, shelter, and other eligible costs as these clients work towards finding employment. Importantly, in addition to administering financial benefits, TESS staff provide critical support as service navigators, working collaboratively with clients to develop service plans while also connecting them to vital services and supports in the community to address their unique and diverse needs (e.g., housing, child-care, health and mental health, employment supports, etc.).

Through a network of 15 in-person service offices, TESS manages the largest municipal-administered social assistance delivery system in Canada. In 2022, as COVID measures began to lift across all orders of government, we successfully delivered this program while continually demonstrating our adaptability, resiliency, capacity for innovation and commitment to serving Toronto's low-income residents – many of whom continue to face extremely complex and compounding challenges resulting from the pandemic and broader social and economic factors. In recognition of these immense challenges, it was critical that our priorities and business decisions continued to be rooted in our client-centred principles throughout the pandemic.

We thought that it was fitting to select Jasmine Swimmer's "Solidarity" artwork for our cover this year. Looking back on 2022, it reflects the strength and resilience of our clients, our staff and the communities we served. From a forward-looking perspective, the cover also represents our steadfast commitment and resolve to take meaningful actions that value, support and contribute to an equitable, diverse and inclusive environment, for our clients and staff.

We are truly proud of our contributions as members of the Toronto Public Service and are pleased to share our success story of 2022 with you.

TESS Senior Management Team

General Manager

Tom Azouz

Operations

Erendira Cervantes-Altamirano, Director, West District

Jennifer Pitt, Director, East District and Central District

James Lapierre, Director, Customer Service, Intake & Access

Executive Office

Anna Cain, Director, Community and Employment Partnerships & OW Program Support

James Lapierre, Director, Strategic Program Management

Tracey O'Brien, Director, Business & Financial Supports

WHO WE SERVE

The Ontario Works caseload statistics below represent the number of OW cases, not the total number of members (i.e. cases can have more than one family member).

2022 Caseload Statistics

107,300
Cases served
2022

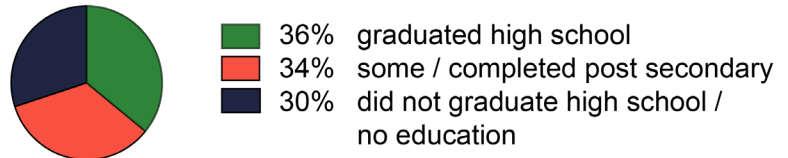
175,718
Individuals served
2022

50.7 months
time on assistance
average for 2022

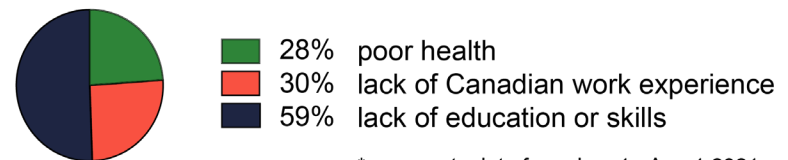
56.1% of cases
2+ years length of stay on assistance
average for 2022

Demographic characteristics represent the characteristics of the primary applicant. Percentages may not add up to 100 percent because of non-response on some variables

Educational Attainment (applicant only)

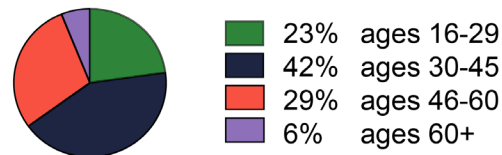


Reported Barriers to Employment*

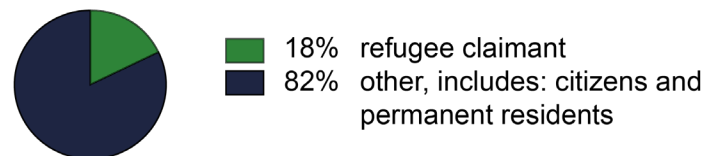


*represents data from Jan. 1 - Aug. 1 2021

Age (applicant only)



Immigration Status



UNDERSTANDING OUR CLIENT EXPERIENCE



TESS is one of four City divisions participating in the Data for Equity Strategy pilot projects to improve the collection, management and use of sociodemographic data, and ensure that program planning, policy development and service delivery is inclusive of and responsive to the needs of all Torontonians, particularly Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving groups.

In 2022, foundational planning for TESS' Data for Equity pilot began, which included 10 engagement sessions with over 100 individuals (clients and staff) consulted, to help inform training, strategies and approaches to increase the collection of sociodemographic data. TESS will be launching its Data for Equity pilot in 2023, with key outputs and learnings to be embedded in both divisional and City practices following evaluation.

The Data for Equity Strategy also informed the development and administration of TESS' 2022 Client Survey which aims to gain a better understanding of the quality of TESS' programs and services from the perspectives of clients. The responses received highlighted areas where clients were experiencing/facing multiple barriers and provided TESS with an opportunity to identify areas

for improvement. For the first time ever, our client survey was provided online and translated into multiple languages. In addition to the official languages of English and French, the survey was also translated into Farsi, French, Spanish, Urdu, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional). In total, responses were received from 1,897 clients, representing a 28% response rate.

The survey results showed that:



100% of respondents that received in-person services felt safe and believed that TESS had taken appropriate measures to help protect their health and safety.



90% of respondents were able to connect with their caseworkers when they needed to during COVID-19.



81-89% of clients had a very positive rating with regards to how they were treated by caseworkers (areas assessed include respect and dignity, confidentiality, understanding, listening, being treated fairly, and discussing activities and opportunities).



Of the 36% of respondents that identified as having a disability, 22% said their disability negatively impacted the services they received from TESS.



6% of respondents said their race negatively impacted the service they received, and 2% said their sexual orientation negatively impacted the services they received.

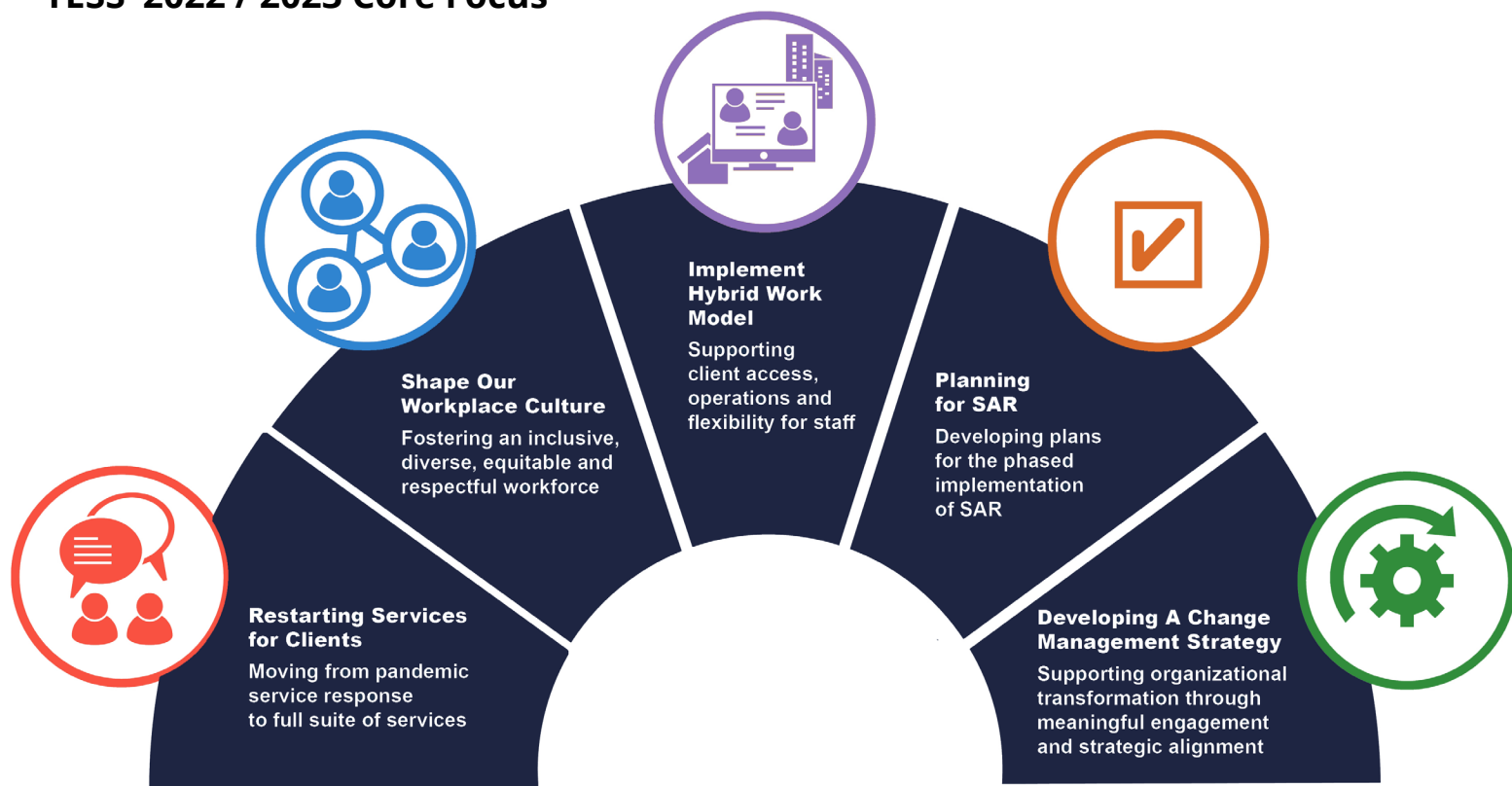
TESS will use the feedback received from respondents to inform its approaches to improving service planning relationships, the complaints and appeal process, and ensure a respectful, equitable and safe environment for clients of all abilities and social identities.

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TESS' DIVISIONAL PRIORITIES

In 2022, TESS established its 2022/2023 Divisional Priorities Plan to continue to build on the important work we started in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this plan, we identified five key areas of focus: restarting and expanding services for clients, shaping our workplace culture, implementing a hybrid work model, planning for Social Assistance Renewal (SAR), and developing a change management plan. We made great strides in these areas by:

- Restarting the programs paused during the pandemic, including the return to more in person services, and the lifting of temporary COVID-19 measures
- Maintaining an inclusive, safe and respectful service environment through Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) trainings and the initiation of a Zero Tolerance Framework
- Designing a hybrid work model grounded in our client service principles
- Preparing for and implementing changes to support the Centralized Intake prototype as part of SAR
- Developing a plan to enable consistent and effective change management over the coming months and years, with the support of external change consultants



2022 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Reflecting on our accomplishments this past year, we are extremely proud of the collective progress our staff have made to empower our clients and meet our organizational objectives. Some of our notable achievements include:

MODERNIZING & EVOLVING SERVICE DELIVERY



Since the onset of the pandemic, TESS has been focussed on finding ways to modernize and improve our services to clients, working collaboratively with external and intergovernmental partners to improve the OW application process, funding disbursement and providing access to stability supports. Below are some of the ways we evolved our service delivery in 2022:

- Provided targeted supports to Ukrainian nationals, including the issuance of the Emergency Assistance benefit and language interpretation services
 - On average, TESS serves 2,000 clients a month and has supported over 7,500 Ukrainian nationals to-date.
 - As part of the City of Toronto's coordinated response to supporting Ukrainian nationals, TESS actively participated on two tables – one internal to the City, and the Inter-Agency Task Force which works with external partners – to coordinate efforts amongst interdivisional and external partners including Ukrainian Leaders, and strengthen collaboration with service providers and key organizations in the Ukrainian community.

- TESS collaborated and engaged with other levels of government including the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training & Skills Development (MLITSD) and Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to strengthen supports and create service pathways for newcomers and refugees.
- Implemented the first phase of the Centralized Intake prototype as part of Social Assistance Renewal, which resulted in the upload of online OW applications to the Province's Intake and Benefits Administration Unit (IBAU)
- Enhanced the Housing Stabilization Fund (HSF) to provide assistance to migrants in receipt of Emergency Assistance
 - In 2022, TESS received and processed a total of 21,100 HSF requests for OW and ODSP clients, which represents a 30% increase in the number of requests received and processed in comparison to 2021.
 - On average, eligible households received \$1,084 under HSF.
- Expanded the Homeless to ODSP Project Engagement (HOPE) Initiative - an integrated approach that provides one-on-one support to help people experiencing homelessness to apply for and access Ontario Disability Support Program - almost doubling the number of clients served
 - At the start of 2022, the HOPE Initiative, in partnership with Inner City Health Associates (ICHA), had one health professional working three days per week. By the fall, the team increased to three health professionals working five days a week.
 - Annually, the HOPE caseload serves over 350 OW clients.
- Adapted and offered hybrid and virtual services for Purchase of Employment Services (POES) programs
 - In partnership with its contracted service providers, TESS delivered 103 POES programs to help clients prepare for employment, self-employment or career advancement.
 - POES programs received approximately 2.5 times more referrals in 2022 than in 2021, and more than 2,100 training seats were filled, representing 84% of the available seats.
 - Through these programs, approximately 685 participants moved into employment or relevant next steps, bringing them closer to the labour market.
- Continued to provide critical stability supports through the Wrap Around Supports Program (WRAP)
 - In partnership with 41 WRAP delivery partners, over 2,300 referrals were made to WRAP and TESS successfully filled 1,100 seats, representing 85% of the 1,300 available seats.
 - TESS hosted Community of Practice sessions for WRAP providers to share best practices.



ENHANCING & IMPROVING CLIENT EXPERIENCE



In 2022, TESS undertook several activities to improve service delivery, enhancing how and where we provide service and ensuring our clients received services and supports that are relevant and appropriate. Most notably, TESS:

- Completed 144,109 service plans, collaboratively working with clients to establish goals and support navigation to appropriate programs and services
- Opened three neighbourhood-focused storefront locations at Bridlewood Mall, Dufferin Mall and North York Civic Centre that incorporated elements of inclusive design
- Collated approximately 4,400 Service Planning Surveys and communicated feedback trends to support service improvements in three identified areas: service plan development, client-caseworker relationships and impact of select demographic factors. The results showed that:
 - Clients most valued the role that caseworkers played in connecting them to stability and employment supports.
 - Transit, housing, food and community supports were discussed approximately 18% more frequently in 2022 than in 2021.
 - 20% more respondents report being in Canada for less than one year than in 2021, validating the need for increased focus on service navigation and culturally appropriate resources for new Canadians.
- Enhanced access to Family Related Benefits to meet the emerging needs of OW families with over \$4 million issued in Family Related and Technology Support Benefits to eligible families
 - TESS expanded its Educational Support Benefit which provides tutoring support to children and high school students with Individual Education Plans (i.e. an amount of \$500 issued to support access to tutoring for high school students in grades 9 through 12 and for children aged 8-17 years old, when free tutoring/homework help resources are unavailable or insufficient to meet the child's immediate support needs).
- Re-established client referral mechanisms to Recreation Liaisons and Public Health Nurses, completing 5,145 client referrals in 2022



Opening remarks at the Bridlewood Employment & Social Services Open House.



Cutting the ribbon at the Dufferin Employment & Social Services Open House.

IMPLEMENTING POPULATION SPECIFIC ICM PILOTS



In 2022, ten divisional pilots and eight local/district innovative case management (ICM) pilots were implemented, which filled critical service gaps and aided in strengthening our connections with local agencies. Informed and funded by the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, these population specific ICM pilots were lived experience led and helped to address clients' unmet needs by providing them with the necessary supports and services to reduce barriers impeding employment and employment readiness.



TESS staff and participants of the Beneath the Surface ICM program.

- All 18 pilots were grounded in equity-centred design and provided evidence-informed and culturally safe services and supports to disempowered communities including those that identify as Indigenous, Black, youth and newcomers/refugees.
- These ICM pilots provided wrap-around health supports, including connections to mental health resources, life skills and empowerment supports, and connections to employment, including entrepreneurship, peer support, mentorship, and internships, ultimately supporting clients to move closer to the labour market.
- Preliminary results demonstrate that these pilots increased access to mental health and addiction supports, and significantly improved social connections and well-being for clients.

1,000+

clients participated
in the ICM pilots



200+

moved into
training, bridging
or POES programs



30+

gained
employment



BUILDING A POSITIVE, SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE WORK & SERVICE CULTURE



- The TESS CABR Action Plan was launched in 2022 and is a roadmap to continue addressing and confronting anti-Black racism in Toronto. The plan outlines tangible actions within staff learning and culture, staff recruitment and advancement, race-based data, collaborative service planning, community investment, youth mentorship and employment, public education, policy development, and intergovernmental advocacy and support.
 - Some specific outcomes from 2022 included implementing the CABR 101 training program to increase awareness of anti-Black racism and cultivate behavioral and systemic change – over 1,000 frontline and non-union/management staff completed the training in 2022, recruiting leaders in Black communities to facilitate staff training and cultural awareness, applying an anti-Black racism lens to talent management practices, and embedding CABR principles into service planning practices.

- TESS initiated a Zero-Tolerance Framework which articulated the division's commitment to establishing and maintaining an environment free from harassment and discrimination, including microaggressions. This will include a clear and consistent protocol for raising, investigating and resolving incidents and complaints of harassment and discrimination, in a confidential, timely, and unbiased manner.
 - In 2022, the division held eight engagement sessions with clients, staff and contracted service providers including members from the Client and Job Seeker Advisory Committee (CJSAC), the Confronting Anti-Black Racism (CABR) Committee, the Indigenous Affairs Divisional Committee (IADC), and a cross section of staff to inform the development of guides, resources and a complaints process.
 - The Zero-Tolerance policy also enabled TESS to address concerns raised by clients about their training experiences. Steps taken in 2022 included working with organizations to ensure their environment and instructors provided a safe and respectful space for clients, suspension of referrals in some situations until organizations completed agreed upon actions, and termination of the contractual arrangement in more serious situations where a mutually agreed upon resolution could not be found.
- TESS commenced the installment of visual Land Acknowledgements and African Ancestral Acknowledgements in all public-facing areas of TESS offices.
 - The visual Acknowledgements were designed to highlight the intersectionality of both Indigenous and African cultures and articulates our collective acknowledgement of the land and traditional territory that we meet and work on.
- In 2022, TESS had four communities of inclusion staff networks: the TESS Black Staff Network, TESS Pride, TESS AccessAbility and TESS Muslim Support Network which provided staff and manager members with a space to meet regularly, network, dialogue, share best practices, build capacity, learn and develop.
- The Divisional Engagement Advisory Group (DEAG) was formally established with representation from all TESS locations, to improve current communication strategies, increase interactions between the Senior Management Team (SMT) and staff, and increase opportunities for staff to engage and provide recommendations.
- TESS established a Change Advisory Board with representation from various functions across the division to support the development of a Change Management Plan for 2023 and beyond.



The Indigenous Land Acknowledgement artwork by Jasmine Swimmer.



The African Ancestral Acknowledgement artwork by Jasmine Swimmer.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2023 AND BEYOND

TESS is eager to build on last years successes and continue to collaborate with our numerous partners to ensure we meet the diverse and often complex needs of our clients and provide great customer service. In 2023, we will continue to be guided by our 2022/2023 priorities as expressed earlier. Specifically, TESS will:

- Continue to work on Social Assistance Renewal, including implementing the second phase of the Centralized Intake Prototype
 - Given the size, diversity and complexity of our caseload, and to ensure minimal impact to clients, TESS adopted a phased co-design approach with the Province for Centralized Intake. TESS will be providing a progress report on Centralized Intake to Council in 2023.
 - TESS continues to iterate and improve the initial prototype to prepare for the second phase of the Centralized Intake will include the transition of the phone channel for OW applications to the Ministry in mid-2023.
- Continue to work with the Province and city stakeholders to inform upcoming Employment Services Transformation in Toronto
 - TESS has engaged key external stakeholders and the Province on upcoming changes and has conducted a comprehensive assessment of anticipated impacts for Toronto. TESS will be reporting back to Council in 2023 on the best role for the City in response to the Provincial call for the Employment Services System Manager function.
 - Given the important role of workforce development strategies in supporting clients' employment needs, TESS along with partner divisions will also report back to Council in 2023 on opportunities to better coordinate City workforce development programs and investments.
- Continue to modernize service for clients including the implementation of Virtual Caseworker services and electronic signatures
- Move forward on our commitment to measuring and improving client outcomes through the development and implementation of an Integrated Performance Measurement Framework
- Continue our focus on Confronting Anti Black Racism, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, and Indigenous Reconciliation which will include the implementation of an Equity Assessment Tool to support inclusive program design and evaluation. TESS will also continue to explore the development of Indigenous service pathways for clients
- Develop a Change Management Plan in early 2023, which will support TESS with its transformational journey over the next three to five years and the resulting changes from SAR. A key element of this work will also include the development of a refreshed vision statement





APPRECIATION

TESS would like to use this opportunity to thank all its staff, clients, internal and external partners, including interdivisional partners, community agencies and other orders of government for a successful 2022.

We look forward to continuing the great work we have begun and are committed to providing supports and services to move our clients towards living their best lives and to ensure a more equitable and prosperous city for all.

