



Abiona Centre

For Infant & Early Mental Health

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Letter from our Leadership

To our Supporters and Community Members,

It is with great pleasure and gratitude that we present to you our Annual Report for the year 2022-2023. We are thrilled to share the significant growth and achievements we have accomplished over the past year, thanks to the unwavering support from individuals like you.

The first change you may have noticed this year, is our new name! After months of consultation with clients, staff, volunteers, and partners, we landed on a name that we love: Abiona Centre For Infant and Early Mental Health.

Abiona is a Yoruba girl's name meaning 'born on a journey'. We wanted a name that reflects our centre now, and where we're headed. It was also very important to us to find a name that reflects our clients and makes future clients feel welcome here. As the majority of our clients identify as Black or African Canadian, we chose a name with African roots.

Our work in infant and early childhood mental health continues to be a strategic priority of ours, as it lays the foundation for a child's emotional well-being, cognitive development, and future relationships. We've made great strides in this work this past year and have increased our programs offered in this area which you'll hear more about in this report.

One of our proudest moments was securing new funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada to support the educational achievements of young, Black mothers through

the Mental Health of Black Canadians fund. We firmly believe that education is a powerful tool for change, and this new funding has allowed us to make a lasting impact in the lives of young Black moms in our community.

Furthermore, this year we have also taken a significant step forward in our organizational development by implementing a deepened focus on data collection and evaluation. We recognize the importance of measuring the impact of our programs to ensure they are effective and address the unique needs of our participants. Through rigorous data collection and analysis, we have been able to make data-driven decisions, improve our programs, and better allocate our resources to maximize our impact.

This past year, we conducted a deeper dive into calls to our intake line to make sure we were meeting the evolving needs of the community. One large trend that we noticed was mothers over twenty-five who were in need of housing and comprehensive support but with nowhere to turn. To meet this need, we piloted raising the age range on our transitional housing program to 29 years old. Our program is now completely full. By providing this essential support to these families, we're keeping families together and keeping children out of the child welfare and shelter system.

While we've had an exciting year of growth and opportunity, we cannot ignore the challenges that our community continues to face. The demand for our programs continues to grow.

One of the most pressing issues we have encountered is the scarcity of affordable and safe housing for young mothers in Toronto. The lack of suitable housing options creates additional stress and hurdles for these mothers who are already navigating the complexities of parenthood at such a young age. We remain committed to advocating for improved housing options and will work tirelessly with our partners to address this urgent issue.

As we reflect on the past year, we are also filled with hope and optimism for the future. Our ongoing commitment to expanding our programs, services, and partnerships will enable us to provide even more comprehensive support to young, Black mothers in our community. By continuing to collaborate with local organizations, government agencies, and generous donors like you, we are confident in our ability to create a brighter future for these resilient individuals.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all of our supporters, volunteers, and staff members who have dedicated their time, resources, and

expertise to the success of Abiona Centre. Together, we are making a meaningful difference in the lives of young, mothers and their children.

We look forward to continuing this journey together as we work towards a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Jessica Amey
Chair



Ekua Asabea Blair
President & CEO

Mission

Abiona Centre seeks to create a better future for vulnerable pregnant and parenting young mothers and their children 0–6. Our infant and early childhood mental health programs give our clients the tools they need to build secure relationships with their babies, cope with life’s adversities, find help when needed and succeed in life.

Governance

A huge thank you to our Board of Directors. Your passion, vision, and leadership is instrumental in the success of our agency.

Jessica Amey, Chair	Mitze Mourinho	Beth Dewitt
Catherine Wang, Vice Chair	Anika Mehta	Michael Kuske
Justine Humphries, Secretary	Jalpa Patel	Edem Akan
Alana Buckley, Treasurer	Elena Simonetta	Ekua Asabea Blair, President & CEO (ex-officio)
Breann Kirincich	Stephanie Wang	Reverend Jody Maltby (ex-officio)

Vision

Abiona Centre envisions a world where families led by young women will have the emotional and physical supports to realize their full potential.

From Worries to Triumph: EarlyON Child and Family Centre’s Free ASQ Screenings and Support Transforms Samuel’s Speech Development, Delighting his Mother Soreya!

When Soreya came to our EarlyON Child and Family Centre, she was concerned about her son, Samuel’s, speech development. He seemed different from the other kids and she didn’t know where to turn for help. She asked our staff for advice on what to do as she couldn’t afford to see a specialist. Our staff told her all about the free Ages and Stages (ASQ) developmental screenings we offer. She was overjoyed by this news. She took a screening home with her and brought it back the very next day for scoring. Through this process, we were able to develop a plan for Samuel. We connected him with an Early Literacy Specialist in our Ujima Project where Samuel participated in group programs. We also got him started in free Speech and Language services at our centre through our partnership with the Hanen Centre. Samuel is now catching up to his friends and Soreya is thrilled with his progress.

Did you know?

5064

We had 5064 visits to our EarlyON program this year.

350+

Over 350 parents and caregivers attended workshops through our EarlyON program including Baby Love, Infant Massage, Literacy and Me, School Readiness, Glitterbug LGBTQS2 mobile workshops.

656

656 children and caregivers attended our EarlyON program for the first time this year.





Building strong young families

The Ujima Project

Last year, we announced the exciting news that The Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies (OAYPA) was awarded a grant of \$5.5 million over three years to establish nine Early Childhood Development Hubs throughout Ontario. The hubs aim to improve outcomes for at-risk parents and meet early childhood development needs. Participating hubs have each hired a full-time Family Navigator and Early Literacy Specialist to offer early literacy and learning support, referral to speech and language services, service navigation, and infant, early childhood and family mental health services through group-based programming and one-on-one consultations. Abiona Centre took on the critical role of project trustee for this important provincial initiative.

This project is also supported by the Young Families Program at SickKids Hospital. This team is offering resources and support to all of our hubs including a Pediatrician, Nurse Practitioner, Social Worker, and telehealth and telepsychiatry.

Breaking Barriers: Ujima Project's Holistic Approach Transforms Lives

May was looking to access mental health services but found the process confusing. She connected with a Ujima Project family navigator, Jenny. Jenny helped her understand her options and even accompanied her to her first appointment. But it was through continued engagement with Jenny that May began to open up and Jenny discovered that employment, her son's development, and legal concerns, were some of the external factors affecting her mental health. Through the Ujima Project she was connected to legal counsel, an employment program (that ultimately supported her in finding a part-time job), and literacy and development resources. The Ujima Project early literacy specialist worked closely with May to help her understand her son's developmental milestones using developmental screenings and supported May and her son as they accessed onsite Speech and Language services. May found the program so helpful that she has since referred a friend to the program.

"Young parents have voiced that they feel disappointed that they can't access services on their own because they're brushed off. They wish they could be taken seriously. So, they are grateful that someone can come with them. It helps lighten the burden of the things they are working through because they realize they have people working alongside them".

– Family Navigator

Working closely with project evaluator, Taylor Newberry Consulting, we completed phase two of the project evaluation including staff focus groups, leadership key informant interviews, Hub focus groups with clients and family experience surveys. Our preliminary findings suggest:

- Ujima Project services are providing young parents with support during a critical time in their lives.
- Parents trust and feel heard by Ujima Project staff, which may have helped them feel safe accessing new services for their themselves and their children.
- Parents are gaining new skills, and these parenting strategies are also contributing to stronger parent-child relationships.



Empowering a Teen Mom's Path: Overcoming Struggles, Finding Support, and Building a Better Life for Her Daughter

Mia was trying to make it on her own with a young daughter in tow. But at only 19 years old, she was struggling. She was bouncing around from place to place and yearned to give her daughter, Neveah, a better life. She moved into our two-year transitional housing program, grateful to have some extra support. One thing she found really challenging was to establish routines for Neveah. It seemed to her like every day she was on the verge of tears trying to deal with this challenge. She was referred to our Maternal Infant Mental Health program where she received support with parenting skills and how to relate to her daughter. Budgeting was another big challenge for Mia. She didn't learn it in school and didn't grow up learning it from her parents. Over time and with the support of her community worker, she benefitted from help with childcare subsidy applications, filing her taxes and accessing government benefits like the child tax credit, applying for social assistance, and more. When the time comes for her to live independently, she won't have to worry as she now has enough saved up for first and last month's rent.

Did you know?

62

We offer transitional housing to 62 families at a time at our three sites across Toronto.

29

29 young moms received a housing subsidy to support living independently in the community.

165+

Over 165 young moms living in the community received housing help through workshops and 1:1 support.



The Umoja Project: Improving Mental Health and Educational Attainment for Black Parenting Youth through a Home Visiting Model

We are thrilled to share with you a new 16-month pilot program we are working on aimed at improving the lives of hard-to-engage young Black mothers and their children in Toronto.

Through a community-based home-visiting model, we are providing tailored support to empower these mothers and their families, fostering positive mental health, resilience, and educational success.



Carolyn Bennett, MP and Julie Dabrusin, MP visit Abiona Centre.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented obstacles, especially for these vulnerable mothers. With the sudden shift to online learning and the lack of childcare options, many found themselves unable to stay in school. Accessing essential services became even more challenging, exacerbating their isolation and hindering their progress. But together, we can change their trajectory and give them the support they desperately need.



Press conference to announce new funding from Public Health Agency of Canada

Drawing inspiration from successful home visiting models, the Umoja Project is deploying a team of dedicated professionals and paraprofessionals who will deliver vital services and support directly to these families in their own homes and schools. By bridging the gaps and removing barriers, we are ensuring that no mother is left behind.

"The mental health of young Black mothers has been disproportionately affected by the covid-19 pandemic. We need to intervene now to stop the negative impacts of the pandemic from being passed down to their children. This critical funding from PHAC will promote positive mental health, resilience, and educational attainment and outcomes for Black adolescent mothers and their children through a home-visiting model. We are grateful to the Public Health Agency of Canada for their significant investment in young Black lives."

– Ekua Asabea Blair, President & CEO

From Crisis to Connections: How HomeNest Helped Sheree Rebuild Her Life and Strengthen Her Family Bonds

Sheree was in over her head. As a young single mom of two kids, one with behavioral issues, she was struggling. She enrolled in our HomeNest program, an intensive in-home service. Working with her HomeNest facilitator, she identified goals for herself and her children, and built a team of support consisting of friends, service providers, and supportive family members that will be there for her and her family.

One of her main goals throughout her entire WrapAround process was to build a better relationship with her son, Matt, and to support his developmental needs. Things came to a boiling point this year – Sheree was dealing with her own trauma and mental health issues and also felt like Matt’s external clinician was dismissing her concerns. She loved her kids but told her HomeNest facilitator that something needed to change as she was feeling pushed to her limits and unable to care for her kids.

Her facilitator worked 1:1 with her to de-escalate the situation, and worked together with Sheree and Children’s Aid to ensure the safety of her children. The facilitator brought in team members to support with the crisis, and a plan was developed with all supports in place to keep the family together. Sheree reported feeling her stress level decrease and regained her capacity to parent. The team continued to support the family and with Sheree, they discussed strategies on how to prevent a similar crisis from happening in the future.

Sheree says that her mental health, parenting, and relationship with her children have all improved after participating in HomeNest. She feels ready to graduate from this intensive service and knows she can always count on her team if she needs them.

Did you know?

100%

100% of HomeNest clients felt very or extremely satisfied with the support that they received from their HomeNest facilitator.

“It was a very warm and welcoming environment to trouble shoot any struggles with any area in your life that you may be having”

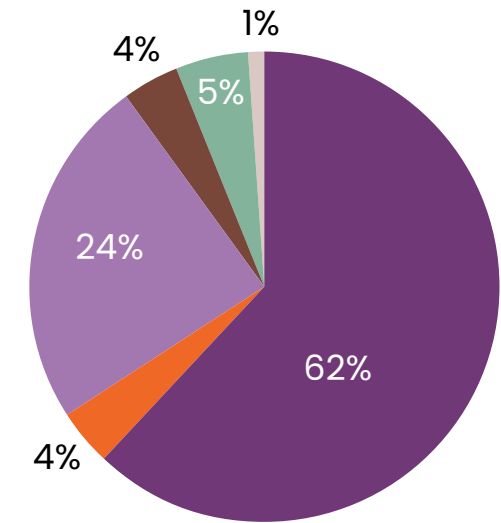
– Tianna, HomeNest client



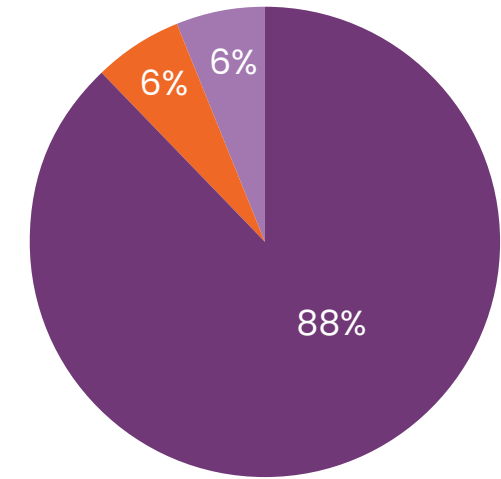
Financials

Audited Income statement for the period of April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023

FY2023	
REVENUES	\$10,192,185
Government Funding	\$6,282,940
Grants from Other Agencies	\$444,773
Fundraising and Special Project Donations	\$2,479,531
Rental & Other Income	\$352,404
Amortization of Deferred Capital Contributions	\$525,562
Investment Income	\$106,975
EXPENSES	\$9,998,212
Programs	\$8,809,322
Amortization	\$557,125
Management and Administration	\$631,765
SURPLUS	\$193,973



- Government Funding
- Grants from Other Agencies
- Fundraising and Special Project Donations
- Rental & Other Income
- Amortization of Deferred Capital Contributions
- Investment Income



- Programs
- Amortization
- Management and Administration

From Trauma to Transformation 16-Year-Old Raquel Overcomes Adversity, Finds Hope in Live-in Treatment Program

Trigger warning: sexual assault

At only 16 years old, Raquel has faced an incredible amount of trauma. She became pregnant after a sexual assault by a family friend; but her parents blamed her and kicked her out of their house. Without an income, family support, and a place to live, she was incredibly vulnerable. She moved into a youth shelter and dropped out of high school. She was referred to our Live-in Treatment program just in time to have her baby boy. When she moved in, she was incredibly timid and kept to herself; sitting alone at meals and during group programs. With time, she learned to trust our staff and find her voice. She has become a lot more confident, especially when advocating for her son's needs. She is now back in high school and is glad to have her son nearby in our childcare program while she studies. Seeing her son smile reminds her that there is hope for a better future for both of them.



Tamara's Inspiring Journey: From Unemployed to Medical Receptionist and Beyond!

Tamara was stuck. She had finished school a while ago but had no luck finding a job, despite the countless applications she had sent in. Not having any family to turn to, she had no idea what she was doing wrong. A friend told her about our employment program, Success in Employment for Adolescent Mothers, or SEAM, and she signed up right away! While in the program she started to ease her way back into learning the skills she needed to land a job. With the help of our job coach she updated her resume, did mock interviews, and learned more about workplace expectations. Before the 18-week program was even over, she was able to land a job as a medical receptionist! She is currently still working at her job and shares that she loves working with the people and for the agency. Part of her goal with her current job is to continue to build financial stability and save to pay for college to achieve her long term goal to become a midwife.

Did you know?

85%

85% of clients in our SEAM program found employment!

90%

90% of our high school students stayed in school this year or graduated! On average, only 50% of teen moms graduate high school by age 22. Our students are beating the odds!

Empathy and Innovation: Early Learning Centre Transforms a Young Mother's Life While Nurturing her Daughter's Development

Malia was extremely nervous about leaving her daughter, Mia, in our childcare program. As a young mother, Malia had endured significant trauma during growing up, making it challenging for her to trust others with Mia's care. In her determination to be there for Mia, Malia even resorted to skipping school, sacrificing her own education.

Recognizing that Malia needed extra support, our Early Learning Centre (ELC) staff connected with her on a daily basis about Mia's progress. They followed Malia's lead and helped her feel heard and validated as a parent.

Mia herself faced difficulties expressing her emotions, leading to occasional physical outbursts towards the staff and other children in her class. Sensing the urgency to help Mia overcome these challenges, our ELC staff introduced her to PEC symbols – an Augmentative and Alternative Communication method using visual symbols that helped Mia to communicate more effectively.

Staff kept Malia up to date on Mia's progress and Malia began to feel much more comfortable leaving Mia in the ELC. Malia's attendance at high school improved dramatically and she won several academic awards this year!

Through empathy, innovative solutions, and consistent communication, our Early Learning Centre not only made a profound impact on Mia's development but also instilled newfound confidence and achievements in Malia's life. The ripple effect of this nurturing environment continues to empower both mother and daughter, helping them both on their journeys.



Donors and Funders – Thank you for your support!

Government of Canada

Canada Revenue Agency, Children’s Special Allowances
Employment and Social Development Canada
Public Health Agency of Canada

Province of Ontario

Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services

City of Toronto

Children’s Services
Community Service Partnerships
Housing Stability Services, Housing Secretariat
Investing In Neighbourhoods

\$1,000,000 +

Anonymous

\$100,000 +

Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation
Canadian Women’s Foundation

\$50,000 to \$99,999

Evelyn C. Kidd
United Way, Community Services Grant

\$20,000 to \$49,999

Metro Mothers Network
Shorcan Brokers Limited
The Estate of Elizabeth Shiels
Tippet Foundation

\$10,000 to \$19,999

Azrieli Foundation
CIBC Foundation
Daily Bread Food Bank
Greater Toronto Apartment Association
Menkes Development Ltd
The Catherine & Maxwell Meighen Foundation
Shining Waters Regional Council
• Mission and Service Fund

The United Church of Canada Foundation
• The Wesley C. Smith Estate Fund at The United Church of Canada Foundation
TELUS Friendly Future Foundation
The Tenaquip Foundation
Tides Foundation

\$5000 to \$9999

Patti Bunston-Gunn and Stephen K. Gunn
CHUM Charitable Foundation
CST Foundation
Frederick and Douglas Dickson Memorial Foundation
Eglinton St. George’s United Church
Harry E. Foster Charitable Foundation
Pamela Hodgson
Michelle Illiatovitch
The MacBain Family
Alice & Murray Maitland Foundation
Reckitt Health & Nutrition Canada
SSQ Foundation
TAKLA Foundation
Toronto United Church Council
• Nancy Peters Massey Centre Fund
• TUCC Legacy Fund
Stephan & Jeannie von Buttlar

\$1000 to \$4999

AIG
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Cindi Alexander
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BAP Foundation
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Stephen Smith
Kathleen Spence
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Andrew & Margaret Clark
Turnpenny Milne LLP
Unifor
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\$500 to \$999

Jonathan Abbatt
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Cordone Investments Limited
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Patrick Leslie
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Stacia Neale
Parkwoods United Church
Nianda Penner
Ardyth Percy-Robb
Bhanu Raja
Nick & Lynn Ross Charitable Foundation
Kevin Rowe
Serano Bakery
Dominic Sloan
Joan Smith
Rachel Solomon
The Big Carrot Community Market
Thorncliffe Park United Church
Trinity United Church Women (Iroquois Falls)
Gino & Leith Truant
Lenore Walters



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