

# SomerViva's FY23 Report:

## *A Year of Direct Service*

July, 2023

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OFFICE OF  
IMMIGRANT  
AFFAIRS

WE SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE  
HABLAMOS SU IDIOMA  
FALAMOS A SUA LÍNGUA  
NOU PALE LANG OU  
हामी तपाईंको भाषा बोल्दछौं ।  
我们会说您的语言

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## Introduction

SomerViva: Office of Immigrant Affairs was founded in the Spring of 2013 with the goal of enhancing wellbeing and equity through programs, services, and policies that facilitate the successful inclusion of Somerville’s immigrant residents and workers in the City’s civic, economic, and cultural life. SomerViva is able to advance the equitable access to municipal services, community resources, information, public discourse, and opportunities for civic leadership of Somerville’s immigrant community members by designing programs and services that are multilingual and culturally competent, in collaboration with departments and partners citywide.

Since its founding, SomerViva has prioritized three core areas to achieve its goal:

1. **Access:** ensuring language and culture are not a barrier to accessing information, resources, programs, and services
2. **Engagement:** ensuring language and culture not a barrier to engaging in public discourse
3. **Celebration:** celebrating the diverse cultures in our community

This report aims to serve as a non-exhaustive account of SomerViva’s accomplishments in FY23, shedding light into how Somerville’s Office of Immigrant Affairs continues to pursue the ideal of a Somerville that is welcoming to all.

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## Language Access

SomerViva made significant advances toward language justice and the development of a 5-year language access plan in FY23. Language justice refers to an ecosystem that supports clear, equitable communication, participation, and access to resources and knowledge regardless of the language you speak. SomerViva defines the elements of language justice in five buckets: Civic Engagement, Plain Language, Outreach, Welcoming Environment, and Language Access Services (translation and interpretation services).

You will find evidence of our progress in language justice across all sections of this annual report, but this section, “Language Access”, focuses on our progress expanding meaningful language access services and institutional capacity in this area. We have made significant strides in FY23 in the following areas of language access:

1. Expansion of translation and interpretation services
2. Assessment of internal language access services
3. Development of quality control and efficacy processes
4. Development of training and coaching for accessible and plain communication

Progress in these focus areas was achieved through an iterative process informed by feedback and experiences of City staff, community partners, and constituents. For example, the assessment of internal language access services informed our expansion of translation and interpretation services and the development of quality control processes. These quality control processes then informed how we strategically expanded language access services. Our goal throughout each of these focus areas was to provide meaningful language access services that are accessible, equitable, effective, and do no harm, so that language is not a barrier to participation in local government or access to information, resources, and opportunities.

	<b>Civic Engagement</b> Consistent engagement to increase knowledge of local government & civic involvement (long-range).
	<b>Plain Language</b> Accessible communication your audience understands the first time they read or hear it.
	<b>Outreach</b> Multilingual sharing of information and inviting residents to events and opportunities (mid to short range).
	<b>Welcoming Environment</b> Build in processes and methods for contact, communication, registration, and participation that fully include a multilingual public.
	<b>Translation &amp; Interpretation</b> Translation and interpretation of written and oral communication, setting up systems for language access.

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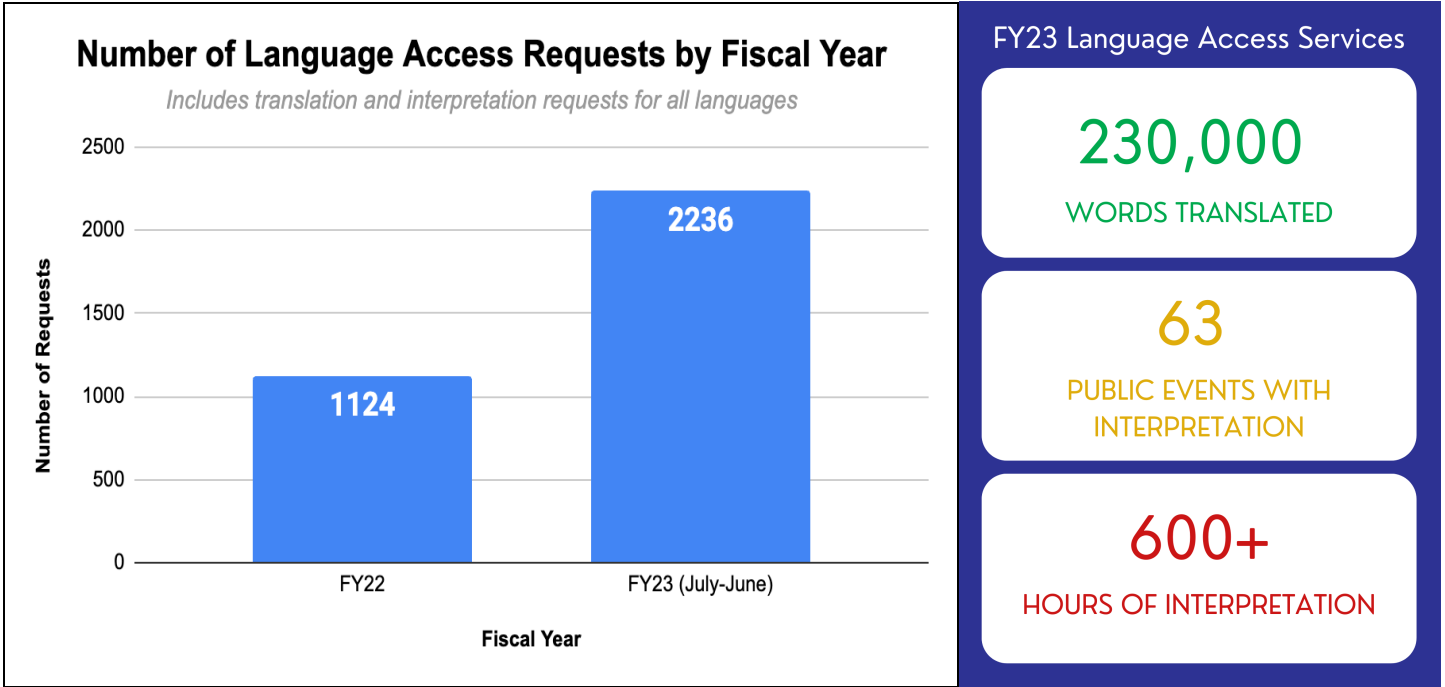
## Expansion of Translation and Interpretation Services

SomerViva's FY23 budget allocated just over \$97,500 to a centralized language access services budget to provide interpretation and translation services to all departments City-wide and to the City Council. As of late May, the Office has spent \$68,408.67 on translation and interpretation services since the beginning of the fiscal year. These expenditures reflect significant expansions in language access services across all City Departments and the City Council compared to the previous fiscal year, and demand is likely to continue to increase in FY24 as SomerViva releases the language access plan and identifies and fills gaps in language access services.

Compared to the previous fiscal year, language access services requests in FY23 are on track to more than double by June 30, averaging about 10 requests per workday.

The 2,236 translation and interpretation requests from FY23 include a diverse range of services. Examples include:

- Interpretation for 12 Public Safety for All focus groups hosted by the Department of Racial and Social Justice, including in-person and virtual sessions in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Mandarin, and Cantonese.
- Interpretation for Spanish and Portuguese in-language community meetings to provide updates on a range of topics and projects in the City
- Interpretation in Thai for a business owner applying for an outdoor dining permit
- Interpretation in Spanish and Portuguese for an informational session hosted by the Mobility division in collaboration with the Padres Latinos group
- Translation of social media content for in-language social media pages
- Translation of emergency alerts for weather-related emergencies (snow, heat, cold, flooding), public safety, and public health
- Translation of contact forms and cards for departments that have a high level of interaction with the public, including the Office of Housing Stability and Health and Human Services.



Fourteen departments and divisions requested language access services through the internal request form this fiscal year. The top requesters were the Department of Communications and Community Engagement (including SomerViva), the Department of Racial and Social Justice, the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

SomerViva provided language access services through 1) in-house multilingual community engagement teams that specifically work with Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Cantonese, and Mandarin-speaking communities, and 2) four language access service vendors that provide on demand translation and interpretation services through a state-wide contract.

In May 2023, SomerViva successfully released a Request for Proposals (RFP) for language access services. Following thorough research, consultation with other cities around the country with successful language access plans, and review of similar language access RFPs issued by those cities, SomerViva developed a comprehensive RFP tailored to identify and contract with language access service providers in the region that are best equipped to meet Somerville’s diverse language access needs. Review of the applications is currently underway. New contracts with selected applicants are designed to carry the City through the next phase of

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language access and will prepare the City to expand language access services, quality, and cultural responsiveness in the next fiscal year and beyond. These contracts will provide services for interpretation (in-person, virtual, simultaneous, and consecutive), on-demand telephonic interpretation that will launch City-wide, and translation services.

In addition to expanding language access services, SomerViva has remained committed in FY23 to advocating for language justice beyond Somerville's borders. The City of Somerville has endorsed an [Act Relative to Language Access and Inclusion](#) in the Massachusetts legislature, and frequently advocates for constituents' rights to language access in other agencies. For example, SomerViva has advocated for patient's rights to language access services in health care settings, court settings, and with state agencies. Additionally, in FY23 the office helped residents to file civil rights complaints concerning language access and discrimination and police complaints.

## Internal Language Access Assessment

In FY23, the Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator met with over 15 priority departments with front-facing staff and high levels of interaction with individuals who prefer to communicate in a language other than English. The meetings assessed how those departments are currently providing language access, their experiences and feedback about existing resources for language access, and barriers or challenges to providing access. Meetings with additional departments will continue into the next fiscal year.



Interpretation at a 90 Washington Community Meeting. Over 70 people used interpretation services in 5 languages at this meeting.

This initial assessment revealed that the availability of language access resources across the City of Somerville varies considerably depending on the department and how that department has historically budgeted for language access services, and/or trained its staff to use those

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services. Additionally, this initial assessment revealed that Departments with some language access resources (either through bilingual staff or contracts and budgets with language access service providers) experienced challenges with high demand and overburdened bilingual staff, and quality and cultural competency concerns with the language access resources that those departments depend on for everyday interactions with constituents.

The initial assessment made clear that there are three initial major needs in the city: 1) broad, even access to language access services across all city departments, 2) robust training on how



Sign that says: "Do you need interpretation in Haitian Creole?"

to appropriately access, request, and provide language access services, and 3) language access services that are responsive, flexible, and appropriate for the diverse types of interactions that the City has with residents (e.g. case management, application support, general information, transactions, hearings).

In response to these findings, in FY23 SomerViva took steps to prioritize the release of the language access RFP in order to contract with preferred vendors and release city-wide on-demand interpretation, has developed trainings on how to access interpretation and translation services through our office, and, as discussed below, developed quality control measures to ensure that language access services are meeting constituent and City department needs. The findings from this initial assessment will further guide the

priorities for ensuring a baseline for accessible communication, language access services, and training across City departments.



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## Development of Quality Control and Efficacy Processes

In FY23, SomerViva began implementing quality control and efficacy processes to ensure that translated materials and interpretation services were reaching and impacting the intended audiences of those services. The Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator and other SomerViva staff implemented these processes at every stage of providing services: before fulfilling requests for language access services, during the delivery of those services, and following the delivery of those services.

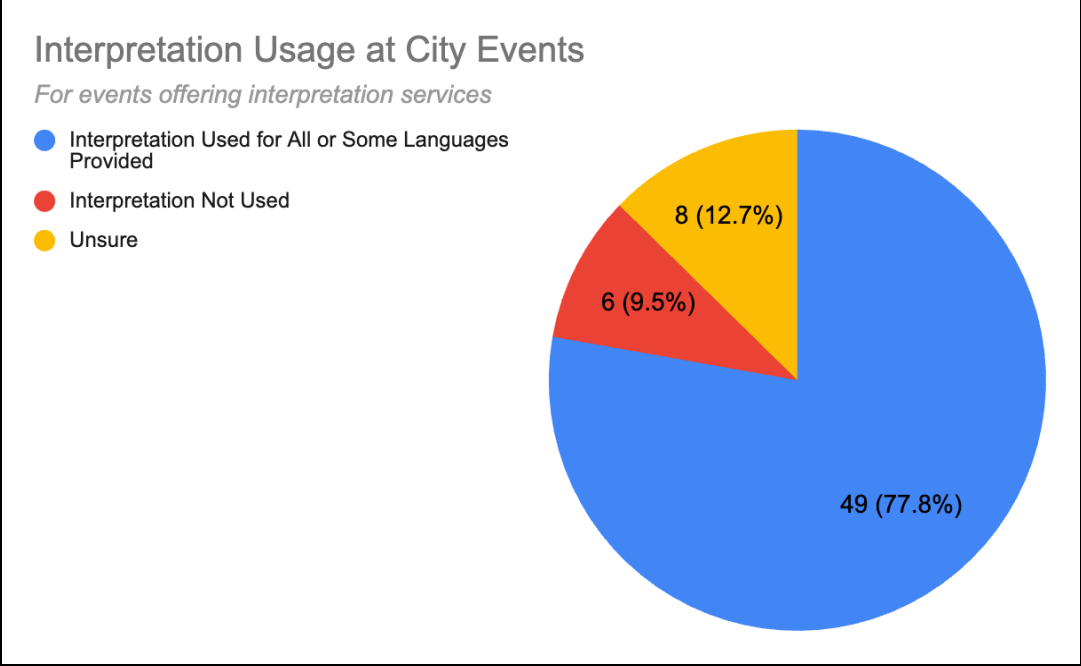
To ensure quality, effective, and culturally responsive language access services, SomerViva expanded coaching, consultation, and training for departments on how to appropriately integrate interpretation and translation services into their operations, events, and outreach efforts. Before approving and fulfilling a language access request, SomerViva staff carefully reviewed all requests and worked with departments to ensure there were appropriate plans in place to reach the intended communities. SomerViva worked with multiple departments to advise, strategize, and support with the distribution of translated materials, and delivered trainings on working with interpreters for virtual and in-person meetings. For example, the SomerViva team worked with the Mobility division to develop multilingual communication tools and outreach strategies to inform the East Somerville community about changes to bus stops, parking, and bike lanes. This collaboration included workshopping plain and accessible information materials, collaborating with SomerViva staff for street outreach efforts, and providing signage at bus stops about upcoming changes. These additional steps and collaboration with staff in other City departments help to ensure that translation and interpretation services are used in effective ways that meet community members where they are, in the language that they understand, and that is responsive to their concerns, needs, and wants.

In addition to strengthening collaboration with City departments on language access and outreach, SomerViva also developed quality assurance tools and protocols for language access services. These include an internal checklist used for a preliminary review of translation requests to ensure that translated materials are appropriate and effective for communication with diverse immigrant audiences and that the materials are in a state ready for translation (for example, it is written in plain, clear language free of jargon, acronyms, abbreviations). This

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review process paves the way for expanding public access to participation in local government, information, resources, and opportunities.

SomerViva staff also developed systems to provide quality interpretation services and evaluate their efficacy. In FY23, SomerViva introduced and continued to iterate on processes for ensuring interpretation services are provided where appropriate and where needed, that staff involved are prepared to appropriately integrate interpretation into their events and meetings when provided, and that interpreters understand the City's expectations for interpretation and the flow of events. Since July 1st, 2022 SomerViva developed and shared 63 interpretation plans with City staff and interpreters for City events. The interpretation plan contained quality assurance measures including: clear details about when, where, and how the meeting is being held; materials and background information about the event such as PowerPoint slides, press releases, news articles; glossary of terms; and step-by-step run-of-show with clear instructions for how to introduce and provide interpretation in-person and in virtual spaces. We developed and introduced tools such as translated instructions for how to join Zoom interpretation channels, and troubleshooting guides. During and following events, SomerViva staff monitored for language access issues, and followed up with interpreters for their feedback.



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In FY23, SomerViva also began tracking whether or not interpretation services were used by meeting and event attendees. Of 63 interpretation events in FY23, 49 of these events had participants that utilized interpretation services for one or more of the languages provided. We could not identify if attendees used interpretation services in 8 events because those events occurred over Zoom and Zoom does not have a function to tell if participants are listening to interpretation. Only 6 events provided interpretation services that were not used.

## **Training and Coaching for Communication Access**

SomerViva significantly ramped up training and coaching in FY23 to provide City departments with the resources and support for equitable communications access. Training and coaching including support with:

- Plain and clear language basics
- How to request language access services
- How to integrate and manage interpretation on Zoom and for in-person events
- Building outreach strategy for multilingual public
- Workshopping forms and documents for usability and plain language

One of the foundations of language justice is plain, clear language communications meant for a general public audience. This foundation is a critical prerequisite for quality translation and interpretation services. In FY23, the Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator developed a set of accessible language guidelines, quality review steps, and resources to ensure that all communications that are translated or interpreted are first developed 1) with a general public audience in mind, and 2) written in plain, clear language. The guidelines are currently organized in a checklist that is used by the internal language access request review team (the Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator and Multilingual Communications Coordinator) to review every incoming request. If a request does not meet accessible and plain communications standards, the review team then meets with the requesting department for a coaching session to improve the accessibility of the document or event. The addition of this review and coaching process has improved language access by creating materials that translators are able to precisely and accurately translate; documents that the general public - regardless of the language they speak or their background knowledge - can read, understand,

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and take action on the first time they read it; and public meetings that interpreters can accurately interpret for and that the general public can understand.

To build City-wide capacity and understanding of the importance of accessible and clear communication, the Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator developed a Plain Language 101 training that was piloted at a Community Engagement Meeting with multiple community engagement staff City-wide. The Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator is further developing the training and hands-on training exercises and will deliver this training to City Departments in the next fiscal year. The accessible communications guidelines and review process represent an important and necessary addition to ensuring language justice for all Somerville constituents - including English speakers - and the delivery of high-quality translation and interpretation services.

Additional training and coaching sessions with City staff focused on how to integrate interpretation in-person and in virtual meetings, guidelines for working with interpreters, and technical training on Zoom interpretation functions.

As a result of training, coaching, and collaboration, SomerViva has helped build language access capacity and understanding across the City, including in: the Communications and Community Engagement Department (including SomerViva), the Department of Racial and Social Justice, the City Clerk's office, the Mobility Division, Housing Division, Capital Projects, Prevention, the Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities, OSPCD (Administration, Mobility Division, Housing Division, Public Space and Urban Forestry, Planning and Zoning, and others), Parks and Recreation, Office of Sustainability and Environment, Engineering, and more.

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## Additional Organizational Policies and Practices

In addition to simultaneously managing day-to-day access needs, delivering staff training, developing a language justice infrastructure, and scaling up of services, the Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator also began a preliminary exploration of language justice policies that will be worked into the 5- year Language Access Plan. This year, the exploration included:

- Explored the role bilingual staff play in language access
- Worked with the Department of Human Resources to identify and test a language proficiency testing vendor to evaluate bilingual competencies for the existing bilingual pay incentive program
- Computer-assisted translation services to increase efficiency and consistency in translations. This exploration will continue once Language Access Service vendors are selected for the current RFP cycle.

## Legal Assistance

The immigration landscape across our country remains dreadful, as more people flee their home countries, and others who had been previously held back from coming into the United States take advantage of new legal pathways to entry. With no substantial - and yet needed - changes to the legal infrastructure and processes, the immigration system is facing a huge backlog: the immigration court breakdown is currently at [about 2.2 million cases](#), and pending U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services cases are around 8 million, with 5 million beyond normal processing times. Needless to say, our immigration system is broken and in desperate need of repair.

In response to the need for legal aid, SomerViva provides immigration support in 4 ways: through referrals to area nonprofits and pro-bono and low-bono attorneys; through immigration clinics and information sessions in partnership with the Harvard Law School, the American Immigration Lawyers Association, Rian Immigrant Center, Project Citizenship, and Pathways for Immigrant Workers; through a legal services vendor; and through multilingual information sharing.

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## Referrals to Nonprofits

For FY23, referrals to area nonprofits accounted for less than 15 percent of all legal service provision. This low number was in great part due to area nonprofits being at capacity and unable to take on new cases.

*It's complicated-- and it's a mix of the increase in community need, decrease in funding of immigration legal services, systemic barriers of the immigration system (including more than 70,000 cases backlogged in MA, plus Boston being a test site for at least 2 pilot programs), and the challenges in hiring. - Local nonprofit leader*

To provide more context around the immigration picture in Massachusetts, the dedicated docket program was implemented in May 2021 in an attempt to expedite court proceedings for new arrivals with removal, deportation, exclusion, asylum-only, and withholding-only cases. As of [January 6, 2023](#), the Boston immigration court had the highest number of dedicated docket cases in the country, in addition to all non-dedicated docket cases.

The demand for pro-bono immigration services has [skyrocketed](#) in the past two years and legal services agencies have been unable to keep up with the trend. The situation is dire, considering that three out of every four persons ordered removed from the United States had no legal representation.



*In terms of legal services, there are definitely insufficient services - providers and staff relative to the number of low income folks needing immigration legal services. And also, even when organizations have funds, they are often struggling to hire legal (and also social service) staff. - Local nonprofit leader*

Temporary Protected Status Clinic

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## Immigration Clinics and Information Sessions

Immigration clinics with Harvard Law School continue to take place each fall and spring with full enrollment. This year, SomerViva also collaborated with Rian Immigrant Center and the American Immigration Lawyers Association to host a legal clinic for eligible Haitians to apply for Temporary Protected Status. 47 applicants, many of whom were living in shelters and therefore homeless, were able to apply. SomerViva also collaborated with Project Citizenship and the St. Anthony of Padua Parish to host a Somerville Citizenship Day, in which 36 permanent residents were able to access free services to file for naturalization.

*J.D.D., a Portuguese-speaking 64 year old resident, had been a green card holder for 19 years and, due to language barriers, was unable to pass the written citizenship test. J.D.D. came to SomerViva after reading in the Portuguese newsletter that Project Citizenship was holding a free clinic in Somerville. The SomerViva team assisted her with requesting a language waiver and joining the citizenship clinic. On May 4th, 2023 J.D.D. passed the citizenship test and on May 11th she became an American citizen!*

In FY23, SomerViva also launched a partnership with Pathways for Immigrant Workers, a local nonprofit that provides pro-bono legal representation for employers to sponsor workers for employment-based permanent

residency. Through this partnership the City now holds quarterly information and consultation sessions with Pathways for Immigrant Workers and has prompted the City of Cambridge and Boston to hold sessions of their own. At these sessions, SomerViva connects Somerville employers, residents, and workers with free consultations and a



Pathways for Immigrant Workers Information Session

potential pathway toward permanent residency and citizenship. For example, after our January session with Pathways for Immigrant Workers, a Somerville plumbing company was able to start the process to sponsor an employee with DACA.

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## Legal Services Vendor

Moreno Law has been SomerViva's immigration services vendor for three years. Through the City's contract with Moreno Law, this fiscal year over 75 immigrants residing or working in Somerville were able to schedule an intake with an immigration attorney at no charge, and 29 people are currently being fully represented with the City covering their legal costs.

The City recently released a new Request for Proposals to engage a new vendor in the provision of legal services and the review of the proposals submitted is currently underway.

## Multilingual Information Sharing

SomerViva keeps abreast of changes in policy, laws, and emerging scams to inform and protect Somerville's immigrant residents. Information shared during FY23 included:

- The Work and Family Mobility Act, which removes the requirement to provide proof of lawful presence to obtain a standard driver's license
- MassHealth redeterminations
- Work authorization automatic extensions so immigrants can keep their jobs
- Humanitarian Parole for Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela
- Changes in SNAP benefits
- Resources for new arrivals
- Unauthorized practice of immigration law (immigration scams)
- Tax filing options for immigrants
- Public benefits for immigrants
- Information about state bills- Safe Communities Act, Language Access & Inclusion Act, and others
- And federal policy updates, including the end of Title 42, changes to Temporary Protected Status, public charge, dedicated docket, DACA, and asylum



Citizenship Day Flyer in Spanish



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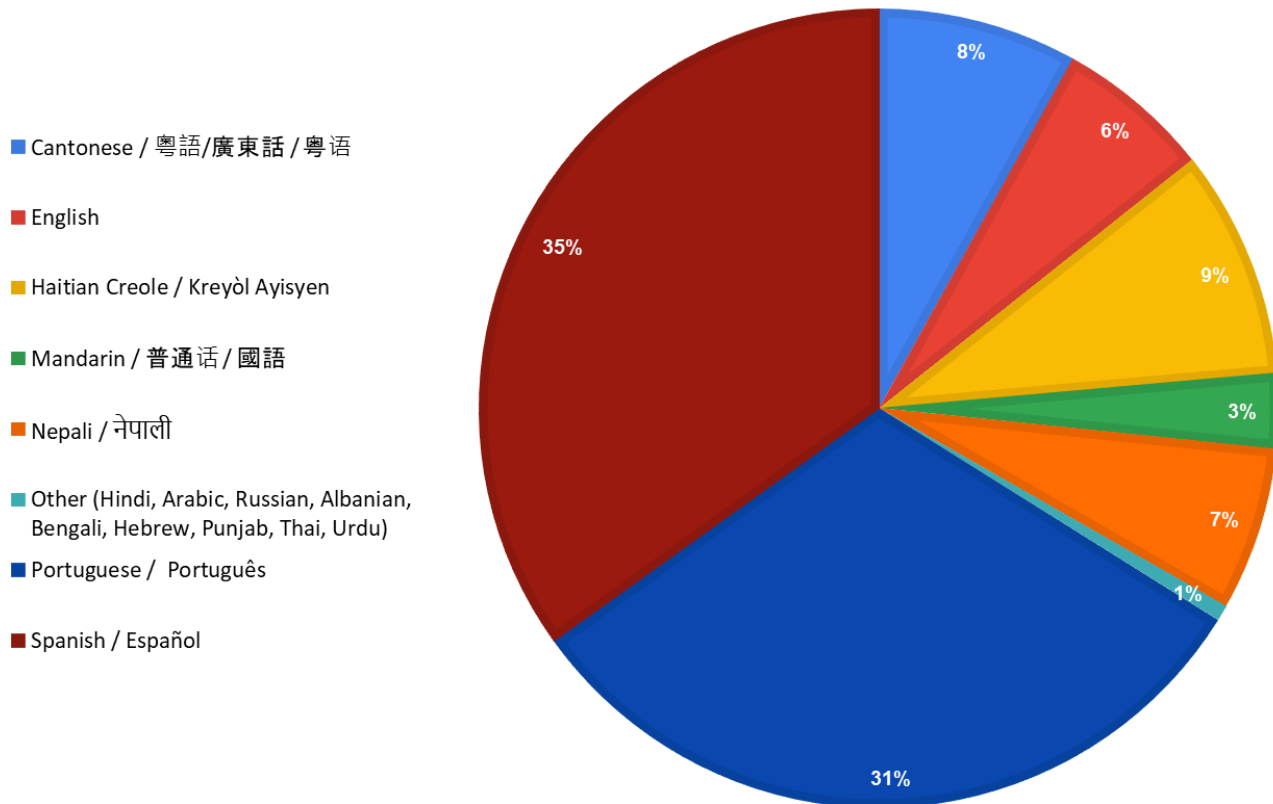
Under Mayor Katjana Ballantyne’s leadership, the City has signed on to letters requesting extensions of Temporary Protected Status for Haiti, El Salvador, Nepal, as well as other countries; advocating for stronger protections for Dreamers/DACA holders; advocating to accelerate work permit processing; and supporting tuition equity in Massachusetts.

## **Connecting to Services, Information, and Support**

SomerViva serves as a bridge, connecting immigrants and refugees in the Somerville community to services, information, and support offered by the City, local nonprofits, community based organizations, and the state. Over 1,800 contact requests were responded to within 72 hours through SomerViva’s Contact Form during FY23. 35 percent of these contact requests were made by Spanish speakers, while 31 percent were made by Portuguese speakers. Mandarin and Cantonese speakers together represented the group with the third highest contact requests, demonstrating the vital role SomerViva’s Community Engagement Specialist for Chinese plays in the integration of the City’s Chinese, Taiwanese, Hongkonger, Macanese, Vietnamese, and Malaysian constituents.

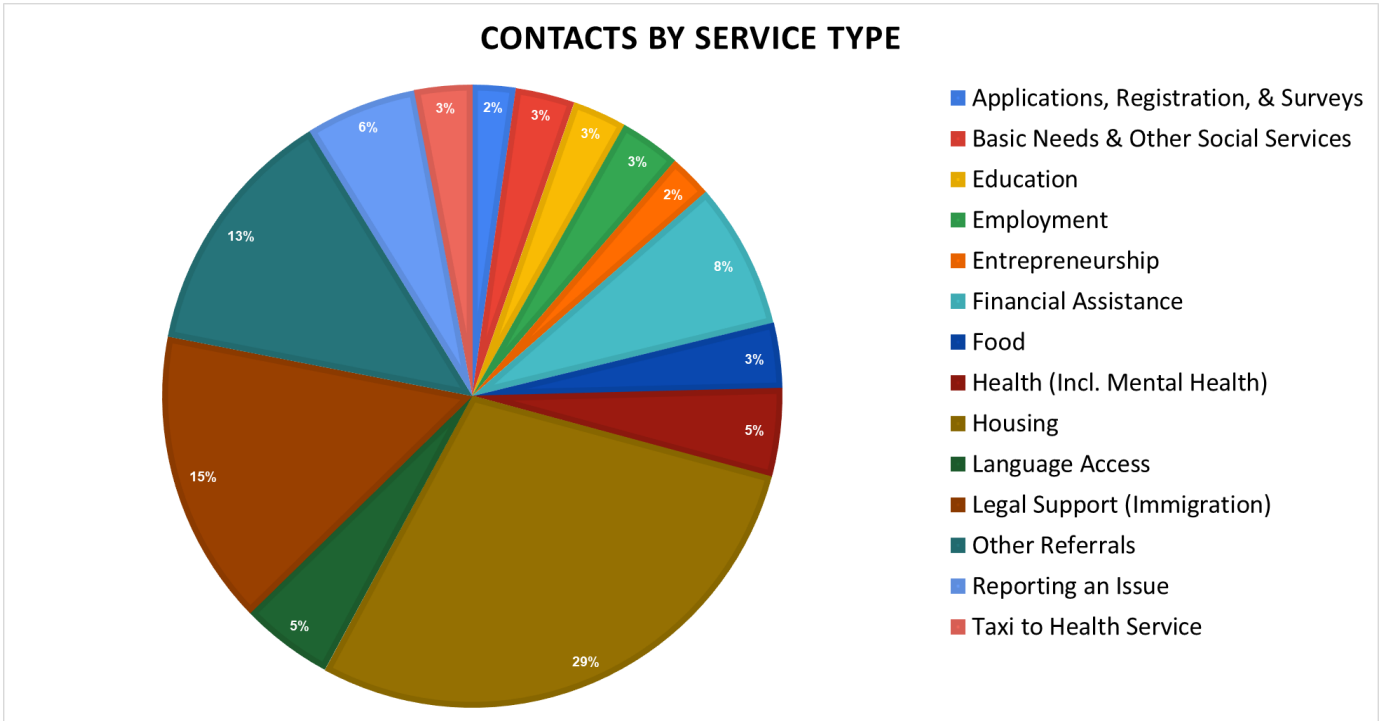
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## CONTACTS BY PREFERRED LANGUAGE



*I.M. and her family had been struggling with high rent prices and had been applying for affordable unit lotteries for years, always ranking high and not being invited to present documentation. They were finally fortunate enough to be invited to present the certification documentation for a unit but were overwhelmed with the requirements. They sought SomerViva's assistance and, after a few meetings in person, phone calls, and e-mails exchanged, the certification was submitted. After three careful reviews, their application was finally approved and they moved into a rental unit they can afford!*

SomerViva is contacted by community members to support with a wide range of issues, including completing housing lottery applications, referrals to the Office of Housing Stability, connecting with immigration attorneys and other forms of immigration relief, understanding correspondence sent in English, navigating the medical system, obtaining various forms of financial assistance, sharing concerns and ideas for a better Somerville, and much more.



*In November, the team successfully placed a homeless individual and their daughter - with ties to Somerville - in a shelter. Contact with the family was made after City office hours, but the team managed to come up with a plan, strategize, and find a shelter (Rosie's Place) that had beds available and assisted the family with the application.*

SomerViva staff leverages multiple communication channels to reach Somerville's immigrant residents, businesses, and workers. These channels include:

- In-language newsletters in seven languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, French, Nepali, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese) with tailored content
- In-language programming on Cable TV
- In-language social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram
- Whatsapp and WeChat groups
- Face-to-face outreach through tabling at events and cultural affairs and blockwalks



SOIA staff get acquainted with the Cable TV studio. SOIA utilized the studio to produce in-language programming in FY23.

*L.M. connected with SomerViva at a food pantry and reached out to ask for assistance understanding correspondence in English and filling out forms. She later shared that she is a domestic violence survivor, and expressed that in the past, she needed to wait for her husband to translate the letters for her. The SomerViva team referred her to a domestic violence agency and provided her with legal support and mental health resources. Although the resident has not left the abusive relationship, she is now more empowered and independent.*

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## Outreach Expansion

With the support of the Core Communications and Community Engagement team, SomerViva expanded its social media presence, with four new Instagram accounts in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Nepali, and Chinese. This new channel has opened another avenue for sharing information with the immigrant/multilingual community. The number of followers in these new accounts, as well as in the Portuguese Instagram account, continue to steadily increase:

- Spanish: 116
- Portuguese: 525
- Haitian Creole: 99
- Nepali: 64
- Chinese: 46

Since July, 2022, SomerViva also launched four new newsletters. The Portuguese newsletter launched in August 2022, the Nepali newsletter launched in September 2022, and the Haitian Creole (and French) and Chinese (Traditional and Simplified Chinese) newsletters were launched in February, 2023. These newsletters are made available to the community via email and WhatsApp subscription, as well as in printed form at many different locations throughout the City, including businesses, houses of worship, libraries, and schools. The various formats allow SomerViva to reach constituents that were not connected to the City previously.



SOIA's Portuguese language newsletter at local Brazilian eatery, Modelos, in Magoun Square.

SomerViva had its first open house on Thursday, January 26<sup>th</sup>, welcoming residents, city staff and community organizations to learn about the services we provide, meet staff, and enjoy a wide range of cultural foods. Presentations were delivered in the City's seven main languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Mandarin, and Cantonese) to ensure language access.

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## New SomerViva Landing Page

SomerViva has grown significantly over the past two years, and with that growth comes a need to update and improve our web presence. Multiple brainstorm sessions and intentional planning took place before finalizing the new and improved landing page. Knowing we have to engage web users within the first 10 to 20 seconds to avoid losing them, we made sure to highlight the services we are most frequently asked about.

Part of the update to the website includes SomerViva staff headshots and short biographies to add a more personal and inviting web environment. SomerViva believes that by adding each story and friendly smile, we may help break away from the misconceptions that constituents have about public servants. We want residents to ask for assistance and feel comfortable connecting with us, especially regarding sensitive matters.

The landing page also includes SomerViva's newsletter subscription forms, as well as access to previous editions through our archive folder links, in addition to all of the social media platforms we manage.

## Events

During FY23, SomerViva participated in over 60 events, co-sponsoring more than 40 of these. The events engaged more than 5,000 people and enabled SomerViva to share important information, including mental health resources, civic engagement opportunities, and cultural enrichment. A non-exhaustive list of these events included:

- Saint Benedict Festival (July 17th, 2022)
- Mid-Autumn Festival at SomerStreet (September 11th, 2022)
- Brazilian Independence Festival (September 11th, 2022)
- Hongkongers in New England Annual Orientation BBQ (September 17th, 2022)
- Taiwanese Association of America Boston Chapter Annual BBQ Event (September 24th, 2022)
- The Roots that Made Us, Hispanic Heritage Month (October 11th, 2022)
- Three Kings Celebration (January 8th, 2023)
- Haiti Earthquake Reflection (January 12th, 2023)

- Chinese American Association of Cambridge Lunar New Year Potluck (January 21st, 2023)
- Taiwanese Association of Students at Tufts Lunar New Year Party (January 22nd, 2023)
- International Women’s Day (March 10th, 2023)
- Racism in the Mind, Skin, and Action (April 18, 2023)
- Guardians of Wellness, Chinese mental health information session in both Mandarin and Cantonese (May 27th, 2023)
- 2 Spanish Story Time at the East Library events (July 13th, 2022 and June 17th, 2023)
- 3 Driver’s License Information Sessions (March 11th, June 22nd, and June 23rd, 2023)
- And many more...



Cambridge-Somerville Asian Festival

## Community-Driven Leadership and Civic Engagement

SomerViva made significant investments into creating welcoming spaces and providing immigrants and refugees throughout Somerville with the necessary tools to engage in civic discourse and uplift their communities. During FY23, this was carried out through initiatives like the IMPACT group, the Spanish-Language Leadership Training, the Portuguese-Language Financial Literacy Training, and the Haitian Business Coalition.

### IMPACT Group

IMPACT stands for Immigrant Parent Art and Conversations and it was established many years ago through a partnership between Somerville residents, The Beautiful Stuff Project, and the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative (SFLC). Last year, in January, SomerViva joined the group as a partner. The partnership represents a desire to work in concert to foster healthier immigrant communities through the creation of arts and crafts. The major objective of the partnership is that Spanish-speaking mothers in Somerville have a therapeutic, non-clinical

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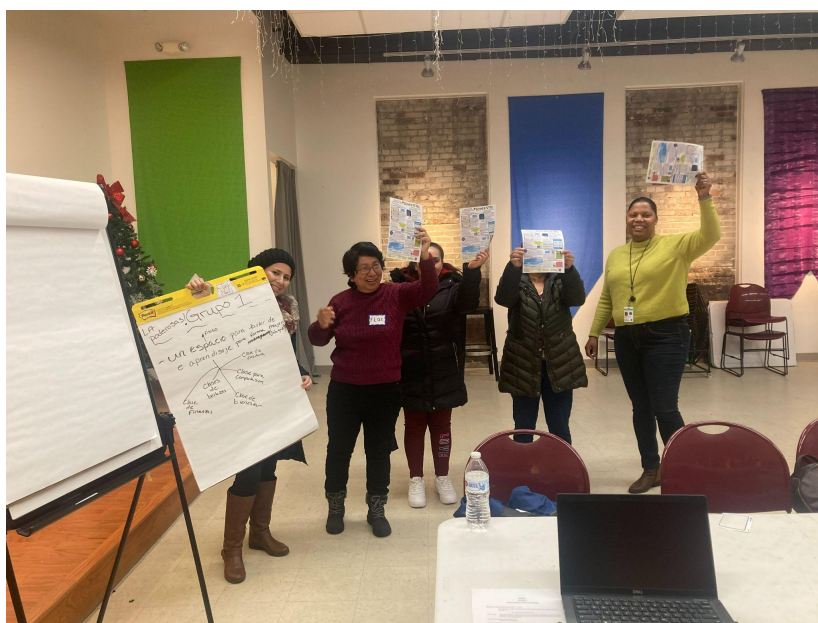
space to learn new art skills and come together to connect and support one another, in an environment where the community has control. The group meets weekly on Friday and regularly has around 20 participants.

## Spanish-Language Leadership Training

The IMPACT Group expressed an interest in learning about leadership skills, so SomerViva developed a curriculum to fit their needs. Four 90-minute sessions were delivered with basic leadership tools focused on the first four stages of leadership:

1. Building community
2. Community work values and principles
3. Mapping collectively needs and resources
4. Expectations and priorities

The trainings were delivered on November 18th, December 2nd, December 9th, and January 6th and 22 women participated.



Spanish language leadership training at Connexion.

## Portuguese-Language Financial Literacy Training

During November, 2022, SomerViva delivered the first financial literacy training in Portuguese, partnering with an expert in personal finances who has been working with the Portuguese-speaking community for a decade. The Portuguese-speaking community had expressed the need for support to better organize their own finances, be structured and independent financially, and be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities the City offers in relation to affordable housing. There were several financial literacy courses offered by local organizations in English, so the need to offer in-language training was clear.



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10 residents attended the training in person, but many more expressed the need for other opportunities to gain these skills. Therefore, a second round of financial literacy trainings was set up, covering budgeting, insurances, investment options, and retirement planning in the U.S. Virtual and in-person opportunities were offered during this second iteration and over 25 residents participated.



Portuguese language financial literacy classes at SomerViva..

### **Haitian Coalition of Business Owners in Somerville (HCBOSS)**

SomerViva developed a project aimed at fostering cohesion and coordination among Haitian business owners in Somerville. Through this project, SomerViva supported the creation of a Haitian Coalition of Business Owners in Somerville (HCBOSS) to address, support, and foster their common interests to positively impact the community of Somerville.

## Acknowledgements

The work SomerViva does would not be possible without the leadership and support of Major Katjana Ballantyne, our City colleagues, and the many community partners that fight relentlessly to improve the lives of immigrants and refugees in Somerville.





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