



# 2023-2024

# Annual Report

A Year of Accomplishments



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# ABOUT US

For 29 years, Across Boundaries has been dedicated to a service-user-centered approach, ensuring that the needs of Black and racialized communities in the Greater Toronto Area are at the core of everything. We continuously strive to integrate new programs and services that directly address the evolving challenges our service users face.

Our commitment is grounded in Anti-Racism/ confronting Anti-Black Racism and Anti-Oppression frameworks, fostering interdependence and improving quality of life. Additionally, our staff, who come from the same communities as our service users, provide culturally relevant care, ensuring a deep understanding of the lived experiences of those we serve.

# OUR MISSION, VISION & STRATEGIC DIRECTION

## MISSION

To provide high quality person and family centered mental health and addiction care for racialized communities within an anti-racism, resisting anti-Black racism, and anti-oppression framework.

## VISION

A just and healthier society for racialized communities.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION (2023-2026)



**Strengthen service quality and responsiveness to improve clients' quality of life**



**Increase organization's capacity to sustain and succeed**



**Promote system adoption of Anti- Racism/Anti-Oppression Framework to advance health equity**

# YEAR IN REVIEW FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

**“It always seems impossible till it’s done”- Nelson Mandela.** This quote encapsulates our last year – and what an incredible year it was! As we continue to move forward in our journey at Across Boundaries, we continue to build upon our successes, learn from our challenges and become stronger year over year.

We set ourselves the ambitious goal of engaging in two different quality improvement initiatives, one focused on enhancing services, programs and supports for our service users and caregivers through Accreditation Canada. The other to ensure the psychological safety and well-being of our most important asset, our staff – through Excellence Canada.

It is with great pleasure that we share news of our success in both initiatives, surpassing expectations. It indeed did not seem possible till it was done. We achieved **Accreditation with Exemplary Standing** from Accreditation Canada, a designation that is most coveted. We are still celebrating this accomplishment and look forward to maintaining this level of competence and quality—not just annually, but every day. We achieved this designation as a team, with the staff, the board, our partners and of course our service users and caregivers.

As we gain more prominence in our activities, we increase our engagement with external entities. Last year we hosted a contingency of 12 people from New Zealand who wanted to learn about our experience with the Housing First model implemented at Across Boundaries since 2013. We shared with them our work, our approach with racialized communities and experiences from our service user. A great opportunity not only to showcase our work but also to build bridges across the globe for better supports for marginalized communities everywhere.

As a leader in anti-racism/anti-oppression/confronting anti-Black racism work, last year we received one time funding from Ontario Health to develop online training modules on anti-Black racism and mental wellbeing. We partnered with a great team of individuals in the community, whose expertise helped develop the content for nine modules. We look forward to launching these modules in the very near future. Through this work, we hope to assist participants and organizations as they strive to be more accessible and responsive in serving the needs of the Black community.



We continue to get invited to and sit at many system level tables at the local, provincial and national levels. We are grateful for the opportunities to offer our insights and help shape some of the thinking in equity work while ensuring meaningful and authentic change is sustained. We are in the second year of our very ambitious strategic plan, and of the 3 directions the board had approved, we are making great strides in each area. More will be posted on our website in the coming months.

As we look back on the previous year, we realize we cannot do justice in this report, to the depth and breadth of work that has taken place, and we invite engagement with us through our [website](#), social media platforms such as [Instagram](#) & [LinkedIn](#), and with staff to learn of and support our initiatives.

At the end of an incredibly busy but gratifying year, we respectfully submit this report, both humbled and inspired by all that has taken place.



# QUALITY IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY



2023 marks a significant milestone in our ongoing pursuit of excellence. We are incredibly proud to have been awarded the Excellence Canada Silver Certification in Mental Health at Work, a recognition that reflects our unwavering commitment to the psychological health and safety of our team.

This certification is a testament to the comprehensive measures we've implemented to create a supportive, inclusive, and mentally healthy workplace. In addition to this prestigious certification, we are also honored to have achieved Accredited with Exemplary Standing from Accreditation Canada! This highest level of accreditation reflects our continuous quality improvement efforts, rigorous adherence to national standards, and our dedication to providing the highest quality of care and service. The successful completion of the onsite survey is further evidence of our organizational resilience, our commitment to safety, and our focus on meeting and exceeding the expectations of those we serve.

Through comprehensive staff surveys, we not only gathered valuable insights into the experiences and needs of our team but also used this feedback to develop a robust recognition program that celebrates the dedication and excellence of our employees. Understanding the importance of acknowledging outstanding contributions, we introduced titles such as **Patient Safety Champion**, **Quality Champion**, and the **Annual Staff Choice Award** to formally recognize and reward those who consistently go above and beyond in their roles.

This recognition program was designed with the intent to cultivate a culture of appreciation and motivation within our organization. By publicly acknowledging the achievements of our exceptional team members, we reinforce the values of safety, quality, and collaboration that are central to our mission.

These achievements are not just accolades; they are an affirmation of our collective efforts to foster a culture of excellence, innovation, and continuous improvement. They also serve as a reminder that our journey towards providing the best possible environment for both our staff and service users is ongoing and ever evolving.





# Our Team ( April 2023- March 2024)

## Board Members

Azuka Obasuyi  
Behzad Alijani  
Cathlena Mason  
Dawnmarie Harriott  
Dr. Babatunde Fakunle  
Fizza Khalid  
Hugh Williams  
Ilina Sharma  
Ayo Oluyemi  
Joy Edobor  
Mahedar Mellkamu  
Nicola Holness  
Roger Love  
Simone Atungo

## Management Team

Abida Islam Sheikh – Operation and Administration Manager  
Aseefa Sarang – Executive Director  
Andrine Elice Johnson – Director of Program and Quality  
Bolanle Ajiboye – Program Manager  
Genoveva Policarpio – Office Manager  
Hiral Sanghavi – Project Manager  
Maria Lydia Suarez – Program Manager  
Moonis Tariq – Quality Improvement Manager  
Nicola Holness – Director of Program and Quality  
Rumi Rajkarnikar – Program Manager  
Tahreem Dogar – Quality Improvement Coordinator





# PROGRAMS & SERVICES

## Case Management

- Housing support program
- Mental health & justice
- Transitional aged youth programming
- 2SLGBTQ++ programming
- Substance use

## Psychosocial Rehabilitation/ Day Program

- Alternative / complementary therapies (i.e. yoga, art therapy, music therapy, traditional Chinese medicine)
- Food support program (daily meals, groceries)
- Basic necessities support (i.e. clothing, food, hygiene items)

## Short Term and Long Term Counseling

- Individual and family
- Groups



# Highlights (2023-2024)

In addition to our ongoing programs and services, Across Boundaries remains committed to improving the quality of support we offer. Here are some key highlights of our initiatives from 2023-2024:



## Mindfulness-Based Wellness Program

This program, in collaboration with the Center for Mindfulness Studies, offered sessions focused on intentional living, stress reduction, and guided meditation. Designed for youth facing emotional challenges, social isolation, or anxiety, the program aimed to improve mental health and overall well-being through mindfulness techniques. The initiative has helped participants develop essential stress management skills, fostering a greater sense of calm and emotional resilience.

## Satellite Offices

We have established 2 satellite offices in partnerships with existing hubs in different geographic areas of Toronto.

This makes services more accessible, reduces travel time for service users and makes it easier for them to attend appointments. Currently, we are located out of the *East Scarborough Storefront* in East Toronto and the *Northwest Toronto Ontario Health Team Community Care Hub* in Northwest Toronto.

By providing this service we have observed stronger connections within the communities we serve, allowing for deeper engagement and collaboration.

## Anti-Black Racism Community Listening Sessions

In collaboration with Humber River Hospital, we facilitated a focus group session for African, Caribbean, and Black community members to share their experiences with racism and discrimination during hospital visits. While some shared positive interactions, others described instances of systemic discrimination, including being ignored and experiencing biased diagnoses based on their physical appearance. The session not only highlighted these issues but also generated valuable recommendations for addressing systemic discrimination within healthcare. These insights will help guide our collective, ongoing efforts to improve equity and inclusion in healthcare services.



# Highlights (2023-2024)



## Back-to-School Support Initiative

Through the Back-to-School Support Initiative, we provided essential school supplies to 60 children and youth in the community, which included backpacks filled with notebooks, pens, pencils, calculators, and other essentials. This initiative helped alleviate the financial burden on low-income families, ensuring students were well-prepared for the school year. By equipping students with these resources, we've seen increased confidence and readiness to engage in their education, contributing to a positive learning experience for the children and their families.

## Northwest Toronto Ontario Health Team (NWT OHT) Health Equity Project

Across Boundaries staff participated in the NWT OHT Health Equity Day, which aimed to help agencies set a strategic course of action. The event focused on using data to identify best practices, outline an execution plan, and commit to a racial equity charter.

We used the day to assess the impact of our Anti-Racism (AR), Anti-Oppression (AO), and confronting Anti-Black Racism (ABR) frameworks, with the goal of improving patient experience and safety. Through increased participation and feedback on our annual anti-racism/anti-oppression surveys, we aim to reduce internalized racism and increase authentic engagement. A third-party vendor will assess these outcomes, and we'll collaborate with the Service User Advisory Committee to develop actionable strategies.





# Highlights (2023-2024)



## FOOD SUPPORT PROGRAM



Across Boundaries has distributed biweekly hampers of fresh produce and monthly packages of dry foods to 227 service users/families. In addition to the hampers, hot meals are daily delivered to community members with mobility or physical challenges. Since the pandemic and the rise in food prices, we have expanded our food support programs to ensure additional service users have access to nutritious meals.

### COMMUNITY KITCHEN

- 80 to 120 meals served daily (breakfast and lunch) to an average of 40-58 service users
- Additionally, 20-30 meals served weekly to drop-In service users during evenings and weekends

### WORKSHOPS

- Weekly Life Skills, Nutrition, and Budgeting workshops teach service users how to prepare nutritious meals, budget smartly, and fully utilize items donated through partnerships like Second Harvest
- These workshops help participants make healthier choices and improve food utilization from limited resources

# Highlights (2023-2024)



## Green Thumb Mastery Gardening Workshop Series



The 12-week Green Thumb Mastery Gardening Workshop Series was successfully completed on-site. This program introduced participants to various aspects of gardening and self-sufficiency, with the goal of increasing access to healthy meals and promoting hands-on learning.

The series covered a wide range of gardening skills, including *Gardening Basics*, *Seed Starting*, *Plant Propagation*, *Vegetable and Herb Gardening*, *Container/Vertical Gardening*, *Organic Pest Management*, *Soil Health*, *Composting*, and more. At the end of the program, participants harvested the produce they had grown and shared it among themselves.

Some of the herbs were used to create scented oils, showcasing the practical application of the skills learned. In addition to providing participants with skills to grow their own food, the workshop fostered increased self-confidence and self-esteem, helping participants maintain their health and wellness by utilizing what they learned through practical applications.

# Highlights (2023-2024)

## Our Stories, Our Voices

The Our Stories Our Voices project funded by Public Health Agency of Canada was completed March 31st, 2024. This three year initiative was a collaboration with Adornment Stories, a community organization that provides mental wellness inspiration, arts education and a platform for the voices of Black women, femmes and non-binary people. This project resulted in active engagement with Black LGBTQ+ individuals in Toronto and across Canada. It prioritized those within the community who might intersect with poverty, madness/neurodivergence, migration, and disability.

Over the three years, the project engaged in a range of activities, including a mentorship program (Leadership Cohort), three Black LGBTQ+ Wellness Retreats, digital training and workshops (Inhale/Exhale), expert-led education (Masterclass), mental health sector engagement (Practitioner Development Series), and community engagement (The Gathering).



The major goal of the project was to provide a platform for these communities to share their stories and experiences, while also identifying and addressing the unique challenges they face. The project also sought to foster a sense of community and support among Black LGBTQ+ individuals, and to promote greater understanding and inclusivity within our community as a whole. Discussions addressed the pervasive impact of colonialism, racism, ableism, and capitalism, advocating for justice-oriented approaches and collective action.

Over three years of this program 1,383 individuals from across Canada participated in this project. Each of these participants shared their experiences, and provided data on the impacts of these programs on their mental health. These findings were submitted to the Public Health Agency of Canada to inform and support their priorities and policies that support these vulnerable communities.





## IN THEIR WORDS...





# A JOURNEY OF RENEWAL



In November 2023, I was introduced to Across Boundaries by a friend whose life had changed through their support. Originally from the Middle East, I had been struggling with depression, anxiety, and insomnia for over 20 years. Compulsive shopping was my way of coping, but it only added to my stress, especially after separating from my controlling husband. My financial worries and emotional burden grew heavier.

When I came to Across Boundaries, I immediately felt at ease. The transportation support helped me attend regularly, and I quickly found comfort in the activities offered. I made meaningful friendships and was motivated by hearing the success stories of others. The yoga and exercise programs revitalized me, and peer support helped me better manage my mental health. Across Boundaries became my sanctuary, providing me with practical help and emotional support. I'm incredibly grateful for this new chapter in my life and for the friend who led me here.

***“The kindness and compassion of the staff at Across Boundaries truly stand out. They treated each of us with dignity and care, helping with food and financial assistance, which lifted a huge burden off my shoulders. Through their support, I felt a sense of belonging and hope.”***

*submitted with consent of service user*

# FINDING STRENGTH THROUGH SUPPORT

In 2011, I arrived in Canada as a newcomer and was introduced to Across Boundaries. Coming from a Caribbean country, I experienced deep culture shock and isolation. Although I had a part-time job, I still felt disconnected, and my depression worsened. An incident of workplace discrimination made me even more withdrawn. My wife encouraged me to stay hopeful, but I was unsure how to adjust.



At Across Boundaries, my Case Manager became a key source of support, always going out of his way to help. His compassion and the resources he provided helped me start feeling connected again. In 2015, I suffered a heart attack and stroke, which only heightened my anxiety. However, with the help of CBT and the staff's continued support, I slowly regained my strength. Though I still struggled with panic attacks, Across Boundaries was a place where I felt truly safe and understood. Their ongoing care has helped me rebuild my life and find hope again.

***“Across Boundaries quickly became my home, a place where I could feel safe and like I truly belonged. It was here that I found a kind of support I hadn’t expected—a community that embraced me and offered care when I needed it most.”***

*submitted with consent of service user*



# FINDING SUPPORT AND BELONGING



Three weeks ago, I came to Across Boundaries on a referral from another mental health agency. As an individual from the African community in Toronto, I needed counseling to address deep-seated traumas and legal issues that led to electronic house arrest, restricting my freedom. Referred for culturally sensitive support, I found Across Boundaries to be a welcoming and caring place. Unlike the other institutions, here I felt respected and at ease. The staff's genuine kindness and the supportive environment made me feel like I truly belong.

The cultural understanding and friendly atmosphere at Across Boundaries have been a relief. I now look forward to coming here each day, finding comfort in the Short-Term Counsellor and connecting with others who are motivated to improve their lives.

I highly recommend Across Boundaries for its genuine care and support. I also enjoy cooking as a therapeutic outlet and am glad to have found a place I can confidently recommend to my family.

***“When I arrived at Across Boundaries, I was greeted with love, care and made me feel a sense of belonging. Meeting and socializing with people of other racialized people made me feel at home and relaxed.”***

*submitted with consent of service user*



# OUR IMPACT

This fiscal year our staff of **37** served **1200+** service users. Additionally, through the three-year Our Stories, Our Voices initiative, we reached **1,383** Black 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.



Through our Food Support Program, we distributed:



**4,800**

bags of groceries



**2,896**

hot meals (onsite)

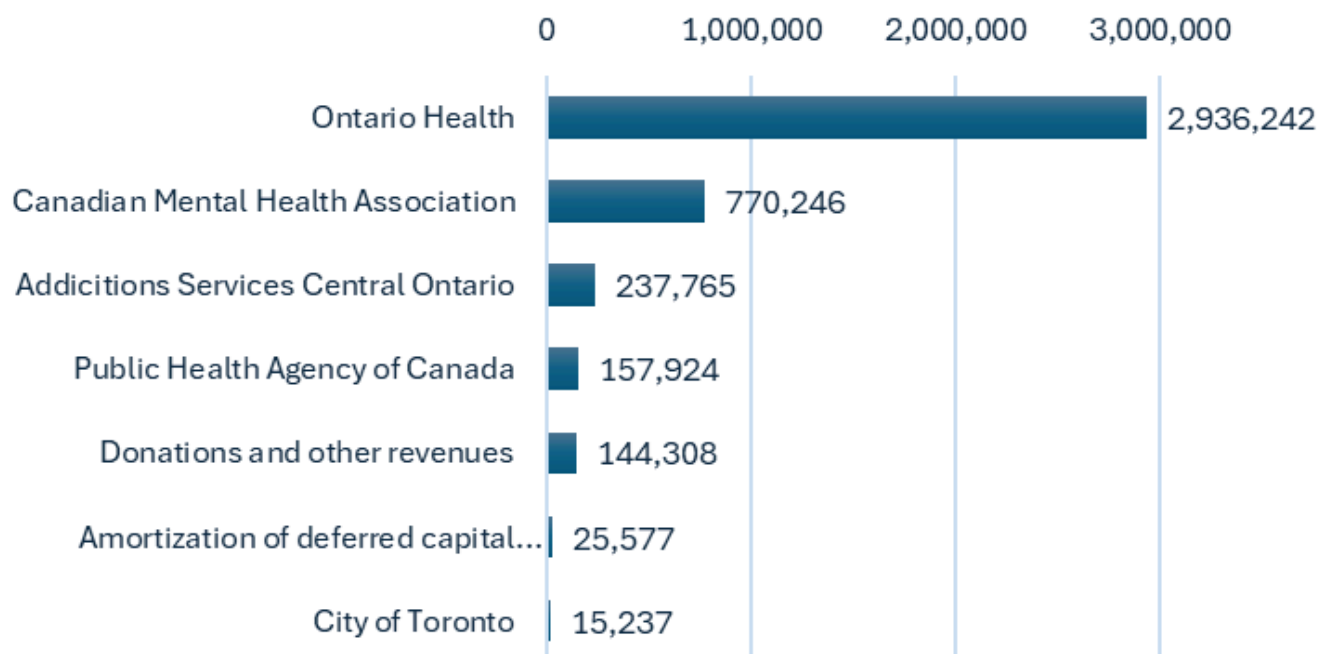


**7,366**

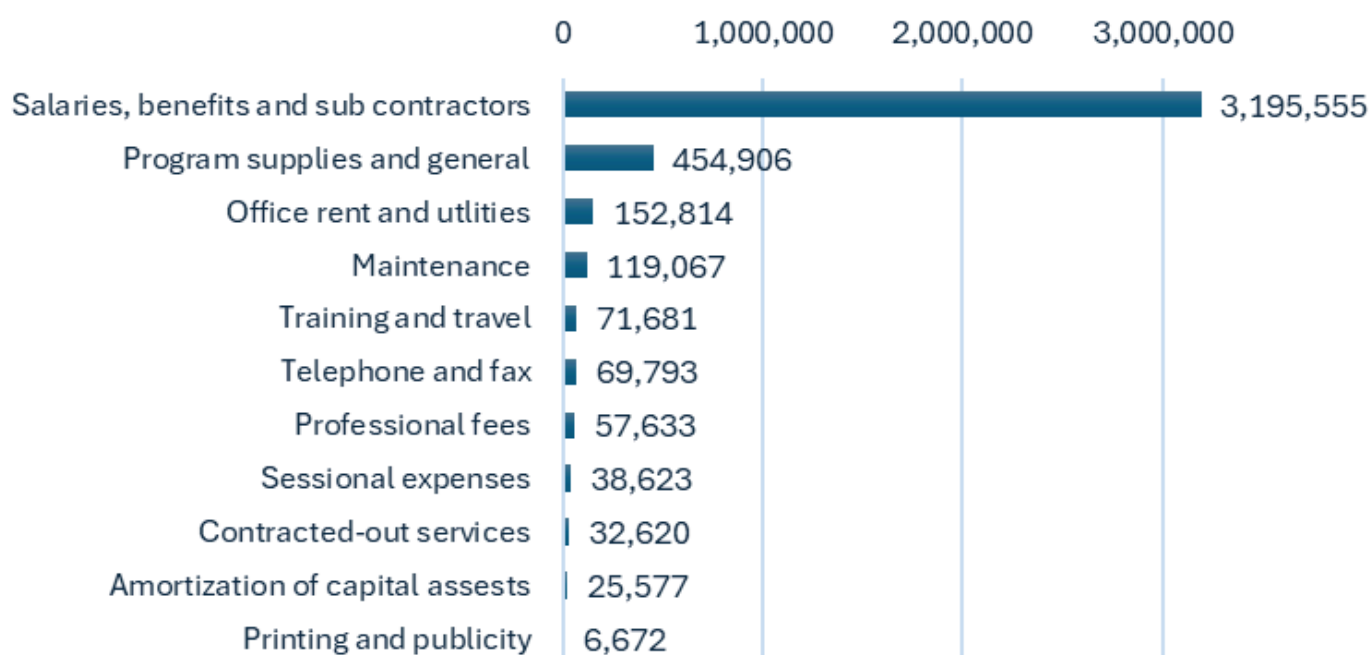
hot/frozen meals (pick-up)

# FINANCIALS

## Revenue : \$4,287,299

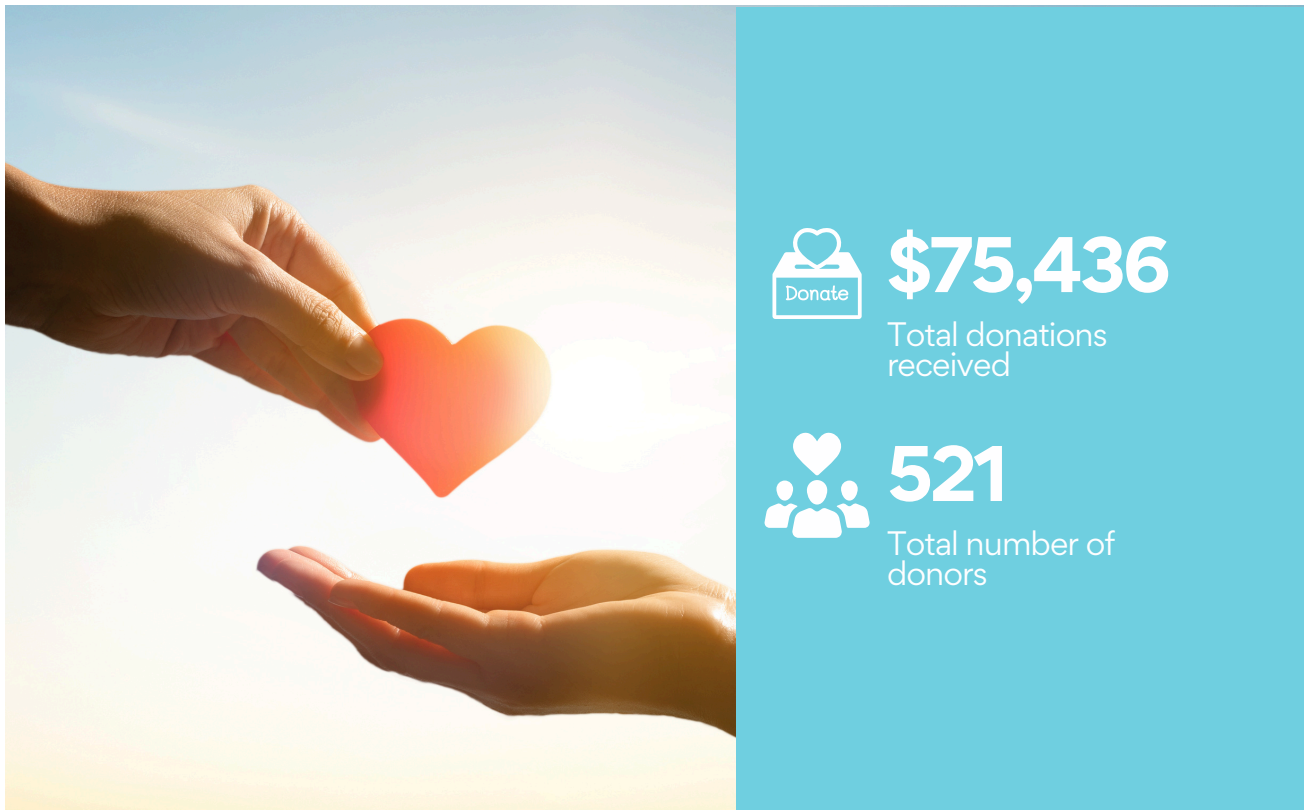


## Expenses: \$4,224,941





# A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS



## MAJOR DONORS (\$5,000- \$25,000)

**Echo Foundation**

**Fidelity Investments Canada**

**The Salvation Army**

**Sweat & Tonic**

We extend our deepest gratitude to all our donors for their incredible generosity this past year. Whether you contributed through a small gift or a larger donation, every dollar has made a difference in advancing our mission. As we look ahead to the future, we continue to rely on the kindness and commitment of people like you.

# **28th Annual General Meeting**

**Draft Minutes**

**September 26, 2023**

# AGENDA

1. Welcome from the Chair
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Approval of Previous Year's Minutes
4. Treasurer's Report
  - Acceptance of Financial Report
  - Appointment of Auditor
5. Nominations Committee Report
6. Other - Amendment of Articles of Incorporation
7. Executive Director's Report
  - Presentation of Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan
  - Feedback & Discussion
8. Adjournment and Thanks
9. Program Presentation

## 1.WELCOME TO THE CHAIR

On behalf of the Chairman of the Board, Dr. Babatunde Fakunle, Simone Atungo, hosted Across Boundaries' 28th Annual General Meeting and welcomed over 50 attendees in-person and virtually, confirming quorum. Simone led the Land Acknowledgement, a video was played to honor the Indigenous Peoples. Simone commended the impressive work of the organization for the past year. She thanked the management and staff who provide services, the Board of Directors who meet regularly to provide strategic directions and set policies, and the service users for the continued support and engagement with Across Boundaries.

## 2.APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda of the meeting was approved

Moved by: Ramatullah Rahimi

Seconded: Monica Douglas

CARRIED

## 3. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS YEAR'S MINUTES

The minutes of the 27th Annual General Meeting held on December 8th, 2022, were approved

Moved by: Sandra Suriydai

Seconded by: Alice McGillivray

CARRIED



## 4. TREASURER'S REPORT

### i) Presentation of Financial Report

Roger Love, Member of the Board, presented the audited financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2023, which has been done by independent auditors and reviewed by the Board of Directors. Roger presented last fiscal year's financial report, (page 9 of the AB Annual Report). Roger attested that the money from Ontario Health grants (core funding), CMHA & other sources like ASCO, Public Health Agencies of Canada and income from donations were managed responsibly.

Roger moved a motion for approval of the Audited Financial Statements for the fiscal year 2022-2023.

Moved by: Shawn Ram

Seconded by: Marcia Shaw

CARRIED

### ii) Appointment of Auditor

Roger made a motion to appoint the firm of Hogg, Shain & Scheck Professional Corporation, to be the auditors for Across Boundaries for the fiscal year 2023-2024.

Moved by: Shawn Ram

Seconded by: Atul Nischal

CARRIED

## 5. NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

Hugh Williams thanked the management and staff for a great year delivering the mandate and visions of Across Boundaries. He presented the slate of nominees for the Board (2023-2024) and was proposed as circulated. The following slate was tabled:

New Members:

1. Azuka Obasuyi
2. Cathlena Mason

Returning Board:

1. Babatunde Fakunle
2. Simone Atungo
3. Hugh Williams
4. Roger Love
5. Dawnmarie Harriott

Moved by: Hugh Williams

Seconded by: Sandra Surijdai

CARRIED

## 6. AMENDMENT TO ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

Across Boundaries hired a legal firm to review the status of its corporate documentation to ensure compliance with the Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act. They advised that Across Boundaries' Articles of Incorporation will need to be amended as they need to align with the By-Laws with respect to the number of board members that can hold office. Membership voted to make the necessary amendment as follows: that the articles of the Corporation be amended:

1. by providing for a range of directors with a minimum of three (3) and a maximum of eleven (11); and
2. any officer or director of the Corporation be and is hereby authorized and directed to execute, under the corporate seal or otherwise, and to deliver all documents and to do all things necessary or desirable to effect such amendment including the execution and delivery to the Ministry of Government Services of said articles of amendment for such purpose.

Moved by: Shawn Ram

Seconded by: Gurpreet Sandhu

CARRIED

## 7. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Aseefa greeted and welcomed everyone to the 28th AGM. Aseefa directed the membership to the Board Chair and ED message in the Annual Report for the activities of the last fiscal year. She also indicated that she would use this time to review the strategic plan process to date and the resulting directions and goals and objectives with everyone and provide an update on the upcoming accreditation process. Members were very engaged and provided a lot of feedback for service and quality improvement initiatives. These were as follows:

### **Service Users Requests/Feedback:**

With respect to the strategic plan and vision and mission, there was no additional feedback. They felt while it reflected overall what needs to happen, they had very specific program related feedback to improve their experience with the organization, such as:

- Additional support in transportation as the rising cost of living is making it difficult for people to participate in onsite programming.
- Funding for TTC tickets/Metropass to access more services in the city, e.g., Library, alternative healing, etc.
- More gift cards/food vouchers instead of the regular winter items, so that they have the freedom to choose and buy what they need.
- Facilitate more outings, such as in the past, with opportunities to go out of the city for day trips, which is not possible for many under normal circumstances.
- Internet access – funding to have internet at home. Many people don't have the ability to have internet at home, so they are forced to go to public places for free wifi. Having internet at home would help with the loneliness especially during the coming winter months.
- More programs on site, e.g., Access to computers and other programs that would enhance the onsite programming.

The board listened very carefully to the discussion, and Aseefa thanked the membership for their very honest and frank feedback to the organization. Aseefa assured the service users that their feedback would be reviewed and shared with the ABSUAC (Across Boundaries Service User Advisory Committee) to ensure a plan to address their concerns. Aseefa also reminded people of the other ways they can share their concerns and ideas, ranging from anonymous feedback in the box in the lounge, to speaking to the staff, the managers, herself and members of the ABSUAC.

Aseefa thanked the staff and the Board of Directors for all their support and hard work through out the year and looked forward to more exciting times and growth for the organization in the year ahead

## 8. ADJOURNMENT AND THANKS

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Simone acknowledged and thanked everyone for their participation and valuable contributions throughout the AGM.

The Annual General Meeting was closed at 7:50 pm.

Moved by: Marcia Shaw

Seconded by: Jovelino de Sousa Luis

CARRIED

## 9. PROGRAM PRESENTATION

### i.) Staff Choice Award

The Staff Choice Award was presented to Ana de Garcia for her dedication, compassion, and resilience, and for inspiring those around her. Ana acknowledged the award and thanked her colleagues, peers and management for their supports.

### ii.) Recognition:

Aseefa presented a Plaque of Appreciation to Genie Policarpio, who was resigning from 16 years of commitment and dedicated service to Across Boundaries.

A video compilation from staff was presented to honor Genie's work and life at the agency.

Genie was very touched and grateful for all the testimonials and thanked Aseefa for giving her the trust, and the opportunity to work and grow with the organization.

Meeting Concluded at 8: 30 pm.