



**Abilities
Centre™**

Abilities Centre 2022-2023 Impact Report



2022-2023 Abilities Centre Impact Report



**Abilities
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How to navigate this report

This report has been arranged into sections. To assist with the navigation of the report, there are headings for each section and each Abilities Centre program or initiative described. To go to a specific page, please click on the name of the section you would like to see within the Table of Contents. This will take you right to that page.

Our Purpose:

Unlock potential through accessibility

Our Mission:

Reimagining accessibility and redefining the way Canadians live, work & play

Values

Person-centred:

prioritizing the needs and well-being of individuals in decision-making and actions, ensuring everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Genuine:

committing to communicating information and behaving in a way that is authentic, honest, and aligned with stated priorities and principles.

Flexible:

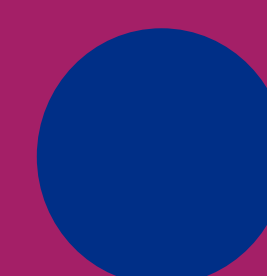
adapting and adjusting to changing circumstances, environments, and situations to consider new approaches and ideas that are accessible and inclusive.

Innovative:

challenging the norm and thinking of new and creative ways to achieve goals and best practices, while taking calculated risks and embracing change.

Collaborative:

seeking out and valuing the input of others and those with lived experience to work together and build an inclusive community.





**Sharon Cochran,
Interim Chair, Board
of Directors**

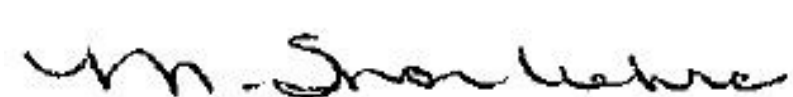
Message from the Chair of the Board

**As the Chair of the Abilities Centre,
it is my pleasure to present our
2022-23 Impact Report.**

This year, we have seen our programs and services grow across the province and the country. In this report, you will read about the development the Abilities Centre has been driving, challenging municipalities, school boards, post-secondary institutions, businesses, and employers to think differently about their policies and practices. We are working to empower members of our communities to make changes that support accessibility and inclusion.

Another area highlighted in this report is the role the Abilities Centre has played and will continue to play in supporting the disability community. We will continue to build equitable access to education, after school programs, employment, community based post-rehabilitation, sport, recreation, and independent living. As we look forward, we will focus on developing programs that increase the economic participation of individuals with disabilities, showcasing how their skills, knowledge and expertise support the diversified workforce that Canada needs in order to thrive in this global economy. Additionally, the implementation of our new strategic plan will further solidify our purpose and define our path forward.

I want to thank the Board of Directors for their continued support and engagement. I also want to acknowledge the Abilities Centre staff for their on-going commitment to innovation and their dedication to creating and implementing programs of the highest quality.



Sharon Cochran,
Interim Chair, Board of Directors



Message from the Executive Leadership Team



Ross Ste-Croix,
GM & COO



Pinder DaSilva,
VP Programs, Partnerships
& Impact

In 2022-2023 Abilities Centre found itself balancing new opportunities discovered during the pandemic. We returned to the way of life that we all missed during lockdowns and enhanced health and safety protocols. This year was a year of re-building and re-connecting, and we are proud of how we weathered the storm and managed to not just survive, but to thrive during a period of considerable change.

We celebrated our first 10 years and looked back to see how we have evolved, and the impact we have had, in that time. In 2023-2024, we will welcome a new President & CEO who will help us to begin telling the story of the next 10 years. In that time, we will continue to expand our reach across Canada as we build towards our Vision of a better, barrier-free life for all Canadians. This will involve an even greater involvement of those with lived experience in everything we do, from conception to execution, and from Programs to Human Resources and Accessible Technology. It is through innovation that we will find solutions to the challenges we face.

Our Mission is to Unlock potential through accessibility. To unlock the Centre's full potential, we will need to build our network of partners and supporters to build a sustainable foundation on which to moor the scaling of our programs and services. We have the tools to change the world for the better. Through our training and education initiatives, we can educate organizations and give them the tools they need to become more accessible and inclusive. Through our vocational services, we can supply a struggling workforce with an influx of talented, motivated individuals who want to become participating members of the economy. Through our therapeutic recreation, skills development, and sport programs, we can provide individuals with the tools and support they need to succeed throughout their life. And we can do it all from our community hub - our home base here in Durham Region.

As you read on and learn about the impact we had in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, we challenge you to visualize how you can contribute to that impact. At some point in all our lives, we will have to deal with accessibility challenges. It is our responsibility to ensure that every one of us can experience equitable access to programs and services. It is only through working together to prioritize accessibility and inclusion and to remove barriers that we will unlock our potential as a community; as a Region; as a Province; as a Country.

Executive Leadership Team



Ross Ste-Croix,
GM & COO



Pinder DaSilva,
VP Programs,
Partnerships & Impact

2022-2023 Year in Review

2022-2023 was a big year for Abilities Centre. With the re-opening of the Centre following the lift of the COVID-19 restrictions, the launch of new programs and services, and the growth of our membership, this year was one of the most successful we have had to date.

In honour of our 10th anniversary, we celebrated the many milestones we have achieved and reflected on how our continued commitment to accessibility and inclusion has impacted our communities and Canadians with disabilities. In Canada, over 6.2 million individuals live with a disability. At Abilities Centre, we strive to unlock potential through accessibility to build a better, barrier-free life for all Canadians, especially individuals with a disability.

Abilities Centre started with the vision to improve access for individuals with disabilities so that they could fully participate in their communities. Since then, we have been able to support individuals with disabilities to engage in our communities and we have worked with the communities to create a place where all are welcome. Abilities Centre continues to challenge biases, perceptions, and assumptions about persons with disabilities and of other marginalized groups and intersecting identities to contribute to our workforce, participate in recreation, join competitive sport clubs, to be entrepreneurs, and be independent members of our communities.

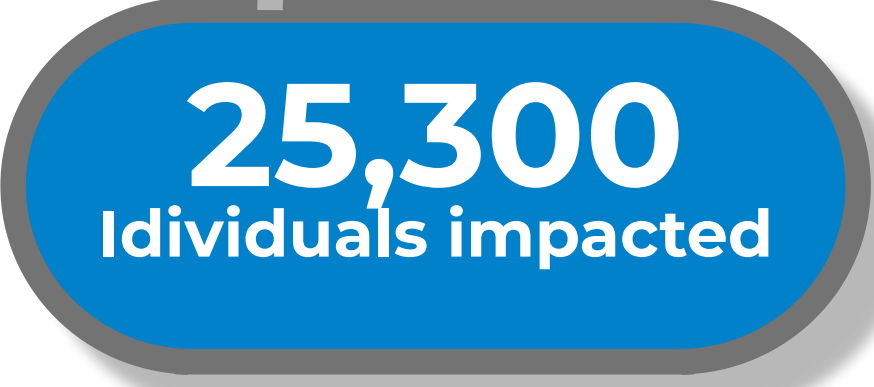
This year, more than any other year, we broke down barriers for people with disabilities and other marginalized groups. We worked with provincial and national sport and community organizations to provide equitable opportunities for all individuals to participate alongside their peers. We created cross-sectoral partnerships with school boards and municipalities to break down barriers to accessing programs, services, and employment by providing services in the community. We partnered with academic research to conduct and publish new research with the disability community.



Breaking Barriers



300%
Growth in membership



25,300
Individuals impacted



\$250K
Raised at AC Accessibility Awards



Growing IDEA



Award Winning



Program Expansion



Unlocking Potential

We invested in our staff with training and development opportunities, to support those who work so hard to uphold our purpose, vision, and mission. We created and co-designed new innovative programs based on research and lived experiences to meet the needs of the communities we serve, and we created a sustainable model of programs and services that have spread to serve more individuals with and without disabilities across Canada.

Abilities Centre has always been a place for our community, but our programs and services have gone beyond our walls in Durham and into Ontario and across Canada. In our organization, we build and test innovative programs through research to ensure that we can provide the highest quality programming for everyone. Our programs and services are co-developed with people with lived experience to help us create programs and opportunities that meet the needs of the communities we serve.



This year, we were fortunate to receive new funding from the Government of Ontario. The \$3.5 million over the next 3 years will support the development and growth of Vocational Services at Abilities Centre. This funding comes from the success of our employment programs and the continued need to support those who want to find gainful employment.

In addition to this funding, Canadian Tire Jumpstart and the Government of Ontario renewed their funding for 2022-2023. This funding supported our Sport and Recreation Programs and our Skills Development, Therapeutic Recreation, Post-Rehabilitation and Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery (LEAD) programs, respectively. It allows us to do the work we do and continue to serve over 25,300 individuals each year. Our previous Jumpstart funding resulted in impacting over 130,858 children and youth over the past 5 years. In addition to the funding we receive through grants and the government, we are also extremely fortunate to receive financial support from our business and corporate partners. We would not be able to serve our local community as well as our growing community across Canada without financial support from all our partners.

Some of our highlights from this year include:

Growing our membership from just over 500 members to 2,000 individuals and providing more classes for members than ever since the pandemic.

Hosting the first annual Abilities Centre Accessibility Awards and Gala, which raised over \$250,000.

Accompanying the Oshawa Vikings Mixed Ability Rugby team to the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament (IMART) in Cork, Ireland and sharing our work at the Mixed Ability Week International Conference.

Contributing to the Canadian Physical Activity Report Card for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities .

Winning the Whitby Chamber of Commerce Award for the non-profit of the year and the Readers' Choice Awards 2022 for Oshawa and Whitby in Fitness club and Recreation Facility categories.

Launching new Academy for Student-Athlete Development (ASAD) programs in Ottawa, ON, and Fort Providence, NWT.

Contributing to Canada's Parallel Report in response to the United Nation's review of Canada's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Growing our Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Advisory Council.¹

At Abilities Centre, we are excited to see how we continue to grow and serve our community in Durham and across the country. We hope this report gives you a snapshot of our work this year and that you continue to support us by sharing this report, following us on social media, or donating to our charitable organization so we can continue to reimagine accessibility and redefine the way Canadians live, work, and play.

1. The IDEA Advisory Council is a volunteer community council made up of 14 individuals with various lived experiences. The Advisory Council meets monthly, where they learn about Abilities Centre departments and ongoing initiatives and provide input on integrating IDEA into the Centre's work. The IDEA council continues to help Abilities Centre create a space that is accessible and inclusive to all.

Our Team

Abilities Centre's staff continues to grow to meet the needs of our community. Our staff is made up of passionate individuals who share their experiences and knowledge to make the organization a leader in accessibility and inclusion.

This year, Abilities Centre spent time investing in our team. Through our Teaching and Learning Institute², staff identified areas of growth and professional development for our organization. We want to ensure that Abilities Centre is accessible and inclusive to all our team members and that staff have opportunities to unlock their potential in their work.

Abilities Centre's Teaching and Learning Institute brought forward opportunities for staff to grow professionally and personally in the workplace.



Some initiatives that we ran include:

- Participation from all Abilities Centre Staff in our Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery (LEAD) program in April 2022. This process allowed staff to come together and identify where Abilities Centre can continue to improve in our internal and external accessibility and inclusion practices.
- Creation of Professional Development sessions. We had both internal and external speakers deliver professional development session, in partnership with our IDEA Department³. Sessions from Durham Deaf Services and Canadian Hearing Services on Misconceptions and Best Practices for communicating and working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing people, Shauna Bookal on on Creating Inclusive Workplaces for the BIPOC Community, and Canadian National Institute for the Blind on Employment for the Sight Loss Community were a few of the most popular professional development sessions run this year. We also partnered with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion to attend their professional development webinars on topics such as Microaggressions and Antisemitism.
- Creation of a staff support group, called the Take-a-penny, Leave-a-penny club, to provide a space for personal and professional development for Abilities Centre staff.
- Continuation of our Staff Demographic Survey. This survey informs our IDEA strategy internally as well as our hiring practices. The goal of the survey is to identify the communities in which Abilities Centre staff belong to and capture the changing staff landscape over time.
- Continuation of our Staff Engagement Survey. This survey helps us better understand how staff feel about the leadership at Abilities Centre, their work experience, career development, and the culture of the Centre. This information will be used to help us continue to improve as an employer and make sure that we are meeting our staff's needs.
- Launched Abilities Centre's Discovery College. Discovery College is a community education initiative designed to give all members of the Abilities Centre community access to participate in and deliver courses on topics of interest. This year, we launched our first course on Bibliotherapy, and trained staff on how to deliver the sessions. We are looking to bring more community opportunities in the future, including partnering with Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences and their Recovery College to learn more about Mental Health.
- Hosted our first All-staff Day in May 2022, since the pandemic. This event brought together the staff to participate in team building activities, led by Greg Frankson, and to learn about our Strategic Plan. This was also a way for the organization to recognize and celebrate all the hard work the staff do each and every day.



The investment in the growth and development of our staff reflects Abilities Centre's journey to remain responsive to the needs of our communities and reflective of the diverse populations that we serve.

We want to ensure that Abilities Centre is not only an excellent place for individuals of all lived experiences and abilities to live, work, and play, but it is an organization that supports the personal and professional growth of its staff.

2. Abilities Centre's Teaching and Learning Institute is an internal committee dedicated to the personal and professional growth of the Abilities Centre's staff and community. The Teaching and Learning Institute formed in 2021 with staff from the Human Resources, Programs and Services, IDEA, and Research Departments and oversees all internal and external training for staff and community education opportunities for all.

3. Abilities Centre's is committed to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA). With the support of our IDEA Department, we embed inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility into all our programs, collaborations, and projects to ensure we build strong, trusting relationships, especially when working with persons with disabilities and minority groups.



Impact & Research

Abilities Centre is a community hub, research lab, and innovation incubator. Our goal is to use thoughtful and innovative research methods to identify gaps in our community and create programs to meet those needs. We work alongside individuals with lived experience, our members, participants, and partners to create and improve our programs and services so that they continue to be accessible and inclusive for all.

Research at Abilities Centre is embedded within each of our programs and services. Research informs the way in which we conduct our work and achieve our mission and vision. All our programs and services aim to improve individuals' quality of life by supporting health and wellness, social inclusion, and/or economic participation. To capture the impact of our programs, we conduct regular evaluations. This year, we evaluated 33 of our programs and services to capture the impact they have on our participants and members. From these evaluations we were able to capture impact from 10,000 individuals.

However, impact at Abilities Centre is more than just the number of people who participate in our programs - it is the outcome of our work on the lives of the people we serve. It goes beyond what we can measure and captures the stories of individuals who participate. Impact can be individuals successfully finding a job, students building resilience to overcome obstacles, and/or seniors increasing their ability to participate in activities of daily living. With all our programs, we aim to create positive and lasting change in our communities, while unlocking individuals' potential.

In addition to measuring the impact of our programs and services, we work hard to have an impact on our communities. Research at Abilities Centre provides the foundation that allows us to advance the scale of our work and impact to a national and global level. This year, Abilities Centre partnered with academic institutions across Canada to develop, conduct, and share research that breaks down barriers for Canadians, especially those with disabilities.



33
Program evaluations

impacting
10K
people



Health & Wellness

Social Inclusion



Some highlights from our research collaborations this year include:

- Named as a co-applicant on the Social Science and Humanities Research Council SSHRC Partnership Grant for the Canadian Disability Participation Project (CDPP), led by Dr. Amy Latimer-Cheung at Queen's University. This project will begin in 2023.
- Contributed to the SSHRC Connection Grant "Co-creation of an interactive technology digital program-evaluation toolkit for Canadian physical activity programs for people with disabilities" as a co-applicant, led by Dr. Kathleen Martin Ginis at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan. This project began in 2022 and will end in 2023.
- Co-authored journal article "[Physical literacy and the participant perspective: Exploring the value of physical literacy according to individuals experiencing disability through composite narratives](#)" led by Dr. Kyle Pushkarenko at Memorial University and published in the Journal of Exercise Science & Fitness.
- Contributed to the journal article "[The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical activity and social isolation among adults with physical disabilities living in Canada and the Netherlands](#)" led by Drs Kim Meijer at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Femke Hoekstra at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan and published in Disabilities.
- Co-authored journal article "[Physical activity, well-being, and the needs of Canadians with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)" led by Dr. Cameron Gee at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan and published in Disabilities.
- Co-created knowledge translation product, led by Active Living Alliance for Canadians with Disability, [exploring the physical activity and recreational sport experiences of mothers with disabilities.](#)

Economic Participation



Quality of Life



Each of these projects contribute to the overall advancement of both the research for persons with disabilities and the programs conducted at Abilities Centre. The work done in these projects informs and guides our knowledge, work, and contributions at national and global planning tables. Research allows us to be leaders in the field of accessibility and inclusion. This report highlights the impact Abilities Centre has had on our local, provincial, and national community.

Training & Education

Training and Education at Abilities Centre promotes continuous learning for our community. Our goal is to support individuals and organizations in building accessible and inclusive communities by providing them with the tools and resources they need. This year, our Training and Education initiatives were able to reach more individuals and enhance their learning by using principles of co-development and co-design. We encourage all those who attend our Training and Education initiatives to think about how they can become leaders of accessibility and inclusion and help create a better, barrier-free life for all Canadians.

Additionally, Abilities Centre staff engage in community events and discuss accessibility and inclusion with various communities across Canada.

Some of the speaking engagements this year included:

- Abilities Centre's Vice President of Programs, Partnership, and Impact, Pinder DaSilva, was part of a panel at Queen's University on the theme of Advocacy in Practice: Perspectives from Decision Makers, Health and Service Providers and Patients. Pinder presented alongside Dr. Jane Philpott, Dean of Health Sciences and Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health for the province of Ontario.
- Abilities Centre's Director of IDEA, Yin Brown was a speaker at the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Unconference.
- Abilities Centre's former President & CEO, Stuart McReynolds was a speaker at the Atlantic Recreation & Facilities Conference.



LEAD™

Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery (LEAD™) is one of Abilities Centre's signature training initiatives. LEAD™ is a process that helps organizations improve their accessibility and inclusion. It is a facilitated self-assessment that allows organizations to reflect on how their internal practice, processes, and culture can be made more inclusive and identify how they can embed both accessibility and inclusion into their organization in a sustainable way. LEAD™ is a key example of how Abilities Centre is supporting inclusivity and breaking down systemic barriers that prevent full and meaningful participation in the communities in which we all live, work, and play.

LEAD™ launched in Canada five years ago in collaboration with Activity Alliance, a UK-based organization, to help address challenges in Canada and provide equitable opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in their communities. Since its launch, Abilities Centre has facilitated LEAD™ with 36 sport and recreation organizations, not-for-profits, municipalities, and school boards across Canada to implement strategies that better support the need of people with disabilities. LEAD™ helps organizations achieve transformational change, which is when organizations understand how and what they need to change to become more accessible and inclusive.

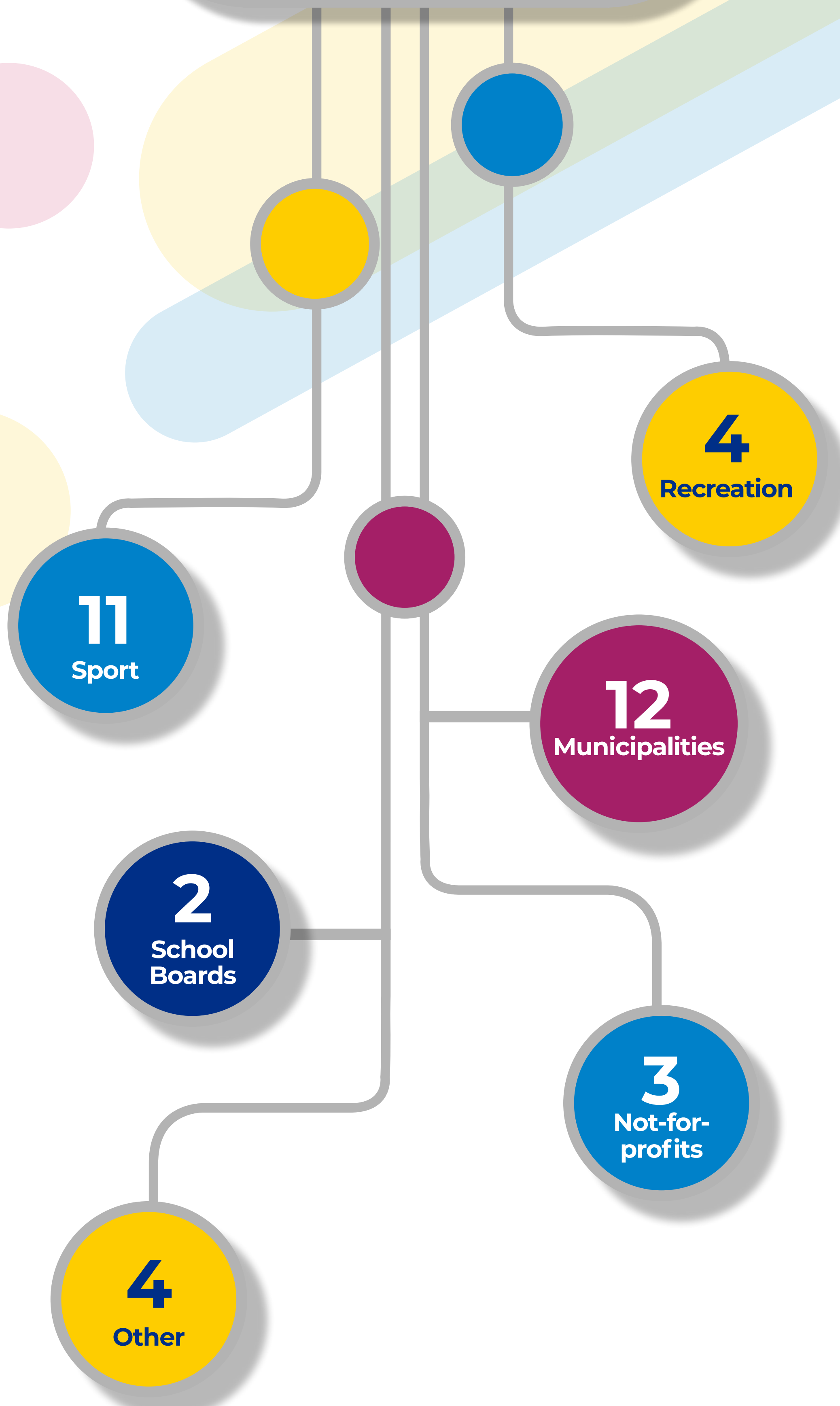
This year, Abilities Centre facilitated LEAD™ with 14 organizations. We saw an increase in the demand for LEAD™, especially among municipalities. With many organizations updating or creating multi-year accessibility plans, LEAD™ was instrumental in supporting organizations to create plans that met and exceeded accessibility guidelines.

As a result of participating in LEAD™, organizations have

- Included accessibility and disability in their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies.
- Embedded LEAD™ improvement plans in their multi-year accessibility plans or organizational strategic plans.
- Updated Human Resource practices for hiring and succession planning, including creating inclusive job descriptions.
- Built-in or increased budgets for accessibility accommodations.
- Modified procurement processes to be more inclusive of marginalized population groups.
- Enhanced training curricula to include accessibility training.
- Increased partnerships with disability organizations.
- Increased website and document accessibility.
- Applied disability-inclusion principles to other programs for specific population groups (e.g., newcomers, seniors, and youth).

430
individuals representing executive leaders, management, front line staff and community members since 2018

LEAD™ has been facilitated with 36 organizations



In addition to supporting organizations through the LEAD™ process, a new evaluation was created for organizations that participated in LEAD™. In partnership with Queen's University, we assessed the confidence, opportunity, and motivation organizations had to embed accessibility and inclusion into their workplace. We found that most organizations had the opportunity and motivation to increase accessibility and inclusion in their organizations before and after participating in LEAD™. However, across most organizations, before starting LEAD™, individuals had low confidence to action changes. This information has allowed the LEAD™ team to embed confidence-building strategies into their facilitation and make changes to the LEAD™ content to better support the organizations after they complete the LEAD™ self-assessment.

The LEAD™ training initiative will continue to expand this upcoming year by supporting more organizations across Canada and providing more tailored facilitation and improvement plans to organizations at various stages of the accessibility and inclusion journey.



Inclusion Journey

Embed Confidence



LEAD™ In Action:

Abilities Centre went through the LEAD™ process again this year. In April 2022, over 100 Abilities Centre staff participated in the LEAD™ self-assessment. This process allowed us to reflect on what we are doing well and where we can continue to improve in terms of accessibility and inclusion.

Some of the changes that Abilities Centre has made since going through LEAD™ include:

- Expanded hiring practices to be more inclusive and created better processes for internal staff to access job opportunities and career progression.
- Updated training for new staff by creating organization-specific training.
- Updated job descriptions and postings to be written in plain language.
- Improved website content and accessibility by providing more opportunities for the community to give feedback and adding an accessibility widget.
- Created an annual plan for professional development opportunities for all staff related to IDEA.
- Simplified financial processes and increased budget for accommodations.

Disability Inclusion Workshop

Abilities Centre's Disability Inclusion workshop⁴ is a training and education initiative that provides organizations with specialized learning about disability. The workshop provides individuals with the platform to reflect on their own knowledge of inclusion by analyzing concepts such as assumptions & biases, language, and models of disability, and removing barriers related to how individuals can participate in all aspects of a business. The workshop provides an introductory understanding of inclusion and highlights best practices for breaking down stigma related to disability.



17
Disability
Inclusion
workshops

This year, the Disability Inclusion Facilitation Team delivered 17 Disability Inclusion workshops to over 300 individuals. The organizations that participated were from various sectors, including businesses, not-for-profits, and municipalities. The knowledge shared in these workshops has led organizations to become more aware of disability inclusion practices and led many to change their business practices to be more accessible and inclusive and to provide more opportunities for people with disabilities. It has also helped increase the opportunity for economic participation of people with disabilities within various sectors and represents a significant step forward in creating more inclusive and accessible communities.

Over 300
Individuals



**Knowledge
Of Inclusion**

4. The workshop is delivered by the Disability Inclusion Facilitation Team, who are Abilities Centre staff with lived experience with disability. The content is built off their personal experiences and current research and literature.

Mixed Ability Sport™



Through partnership with International Mixed Ability Sports (IMAS), Abilities Centre is the only organization to deliver Mixed Ability Sport (MAS™) in Canada. Since 2020, we have led education, training, and advocacy initiatives to support change in the Canadian sport system. Mixed Ability is a social movement within sports that actively promotes inclusion and equity by fostering a sense of belonging and membership to a group, team, or club. The Mixed Ability Sport™ model is an innovative approach to inclusive sports that creates a safe, welcoming, and accessible environment for all athletes to participate in a meaningful way.

By following the MAS™ model, mainstream and grassroots clubs redefine membership within their teams, welcoming individuals of all abilities and life experiences to take part in community sports, without being separated, classified, or labeled. By capitalizing on the power of sports to drive social change, MAS™ is a promising avenue for improving engagement in physical activity and recreation pursuits while promoting additional positive outcomes for everyone.

At Abilities Centre, we are proud to offer a range of training opportunities to support MAS™, including coach certification, ambassador training, MAS™ sport affiliation, and club accreditation. Our Inclusion in Sport team is composed of individuals with lived experience who are committed to breaking down barriers to participation and creating a safe and welcoming space for all. In the last year alone, we trained 42 coaches from 7 different sports and 18 clubs across 8 regions of Ontario.

In April 2022, we recognized the first annual National Mixed Ability Sport week. Try-it sessions and demonstrations were hosted across 6 cities in 5 different sports.

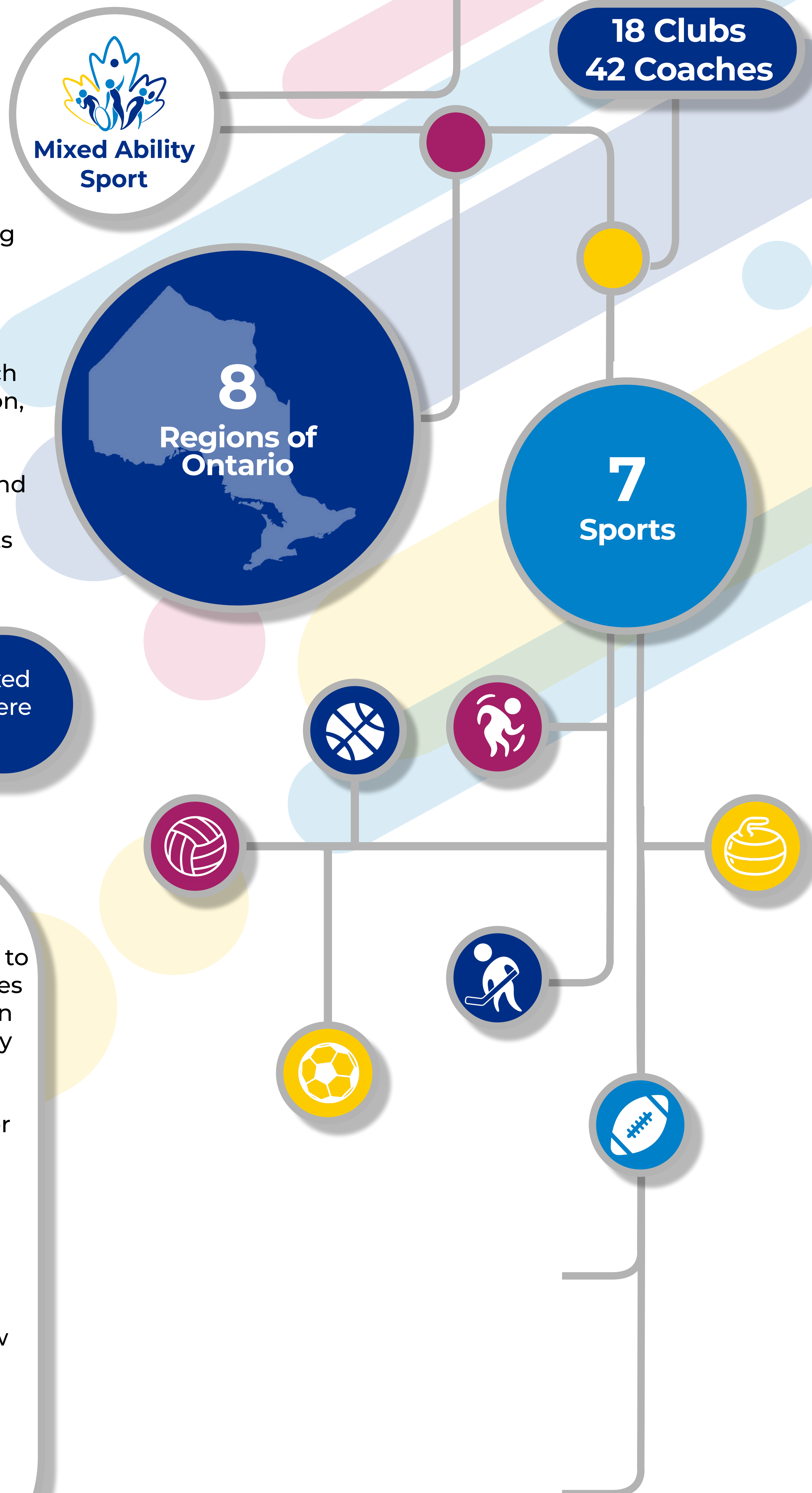
The impact of adopting the MAS™ model is evident in the experiences of participating clubs. For example, the Oshawa Vikings rugby club was the first club in Canada to receive Mixed Ability Sport accreditation through Abilities Centre and the first-ever Canadian team to participate in the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament. Many of the Vikings' players shared that they were honoured and proud to be part of Canadian rugby history. When asked about coming together with athletes from all over the world to compete, one representative said,

“the culture of inclusion is almost tangible to touch.”

MAS™ has also had a profound impact on individual athletes, helping them grow in confidence, develop new skills, and providing direction for future career paths.

“I’ve kind of found I’ve been more confident over the past year...It’s helped me grow as a person. It’s helped me come out of my shell because I’ve always been very quiet and shy.”

-Joanna Ang, Oshawa Vikings Rugby Club



Physical Literacy & Inclusion Workshop

The Physical Literacy & Inclusion (PL&I) workshop is an interactive learning experience to support coaches, teachers, students, recreation professionals, and other program leaders in developing their understanding of the value of physical literacy and inclusion.

This year, the PL&I team continued to build relationships across sectors both within and beyond Ontario. Acknowledging the variety of environments that individuals will move through during their lives, the team has worked to enhance the capacity of the people working in those spaces and helped them to fill their knowledge gaps around physical literacy development. Workshop delivery was also expanded significantly this year, as we wanted to engage a variety of professionals and students in learning about physical literacy development.

Through the workshop, teachers and community recreation professionals enhanced their understanding of physical literacy and learned new strategies to carry forward in their work. Some key learnings that participants took away this year include:

- Deeper consideration of inclusion throughout processes – program planning with variations for participation in mind and more mindfulness for the language used in delivery.
- Broader view of physical literacy development – its importance to environments outside of exercise or gym class, such as work environments or classrooms
- Greater appreciation for the importance of physical literacy across all areas of life and throughout the lifespan

Last year, the Abilities Centre team identified an opportunity to link each workshop with a follow-up field trip to provide workshop attendees with the opportunity to co-facilitate programming with Abilities Centre staff, building confidence in their practice. This year, field trips were done with over **1,000** students and we provided continued learning support for more than **20** educators that previously attended the workshop.

While most workshop attendees that have shared stories of their journey with physical literacy indicate changes among their participants with the application of workshop learnings, those that engaged with the field trips shared enhanced application of learnings. Some ways the field trips supported learning included:

- Watching inclusive delivery in action, helping to overcome challenges with how to consistently implement techniques taught in the workshop.
- Understanding the true impact of supporting autonomy of participants, helping to deepen the importance of prioritizing choice for students throughout delivery.
- Witnessing examples of activities and the impact of inclusion on students, helping to increase motivation for future planning and implementation.
- Abilities Centre's PL&I education proves invaluable to the community as we continue to empower students and professionals to mindfully engage others in physical activity and movement and equip them with the proper tools and strategies to foster inclusive environments.



74
Teachers

117
Camp Staff



64
Community
Rec Staff

124
High School
Students

163
Post-secondary
Students

542
Workshop
Participants



Community Events



Over the past year, Abilities Centre has been a part of many exciting and innovative events. We have had the amazing opportunity to work with community partners to host conferences, open houses, and fundraising events. Additionally, Abilities Centre staff and stakeholders have attended conferences, events, and award ceremonies. We are honoured to have been a part of these events and are looking forward to a new year of community engagement.



May 2022

Inaugural Durham Accessibility Conference in partnership with The Region of Durham

291 Attendees

- 291 individuals attended the conference.
- Attendees increased their awareness of how to contribute to an organization's accessibility and inclusion and their understanding of accommodation needs and inclusive communication.



June 2022

Abilities Centre's 10-year anniversary, Birthday Party Open House

236 Attendees

- 236 people registered, open to the public.
- Activities included: Art stations, Group fitness classes, Sport demos, Beyond the Farm Gate (mobile petting zoo), and vendor market.

25K Spectators



International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament in Ireland

1,100 Athletes

- 44 Canadian Delegates (28 athletes, 2 coaches, 1 athletic therapist, 6 supports, 1 parent, and 6 organizational delegates).
- Mixed Ability Rugby World Cup – 1,100 athletes, 28 teams, 15 nations and 25,000 spectators!
- 3 Abilities Centre representatives presented at the Mixed Ability Week international conference.



July 2022

Annual Abilities Centre Golf Tournament

79 Golfers

- 79 Golfers attended.
- Raised over \$25,000.

Programs Supported: General Abilities Centre programming. Sponsor: Bird Construction, Durham Regional Police Services, Neurochangers, Wilson Vukelich LLP, Ambient Mechanical and auticon Canada.



September 2022

Technology Supporting Accessibility, Belonging and Inclusion – Access IO, Grandview, and AC

200+ Attendees

- 200+ attendees.
- 14 start-ups.
- Hosted in partnership with Grandview Kids.
- Currently exploring opportunities to work with several organizations that presented at the event.

Winning the Readers' Choice Awards 2022 for Oshawa and Whitby in Fitness club and Recreation Facility categories



November 2022

2nd Annual Festival of Trees

92 Vendors

- 92 vendors, 1,160 attendees.
- Raised over \$30,000.
- Programs supported: 2023 Summer Camp Programs.

Sponsor: LiUNA! Ontario Provincial District Council & LiUNA! Local 183, Tacc Developments, Fieldgate Developments & Ontario Power Generation, Arbor Memorial, Tim Hortons & Dominos (In-kind sponsors).

1,160 Attendees



37 Attendees

Whitby Chamber of Commerce Awards Business Achievement Award for Not-for-Profit Category

Mixed Ability Floor Curling Bonspiel

- 37 attendees, 8 individuals and 8 teams.
- Partnership with Town Brewery.



February 2023

Durham Region 2023 Ontario Parasport Games

Events hosted: Opening Ceremonies, Sitting Volleyball Competition, and Boccia Competition. Demos for Adaptive Rock Climbing, Mixed Ability Floor Curling, and Powerchair Hockey.

\$250K Raised

March 2023

Accessibility Awards Gala

280 Attendees

- 280 individuals attended.
- \$250,000 raised.
- Programs supported – General programming including Mixed Ability Sport.

Sponsor: Rice Group, TACC Developments, Fieldgate Developments, Paradise Developments, Miller Waste Systems, Bird Construction, The Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons, Durham District School Board, My Job Match, Ontario Power Generation, Pear Tree, Primacare Living Solutions, Redwood Employment, Greater Toronto Airport Authority, Verdi Alliance, Municipal Solutions, Richardson Wealth, Durham Tourism.

Honorary Chair – Christine Elliot, Keynote Speaker – Mike Shoreman, MC – Terry Johnston (CKDO), Street re: naming Jim Flaherty.



Membership



This year at Abilities Centre, membership services were updated to better meet the needs of our community and respond to demand from our growing membership base. Last year, we received over 350 responses sharing feedback about which services are the most popular, and what changes were desired. A strategy was put together to respond to this feedback and improve the experiences for our community members, which was executed throughout this year.

In addition to over **1,450** personal training sessions, our most popular member-based programming, including Strength & Stretch, Pickleball, Cardio & Core, and Spin continued this year. As demand rose, more class times and varieties of these popular programs were made available.

New member-based programming was also added to the calendar this year to fill gaps identified by our community members. Some of the new programming made available this year included:

- Total body fit,
- High-Intensity Interval Training,
- Gentle Yoga and Seated Yoga,
- Boccia,
- Stroller Fit, and
- Kids programming on Monday to Thursday evenings for children ages 4 and up: Monday Art, Games Night, Creative movement, and Park Play.

For members looking for support on their journey with Abilities Centre, coaching sessions continue to be available. These sessions include assessments and planning discussions about what options are available to support members in meeting their personal goals and to help them make the most of the centre.

Coming out of pandemic restrictions, Abilities Centre has focused on returning to a full schedule of programming and having more community members return to the centre. Over the course of the year, we have seen our membership grow by almost **300%**.



This year has also seen a surge in local community groups coming into the centre and making use of our unique spaces. Over **67** groups rented Abilities Centre spaces and more than **630** court times were booked this year. Abilities Centre hosted voting for the 2022 Provincial and Municipal elections, a graduation ceremony, board, and committee meetings for a number of organizations, and regional and provincial sport competitions. A new opportunity was also opened to our community in March 2023 and is already very popular – Birthday Packages are now available at Abilities Centre!

To support community members in accessing Abilities Centre, we continue to offer a Membership Assistance Program to reduce financial barriers. This year, to honour the late Bill Thompson, a former member of Abilities Centre since 2012, a campaign was launched to help support the Membership Assistance Program. Bill wanted others to experience the feeling of camaraderie and inclusion he had at Abilities Centre. Read more about Bill and the campaign to honour him here: [There's Something About Billy](#).



Programs & Services



Abilities Centre focuses on providing innovative, accessible programs and services that are evidence-based, engaging, and open to people of all ages and abilities. We embrace continuous learning and improvement through unique, original, and specialized programs. Abilities Centre, through programs and services, offers individuals the opportunity to participate as they choose, helps to build a foundation to assist in successful transitions to community engagement, and supports all levels of participation. This year, Programs and Services were able to support 10,000 individuals through delivery of programs locally, provincially, and nationally.



Employment



Employment Services at Abilities Centre support individuals on their journey to finding meaningful employment. We are intentional in how we provide support to job seekers and use an individualized approach to help them reach their goals. We offer a variety of services that are strategically developed and continuously updated to meet current gaps in Employment Services in the community.

Abilities Centre Employment Services offer skill development workshops and Job Development and Coaching for individuals to identify meaningful employment opportunities and ensure that employment is successful for both the job seeker and employer. Job Development and Coaching services include working with employers and job seekers towards employment goals.

This year, Abilities Centre consulted with 10 employers from the community (businesses and municipalities) to ensure that our employment services were accessible. We worked with the organizations to increase employment opportunities for our community through advocacy, education, and support of both job seekers and employers. Additionally, Employment staff collaborated with Abilities Centre's Therapeutic Recreation and Skills Development teams to identify additional opportunities, such as Pathways to build functional skills, Creative Café to explore interests, and TR Active Connection for recreation and social engagement. The goal of these connections is to help the job seekers gain skills that will allow them to succeed.

EmployAbilities

EmployAbilities is a workshop for individuals experiencing employment barriers. It supports individuals in developing the professional skills needed to identify employment, educational and/or volunteer opportunities that match their skills, goals, values, and strengths. Over the past year:

- A total of 5 sessions were facilitated.
- 1 in collaboration with Toronto District School Board, and 4 at Abilities Centre - 35 individuals enrolled.
- The workshop's curriculum was updated to reflect the move from virtual to in-person delivery.
- EmployAbilities participants developed professional skills such as leadership, engagement, and self-reflection and felt that they were able to excel in social interactions by the end of the workshop.
- Following the completion of the workshop, participants started working with a job coach and transitioned to other employment and skill development programs within and outside Abilities Centre.

Connect2Work

Connect2Work is a 4-week employment workshop that supports individuals in acquiring the skills they need to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. This past year:

- A total of 6 sessions were facilitated.
- 1 in collaboration with Toronto District School Board and 5 through Abilities Centre – with 36 participants enrolled.
- 2 community partners were invited to support the Connect2Work curriculum. Ontario Chamber of Commerce presented on disability disclosure in the workplace.
- Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) taught our participants about bank accounts and pay cheques.
- As a result, participants of Connect2Work increased their confidence in networking and interviewing. Also, participants learned how to better advocate for themselves, help others, take on leadership roles, and reflect on past learnings.



Job Coaching/ Job Development

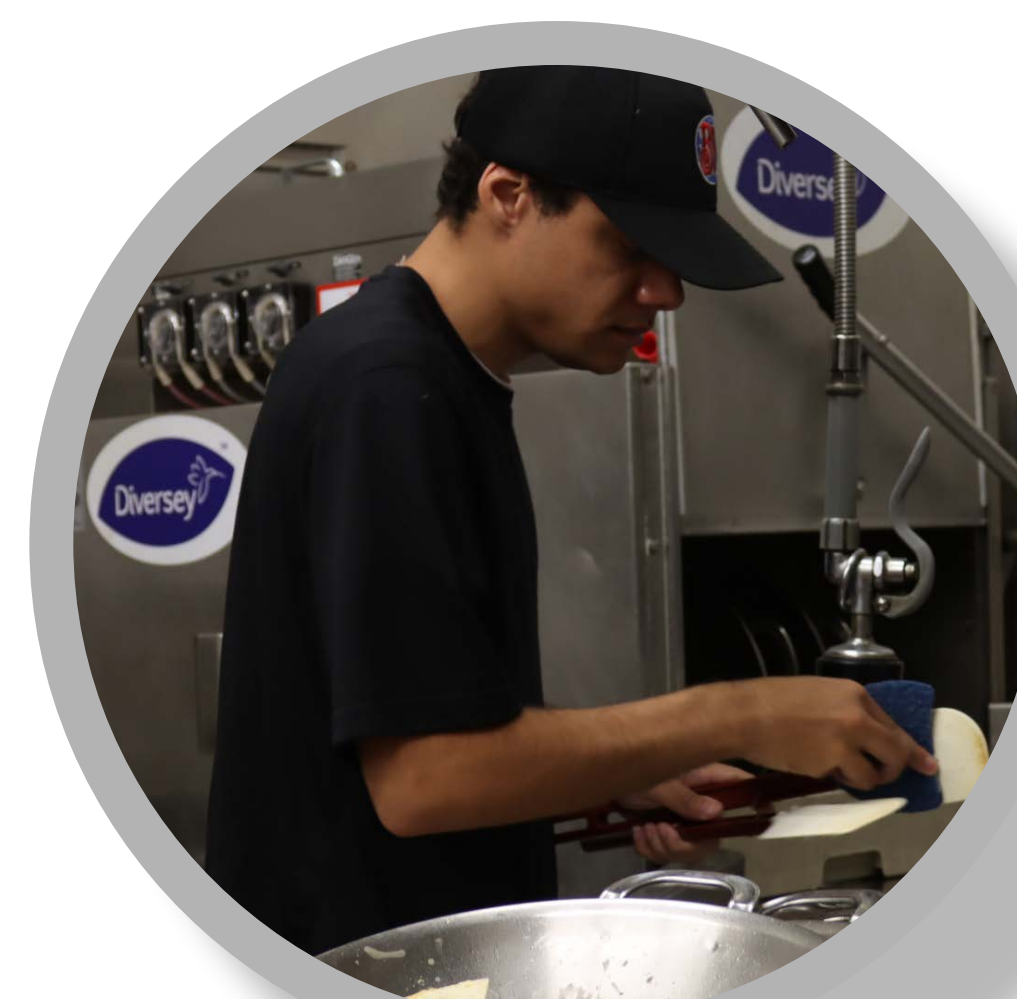
Job Coaching supports and guides individuals in developing the hard and soft skills necessary to be successful at work, maintain employment and work towards independence in the workplace. Job Coaches assist job seekers with job applications, preparing for interviews and developing the skills required when in the workplace. 43 individuals enrolled in Job Coaching this past year.

Job Development is an important step for job seekers to be connected to employment opportunities in the community. Abilities Centre's Job Developers connect and maintain relationships with potential employers to create opportunities for meaningful employment. They also work to build capacity of potential employers to foster an inclusive workplace. When both the job seeker and Job Coach feel confident in starting the job search process, they meet with the Abilities Centre's Job Developers to discuss the job seekers' employment goals and desires. In partnership with the Job Coach, the Job Developer supports job seekers with the interview process, onboarding tasks and paperwork, and job orientation. 24 individuals enrolled in Job Development this past year.

Job seekers enjoy working with Abilities Centre's Job Coaches and Developers as they are motivated and show a willingness to learn skills that will support them in finding meaningful employment. Job seekers who are a part of Abilities Centre's employment services have noticeable changes in their overall confidence, resilience, and self-advocacy. Additionally, Job Developers play an integral role in supporting the employers we work with; their work often resulting in positive changes to team morale, safety, and innovation as a result of diversifying their workforce. Over the last year, the Abilities Centre's Employment team has engaged 78 employers and supported 14 individuals in finding meaningful employment in Durham Region. As we move forward, Job Coaching and Development will continue to support both job seekers and employers to create more accessible and inclusive employment opportunities in Durham Region.

Project SEARCH®

Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB) in partnership with Abilities Centre and the Regional Municipality of Durham will be running Project SEARCH® Durham in September 2023. Project SEARCH is a 10-month transition-to-work internship program for Grade 12 high school students with developmental or intellectual disabilities. Interns will be fully immersed within the municipality's office and service delivery sites, gaining employment skills through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on career training. The Project SEARCH® team, consisting of a DCDSB instructor and Abilities Centre skills trainers, will train and support the interns throughout the program. Interns will gain marketable and transferrable employment skills and will be supported by Abilities Centre to find and secure competitive and meaningful employment upon completion of Project SEARCH®.



71
Participants

11
Total Sessions



**Increased
Confidence**

**Meaningful
Employment**

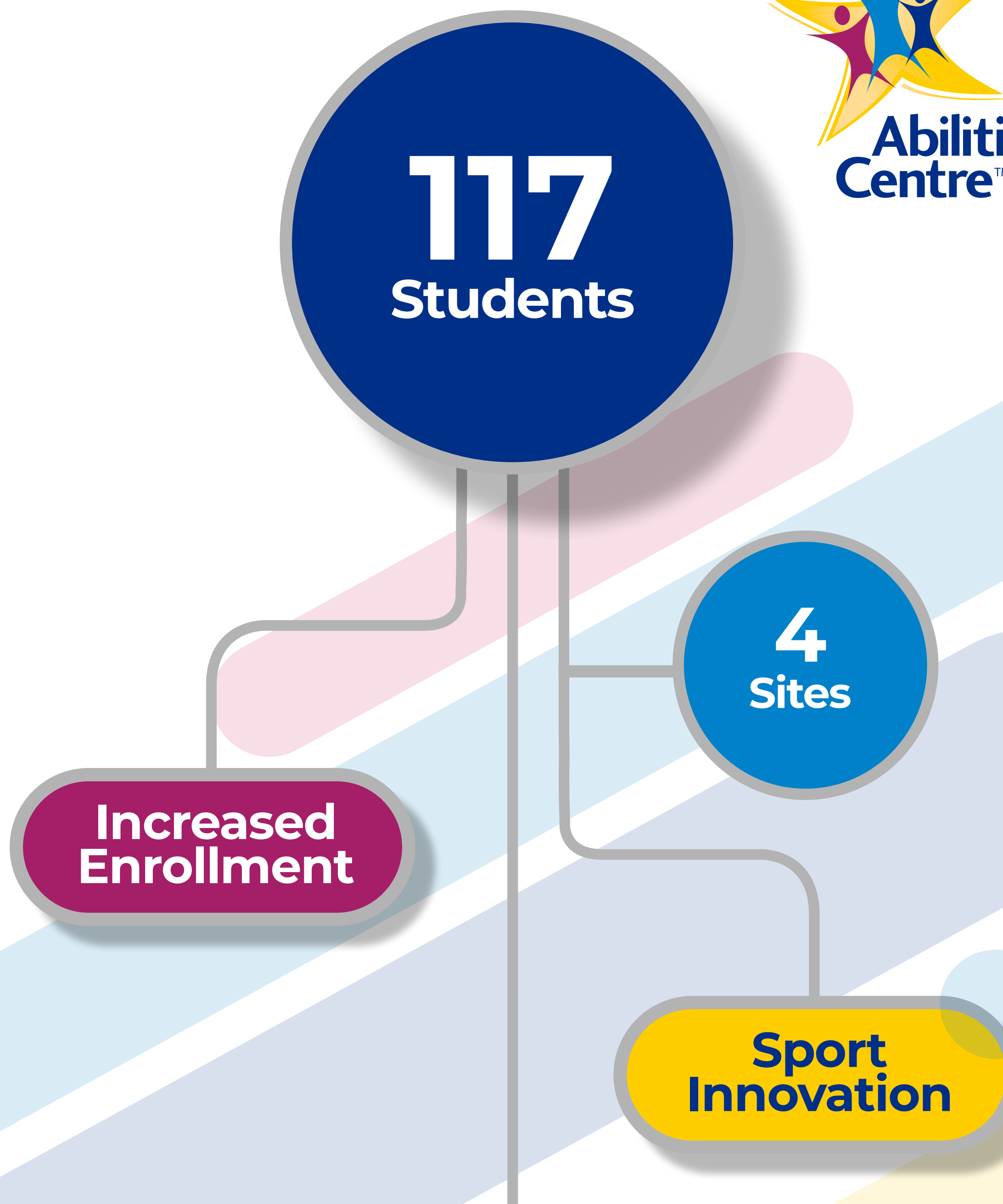
14
secured
employment

78
Employers
supported

The Academy for Student Athlete Development (ASAD) program is focused on removing barriers and creating equitable access for athletes with aspirations of pursuing competitive and high-performance sport. The program brings student-athletes' academic, athletic, and personal development together in one environment with a focus on developing accountability, respect, and leadership. This year, ASAD expanded to continue to remove barriers and increase access for athletes in communities across Ontario and beyond.

A key development this year, was the enhancement of the ASAD Integrated Support Team. This interdisciplinary team brings together experts in the areas of Mental Performance, Sport Nutrition, Strength and Conditioning, and Mental Health, key disciplines for high performance athlete development. These representatives are responsible for designing and overseeing the consistent delivery of evidence-based curricula across all ASAD sites. The Integrated Support Team leads also support professional development of local practitioners who are working directly with athletes at each location through mentorship, sustainably impacting communities and benefitting future athletes.

In partnership with Deh Gah Elementary and Secondary School, ASAD is now being offered in Fort Providence, Northwest Territories, a third campus for delivery among high school aged student-athletes, alongside Whitby and London, Ontario.



In 2021, the ASAD team was awarded a Sport Innovation Grant from Sport Canada and begun working to identify gaps in athletic development for Canadian Paraspport athletes. This year, the ASAD team worked to implement regional programming in parasport to support para-athlete development. These regional sites make use of the ASAD framework and integrated support team to support parasport athletes across Ontario. Regional programming has been delivered in the National Capital Region throughout the year and is launching in Scarborough in September 2023. The ASAD team has also been collaborating with Ontario Cerebral Palsy Sport Association (OCPSA) to develop an ASAD model specific to boccia targeted athlete development.

With the two areas of expansion, ASAD programming is now being delivered at 4 sites with more new locations to come over the next year.

With the lifting of pandemic-related restrictions, ASAD returned to growing participation. Enrollment increased in both Durham and London, and new athletes joined programming in the new Fort Providence and National Capital Region sites.

The athletes in ASAD programming compete in a variety of sports. At least 22 sports are represented among our athletes training in para-athlete regional programming, the sport streams, and the individual athlete development program.

22 Sports

Program Expansion



Therapeutic Recreation



This year, Abilities Centre's Therapeutic Recreation (TR) team was focused on innovation and partnerships. TR programming continued to support community members with skill development, confidence, and community engagement while also addressing gaps in the community. To better meet the needs of our community this year, the TR team expanded the scope of program offerings and collaborated with partner organizations and other Abilities Centre teams.

Beyond the walls of Abilities Centre, the TR team supports students and teachers across three local school boards through its Therapeutic Recreation in the Schools (TRIS) program. In this year's TRIS program, more than 170 students and over 60 educators were supported within their school.

TRIS helps students to develop and demonstrate important skills to thrive within and beyond the school community, building towards their next steps. Some key examples of growth and achievement within TRIS' autonomy-supportive environment this year include:

- Half of the enrolled students demonstrated strong skills for teamwork, character, coping skills, self-advocacy, and confidence.

- 80% of students showed increased competence and developed important skills such as interpersonal communication skills, coping skills, leadership and pre-employment skills, and movement skills needed for physical activity participation over the course of a single semester.

- 60% of students gained confidence and independence. This was demonstrated by such actions as: volunteering to go first and lead, a willingness to try new things, increased contribution to group activities, and interest in applying new skills outside of TRIS.

TRIS promotes inclusion and resilience among students with disabilities to support their psychosocial wellbeing, healthy development, and quality of life. Programming supports meaningful participation in the school and community settings through creation, movement, and education. TRIS programming is designed to meet the self-identified needs of each school community, enhancing recreation and skill-building opportunities for students, and supporting teachers. Through this programming, students are supported to develop and enhance important skills such as emotional regulation, confidence, problem-solving, and igniting a value for remaining active and engaged. Through skill development, students build motivation and resilience and discover passions that successfully get them started on the next steps of their journey through life. A core belief of TRIS is that all students, including those with disabilities, can set and achieve goals while building the skills to effectively navigate future challenges.

60
Educators

170
Students



60%
showed
increase in
confidence

Skill-building
opportunities

80%
showed increased
competence



To further improve support for students, the TR team has also expanded school-related programming this year through 3 separate initiatives: the Taking Aim program, the Therapeutic Recreation in the Summer program, and the TRIS Elementary expansion pilot.

Taking Aim:

The TR team began delivering Taking Aim with two classes this year, both of which have previously built skills through TRIS and are looking for next steps and skill building for life after school. Taking Aim involves collaboration with the Abilities Centre Employment team and enables students to showcase their confidence, teamwork, and leadership skills while taking the next steps into exploring employment and sharpening their life skills.

TR in the Summer:

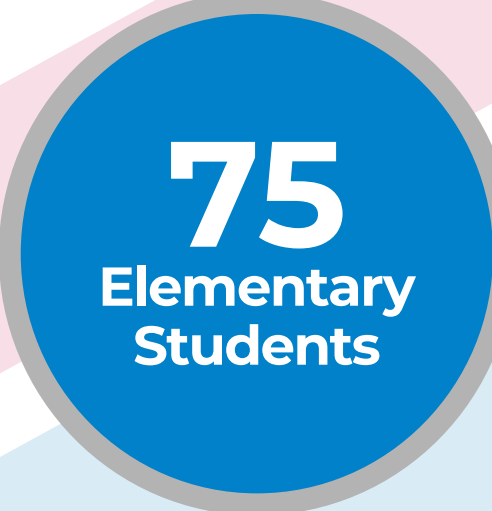
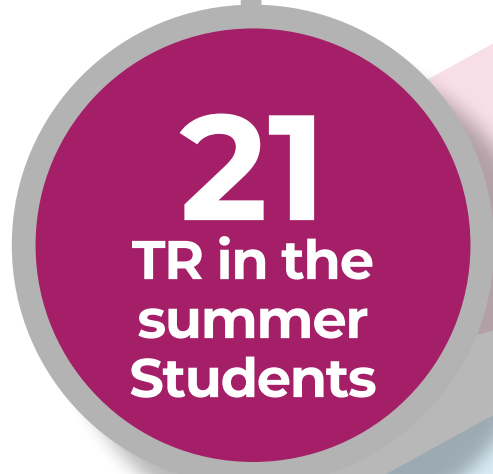
To further support students during the summer months, Abilities Centre's TR team partnered with the DDSB on an innovative pilot program – Therapeutic Recreation in the Summer. Two 4-week sessions were delivered on-site at Abilities Centre, supporting 21 students to continue building physical, social, and transition skills over the summer while fostering independence and having fun.

Participants in the program enjoyed creating new friendships outside of school, being active, playing new sports and games, and expressing themselves through a variety of creative arts activities.

Educators involved in the program saw benefits for students accessing an inclusive, universally designed learning space to engage in fun skill development activities.

TRIS Elementary Expansion:

This year, a gap was identified for skill development and recreation exploration within school for younger students. The TR team has worked to create TRIS frameworks that support younger students in transitioning to high school, building connections in the community, and finding joy through play, movement, and creation. The Elementary Expansion of TRIS initially started with three classes, supporting more than 75 students. The full program is currently being delivered through the Spring in two Durham Region Elementary Schools, helping students to be more successful, resilient and improve their overall health and well-being.



This year, the TR team also enhanced programming within the centre by including more arts-based recreation, increasing opportunities for goal setting and achievement, and enhancing transition support for individuals moving through Abilities Centre programs.

A new program – Creative Café – was added to introduce interested participants to a variety of art-based recreation pursuits. The new program was a massive hit and remained full this year. Creative Café had an exciting partnership with the Robert McLaughlin Gallery in Oshawa, with participants sharing their lived experiences through photos. This showcase will contribute to diversifying the perspectives and stories captured within the gallery. The TR team plan to continue collaborating with the gallery to create more opportunities for individuals to contribute to the community in the future.

Weekly challenges were embedded into the Thinking Ahead program for interested participants to try new things and continue skill development outside of programming. These weekly challenges are opportunities for participants to set and achieve goals each week and over the course of the program, practicing goal setting skills and identifying longer term goals for themselves.

Collaboration within the program and services team continued to be strengthened over the course of the year. These team members work together to build and execute strategies to support participation transitioning. The TR team works with each individual to understand their goals, strengths, and needs. Transition strategies are then used to identify opportunities that will help participants get started on the next step in their journey.



Post Rehabilitation



Post-Rehab at Abilities Centre is a collection of community-based post rehabilitation exercise and education programs. Post-Rehab programs support individuals transitioning from rehabilitation treatment (for stroke, COPD, Cardiac events, Alzheimer's, or neuromuscular conditions) into community-based programs. The aim of Post-Rehab at Abilities Centre is to support individuals on their rehabilitation journey outside of the clinical setting by offering inclusive programs through accessible in-person and virtual spaces. We work with our partners to align our programs with current clinical-based rehabilitation.

Fitness for Breath

In partnership with Lung Health Foundation, Abilities Centre continued to offer 10-week sessions of Virtual Fitness for Breath throughout the year. This group-based exercise and respiratory maintenance program is for individuals with lung health conditions. It also provides participants with a respiratory education session led by Lung Health Foundation. The program is delivered virtually by live facilitators located at Abilities Centre.

This past year, Virtual Fitness for Breath had 148 participant enrollments throughout the year, reaching individuals across Ontario. With the popularity of the program, more spaces were made available in each class and an additional session was created, resulting in more than a 50% increase in participants each quarter. With the continued demand for programming, a recorded video library was also created (1,400 combined views) to supplement the live virtual classes. Additionally, the in-person counterpart of Virtual Fitness for Breath, Respiratory-Cardiac Maintenance program also increased enrollment to help accommodate the popularity of the program. Participants report having more energy, strength, and overall mobility after the program. Participants indicated the program is 'lifesaving,' 'impacts my whole family' and 'an enjoyable experience as well as vitally important to those of us that have COPD.' Six participants provided participant testimonials that can be seen here.

As Virtual Fitness for Breath moves forward, we are excited to expand our work with the Northern Ontario communities, increasing the number of classes offered, and enhance the education and support resources ensuring continued aid of those living with lung health conditions.



TIME™

This year, the Together in Movement and Exercise (TIME™) series of programs TIME™, TIMEPlus™, and TIME Lite™ continued to support individuals with neuromuscular conditions in group exercise for physical, mental, and social health. Our partnership with Toronto Rehabilitation Institute (University Health Network) has fostered the development of the TIME™ group of programming. TIME™ was the first of the TIME™ series programs to run at Abilities Centre, TIME Lite™ was developed to support individuals who require additional support and TIMEPlus™ was developed to challenge individuals who can complete faster paced movements with more stamina for mild cardiovascular exercises.

Across the TIME™ programs we had 114 participant enrollments this year and over 248 classes delivered for TIME™, TIMEPlus™, and TIME Lite™. Movement from TIME™ to TIMEPlus™ was an exceptional achievement that three of our participants completed this year. While each participant of the program has their own goals and reasons for participating, TIME™ community supports both socialization and physical exercise.

TIME™ participants from this year shared different ways the program has impacted their overall health and well-being during and outside of programming including:

- Increasing their independence and strength
- Improving their mobility and decreasing use of ambulatory aids
- Returning to enjoyable activities such as traveling
- Increasing their motivation

The social aspect of the program provides participants with an elevated mood after their session and renewed energy. Additionally, the collaboration with Mixed Ability Sport floor curling and boccia have increased participants' enjoyment for sports events.

Additional Post Rehab programs

Post-Rehab programming at Abilities Centre also provides individual with knee replacements, cardio-respiratory conditions, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other neurological conditions a space for safe exercising and socializing. Participants of these programs felt stronger, had increased energy, and noticed positive changes in their daily activities.

Post-Rehab through Abilities Centre will continue to grow, expanding our current programs, assessing the needs of our community to help fill the current gap in community-based post-rehabilitation programs.



Skills Development

Pathways

Pathways is a 12-week program designed to foster confidence and community engagement among individuals with disabilities aged 14 and above. The program supports individuals in building functional skills with the goals of enhancing community navigation, financial management knowledge, and decision-making skills while preparing for experiential learning each week. Experiential learning takes place at local community locations (grocery stores, restaurants, the library, etc.) while building transit awareness through the regular use of public transit.

The transit portion of the Pathways program has proven to be a particularly popular and empowering experience amongst our participants, who enjoy exploring and gaining confidence navigating the community through the regular use of public transit. Last year, Pathways proudly partnered with Durham Regional Transit, and this collaboration has become an essential component of our efforts in supporting our Pathways participants.

The program's unique curriculum has been recently updated to meet a wider variety of goals in community engagement and to better facilitate skill application and connection between participants and staff. The Pathways program meets the needs of its participants by providing an opportunity to build functional skills in a supportive space to become more integrated with their community. An evening Pathways program was developed and implemented as a pilot last year for high-school aged individuals to address an identified need for community transition programming for this age group. The pilot was successful, and the evening Pathways program has become a permanent addition to our programming!

Pathways had a total of 18 participants across three daytime sessions and 15 participants across two evening sessions. This year, participants reported thoroughly enjoying the intimate group setting, social aspect, and out-of-classroom activities. As a result of their time in Pathways, participants were able to:

- learn new skills,
- learn about activities to pursue in the community,
- increase their ability to plan and navigate outings in the community, and
- build confidence in self-advocacy and a stronger sense of autonomy.

The program has a profound impact on the lives of its participants. The desire to empower participants and make the program more accessible has led to the constant implementation of changes to programming to better serve the community. With the lifting of restrictions, Pathways hopes to begin scaling into other communities in the next couple of years and will continue expanding to meet the needs of its diverse participants.



**Thank you to our
partners & collaborators:**

Durham Catholic District School Board

Durham District School Board

Durham Region Transit

Town of Whitby

Whitby Public Library

Real Canadian Superstore

Metrolinx

Durham Region Police



Thank you to our partners & collaborators:



Foundation

LIT/Unlocking Leaders

Leadership in Training (LIT) is a workshop for youth aged 15 to 30. This program is funded by RBC. It is a space for individuals to identify their internal leader by assessing their values, strengths, and goals. Program participants work together in a group on activities around active listening, problem-solving, and self-advocacy, to build soft skills and discover how to become a leader in the community and a self-advocate. LIT ran for the first half of the year with 16 participants enrolled. Participants formed connections with staff and with each other while developing their goals for employment. This year, LIT transitioned from the Employment to the Skills Development department as there was a bigger need for leadership building outside of an employment lens and was re-imagined as Unlocking Leaders.

Unlocking Leaders is the natural progression after LIT. Unlocking Leaders addresses gaps that were identified through other programs at Abilities Centre. It is a 10-week skill development program for youths that focuses on enhancing 21st century skills through project-based and activity-based learning. The program works to promote three main areas: learning, life, and literacy skills.

The first session, delivered in Winter 2023 was a success, with participants working through sequential units and completing an independent project to showcase their ideal leader. The showcase was attended by 35 guests (community members, family and friends, AC and RBC staff) who were impressed by the participants' work and the skills they had developed throughout the program. Participants interacted with the audience, answering questions, and providing insight on their process and the development of their projects with great pride.

Throughout the program, participants were able to:

- enhance their teamwork and leadership skills through collaborative activities,
- apply and practice new skills in a supportive environment,
- build confidence in communication,
- develop resiliency.

At the end of the program, participants were presented with certificates, recognizing the hard work and dedication they put into enhancing their leadership skills. The program's success can be credited to the collaborative activities that enhanced participants' teamwork and leadership skills, providing them with a supportive environment to apply and practice new skills. By offering a platform where participants could showcase their skills, the program helped promote a sense of community among everyone involved.

Sport & Recreation Programming

The Abilities Centre sport and recreation team continued to enhance programming and offer enriching experiences for our community members this year. A key focus was increasing individuals' engagement, supporting them on their physical literacy journey, and connecting them to a community. Programming was delivered to individuals aged 5 and up. Popular programming like You.Me.We, Obstacle Course, and Wheelchair Basketball continued to be delivered and was enhanced with more focus on physical literacy development and facilitation by experts of lived experience. The programming team identified that there was a need for new programming options among our community members and added new opportunities to the calendar to meet demand, including You.Me.We Teens and Healthy Youth Program for Everyone (HYPE). To further support engagement for all members of the community, Mixed Ability Sport leagues were delivered at the facility by community sport coaches throughout the year.

This year, Abilities Centre also continued sharing You. Me.We programming with Sick Kids Hospital for delivery on their internal SKOOP network. This program gives youth within the Children's Treatment Centre a chance to get moving and have fun during their day. Abilities Centre is working with Janeway Children's Hospital to launch You.Me.We programming in Newfoundland starting in the Spring of 2023.

You.Me.We.

Abilities Centre's Physical Literacy and Inclusion team works to make sure that all people are supported on their unique lifelong physical literacy journey. For some youth, it can be challenging to be involved in activities and get moving in ways that support physical literacy development out in the community. Two live virtual programs have been made available to fill this gap: You.Me.We – Virtually Together and You.Me.We. – Teens.

Abilities Centre staff engage You.Me.We participants, wherever they are, in interactive games to get them moving, socializing, having fun, and making friends.

“Covid risks have been quite isolating for our highly social young teen. You.Me.We has reduced his isolation and brought much needed social connection for our gregarious teen.”

Sport & Recreation @ Abilities Centre

- The Obstacle Course program continued to be popular for our community members ages 5-10. Participants come together to get moving and be creative. With a different course each week, participants flex their creative muscle by helping to build the course and challenging themselves with finding new ways to move throughout the space.
- The Abilities Centre Eagles Wheelchair Basketball team is open to individuals aged 11 and up. The Eagles focus on learning skills and game play, following a curriculum created and delivered by Mike Frogley – former Canadian Wheelchair Basketball Head Coach.
- The brand-new HYPE program (Healthy Youth Program for Everyone) was created to give our community members aged 10-14 a space to be with friends, play games, and have fun. This program involves a huge variety of activities including time spent on court playing games and social time upstairs in Abilities Centre recreation spaces.
- In addition to the Abilities Centre Sport and Recreation programming, three Mixed Ability Sport leagues were offered at the centre by Community Sport Coaches. Community coaches engage all members of the group in a fun, social environment and help individuals build sport-specific skills. The goal is to support athletes to confidently transition to their local community sport club for continued participation.



Thrive™ is an adult day program for individuals over the age of 18 with developmental disabilities. Participants engage in activities that support their health and well-being through programming focused on social engagement, creative expression, life skills, and sports and movement. Thrive™ provides a strong foundation of support for individuals to gain skills and achieve the goals that are most important to them.

Over the year, 68 individuals were enrolled in, and returned to in-person programming at, Thrive™. Participants developed new skill sets, gained confidence, and progressed towards their personal goals to enhance overall well-being. Participants also noted an increase in the quality of social relationships and physical activity levels since returning to Thrive™ post-pandemic. In collaboration with participants, the Thrive team co-designed, developed, and implemented 11 new classes, out of the 39 total classes offered throughout the year. Participants really enjoyed the process and being part of curriculum development and classes such as Movie Magic, Thrive™ Exclusive and Thrive™ Mentorship, putting the creative and decision-making processes in the hands of the participants.

Throughout the year, activities and events were held to foster connections between the Thrive™ team, participants, and their families. Participants from the Thrive Exclusive and Yearbook classes worked hard over the sessions to develop vibrant, informative, and fun keepsakes about the program and for families to be kept up to date with the happenings in the program. A holiday party was hosted in December 2022 for participants and family members. The holiday party featured a trailer from the Movie Magic class, a performance of Jingle Bell Rock from the American Sign Language (ASL) class and a Dance Fit session for all holiday party guests.

**Thank you to our
partners & collaborators:**

**Windreach Farm, CAREA C.H.C., Jays Care,
Vikings Rugby, Horizon's Music, Iroquois Park
Sports Centre, Therapeutic Dogs of Canada,
Durham Region Police, Station Gallery.**



68
Individuals

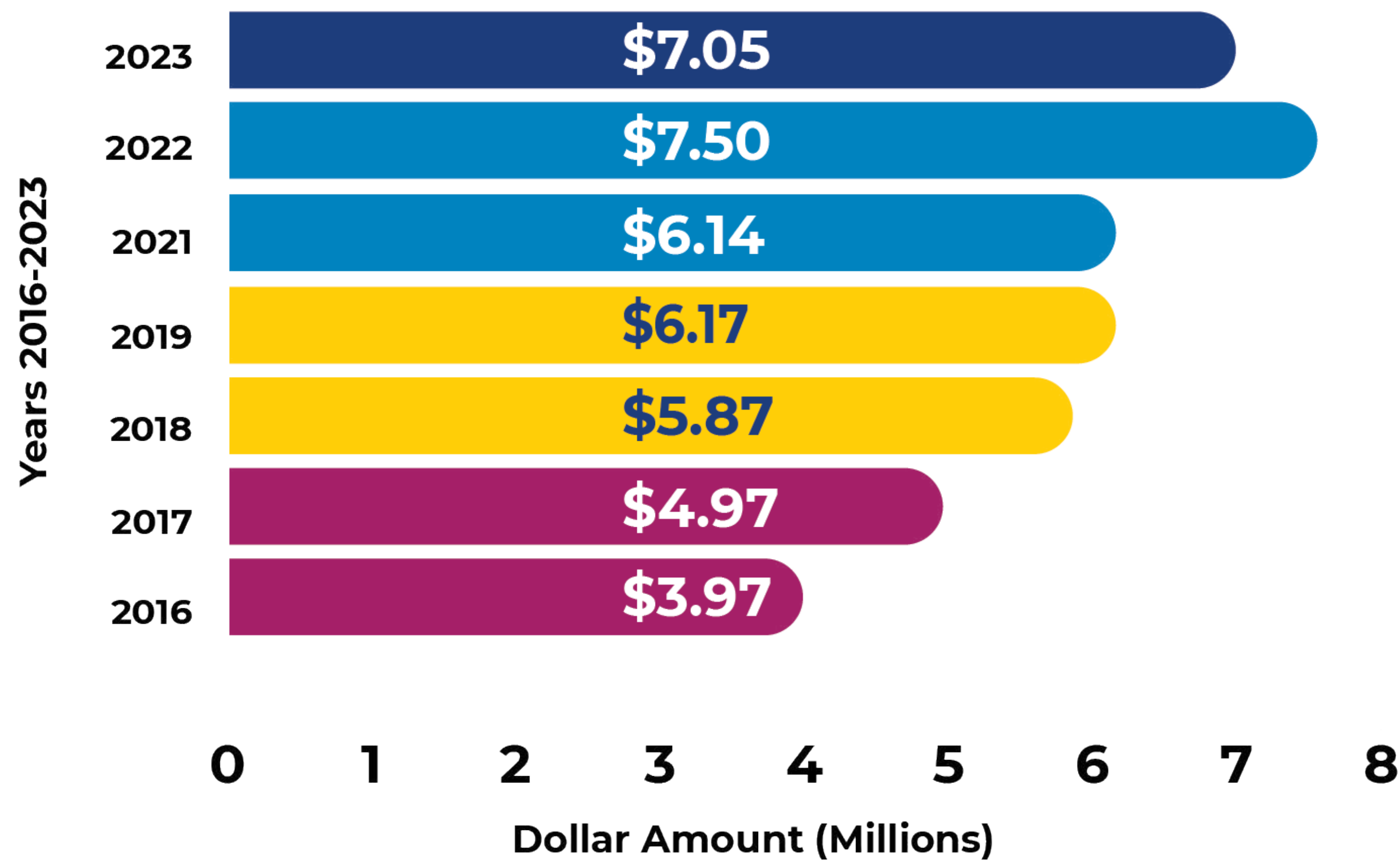
39
Sessions



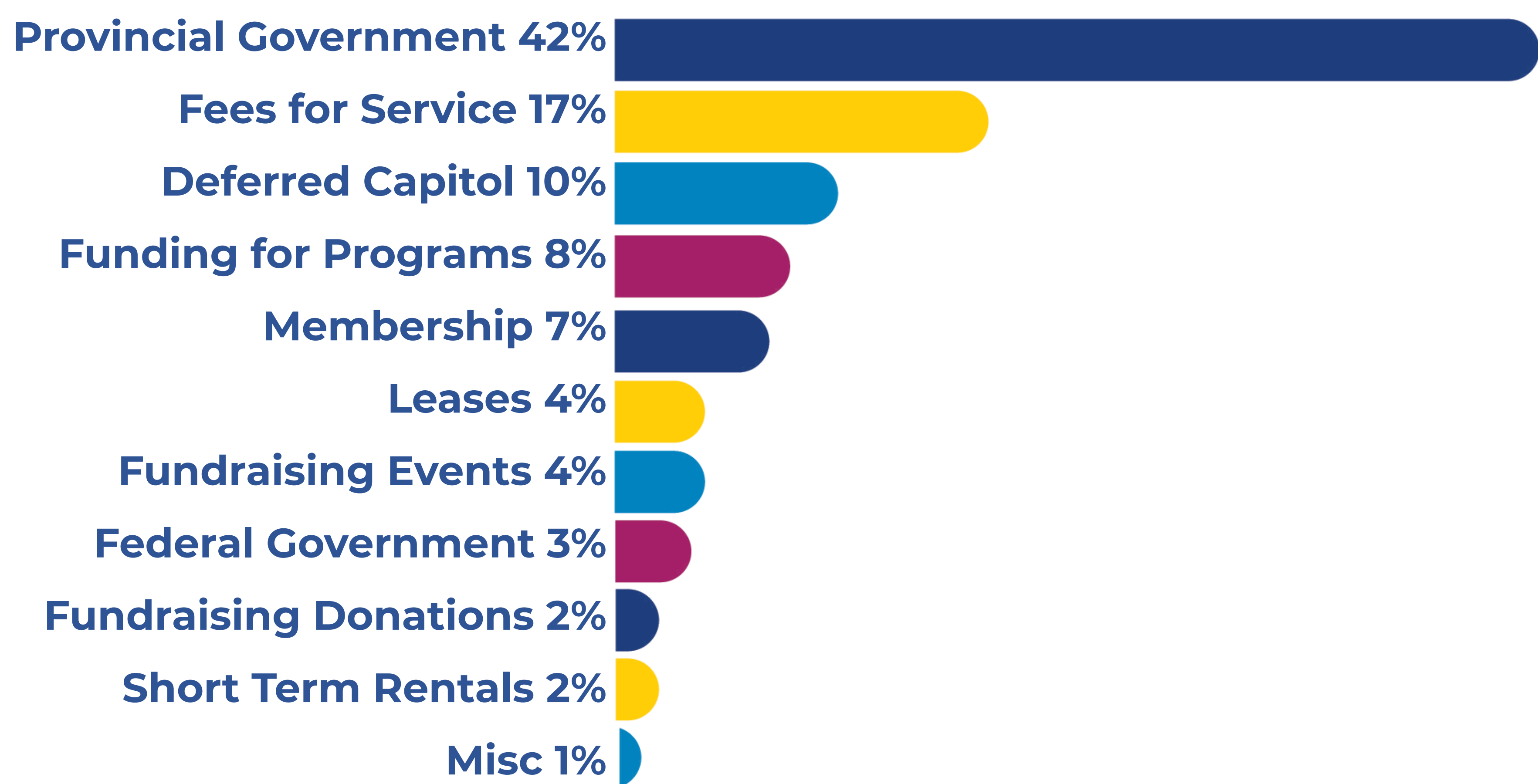
16
Placement
Students



Revenue Growth



Revenue Breakdown 2023



Thank you



We want to thank everyone in our Abilities Centre community who engaged in and supported our work over the past year. Together, we work towards unlocking the potential of our community. We appreciate the generous support from corporations, foundations, and individuals, who allow Abilities Centre to give people the power to achieve their goals through sports, arts, life-skills programs, and research.

Thank you to all our government, health, research and education, sport, and other community partners. Your partnerships are critical to the work we do at Abilities Centre and would not be possible without your collaboration.

If you would like to continue to support our organization, you can share this report, follow us on social media, or donate to our charitable organization so we can continue to reimagine accessibility and redefine the way Canadians **live, work, and play.**



Charitable registration number:
88981 9116 RR0001.

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