

THE NEW LIVES NEWSLETTER

Summer 2020



massey
centre

new lives start here

Message from the CEO



Ekua Asabea Blair
Chief Executive Officer

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, Massey Centre remains open for business. While our Early Learning Child Care Centre and EarlyON Child and Family programs were ordered closed with

the March 17th State of Emergency in Ontario, our Residential and Transitional Housing programs stayed open to offer face-face-services onsite and continued to take in more vulnerable young moms and babies. We quickly updated to virtual services for our infant and early childhood mental health, secondary school, and some of our community and EarlyON Child and Family Centre programs.

COVID-19 has taken its toll on our management, staff and clients. The pandemic no doubt kept us very busy developing new policies and procedures, and we have done everything possible to keep everyone safe and healthy. The COVID-19 restrictions were a particularly hard pill to swallow for our young mothers who are still teenagers. It was a big change being unable to have visitors, and having their visits out in the community restricted to only essential trips.

I had a representative from the young moms in my office complaining about the new infection prevention and control protocols. We had established these protocols as soon as the WHO announced that there was a pandemic. As the media and the world adjusted to the news of the pandemic, so did the young mothers. Over time they learned that Massey Centre had only moved quickly to protect them.

Many of our work projects were slowed down to a halt as we dealt with the ever-changing realities of the pandemic. In February, the Board had just approved our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan. Management had the responsibility to create the three-year implementation plan. All of this work slowed down. We will share the final results of this important work in our 2019-2020 Annual Report. Please watch for this information.

We also received some good news before the pandemic regarding funding over the next three years for our Success in Employment for Adolescent Mothers (SEAM) program. The presence of the COVID-19 virus did not slow down our plans for starting our SEAM program. SEAM will start on July 20th! Young parents living in the community or onsite will have the opportunity to participate in paid employment preparation training and paid work placements. There is a lot of excitement about this new opportunity for vulnerable young parents.

We could not survive this difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic without the support of so many organizations and institutions that helped with our infection prevention & control planning and implementation. We participated in weekly virtual meetings with the East Toronto Health Partners Ontario Health Team (OHT), Webinars with the North York Toronto Health Partners OHT, Toronto Lead Agency and Children Mental Health Ontario and the Ontario for Young Parents Association (OAYPA). I also must thank our donors and funders. All funders understood that all our efforts were required on the pandemic and delayed all our funding reports and budget submissions. Foundations quickly pivoted to offer new opportunities to access COVID-19 funds. Gratitude also goes out to the organizations who

donated cloth facial masks. Michael Garron Hospital and WE Make Masks TO and several other organizations donated these masks at no cost to the Massey Centre.

The support from our community has been tremendous and we truly appreciate and value the

care and love we continue to feel during these challenging times. I must also thank our staff who came into work every day despite the pandemic. They are the true heroes and I want to thank them for their dedication to the mission of the organization during the worst pandemic in our lifetime.

Nathalia's Story

Nathalia was trying hard to make a better life for herself. She left a difficult family situation, moved in with friends, and had started college. Just as things in her life were starting to improve, she found out she was pregnant at only 19 years old.

For months Nathalia "tried to make it work" but had a hard time as her support network fell away. Nathalia was young, pregnant, alone, and now homeless. Nathalia wanted what all mothers need, a safe healthy pregnancy for herself and her unborn child. She needed shelter and prenatal support. It was a referral from a midwife at a women's shelter who recognized her needs that led her to us here at Massey Centre.

After moving to Massey Centre Nathalia really enjoyed participating in many of our programs. The Mindfulness program being one of her favourites, she enjoyed how it allowed her to "reflect on and care for herself." For Nathalia her little girl Jade, now four months old, brings her so much joy, "Becoming a parent is a lot of responsibility but she makes me happy, she makes me laugh".

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created some difficulty as Nathalia works on going back to school, but she is staying positive. She and Jade have a safe place to live, a support network of staff and peers, and she is attending online programs. She is grateful that Massey Centre is there for her when she needs it most, and is looking forward to a bright future for herself and her daughter.



New Year, New Look!

We are committed to improving our accessibility and increasing our programming capacity to better serve our community. Over the last few months, clients and community members will have seen the construction crews onsite transforming our Early Learning Centre by:

- Upgrading the front doors to be more accessible;
- Lowering the reception window to be more welcoming to all our Centre visitors;
- Renovating the main floor washroom to be accessible;
- Enhancing our playground by updating safety barriers;
- Installing new cubbies for all our daycare rooms;
- Renovating our second floor to create space for our brand new Preschool program! This new space will allow us to support families until their children start kindergarten.

A big thank you to the City of Toronto who provided the funding for this project, and to our clients who were so patient with us during the construction process. The work has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic closure. We look forward to showing you our upgraded and accessible space soon!



Anti-Black Racism and Current Events

It was with great sadness and horror that we and the rest of the world witnessed the murder of George Floyd during an interaction with the police. George Floyd's death highlighted the troublesome pattern of police brutality against Black people.

As an organization that supports primarily Black young women and children, we see the impacts of this anti-Black racism every day. It negatively shapes the lives, experiences, and opportunities of the clients we support. Anti-Black racism also negatively affects many of our staff members and volunteers.

The current high profile anti-Black racism events touched a nerve with our community and raised fears and worries amongst our clients. Our clients came together in a town hall to support each other and share their personal experiences of racism, and staff chimed in with their stories as well. Our high school teachers also quickly pulled together resources to support the young women and teach them the history and current context of anti-Black racism. As always, our clients had access to free mental health support if needed.

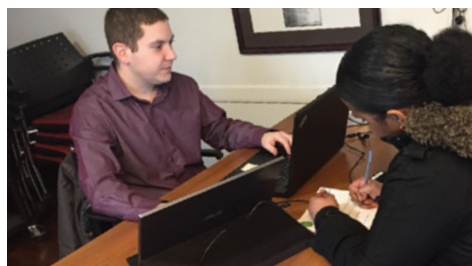
As an organization, we are committed to aligning our programs, policies and practices with best practices in anti-racism and anti-oppression. We will work towards creating an equal and just society through education, training, advocacy, and concrete action.

Annual Tax Clinic

Tax season can be an intimidating time of year for many; for our young clients it is no different. Many have never done their taxes on their own, and need help to file their taxes so they can access government benefits.

McCarney Group LLP Chartered Professional Accountants has been generously helping our young mothers navigate their taxes for over 10 years by offering a free Annual Tax Clinic onsite.

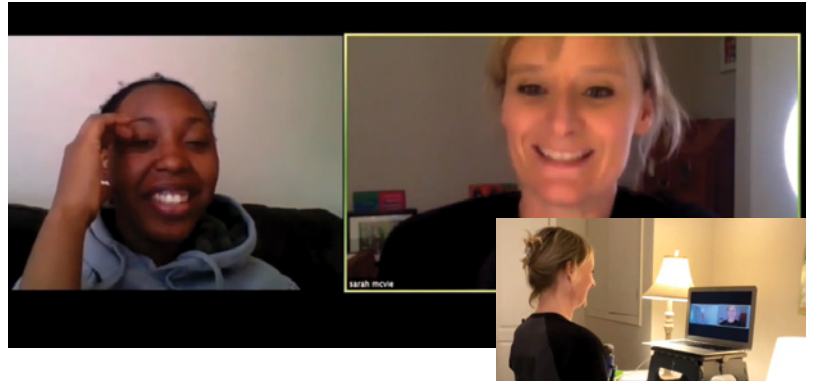
The clinic is available to both our current residents and our young moms that now live independently in the community. On Tuesday March 3, 2020, close to 40 clients received help to file their taxes. We are thrilled to have this amazing partnership; a big thank you from all of us to volunteers Allan, Joshua and Sandra for all their support this year!



Innovating for Success

The Challenge of COVID-19

When presented with a challenge we strive to innovate and adapt to overcome it because our services are essential for the families that access them. COVID-19 presented a new set of challenges; how could we operate in a way that was safe for both our clients and our staff? How could we continue to offer services to not just the young families that live here but also those struggling with isolation in the community?



While some of our programs like our childcare centre had to close due to the State of Emergency, we knew we needed to quickly innovate many of our other services so that we could support as many families as possible. Many of our programs moved online, like our EarlyON program, Maternal Infant Mental Health Services, Section 23 School, and New Beginnings. Amazing individuals like **Sarah McVie**, actor from the series *Workin' Moms* featured on CBC and Netflix, helped our young mothers stay connected by hosting a weekly virtual drama class.

Integrated Residential and Transitional Housing Program

Within days of the pandemic being announced, we moved all young women in our residences to their own townhouses and apartments on our property. This enabled them to safely practice physical and social distancing. Everyday, our onsite cook prepares nutritious meals that are delivered to our young families by frontline workers, who also use the opportunity to check on how the young mothers and their babies are doing. We continue to take in more new young moms and babies during the pandemic.

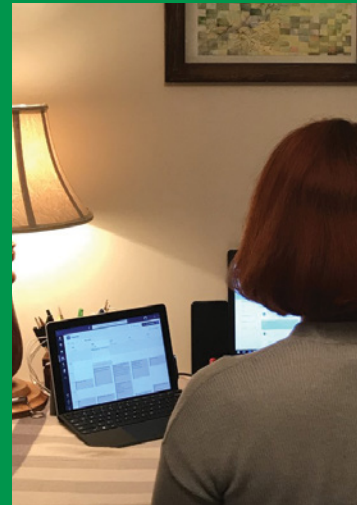


Going Virtual

Maternal Infant Mental Health

As an accredited children's mental health organization, the demand for our mental health services has doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic! To be able to safely support as many families as possible, we moved these vital services online. Services offered virtually include:

- Child Individual Play-Based Psychotherapy Sessions
- Parent Counselling Sessions
- Developmental Screenings (ASQ)
- Maternal Infant Mental Health Assessments
- Individual sessions of Baby Love: Supporting Infant Security and Attachment



Section 23 School

As the pandemic forced our school to move to virtual classes, we immediately encountered a problem – some of our students didn't have cell phones or laptops to be able to connect to their classes. **Compugen** and **Rogers Communications** stepped up by donating phones and tablets to help keep our young pregnant and parenting students connected. Thanks to these donors our students were able to continue their studies online from home and earned a total of **fifty two credits**. We are proud to report this school year we have **three** graduates who have earned their diplomas and one has already been accepted into a university program and will be starting this fall!

EarlyON Child and Family Program



Have you seen our EarlyON team on Facebook Live? We know the importance of routine for children and how very odd it must be for them during the pandemic to no longer see their friends and favourite staff members at our program. Every weekday, families are able to join our staff for a virtual circle time sing-a-long, story time, and a fun variety of child friendly activities that can be done at home.

New Beginnings

Program Spotlight: Interview with Cindy

What do you call a program that acts as a gateway to housing stability? At Massey Centre we call that program New Beginnings.

New Beginnings helps vulnerable young mothers keep their housing through a variety of ways including on-going mediation with landlords, referrals to local service like foodbanks, claimant supports, educational skills training, employment supports, educating them about their rights as a tenant, and educating them about the responsibilities of a landlord. The program also works to help overturn evictions and assist in finding new housing in the event of eviction.

Cindy has been helping the young families here at Massey Centre for over eighteen years, and we are thrilled to have her on the New Beginnings team bringing her experience and expertise.



What are some of the challenges your clients face?

"Definitely finding affordable rental units, and affordable does not always match up to suitable. Many clients struggle with cost of living, as it does not coincide with the amount of income that they are getting, especially those on Ontario Works or Ontario Disability. They face barriers due to discrimination and stigma around things like being on Ontario Works, or because of the fact they are young and have a child. Sometimes they come to us with poor credit, sometimes they come to us with no credit but we work with them on all of these things. Luckily, I work closely with our Baby and Me: Our Home program which provides our clients with rental subsidies. These subsidies go a long way in helping them find and keep safe housing."

Has COVID-19 created new challenges for the program?

"I am very knowledgeable about community resources but what I am having to do now, if I have a client I need to refer, I have to call the referral agency to see what service disruption they are facing due to COVID-19 and some things are changing on a daily or weekly basis. So even if I called that agency two weeks ago and referred a client there I am still going to have to call today just to see if anything has changed.

It's been difficult because some of the key places we connect with like Ontario Works, Ontario Disability, Canada Revenue have longer response times. A lot of places are not running at full capacity.

One new challenge has been educating myself about the various new COVID-19 benefits applicable to our clients and filtering that information to them."

Have your services adapted to serve them during COVID-19?

"One of the ways we have adapted is over the phone services and virtual meetings. I've had to think outside of the box and be creative on ways to continue services from a distance. Despite COVID-19 clients are still being connected and supported. I have been striving to bring the same level of care to clients I offered before

COVID-19. I have been doing a lot of over the phone outreach, doing wellness checks on clients we haven't heard from letting them know we are thinking of them and a reminder we are still here to help."

What is the biggest challenge in your job?

"It's becoming increasingly more challenging to find affordable rentals units in Toronto for our women, the cost of living just does not work for the fixed income our clients have. It is also taking a lot more time to find these units."

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

"I value the work that is being done at Massey Centre and I do thoroughly enjoy working with the population we serve. The clients have taught me a lot over the years including how important a good sense of humour is. I am the sort of person that finds reward in simple things. Whether that's knowing I've helped them in some capacity like finding a place to call home, or helping them submit a college application. I just really celebrate all of their milestones and accomplishments alongside them. I am their cheerleader cheering them on. It's those day to day things that I take along with me."



Mother's Day 2020

Physically distant but together in heart

Mother's Day looked a little different this year due to social and physical distancing for COVID-19. Thanks to our wonderful community of followers, donors, and volunteers it was still a very special day for the young mothers and their children. These special days can often be difficult for our young mothers who may already struggle with isolation from family, so your support means so much during these times.

Many of you sent uplifting messages online for our Mother's Day Wellness Wall, other's used contactless drop off to deliver special gift bags to bring a smile to our moms' faces, and our friends from Branksome Hall bought individual Popeye's dinners for each of our young families. Thank you so very much for showing our young families that we are all together in heart. Mother's Day was truly special for your young mothers and their children this year all because of you.



Volunteer Spotlight: Alexandra



How did you first hear about Massey Centre?

I first heard about Massey through my mother who was a board member for six years and an advisor for a year. She always spoke very highly of the centre which sparked my interest to support Massey in any way I could.

What motivated you become a volunteer at Massey Centre?

Once I heard about Massey I was keen to help out. In grade twelve (2011) I ran a fundraising initiative at my high school whereby students who dressed down for the day (no uniforms) would donate to Massey Centre. Once the time permitted I started volunteering with the centre as I truly wanted to do more. Raising a child can be difficult and stressful at any age, but I empathize with these young moms. Many are still learning and growing into adulthood, while taking on the responsibilities of being a parent.

What programs have you worked with as a volunteer at Massey Centre?

I have been volunteering with Massey for over three years - predominately as parental relief for the prenatal and postnatal programs as well as tutoring.

Do you have any fond memories from volunteering?

Every time I come to the centre it is a great experience. Over the many years of volunteering I have had the pleasure to meet numerous young moms all with a unique story, however one thing remains consistent. No matter their age or background they all embrace strong motherhood and dedication to the growth of their babies.

What's your favorite part of being a volunteer?

Knowing that I am helping to support a young mom in her growth and development is the most rewarding part of this experience. I love attending the graduation and celebratory events for the moms as it is inspiring to hear their stories and be a part of their journeys.

Get Involved

Join our Eat4Eight: Teen Mom Budget Challenge!

This year's challenge will run from September 28-30. Join our mailing list or follow us on Facebook and Twitter to get up to date information on this year's challenge! To register your team now, visit massey.ca/eat4eight



Make a Donation

By making a donation today, you can bring real help and hope to thousands of moms, babies, and caregivers served by Massey Centre. Every dollar counts! **Did you know** that some employers will match your donation if you show them your receipt, doubling your gift? Speak with your company's human resource department to find out if they will match your gift.

Become a Monthly Donor

Consider becoming a monthly donor to offer ongoing support to our young families – just \$5 or more a month can help provide formula, diapers and infant care items to one family.

Donate Items for our Young Moms and Babies

The young moms and babies in our programs rely on your in-kind donations. Diapers, baby clothes, personal care items, and grocery store gift cards are always needed. For an updated list of items we are currently in need of please visit our website.

Host an Event in Support of Massey Centre

Commit to being a leader in your community by organizing a fundraising event for Massey Center! Organizing an event is a lot of fun! Your fundraiser can be as modest or ambitious as you choose. Dinner parties, toonie drives, raffles and bake sales are all great ideas to start with.

Leave a Gift in Your Will

Create a legacy while maximizing tax and other financial benefits. Gift a pre-determined or residual amount of your estate to ensure that support services needed by young moms and babies are available in the future.

Visit www.massey.ca or email giving@massey.ca to learn more about how you can get involved.



Your donation provides education, life skills, and self confidence.

YES! I want to help new young moms and their babies because they need me!

Here is my gift of: \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 I will give \$_____

YES! I will join the **Best Start** Monthly Giving Program* with my gift on the **last** day of each month of: \$10 \$20 \$25 \$50 I will give \$_____

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Province: _____ Postal Code: _____ Phone No. _____

Please add me to your email list. I understand I can unsubscribe at anytime.

Payment Options

I would like to give by: Cheque

My cheque payable to **Massey Centre** is enclosed.

Please charge my   

Card Number: _____ Expiry Date: ____/____

Name exactly as shown on card: _____

Cardholder Signature: _____

Name for Acknowledgement Purposes (if applicable): _____

I would like this donation to be Anonymous.

I am interested in learning more about how to leave a gift in my Will to Massey Centre.

* I can revoke or change my authorization at any time in writing or by calling 416-425-6348 x 224, subject to providing 30 days' notice.

* I have certain recourse rights if any debit does not comply with this agreement. For example, I have the right to be reimbursed for any debit that is not authorized or is not consistent with this Pre-authorization Debit (PAD) Agreement.

* To obtain a cancellation form, or for more information on my right to cancel a PAD Agreement or my recourse rights, I may contact my financial institution or visit www.cdnpay.ca.

Massey Centre protects your private information and complies with all legislative requirements. We will send you information from time to time. If you wish to limit, or not receive any correspondence in the future, please contact us at 416-425-6348 x 224.

Thank you for your support!



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