

THE GRATITUDE REPORT

2021

A Community is....

A Place where kindness

flows,

Where People say Hello.

With People who share

And People do care.

MISSION

ACSA is a non-profit, multi-service agency addressing needs and empowering children, youth, newcomers, homeless and underserved communities to build a better tomorrow



GRATITUDE

During another relentless year of the pandemic ACSA's programs remained open to ensure the needs of those most vulnerable in the community were met and sadly, we have seen the inequities in our communities continue to grow.

Through it all, ACSA has remained steadfast and committed to the community and becoming even more emboldened by the challenges presented by the global pandemic.

Within weeks of the first lockdown, ACSA regrouped and opened quickly, pivoting and adjusting ourselves and our programs ensuring that we were responsive to the needs of the community. ACSA has raised "pivoting" to an art form, as 2021 was filled with uncertainty and changing guidelines. We have brought unique insights to planning processes such as our consistent involvement in the newly created north and south Scarborough cluster tables, and stepped up in ways where even governments struggled. That heavy lifting showed a new way of working, but it also took a toll as we began to talk about going back to normal....*(read Lee Soda's full comments below)*





MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

MANNY SOUSA, BOARD CHAIR

The world is constantly changing whether it's more variants added to the COVID virus, war in the Ukraine or climate change becoming more and more prevalent. The needs of our communities do not go away. In fact, the need is greater. As I've heard time and time again, many clients say, thank God for ACSA.

As we head into the third year of this pandemic, the great team at ACSA led by Lee Soda has never closed their doors to their clients. They have persevered in order to give a hand up to their clients and provide the best possible service.

The new ACSA Food Centre had their soft launch in March and is already serving up to 2500 individuals a week. The response from the community has been amazing. The shopping model allows clients choice and most of all dignity.

ACSA's work as a community partner has not gone unnoticed. The United Way of Greater Toronto, recognized ACSA as one of the top agencies in the GTA forging new partnerships and intentionally nurturing and building existing relationships in the community. Whether it's ACSA's new Food Centre, the homeless outreach services, the work with seniors, children and families, newcomers or community ambassadors who work to promote vaccines to mitigate the effects of COVID, ACSA is a backbone agency in Scarborough that is called upon to participate in committees and networks...active in the work necessary to build a better stronger, healthier communities.

I encourage you to read through the 2021 Annual Report to get a snapshot of ACSA accomplishments and challenges. Like everything in life, there are always challenges, whether it's funding, logistics and supply chain issues, community safety or simply being able to satisfy everyone who walks through their doors. I am proud to say that Lee Soda and her incredible Team do a fantastic job at mitigating these challenges.

I'm going to build on one of ACSA's mantra, "stronger together". Therefore, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize our incredible volunteers who give so much of their time to assist ACSA. Their commitment to helping our communities is very much appreciated. Of course, this also includes our incredible Board of Directors. They not only volunteer their time but ensure that ACSA has all the support they need from a governance perspective. Their tireless work on our committees does not go unnoticed. Thank you to every single one of our volunteers.

Finally, I can't thank Lee Soda and her incredible team enough. The incredible work they do for ACSA is amazing. Words cannot describe it. Thank You, Thank You, Thank You. As I head into my second year as Board Chair and my second three-year stint on the ACSA Board, let me tell you what an honour it is to be affiliated with ACSA. This is my second go around with ACSA as I sat on their Board back in the early 2000's. Sadly, the mission hasn't changed and there is greater need in our community. I'm proud that ACSA is in community to offer a hand up because "ACSA Cares" about community.



STRONGER TOGETHER

Throughout 2021, the collaboration between ACSA departments was essential to getting the job done! When clients needed rapid housing, our HOS team would call the ACSA tax clinic and would receive the necessary documents within minutes. Food insecurity is at an all-time high, and all ACSA departments have referred clients to the ACSA Food Bank for additional support. As a multi-service agency, we were able to holistically support clients during another difficult year. We find multiple solutions within our own departments by leveraging our assets and we look outward to partners and community stakeholders to further strengthen the social fabric that blankets our community. We become emboldened when we look for each other's assets, and leverage them to best serve the community.



ANOTHER REMARKABLE YEAR...

LEE SODA, ACSA ED

Earlier this year, the Province of Ontario appreciated nearly 1 million workers in the non-profit sector, over 5 million volunteers and almost 60 thousand organizations, in every city, town and village across this province, recognizing the incredible contributions of the not for profit sector and it's workers during another remarkable year of pandemic uncertainty.

Collectively we have experienced 2 years of both grief and wonder. We have seen hunger and poverty grow, through ACSA's various programs we have given out a record number of prepared meals, delivered thousands of meals to vulnerable sick Seniors, given out grocery vouchers and food hampers in record numbers, and the ACSA food bank, homeless drop In's and Street Outreach services, Newcomer services remained open every day. We have seen, isolation and mental health challenges grow, we've seen despair amongst our most marginalized in the community, youth, seniors, those without homes, individuals and families living in substandard conditions. This pandemic has not impacted everyone in the same way.

Through it all, ACSA has remained steadfast and committed to community and becoming even more emboldened by the challenges presented by the global pandemic. If you haven't taken a moment to really absorb how incredible the response of this Agency has been please do so...because ACSA has been nothing short of remarkable!

We've seen wonders, Within weeks of the first lockdown ACSA regrouped and opened quickly, pivoting and adjusting ourselves to respond essentially to the "unknown", keeping ourselves open to what this community based agency needed to do to respond to a landscape that was unknown, uncertain, and frankly terrifying. ACSA has never wavered from our strategic goals...



AND SO IT BEGAN,

- Community Phone trees, the thousands of check-ins by phone and by foot.
- Expansion of the food bank to serve double, or triple the number of families in need of food.
- Doubling our Street outreach efforts by adding an additional team with an additional van to cover larger geography now inclusive of North York to Jane St.
- Creating early childhood education content, providing virtual programming for children and families who were no longer able to access community-based programs. But knowing full well we needed to continue caring for communities' children.
- Taking a lead role, in a partnership with MLSE to receive 40,000 prepared meals weekly for distribution in North Scarborough
- At the start of the COVID 360 initiative, delivery hampers filled with food and essential items to those quarantined from COVID-19. The front-line workers, grocery store cashiers, PSWs, Uber and taxi drivers, and the front-line workers bear a heavier load during the pandemic.
- Connecting with community youth and Seniors in clever, innovative ways to ensure connections were not lost.
- Extending services through our Newcomers Centre to include helping residents file for CERB and take endless calls from our newest citizens even more lost and confused than usual when trying to establish a life in a new city.
- Supporting grassroots groups, comprised of community members who became inspiring leaders during hard times.
- ACSA taking the charge and leading the North Scarborough Vaccine Engagement Team, leading a team of over 18 service providers making vaccines and information about vaccines accessible using an equity lens again understanding that the pandemic was not impacting all people inequitable ways.
- A renewed and resounding commitment to addressing Anti Black racism and Reconciliation. Ensuring ACSA embarks on an ongoing journey to do better, be better and understand there is much to learn and understand that anti-racism is a journey to becoming a better human to other humans.

ACSA has raised "pivoting" to an art form, we have brought unique insights to planning processes such as our consistent involvement in the newly created north and south Scarborough cluster tables, and stepped up in ways where even governments struggled. That heavy lifting showed a new way of working, but it also took a toll as we begin to talk about going back to normal. And finally, considering this notion of normal, let me share this final thought by author, and social justice activist Sonya Renee Taylor: We will not go back to normal. Normal never was.

Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.

With gratitude, always,

Lee Soda

WHO WE ARE

ACSA acts as a bridge between people who need help and those who can provide it.

Today, ACSA addresses a variety of issues including systemic poverty, hunger, housing, homelessness, unemployment, accessibility, and social isolation. ACSA's strength remains in the original concept: To act as a bridge between people who need help and those who can provide it.

While the original concept has remained the same, some of the methods have changed: more and more ACSA helps people to help themselves by providing 'hand up' programs rather than 'hand out' programs. Programs have also changed to reflect the ever-changing community needs.

True to our history and roots in the community, we have worked with community partners, local businesses, donors, volunteers, funders, faith groups, residents, and elected officials to adapt to the pandemic and after-effects. We were quick on our feet constantly identifying needs and issues that were emerging daily at a local level. 2021 was a hard year for our ACSA team as well as for the people we serve. Despite the fear and uncertainty, we remained grateful for the strong Scarborough community that banded together through these difficult times demonstrating resilience and commitment to the people of Scarborough.

ACSA continues to be a driving force in the community to provide sustainability and wrap-around support to those most in need. In 2021, we saw the needs in the Scarborough communities increase drastically. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, deepening food insecurity, inflation, unemployment, housing shortages, and mental health barriers continue to directly and unapologetically impact our community.

ACSA and the larger Scarborough community continue to work together for the common good as defined by residents. ACSA continues to be responsive, evolving, and embedded in and with the community. Our community development approach enables entire neighborhoods to work together to identify common issues of concern and address them as a community. It is by working through this lens that ACSA continues to ensure our programs and services are relevant, accessible, and serve the needs of the communities we serve.

ACSA helps to improve the lives of over
60,000
vulnerable adults, youth and children in Scarborough every year



HOMELESSNESS SERVICES AND HOUSING ACCESS

Our Homelessness Services and Housing Access department addresses the needs of people experiencing homelessness and provides support to people to attain temporary housing with the ultimate goal of securing safe, affordable and permanent housing. Our programs also assist individuals and families who are under-housed or at-risk of homelessness to improve their quality of life.

COVID-19-related restrictions and ensuing lockdowns made it difficult for those most in need to access vital services. Our programs remained responsive and committed, providing in-person service 7 days a week. Our two Drop-Ins assisted the community with accessing basic human necessities such as food, harm reduction supplies, clothing, housing help, and medical/mental health support. In 2021, our HOS team served 102 317 meals addressing the rising food insecurity epidemic.

The HOS Housing Help program supported over 214 households by creating and maintaining subsidized housing applications. Our team also continued to support individuals experiencing domestic violence, providing safety planning, referrals, ongoing case management, and assisting with priority housing applications to secure safe housing.

We intensified our presence and continued to address barriers throughout these two very difficult pandemic years. Connecting with people throughout the pandemic was a challenge for many but our team continued to persevere and show up for our community's most vulnerable citizens. The ACSA staff adapted to the constantly changing pandemic restrictions, and demonstrated remarkable engagement, commitment, and resilience! We were on the front line of not just a pandemic but were also working hard to address respective and overlapping homelessness, housing affordability, and overdose crisis.

In response to the increase in encampments and the rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness, we expanded our Street Outreach team. Our remarkable Street Outreach teams met clients in the community, at hospitals, in parks, encampments, ravines, and areas where we knew we had encountered people in need before. We used these opportunities to connect, conduct wellness checks, and provided survival supplies and emergency support. Throughout 2021, we made 248 referrals to requested support including shelters, food banks, and ID clinics.

Our Harm Reduction team also launched a new program to meet the need for a mobile delivery harm reduction service throughout Scarborough. The need for harm reduction supplies has risen throughout the pandemic while restrictions and lockdowns have reduced people's access to these supports. ACSA Staff met people at parks, plazas, local shelters, and at their homes, distributing 550 naloxone kits, 5048 safer use kits, and trained over 200 individuals regarding overdose recognition, response, and Naloxone administration. This important work can not be done virtually, ACSA understands the need for connecting and interacting with people is crucial and we never lost sight of this.



HOMELESS PREVENTION

Our Homelessness Prevention Services Department provides intensive case management support and eviction prevention services to individuals and their families. Working from a client-centered, housing first and harm reduction framework, the programs offer wrap-around support to foster greater independence and housing stability.

Our ACSA staff have displayed commitment to the community! Throughout the Pandemic, our homelessness prevention programs continued to provide in-person service delivery to individuals and their families; we met clients in the community and at their places of residence to minimize barriers while abiding by lockdown and COVID measures. We have pulled up chairs and sat with clients in parking lots to complete assessments and housing paperwork.

In 2021, ACSA's EPIC (Eviction Prevention in Community), Housing Follow Up and Home for Good programs continued to support clients by conducting wellness checks, providing food and transportation support, access to technology, and ensuring that clients were connected to essential services.

Many of our clients faced loss of employment. There was also an assumption that there would be a rent freeze to support tenants at risk of eviction, but this was not the case! Rent still needed to be paid even though people lost their jobs. There was a great deal of misunderstanding and ambiguity around what COVID support meant for housing stability. The ACSA team showed up for our community members in need and provided short-term intensive case management wrap-around support to help prevent evictions and sustain tenancies. In 2021, ACSA EPIC helped to prevent 69 evictions. Our EPIC staff worked diligently to create case plans, mediate and negotiate payment plans with landlords, advocate at the Landlord and Tenant Board virtual hearings, and connect clients to financial support to prevent evictions and sustain housing. Vulnerable seniors in the community who were ineligible but accessed CERB found their income being clawed back by 50% putting their tenancies at risk. EPIC staff negotiated, advocated, and mediated to support the most vulnerable in our community and stabilize housing!




The Landlord and Tenant Board remained closed due to COVID. The once-in-person hearings were transferred to an online platform, adding an additional layer of digital barriers. We opened our doors at ACSA and created a safe, physical space to support clients and ensure they could attend virtual LTB meetings throughout the pandemic.

COVID impacts were felt by many people, particularly those most vulnerable in our community. The pandemic has had significant impacts on our clients' mental health and ability to access services and sustain their housing. ACSA has remained committed, showing up and giving 110% to continue to support our Scarborough community! Demonstrating the resilience of residents and the tenacity of this Agency!

ACSA's Home for Good follow-up support program provides intensive case management support to formerly homeless clients for a period of 1 year to foster greater independence and increase housing stability. Support provided includes financial literacy, basic needs supplies, wellness checks, coordination and support for activities of daily living, community mapping, crisis planning, referrals to community supports, and connections to medical services. Follow-up case managers conduct monthly rent checks and provide mediation and advocacy with landlords to help mitigate tenancy risks.



ACSA supported one client referred to the program from a shelter who had no previous history of homelessness. The client was assisted with re-entry into the workforce, housing support, as well as support surrounding an undiagnosed eating disorder. Community mapping was completed for the client and they were then connected to ACSA's Food Bank and Tax Clinic. Safety planning for alcohol use was completed and he was provided with access to technology that allowed the client to be connected to multiple support systems. Regular check-ins reduced isolation for this client and encouraged follow-through with their self-determined goals and priorities. The client was assisted with referral and appointment to a Vaccine clinic through ACSA's Vaccine Engagement program. The client was successfully discharged from the program having remained stably housed for a period of 1 year and is now able to live independently. The client felt more empowered to take control of his physical health and had started cooking for himself and is currently thriving.



SCARBOROUGH DROP-IN
416-267-0115

“Since I lost my job, it has been very hard to make ends meet. Some days I would go out without food and stay in bed. My landlord has been kind enough not to kick me out of his place, but I needed to get out of this cycle of not paying rent and not having any money. I wish I can get a job but I have no luck. Thank you for this help. I will not forget how much EPIC has helped me during a rough time in my life.”

EPIC CLIENT



CHILD AND FAMILY

ACSA's Child & Family department offers a variety of programs for caregivers and children from 0 - to 12 years of age. Our team strives to create a strong, connected community that provides families with support, resources, and care to promote healthy child development.

The ACSA Child and Family staff, placement students, and volunteers demonstrated their dedication to families and children by quickly adapting programs to meet the needs of our families during extraordinary times. Our team went shopping and prepared "care packages" for families. The packages were filled with items and supplies that could be used to engage children in the home. ACSA also continued to offer programs to over 120 families through our After School Programs and provided support to parents and caregivers both individually and through group meetings during a time when a lot of families were experiencing isolation and the onset of anxiety and depression setting in with children struggling with the challenges of digital learning and living during a second year of pandemic uncertainties. Our community partners including the TDSB and TCDSB, neighbouring colleges, and institutions, among others, shared their experiences in their programs and supported ACSA in our efforts throughout the pandemic. Working together as a community, we came together and ensured that Scarborough families were supported.

Throughout 2021, our department shifted to a hybrid model and started meeting families in person again. Our Child and Family outdoor programming initially accepted 2-3 families at a time increasing to 4- 5 families by the end of 2021. Our participation throughout the year grew as socialization amongst our young ones became a growing priority. In the spring, we had 71 participants and by the end of the year, we had over 154 participants joining our regular Child and Family programming.

Being able to continue virtual programs also allowed our staff to keep an eye on our children, especially in our harder-to-reach communities. We were constantly checking in, and conducting family well-being checks and the ongoing provision of care packages meant we had a multi-pronged approach to caring for children and families during difficult times. We are incredibly grateful for our families that attended programs, turned on their cameras, and would come to the door to pick up materials... our community showed up and stayed engaged throughout the pandemic!



Our Early ON programs included 0-6 child and family drop-ins and allowed for families to explore and have access to other community members while following COVID protocol. We made sure that socialization continued through a hybrid model and catered to the needs of the diverse Scarborough residents.

In 2021, Child and Family started a new initiative called The Restorative Justice Program. Through restorative practices, this program helps participants, who face significant barriers due to the effects of poverty, racialization, and living in marginalized communities to develop strong emotional and social skills. The curriculum has focused on conflict/aggression prevention, management, how to build and strengthen healthy, trusting relationships through looking at what happened, how to repair relationships, how to take responsibility for actions, and how to understand emotions and perspectives rather than punishments.

"We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of you who worked so hard during this very challenging school year. Thank you to all the staff who have been so welcoming and kind to all the children and parents since the beginning. Haleema, Roula and all the ACSA staff have been so nice to all of us. You guys are very reliable, accommodating, and approachable.

We thank ACSA and the whole community for all your generosity by providing families with gift cards, school supplies, learning materials, and food. We can't thank you enough for all the things you have provided us. My daughter Erin enjoyed her time with you and she wishes to stay and be part of the ACSA Afterschool Program next year.

Again, Thank you ☺ Thank you ☺ Thank you ☺ to all of you!!! We pray to God that He will bless all of you even more because you guys are blessings to our family."

PAULINE MENDOZA

THE NEWCOMERS' CENTRE



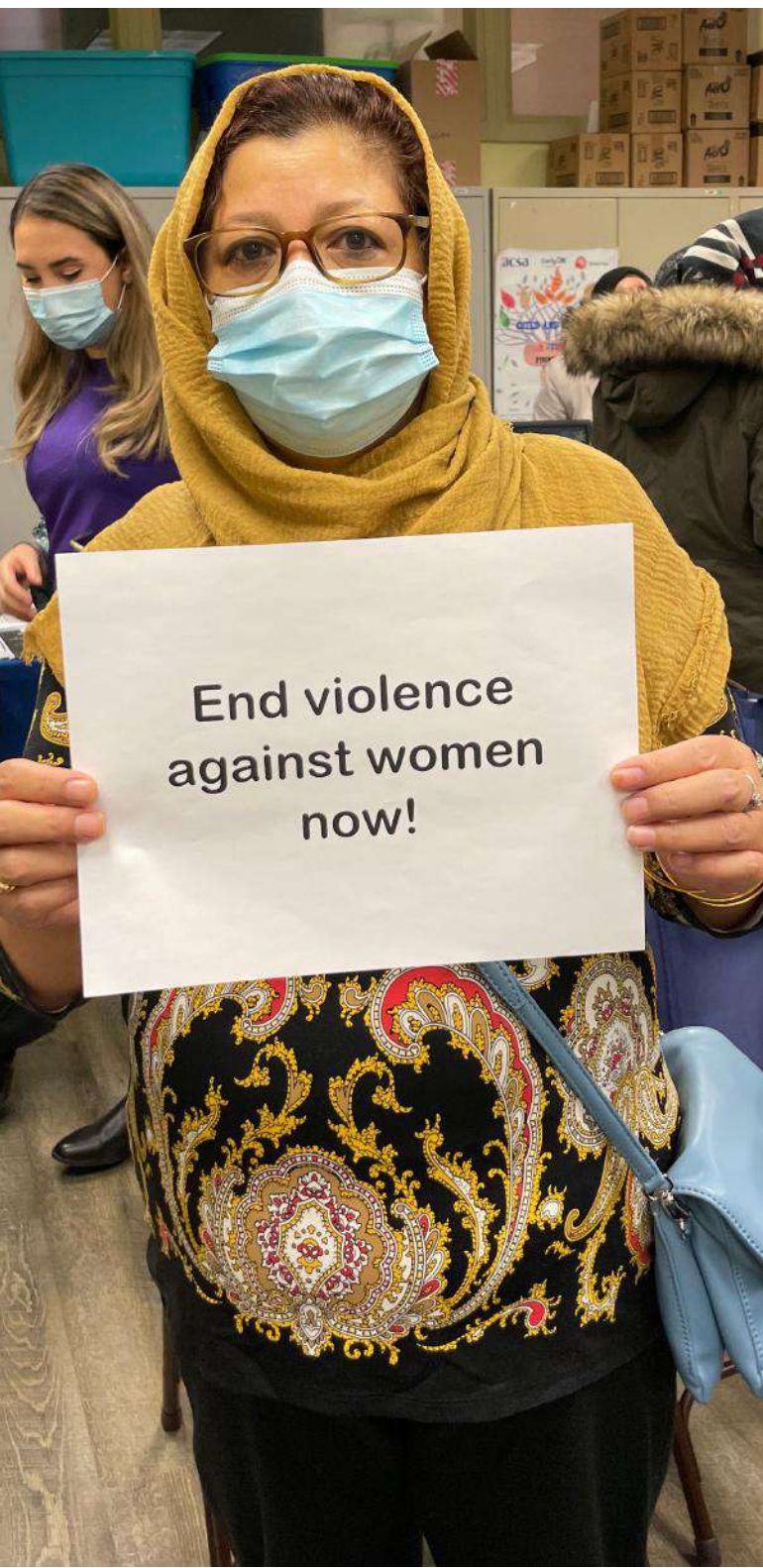
The ACSA Newcomers Centre has remained impactful in the community throughout the pandemic. The Newcomers' Centre delivers a complete package of settlement programs and services for new immigrants, refugees, and newcomer LGBTQ2S+ through knowledge transfer, capacity-building, employment support, and creating meaningful connections to help them succeed in Canada. Throughout 2021, our team provided settlement and integration support to over 2,449 new arrivals, of which over 40% were refugees.

The ACSA team quickly responded to current events in the community and pivoted our services to serve those most in need. In 2021, our team served over 50 families fleeing Afghanistan providing resources and services to assist with settlement and wrap-around support. We recognized the need for socialization, especially for newcomer youth coming to Canada during COVID, and started youth meetups through our Among Us programming serving over 20 youth weekly. We also continued providing in-person one-on-one case management support, as well as had 172 participants in our Online LINC program. 190 newcomers benefited from our employment and entrepreneurship programs, acquiring skills in food industry-related occupations/businesses, Esthetics and Security occupations.

For many newcomers, acquiring and maintaining immigration status is a lifelong process. The precarity of status for many also means uncertainties of the future, loss of income, and multiple years of family separation. Faithful is a refugee claimant who had her work permit restored because ACSA's Legal Assistance Centre was able to help her prepare her paperwork when other places like community legal clinics had closed during the pandemic. It was harder to access any service due to lockdown and strict public health guidelines. ACSA Legal Centre remained open, providing a hybrid service delivery model, thus allowing people to still access in-person services when digital access is limited. The ACSA Legal Assistance Centre has served over 1134 participants through Public Legal Educational Sessions and has connected 194 clients to free legal consultations through the Virtual Legal Clinic.

Our COVID 360 Wrap Around program continued in 2021 as COVID variants continued to impact the most vulnerable in our community. COVID 360 is intensive, wrap-around support that offers vital services considering the many barriers faced by newcomer families, isolated individuals, and those who are most impacted by the COVID crisis. Over 3000 families who were severely impacted by COVID were served 45,000 lbs of food to support them while recovering from their illnesses or completing their self-isolation mandates. These newcomer families have also been provided with wrap-around support and referrals to life-stabilization programs.

ACSA Newcomers' Centre remained at the forefront of vaccination efforts, helping over 1000 newcomers, live-in caregivers, children, and youth, to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Several community consultations have been hosted in collaboration with the Scarborough Health Network and medical professionals to engage with the larger community to inform newcomers on vaccine information. Remaining vigilant to working from an equity perspective, the work has focused on equity seeking groups and providing knowledge in multiple languages, including the dissemination of print materials in over 10 languages.



THE STRONGER WOMEN PROJECT

In 2021, the ACSA Newcomers' Centre received a grant from the Canadian Women's Foundation under the Safer + Stronger Grants program, through funds provided by the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) to support capacity building initiatives that will enhance staff capacity in dealing with the prevalent increase in gender-based violence over the COVID-19 pandemic to address, prevent and reduce gender-based violence. This Project focused on helping women who are belonging to the BLACK and BIPOC communities who are also refugees, protected persons/convention refugees, live-in-caregivers, newcomers and low-income Canadian women, and gender diverse individuals who have experienced abuse or are in crisis situations. This project increased the awareness of 148 women and service providers on gender-based violence and increased the capacity of over 70 ACSA staff to address the influx of calls for help from women experiencing abuse. Some of the capacity-building initiatives include Vicarious Trauma, Trauma-Informed Care, Phone Counseling, Intake and Referral, Case Management, Safety Planning, and Introduction to Indigenous Protocols and Cultural Diversity. Through this grant, we were also able to provide one-time micro-grant support to 51 women experiencing abuse or in crisis situations. ACSA Newcomers' Centre supported over 50 Afghan families with their settlement needs in the last quarter of 2021.



“I can’t thank you enough for all your support to me and my family. My work permit was about to expire, and I did not know where to get this done with everything closed around me. Renewing my work permit helped me maintain my work and status. Referring me to a program that prepares me for my court hearing was so helpful. Your free legal services mean a lot to people who have limited resources and lots of challenges.”

NEWCOMERS' CENTRE CLIENT



THE ACSA FOOD BANK

The ACSA's Foodbank kept its doors open during the most difficult times of the COVID pandemic. We made sure to respond to the people's needs and provided support by ensuring consistent access to food even when we experienced shortages in deliveries and volunteer support. Our commitment throughout the pandemic was to ensure families always had food on the table. In addition to the ongoing need for food, hygiene kits, and personal protective equipment was much needed and among our clients and our clients who rely on social assistance struggle with transportation costs. The pandemic impacted seniors, single parents, those who are immunocompromised, isolated and struggling with mental health challenges in very different ways, once again demonstrating that this pandemic exacerbated the inequities in our communities.

We mobilized our resources to respond to those who were hit hardest by the pandemic through our new ACSA Cares initiative which includes weekly food deliveries to our clients, led by volunteers. This initiative had a huge impact on the community and it expanded from food deliveries to COVID-affected individuals and families to isolated seniors and individuals who were not able to pick up their weekly food hampers. We also wanted to respect cultural diversity and give choices to people in picking the type of food they need so we created efficient systems that allowed families the ability to customize the food deliveries based on their preferences and availability of items at our Centre.



“Do you know what it means to feel unable? Unable to work, unable to connect, unable to get the basic needs for myself and my child is just too much! Your food deliveries were just Amazing and meant SO MUCH to me.

CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH”

ACSA FOOD BANK CLIENT



THE BAYMILLS COMMUNITY HUB

The Bay Mills Community Hub aims to engage community members living in and around the 365 Bay Mills community. In 2021, the team remained steadfast and worked diligently to ensure the needs of the community were consistently met. This included pivoting some programs to an online platform, but the doors to the hub never closed, as services and support continued to be provided at the front of the space. The Bay Mills Hub staff and resident leaders continued to be present in the community by reassessing needs and pivoting support. Our team remained vibrant and despite all challenges, were able to engage with over 720 community members throughout 2021.

Thanksgiving and Christmas are two significant holidays that the Bay Mills community celebrates. During this time, the Bay Mills Hub distributed over 100 turkeys to individuals and families in need. During Christmas, the Bay Mills Hub partnered with CHUM and were able to distribute over 120 Christmas gifts to children and youth in the community. The community comprises many single individuals, seniors and families, many of whom are isolated and are struggling financially. The impact of these types of initiatives cannot be understated, as the simple act of providing a turkey and a Christmas gift gives isolated residents the opportunity to socialize and connect with one another. For residents, these initiatives resulted in a reprieve during an otherwise very difficult time.

The Bay Mills Hub implemented the Taking the Lead Project in 2021. Funding by Ontario Trillium Foundation, this project consisted of a 24-week workshop series covering an array of conceptual and practical topics related to leadership in the community. Eight resident leaders had the opportunity to develop leadership skills and were able to implement their own initiative based on the current needs of the community. One of the participants explained, "This project had a lot of different things that made it special but one thing that stood out to me the most was being able to make my project based on the needs of the community". Through this project, the leaders were able to engage with more residents and address the current needs of the community. This led to greater engagement and fostered leadership with residents in the community helping to build connectivity and friendships.

In the summer months, we pivoted and conducted in-person programming to connect to our Bay Mills family. Creative ways of engaging included the breakfast program, which consistently served an average of 70 residents per week. Bay Mills residents would regularly drop in at the front door and pick up breakfast before going to work or school. Food security is a prominent concern in the community, especially among children and youth, and this program ensured that residents had access to food every day and allowed staff to regularly check in on community members to ensure they were connected to other services and supports needed.

YOUTH TEAM

ACSA's youth department is focused on providing support and opportunities for youth and their families so that youth in our communities are able to succeed and thrive. Although 2021 was a challenging year, the team was able to persevere and ensured that youth and their families were supported during these difficult times.

ACSA's two Youth Outreach Workers provided case management wrap-around support to over 200 youth in the Steeles-L'Amoreaux community. The RACKS program (Resilience, Accountability, Community, Knowledge & Success) supported 145 youth with intensive case management support, as well as both programs served an additional 600 youth through various events and workshops. Both programs saw a drastic increase in youth facing complex needs related to mental health and addictions, as youth were dramatically impacted by the pandemic. Youth also struggled in connecting to essential services and supports due to many agencies going virtual. ACSA staff remained steadfast and present in the community and connected with youth in whatever way they could, whether this meant over the phone, online, or in a park. This level of in-person engagement was crucial, as youth struggled through zoom-fatigue and in-person connections played an essential role in providing these youth with the support they needed.

In 2021, the youth team offered a variety of programs and events, all with the goal of ensuring youth were engaged in the community. This included after-school programs, holiday events, Back to school events, Black history events, community workshops, virtual events, and one on one support. The youth team led four back to school events serving over 500 youth in the communities of Bay Mills, Chester Le, Victoria Park, and Parma Court. Our youth summer programs had over 100 youth participate, many of whom shared that they would have had nowhere else to go if it weren't through this program.

2021 also marked the end of a three year Ontario Trillium Foundation grant where ACSA provided trusteeship to the SLYE (Student, Leadership and Youth Empowerment). Through its Peer to Peer model, the project was able to work with over 3000 youth leaders in the community who led roadshow events and workshops that connected youth in the community to much-needed support.





CHESTER LE

The Chester Le Community Corner works to increase the capacity of residents in Chester Le and the surrounding Steeles-L'Amoreaux neighbourhood. Acting as a connector, the program connects residents to essential services, such as employment support, children and youth programming, as well as skills training for adults. This includes animating the Chester Le space itself with responsive programming and support for the local community.

Throughout 2021, our team saw an increase in mental health challenges amongst community members, as well as social isolation due to the prolonged state of the pandemic. As a result, a key focus of our team was ensuring that residents were provided with opportunities to connect with one another and with staff, and this helped to ensure people were provided with any support needed. Our consistent presence was crucial and was felt as the team conducted door-to-door outreach and engagement to over 200 homes in the area. The teams used this opportunity to distribute resources and learn more about the issues residents were facing. Residents were encouraged to join our in-person pop-up events that were held weekly when weather and restrictions permitted.

in 2021, we also offered programming virtually and recognized the important role that this could play in community engagement through digital access. In partnership with Toronto Police Services, we distributed 26 laptops to different schools in the Scarborough-Agincourt area, allowing children and youth access to school and other support.

Our Chester Le staff hosted multiple community engagement events including our Holiday Meal program which distributed 150 meals, grocery gift cards, and holiday letters to 23 families in the Chester Le community. This was a great opportunity to reach out to community members and helped to strengthen the relationship between ACSA and the Chester Le community.

The Chester Le residents got involved this past year through various events and engaged with the larger community. In 2021, the Chester Le Safety Collaborative continued to advocate and work together to ensure a safe and vibrant community. Composed of ACSA, local schools, the Toronto Police, Toronto Community Housing, and resident leaders, the group was able to get speed bumps installed in the community. With a large children population, this was a key measure in ensuring a safe community is created for all residents as evidenced by the residents themselves.

Being able to connect with the community has been very important throughout the pandemic, we have been thankful for the relationships we have built and the bonds that have been created. The need for human connection is powerful. When everything shut down due to pandemic restriction, we doubled down in our efforts to stay connected with residents, both virtually and in person. Our Chester Le community space has continued to foster that connectedness, no matter the circumstance! Even if community members were isolated due to the pandemic, we remained engaged and present and let residents knew they could count on ACSA.





FOOD SECURITY

ACSA's Food Security department offers year-round programming to help improve access to healthy, good, and culturally appropriate food for our communities. Throughout the spring till fall, we focus on growing good food by running our two community gardens and hosting capacity-building workshops that focus on sustainable growth, environmental sustainability, and stewardship.

After gardens were closed for part of 2020, it was empowering to have so many individuals wanting to be part of our gardening initiatives, involved in increasing local food security and supporting environmental sustainability. Throughout the 2021 season, we had the support of 50 gardeners and over 64 volunteers. Our gardens have been a green space where community members can share knowledge and connect with one another throughout the inconsistencies of the pandemic. We are grateful to have our communities being involved in their communities, connecting with nature, and contributing to local food systems.

Throughout the fall months until early spring, our food security initiatives focused on nutrition education and food literacy. Our Cooking Healthy Together program is a 6-week program that has been run by ACSA for many years and continues online. This program has evolved over time- first being catered to caregivers of children aged 0 – 6 with programming focusing on toddler nutrition. In 2021, we saw the need for connection between communities. In response, we invited community members of all ages to join the program. In the Cooking Healthy Together program, food is explored on a holistic level, with subjects including nutrition, food science, healthy recipes, cooking skills, and the cultural significance of food on social connection and well-being. We had over 100 enthusiastic participants in this program and distributed recipe packages to those participants. Participants of the program also ran their own workshops, sharing their favourite meals and cooking tips. The food that we eat reflects our cultures to others in our communities and can bring back meaningful memories. Our Cooking Healthy Together program has been a social connector during the many COVID shutdowns throughout 2021. By having a weekly program where mothers, caregivers, seniors, children, and gardeners can come together to share recipes and share food histories, we've seen just how powerful food can be to foster community connectedness, improved nutrition, and general well-being.

With the start of the COVID pandemic, multiple agencies within North Scarborough collaborated to create a project addressing this global issue while focusing on reducing the social isolation present within their communities. ACSA led The Recipe for Climate Change project which engaged local youth and isolated seniors to build intergenerational connections, share skills to grow and preserve food, and create meaningful relationships while empowering the community to act on local climate change. Through online group sessions, community elders could share their personal food histories, teach how to cook their favourite meals that tie them to their families' culture and share tips on growing and preserving food sustainably. Youth supported elders by assisting them in creating recipe videos and combining each senior's story into a recipe book.

One of the project's elders, Nella Marhasin, shared how back home, her family would preserve most of the vegetables grown in their garden to have food for the winter. "I like to eat locally grown food," Nella said. "Especially when it's home-cooked." The youth created a recipe video featuring Nella's "Green Borscht," a popular Eastern-European dish using fresh vegetables from her garden.

The Recipe for Climate Change members voiced their appreciation for the project as it taught them how food directly connects to climate change. As well, community advocacy was intertwined in group discussions. Participants mentioned feeling empowered and excited to tell others in their neighborhoods what they learned about sustainable living, climate change action, and the profoundness of connecting to culture through recipes. This integrative project fostered meaningful relationships, improved knowledge surrounding climate change on a local and global level, enhanced community resiliency, and improved engagement for residents of our Scarborough communities.

Food truly connects us all and has been a catalyst to build community relationships and create meaningful conversations during the uncertainty of the ongoing pandemic in 2021.



"Being a participant in the Cooking Healthy Together Program has been a highlight for me, as it enabled me to learn about the nutritional facts of the various food groups, while also allowing me to try new cost-effective and healthy recipes. I looked forward to each group and was always excited to see what topics we would be covering each session. The social component of interacting with other individuals during the group, while learning more about each person's cultural dishes, helped in alleviating the isolation which we have all faced over the last two years. With the increasing cost of groceries over the pandemic, receiving care packages with the ingredients for the meals has been invaluable, as I might not have otherwise been able to afford to buy them. The facilitators were very knowledgeable and engaging, taking the time to answer all queries that we had during the group. This was an excellent and informative series and I look forward to attending more of these types of workshops. Thank you for continuing to run should well-organized groups"

THE DORSET PARK COMMUNITY HUB

The Dorset Park Community Hub is a place where everyone has equal access to a wide range of services and supports vital to the wellbeing of our community. In 2021, over 70,000 people walked through the Hub doors and accessed the services of our anchor partners including the food bank, the Newcomer Centre, computer labs, children and youth programs, and wellness resources. The Hub is not just a place for people to access service and support, it is about creating a vibrant space that benefits community in a multitude of ways!

In 2021, over 80 women participated in the English Circle for Women Program at the Hub. Women attending were able to improve their English, allowing them to apply for jobs and further education, access resources that they need for themselves and their families and take on leadership roles in their communities. The program provided much needed support to women who were experiencing a lot of challenges through the pandemic. Given the results of the program, we have decided to expand the program to include supporting the BayMills community.

The Hub also hosted programs to seniors living in and around the Dorset Park community. Over 200 residents participated in various community events and workshops, which provided crucial opportunities for residents to connect and reduce their isolation. These initiatives allowed residents to engage with each other, learn about resources in the community, as well as the creative opportunities for new friendships to be built.

With the pandemic increasing the need for digital literacy skills, we recognized the barriers for seniors in accessing and using technology. Through a Federal New Horizons for Seniors grant, we were able to offer the Technology Club for Seniors where over 80 seniors were able to learn new technological skills. Through one on one and workshops, seniors learned how to use their devices and platforms including ZOOM. This helped to ensure seniors could keep in touch with family, as well as allowing them to access other services and supports that were only available virtually throughout the pandemic. The program also increased awareness of fraud and applying for services such as Canadian pensions.





The Our Strong Neighbourhoods project worked tirelessly over 2021 to ensure residents in Dorset Park were supported. This included conducting weekly wellness checks, the provision of food supports, as well as hosting a variety of in person community events that ensured residents had the opportunity to connect.

One specific success was the Cook and Connect initiative that brought 15 residents from Dorset Park together to share cooked meals, share their cultures and connect with each other in a safe space. The program also provided tools for residents on community healing and trauma, as the community had suffered some tremendous losses in 2021. The success of this project is that it brought residents from across communities together who were from different pockets who traditionally don't connect. This has resulted in new connections and relationships being created where support is being provided beyond the boundaries of the project itself. Residents are not only supporting each other on a personal level, but are also starting to work together on community initiatives.



As soon as I step into the community center, everybody will cheer at me and it makes me feel so welcoming. This happiness did not last long because of COVID pandemic. Thereafter, I had to stay indoors which made me very anxious and depressed.

There was no one to console me or show me love and compassion. Also, I cannot go anywhere due to the pandemic. I was like a bird in a cage. I always ask myself why did the COVID come? I sometimes get so angry and irritated. This is the same situation for everyone. I cannot express how much I have been through this pandemic. I have suffered so much.

HUB CLIENT



FEPS

The Financial Empowerment and Problem Solving (FEPS) program provides financial education, advocacy and problem-solving services to people living on a low income. The one common thread throughout all of the work at ACSA is that those we support are often living in poverty and FEPS is able to provide the best support possible, as it is focused on putting income back into the pockets of those who need it most.

2021 was a challenging year, as the bulk of services were offered virtually. Although virtual methods were at times a challenge, staff found that it offered a huge benefit for many in our community who faced barriers in accessing in person services.

The FEPS team is grateful to have helped so many members of our community who live on low incomes. Having access to these supports make a real difference in the lives of individuals. In times of a pandemic, where cost of living is also increasing, having access to benefits can go a long way in ensuring people can make ends meet and allows for people to live with more dignity.

through our amazing staff team and 32 volunteers engaged, the program was able to return

\$7,318,733

of tax credits and benefits into the hands of

1730

community members

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS

For almost 50 years, the backbone of ACSA has been the army of volunteers who help support an array of programs and services. Over 80 persons volunteered with ACSA throughout 2021, contributing over 15 000 hours to the organization. Volunteers assisted with our ACSA Tax Clinic, LINC language classes, EarlyON resources for children and families, the Food Bank and our community gardens. Volunteers have been crucial in ensuring ACSA keeps its doors open to those who need us the most. We are so beyond grateful for the volunteers who continually dedicate their time and talent to ACSA to help support our Scarborough community.





VACCINE ENGAGEMENT

A large focus of 2021 for all of ACSA, as well as the entire City of Toronto, was vaccine engagement, as vaccines gave hope that the pandemic was coming to an end. Once vaccines were approved, it became a core part of ACSA's focus, to increase vaccine uptake in the communities that we serve.

In 2021, ACSA led the, City of Toronto funded, North Scarborough Vaccine Engagement team, a consortium of 12 organizations and resident groups with the goal of increasing vaccine uptake in Scarborough. Working with local resident ambassadors, the project saw huge success as we saw vaccination rates in Scarborough increase, and by the end of 2021, vaccination rates were over 80%. This success was achieved through a variety of initiatives ranging from outreach tables, pop up vaccine clinics and workshops. Hiring local resident leaders as ambassadors for the project played a key role to its success, as their relationships in the community were crucial in creating a safe space for people to have dialogue about vaccines.

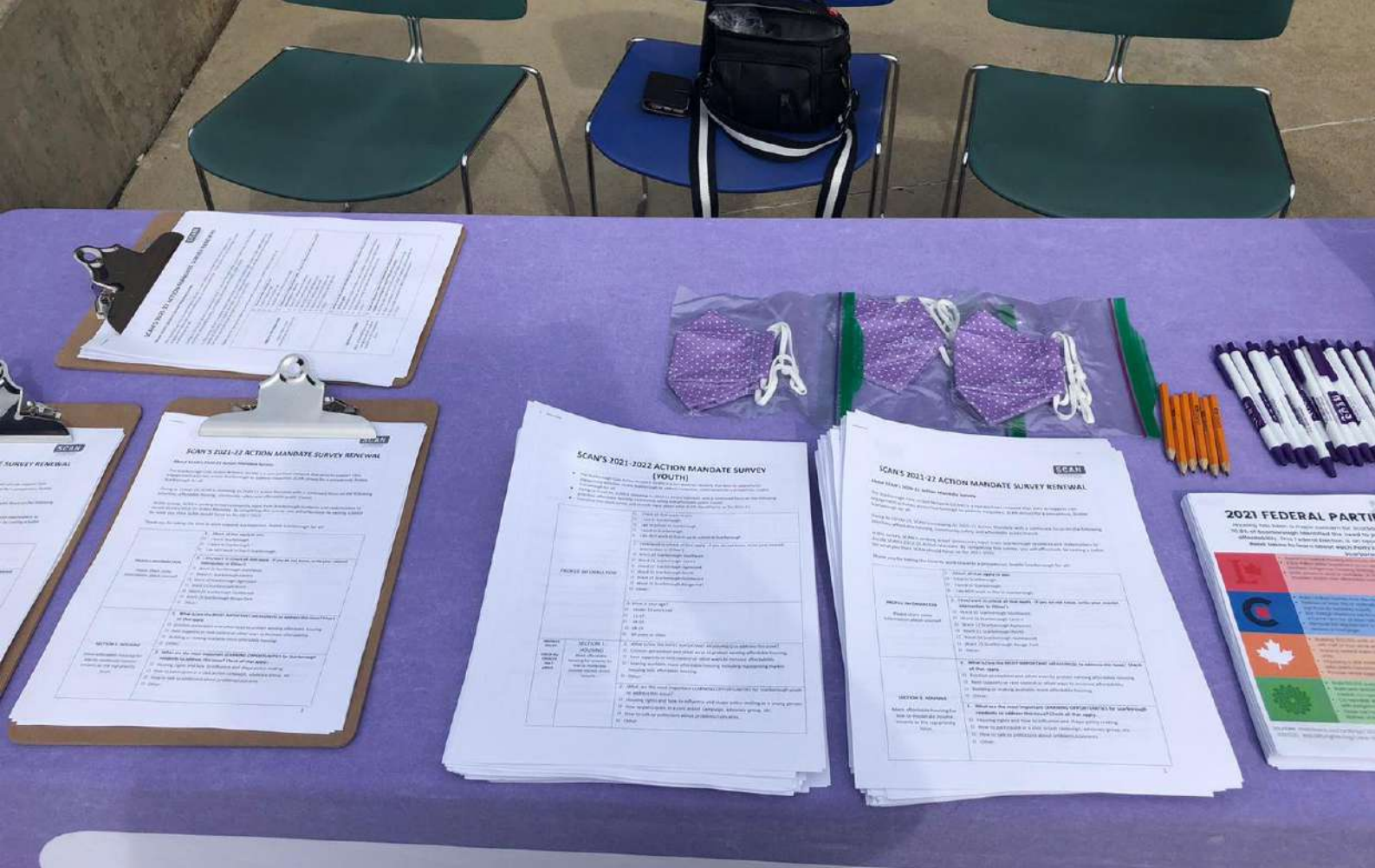
ACSA staff and departments worked closely with our partners at the Centre for Immigrant and Refugee Health Care and were able to host specialized clinics for both ACSA staff and clients. Staff were also able to get creative whether it was the Newcomer Centre creating TikToks or Child and Family hosting information sessions with parents. Through this partnership ACSA was able to host targeted clinics for newcomers, those in the sex trade and those experiencing homelessness. If not for these opportunities, many individuals would not be vaccinated, as these clinics created a safe space where they were supported by trusted staff.

Ongoing advocacy played a key role, as accessibility whether it was locations of clinics, navigating language barriers, continued to be ongoing challenges that had to be addressed. Thanks to the amazing work of the amazing Project Manager of the North Scarborough Vaccine Team, as well as ACSA's Executive Director, we were able to make some headway and the results of the work speak for themselves.

“I met some residents while they were coming back from school with their kids. One was a woman who spoke Arabic who said that she didn't get any vaccines yet and was having trouble accessing due to the language barrier. Luckily, I had an Arabic speaking volunteer with me who was able to talk to her about the benefits of vaccines, as well as was able to tell her about various vaccine pop up clinics in the area. This individual then went onto getting her first dose at a pop up clinic the next day. The best part is that she took 3 family members with her, all of whom were first dose, 2 of whom were children”

SCARBOROUGH RESIDENT





SCAN

The Scarborough Civic Action Network (SCAN) is a non-partisan, community-driven network that aims to support civic engagement to address inequities and mobilize a civic voice for Scarborough. SCAN played a crucial role during the pandemic working with the community on the priority issues of affordable housing, community safety and transit.

Affordable housing continued to be a huge issue facing those living in Scarborough. With inflation increasing and more people being at risk of eviction, it became more of a growing concern. Thanks to an active affordable housing resident advisory group, SCAN was able to implement a few different initiatives. The group was heavily engaged in the City of Toronto's Multi Tenant housing initiative where they actively engaged with tenants across Scarborough and ensured Scarborough residents had a voice when the multi tenant housing framework was presented at Council. SCAN also hosted a housing forum that brought residents from across Scarborough together to learn more about the issue of housing and what they, as residents, could do to make change.

2021 was also a big year, as many stakeholders, including SCAN, started to talk about Community Safety and Policing and what could be done differently to ensure the root causes of violence are addressed. One piece of this including SCAN collaborating with a diverse group of stakeholders to host a "Rethinking Community Safety" forum, where the community discussed the City of Toronto' SafeTO plan, as well discussed increasing resources to allow certain interventions, such as mental health distress calls to be diverted from the police and directed to organizations with mental health expertise.

Overall, SCAN hosted a variety of workshops and conducted outreach and engagement with the community, all working towards the call of ensuring people could participate in discussions on issues that impact them the most.



“The safety forum really opened my eyes to the real issues facing those in the community. More of these conversations need to be had and action needs to be taken”

SCAN PARTICIPANT

ACSA'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The ACSA Board of Directors are volunteers giving of their time and talent ensuring adherence to the mission and vision of the Agency. 2021 was another full year of pandemic protocols, including closures, following Toronto Public Health guidelines and pivoting our services in ways that best met the needs of community members. Every Director stepped up and showed up for ACSA and the community! Each member of the Board makes a personal commitment to support ACSA and during 2021 this Board worked together to ensure ACSA staff was supported during another extraordinary year. ACSA Directors meet year round to support ACSA Management, support fundraising efforts, donate food and resources, support social media campaigns, check in with staff, and always show up a “can do” attitude! A truly committed and dedicated group of people because they too believe that TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER and ACSA is grateful for your time and service to community.

A special thank you, to long time Directors, Paul Rook and Lois Williams, both Paul and Lois are ending their consecutive two, 3 year terms on the ACSA Board.

A huge thank you, your support and contributions to ACSA are so deeply valued and appreciated! Paul Rook was instrumental in leading the charge when ACSA by-laws and policies needed revamping upon his arrival to the Board, he has been a steady voice of reason and his experience and knowledge in Governance and Policy has been an incredible asset to the ACSA Board. Lois Williams has been the voice of community on the ACSA Board, her steadfast commitment to ensuring the needs of our most marginalized were always at the forefront of our work. Lois (and her trusted crew of community ladies) doesn't leave things to others to get done, she's a frontline, roll-up the sleeves and get to work person and ACSA has been all the better having Lois as part of the Board. Heartfelt thanks to Paul and Lois for your boundless energy, thoughtfulness and care you've shown ACSA, and the communities we serve, during your time on the Board.

OUR BOARD

MANNY SOUSA

Chairperson

MARIA LYKOS

Vice Chairperson

STANLEY SZETO

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JACKIE TSUI

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BRANDI BRENNER

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ZAHRA BHIMANI*

MOHIBA BATOOL*

***APPOINTED AND STANDING FOR ELECTION AT JUNE 2022 AGM**



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