



Abiona Centre
For Infant & Early Mental Health

New Lives Newsletter

SUMMER 2024 EDITION



A Message from our CEO

As the summer ends, I am filled with gratitude and inspiration reflecting on the incredible strides our community has made over the past few months. Our strategic objective to embed infant and early mental health in all we do has continued to thrive, thanks to your unwavering dedication and enthusiasm.

In this edition of our newsletter, we are excited to share highlights from our summer activities. You'll read about the impactful workshops that brought together experts and families, offering valuable insights and support. We'll also recount the stories of some of our clients and former employees, whose experiences remind us why we do what we do.

As we move forward into the fall, we look forward to continuing this journey with all of you. Whether you are a donor, staff member, or simply a supporter of our work, your commitment to our mission has made a world of difference in the lives of the young mothers and their children who rely on our programs and services. Together, we are making a difference in the lives of the youngest members of our community.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication. Here's to a future filled with hope, growth, and positive change.



Ekua Asabea Blair
President & CEO





A Walk Down Memory Lane

An Employee's Return to the Centre After 50 Years

Fifty years ago I was a “housemother” at Victor Home for Women (now Abiona Centre For Infant & Early Mental Health). At that time, it was a “home for unwed mothers”. Congratulations on the progress you have made since those early days. So many positive changes have been implemented while growing into Abiona Centre for Infant and Early Mental Health.

In March 2024 I visited for an update and tour. The main building was familiar but oh, what great program changes have been implemented. I love the focus on infant, early childhood and woman mental health with support for single mothers up to the age of twenty-nine. The information and support on attachment, bonding and wellness is so encouraging to see. Mother and child are able to live in transitional housing (10 units) and then the two-bedroom townhomes (17 units) on site for up to four years. With housing so difficult to access these days it is such a service to help provide stability in the lives of these young women.

In the past, the new mom was expected to leave the residence when her infant was six weeks old. The women are encouraged to continue their education with support as schooling and day care are on site for the women living at Abiona Centre. Daycare is also available for the community. There is also a program for success in employment with job coaching, training and placement. I was impressed with the support offered to the young woman with either a social worker or residential counsellor for every four women. When I was housemother, there was one of us on site for each shift and one social worker for the whole program. Certainly, not enough support for the women and babies.

My overall impression of Abiona Centre was simply wow—it provides safety, support, education and wrap around services to mother and child for a brighter and healthier future for all. Well done, and I wish you ongoing success.

– Aldona Mitrakas

Former Employee at Victor Home for Women (Abiona Centre) during the 1970's

Congratulations Class of 2024!

On June 21st, we held our High School Program graduation ceremony! Surrounded by family, friends, and staff, our young moms received their diplomas, award, and scholarships, signifying the completion of their programs and the beginning of a new and exciting chapter of their lives.

Thank you to everyone who supported our students on their journeys!



A Message From Our Valedictorian

"I am beyond grateful to stand before you all and share my story of how living at Abiona Centre, and attending Abiona Centre high school, has given me and my daughter a second chance to have a better, more promising life.



I lived a hard life, coming from an abusive biological family and facing daily challenges while in the foster care system. June 5th, 2024 marks the date of 12 years ago when some of my siblings and myself were apprehended into the foster care system. I went through 5 foster homes, 4 temporary shelters, 3 different family environments, 2 predominant very important people (myself and my daughter), and 1 story later here I stand before you all.

Domestic violence comes in all shapes and forms and can sometimes be invisible at first prior to escalation. It had taken me a while to realize that violence is not love. Having been abused by family members that claimed to love me, it made me blind sighted to the fact that you and I do not deserve to be abused. Love is gentle, kind and compassionate and when all you have ever known is violence, it can be challenging to see being abused from being genuinely loved.

I am here today sharing my experience of being a domestic abuse victim, however, let me tell you that abuse is not love. Any form of physical, mental or emotional turmoil is not love. I am a strong survivor of abuse, as I am sure some of you may have experienced abuse in some form. I am here today as living proof, a symbol and reminder to each of you, that you all deserve gentle hands, caring words and supportive and positive love in your life. Despite getting adopted by what was promised to be a loving and safe home, I ended up finding myself homeless and was so lost with how I ended up in that position or how to fix it. It took me a miracle, my daughter, to realize I have so much life to live, not just for myself but also for my child. I am sure your children also inspire you all to be the best versions of yourself.

Remember when the going gets tough, to keep on going. I have overcome so many hardships in life and hope to inspire each of you to continue to keep your heads held high while pushing through to make a better, brighter future for yourselves. I would like to say thank you to my fellow classmates and teachers/housing staff. Being a part of this community has had a positive impact on my life and my daughter's, and I am forever grateful for the love, support and inspiration you each have shared with me.

I would like to share with you all my favourite quote that has helped me along my journey, said by George Eliot "It is never too late to be what you might have been". I hope that today you all walk away with positive inspiration from my story and continue succeeding onward in everything you do.

Congratulations to all graduates and fellow students in ceremony today!"

-Leah, Young Mother & 2024 Valedictorian

Yoga with Celebrities!

We were honoured to host Donisha Prendergast and Shacia Marley, Bob and Rita Marley's granddaughters, for a yoga and chat session! The session was not just about physical well-being, but also about creating a sense of community and connection. The experience was a wonderful opportunity for participants to relax, reflect, and rejuvenate, all while gaining a deeper understanding of wellness from a cultural perspective.





Achieving Dreams: A Success Story

One of our Baby and Me: Our Home clients has been accepted into their dream post-secondary program! After a year of hard work and dedication, their efforts have paid off. Adding to the celebration, they delivered an inspiring speech at our graduation ceremony in June, sharing their journey to success.

Community Through Cooking

Our monthly cooking program at 1900 Sheppard has seen a 125% growth in participants! In addition to cooking skills, we've also witnessed the young moms develop a strong sense of community and friendship during the sessions. It has been a great opportunity for them to come together and build support systems!

A Heartfelt Mother's Day Celebration

In May, we hosted a Mother's Day brunch paint and sip event for the mothers and children of 1900 Sheppard.

The event featured a delicious brunch, sparkling juices, and canvas painting. We received generous donations from local businesses like Beauty Braids and Beyond and Andrea's Cookies, which added a special touch to the day. The clients had a wonderful time and expressed interest in more events like this at 1900 Sheppard.



Battle of the Teams: Staff vs. Clients in Capture the Flag!

What a fantastic showdown we had at our Staff vs. Client Capture the Flag game!

This exhilarating event brought together our dedicated staff and hardworking young moms for an afternoon of teamwork, strategy, and friendly competition. Congratulations to the young moms for the win!



Embracing Curls: A Fantastic Curly Hair Workshop

We were thrilled to host Elisha Gotha from The Curl Lounge at our Broadview campus for an informative Curly Hair Workshop! This engaging session was designed to celebrate and enhance the beauty of curly hair, offering both staff and young moms valuable tips and techniques for hair care and styling.

The workshop covered everything from the best products for different curl types to effective styling methods that embrace and highlight natural texture. We can't wait to host more events that support and uplift our community of young moms!



Get Involved and Make a Difference!

At Abiona Centre For Infant & early Mental Health, we believe that every contribution, big or small, can create a positive impact in our community. Whether you have time, skills, or resources to share, there are many ways to get involved and support our mission. Let's make a positive change together!



Become a Monthly Donor: Support Us Year-Round!

Consistent support from our community allows Abiona Centre to provide ongoing services and make a lasting impact.

As a monthly donor, your regular contributions provide:

- Stable Funding: Help us maintain and expand essential programs and services.
- Long-Term Impact: Enable us to plan for the future with confidence and stability.

No matter the amount, your monthly gift ensures that we can continue to empower young mothers and families in need.

Join our community of compassionate supporters today!

Volunteer With Us!

Please visit www.abionacentre.ca or email us at xjawad@abionacentre.ca to learn more about our volunteer opportunities.

In-Kind Donations

Abiona Centre is always in need of essential items to support our programs and services. We are currently seeking:

- Formula
- Baby wipes
- Personal hygiene products
 - Shampoo/Conditioner
 - Body wash
 - Black hair products

If you are able to donate any of these items, please email xjawad@abionacentre.ca to arrange a drop-off time.



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Need to contact us?

416-425-6348 | giving@abionacentre.ca