



Abiona Centre

For Infant & Early Mental Health

Formerly Massey Centre and Humewood House

New Lives Newsletter

WINTER 2024 EDITION

A Message from the President & CEO

EKUA ASABEA BLAIR



As the fiscal year winds down, I find myself reflecting on the journey we've embarked on together at the Abiona Centre For Infant & Early Mental Health. We've overcome challenges and celebrated triumphs, a testament to the resilience of our employees, volunteers and students and the dedication of everyone involved.

CELEBRATING OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

This year has seen us reach significant milestones. We completed the rigorous licensing process for our childcare centres and Live-In Treatment programs, made possible by our diligent staff and management. We also secured funding for the Umoja Project from the Public Health Agency of Canada, a crucial step in our mission to support the mental health and educational needs of young parents.

In advocacy, our collective voice was heard. The creation of the policy shop to support Young Parent and Infant agencies within the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) marks a pivotal moment in our sector, promising more focused and tailored services for young families and their children across the province.

NAVIGATING CHANGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Change has been a constant this year, especially with our shift from the Children & Youth Services Information System (CYSIS) database to a new Client Information System (CIS). This transition, supported by our CIMS project manager, our data analyst and Capitalize for Kids, is a strategic move to enhance our data management and service delivery, set to be completed by March 2024.

Help Ahead, a Strides Toronto Lead Agency Infant, Child and Youth Mental Health initiative, has emerged as a beacon of hope, becoming the central intake point for intensive mental health services in Toronto. This initiative streamlines access to vital services, ensuring that help is just a phone call away for children, youth, and their families.

SEAM PROGRAM AND UJIMA PROJECT: LOOKING AHEAD

The Success in Employment for Adolescent Mothers (SEAM) program, thanks to its success, has received extended funding from July 2023 until March 2024. We're working on securing further extensions and exploring new funding opportunities, a move that will bolster our support for young mothers in the workforce.

The collective efforts of the Ontario Association for Young Parent Agencies' Ujima Project has experienced remarkable growth, significantly increasing its reach and impact. St. Martin's Manor, located in Hamilton, that offered an Early Childhood Development Hub, closed its doors permanently. The addition of the Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers as the new Ujima Project Hub in Newmarket/York Region is important to ensure that we can continue to offer 9 Early Childhood Development Hubs across the province since early 2022.

FACILITIES AND OPERATIONAL ENHANCEMENTS

Our commitment to providing the best environment for our staff and clients saw us undertaking several key facility enhancements. The rebranding of Humewood Campus, soundproofing of offices and meeting rooms, addressing minor capital needs, and partnering with Smilezone with support from The Slight Family Foundation to create 2 child-friendly rooms are all part of our effort to create spaces that are not only functional but also nurturing.

The intent to expand our Early Learning Centre, Humewood Campus aligns with the city's \$10-\$12/day childcare program, reflecting our commitment to making quality childcare accessible.

LOOKING FORWARD

As we look towards 2024, I am filled with hope and gratitude. The virtual book launch by the Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies (OAYPA) for the book: "Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenting: Reducing Stigma and Improving Outcomes" by Jean-Victor Wittenberg, et al, on January 29 was not just an event; it's a symbol of our collective and ongoing commitment to addressing vital issues in our community.

Our support for the OAYPA webinars on equity, mental health, and trauma, in collaboration with our partners, all offer invaluable insights and solutions to pressing challenges facing the young parents and their children that we serve.

A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

Last year's journey wouldn't have been possible without your unwavering support. To our staff, donors, volunteers, partners, and the families we serve – you are the heart of Abiona Centre. Your commitment, generosity, and belief in our mission have been the driving force behind every success.

As we step into the new year, let's carry forward this spirit of resilience, collaboration, and hope. Together, we'll continue to create lasting change and empower young families.

Thank you for being part of our story. Here's to growing, empowering, and making a difference, together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'S' followed by a long horizontal line.

Did you have a chance to meet Dominique in December?

I was 19 when I found out I was pregnant with my daughter. Initially, I was shocked and scared. It was unexpected, but I knew I always wanted to be a mom. I was living with a friend at the time, which was not an ideal situation. I moved in with my boyfriend which was great at the start, but he lived with his mom so there wasn't much privacy for me and my daughter.

After having my daughter, my life shifted from having fun and being young to having to grow up and focus on being a mom and figuring out how I was going to complete school. I felt like I couldn't relate to the same group of people anymore. When I found out I was pregnant again, the situation at home became even more difficult and I needed to consider my options.

I heard about Abiona Centre but was not sure at first if it was the right fit for me. But I reached out because I wanted what was best for my daughter and my soon-to-be-born son. As soon as the intake worker said I would get my own townhouse, I was on board. My daughter is really enjoying the space and friends she has here. While this life is all my son has known, I know he also enjoys having the space to crawl around and explore.

Being a young mom is difficult because you're still trying to find yourself and achieve your goals, all while learning to be a parent. Due to COVID-19, most of my classes were online so that made it easier to balance my kids and school. If school was in person, I probably would've had to put it on hold. Abiona Centre gave me affordable housing, helped me get clothes for my kids, and gave me access to really useful programs and workshops. Abiona Centre is great. I love it here.

I hope to be a parent that my kids aren't afraid to come to. I think every kid wants that, and I wish I had that with my mom. I want them to have a fun and good childhood.

I'm excited about Christmas at Abiona Centre!

I am really big on all holidays, but Christmas is the main one for me. I want my kids to be as excited about it too. As a child, it was a struggle having to wait all day to open presents, but it's tradition so that's what my kids are going to do! This year I'm going to participate in the door decorating contest at the Centre, and I think I'm going to win. I'm excited for Christmas at Abiona Centre!"



Dominique's story was featured in December! Check out our social media pages to see her video!

Smilezone Grand Opening

At the end of November we celebrated the grand opening of our newly renovated program spaces, generously donated by Smilezone Foundation with support from The Slaight Family Foundation.

The bright and lively Smilezones feature murals, sensory development equipment, drawing boards, and dreamy decorations to promote well-being and inclusivity at the Centre.



Humewood Campus Autumn Fair

We had a great turn out at our Humewood Campus Autumn Fair this year! Both the parents and children who attended had a great time doing arts and crafts, enjoying refreshments, and listening to storyteller Lynn Torrie who generously donated her time to our event.

We had approximately 50 visitors participate in the activities and expressed their excitement for both the event and the newly renovated Smilezones where the event was held.

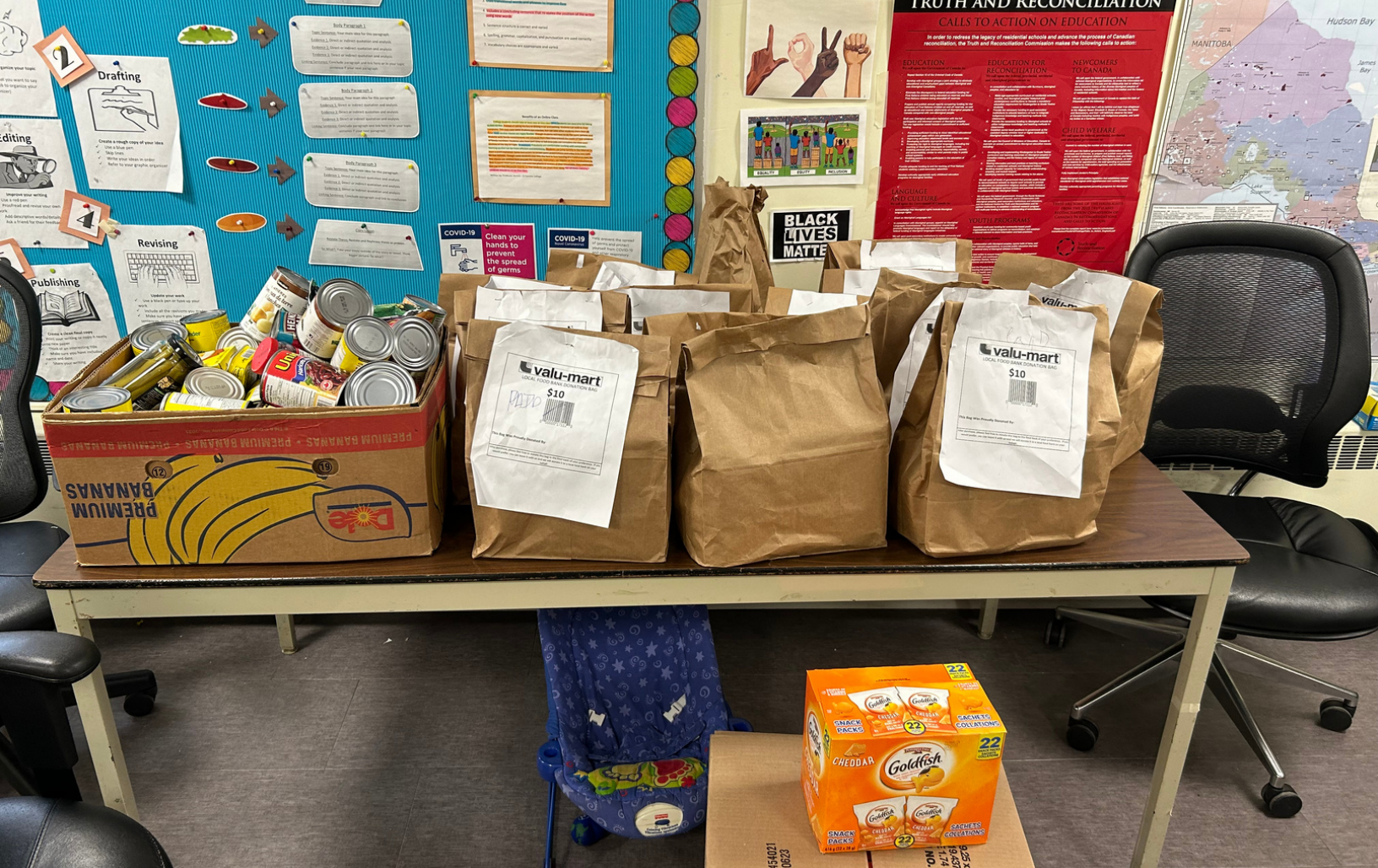
Overall, the event was a great success and helped reignite our connection with the community.



Thank you for making the holidays special!

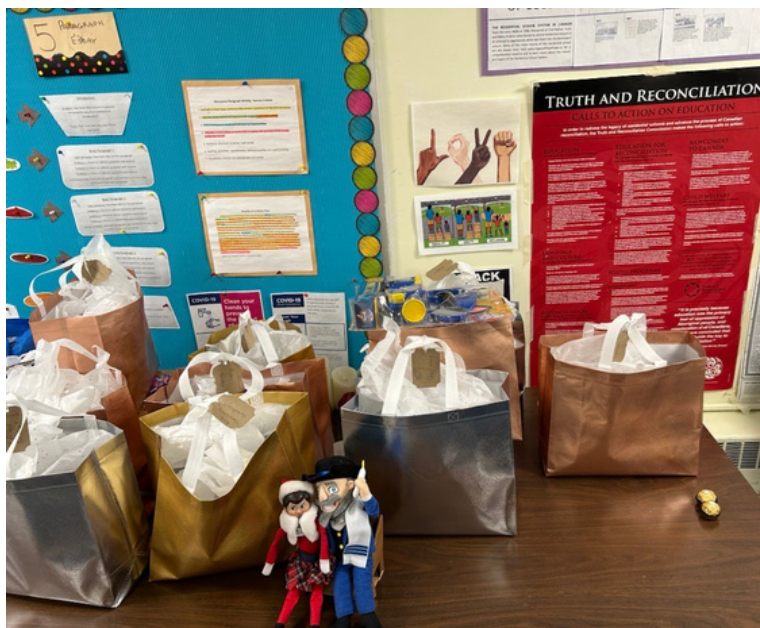
A heartfelt thank you to our generous donors who brightened the holiday season for the young moms and children in our community! Your kindness and generosity have created magical moments and brought joy to their hearts. The gifts and donations you provided not only filled their homes with warmth but also reminded them that they are cherished and supported. Your compassion has made a significant impact, making the holiday season truly special for these families. From all of us, thank you for spreading love and cheer during the festive time. Your generosity has touched lives and created lasting memories that will be cherished for years to come.





A Successful and Festive Holiday Season

The school Program at both Broadview and Humewood campuses successfully held their holiday events in December with an 80% turnout from the students. The students enjoyed cooked meals at the Humewood campus and pizza at the Broadview campus based on their requests. The students also participated in fun activities that allowed them to win prizes along with the other gifts provided by CP24 CHUM Christmas Wish. The staff and Program Supervisor also did some outreach and collected small donations that were used to create prizes and will be used as incentives throughout the year to motivate the students to achieve their goals. Some of the donors included CP24 CHUM Christmas Wish, Shoe Box Project, St. Michaels Church, St. Matthews Church, Brampton Association, Sweet Legs, Barbara's Room, Jackie's Beauty Portal, Chef Richie D, Vybe and Co, Designs by V, Ales Cookie Jar, Deposits, Eye got you, I_b_u_2, and other individual community members.



Empowered Progress

We are thrilled to share a heartwarming success story from one of our incredible Umoja clients this month! Picture this: a dedicated mother with a precious three-month-old baby, embarking on a journey to achieve her goals. In our recent meeting, we joyfully went through her objectives, and I'm over the moon to tell you that she not only met but exceeded expectations, ticking off an impressive 4 out of 8 goals in just three months!

Her achievements are nothing short of amazing – from securing vital childcare support to finding the perfect daycare spot for her little one. On top of that, she managed to obtain her TDSB transcript for adult learning and successfully applied to an adult learning center. These milestones aren't just tasks accomplished; they're steps toward completing her high school education, marking a remarkable journey of personal and educational growth.

This success story is a shining example of what can be achieved through our collaborative efforts. It underscores the profound impact we can make when we work hand in hand to support our clients in overcoming challenges and realizing their educational dreams. We celebrate this wonderful achievement and look forward to witnessing more inspiring moments on the journey ahead!





New Job & Apartment!

One of our young moms got a job offer in the Durham region. She will be working as a PSW and was able to secure a 3-bedroom apartment. She has transitioned off our rent supplement program this month and will remain a client for the next 6 months to ensure she is adjusting into her new home.



Full-Time Employment!

One young mom obtained the Administrative Assistant with Desktop Publishing certification from the Academy of Computer and Employment Skills. With all her hard work and determination, she was able to secure a placement that has resulted in a full-time employment offer.



Turning Goals into Reality!

After careful consideration, one young mom chose to pursue an ECE degree, with the goal of entering teachers college. She juggled a demanding five-credit course load, a part time job, and motherhood. Her dedication sets her on a path toward a meaningful career in education and serves as a powerful example of how hard work and determination can turn goals into reality.



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Need to contact us?

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