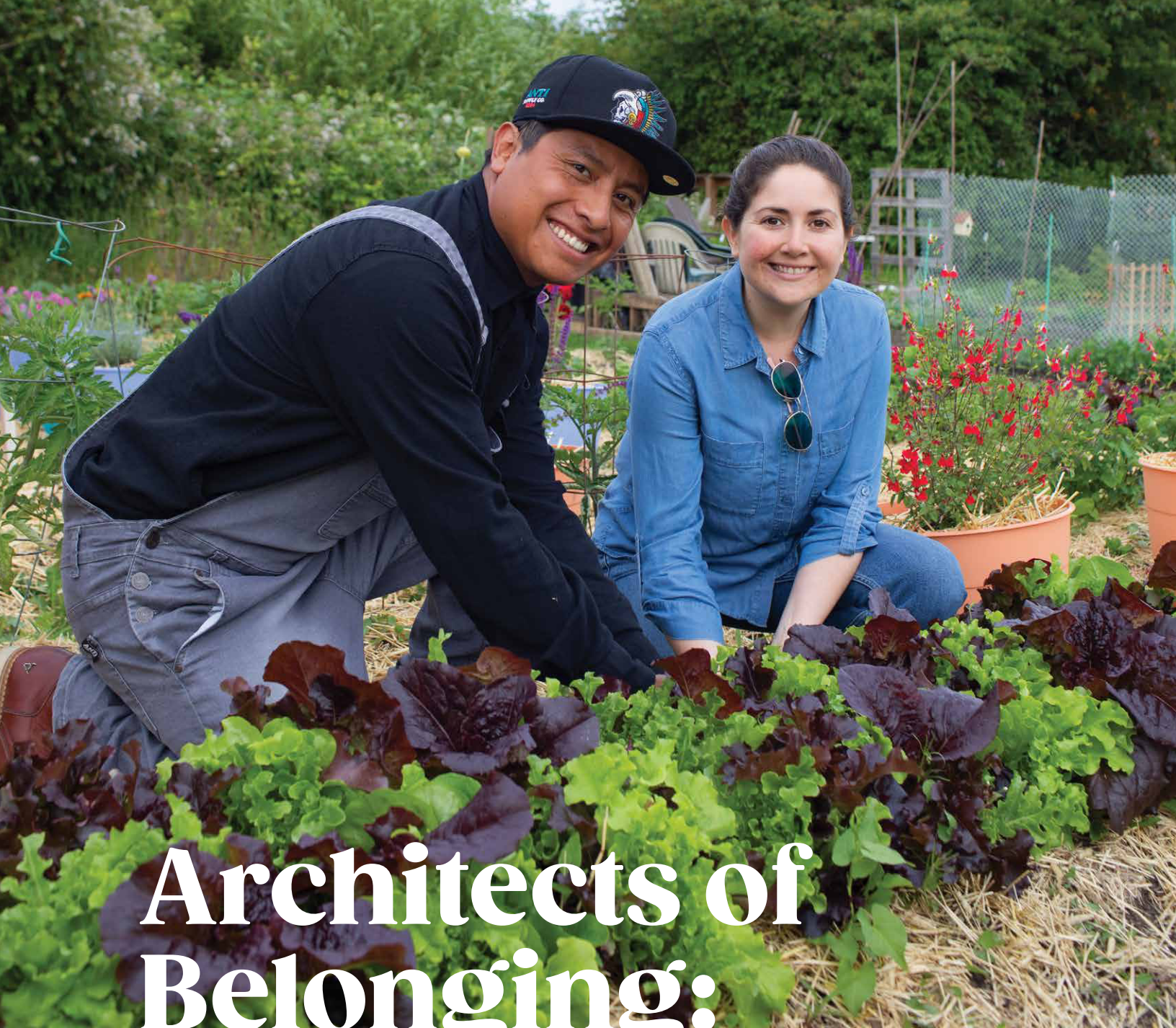




# Architects of Belonging: Civil Society Impact Study



Victoria  
Foundation



## Study methodology

The methodology combined the most current data available from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) 2023 assessment with empirical research to capture both the economic and social impacts of charitable organizations. The research team sent a survey to organizations with publicly available contact emails from the CRA 2023 list (total 998 registered charities) and received 64 completed surveys between April-June 2025.

The economic impact analysis was conducted by Dr. Brock Smith of the Peter B. Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria, following an approach developed for the Ontario Arts Council by Informetrica Limited and used in the 2018 charitable sector study.



Established in 1936, the Victoria Foundation is Canada's second-oldest community foundation and sixth largest of over 200 nation-wide. We manage charitable gifts from donors whose generosity allows us to create permanent, income-earning funds. The proceeds from these funds are then distributed as grants for charitable or educational purposes. Over the years, the Victoria Foundation has invested more than \$400 million in people, projects and charitable organizations that strengthen communities in BC and throughout Canada. The Victoria Foundation seeks to create a sense of belonging that inspires philanthropy, essential partnerships and collaboration, and makes a lasting contribution to our community.

# Letter from Victoria Foundation CEO, Sandra Richardson

This document is an encapsulation of the research report *Architects of Belonging: Civil Society Impact Study*, published in 2025. It builds on our foundational 2018 impact assessment, and examines how the sector has evolved through one of the most challenging periods in recent history.

The study captures the vital role that civil society organizations play in our community and the breadth of individuals they support. The key points of the 2025 study have been condensed into this document, so you can access the highlights of the findings. The complete study is available on our website.

The Victoria Foundation is committed to strengthening the capacity of the charitable sector. We invite you to read this document to understand the profound impact of civil society organizations in our region, and how you can help support the charities and nonprofits that enrich our community.

Thank you.

**Sandra Richardson**  
CEO, The Victoria Foundation

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**The Victoria Foundation**

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## Land Acknowledgment



**Victoria  
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We acknowledge with respect that the Victoria Foundation works on, and the research was conducted on the unceded Coast Salish Territories, specifically of the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees) and Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) Nations, the W̱SÁNEĆ Nations {W̱JOLELP (Tsartlip), BO̱KÉCEN (Pauquachin), STÁUTW̱ (Tsawout), W̱SIKEM (Tseycum) on the Saanich Peninsula and Gulf Islands, and to the west Sc̱'ianew (Beecher Bay), T'Sou-ke, and Pacheedaht, and MÁLEXEL (Malahat) and Pune'laxutth' (Penelekut) Nations. We recognize that these Nations have been caring for these territories since time immemorial, and their connection to these lands and waters continues today.

# The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Greater Victoria

Belonging happens when people come together, feel valued and are able to contribute. Civil society organizations are the **architects of belonging** in our community and the services they deliver shape, support and define our region.

Their work reflects the needs of our community and serves a breadth of people including seniors, children, youth, women, low-income individuals and families, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, LGBTQIA2S+, newcomers, immigrants and refugees.

The sectors supported by civil society organizations in Greater Victoria include:

## > Health & Wellness

By far, the largest sector by economic impact is health and wellness. The 91 organizations in this sector include the Victoria Hospice and Palliative Care Foundation and Umbrella Society for Addictions and Mental Health.

## > Education & Research

This sector is made up of 184 organizations, encompassing major institutions and educational centres such as Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific and United World Colleges, and Greater Victoria Public Library.

## > Poverty-focused Organizations

These groups support families and individuals facing the day-to-day challenges of poverty such as the Mustard Seed Street Church and Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS).

## > Community & Public Amenities

In Greater Victoria, 137 organizations create gathering spaces and programming that enrich our lives, such as Boys and Girls Club Services of Greater Victoria and Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria.

## > Arts Organizations

The vibrancy of Greater Victoria is supported, in part, by the 58 organizations providing venues for creative expression and cultural celebration, such as the Victoria Conservatory of Music and Maritime Museum of British Columbia.

## > Religious Organizations

These faith-based groups demonstrate broad community engagement through high participation numbers. The 234 organizations in our community range from church organizations to community groups.

## > Other Organizations

Organizations driving change and enhancing belonging include those working for environmental causes, advocacy groups, professional associations, emergency services and sports and recreation. Together, these 117 nonprofits contribute significantly to the vitality and community belonging through their focused approaches to specific populations and issues.

## What are civil society organizations?

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are the nonprofits, charities and community groups that operate between the public and private sectors. These organizations are the food banks, environmental groups, newcomer services, arts organizations and advocacy groups that create the spaces where belonging happens.

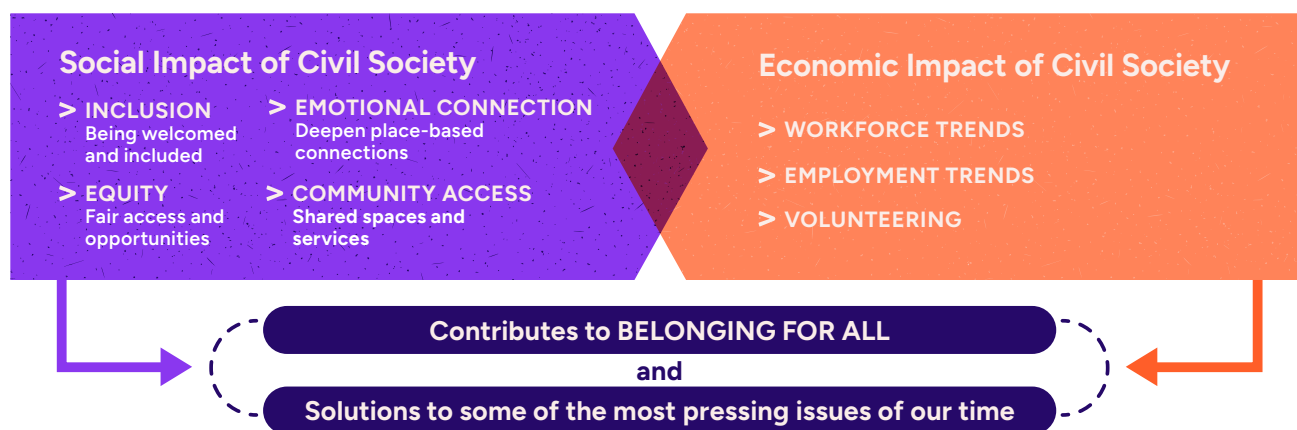
# The Impact of Belonging

At the core of charitable organizations' impact lies belonging. When people feel like they truly belong, they participate more fully, share their skills and knowledge, and help build the resilient neighbourhoods that benefit everyone.

Charitable organizations create welcoming spaces where diverse voices are heard, fostering deep relationships of trust and reciprocity, facilitating access to resources and opportunities and working to dismantle barriers that prevent full participation in society.

Belonging also drives social and economic impact. People with strong community connections experience better mental and physical health, greater economic stability and higher civic participation.

As vital as it is, a sense of belonging is dissipating across Canada. In 2022, a survey of more than 2,000 people aged 18 and over found that a sense of belonging has declined by 12% since 2013. This national decline in a feeling of belonging makes the work of local charitable organizations more critical than ever.



## The 5 Most Prominent Areas of Impact

when aligned to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



### Reduced Inequalities

86% IMPLEMENTING EQUITY PROGRAMS

Serves most equity-deserving populations



### Partnerships for the Goals

77% ENGAGED IN PARTNERSHIPS

Essential for systemic change



### Sustainable Cities and Communities

71% EXPANDED SERVICES

Creates belonging infrastructure



### Good Health and Well-Being

67% SERVE SENIORS

Addresses isolation crisis



### No Poverty

62% SERVE LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

Removes economic barriers

# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BELONGING

Beyond the social impact of their work, the charitable sector drives extensive economic value. Collectively, nonprofits are a proven community asset.

The sector delivers **\$5.4 billion in annual economic activity**, on par with the technology sector in Greater Victoria and with Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing in British Columbia. The charitable sector supports 60,600 jobs and delivers more than \$366 million in municipal taxes. The induced multiplier effect means the sector’s true impact is more than \$8.7 billion, driving the equivalent of 110,000 jobs and just over \$666 million in municipal taxes. These jobs keep skilled workers in the region while building deeper connections to the community.

| SECTOR                       | NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS | ECONOMIC ACTIVITY |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Health & Wellness            | 91                      | \$3.38 billion    |
| Education & Research         | 184                     | \$1.46 billion    |
| Poverty-focused              | 127                     | \$225 million     |
| Community & Public Amenities | 137                     | \$167 million     |
| Religious                    | 234                     | \$77 million      |
| Arts                         | 58                      | \$46.9 million    |
| “Other” Organizations        | 117                     | \$79.4 million    |

**\$5.4 BILLION**  
TOTAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY  
of registered charities in the Capital Region in 2023



With induced multiplier effects, this economic activity rises to nearly:  
**\$8.7 BILLION**



## ORGANIZATIONAL BELONGING

**The charitable sector works best when it works together.** Collaborative infrastructure drives economies of scale, enhanced insights and greater impact. Today, 77% of the sector is engaged in partnerships. Working with other charitable organizations allows for shared learning, skills development, deeper networks and broader community reach.

**77%**  
of the charitable  
sector is engaged  
with partnerships.



**When people truly belong, communities become more resilient, innovative and capable of solving their challenges. In short, belonging makes us all better.**



## Commitment to Reconciliation

Almost half the organizations have specific programs supporting Indigenous peoples and about two-thirds of organizations are actively building their understanding of BC's *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. Nonprofits demonstrate a deep understanding of reconciliation work, supporting Indigenous-led programming, advancing Indigenous revitalization and undertaking comprehensive organizational change towards reconciliation and decolonization of our work.

# The Investment Opportunity

Civil society organizations present exceptional opportunities for strategic investment. The impact of their work, the reach of their support and their inherent connection to community make them the ideal sector to drive change.

## THE CHARITABLE SECTOR IS READY TO SCALE

Deeper partnerships and innovative funding models are at the heart of what organizations need. The funding amounts (\$50,000 to \$200,000 annually) represent strategic investments in core operations, capacity building and collaborative infrastructure that will enable the long-term, systemic change our region requires.



**The charitable sector is the source of the greatest impact for organizations and individuals looking to invest in positive outcomes.**

## CHALLENGES FACING THOSE ACCESSING THE SERVICES OF CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

The charitable sector is a driving social and economic force in our community. Yet despite their profound contributions, people still face barriers accessing their services.

### > Financial Shortfalls

Fiscal barriers limit how organizations support those needing assistance. Because of these financial shortfalls, nonprofits must pass on service fees, or require those living in poverty to absorb the cost of transportation, childcare, time off work and other expenses to access the support they need.

### > Capacity Constraints and Waitlists

The sector is experiencing more requests for services than they are able to provide, resulting in waitlists. Every individual on a waitlist is a missed opportunity for support.

### > Geographic and Infrastructure Barriers

Physical location and lack of reliable transportation impact seniors, people with disabilities and families trying to access organizations providing the needed support.

### > Systemic and Bureaucratic Barriers

Required government applications can limit access for those with literacy issues and facing cultural barriers. Enhanced support to navigate the processes would extend the reach of services to those needing them.

**70 per cent of organizations are serving more people today than they did in 2018.**

## The Good Food Network: Establishing Community Through Food

Since 2015, the Good Food Network (GFN) has been working to transform the regional food system in Greater Victoria. Collaborating with 125 organizations, they are creating a more equitable, healthy and sustainable local food system by removing barriers, improving food access and building community.

### EMERGENCY FOOD, SYSTEM INEQUITIES AND FOOD ACCESS

- Member organizations offer free and low-cost food for those in need, while building capacity through programs like community kitchens, food literacy education and food distribution centres.
- GFN also works to protect, preserve and restore traditional Indigenous food systems by removing the financial, cultural and geographic barriers.
- The network ensures that safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food reaches all community members through a diverse set of programs including local farms, community gardens and education.

### WHO'S AROUND THE TABLE IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT'S ON THE TABLE

The Good Food Network's collaborative model has produced a decade of success while also simultaneously advancing multiple **UN Sustainability Development Goals**, including Zero Hunger, Reduced Inequalities, Sustainable Communities and Climate Action. By working together, GFN has made tremendous progress on these complex and interconnected issues — but there is still so much to be done.



[goodfoodnetwork.info](http://goodfoodnetwork.info)

## The Path Forward

The charitable sector is constrained by outdated funding models.

88%

### Need Stable Core Funding

Stable core funding can dramatically change how the charitable sector works. Reliable funding will unleash a dramatic expansion of services and allow organizations to invest in professional management, strategic planning and desperately needed infrastructure that allows them to meet community demand and pay fair wages. Funding can also support the deepening of the collaborative infrastructure that is vital to the strength of the organizations.

45%

### Need Program Expansion Funding

Program expansion funding must reflect today's reality. The demand for services continues to grow, yet waitlists and capacity constraints are limiting the ability for charitable organizations to meet the needs of the community. Additional program funding would allow civil society organizations to fully deliver on their mandate, closing the gap between community needs and available services.

38%

### Need Physical Space/Facilities

More physical space and facilities are required. Organizational capacity limits result in the underdelivery of needed support. Additional funding would reduce the limitations these vital organizations face when planning and delivering on programming.

35%

### Need Additional Staff Positions

Additional staff and volunteer outreach address the fact that it's people who deliver services. More staff mean enhanced programming, increased local employment and elevated skills in the community. Outreach for additional volunteers is essential to these organizations, allowing them to have greater impact, enriching community connections and belonging.

## Transition Salt Spring: Building Climate Resilience Through Community Collaboration

Isolated by nature, island communities are especially vulnerable to climate change. Of particular importance on Salt Spring Island is the prevention of forest fires and ensuring a stable, clean water supply.

Started in 2006, Transition Salt Spring (TSS) is dedicated to climate action across Salt Spring Island and the Southern Gulf Islands. Their mission is to inspire the community to become climate resilient through encouragement and inclusion.

Working collaboratively with local businesses, governments, nonprofits and First Nations, the community has come together to face ongoing climate challenges. By hosting initiatives such as native flora replantings and events like clothing swaps and repair cafés, TSS has attracted hundreds of people within the community who otherwise might never have attended a traditional climate meeting.

### NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS INCLUDE:

- \$48,000 in rebates to help 58 households invest in rainwater systems and clean heating alternatives.
- Ongoing ecosystem restoration on Hwmet'utsun (Mt. Maxwell), along with community-wide wildfire prevention efforts.
- 50+ formal and informal partnerships across sectors.
- Policy advocacy to ensure climate action is on the agenda of local governments.

By living within Salt Spring Island's environmental and climate capacity, TSS helps ensure the health and beauty of this natural paradise can be preserved for generations to come.



transitionsaltspring.com

## How You Can Help

### > If you're a Policy Maker, understand the economic needs of the sector.

- Consider **expanding the social finance toolbox** to invest in the sector's capacity.
- Establish **core funding streams** for organizational operations including the staff, strategic planning and infrastructure for sustainable program delivery.
- Create **multi-year funding** commitments that reduce administrative burdens, allowing nonprofits to focus on impact, rather than short-term grant applications.
- Develop **a regional civil society strategy** that recognizes these organizations as essential community infrastructure delivering solutions to housing, mental health and social equity challenges that the government cannot address alone.

### > If you're a Donor or Funder, shift how you fund organizations.

- Move from traditional program funding to **trust-based philanthropy** that provides unrestricted operational support with streamlined applications and simplified reporting. Allowing organizations to allocate resources where they're most effective reduces the administrative burden that limits the work nonprofits can do.
- Consider **impact investments** that build long-term sector capacity and fund collaborative initiatives that address systemic challenges.
- By **investing in core operations** and cross-organizational partnerships, you can dramatically expand organizations' ability to create belonging for all communities while tackling root causes rather than symptoms.

Imagine what becomes possible when  
we provide the investment that charitable  
organizations need to thrive.

## Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria: Creating Belonging for Newcomers

A cornerstone organization for more than 50 years, Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria supports newcomers on their journey to full participation in Canadian society. Offering a comprehensive set of programs and 500+ community partnerships, they help those new to Canada create meaningful lives.

### > If you're an Organizational Leader, continue strengthening core operations.

- Focus on **strategic partnerships** to build the networks essential for systemic change. The sector's collaborative culture allows you to share resources, coordinate programming and amplify your collective voice with funders and policymakers.
- **Diversify funding sources** beyond traditional grants by exploring fee-for-service models, social enterprise opportunities and individual donor development.
- Use this research to **advocate for funding models** that support core operations and multi-year commitments, positioning your organization's value as essential community infrastructure that delivers solutions to complex regional challenges.

### > If you're a Community Member, support the organizations that support those around you.

- In addition to volunteering, **offer your professional expertise** through skill-based contributions, join boards or committees, or use your purchasing power to support local social enterprises.

### A PRACTICAL APPROACH

Their work starts by creating welcoming spaces where newcomers can connect across cultural and faith-based communities. Removing communication barriers is the first step to understanding, so the organization is staffed by people who speak more than 40 languages.

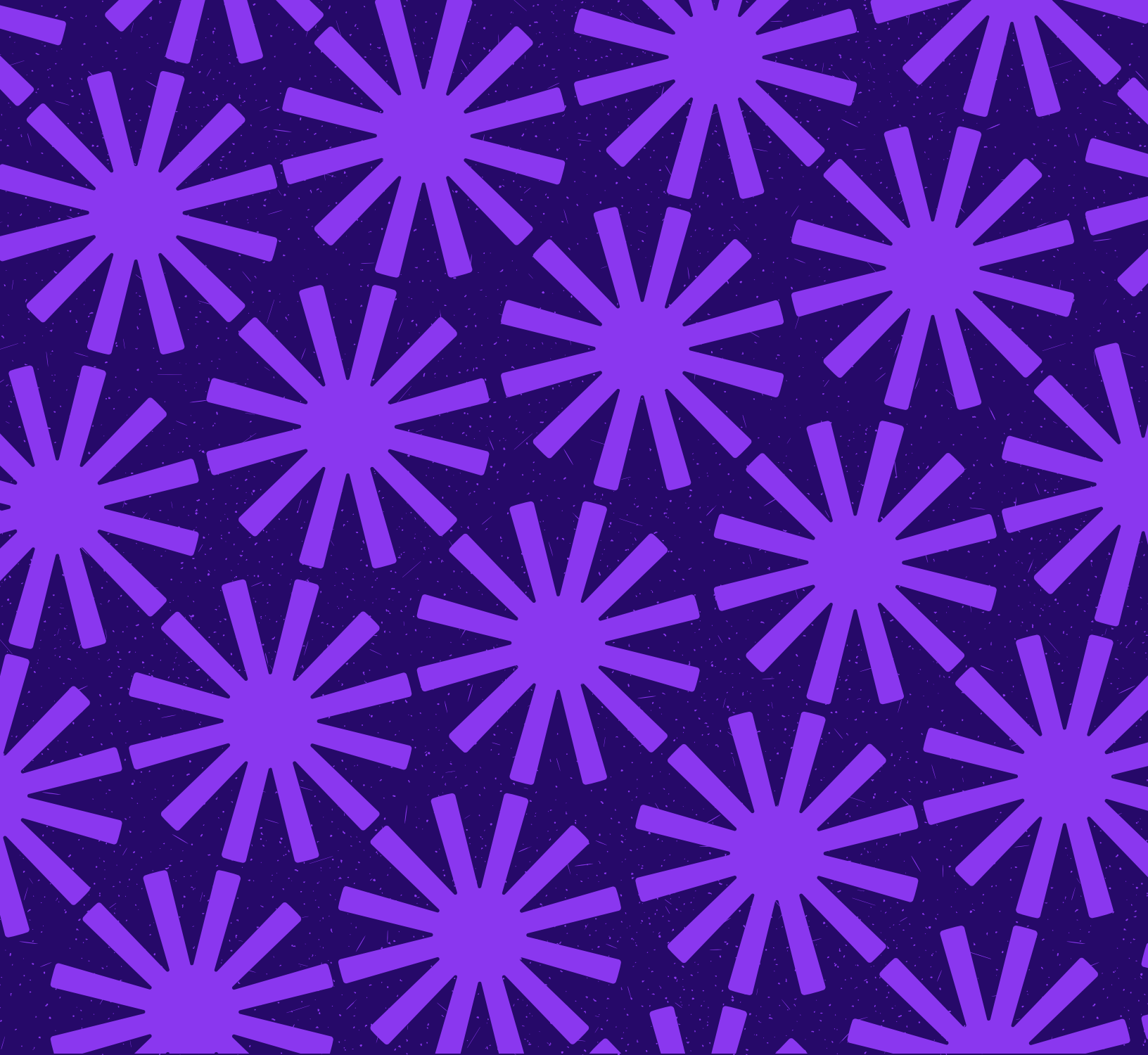
Community access is a key aspect of a newcomer's transition to integration. The Inter-Cultural Association provides a variety of support including employment assistance, language classes, youth services and assistance navigating daily tasks like public transit. Actively addressing the unique needs of immigrant women is also of vital importance.

### A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Beyond just skills and knowledge, Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria places an emphasis on relationship building, cultural connection and community leadership development that creates lasting belonging for all who live here.



**Change moves at the speed of trust.**



**Victoria  
Foundation**

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