Abiona Centre
For Infant & Early Mental Health

Village in Action

2024–2025 Annual Report

A Message from Our Leadership

Reflecting on the past year, we are filled with both pride and renewed purpose. At Abiona Centre For Infant & Early Mental Health, we know that meaningful change happens when we listen closely to the lived experiences of young parents, particularly those navigating poverty, racism, housing instability, and trauma. In the past year, we have continued to centre these realities in everything we do — from housing and early parenting supports to mental health services and community partnerships.

Together, our team and board have worked with intention to deepen our trauma-informed practices and continue building a Centre of Excellence for Infant and Early Mental Health.

Key Highlights from the Past Year:

Program Growth

- Maternal Infant Mental Health (MIMH): Expanded relationship-based therapy and support for children (0–6) and their caregivers, including family psychotherapy and case management.
- EarlyON Expansion: Piloted evening and weekend programming to improve accessibility for families.

Organizational Development

- Advanced our new Client Information Management System to improve service coordination.
- Conducted a staff satisfaction survey developing action plans to enhance workplace culture.

Equity-Driven Leadership

- Our President & CEO participated as a member of the Steering Committee for Toronto's first Black Maternal Health Week with key health partners. We also hosted the Black Maternal Health Week Closing Ceremony at our Broadview Campus

Strategic Partnerships & Advocacy

- Through the Ujima Project, we supported 4,000+ young families across Ontario, completed 3,500+ ASQ screenings, and led 77 Baby Love groups.
- Working with Wilfrid Laurier University our President & CEO and the OAYPA produced a policy paper on the Young Parent & Infant sector. This paper will help the OAYPA advocate for improved services for young parents and their infants.

We remain active in policy leadership through our CEO's role as President of the Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies, helping shape provincial supports for young families.

Our Board of Directors has played a vital role in our success. In 2024, they took part in focused training on fundraising and governance and have been instrumental in preparing for our July 2025 accreditation with the Canadian Centre for Accreditation. We thank them for their exceptional dedication.

Looking ahead, our focus is clear: expanding access to culturally safe mental health care, strengthening advocacy, and ensuring every young family has the opportunity to thrive.

To our donors, funders, staff, volunteers, and the families we serve—thank you. Your belief in our work fuels our continued impact.

Beth Dewitt
Chair

Ekua Asabea Blair
President & CEO

Board of Directors

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Jody Maltby – United Church of Canada, Regional Council – Ex-officio*

Ekua Asabea Blair, President & CEO - Ex-officio*

* Left during the 2024 – 2025 fiscal year

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.

Vision

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

Photo: istockphoto.com

Year in Review

1270
young parents & babies served across all programs

850+
EarlyON Drop-in sessions held for families with children 0-6

130+
young mothers and babies are provided with safe transitional housing onsite

129
young moms & babies supported through Baby&Me: Our Home program to find and keep permanent housing

81
children enrolled in our child care centres

54
young moms participated in employment support programs

44
young moms received wraparound support through our in-home intensive service – the HomeNest program

38
young moms enrolled in our onsite high school programs

24
new mothers and their babies supported through our Live-in Treatment program

One Year Stronger:

Strategic Highlights from April 2024 – March 2025

April 2024

Organizational Excellence

Launched a new organizational structure to strengthen leadership and improve service integration.

Centre of Excellence for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Ujima Project
Building strong young families

Hosted the Ujima Project Impact Webinar to highlight community outcomes and best practices in early mental health.

May 2024

Client Voice and Responsive Programming

Launched the Young Parent Advisory Committee (YPAC) providing young mothers with a meaningful voice in shaping governance, programs, and services.

Systems Integration and Data-Driven Decision-Making

Advanced Phase 2 of the Client Information Management System (CIMS) implementation, including internal referral processes and online form development.

June 2024

Client Voice and Responsive Programming

Celebrated the graduation of five young mothers from our onsite high school—an inspiring milestone of strength and perseverance.

July 2024

Sector Leadership and Sustainable Funding

Through OAYPA, led by Abiona Centre's CEO, a $1.8M provincial funding increase for Young Parent and Infant Agencies was secured.

August 2024

Strategic Partnerships

In partnership with Dr. Jean Wittenberg and Yorktown Family Services, Abiona Centre initiated the transfer of responsibility for training in the Baby Love Preventative Intervention, becoming one of only two exclusive providers authorized to offer Baby Love training and fidelity-based clinical supervision.

September 2024

Community Engagement and Collaboration

Hosted our Annual Meeting of Members, bringing together staff, clients, board of directors, and supporters.

Sector Collaboration

Participated in MCCSS's regional housing integration table; CEO co-chaired the Violence Against Women Housing Work Group.

October 2024

Safe, Accessible, and High-Quality Infrastructure

Received $119,600 from MCCSS's Minor Capital Partner Facilities Renewal Fund to complete critical fire safety and plumbing upgrades.

November 2024

Service Quality and Client Voice

Relaunched the Quality Improvement Committee with three key priorities: family feedback, trauma-informed practices, and early intervention.

Advocacy and Sector Profile

OAYPA released its first policy brief focused on improving support for parenting youth and their children.

December 2024

Community Partnerships

Partnered with Baby Love Beginnings, one of our community partners who donate diapers monthly, to host a holiday gifting event that brought joy and essential items to young families.

January 2025

Safe, Accessible, and High-Quality Infrastructure

Received $369,000 from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to install air conditioning units within our Broadview Campus Transitional Housing program.

Program Innovation

Received rights to adapt the Inventory for Independent Living (IIL) tool from Dr. Jean Wittenberg. This tool helps us respond to service gaps identified by young moms.

February 2025

Centre of Excellence and Organizational Capacity

Restarted Integrated Care Coordination meetings and internal training as part of agency-wide accreditation readiness.

March 2025

Policy Alignment and Sector Leadership

MCCSS updated Young Parent Services guidelines to recognize early mental health and attachment-based supports—validating Abiona Centre's model and advocacy work.

Trudyann's Journey Through Transitional Housing:

Photo: istockphoto.com

A Story of Strength and Leadership

At just 19, Trudyann found herself facing a life-changing moment; she was pregnant. Living in Canada without family support and caught in an abusive situation, she struggled daily to find stability. By 20, she was living in a shelter with her newborn son, having put her education on hold and unsure of what her future could look like.

Everything changed the day she passed Abiona Centre's Sheppard campus. Curious, she looked it up and with help from her shelter support worker, applied to the program. "I believed that if I got into the program, it would change my entire life, and it definitely did," she says.

At Abiona Centre, Trudyann found the support and stability she needed to thrive. She completed her high school diploma, received housing and food support, and gained confidence through programs like Baby and Me: Our Home – a rent subsidy program and housing support service.

She also became deeply involved in community leadership, serving as a tenant representative on the Tenant Advisory Committee (TAC).

> *"Before Abiona Centre, I was confused about who I wanted to be. But my teachers and support workers saw something in me. Their belief motivated me to become who I am today; brave, vibrant, smart, and grateful."*

Now a proud mother of a four-year-old, Trudyann works as a personal support worker, has completed a medical esthetics program, and is studying to become a nurse. She hopes to open her own business to provide affordable self-care services in her community.

"Abiona Centre didn't label me for the life choices I made in the past. They believed in me and pushed me to become the woman I am today, and the woman I will be tomorrow. The love they gave is the love I now have the strength to give back to others."

Sheppard Campus - Transitional Housing Program

In partnership with Toronto Community Housing, Abiona Centre provides 27 rent-geared-to-income units for young mothers aged 16–24 at 1900 Sheppard Avenue, West. This transitional housing community offers a supportive environment for parenting mothers who are homeless or under-housed, with a maximum stay of up to four years. Residents receive case management, attend regular life skills workshops and tenant meetings, and are supported in working toward educational goals, finding employment, and transitioning to independent living.

Baby & Me: Finding Strength, Purpose, and a Home

At just 18, Sharrae learned she was pregnant with her first child. Still in high school, she faced the overwhelming challenge of preparing for motherhood while trying to find a stable home. "Making sure my baby had everything she needed was the most challenging situation for me," she recalls.

Now a proud mom to a 6- and 4-year-old, Sharrae reflects on her journey. She first learned about Abiona Centre—then known as Massey Centre—in 2019 through a shelter. What stood out to her was the wide range of support available. At Abiona Centre, Sharrae accessed housing assistance through the Baby & Me: Our Home, program and participated in employment programming and mental health services. "I had just graduated school and wasn't working. I had been searching for stable housing for months with no luck. Abiona Centre helped me organize my goals and actually achieve them."

Her time at Abiona Centre led to lasting personal growth. "I used to feel like I couldn't live a day without a friend," she reflects. "Now, I have a small circle, and I'm focused on being the best version of myself for my kids."

Although the pandemic limited in-person programs, she still found community virtually. "We had the time and space to talk about our challenges, or even just day-to-day life. It helped build community even in isolation."

Today, Sharrae is enrolled in college, working toward a certificate in Peer Mentoring, with plans to become a psychotherapist.

> *"Over the years, Abiona Centre contributed so much to my drive and my ability to keep going. The staff are such wonderful individuals, kind, resourceful, and always checking in on me and the kids. Thank you for being who you are."*

With renewed confidence, a stable home, and a clear vision for her future, Sharrae continues to grow as both a mother and a leader. Her journey is a powerful example of what's possible when young women are given the support, tools, and belief they need to succeed.

Photo: istockphoto.com

The **Baby and Me: Our Home** program helps pregnant and parenting single mothers secure and maintain permanent housing in Toronto. Participants receive support with housing searches, applications, rent subsidies, life skills workshops, financial literacy, and tenant rights. Through ongoing case management and community referrals, the program promotes housing stability and independence for young mothers and their children.

New Lives Start Here: A Launchpad for Growth and Independence

Emma arrived at Abiona Centre's New Lives Start Here – Housing and Education Program in October 2022 with her young daughter and a clear goal: to complete her degree in Behavioural Psychology. While navigating the challenges of school and parenting, she created a stable and nurturing home for her growing family. In February 2023, she welcomed her second child and just over a year later, she proudly graduated with her undergraduate degree.

With guidance from our family support workers, Emma strengthened her life skills in areas like budgeting, cooking, and time management. She balanced academics and motherhood with remarkable focus, making time for her studies while also prioritizing quality time with her children, including regular community activities.

Emma's academic journey didn't stop after graduation. She went on to complete a certificate in Addictions and Mental Health and, in early 2025, was accepted into a graduate program in Counselling Psychology. Around the same time, she reached another personal milestone: purchasing her first car, an achievement that reflects both her growth and independence.

Beyond her personal achievements, Emma plays an active role in shaping her community. As co-chair of Abiona Centre's Young Parent Advisory Committee, she advocates for the voices and needs of other young parents, helping to inform programs and services from lived experiences.

Emma's story is a powerful example of what's possible when young mothers have access to stable housing and the right supports. Abiona Centre's New Lives Start Here Program provided Emma with more than a place to live—it gave her the foundation to pursue her goals, care for her children, and build a future with confidence.

New Lives Start Here – Housing and Education Program provides up to four years of transitional housing for young mothers pursuing post-secondary education or training. The program combines stable housing with therapeutic support, life skills, and maternal-infant mental health services, empowering young families to thrive through healing and education.

Photo: istockphoto.com

Grace's Story

In this heartfelt video, created in partnership with the Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation, Grace reflects on her journey as a young mother far from home. Through Abiona Centre's Live-in Treatment and Transitional Housing programs, she found a village of support, safe housing, caring staff, and a community that walked alongside her. Her story is a powerful reminder that when young families are surrounded by care and connection, anything is possible.

Play Video ▶

Alessandra's Transformation Through the HomeNest Program

When Alessandra first came to Abiona Centre, she was navigating immense challenges. At 21, she was fresh out of college, newly pregnant, and struggling with an undiagnosed mental health issue—all while caring for her eldest son. "I was a young mom suffering and trying to find work in my field," she shares.

A friend told her about Abiona Centre, and she soon became involved in the HomeNest program and accessed speech therapy for her son. During her second pregnancy, she found crucial support from a HomeNest facilitator. "She was always someone I could talk to," Alessandra says.

But the road wasn't easy. While pregnant with her second child, a family argument led to a distressing misunderstanding. Her eldest son accidentally dialed emergency services, and what followed was treated as a domestic violence incident. Alessandra's partner was arrested, and a no-contact order was put in place for nearly four months. "We couldn't see or speak to each other," she recalls. "The staff were incredibly helpful in connecting me with the right people and guiding me through that time."

Despite the emotional weight of that experience, Alessandra continued to invest in her growth. Through Abiona Centre's Employment Support Program, she built a strong résumé, improved her interview skills, and gained confidence. "I've grown in so many ways. I'm more patient, more attentive, mentally stable, and better prepared for life."

Looking ahead, Alessandra's dream is to move her family into a home outside the city. "I'm saving money and looking for good areas to move to," she says. "The HomeNest program taught me to take things step by step, instead of trying to rush through it all."

HomeNest supports young parents and their children through in-home and community services using the WrapAround model. The program helps families break life goals into manageable steps and builds a strong community support network, empowering lasting success in all areas of their lives.

Building Community Through Cooking

At our Sheppard Campus located at 1900 Sheppard Avenue West, our monthly cooking program in partnership with Black Creek CHC, has become more than just a life skills workshop; it's a space where young mothers connect, unwind, and support one another.

In one session, a mother arrived exhausted after a long shift, her child in tow. Without hesitation, another participant offered to care for the child so she could rest and join the group later. It was a small act of kindness, but one that perfectly captured the spirit of the program—a growing community built on empathy and shared experience.

This year, participation in our monthly cooking program has steadily increased, with some sessions having **twice as many participants** as earlier in the year!

Empowering Young Mothers Through Employment

The Success in Employment for Adolescent Mothers (SEAM) program has been a transformative force for young mothers navigating the challenges of parenting and employment. For participants like Lilyanne, SEAM offered far more than job training—it provided stability, purpose, and a sense of belonging.

> *"Participating in the SEAM Program was one of the best decisions I've made," says Lilyanne, a 24-year-old mother of two. "I formed strong friendships and found a supportive community that I now consider family... I truly couldn't ask for anything more."*

Through SEAM, Lilyanne earned her Food Handling Certificate, set achievable goals, and gained the confidence to pursue a better future, all while caring for her young daughter with autism spectrum disorder.

Though the original Government of Canada–funded SEAM program has come to a close, its impact continues to resonate in the lives it touched. We're pleased to share that the LesLois Shaw Foundation has stepped forward to sustain the core of the newly renamed Employment Support Program—offering continued employment readiness, job skills training, and mentorship for young mothers. Their support is empowering a new generation to thrive.

The **Employment Support Program** helps young mothers build job readiness skills, gain confidence, and prepare to re-enter the workforce. Over four weeks, participants explored careers, set goals, earn certifications, and received support in financial literacy, mental wellness, and job searching—laying the foundation for long-term employment and independence.

Young Leaders at the Table: The Impact of the Young Parent Advisory Committee

The Young Parent Advisory Committee (YPAC) gives young mothers at Abiona Centre a meaningful role in shaping programs and services that affect them. More than a discussion group, YPAC centres their lived experiences to guide decisions on mental health, parenting, housing, healthcare, stigma, employment, and event planning.

YPAC was formed because young parents are often talked about but rarely included. Here, their expertise is respected—they participate in board meetings and contribute to program development and events like Open Mic Night. They've also provided important input on the client complaint flyer and client satisfaction survey, helping make communications clearer and more welcoming.

Their insights have strengthened our programs and communications, ensuring young parents feel truly heard, valued, and supported.

> *"Being a part of YPAC has empowered me to use my voice in ways I never imagined. It's given me confidence, leadership skills, and a sense of community. With more support, YPAC could grow into something even greater – offering mentorship, training service providers, leading advocacy efforts, and creating toolkits for youth-led initiatives in our community. When young parents are trusted to lead, real change happens."*
>
> *- Dominique LaFleur, YPAC Co-chair*

Early Learning Centre: Where Little Learners Grow

This year, our Early Learning Centre programs continue to provide safe, nurturing, and inclusive environments where children can learn, grow, and thrive. We remain committed to delivering high-quality childcare services to both young families living on-site and to families in the broader community with children aged 0–4. By supporting early childhood development and family stability, our Early Learning Centres play a vital role in helping families build strong foundations for the future.

Photo: istockphoto.com

> *"Since we enrolled our daughter into Abiona Centre's Early Learning Centre, we have seen her thriving as a confident, social and happy kid in just a few months... Every time we pick her up, we see how much care, time and effort the team puts in to ensure our little one is physically nourished with great food and intellectually stimulated with various activities."*

EarlyON Child and Family Centre After Hours: Supporting Families on Their Time

This year, we piloted new evening and weekend programs to make EarlyON services more accessible to families with diverse schedules. EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free, high-quality programs for families with children aged 0-6. These programs support early learning and development, provide parenting resources, and allow families to connect with each other and with community services. By extending our hours, we're helping more families benefit from this valuable support in ways that fit their daily lives.

> *"Having been to a few EarlyONs across the city, Abiona is our favourite one by far — in terms of the staff, programming, facilities, equipment, and toys... The team has created such a warm and welcoming environment as well. As a first-time mom, I truly appreciated that and often recommend this to fellow moms in the neighbourhood."*

A Year of New Beginnings: Live-in Treatment Program

This year, Abiona Centre proudly welcomed 10 babies born within our Live-in Treatment program, which provides 24/7 support to young mothers aged 13 to 21 and their infants. Participants can join at any stage of pregnancy and stay up to six months after delivery.

The program supports healthy births, mother–baby bonding, newborn care, and life skills for parenting and independence. Each mother creates a personalized care plan and takes part in structured activities like schooling, counselling, and prenatal classes.

Congratulations to our new mothers!

Ujima Project: A Celebrated Success in Supporting Young Families

Ujima Project
Building strong young families

We are proud to have led the Ujima Project, a transformative proof of concept project that advanced early childhood development and expanded access to services for young families across Ontario. An initiative of the Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies (OAYPA) and in partnership with SickKids, we established nine Early Childhood Development Hubs, providing evidence-based services such as developmental screenings, early literacy groups, referral to specialized children's treatment services and attachment programming like Baby Love. These Hubs, equipped with Early Literacy Specialists and Family Navigators, played a crucial role in supporting young families and helping them navigate challenges.

> *"Being a First Time Mom, I didn't have a lot of resources when it came to my son. After a conversation with my family facilitator, I was able to make a plan for my future and access resources to help with the day-to-day journey of life."*
>
> *- Ujima Parent*

Over the course of three years, the project has had an impressive reach providing support to over **4,200 vulnerable young families**.

- **3,591** Ages and Stages Questionnaires and **872** Developmental Support Plans conducted with **1,277** children
- **309** referrals to Speech and Language services
- **3,535** families accessing early literacy supports (1:1 sessions, group programming)
- **2,829** families accessing family navigation supports through **18,923** service interactions

The robust project evaluation was co-designed with staff, leadership and young parents and evaluation finds demonstrated that the Ujima Project was successful in supporting young families including:

- Increased confidence in navigating health and social service systems
- Increased awareness and advocacy of needs
- Improvements to positive parenting techniques.

With the project officially ending in January 2024, Abiona Centre remains committed to ensuring the lasting impact of the Ujima Project and continuing our efforts to secure sustainable funding for similar initiatives in the future.

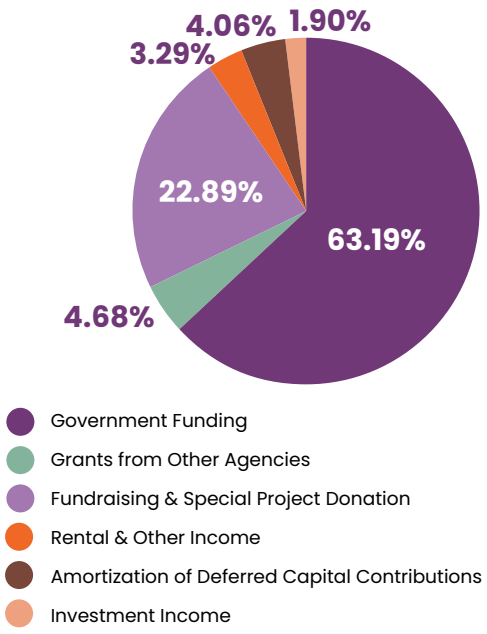
For more information, visit:
https://www.oaypa.ca/ujima-project/.

Financial Highlights:

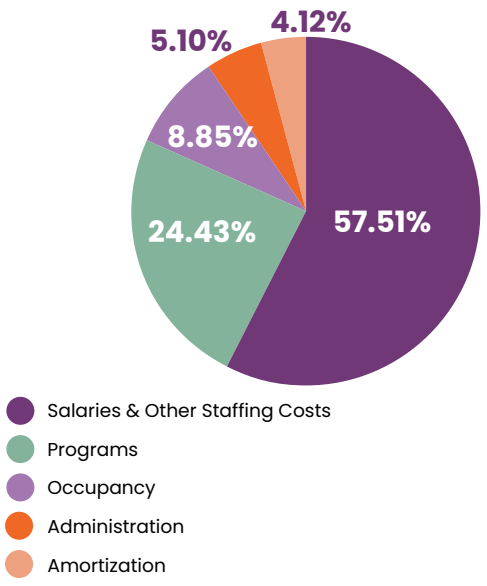
Ensuring Transparency and Accountability

Audited Income statement for the period of April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025.

REVENUES	$ 10,911,157
Government Funding	$ 6,894,490
Grants from Other Agencies	$ 510,451
Fundraising & Special Project Donations	$ 2,497,284
Rental & Other Income	$ 359,151
Amortization of Deferred Capital Contributions	$ 442,744
Investment Income	$ 207,037



EXPENSES	$ 10,727,050
Salaries & Other Staffing Costs*	$ 6,168,649
Programs	$ 2,620,120
Occupancy	$ 949,138
Administration	$ 547,278
Amortization	$ 441,865



SURPLUS	$ 184,107

* includes administration salaries

Thank You to our Donors and Funders!

Government of Canada

Canada Revenue Agency, Children's Special Allowances

Employment and Social Development Canada, Canada Summer Jobs

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

Other

United Way

$100,000+

Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation

TD Bank Group

$50,000 - $99,999

Capitalize For Kids

Leslois Shaw Foundation

Scotiabank Rise

$10,000 - $49,999

Azrieli Foundation

Mitchell & Susan Brown and Family

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The Tenaquip Foundation

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$5,000 - $9,999

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Scotiabank Capital Markets

Toronto United Church Council

The United Church of Canada Foundation

$1,000 – $4,999

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CHUM Charitable Foundation

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The Dawson Family Sharing Foundation

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United Steelworkers Local 1998
Rhonda L Upshaw

$500 - $999

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BAP Foundation
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Brookes Publishing Co
Diana Cameron
Chapel In the Park United Church
Cummer Avenue United Church Women
Daily Bread Food Bank
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Parkwoods United Church
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Abiona Centre
For Infant & Early Mental Health

www.abionacentre.ca
giving@abionacentre.ca
T: 416-425-6348
F: 416-425-4056

Charitable Registration
No.11928 3687 RR0001

Broadview Campus & Head Office
1102 Broadview Avenue, Toronto, ON M4K 2S5

Humewood Campus
40 Humewood Drive, Toronto, ON, M6C 2W4
55-57 Humewood Drive, Toronto, ON, M6C 2W4

Sheppard Campus
1900 Sheppard Avenue West, Toronto, ON, M3L 2G8