



IMPACT REPORT

2021-2022

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Message from the CEO

The world we live in is changing. This past year, we have all faced significant challenges. Whether it be in our daily lives, our jobs, or our communities, we have individually and collectively experienced situations that have tested our resolve. Yet, with these challenges, we have seen what can be achieved when we work together, co-designing solutions and embracing innovation.

At Abilities Centre, we work alongside individuals with lived experience, our members, participants, and partners to implement and scale programs and services across Canada. Through innovative collaboration, our program and research teams have developed and tested concepts and ideas and implemented key research strategies to measure the transformative impact we are having on the individuals and communities we serve.

We know that the only path forward for success as a society is one that embraces full accessibility and inclusion. Now, more than ever, we must come together to support inclusivity and break down systemic barriers that prevent full and meaningful participation in the communities in which we all live, work, and play.

As we celebrate our 10-year anniversary, we are embarking on an exciting journey to develop a new strategic direction; one that helps us to solidify our purpose and define our aspirations for the next 10 years.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all our stakeholders, including our staff, community members, and partners who offered perspective and insight to help us capture the story of our past and pave the path for our future. It is with great pride and excitement that I share our new purpose, vision and mission that will guide us as we rebrand and prepare to launch our new strategic plan:

Our Purpose:
Unlock potential through accessibility

Our Vision:
A better, barrier-free life for all Canadians

Our Mission:
Reimagining accessibility and redefining the way Canadians live, work and play

With a renewed purpose, and a passionate, dedicated team, we look forward to working with our stakeholders and those we serve in using accessibility to unlock the potential of individuals and communities, locally, provincially, and nationally.

On behalf of our entire Abilities Centre community, thank you for your continued support, and I invite you to join us in reflecting on the impact we have collectively delivered over the past year and to share in our journey in the years to come. We look forward to continuing our work together for the benefit of Canadians of all abilities.



Stuart McReynolds
President & CEO, Abilities Centre

Message from Chair

Our journey to build a new strategic plan is happening at the most opportune time. The last two years have proven, more than ever, the important and compelling role Abilities Centre plays in supporting persons of all abilities in our communities.

Our purpose to unlock the potential that we see around us is bold, but very much needed if we are to achieve our mission to reimagine and redefine the way Canadians live, work and play.

As we encourage other businesses, organizations, and governments to think differently and change how they work and support individuals with disabilities, we must demonstrate the same commitment. As a Board of Directors, we remain steadfast in supporting Abilities Centre as we move forward on our journey of growth and expansion, with a vision of creating a better, barrier-free life for all Canadians.

I want to acknowledge and thank the Board of Directors for their continued support and engagement. As well, I would like to thank the Abilities Centre staff for the determination, commitment, and resilience they have demonstrated in managing the many challenges that we have faced in our sector. They were able to continuously shift to ensure that the needs of clients were met, especially when they needed us the most.



Mark Wafer
Chair, Abilities Centre Board of Directors





This year, Abilities Centre is celebrating its' 10th anniversary. As we think about the next ten years, we'd like to reflect on where we began. Abilities Centre was inspired by the vision of the late Honourable Jim Flaherty and Honourable Christine Elliott. Their goal was to create one of the most accessible and inclusive community hubs in Canada to fill a programming gap in the disability community and Canada at large. In the early 2000's, the founding members and volunteers began the journey of creating a space where people of all ages and abilities could come together and realize their full potential. Over 6.2 million Canadians identify as living with a disability, almost a quarter of the total population of Canada. Yet only 4% of businesses are focused on making offerings inclusive of disability. The vision of Abilities Centre was to improve access so individuals with disabilities could fully participate in the community where they live, work and play. To accomplish this vision, we began work consulting with stakeholders, and modelling all conversations and decisions based on the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. This ensured that Abilities Centre was centered around the community's voice, needs and experiences.

Ten years later, we have grown far beyond the original vision. We have created a space that brings people of all abilities together, as well as challenges biases, perceptions, and assumptions about persons with disabilities. We work with provincial and national sport and community organizations, businesses, municipalities, and school boards to create cross-sectoral partnerships that are focused on breaking down accessibility barriers. We partner with academia to conduct novel research with the disability community. And we work with our partners to build communities of practice focused on a new paradigm – one that looks at our system as the problem, not the individual with the disability.

Abilities Centre is now more than a community hub, it is an innovation and research lab where we develop and test programs before scaling them across the province and the country. We engage individuals with lived experience to co-design programs and provide opportunities for individuals to participate as they choose to improve their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. As we look to the future, we will continue to create programs and partnerships that provide these opportunities for individuals in our local community and the Canadian community at large. Our work is guided by evidence-based research,



innovative approaches to accessibility and inclusion, and the voices and needs of members of the community, stakeholders, and beyond.

This year, one of our biggest milestones was receiving a 3-year, \$6 million commitment from the Government of Ontario to support many of our programs. These funds will help us continue to develop and grow programs that support Ontarians health and wellbeing, economic participation and social inclusion. Additionally, we grew our health and education partnerships to build out new programs and expand the breadth of current programs. Working with our national and academia partners, our research team shared the impact of our work through presentations and reports to our stakeholders and funders. To meet these programming demands we invested resources to grow our highly skilled team.

Other big accomplishments we achieved this past year include:

- Winning the Durham Region Readers' Choice Diamond Award for 'Best Recreation Facility' for the second year in a row
- Launching a campaign to increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake among persons with disabilities
- Hosting the first every Mixed Ability Rugby tournament in Canada
- Certifying almost 100 coaches in Mixed Ability Sport
- Launching our Employment programs
- Expanding Therapeutic Recreation in Schools to two new school boards
- Bringing membership back while abiding by all health & safety protocols
- Launching the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Council



As we came out of the pandemic, we focused on growth and supporting those who were disproportionately affected by COVID-19. As we move forward, we want to continue to meet the needs of these individuals, while we continue to expand into new communities to ensure that we are providing opportunities for individuals to participate in their communities in ways that are meaningful to them. The goal of this report is to share our stories of impact from the year and the future directions of the Centre. We hope you enjoy!



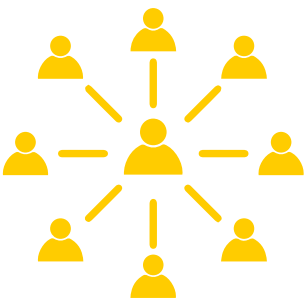
Research

The annual impact report begins with an overview of the integral role that research plays in every aspect of the programs, services and overall work that is produced at Abilities Centre. Research is defined as a collection of evidence-informed knowledge and experience to address unmet needs and create novel and meaningful contributions to better support the community. At Abilities Centre, our goal is to use thoughtful and innovative research methods to identify gaps in our community and create programs to meet those needs.

Research at Abilities Centre is embedded into each program and services. Research is used as the framework in which we conduct our work and achieve our mission and vision. It also provides the structure in which we can advance the scale of the work done at Abilities Centre to a National and Global level.



This year, Abilities Centre has become a key community partner in several large scale research programs and projects.



- Contributor 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
- Contributing partner in the development of a Canadian Report Card on the Physical Activity of Children and Youth with Disabilities, led by Dr. Kelly Arbour Nicitopoulos at the University of Toronto. Report current submitted for publication to the Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly (APAQ) journal



- Contributor member of the Employment Services Transformation Reference Groups on Serving People with Disabilities with Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
- Partner with the Canadian Disability Participation Project (CDPP) on the COVID-19 National Disability Survey for persons with Disabilities



- Co-application on a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Connection Grant for the “Co-creation of an interactive technology digital program-evaluation toolkit for Canadian physical activity programs for people with disabilities” led by Kathleen Martin Ginis at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan

Each of these projects contribute to the overall advancement of both the research for persons with disabilities and the programs conducted at Abilities Centre. Our programs are implemented, tested, and measured in our facility and research lab for innovation and impact. The results inform and guide our knowledge, work, and contributions at these national and global planning tables. Research allows us to be leaders in the field of accessibility and inclusion and this report highlights the research gathered this year to capture the impact of Abilities Centre work on our local, provincial, and national community.



IDEA

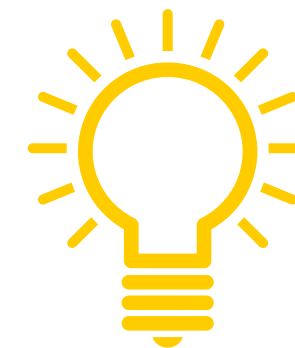
This year, an emphasis was made on integrating Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility, or IDEA, across all departments at Abilities Centre. Early in the year, team members were brought into the conversation about IDEA and the strategy to build it into the organization. The goal was to help understand their role in integrating IDEA into their work. These conversations were held with staff, the Board of Directors, and the IDEA council to best understand how these principles could be integrated across Abilities Centre. The ongoing conversations and actions that have happened since the beginning of the year regarding IDEA are integrated throughout the report.

To ensure the work being done in IDEA is guided by the needs of our community, we launched the Abilities Centre demographic survey. In the new survey, we used more inclusive language, increased the number of options for individuals to select from, and included options for individuals to describe themselves in their own words. All changes were based on community partner and staff feedback. The demographic survey was launched with specific programs and Abilities Centre staff. The survey is also used as a resource for other organizations that are creating demographic surveys as part of the Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery (LEAD) process.

The IDEA strategy helps us to better engage with members of our broader community.

Training sessions were provided to staff on disability awareness to grow our understanding of IDEA and to better support members of our community. Abilities Centre's Director of IDEA also collaborated with the Region of Durham in honour of National Accessibility Week by planning a Virtual Accessibility Conference in May 2022.

This year, a key learning for the organization was that IDEA needs to be embedded into all our collaborations and projects. We learned the need and benefit of having strong, trusting relationships, especially when working with persons with disabilities and minority groups.



Our Team

Abilities Centre Staff is a team of highly skilled, passionate, and driven individuals who bring their unique backgrounds, experience, and perspectives to our work to create a virtual and physical space that is accessible and inclusive to all program participants and members of our community. This year we grew our team and brought in new positions and individuals to ensure that the needs of our members and participants were being met.

To keep developing the strength of our team and ensure that we stay current on trends within our landscape, Abilities Centre launched our Teaching and Learning Institute to formalize a process for continuous learning and increase opportunities for personal and professional development. This year, the Institute committee worked with IDEA, program department heads and Human Resources to develop a training calendar that includes both staff training for work-related skills and optional professional development events facilitating observation of and honouring important cultural and historical days and months.

In addition to our staff, Abilities Centre is proud to work with many organizations and academic institutions as programming and research partners. These partnerships help us advance our mission, identifying gaps on a national scale within the disability sector so that development and expansion of programs directly align with the communities we serve. Our goal with these partnerships, first and foremost, is to capture the voices and stories of individuals that we represent, especially those with disabilities. Collaboration between Abilities Centre and other organizations helps to increase the impact of both our work and that of our partners. By collaborating, we streamline the use of resources, share learnings, and make sure actions are guided directly by the community and those with relevant expertise.

Our partnership strategy includes Abilities Centre team members influencing partners by continuing to uphold our standards for accessibility and inclusion in all their work. In working with partners this year, Abilities Centre team members shared our best practices for inclusive information collection, co-development with people with lived experience, and accessible virtual facilitation. Sharing our learnings and inviting partners to progress with us helps ensure accountability for breaking down barriers becomes a community responsibility, allowing us to unlock potential through accessibility on a larger scale.





Impact is about seeing the changes we can have in individuals' lives rather than only measuring success on the number people who come to our programs and services. With all our programs, we aim to create positive and lasting change in our communities, while unlocking individuals' potential. To further showcase and demonstrate the impact of our work this year, we redesigned how we assess our programs and services through our Impact Assessment Framework.

The Abilities Centre Impact Assessment Framework was developed to look at the impact of our programs and services from two perspectives. The first is to evaluate our programs to make sure they are meeting their objectives and helping participants achieve larger outcomes. The second is to share the stories of impact captured in our programs. The goal of both is to look past the number of people who attend our programs and capture how the programs are making a difference in the lives of these individuals.

Our new Impact Assessment Framework is used with each program. Based on the RE-AIM framework, we capture the reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance of each program. The program evaluations are created to meet the needs of the staff, participants, and other key individuals involved, while capturing each program's successes and areas of growth.

Second, our Impact Assessment Framework also allows us to capture the stories or pathways of impact for each program and service at Abilities Centre. Program staff and participants are the key storytellers of their experiences in our program. Therefore, our Impact Assessment Framework also includes stakeholder conversations and knowledge translation elements so we can share and celebrate the stories of our programs. Together, both elements of the Impact Assessment Framework allow us to capture reliable and credible evidence from our programs and make sure that this data represents the voices of those in the programs.

In this year's Impact Report, we captured data collected through these methods, sharing the stories of our programs and the learnings from our community. This report showcases impact on our communities through five different pathways: Community Hub, Innovation, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Participation, and Social Inclusion.

These pathways help us look at what each program achieved this year focusing on the opportunities we created for meaningful participation, and how we continue to be a leader at a provincial and national level in the field of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. It is important to note that although each program has been captured in one of the five pathways, the overall impact of all programs cross multiple pathways as programs are inter-connected and rely on each other to create the biggest impact.

PATHWAYS TO IMPACT

This year Abilities Centre has worked to capture and share our impact differently. Impact at Abilities Centre is defined as 'the outcome of the organization's work on the individuals they serve, the greater community, and their ability to create change at a local or global level'.



Community Hub

A community hub is defined as a two-way meeting space for knowledge exchange, accessing programs and services, building relationships, and strengthening ties between the community. At Abilities Centre, this means that we are a dynamic space that is not only utilized for the purpose of developing, testing, and scaling programs but contributes to discussions and the sharing of knowledge that contributes to the communities where we deliver programs. We also bring together groups and stakeholders to spark these conversations. We do this in several ways. The various programs and services that are highlighted in this pathway are: Community Events, Membership, Academy for Student Athlete Development, You.Me.We., Discovery College, Mixed Ability Sport, and Joint Research Ethics Board.





Community Events

Our goal has always been to ensure that Abilities Centre is not just a location that offers programs and services, but a safe and versatile space for the community. This past year has been challenging with public lockdowns, social isolation, COVID-anxiety, and COVID-fatigue. Ensuring our center adapted to meet the ever-changing needs of our community was important to us.

As the need to increase vaccination uptake became a national priority, the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table discussed how persons with disabilities were at an increased risk throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. They provided recommendations to increase the accessibility of vaccination experiences for persons with disabilities.

To better support our community during the pandemic and address the recommendations of the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, Abilities Centre launched two initiatives. First, we created the My Vaccine Why campaign. This campaign was centered around the experiences of Canadians with disabilities. Four videos were created that focused on different aspects of the importance of becoming vaccinated to safely reunite our communities. A key message of the campaign focused on how vaccines reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and allow for the lifting of restrictions bringing communities back together. This campaign was supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Over the month-long campaign, the videos were viewed by over **2,200** individuals and shared with over **68,000** social media feeds and **1,900** organizations.

Second, Abilities Centre hosted a sensory-friendly vaccine clinic. Due to the physical accessibility of our location, and the strategic design of our space, this clinic was able to be client-centred

and responsive to unique needs to accommodate successful vaccination experiences for people with disabilities. Over **270** community members accessed vaccinations at the clinic over two afternoons. Many of these vaccinations would not have been possible without the specific opportunities available at our site. We additionally collaborated with MCCSS, and local Developmental Service providers to host a second vaccine clinic through GO-VAXX for residents and staff from Durham Region Developmental Services agencies. This was a highly successful clinic and saw **186** residents and staff vaccinated and support the residential services capacity during the pandemic.

As we began to transition into recovery from the pandemic, Abilities Centre hosted the Festival of Trees and Holiday market on November 6th, 2021. This event was an opportunity for small businesses to sell and advertise their goods. It also brought the community and members of Abilities Centre together to enjoy the festivities and activities of the holidays. Among the highlights were watching movies, decorating trees, and making crafts. There were over **2,489** people in attendance and 30 participating vendors. The festival of trees and holiday market raised a total of **\$46,000**.

Abilities Centre also hosted spring training for the Oshawa Vikings Mixed Ability Rugby team. Through collaboration with Abilities Centre's Mixed Ability Sport initiative, Rugby Ontario and Rugby Canada, the Vikings are the first team from Canada to compete at the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament, hosted in Cork, Ireland in 2022. The team used our state-of-the-art facilities to train and practice weekly as they geared up for competition. The accessibility design features of our building allowed us to effectively share and maximize usage of the space with the team, and other teams and members of our community.



68,000

Impressions on social media during the "My Why" Vaccination campaign



2,489

People in attendance at the Festival of Trees



Membership

This year, adaptability was a key part of our members' experiences. With the various openings and re-openings due to COVID, members continued to find ways to engage with Abilities Centre. Early in the year, the Abilities Centre Virtual World provided an option for fitness outside the centre, with over 140 hours of video viewed from April to June 2021.

To support individuals transitioning back into the centre after months of not accessing fitness facilities, coaching sessions were made available to returning members. These sessions included assessments and planning discussions for how Abilities Centre can best meet needs and help people progress towards the goals that they have identified. Coaching sessions continue to be available for new and returning members of Abilities Centre to help them make the most of the centre.

To ensure that Abilities Centre is meeting the needs of our community, surveys were shared with our current and previous members to understand needs, hear perspectives, and gather recommendations. Over 350 responses were received, helping us to identify services that are most in-demand, gaps in current services, and areas for change from our members' perspectives. Moving into the next year, these responses are informing a strategy related to member experience with the views shared guiding key actions to be taken.



140

Hours of video viewed from April to June 2021.



75%
Growth in woman
registrations

ASAD

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-athlete's academic, athletic, and personal development together in one environment with a focus on developing accountability, respect, and leadership. ASAD is a partnership-based program supported by school boards in Durham Region and London, Provincial Sport Organizations, Canadian Sport Institute of Ontario, sport psychologists, and strength and conditioning and physiotherapy partners.

ASAD is the first sports academy for high school aged student-athletes on able-bodied, Paraspport, or Special Olympic high-performance pathways and offers streams across a variety of sports, including: Volleyball, Hockey, Rugby, Soccer, and students participating in our Individual Athlete Development (IAD) stream comprised of athletes competing in Baseball, Alpine Skiing, Water Polo, and Snowboarding. Each year, ASAD programming includes performance nutrition, mental performance, seminars on healthy sleep, technical sessions, and strength and conditioning sessions.

In the 2021-2022 school year, ASAD had 97 student-athletes, of which 43% were women. This represents a 75% growth in women registrations from the year previous. The IAD stream also saw a 50% growth in athletes from last year, and its highest enrollment since the inception of the program in 2016.

Current ASAD student-athletes shared that the ASAD program allows them to be around like-minded individuals with similar work-ethics and personal goals. This environment helps to support their athletic development. For many, the dedicated training time and space supports their overall well-being by aligning their schedule with their priorities and helping them balance their sport and personal obligations in a more sustainable way. Additionally, having five dedicated school board teachers allows students to stay on track with their schoolwork, while also managing their training. Participating in ASAD also supported athletes in connecting with others, building confidence, and fostering responsibility.

Some significant changes were implemented in ASAD to support the future growth of the program across the country. First, was the creation of a non-academic stream for Special Olympic athletes who are no longer in high school but would greatly benefit from all the other components of ASAD (strength & conditioning, nutrition, sport performance etc.). The program is providing the opportunity for two Special Olympics athletes to train in their sports of Power Lifting and Figure Skating. Their ASAD programming includes weekly strength and conditioning sessions and technical training with a coach. The participation of these athletes within the ASAD program has positively influenced the culture and inclusiveness of the ASAD program and impact on the students.

Second, ASAD has restructured its staffing framework to better support the national growth and delivery of the ASAD model. Two new positions were created, Manager, ASAD Enrollment and Administration and Manager, ASAD Integrated Support Teams to oversee the administration, operations, and programming of the current ASAD Campuses (Whitby and London) and future campuses. This restructure will create consistency, capacity and ensure a high level of quality assurance between all campuses.

Third, ASAD has signed on with Learning Stream, an online registration and classroom management platform to streamline student applications, registrations, reporting, attendance and communication with students and families. ASAD and Learning Stream are currently collaborating on development, with launch targeted for registration of the 2022-2023 incoming class.

Lastly, in 2021, the ASAD team was awarded a Sport Innovation Grant from Sport Canada. **This three-year \$260K grant** focuses on creating a national system of regional sport programming in parasport to support the overall development of parasport athletes. The ASAD team has already participated in a training camp with Canadian Blind Hockey and Ontario Cerebral Palsy Sport Association, working to understand and fill gaps in athletic development with these organizations.



You. Me. We.

Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life. Everyone's physical literacy journey is personal and unique to them. Abilities Centre's Physical Literacy and Inclusion team works across sectors to help make sure all people can be supported on their lifelong physical literacy journey. For youth in children's treatment centres (CTC), it can be challenging to be involved in activities and get moving in ways that support physical literacy development. You. Me.We. fills this gap by bringing participants together in a virtual space for interactive social games and physical activity led by Abilities Centre staff.

Through the virtual platform, Abilities Centre staff engage participants, wherever they are, to get them moving, have fun, and make friends. Additionally, You.Me.We. builds variations into every program plan and celebrates diverse holidays and recognition months throughout the year.

This year the Physical Literacy and Inclusion team collaborated with CTC's across Ontario, including Niagara Children's Centre, CHEO, Five Counties Children's Treatment Centre, and Grandview Kids. The relationship between Abilities Centre and these Children Treatment Centres continues to evolve so that new gaps can be identified, and the You.Me.We. program can adapt to best meet needs of potential participants.

The You.Me.We. programming is constantly well-received, with positive feedback coming from both participants and the CTC's who collaborate with Abilities Centre. Participants are invited to rank each session from 1-5 and consistently give the staff a 10. Recognizing the barriers to physical activity children face given their physical environment, You.Me.We. fills an important gap in programming for participants by providing children with opportunities to experience movement, development, and social engagement with their friends and family. It also provides opportunities for staff of CTCs to learn how physical literacy can be integrated into daily activities for youth.

New this year, Abilities Centre initiated conversations with Sick Kids hospital. We are now piloting the You.Me.We. program on the Sick Kids internal television loop, SKOOP. Based on the success of the pilot, we will look to continue delivering programming with Sick Kids in the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

Discovery College

As part of an initiative to grow community connections at Abilities Centre, we collaborated with Ontario Shores for Mental Health Science to create the Abilities Centre Discovery College. This is a new initiative that will be launched in the fall of 2022 with the goal of growing it over the next few years.

Discovery College is a place for community education. It brings people together from various backgrounds to learn, teach, and share skills that are important to them. Abilities Centre Discovery College is based on the Recovery College model that has been created by organizations such as Canadian Mental Health Association and Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Science. At Abilities Centre, instead of taking a mental health focus, Discovery College is all about learning and growing skills that are important to participants and members in a community setting. Discovery College courses are co-designed and co-facilitated by Abilities Centre staff and people with lived experience in the community. Individuals who are interested in being involved will receive training on how to co-design and co-facilitate Discovery College courses. These training workshops will build skills in our community and help create Discovery College courses that are important and valuable to our community.

This year, we worked with our partners at Ontario Shores, to understand how their experience with Recovery College can help us build our new training initiative. We also conducted surveys and focus groups with Abilities Centre staff to understand where Discovery College could fit within our Teaching and Learning Institute. Our next steps are to bring in members of our community to help us identify learning topics, and design and facilitate the courses so that they can be shared out in our community for everyone to take part. Look to see Discovery College courses coming to Abilities Centre in 2023!



Mixed Ability Sport



Mixed Ability Sport

Mixed Ability Sport represents an innovative approach to sport participation, radically changing the way we think of, join in, and participate in sport. Following the Mixed Ability Sport model, mainstream and grassroots clubs redefine membership within their teams, welcoming individuals of all abilities, ages, backgrounds and experiences to participate as equal, valued members of the team, playing traditional sport.

Abilities Centre is formally partnered with International Mixed Ability Sport in the United Kingdom which provided Abilities Centre with the exclusive rights to grow Mixed Ability Sport in Canada. This partnership connects Abilities Centre to a network of global partners driving the Mixed Ability Sport movement.

From its onset in 2020, Mixed Ability Sport Canada has co-developed all educational resources with a team of individuals with lived experience. Named the Inclusion in Sport team, this group of individuals meets weekly to discuss barriers to participation and solutions to break down these barriers to create a space where everyone is safe, supported and welcomed. The Inclusion in Sport team also leads coach certification courses, educates on the Mixed Ability model and its impact, and advocates for change. This year, the Mixed Ability coach certification trained 99 coaches from eight different sports (rugby, pickleball, artistic swimming, boxing, ringette, floor curling, baseball, and archery) and 24 clubs across three different provinces and ten regions of Ontario.

Mixed Ability Sport in Canada was initially launched with rugby clubs. Through funding support from Sport Canada's Innovation Initiative, Abilities Centre collaborated with Rugby Ontario to pilot a Mixed Ability Flag Rugby league in the summer of 2021. The pilot league included four teams from across Ontario (Oshawa Vikings Rugby Club, Toronto Muddy York Rugby Club, Burlington Centaurs RFC and London St. Georges RFC) participating in a summer league. This league culminated with the first-ever Mixed Ability Rugby tournament in Canada, the All in Rugby Cup. Based on the success of the event, the Oshawa Vikings Rugby Club, the only accredited Mixed Ability Sport club in Canada, was identified to be the first-ever Canadian team to participate in the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament (IMART). IMART represents the World Cup of Mixed Ability Rugby and is played as a full-contact rugby game. The team just competed in Cork, Ireland in June 2022.



99
Coaches

24
Participating
Clubs

Joint Research Ethics Board

In partnership with Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences, Abilities Centre launched a Joint Research Ethics Board (JREB). This initiative will allow for Abilities Centre and other community partners to grow the scope of our research and highlight the work done at Abilities Centre.

The Joint Research Ethics Board is part of our ongoing partnership with Ontario Shores, where together we are building a better community in Durham and beyond. The JREB will allow Abilities Centre to expand our research partnerships and our own initiatives to make sure that we are representing the needs of our community and our members. The JREB oversees all research conducted by Abilities Centre and Ontario Shores staff, as well as any other research submitted to the JREB from the community. The JREB approves all research studies and makes sure that each study follows guidelines for ethical and scientific practice. The JREB ensures that respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice are always upheld.

In March of this year, Dr. Rebecca Greenberg (<https://abilitiescentre.org/news/ontario-shores-and-abilities-centre-welcome-joint->) was selected as the chair of the JREB. Dr. Greenburg, along with JREB members who are Ontario Shores staff, Abilities Centre Staff, and community members, uphold ethical principles in their work to ensure that both organizations conduct high-quality research.



Innovation

Innovation is defined as an organization's ability to react to change and create new practices to have a larger impact on the individuals they serve. At Abilities Centre, this means that we are constantly challenging ourselves to 'think outside the box' to meet the needs of the communities we serve. The programs and services that take innovative approaches to creating and sharing impact and fall under this pathway include Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery (LEAD), Therapeutic Recreation in Schools (TRIS), Therapeutic Recreation (TR) Internal, and Physical Literacy and Inclusion.

[READ MORE](#)



LEAD^{Canada}TM

Leading Equitable and Accessible Delivery (LEAD) is a unique facilitated self-assessment process that supports businesses, municipalities, school boards and organizations to embed principles of accessibility and inclusion into their workplaces and work culture, resulting in removing barriers to make the communities we live, work and play in more accessible.

Rather than creating a universal plan for every organization to follow, the LEAD team takes an individualized approach to meet each organization where they are at in their journey to inclusion based on their readiness for change, capacity, and resources. This approach ensures that the changes being suggested are applicable, realistic and will create meaningful impact within organizations. Any improvements being suggested are made by researching best practices in the identified improvement topic areas. Additionally, since LEAD is a self-assessment process, it is the individuals in the organization assessing themselves, not the LEAD team or an external body. The LEAD facilitation team guides the organization to evaluate, rate, and provide evidence of their accessibility and inclusion strategies, policies, and best practices across their various departments. The team provides on-going support, and resources for up to 12 months once the improvement plan is developed. Therefore, we work with organizations from the beginning and throughout the process rather than having a single contact or point of communication.

The LEAD team has completed the LEAD self-assessment with:

- Ottawa International Soccer Club
- YMCA (Oshawa and Markham)
- Municipality of Clarington
- Ottawa- River Canoe Club
- SmartDesk
- 1855 Whitby
- Durham District School Board
- Township of Scugog
- Town of Ajax
- Vecova
- City of Surrey
- City of Oshawa
- Surrey United Soccer Club
- Abilities Centre

14
organizations

261
participants

32

Further, given the integral role IDEA has in LEAD, the LEAD team has revised the LEAD indicators or categories presented during self-assessments to organizations to include more diversity and inclusion elements. The implications of participating in the innovative process of LEAD are significant and extend beyond creating a more inclusive and equitable space. LEAD can support better economic and social outcomes for municipalities, public sector organizations, private corporations, and individuals. Information collected through follow-up meetings highlighted the following organizational changes and impact because of LEAD:

- Organizations were able to operationalize AODA compliance through LEAD process
- Organizations are using LEAD to build multi-year accessibility plans that meet and exceed AODA standards
- HR practices & policies were updated to implement more inclusive hiring practices resulting in increased focus on hiring people with disabilities
- Workforce development plans were created focusing on diversifying staffing at all levels and improving representation
- Governance structure and recruitment procedures were changed to improve representation of Board members
- Department silos were broken down to ensure accountability for accessibility is embedded across organizations
- Organizational need to collect employee demographic and engagement data was highlighted through LEAD process
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plans incorporated Accessibility to add value to strategies
- Organization gained confidence and support on how to build out their accessibility plans



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Impact Report

Therapeutic Recreation in the Schools (TRIS) promotes inclusion and resilience among students with disabilities to support their psychosocial wellbeing, healthy development, and quality of life. This program fills a gap in schools by supporting students to develop and enhance important skills such as emotional regulation, confidence, problem solving, and igniting a value for remaining active and engaged. Through this skill development, students build motivation, 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 cope with future challenges and using their personal resources with the support of their social networks. TRIS focuses on meaningful– participation in the school and community settings through creation, movement, and education.

From October 2021 to March 2022, 87 students from 12 classes participated in TRIS programming. Through TRIS, this year students learned skills such as:

- supporting healthy friendships,
- solving problems,
- resolving conflicts,
- leading,
- coping with stress,
- setting goals, and
- finding joy.



Students demonstrated the skills and shared how they will use them in their lives outside of school. Students also built confidence and formed connections, demonstrated by sharing more frequently with less support, as well as listening and encouraging their peers. A key outcome of participating in TRIS programming is that students have become more aware of and connected to their opportunities for continued recreation in the community.

Having TRIS in the classroom had a positive impact on not only students, but educators as well. Teachers reported that through TRIS they had opportunities to:

- take a break, giving them more support and less stress,
- observe new and innovative ideas that they can adopt into their teaching, and to refer back to TRIS’s program topics and learnings with their students, enhancing curriculum in the classroom.



“I see this as a gap-closing opportunity, by providing students with the opportunity to be exposed to [Abilities Centre], it’s introducing students to and making that connection to the community. An inclusive opportunity that promotes self-esteem, confidence, and how a community partner can enhance independence. This is a community partner that’s not there in a medical position, this will hopefully provide families down the road with other opportunities for development of life skills” - TRIS Teacher

With the strong, trusting relationships the Therapeutic Recreation department has built with the participating teachers and school boards, TRIS will continue to expand. TRIS has begun delivery with the Toronto District School Board and plans to be in more classes with the Durham District School Board. The team is also partnering with the Durham Catholic District School Board, Community Living Ajax-Pickering, Project SEARCH and Abilities Centre Employment team to build a program that uses Therapeutic Recreation and job search strategies to support students to successfully participate in pre-employment and employment programs.

TRIS is also expanding its’ scope into two other areas of programming. First, we are partnering with schools in priority neighbourhoods in Durham Region to support marginalized youth at risk to improve school attendance and engagement. Second, we are working with the school board to support the creation of a universal classroom curriculum with an Integrated Health Team.



Therapeutic Recreation at Abilities Centre

This year, Abilities Centre’s Therapeutic Recreation (TR) programming continued to address gaps in programming by supporting children, youth and adults with disabilities in developing skills while connecting them with activities to explore and enjoy well into the future. The TR offerings that happen at Abilities Centre Durham take a strength-based approach. Through TR at Abilities Centre, participants:

- engage in activities that support socialization, movement, and well-being
- identify and work towards goals, and form strong connections to others and to their communities that have lifelong impact.

The TR team has seen a significant change in the complexity of needs that many participants are bringing forward, highlighting the importance of developing TR programming through the lens of intersecting identities. This is an area of great growth and accomplishment for Abilities Centre as it proves that individuals belonging to different communities see our facility, our staff and programs as a safe space to bring their whole selves. To ensure the needs of all individuals are addressed, the TR team has added more training on IDEA to ensure that all our staff are equipped with the confidence, respect, and knowledge to provide high quality customer service to our participants and families. The TR programs continue to be a foundation of Abilities Centre’s programs and services department, supporting participants in developing the tools for future success in employment, life skills, post-rehabilitation, and Physical Literacy & Inclusion programs. Abilities Centre is working to develop partnerships and programming that supports individuals beyond the centre.

The Active Connection program engages participants in activities and challenges related to resiliency, increases their physical activity and social involvement, and supports their transition to employment and life skills programming offered at the centre. This year, Active Connection ran four 10-week sessions with an average of 15 individuals participating each time. This program uses a variety of recreation activities as a place to develop social skills that participants can use beyond the centre to enhance their well-being.



The Thinking Ahead program engages participants in goal setting, building skills to pursue the goals, physical activity, and social interaction. This year, Thinking Ahead ran three 10-week sessions with an average of 10 individuals participating each time. In the last session of Thinking Ahead the group identified four broad goals: be more active, be more social, be more creative and try new things.

To work towards meeting the recreation needs of higher priority communities, Abilities Centre TR team consulted staff and participants from Community Development Council Durham, Welcome Centre, Settlement Workers in Schools, Durham Youth Services, and Pride Flag Durham, to inform a new recreation program for marginalized youth. The Level Up program is dedicated to removing barriers for marginalized populations. The program curriculum and delivery are directly based on the needs shared by members of the community during the focus groups. The program is set to launch in Spring 2022.

THERAPEUTIC
RECREATION



Physical Literacy & Inclusion

Physical Literacy has increased in popularity on a global scale over the past decade. Research has shown that physical literacy plays an important role in encouraging and supporting individuals to be and stay physically active for life. To help us explore how to better use physical literacy in our community, we've taken a tiered approach. First, we created a team of experts (internal and external) to help us understand and develop physical literacy programming to support our community. Second, we asked our community to help us co-develop and co-design the programming to meet their needs. And third, we delivered this program to our community and examined the impact.

In October 2021, to start building our Physical Literacy and Inclusion team, we hired a full-time Senior Coordinator. We then added two other key individuals to the team to help increase the quality of our programming.

- Dr. Kyle Pushkarenko, Assistant Professor, School of Human Kinetics and Recreation at Memorial University (NL) and Special Interest Group Lead: Inclusion, with the International Physical Literacy Association (IPLA) was hired as Contractor, Physical Literacy Research and Content Development.
- Greg Henhawk, Mohawk of the Bear Clan, retired teacher, and Coaches Association of Canada Master Learning Facilitator was hired as Contractor, Physical Literacy Content Development.

Both team members bring personal and professional expertise in the field of physical literacy and facilitation. Greg Henhawk also brings forward lived experience from an Indigenous perspective. The Physical Literacy and Inclusion Team oversees all physical literacy programming within the centre and collaborates on all external physical literacy partnerships.

Since the creation of the team, two major projects have been completed. The first project was the collective development and creation of a video introducing Physical Literacy and an individual's journey through life using an Indigenous metaphor for water (<https://youtu.be/vw7k3KYuoP4>).

[Watch the video here](https://youtu.be/vw7k3KYuoP4)



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The second project was hearing about how the Physical Literacy and Inclusion workshop can best address gaps in Physical Literacy knowledge, through focus groups with teachers. The purpose was to identify the teachers' level of understanding of physical literacy, barriers to inclusive facilitation practices, and their confidence in implementing these practices in their own settings. These focus groups were guided by the current definition of physical literacy from the

International Physical Literacy Association, which defines physical literacy as, "the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life." Participants' feedback helped us modify our Physical Literacy and Inclusion Workshop content and delivery to ensure that it met the needs of participants while also being grounded in best practices.

After incorporating the recommendations from the focus groups, the Physical Literacy and Inclusion workshop was re-launched this year. The four-hour interactive workshop is geared toward program leaders, coaches, teachers, students, and recreational professionals to help them develop an understanding of the purpose and value of physical literacy and inclusion. Attendees also participate in activities to practice applying the workshop learnings. This workshop teaches attendees to appreciate the holistic and unique journey of physical literacy.

Understanding the needs of teachers and the demands on their time, each workshop aims to provide teachers with a positive experience that meets their needs. Therefore, to make participation accessible for all, childcare and class coverage options were offered to teachers who were participating in the workshops. The workshop content also continues to be updated and modified as we learn more about what works best, and what can be improved to better support workshop participants.

This year, we worked with five school boards and one independent public school to provide the Physical Literacy and Inclusion Workshops. Forty-nine teachers were able to participate in four separate workshops. As a result of the teacher participation, 25,013 students have been indirectly impacted by the workshops.

Participants' feedback after the workshop highlighted that the workshop helped increased teachers' understanding of the key concepts of physical literacy. They learned about the holistic nature of physical literacy, how it can look different for everyone (i.e., there is no one right way to participate), and how it can change throughout someone's life. Lastly, participants were able to better understand how to design accessible and inclusive programming and facilitate inclusive instruction, activities, and language use.

The Abilities Centre team also identified an opportunity to link each workshop with a follow-up field trip. This practice provided workshop attendees with the opportunity to co-facilitate programming with Abilities Centre staff, helping to build confidence in their practice. The next step of this process will include a re-design of Abilities Centre's field trip content to be co-developed by individuals with lived experience.



25,013

Students Directly Impacted



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Impact Report

Health & Wellbeing

Health & wellbeing is defined as an individual's current state or their satisfaction with their physical and mental health, psychological and emotional wellbeing, and personal development. At Abilities Centre, this means that individuals have the opportunity and access to maintain and improve all aspects of their wellness based on their personal goals. Programs and services that fall under the health and wellbeing pathway include Fitness and Wellness, National Disability Survey, TIME, Next Steps, RCM, and Virtual Fitness for Breath.

Fitness and Wellness

Staying active and maintaining physical and mental health was hard during the pandemic. As Abilities Centre began to re-open, we knew that our community wanted to get back to normal and participate in their favourite activities. To capture any needs that may have changed since the pandemic, we launched a qualitative-based membership survey. This survey allowed us to receive feedback on our members interests and needs. The goal was to understand how we can contribute to creating a better overall Abilities Centre experience, while meeting the health, social, and physical needs of our members. Members shared their concerns and feedback about returning to in-person fitness and wellness programs, and we were able to take this feedback and integrate it into our services. For instance, based on member feedback we extended our facility hours on weekdays and weekends and added a greater variety of classes with more spots and booking times available.

For example, with so many people having taken a break from formal health and wellness activities due to COVID restrictions, there was an opportunity to better support individuals on their wellness journey. To help members safely return to activities and learn about new programming, the Fitness and Wellness team introduced new personal coaching sessions

for members and staff. These coaching sessions involve a health assessment and a guided discussion on exercise history and personal goals. Through the coaching sessions, members learned about Abilities Centre and the different programming opportunities they could use to further their wellness journey. Members were also given the opportunity to do a three-month follow-up coaching session to check in on their goals and get further feedback. These coaching sessions will continue for the foreseeable future.

In addition to the coaching sessions, 46 Specialty Fitness sessions were offered to participants this year. From the survey, individuals were interested in participating in stretch and strength, yoga, and specialty classes, spin, and dance, in addition to current programs. Therefore, more offerings were added to Abilities Centre's Specialty Fitness classes to meet this demand. These classes help participants maintain their physical activity, build muscle, learn new ways to move, and encourage participants to challenge themselves in safe and fun ways. These classes are one part of individuals' wellness journey to help individuals to maintain and improve their health and build their self-confidence and mastery.

Alongside the fitness and specialty classes, 1,502 Personal training sessions were completed by Health and Wellness Coaches. In the feedback survey, respondents discussed the mental health benefits associated with engaging in our classes and fitness opportunities. Recognizing the importance of maintaining mental health and engaging in activities that promote social wellbeing, the exercise and physical activity done our classes can help individuals achieve their goals.



1,502
Personal Training
Sessions



National Disability Survey

Persons with disabilities are often underrepresented in research spaces, meaning that policy decisions that effect persons with disabilities are often being made without proper up-to-date evidence. Recognizing how important it is to capture the current needs and experiences of persons with disabilities in Canada, the National Disability Survey was created. Our team at Abilities Centre and our partners with the Canadian Disability Participation Project, lead this ongoing survey. The survey aims to capture the needs of persons with disability during, post- pandemic and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey questions were built with input from disability groups and organizations across Canada including:

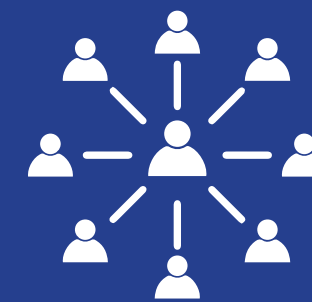
- Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance,
- Canadian Labour Congress,
- COVID-19 Disability Working Group for the British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and
- The Rick Hansen Foundation.

Since its launch, the survey has run three iterations and data have been collected from **1,828** Canadians. The findings have been shared with organizations and community members across Canada through five published reports which are available in English, ASL, Plain Language and French. Presentations of the survey findings were also delivered to 5 provincial Ministries (Ontario Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility, Ontario Ministry of Health, Ontario Ministry of Education, Ontario Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Service, and BC Ministry of Accessibility Legislation) and Parks and Recreation Ontario,

National Disability Survey data (from September 19th, 2021, to April 11th, 2022), was part of the third iteration of the COVID-19 National Disability Survey. Data for the third report were collected from **402** respondents from across Canada. The survey data highlighted that physical health, mental health, and social isolation as issues of serious concern for these individuals. Specifically, access to services that can support mental health and reduce social isolation (counseling, peer support, recreation and leisure programs) are a significant unmet need for people

with disabilities and their families since the start of the pandemic. Canadians with disabilities also continue to report concerns around finances and future plans throughout the pandemic. Finally, rates of physical inactivity for children with disabilities is alarmingly high. For more details, please visit the webpage for the latest reports (<https://abilitiescentre.org/disabilitysurvey>).

The ongoing data collection of the National Disability Survey allows us to track the changing and evolving needs of persons with disabilities. As well, it allows us to conduct inclusive, ethical, meaningful, and trustworthy research with this underrepresented population. Further, this data has significant real-life application and is being shared with organizations and policy makers across Canada to create not just a localized effort but a national effort to better support people with disabilities. We now have a better understanding of needs are not being met for persons with disabilities using evidence-based information.



1,828
respondents from
across Canada.



TIME

This year, Together in Movement and Exercise (TIME) continued to engage people with neuromuscular conditions in group exercise to support their physical, mental, and social health. While each participant of the program has their own goals and reasons for participating, TIME has long been a strong community that supports both socialization and exercise. Over the last year, 269 classes were delivered for TIME with 37 different people participating. TIME participants from this year shared different ways the program has impacted their overall health and well-being including:

- helping them to build strength,
- keeping them both physically and mentally active,
- improving their balance and mobility in their daily life, and
- helping them become more independent.

This year, a new program was created that it is a preliminary to TIME to reach participants who can walk less than 10m with or without a walking aid device. TIMElite was created in partnership with the University Health Network (UHN) and started in the winter session with 4 participants.

The TIME team continues to find more ways to grow and better support the well-being of people in the community. This year:

There was a new collaboration within Abilities Centre with a Mixed Ability Sport “try-it” session for floor curling during a TIME class. The goal is to connect our community members with other activities so they can become more involved in activities within and beyond the Abilities Centre.

Abilities Centre has been collaborating with UHN in creating a ‘mobile’ TIME team to deliver classes in the community working with UHN and Lakeridge Health. This will get more people who are not able to attend at the centre more access to TIME classes.

The Senior Coordinator of Post-Rehab was trained by the Heart & Stroke Foundation to deliver the Living with Stroke program at Abilities Centre. Living with Stroke provides education to people who have had a stroke, gives information about how to understand what happens following a stroke, and supports care partners of those who have had a stroke. This educational program will be implemented in Fall 2022.

Next Steps

The next steps program was initially created by Abilities Centre as a pathway for participants with neuromuscular conditions that have graduated from previous post-rehabilitation programs. This year, 5 participants engaged in Next Steps. Moving forward, Abilities Centre is collaborating with UHN to create a TIMEplus program for individuals who have progressed beyond the standard TIME program. With the TIMElite and TIME programs, this will make a pathway of participation where individuals with neuromuscular conditions progress towards their goals in a positive social environment.

Respiratory Cardiac Maintenance

Respiratory and Cardiac Maintenance (RCM) is a post-rehabilitation program for those who have a chronic lung or cardiac condition. This program allows participants to continue their exercise routine after completion of a rehabilitation program. RCM met virtually through the summer months and returned to the centre for in-person programming in the fall. Throughout the year, 15 members of Abilities Centre community engaged in RCM either virtually or in person at the centre. RCM participants attend consistently and have created a very supportive, motivating culture for exercise participation.




269
Classes
Delivered

Virtual Fitness for Breath

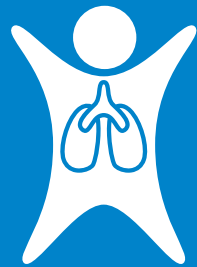
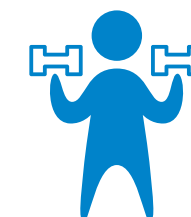
This year, Fitness for Breath was introduced as a new respiratory maintenance program offered by Abilities Centre, in partnership with the Lung Health Foundation. Virtual Fitness for Breath helps alleviate barriers related to physical location and immune system concerns to promote participation among people with chronic lung conditions. Participants of Virtual Fitness for Breath have experienced significant physical and mental health benefits, and a sense of community and belonging. The program ran for the first time during October and November 2021 with 6 participants. Enrollment took off in the winter session, with 22 participants engaging from January to March, 2022.

Virtual Fitness for Breath participants shared that through the program they:

- maintained their lung function and could breathe easier,
- became stronger and felt more confident in daily activities,
- improved their mobility and strength, and
- regained confidence with exercising

Additionally, participants were energized for the rest of the day after attending sessions and some individuals also really enjoyed the challenge of being able to ramp up intensity as the sessions went on. With the isolation of COVID-19, Virtual Fitness for Breath importantly gave an opportunity for participants to be surrounded by other people and have a community, helping them:

- maintain a positive mood,
- feel motivated and inspired by seeing others,
- be accountable and committed to attending, and
- find social support and validation for their experiences





Economic Participation

Economic participation is defined as an individual's meaningful involvement in the development of skills and abilities to provide access to adequate income, benefits, and personal resources. At Abilities Centre, this means that participants can gain the skills and competencies necessary to seek out and successfully engage in employment opportunities to the extent they choose. Participants can meet their employment goals and employers are able to provide the necessary support to help all individuals succeed. Programs and services included in the pathway of economic participation include: the Disability Inclusion Workshop, EmployAbilities, and Connect2Work.

Disability Inclusion Workshop

Biases, assumptions, and societal discourse are known barriers to providing opportunities for persons with disabilities. They prevent full participation in employment spaces in the way that they choose. Employers and businesses are large stakeholders that can increase the participation of persons with disabilities in job settings. Therefore, Abilities Centre's Disability Inclusion Workshop was created to train employers and businesses to improve the success of hiring people with disabilities.

The goal of this workshop is to create an understanding of the concepts of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Universal Design in a way that is sector specific. Another important goal of this workshop is to challenge pre-existing biases and prejudices of employers.

For any organization or group who participates in this workshop, it is a step forward in the path of creating more inclusive spaces. Recognizing that Abilities Centre is guided by and models the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, the Disability Inclusion Workshop is mandatory for all staff. Further, outside of the organization, the uptake of this workshop has been incredible. More organizations are now asking for this workshop to be led at their workplaces and spaces. To date, 190 people have completed the Disability Inclusion workshop and six organizations (Surrey United soccer club, Scugog, Ajax, Jays Care, Oshawa, and Abilities Centre), with more to come in the next months.

The knowledge shared in these workshops has led organizations to change their hiring practices to remove systemic barriers that have prevented individuals with disabilities from applying for jobs in the past. This workshop and the changes that come out of it have a real-life impact for persons with disability. It helps increase the opportunity for economic participation within various sectors. The move to create more accessible and inclusive spaces is not a sprint, it is a marathon. Organizations choosing to participate in this workshop are part of that journey.



190
people completed
Disability Inclusion
Workshop



**2021-2022
Impact Report**

EmployAbilities



Most employment service providers do not offer the support necessary to help individuals with barriers gain pre-employment skills needed to obtain and maintain a job. The Employment team at Abilities Centre aims to take a different approach to their employment services to meet this gap by taking an individualized approach to supporting participants. The main priority of our employment services is to support individuals from a strength-based approach and provide them with the skills, support, and resources necessary to succeed in their employment goals.

This past year, EmployAbilities, our workshop focusing on pre-employment soft skills, helped individuals to successfully identify areas of employment that matched their skills, goals, values, and strengths. Individuals are then able to determine their employment goals and begin taking steps towards achieving them (i.e., applying for a job). Participants also work one-on-one with our Employment Specialist to reinforce concepts that are important for them personally. This approach supports each individual and helps them gain a better understanding of the concepts taught and their application. The skills and knowledge learned in this workshop are universal and transferable to life outside of employment. By participating in EmployAbilities, individuals develop their self-awareness, personal growth, and professional growth. Specific topics taught in EmployAbilities workshops include:

- having appropriate conversations,
- professionalism,
- advocacy,
- time management, and
- independence

Eighty-two EmployAbilities classes were delivered this year. Thirty-six individuals were enrolled in Employabilities, 35 of which completed the program. Many individuals move onto the Connect2Work workshop for the next step in their employment journey, after developing their pre-employment skills. All participants from the February – March cohort moved on to the Connect2Work workshop.



Connect2Work

Connect2Work, launched in November 2021, connects employers and job-seeking members of Abilities Centre's community who are 16 and older. Connect2Work teaches participants how to: network, interview, job search, build resumes and apply for jobs.

In Connect2Work, individuals use this knowledge and skill set to plan out their next steps in their employment journey. Developing participants' hard skills importantly allows individuals to be more successful when applying for, obtaining and maintaining a job. This year, individuals of the Connect2Work program expressed being able to successfully:

- build the confidence to meet people,
- make meaningful connections,
- gain the skills to effectively perform a job search, and
- learn how to create and format a resume based on the job description

With this updated curriculum, 40 Connect2Work classes were facilitated this year. Importantly, following the successful completion of Connect2Work, our participants are now beginning to get hired in workplaces. Connect2Work alumni entered job development and began applying for and interviewing jobs. Three are now employed.

Abilities Centre's Job Developer and Job Coaches provide support through the process of getting hired and continues to support individuals to ensure success in their job once they have been hired. To recruit from diverse communities, the Employment team collaborates with the IDEA Director to send job opportunities and postings to the IDEA Council. The IDEA Council disseminates the opportunities to their networks to encourage a broader reach.

Further, employment staff have actively embedded principles of IDEA. Employment department staff met with key program partners of the Connect2Work workshops who act as guest speakers/subject matter experts to support them in improving their presentation style to be more accessible and inclusive. This will improve engagement of Abilities Centre clients in employment programs but also members of the other communities that these partners engage in.

Both Connect2Work and EmployAbilities are unique pathways for achieving economic participation. They not only increase participation of persons with disabilities in workspaces but also challenge businesses biases and assumptions. These pathways provide individuals with the skills, knowledge, resources, and support necessary to not just achieve a job but maintain a job.

Leadership in Training

Leadership in Training (LIT) is a workshop for youth aged 15 to 30. LIT 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. With Leadership in Training, individuals have the opportunity for self-discovery within the group, helping to build self-awareness, promote community engagement, and support health and wellbeing. This year the Leadership in Training curriculum was updated to make sure it is aligned with the needs of the community members and sets all participants up for success for the next step in their journey. The program changed from an 11-week workshop to a six-week workshop. Between the original workshop and the new workshop, 30 individuals completed Leadership in Training this year.

This year, participants made huge strides in personal development related to their skills and self-confidence. Over time in the workshop, participants:

- became more comfortable interacting and sharing in the group,
- demonstrated confidence by expanding on answers and asking for and offering help, and
- demonstrated self-exploration by relating activities back to their previous experiences.

After completing the workshop, individuals are referred to programming that supports the next steps in their journey. Those with employment goals typically progress to EmployAbilities to pursue pre-employment skills. Those with social or movement goals often find success in Abilities Centre Therapeutic Recreation programming where they continue developing their understanding of their values, interests, and strengths while creating social relationships and exploring recreation activities that are fulfilling.



★ART★



Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is defined as an individual's meaningful participation, to the extent they choose, in an environment with others that fosters a sense of belonging, autonomy, and shared support. At Abilities Centre, this means that individuals can interact with one another in a safe, and welcoming space no matter who they are. As a result, they can build meaningful relationships. Programs and services that fall under the pathway of social inclusion include Leadership in Training, Sparking Connections, Thrive, Pathways, IDEA Advisory Council and Ambassador meetings.

Sparking Connections

During challenging times, being able to relate to others and feel supported by others can have a significant impact on our wellbeing. Sparking Connections was a new program introduced to Abilities Centre to promote a sense of belonging and safe space for individuals with Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias. It was also created as a place for participants’ care partners to connect with each other.

Sparking Connections is a learning environment, where students and participants connect to one another. These intergenerational connections allow individuals to challenge assumptions of each other, provide participants the opportunity to mentor the students, and allow learning to be exchanged. Sparking Connections ran two 12-week sessions, in the fall and winter, offering two 90-minutes sessions each week. Program activities focused on being social, building skills, and engaging in a variety of physical activities.

Participants shared that through Sparking Connections they:

- tried new things and learned new skills,
- met new people and formed relationships,
- played games and expressed themselves, and
- were heard and valued

For the students involved, Sparking Connections:

- changed their perceptions of persons living with dementia, and
- enhanced their understanding of how to effectively facilitate reminiscence and recreation programming.



Thrive is an innovative adult day program for individuals over the age of 18 with developmental disabilities. In Thrive, participants engage in activities that support their health and well-being. They build social relationships with each other, staff, and other members of Abilities Centre’s community. Thrive does this by focusing on connecting people with activities they enjoy in programming. All programming options in Thrive focus on the following four areas: social engagement, creative expression, life skills, and sports and movement. Through engaging activities, Thrive provides a strong foundation that supports individuals in community engagement and achievement of their goals. Not only did the Thrive team continue to delivery high quality programming through the public health lockdowns this year, but they also learned and grew through those ups and downs.

- Thrive transitioned to offer a variety of formats that ensured positive connection and reduced social isolation for participants. The team found different avenues to keep everyone safe and connected.
- The Thrive team found ways to optimize engagement through group sizes that will be brought forward to ensure participants have the best experience in the program. These optimal groups allow participants to take the lead and authentically engage in social relationships while fully participating in program activities.
- Virtual program leaders helped teach digital literacy skills that enhanced engagement and can be translated to other appropriate online spaces for continued enjoyment.
- The outdoor Dance Frenzie parking lot program brought participants and their families together and has continued to be requested throughout the year.
- These learnings will be used as the Thrive curriculum gets updated over the next year to better meet the needs of the participants and the changing landscape with virtual delivery.

Thrive has many community partners that collaborate on delivering programming to help connect participants with activities in the community and offer a variety of different programming. Partners who were involved this year included: Carea, Horizons Music Therapy, Windreach Farms, Robert McLaughlin Art Gallery, Jays Care Foundation, Archery2You, DanceCode, Rocks and Rings (Floorcurl).

Pathways

Pathways

Pathways is a space for individuals 14+ to develop skills to foster independence and community engagement. Individuals engage in experiential learning to develop the preparation, planning, communication, and problem-solving skills needed to navigate community outings safely and comfortably.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, Pathways utilized a virtual model throughout the year, bringing the community to the participants through guest speakers rather than the participants into the community. Community partners engaged in the program to discuss how they make an impact in a positive way within their community and answered participant questions. Topics covered in the program include public transportation awareness, online safety, healthy lifestyles, and social recreation. The virtual delivery also supported participants in developing confidence navigating online and using digital communications.

Four complete sessions of Pathways were run this year with a total of 18 participants. After Pathways, some participants moved on to other Abilities Centre programming such as Leadership in Training workshop or Therapeutic Recreation programming. Participants indicated that their time in Pathways helped them:

- 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

Pathways' unique curriculum helps meet the needs of the participants by providing a space for individuals to become more integrated with their community,

"I really appreciate the Abilities Centre and the special programming you offer to those with special needs. There aren't many programs out there that I'm aware of, and the programming that you offer is well above and beyond anything else we have been involved with. Please continue to expand and grow [the Pathways] program!"

- Pathways Parent

With the lifting of restrictions, Pathways will return to an in-person model moving forward and will continue to expand to meet the needs of our diverse participants.



IDEA Advisory Council and Ambassadors Meetings

This year, an IDEA Advisory Council was formed with 14 volunteer community members sharing their lived experience to guide Abilities Centre work. 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. Members of the Council have created working groups on communications, outreach, and data collection. These working groups have formed workplans and recommendations to guide work in those areas. A member of the Council also supported Abilities Centre staff's growth through a professional development session on Women's Career Development for International Women's Day entitled: The Art of Pivoting: How to Navigate Life Changes on Your Journey to Career Success.

Abilities Centre Staff also have monthly IDEA Ambassadors meetings where staff come together to share experiences. Topics this year included mental health, information about Indigenous communities, Invisible Disabilities, Career Advancement, and Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Anti-Immigrant sentiments. Resources are shared at each session to help with learning.





Abilities Centre’s diversified business model is unique among organizations in Canada’s charitable sector, as we generate revenue from a variety of enterprise and philanthropic sources. Multiple funding streams strengthen our financial position, ensuring that we can fulfill commitments to our clients and stakeholders now and in the future. Operating as an agile organization, we have proven to be successful in employing innovative revenue generation strategies, while continuing to deliver on our charitable objectives.

The organization delivered strong financial performance in fiscal 2021/22, and although a cumulative deficit remains from our inception, our long-term sustainability outlook is positive. With continued support from our donors, funders, and partners, we are confident in our ability to exponentially increase our impact in the years to come, while maintaining financial viability.

In fiscal 2021/22, we were able to restructure and strengthen the balance sheet through the acquisition of new funding partners, and in locking in fixed-rate financing. We introduced new programming and scaled existing services to meet the needs of new clients, communities and partners.

The organization was able to maintain employment throughout the pandemic through utilizing the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) program, which has supported high employee retention rate and engagement, thus resulting in good service continuity. The strength of an organization is its people, and we are grateful to our government partners for providing assistance through the CEWS program and supporting our employees.

The Board of Directors and Executive Leadership Team extends their sincere thanks to staff for their continued commitment to our cause, and to our clients, partners, and funders whose investment and support is critical in assisting us to unlock the potential of those we serve.

As we celebrate our 10-year anniversary, we are excited to chart our journey and impact for the next 10 years. With a refreshed strategic plan, excellent governance, and a passionate, talented staff, we are confident in our ability to transform the landscape of accessibility and inclusion across Canada.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stuart McReynolds".

Stuart McReynolds
President & CEO, Abilities Centre

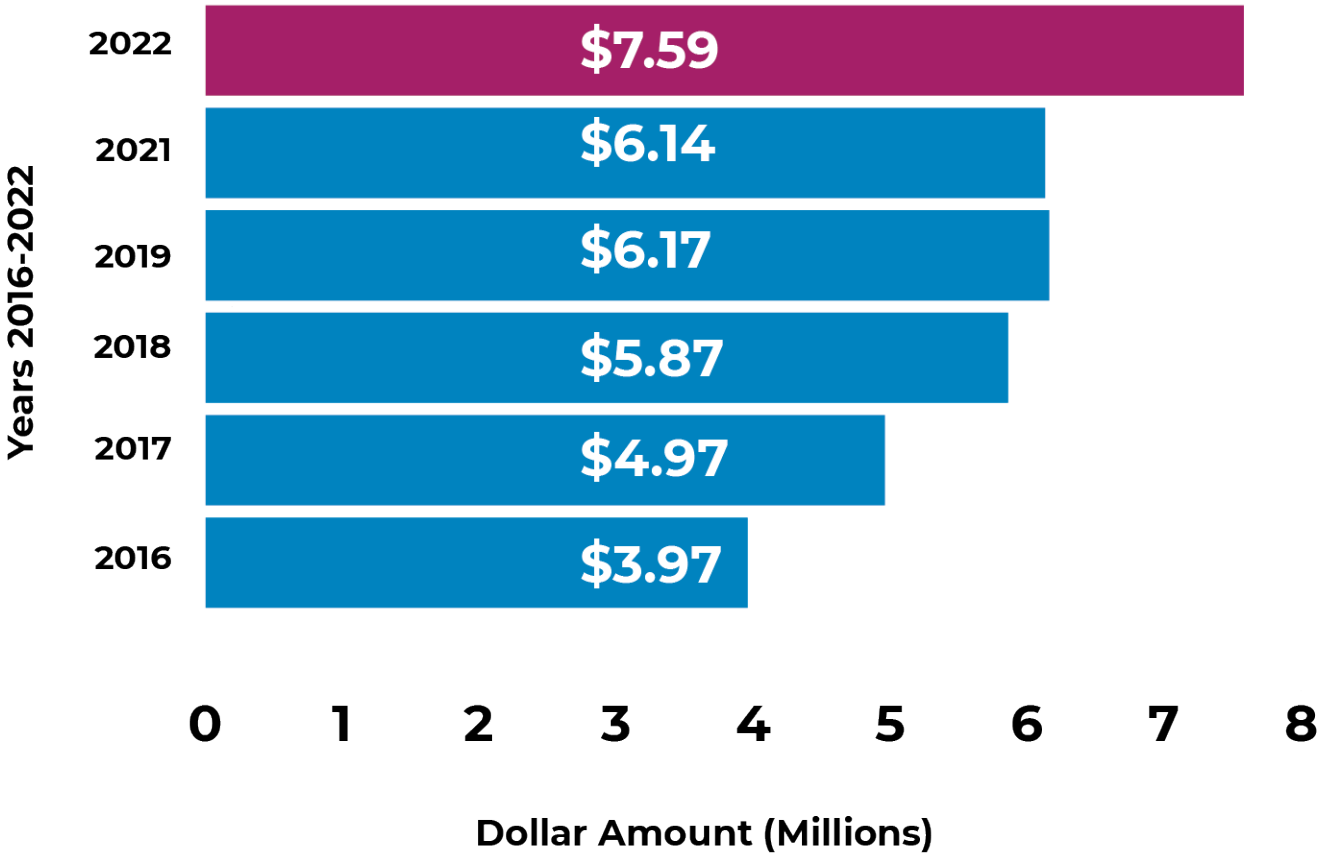
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Wafer".

Mark Wafer
Chair, Abilities Centre Board of Directors

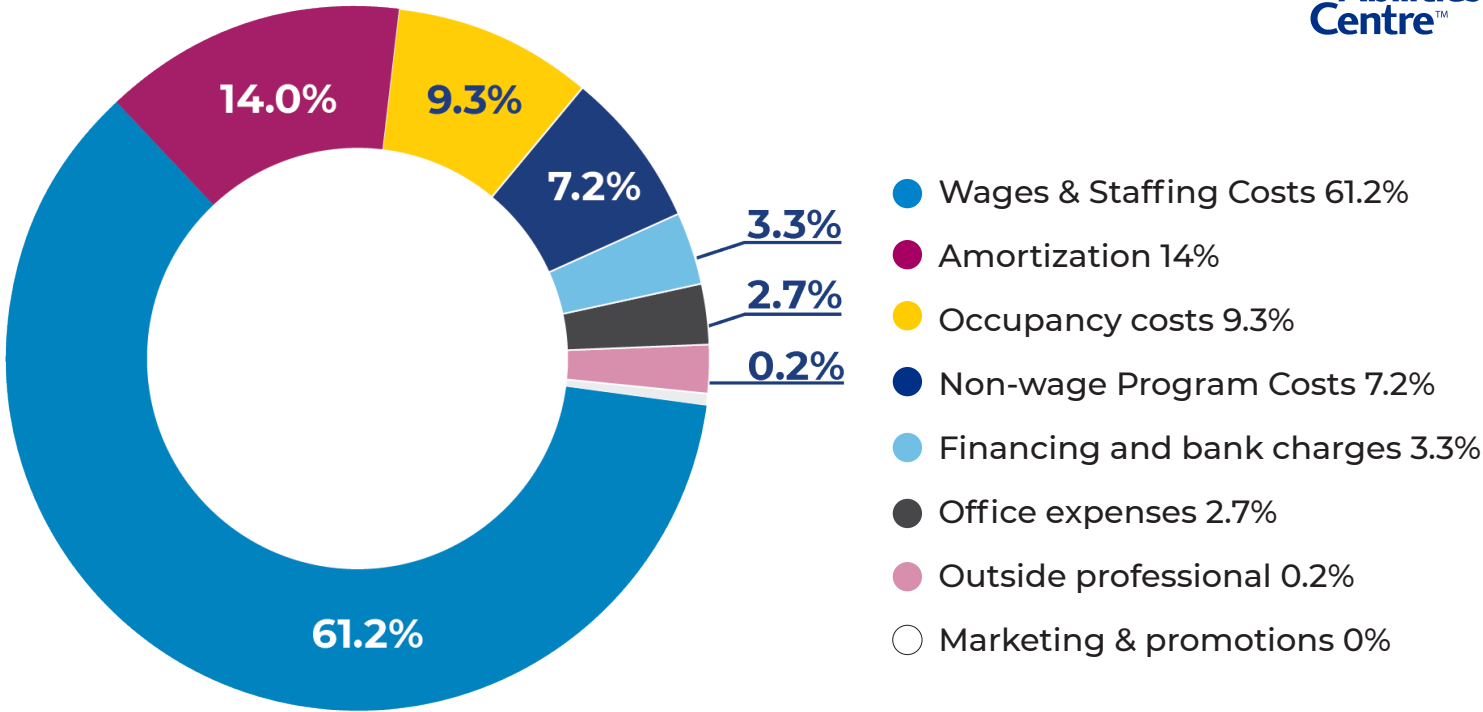




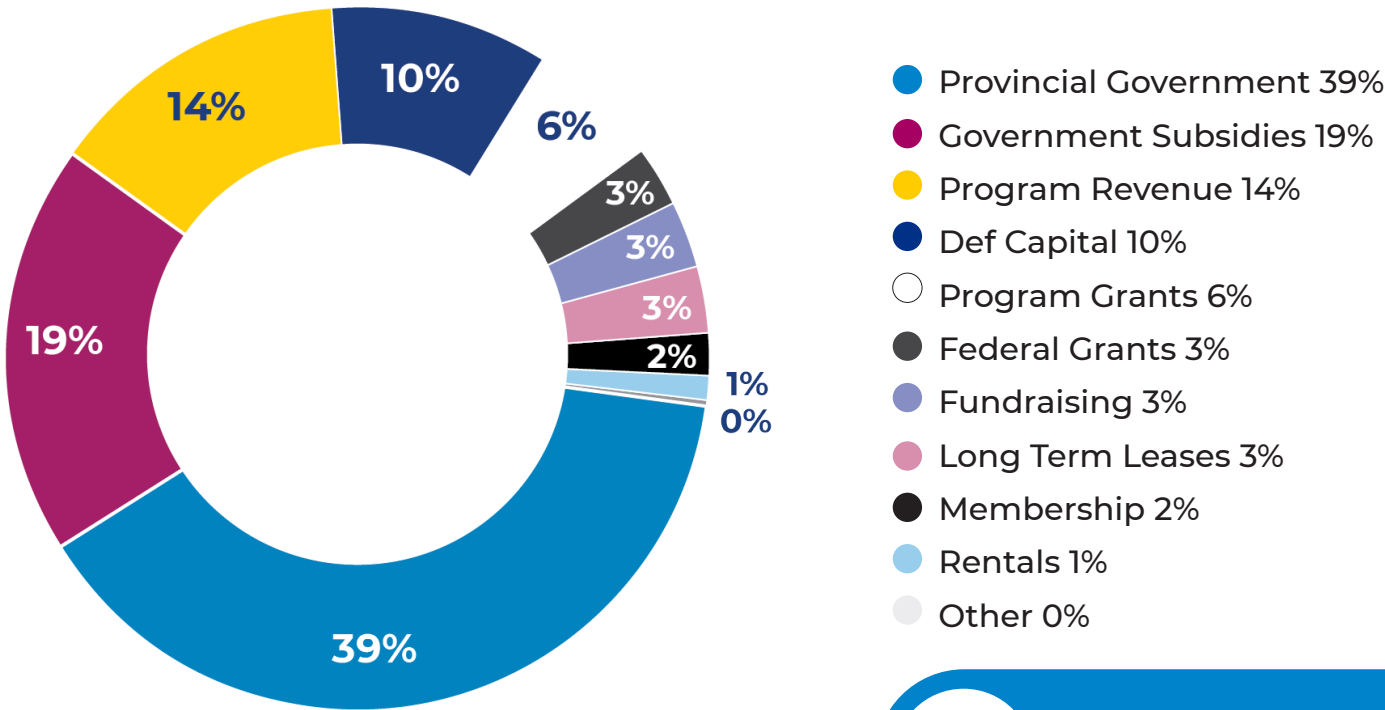
Revenue Growth
(Millions)



2021-2022 Expense Summary



Revenue Sources
Revenue Analysis: April 2021 to March 2022



Thank you

We want to thank everyone in our Abilities Centre community who engaged and supported our work over the past year. Together, we work towards unlocking the potential of our community. We appreciate the generous support from government, 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. Special thanks to our monthly donors who demonstrate an ongoing commitment to Abilities Centre’s inclusive, accessible and barrier-free programs and services.

Listed below are our generous funders and sponsors, who have given \$1,000 or more, and our partners who support the work we do.

Funders and Sponsors 2021-2022

- Government of Canada
 - Government of Ontario
 - Sport Canada
 - Canadian Tire Jumpstart
 - Ontario Trillium Foundation
 - RBC Foundation
 - The Harry E. Foster Charitable Foundation
 - 407 ETR Concession Company Ltd.
 - Bird Construction Inc
 - ELS For Autism
 - LiUNA Local 183
 - Ontario Power Generation
 - TFP Whitby Developments Inc.
 - Windsor Bay Foundation
 - Whitby Oshawa Honda
 - 1959661 Ontario Limited - Joe's No Frills #3141
 - 360insights
 - Aqueduct Foundation
- Dreamseeker Foundation
 - Bell Canada
 - Deloris Campbell-John
 - Crave Doughnuts
 - Durham Region Police Services
 - Elexicon Energy Corporation
 - Freedom International Brokerage Company
 - Olivia Lee
 - Rotary Club of Bowmanville
 - Walmart Canada Corp.
- 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.**



Government

13

Health

22

Research & Education

14

Sport

33

Other

14

For a full list of partners click the link below:

[READ MORE](#)





Our mission is to
reimagine accessibility
and redefine the
way Canadians live,
work, and play.

abilitiescentre.org

IMPACT REPORT

2021-2022