

St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP)

Council Members

Council members represent organizations across libraries, education, settlement services, employment, business, government, health, social services, faith communities, cultural associations, and newcomer communities.

Central Community Health Centre

Catalina Friesen

Catalina is a PSW working at the Central Community Health Centre on the East Elgin Outreach program. She mainly serves the Low German speaking Mennonites on a mobile unit she drives out to Aylmer every Thursday. There is a Nurse Practitioner that works on the mobile unit with her that rosters and extends free health care to any and all folks of the Mennonite culture. They are offered service free of charge with and without a health card. If they are requiring blood work or ultrasounds, CCHC pays for those services for them.

The Central Community Health Centre is a place for community members to access a team of healthcare professionals. The organization strives to empower clients and communities to achieve optimal health and wellbeing.

Community Member/Newcomer Representative



Chiyemenma (Chichi) Kejeh

Chiyemenma Kejeh (Chichi) is an enthusiastic communications professional. A serial entrepreneur with expertise spanning over a decade and a strong background in business development, engineering, management consulting, and public speaking.

New to Canada as of September 2022, Chichi joined his lovely wife Amarachi and they have chosen St. Thomas as home. He is passionate about community building and loves to

meet people from different backgrounds and cultures. Chichi is one of the co-initiators of the Young Entrepreneurs' Initiative in our community.

As the Senior Business Development Consultant at Fanshawe's Strategic Initiatives and Business Development Department, Chichi works with industry partners in the community to develop and optimize products and processes leveraging a collaborative partnership with the College.

Elgin Business Resource Centre



Jennifer Grigg

Jennifer Grigg is the Community Engagement & Business Advisor for the Elgin Business Resource Centre. EBRC helps local businesses reach their full potential, whether they are a new or existing business. EBRC offers business counselling, business planning, business loans, and networking opportunities in St. Thomas and Elgin County. Prior to Jennifer's advisor role, she was the Digital Main Street Service Squad lead for EBRC. Jennifer has a strong background in sales and marketing and is passionate about working with businesses at EBRC, whether a concept, start-up, or existing business.

Elgin County Economic Development



Carolyn Krahn

Carolyn Krahn is the Manager of Economic Development, Tourism & Strategic Initiatives for the County of Elgin. She leads a team focused on supporting local entrepreneurs and promoting community growth. Carolyn, a lifelong resident of Elgin County, strongly believes in taking a comprehensive approach to economic development and building sustainable communities. Outside of work, she enjoys sewing and designing clothing, constantly learning and creating with her hands.

Elgin County Library



Séanin Steele, Co-Chair

Séanin Steele is the Digital Services Librarian for Elgin County Library. She coordinates the eResources for the library as well as connecting all 10 library branches with the wider community. She represents ECL on a number of community groups and is always looking for ways to help community members connect with the services they need. She is passionate about making sure everyone knows all of the great free things the library has to offer. She is committed to helping newcomers make connections within the community whether through STELIP, the library or other community-led organizations.

Elgin County Pride



Neil Hubert and Devon Church

Devon Church and Neil Hubert join the STELIP Council as representatives of Elgin County Pride. Through their work with Pride initiatives across St. Thomas and Elgin County, they help create inclusive spaces that celebrate diversity and support 2SLGBTQIA+ community

members. They are passionate about building connections, fostering belonging, and working alongside community partners to ensure Elgin County remains a welcoming place for everyone.

Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board



Petrusia Hontar

Petrusia Hontar is the newly appointed Executive Director of the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, one of 26 organizations covering the province of Ontario that form Workforce Planning Ontario. Her organization currently leads local research for the EmployerOne Survey, emerging green sectors, and apprenticeship and is responsible for the coordination of the annual Oxford Invitational Youth Robotics Challenge.

Petrusia is currently a Board Member for the Central Community Health Centre, has served on the executive for the Elgin Business Women's Network, served as a board member for the St. Thomas Environmental Stewardship Committee, the Horton Market Board and established the St. Thomas community garden.

She holds a B.Eng in Mechanical Engineering from Western University, and an M.Sc. in Economic History: Demography, and an M.Sc. Society, Science, and Technology from Lund University in Sweden.

Petrusia strives to maintain strong ties to her Ukrainian culture, and is an active member of the Ukrainian Youth Association Mississauga Branch as well as restarting the London Branch.

Elgin/St. Thomas Small Business Enterprise Centre



Emily Mason

Emily Mason is the Business Advisor for the St. Thomas and Elgin Small Business & Enterprise Centre.

Emily has been visiting St. Thomas since 2008, and she finally made the move from the United Kingdom to join her charming husband in March 2023, and they moved to St. Thomas in November 2023. Since arriving in Canada, Emily has established her career in the business & entrepreneurial community, working as a Business Consultant & Coach in London, Ontario initially before moving into her current role.

Through Emily's role as Business Advisor, she oversees 400+ small business enquiries covering St. Thomas and Elgin per year. Additionally, the centre operates grant programs annually for young entrepreneurs and those who are starting or have started a small business in the local region. There is a portion of her role that encompasses support and engagement in the local community, whether that is being part of initiatives such as STELIP, attending local business events, or pitching in to help with events such as Oktoberfest and Light Up Talbot.

With an uptick in local immigration numbers, Emily has seen an increasing number of newcomers starting businesses. It is her hope that the centre can continue to evolve to provide enterprise services that are inclusive and welcoming to all.

Fanshawe Career and Employment Services



John Griffiths

John is the Manager of Career and Employment Services at Fanshawe College St Thomas Elgin and has been working throughout his career to assist people of all kinds (newcomer or otherwise) to prosper. He is dedicated to community building and his work includes active participation in a number of community forums.

John is committed to helping St Thomas Elgin grow as an open and welcoming community by building services that newcomers need to succeed in their new home.

Fanshawe College – St. Thomas/Elgin Regional Campus

Joel Van Bynen

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Arika Barker

Indo-Can Punjabi Cultural Association – St. Thomas



Lakhwinder Kathuria

Lakhwinder Kathuria relocated to St. Thomas in 2008 from London, Ontario, as a businessman and owner of New Elgin Motel. Since then, he has been actively involved in the community, assisting newcomers to the country. In 2014, he founded the Indo Can Punjabi Cultural Association of St. Thomas, a not for profit organization, and has served as its President. He has been organizing and participating in Annual Community Events ever since. Additionally, he has been an active member of the Hindu Spiritual Centre of St. Thomas, located at 100 Redan St. , St. Thomas since 2018.

Kerala Association of St. Thomas, Ontario (KASTO)



Abin Abraham

My name is Abin Abraham, and I am a member of the Board of the Kerala Association of St. Thomas, Ontario (KASTO). I am a professional social worker registered with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. I have been a part of the St. Thomas community since December 2021. As a social worker, I have experience in community mobilization, promoting rural livelihoods, working with families, empowering women through opportunities, assisting community members in accessing necessary resources, and organizing social events for our community. KASTO is a non-profit organization dedicated to uniting all Keralites in St. Thomas and Elgin County under one umbrella. Our mission is to work toward a better future through various social, recreational, and cultural events. KASTO embraces, supports, and guides individuals regardless of their religion, socioeconomic status, or political views. We value diversity and multiculturalism, and we are committed to the empowerment and inclusion of all individuals as we engage with the community.

Latinos in St. Thomas



Michelle Carmona

Michelle is the founder of the Latinos in St. Thomas community group. She works as a Real Estate Agent and plays a key role in fostering connections and providing resources to community members. In addition to her work in Real Estate, she is a member of the Chief of Police – Community Inclusion Council. Michelle also manages online community groups, always striving to connect individuals with essential services and creating meaningful relationships. Michelle thrives on building strong, inclusive communities and enjoys connecting with people from all backgrounds and cultures. Michelle worked as a

Paralegal prior to Real Estate, bringing valuable experience in advocacy and support. Whether welcoming newcomers, attending local business events, or organizing community initiatives, Michelle is dedicated to making a difference. Her commitment to empowering the Latin American community in St. Thomas drives her to support its growth and success at every opportunity.

Mennonite Community Services



Anna Bergen

Anna Bergen is the Executive Director of Mennonite Community Services in Aylmer. She loves serving her community, especially newcomers. Having been a newcomer herself, she empathizes with newcomers who seek out the services of MCS and the positive impact this has on families. Her first language was Low German, followed by High German during her elementary years along with an introduction to Spanish, and finally learning English in high school. These experiences have helped shape her views and passion for helping other Low German speaking Mennonites who continue to arrive in Elgin County looking for new opportunities just like her family did.

In her spare time Anna loves to slow down and listen to her soul by taking long walks or hikes. Her longest walk was 50 km in a weekend.

Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs



Nick Kinkel

Nick Kinkel is a Rural Economic Development Advisor covering the County of Elgin and St. Thomas. Nick and his colleagues design and deliver rural economic development programs and initiatives that support economic development initiatives across Ontario.

Réseau en immigration francophone du Centre-Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario (RIFCSO)



Nabila Sissaoui

Nabila brings over a decade of dedicated service to the Réseau en immigration francophone du Centre-Sud-Ouest de l'Ontario (RIFCSO), having joined the organization in 2011. She began her journey as a Liaison Officer for the Hamilton and Niagara regions — a deliberate pivot away from a purely technical career toward something that mattered more to her: people.

Today, she serves as Coordinator of the Francophone Welcoming Community initiative for Central-Southwest Ontario and Special Events — a role that sits at the intersection of her two greatest strengths: community building and creative problem-solving.

A graduate of École Polytechnique de Montréal with a degree in Computer Engineering (Innovation & Technological Entrepreneurship), Nabila is the rare professional who combines rigorous technical training with a genuine passion for human connection. Technology, design, art, and nature fuel her creativity and inspire the innovative approaches she brings to every project she touches.

Whether she's organizing large-scale community events, driving francophone immigration initiatives forward through her work on multiple committees, or crafting solutions that make newcomers feel truly at home, Nabila shows up as a collaborator who is as organized as she is imaginative.

At the heart of it all is a simple but powerful conviction: that welcoming communities don't happen by accident — they're built, intentionally, by people who care.

Service Canada

Élisabeth Brito

St. Thomas and District Chamber of Commerce



Paul Jenkins

Paul Jenkins is the CEO of the St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce. He is the former Executive Director of the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital Foundation, Treasurer of the Central Community Health Centre, and active in charitable and community building causes throughout our community.

He currently hosts a show on Rogers TV that highlights small local businesses, and previously hosted “We Are St. Thomas/Elgin,” a program that celebrated new Canadians.

Paul has a Graduate Certificate in Corporate Social Responsibility & Sustainability from the University of Toronto; a Graduate Certificate in Corporate Communications & Public Relations from Centennial College; and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Canadian Studies & American History from McGill University.

Paul lives with his wife, Sandra, and dog, Joanne, in Port Stanley.

St. Thomas Economic Development



Mike Kerkvliet

Mike is the Manager of Business Development & Entrepreneurship for St. Thomas Economic Development. Through this role he oversees the Elgin/St. Thomas Small Business Enterprise Centre, and the Horton Farmers Market. In addition to his work as an economic developer, Mike has experience in the software, agriculture, and media production industries.

It is St. Thomas EDC's mission "To enhance the quality of life for all citizens of St. Thomas by attracting, retaining and growing our industrial business and tourism sectors while fostering entrepreneurship in our community." This mission absolutely includes newcomers to St. Thomas, and as our business community becomes increasingly reliant on newcomers to meet local workforce needs it is more important now than ever for our community to be a welcoming place for newcomers to settle.

St. Thomas Elgin Social Services – Children's Services



Teresa Sulowski

Teresa Sulowski is the Supervisor of Children's Services for the City of St. Thomas-Elgin with the responsibility of planning and managing licensed child care services and early years programming. She represents St. Thomas-Elgin Social Services on the STELIP Council. Teresa has worked in various areas of Early Learning Programs including 20 years at the YMCA of Southwestern Ontario, 9 years with the London District Catholic School Board, and most recently with the City of St. Thomas-Elgin. In addition to working full time, she works part-time teaching in the Early Childhood Education diploma program at Fanshawe and Conestoga Colleges. Teresa holds a B.A. in Adult Education from Brock University, and a M.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies from Athabasca University.

St. Thomas Elgin Social Services – Ontario Works



Carrie Escaf

Carrie has been a Caseworker with St. Thomas Elgin Social Services (Ontario Works) since 2002. Her caseload is primarily comprised of newcomers to Canada. She enjoys meeting people from all corners of the world and hearing their stories. She strives to be a welcoming face for people facing tough economic situations. Her husband was a refugee from Colombia in 2000, so she understands all the ‘unknowns’ that refugees are facing. Her education includes a diploma in Early Childhood Education and a degree in Human Ecology – Family Studies.

St. Thomas-Elgin Youth and Employment Services



Jodi Annett-Kish

Jodi is the Executive Director of the Elgin St Thomas Youth Employment Counselling Centre. Jodi’s career has included helping all types of people find employment and training opportunities. Jodi is passionate about helping people achieve goals which includes newcomers arriving in Canada. She is a part of several forums that collaborate to build community capacity.

St. Thomas Islamic Centre

Khalid Ihaab

St. Thomas Police Service



Samantha Wakefield

Samantha is the Corporate Communications Coordinator for the St. Thomas Police Service representing the verbal, visual and digital voice of the Executive Office. Samantha issues thousands of messages every year in print, on social media, TV and radio. Daily communications consist of media releases and social engagement however, it's not unusual to see Samantha maintaining close ties to the Community Engagement Unit attending events in the city or at the scene of a major incident to liaise with the media and ensure citizens receive accurate information in a timely manner. In addition to her job, Samantha sits on the Chief of Police – Community Inclusion Council, is the Crime Stoppers Coordinator for Elgin St. Thomas.

St. Thomas Public Library

Dayna Peebles

Dayna Peebles is the Manager of Programming and Engagement at St. Thomas Public Library.

Thames Valley District School Board



Rheba Moore-Nash

Rheba is a System Principal for the Thames Valley District School Board with responsibilities for Equity and Multilingual Learning. As an educator and school administrator, she has supported students, staff, and families at all levels of the education system.

Thames Valley District School Board is committed to ensuring equitable learning environments and outcomes for the students they serve. They strive to create spaces wherein all students, staff, families and community members feel welcome. Together, their focus is on developing an inclusive culture grounded in respect and reflected in their policies, procedures, and pedagogical practices.

WILL Employment Solutions



Devin Munro

Devin is the Senior Manager of Employer Services and Strategic Partnerships at WILL Employment Solutions – a nonprofit, charitable organization that supports newcomers seeking employment in Ontario; and helps employers source the skilled workers they need.

Devin oversees the activities of WILL Immploy, an employer-focused project of WILL Employment Solutions that provides recruitment services, mentorship programming and employer education/training services to successfully hire, onboard and retain immigrant talent. WILL Immploy is also an Immigrant Employment Council (IEC), serving all of Southwestern Ontario, that is part of a National Network of Immigrant Employment Councils (IECC) that assist employers in effectively integrating immigrant talent into the Canadian labour market. Devin also guides the activities of WILL Access – a project that helps immigrant job seekers continue their career in Canada in regulated professions.

Devin has an extensive background in government relations, corporate communications, stakeholder relations and issues management. He has worked for several elected representatives at both the federal and provincial levels of government, served as a Senior Advisor to the Ontario Minister of Labour, and has worked on many projects, programs and services aimed at addressing challenges and inequities in employment, immigration, labour laws and workplace safety.

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin

Kellie Coelho

Kellie is the Director of Settlement and Wellness for YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin.

YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services

Nirali Naik

Nirali is the Manager of YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin Settlement Services.