

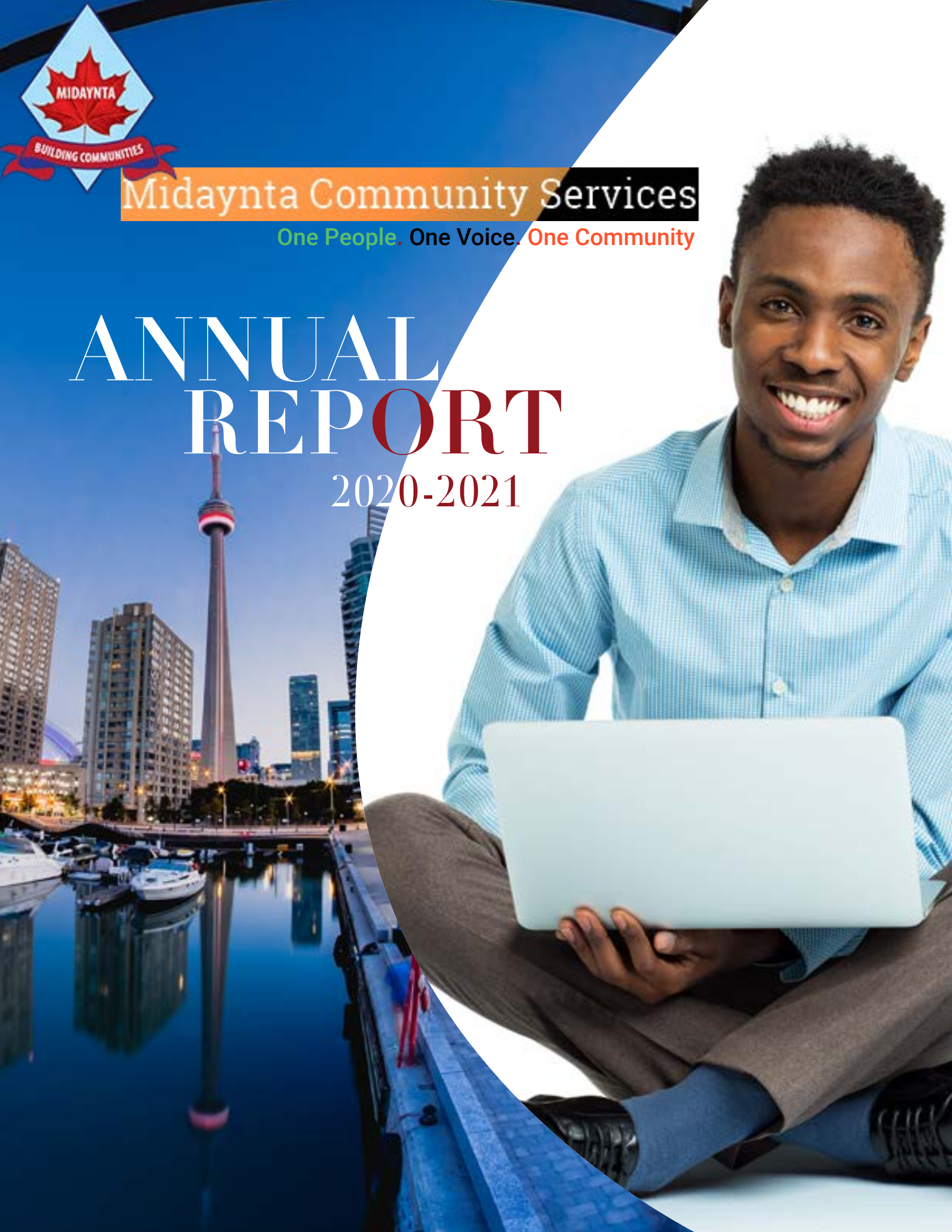


Midaynta Community Services

One People. One Voice. One Community

# ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021





## Table of Contents

Message from the Chairman Board of Directors	4
Message from the Executive Director	6
About Midaynta Community Services	8
Project Turn-Around	10
Gender-based Violence	12
Program Youth Justice	13
Program Family Support counsellor	14
Enhanced Youth Outreach Worker Program	15
Youth Outreach Worker Program	16
Rites of Passage Youth Mentorship Program	18
Housing and Homelessness Program	20
Student and Family Advocate	22
Somali Youth Heritage Games	23
Mending a Crack in Sky Initiative	24
Covid-19 Fund and Support	26
Testimonials	28



## Message from the Chairman, Board of Directors

The past year has been one of challenges and accomplishments in equal measures at Midaynta Community Services. The Covid-19 pandemic brought about challenges that derailed our service delivery. However, we used the challenges as a learning curve and adapt to effectively

Part of our vision at Midaynta is to continue to advocate for a largely underserved and marginalized communities. In the past year, we increased efforts to advocate for these communities at different levels of the governance to ensure that their needs are met. As what has become our tradition every year, volunteers, together with staff, and Board Members continue to look for various ways to increase the organization's capacity so as to ensure that we provide a wide, consistent and sufficient range of services to the community. This past year, the volunteers have been instrumental in outreaching and recruiting participants to various programs in the organization. We also continue to partner and collaborate with other service providers to make a positive effect to the community we serve. The board continues to review and update the organization policies, and last year, the members of the board had to

update some of the policies in order to align with the Public Health recommendations due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Youth have also had a part in Midaynta's success. Over the summer, youth from the community worked with Midaynta to uplift youth voices in their community through the Project Real Talks initiative. Thanks to the support of Service Canada, we were able to hire youth from impacted communities to come together and research how gun violence has impacted their communities, as well as their own lives. Youth canvassed their communities, directed focus groups, took surveys of fellow community members, later converting this research into a written paper, which was then published online. Thanks to this project, we were able to directly show the public how important work against gun violence and provide a direct glimpse into the firsthand experiences of the youth.

Some of our other successes include the expansion of our service capacity with the inclusion of a new Student and Family Advocate program, a Youth Justice Coordinator, and the growth of the Project Turn Around initiative

with a new program tackling Gender-Based Violence in the community. The development of Midaynta's capacity has helped to widen the amount of people we can reach, and community members we can serve. We look forward to seeing how this will unfold in the upcoming year.

Midaynta has taken proactive steps to address youth violence in the Black community by supporting and helping develop a three-phase community healing initiative in partnership with Somali mothers, MCIS. Mending a Crack in the Sky (MCIS) is a dynamic program that consists of a dedicated group of mothers who are passionate about creating safe spaces to heal and engage in transformational community change and activism. The group is inspired by a Somali proverb that states "if people come together, they can even mend a crack in the sky." This concept of unity has also formed the basis of our action plan to address the issue of the radicalization of youth as well as the alarming rates of youth violence.

Furthermore, Board of Directors have made it a priority to focus on capacity building and ensure that the organization's capacity to offer virtual services is enhanced. We are also working to increase our presence in social media platforms.

Finally, I would like to offer our special thanks to our partners and funders: the Ministry of

Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), the United States Consulate General in Toronto; the Ministry of Education; the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE); the Munk School of Global Affairs; the Ministry of Education; the Black Experience Project; the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University; the Mosaic Institute; the Canadian Council of Muslim Women; the Canadian Council of Imams; Somali Immigrant Aid Organization; East Metro Youth Services; Color of Poverty - Color of Change; Northwood Neighbourhood Services; the RCMP, York Regional Police, Toronto Police Services Board, Toronto Police Services; Peel Police and the members of the steering committee for our Project Turn-Around (GPIP). Finally, a thank you to Midaynta Staff, Students, Volunteers and our Board of Directors for their unwavering support and hard work.

Thank you,

Abdirahman Dhore

Chairman



## Message from the Executive Director

Over the past year in the Black community, we have seen an increase in mothers who have lost their children to youth gun violence, who continue to seek answers and justice. These communities have been filled with feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, unable to support their children and youth and provide them a safe space to live, learn and thrive. As they are in these terrible living conditions, community members often feel that there is a clear lack of political will to help solve the issues plaguing their communities. In Northwest Toronto alone, we have seen increases in gun violence incidences, increases in the numbers of incarcerated youth, and increases in youth unemployment due to lack of opportunity and fears for their safety while moving in their neighborhoods. These factors have all led to the increase of mental health disorders in youth in the areas we serve and the persisting feelings of having no opportunities and resources to support and uplift their communities.

The progression of COVID-19 and the rising cases have also had a negative impact on the Black community. Black youth and families have been disproportionately impacted by the

COVID-19 virus and are overrepresented in statistics of COVID-19 cases and deaths. Working through the COVID-19 health crisis has required the organization to shift to support the community on a virtual basis, while trying its best to remain connected to the community's most vulnerable members.

While there have been numerous challenges and difficulties over the past year, Midaynta has also had its fair share of successes. We have seen an increase in the number of partnerships with different organizations and tables to support our programs and services like our partnership with the Ripple Effect Circle, in which we address and explore solutions to anti-black racism on multiple levels of government. We have expanded our safety mission by participating in weekly meetings with the Toronto Police Services and Toronto Community Housing where we discuss violence and other safety issues in the community. We have seen an increase in mothers in our Mending a Crack in the Sky (MCIS) program, who participate in weekly community safety meetings and work within their communities.

Although we have had significant successes with our projects and initiatives, as reported last year our Black community in northwest Toronto is still in crisis again and it is important, now more than ever, that all levels of government show their political will to support this community. Despite the pain and the hardship, our young people and their families continue to face fear, systematic racism, gun and gang violence, poverty, marginalization, criminalization, discrimination in education, employment, housing and healthcare services, as well as the difficulties of accessing financial services and that is something that needs to change immediately.

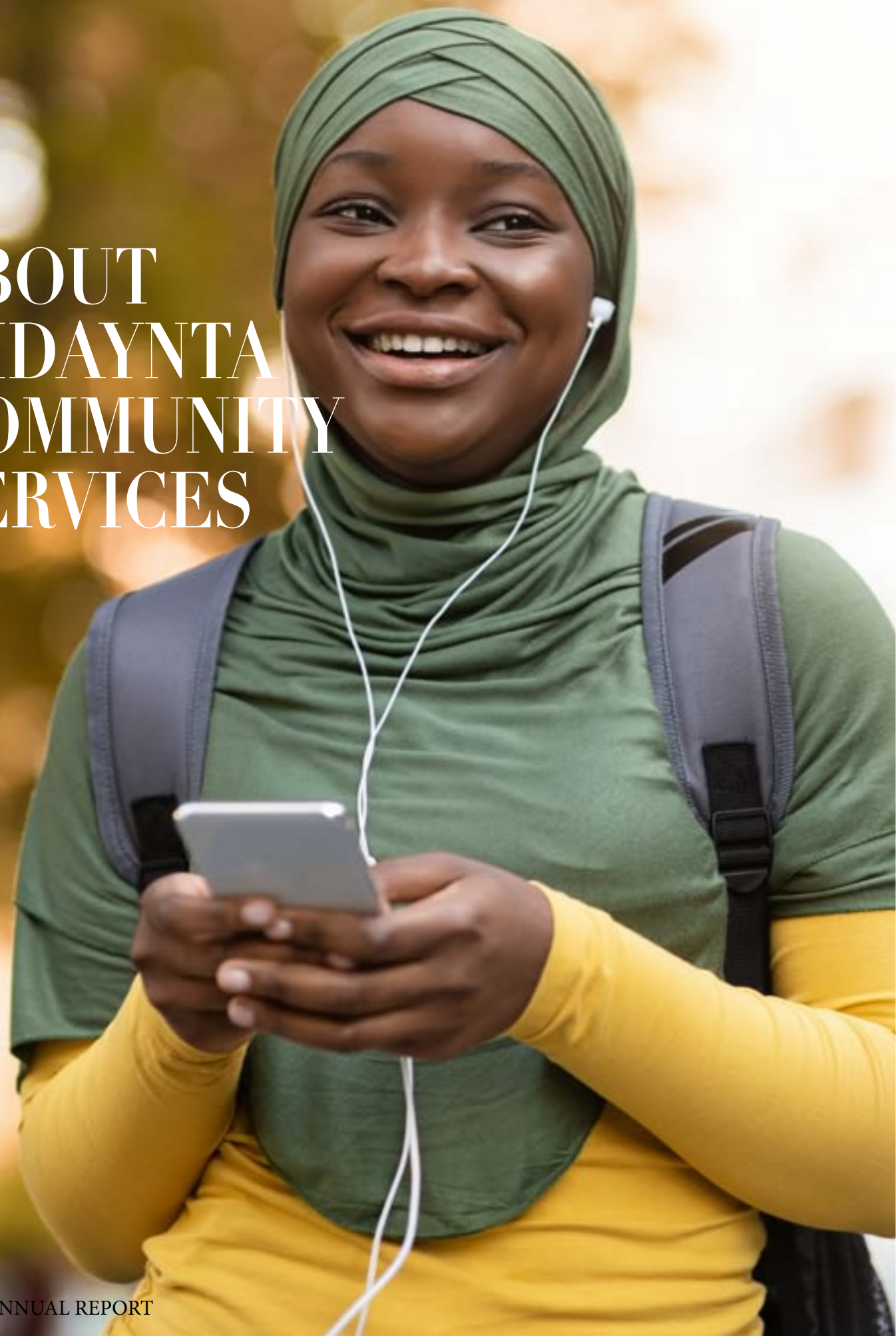
Doing this work would not have been possible without the support of community partners and stakeholders. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge and give thanks to: our monthly roundtable partners, who for many years have supported Midaynta Community Services at our regular meetings and conferences on Youth Resiliency, Hate, Racism, and Radicalization; our funders, whom without them, it would have been impossible to achieve what we have

achieved so far; affiliate organizations; supporters; volunteers and; staff. At midaynta, we value our relationship with all of you and we will continue to strengthen and co-operate with all of you, as well as work to improve our programs and support to the community.

Thank you,

Mahad Yusuf  
Executive Director

# ABOUT MIDAYNTA COMMUNITY SERVICES



Midaynta Community Services is a registered Canadian charitable organization that provides settlement, housing, and youth services. The organization provides meetings, counselling and other support services for refugees, immigrants, and young people across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Midaynta was established in July 1993 as a family reunification project and incorporated in August 1995, as a non-profit organization committed to identifying and responding to the needs of the community. We have been in service for 28 years. Midaynta currently has a team of 11 full-time staff and 2 part-time staff. In addition, through Service Canada Youth Jobs, we can hire 15 youth to support programming throughout the summer.

Midaynta offers a wide range of services to fit the needs of the community. These services include immigration, settlement, counseling, case management, housing and homelessness support, as well as educational services such as courses and seminars. In addition to these services Midaynta offers specialized support through programming such as the Youth Mentorship Program (YMP), Youth Outreach Worker program (YOW), Enhanced Outreach Worker program (EYOW), and Project Turn-Around. These programs focus on supporting marginalized youth with mental health and connecting youth to resources such as, counseling, employment, navigating the criminal justice system, anger management, gang prevention and intervention services, youth mentorship, stress management, conflict resolution skills, educational services (e.g., sexual health, drug and alcohol addictions, cultural and community) education, internship opportunities and parenting support services.

Midaynta had dedicated the last 27 years committed to understanding and supporting the various structural needs of the Black community, particularly young people in the

Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). For instance, we have many years of experience delivering services to young people 'at risk' or in conflict with the law, through the implementation of our program 'Project Turn Around'. Project Turn Around is a gang prevention and intervention program which aims to serve Black youth ages 12- 20, who are at risk of or already involved in the criminal justice system. In further detail, most of Black youth that Project Turn-Around works with are either on probation or at-risk of gang involvement or committing crime. This program is specifically tailored to providing supports through case management, counselling, gang awareness education, employment support, cultural and community education, drug and alcohol addictions awareness, workshops and ultimately supporting the rehabilitation of youth into a positive community setting. Most of these youth share risk factors that are deeply rooted in poverty, low education attainment, lack of opportunities, social alienation and exclusion. Issues of racism and discrimination are evident in most Black youth we work with across all our youth programs.

Considering such problems, Midaynta employs culturally sensitive programs while working with different partners to address issues affecting Black youth and the Black community. Midaynta holds annual conferences for the purpose of converging together, sharing knowledge, and devising collaborative efforts. Through the Youth Outreach Worker program, Midaynta works with Black youth and families in various capacities. This includes but not limited to acting as youth brokers by connecting them to mental health resources, employment resources and conflict mediation. In addition, our Enhanced Youth Outreach Worker provides mental health interventions and develops individualized action plans for Black youth for them to cope with mental health issues, get better education and sustain employment.

# PROJECT TURN-AROUND

Project Turn Around is a gang prevention and intervention program which aims to serve Black youth ages 12- 20, who are at risk of or already involved in the criminal justice system. In further detail, most of Black youth that Project Turn-Around works with are either on probation or at-risk of gang involvement or committing crime. This program is specifically tailored to providing supports through case management, counselling, gang awareness education, employment support, cultural and community education, drug and alcohol addictions awareness, workshops and ultimately supporting the rehabilitation of youth into a positive community setting. Most of these youth share risk factors that are deeply rooted in poverty, low education attainment, lack of opportunities, social alienation and exclusion. Issues of racism and discrimination are evident in most Black youth we work with across all our youth programs. Considering such problems, Midaynta employs culturally sensitive programs while working with different partners to address issues affecting Black youth and the Black community.

Part of the Project Turn Around is a Family Support Counsellor who provides family interventions including counselling, psychoeducation, crisis planning and system navigation. The counsellor often meets clients in the community, at hospitals, court, schools and even online utilizing the Ontario Telemedicine Network technology.

In addition to these services, Project-Turn-Around also provides a series of workshops designed to meet the participants interest and needs, hosted at local schools and community centers. A diverse range of topics are often discussed which include: anti-racism, time management, education and mental health, post-secondary, employment, youth violence prevention. Project- Turn-Around receives referrals from various sources such as probation offices, secured and open custody facilities, youth

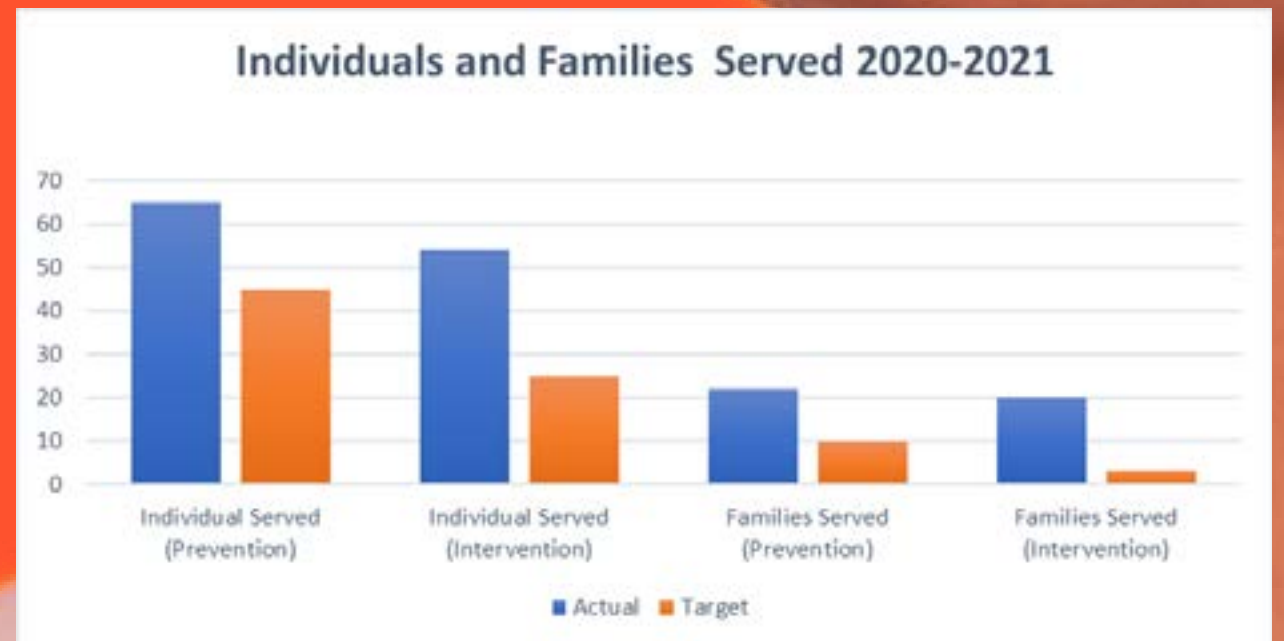
outreach workers, courts, Children’s Aid Society, family referrals as well as self-referrals. The program has developed strong relationships with community partners, resulting in several referrals to external services and agencies to better support our clientele. Our caseworkers also participate in different community safety and community empowerment meetings and tables in the City.

Project Turn Around’s outreach efforts increased this year, with the establishment of the better working relationship with the various Probation Offices in the city’s North west. We can report an increase in the referrals made by probation officers and other youth justice officers and workers. During the Covid 19 pandemic Midaynta has worked closely with the CAFCAN food delivery program. Case workers have also been supporting in distributing PPE and Donations to the local community during these hard times.

At the end of the fiscal year, Project Turn Around was enhanced with two additional programs:

1. Gender-Based Violence Program
2. Youth Justice Program

Referral Sources	Outgoing Referrals
Finch Youth Court	Youth Employment Services
Criminal Lawyers	Costi Employment Services
Focus Rexdale	Various Adult Schools programs
Focus Blackcreek	CAMH
MCCSS Youth Probation officers	TDSB Alternative Schools
Mending a Crack in the Sky initiative (MCIS)	“Steps 2 Success” Program
Children’s Aid Society Toronto	ID Clinics
Community/Self Referrals	‘Building Up’ Program
	Career Foundations
	Neighbourhood Links
	TDSB Safe Schools
	Housing Program



# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PROGRAM

Gender-Based Violence Program (GBV) is culturally relevant prevention / intervention programming to justice-involved male youth (12-20 years) in the Northwest Toronto who:

- Have committed or are alleged to have committed GBV-related offences or are identified as at-risk of offending; and
- self-identify as Black or African Canadian

The Gender-Based Violence program provides community-based prevention and intervention programming to mitigate risk factors that contribute to male youth committing gender-based violence (GBV) related offences with a culturally relevant framework to promote confidence, resilience and positive identity development and paths into adulthood among youth.

The delivery of the GBV program will consist of 16-week group mentorship that runs monthly for 3 hours addressing but not limited to:

- Increasing youth awareness about Gender-Based Violence associated risks
- Harmful behaviours and attitudes associated with GBV such as gender inequality, sexism, harmful concepts of masculinity, mental health and wellbeing and establishing healthy relationship.
- Group counselling sessions also include impacts of intergenerational trauma and different types of violence, colonialism and racism, anger management, stress management, conflict resolution, impact of substance use and abuse, guest speakers delivering cultural and community education.

- The GBV program also supports the rehabilitation and reintegration of male youth back into positive community settings and assist in preventing incidents of GBV among Black male youth.
- 1 on 1 case management assesses the unique needs of each male youth client, and determine their level of need (low, medium and high) and the type of response and support that each youth requires according to that need, supporting young people in creating a personalized plan for professional and educational goals

The Gender-Based Violence program is designed to:

- Reduce Gender-Based Violence related offences among Black male youth.
- Increase recognition of the impact of harmful behaviours and attitudes associated with GBV.
- Obtain greater understanding of the underlying factors of GBV, such as gender inequality, sexism, harmful concepts of masculinity, as well as the impacts of intergenerational trauma, violence, colonialism, and racism.

# YOUTH JUSTICE PROGRAM

The Youth Justice program is culturally relevant program that serves Black youth ages 12-20 who live in the Neighborhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). The program provides support to youth complete Extra Judicial Measures, get charges dropped and restore harm done to the community.

The program employs holistic, trauma and strength-based approach, aims to divert Black youth from entering jails and helps address the overrepresentation of Black in the justice system. We work with the youth with goals of helping them turn their lives around, restoring harm done to the community and addressing the risk factors that funnel many of our young people into the justice system.

The program supports:

- Black youth
- 12-20 years old
- Living in Northwest Toronto

Services Provided:

- Case management
- One-on-one supports
- Referrals
- Individualized Service Plan
- Workshops

# FAMILY SUPPORT COUNSELLOR

Family Support Counsellor works closely with families of youth who are involved with gangs or at risk of joining gangs. The counsellor facilitates one on one clinical counselling and family interventions including crisis planning, system navigation, safety planning, resource navigation and others. Moreover, the worker provides wrap around services to victim mothers who have lost their loved ones to violence in their communities through the Mending a Crack in the Sky initiative. The counsellor utilizes evidence based treatment methodologies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Narrative Therapy, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy techniques to address some of the mental health challenges families face as a result of the violence they directly or indirectly experience in the community. Moreover, the worker engages with the community through various workshops and presentation series to impart skill sets to navigate through crises and provide knowledge about available supports.

During COVID 19, the community has witnessed a shocking increase in incidents of stabbing, shooting and homicides. One of the key perpetuating factor to poor mental health are these incidents of violence as it exacerbates their mental health concerns. Hence the counsellor has been closely working with these families in providing supports such as groceries, housing, mental health and culture appropriate referrals.

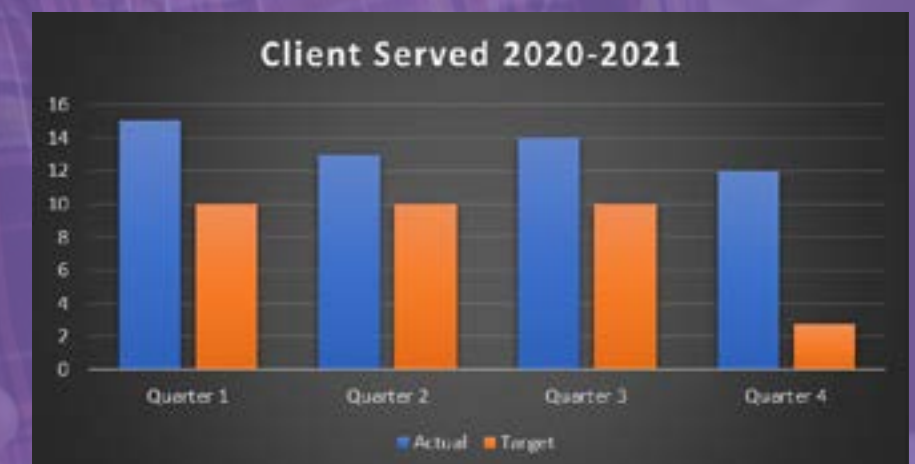
# ENHANCED YOUTH OUTREACH WORKER PROGRAM

The Enhanced Youth Outreach Worker (EYOW) program delivers services to youth between 12 to 25 years with an intensive one-on-one support. In addition, the EYOW provides services based on short term counselling as well as provision of support services based on the Stages of Change intervention model. For effective and relevant services for Black youth who require our support, the EYOWs works in collaboration with youth outreach workers to identify Black youth needs and intervene accordingly. The EYOWs also conduct youth referral to appropriate services providers in the community and support them to access these services as well as support parents and family members to help youth address their needs.

During the 2020-2021 fiscal year, a noticeable increase in gun violence in several communities in the city of Toronto has resulted in crisis response service delivered by the EYOWs program to meet the Northwest Toronto community's needs. Priority was given to mental health response to provide immediate

trauma-informed emotional support to families and neighbors affected by the exposure to violence in the community. In collaboration with the Mending a Crack in the Sky (MCIS), a community-led action which was established by Somali mothers, the EYOW provided the necessary socio-emotional support on a weekly basis to address youth violence in the Greater Toronto Area. Over the last year, the EYOWs program has facilitated several mental health workshops as well as participated in the City of Toronto weekly FOCUS round tables which included several partners addressing key issues facing youth. Midaynta's EYOW worked with multiple service providers to support and lead service plans for FOCUS table clients who face acutely elevated risk factors.

Finally, during the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the EYOW program has utilized several resources to support service delivery such as the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN). The OTN is a private and secure digital network that supports the delivery of virtual care offering a variety of ways to communicate with and care for patients, and for health care providers to connect with peers and specialists.





# YOUTH OUTREACH WORKER PROGRAM

The Youth Outreach Worker program has continued to empower youth and connect them to opportunities and resources while equipping them with the tools to reach their goals. Despite being forced to move the program to a virtual setting, the YOW's have continued serving their clients and attending to their needs. The biggest hurdle of this past fiscal year was learning how to shift youth support into an online environment. Due to the spread of COVID and the subsequent lockdown, Youth Outreach Workers were unable to have face-to-face meetings with youth or go out to schools and neighbourhoods to conduct outreach. As YOWs transitioned to supporting youth virtually, they had to develop new ways to reach out to youth, at first primarily relying on word of mouth, online flyers and social media. After adapting to this new service model, they then had to tailor their services to work virtually and continue to build workshops and programs that did not require in-person interactions. Another difficulty faced by the YOWs was the increase in burnout of the youth in the communities. Due to the overwhelming changes many youths faced; it was hard to keep them engaged virtually. Many youths expressed frustration at the lockdown and feelings of hopelessness regard-

ing their situations. The YOW staff sought to combat these issues by focusing on mental health supports and finding ways for youth to connect with each other virtually

There were also some advantages to moving things to a virtual platform. Some of these advantages include access to many online resources and tools such as icebreaker games and increased accessibility by eliminating commute time and the money it costs to get to and from school. Another benefit to online communications is that it can sometimes be less intimidating for service workers when working with a potentially vulnerable or high-risk client.

## Meetings and Roundtables

The YOW's have continued to sit at different tables around the city to be able to bring those resources back to the community and share info on Midaynta programs and events with other agencies. Some of these tables include F.O.C.U.S. Toronto, the Black Resiliency Cluster Table, North Etobicoke Youth Leads Table, among many others. In addition to attending these external roundtables, the YOW's have

also supported internal meetings such as the weekly Mending a Crack in the Sky safety meetings by doing weekly presentations to inform the MCIS mothers and other community members about some of the different programs and events happening in their communities. Similarly, YOW's have been attending the MCIS weekly meetings with Neighbourhood Community Officers and supporting via taking meeting minutes and moderating the discussion between the two parties.

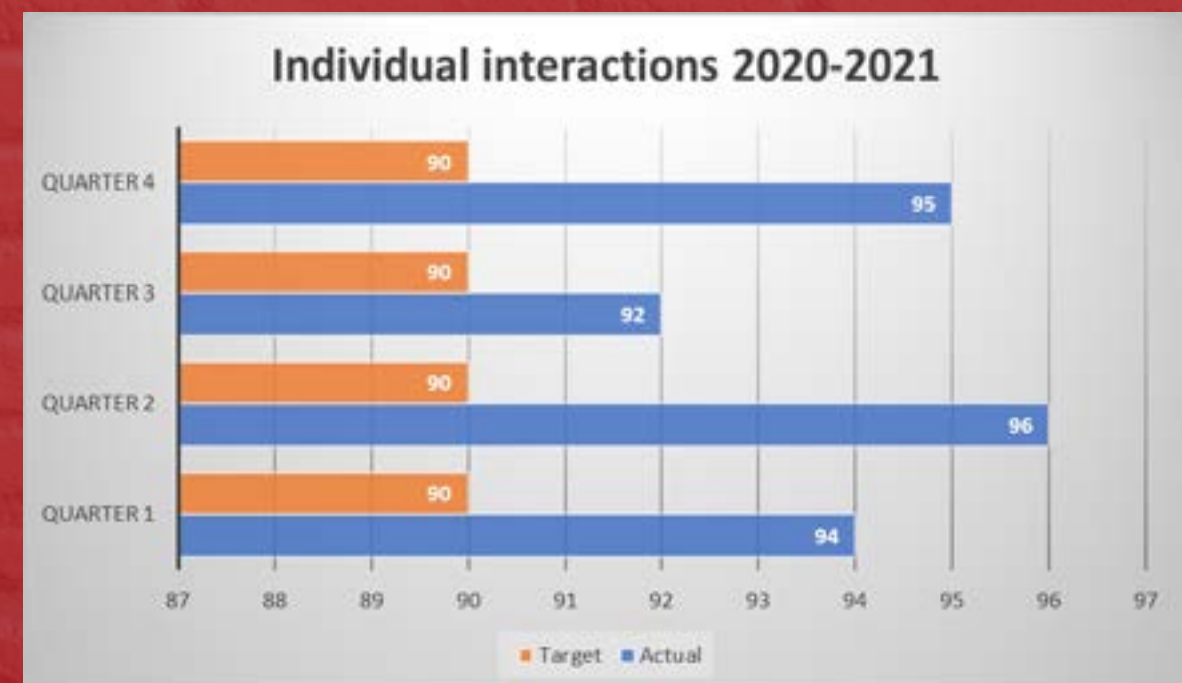
## Community Involvement

After the Coronavirus pandemic forced everybody into lockdown, food insecurity was at an all-time high, so the YOW staff tried to do their part by volunteering with CAFCAN to package and deliver hot meals to families in need. They also engaged youth with fun summer activities such as a soccer tournament sponsored and supported by Midaynta and a collaboration with the Giants of Africa program for an event to celebrate the International Day of the African Child hosted by Toronto Raptors President Masai Ujiri. Moreover, the YOW's organized

and facilitated a free family photoshoot for community members celebrating the holy holiday of Eid Al-Adha.

## Educational

Even though we were no longer allowed into schools, the YOW staff continued to offer workshops, meetings, and events to meet the educational needs of the youth. In collaboration with the Youth Mentorship Program, the YOWs helped to facilitate weekly Zoom workshops on employment, mental health, and post-Secondary navigation, among many other topics. Additionally, the YOW team worked in partnership with the Youth Mentorship and Project turn Around programs on Project Real Talks. Project Real Talks is a community research initiative aimed at uplifting youth voices against violence in the community by leading interactive workshops on leadership and goal setting for the participants, as well as conducting research and compiling the data into a concise report.



# rites of passage youth mentorship program

This summary outlines the Youth Mentorship Program achievement, activities and challenges during the year 2020-2021. As part of the 2020-2021 fiscal year accomplishments, the Rites of Passage Youth Mentorship Program continues to concentrate on building positive representation and mentorship opportunities for Black youth based in the Northwest of Toronto. In order to strengthen the community partnerships and collaborating with existing stakeholders, the need to connect young Black professionals with shared life experiences and the youth was considered a crucial start point. The connections allow for the development of close and supportive mentoring relationships, which promotes positive outcomes among Black youth. Although, there were some difficulties in engaging Black male as formal mentors, the youth were still provided with informal mentorship. That has also contributed in Black boys having less access to formal mentors, in comparison to Black girls, but through the Rites of Passage Youth Mentorship Program, relevant connections were made through the facilitation of workshops and group mentoring.

In addition to the mentoring relationships, the Rites of Passage programming conducted on a weekly basis in which it covers and provides in person and virtual workshops on different subjects, such as, social justice, cultural history, social belief, freedoms, spirituality, positive self-identity, conflict resolution (with other youth or authority figures), anti-bullying, career and educational goals/opportunities, sexual health and more. The Rites of Passage Mentorship Program has constant collaboration with the TDSB by including school-based guidance counsellors and social workers, to allow

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youth in  
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mentorship  
and the pro-  
gram.

With the help of school administration referrals and personal interest from youth, from previous registration in summer camps and march break camps, the need and want for mentorship programs exceeds the program service measures.

Also, during the 2020-2021 fiscal year, there was an increase in the numbers of 28 mentors and 82 mentees who supported the program, exceeding the annual target of 70 mentees, and 25 mentors. Due to the large number of youths, the number of mentees outnumbered the mentors which created a high demand and wait time for matching, but overall, the program was a success. In order to overcome this challenge, many of the mentors took on 2 to 3 mentees each. The vast majority of the program attendees were of African descent; however, youth of various racial and ethnic backgrounds were eager to join the mentorship groups which were taking place virtually. More mentees and mentors were able to participate in the program more due to it being online and virtual. The youth who completed the program identifies the workshops and mentorship matches as a positive experience.

Some key highlights from the year also include mentees presenting and working on their own

for im-

presentation with each other. They were able to choose a topic they were passionate about and present it to their peers. They gave the opportunity to learn leadership and presentation skills. During Black History Month and Somali Heratige Month, the youth were able to share their Black and Somali culture with their fellow students that included music, dance, fashion, food and, how much Black and Somali culture is influenced in many Canadians. Through this activity, students learned some research and presentation skills. Project Real Talk, a community research initiative aimed at uplifting youth voices against violence in the community was a great success as it sought to explore solutions to addressing gun violence and improving community safety. The goal of the study was to give the youth a voice in the search for community solutions and preventative strategies. Also, sport events were greatly attended by youth which are mostly not available to them and that has facilitated the linkage of cultural identity to mentorship group workshops. The opportunities and experiences truly resonated with youth and parents, as youth from marginalized backgrounds had the chance to build a stronger sense of cultural and racial identity that, in turn, lead to positive effects in all aspects of their lives (e.g., academic outcomes, personal relationship...etc).

Finally, it is important to note that there were some challenges impacted the progress of the program mainly based on the TDSB strike within the school system and other factors related to COVID-19 pandemic. However, a shift was made to include remote provision of workshops through Zoom meeting as an option to continue delivering services which were attended and delivered successfully

# HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS PROGRAM

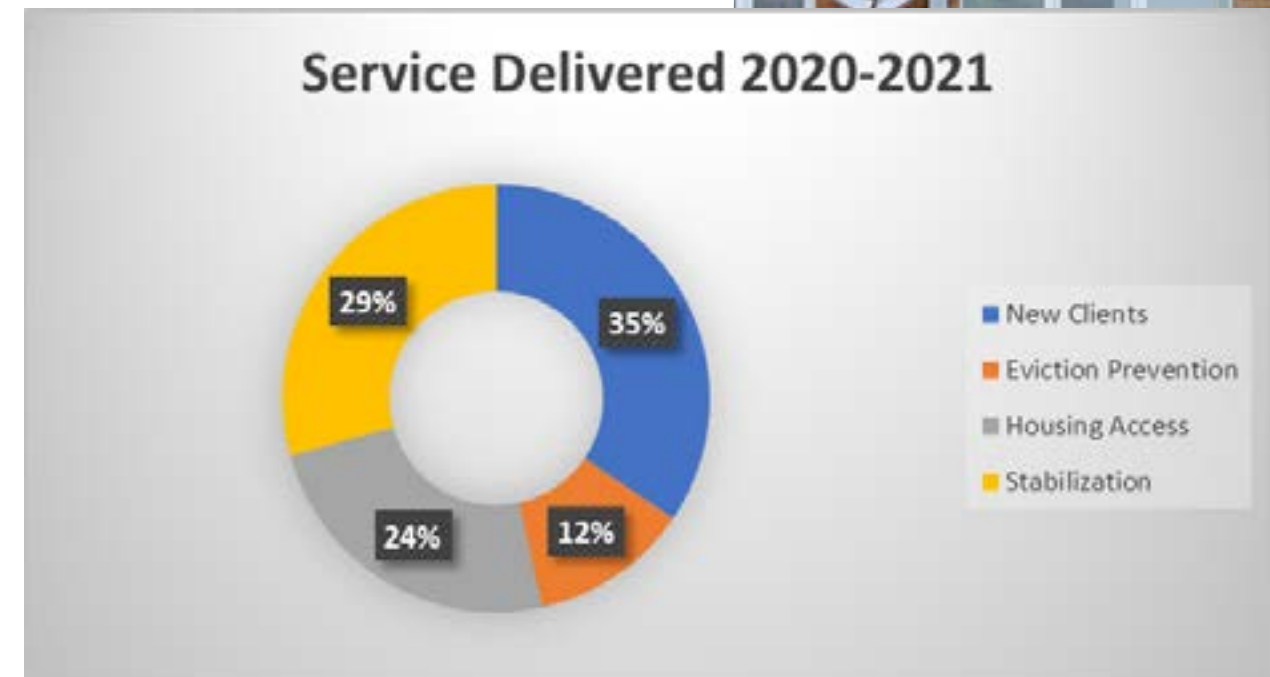


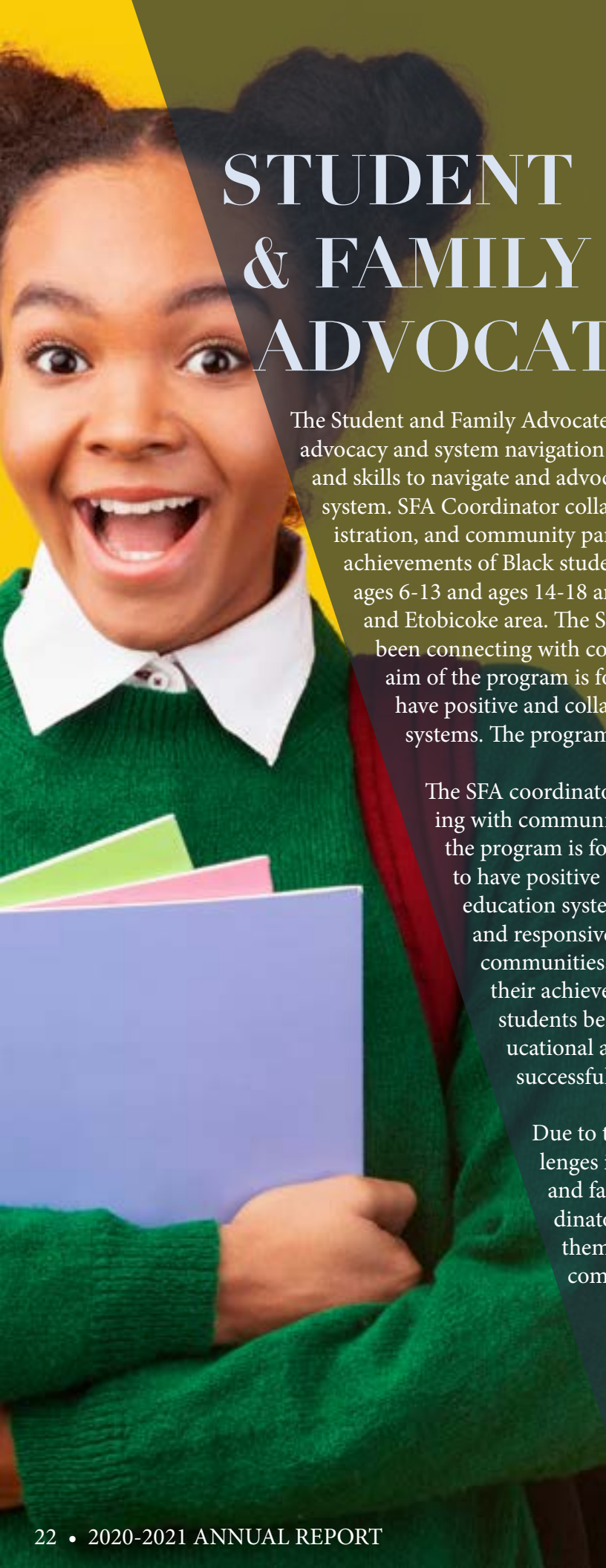
The housing program serves low-income individuals and families who face many obstacles in finding and maintaining appropriate and affordable housing. Midaynta Community Services is continuing to strive towards strengthening the delivery of efficient and effective services that will meet the varied and unique needs of our clients. Through the work of this program, we take a holistic approach and look at several contributing factors when looking into housing needs, such as family size, financial status and variable health challenges, etc... all of which tend to have a detrimental impact on our client's housing status. While we are actively willing to serve anyone and everyone who needs the service, the main emphasis of the program is to provide culturally appropriate support to prevent homelessness in the Somali Community.

These services also include housing access and maintaining affordable housing, information, referral, eviction prevention, housing stabilization and counselling, mentoring programs and peer-support initiatives. To provide high quality support to clients, we work in collaboration with a number of other service providers, including Toronto Community Housing Corporation, who provides social housing, as well as Access to Housing/Housing Connections, who oversee the central wait list process

while also providing educational workshops for housing help centres like Midyanta. Housing project outreach efforts have increased this year with the establishment of the better working relationships with a variety of Community Legal Clinics, which provide conflict resolution and eviction prevention support for tenants that are faced with housing challenges.

Midaynta is also an active member of Landlord Connect, who provide our clients' vacancy listing for affordable private market units. The housing program has also conducted a variety of educational workshops, which help to ensure that our clients are well informed about their rights and responsibilities as tenants. By the same token, we will establish more beneficial partnerships and collaborate with other service providers to better support our clients. Close to 800 hundred individuals receive housing support from the housing program, 79 eviction prevention, Access to housing 300, 200 Stabilization, New clients 221. We have seen more clients that are in dire need of Canada Ontario benefit and rent bank due to COVID 19. Many people lost their job and struggle to a pay the rent and feed their children.





# STUDENT & FAMILY ADVOCATE

The Student and Family Advocate (SFA) program provide Black student/family advocacy and system navigation support to empower them with the knowledge and skills to navigate and advocate for their rights within the Ontario school system. SFA Coordinator collaborates with students, parents, school administration, and community partners to help increase the academic and social achievements of Black students. SFA provides services to Black students ages 6-13 and ages 14-18 and their families in the northwest of Toronto and Etobicoke area. The SFA coordinator was brought on board and has been connecting with community partner agencies, and families. The aim of the program is for Black students, families, and communities to have positive and collaborative relationships with schools'/education systems. The program is focused on creating a systemic change.

The SFA coordinator was brought on board and has been connecting with community partner agencies, and families. The aim of the program is for Black students, families, and communities to have positive and collaborative relationships with schools'/education systems. Schools/education systems are informed by and responsive to the needs of Black students, families, and communities, and identify and address systemic barriers to their achievement, equity, and well-being. Resulting in Black students being better supported and seeing increases in educational achievement and attainment/retention, including successful transitions.

Due to the pandemic, many students were facing challenges in schools, and families connected with students and families advocate for tutoring support. SFA coordinator was able to support students by connecting them to resources and ensuring that there was open communication between the school and families.



# SOMALI YOUTH HERITAGE GAMES

The Somali Heritage games is an intensive annual summer sports program developed by Midaynta Community Services, to celebrate Somali-Canadians, their Somali heritage and empower Somali youth through educational workshops and promote civic engagement within the Somali Community. The program combines sports and education whilst providing a platform where pressing community issues can be discussed and an opportunity for youth to gain transferable life skills and understand accountability and a develop strong work ethic. As the Somali community in Canada continues to face multiple barriers and challenges including high rates of youth violence, increased school dropouts, and socio-economic challenges, a program like this help empowers Somali youth, teaching them of the richness of their Somali heritage to develop positive identities and engage them in physical activity to disrupt them from taking wrong paths. In addition, it provides youth the opportunity to gain intercultural understanding and knowledge of their heritage, breaking social and cultural barriers that deter youth from full participation in their communities.

COVID – 19 has affected our service delivery mode in different ways. Staff have been forced to adapt to new ways and methods to reach and continuing support clients, their families, and the community in general. Our regular annual summer programs had to either be cancelled or re-structured for the safety of the community. However, we were absolutely delighted that we were able to hold the Somali Heritage games once again.

The program started with a series of virtual workshops. These workshops were facilitated by Midaynta's Provincial Youth Outreach Workers (PYOWs) and Project Turn Around Case workers, via Zoom. Youth participated, engaged and discussed with the PYOWs on various topics: time management, post-secondary application process, pre-employment skills, education and mental health workshops.

# MENDING A CRACK IN THE SKY INITIATIVE

Mending a Crack in the Sky (MCIS) is a dynamic program that consists of a dedicated group of mothers who are passionate about creating safe spaces for the community to heal, mobilize, advocate and navigate relevant systems. The group is inspired by a Somali proverb stating that “if people come together, they can even mend a crack in the sky.” This has also been the basis of the action plan to address youth radicalization to violence and the alarming rates of youth violence, primarily male youth violence. The group holds community meetings in different neighborhoods and takes an active community leadership role to address youth violence.

The year 2020-2021 has been very eventful for the group despite the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to the lockdowns and rise in unemployment, the group had to deal with multiple challenges within the community, which already facing crisis. MCIS continued to fight, advocate, and support the community in every way possible. Their efforts led the group to several achievements and recognition from prominent individuals and institutions across the city for their relentless work towards ending gun violence in the City. “Giants of Africa”, through their founder, Toronto Raptors President, Masai Ujiri, rewarded the group and promised to support and work with them to achieve their goal.

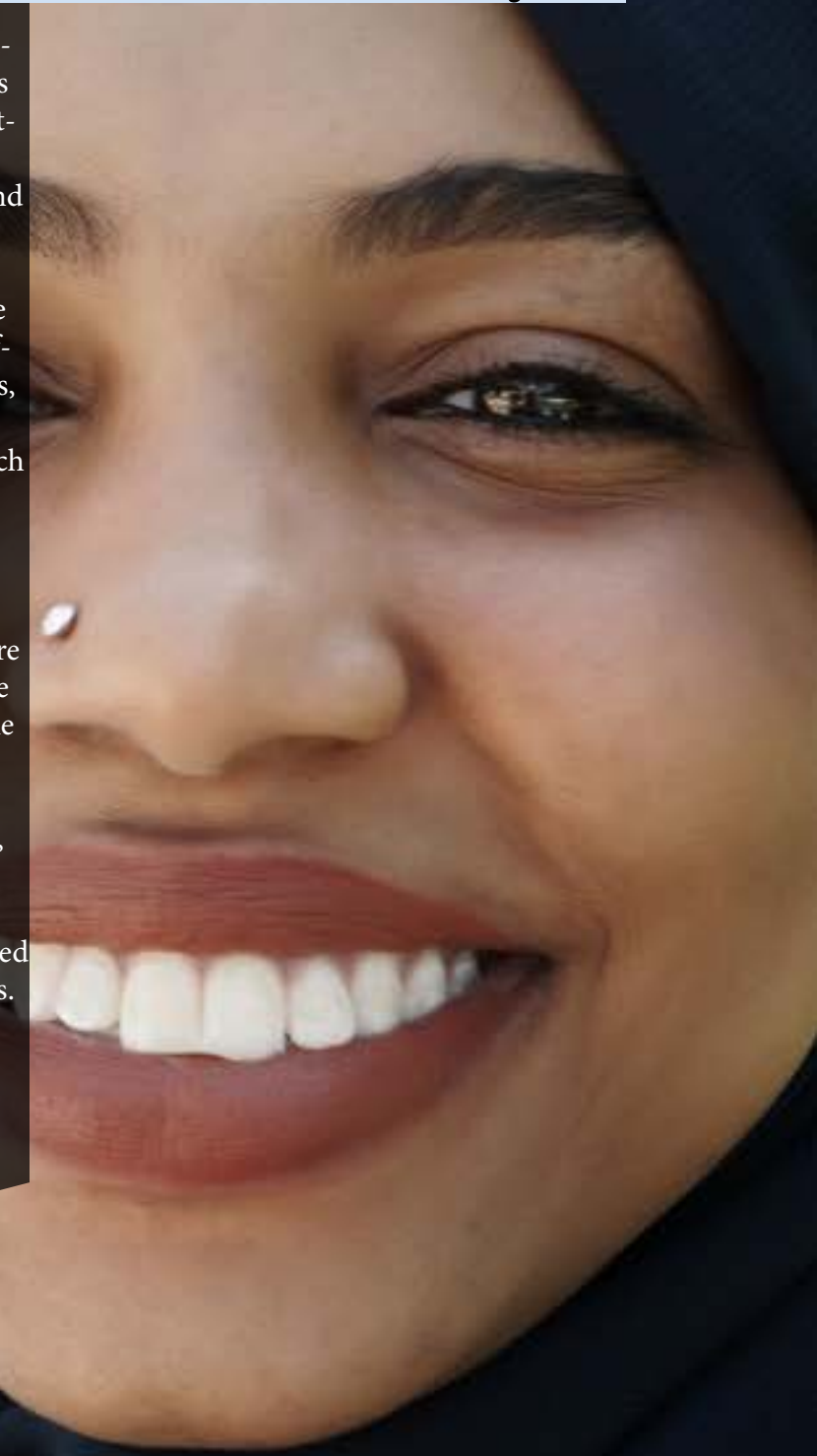
The group shifted their in-person Community Safety Planning meetings onto a virtual plat-

form. The move resulted to record attendances where community members found a safe space to seek solace, vent frustrations, make connections and discuss the insecurity in the neighbourhoods and the multiple barriers they face in seeking support. The weekly meetings usually saw leaders from the government, including the mayor, federal ministers, MPP, and city councillor, attend to show their support for the group’s work. MCIS utilized the meetings by holding a series of workshops, where they invited Mental Health professionals to speak to community members and share each other’s experiences.

The past year has also seen MCIS holding monthly virtual meetings with the Toronto Neighbourhood Community Officers in six Divisions in the Northwest neighbourhoods of Toronto: Division 12, Division 13, Division 22, Division 23, Division 31, and Division 32. These meetings are part of the agreement of the Memorandum of Understanding (M.O.U) that MCIS and Toronto Police Service Board signed to bridge trust between the community and the Police service. The meetings are an integral part of the agreement since discussions are usually on ways to support the youth and the communities in the neighbourhoods through programming and other services. The meetings have grown and now include members from the Toronto Community Housing and the Community Crisis Response Program from the City of Toronto.

“If people come together,  
they can even mend a  
crack in the sky.”

MCIS has been in the forefront support community during COVID –19 pandemic. The mothers have been able to mobilise resource and supporting the community. Last year MCIS applied for grants and resources through City of Toronto and other cluster tables and donors. These resources were provided to vulnerable Torontonians as part of community response to COVID-19. The funding received from TO grant supported staffing and distribution of food vouchers to families, isolated seniors and youth living in North York and Etobicoke areas of Toronto. Mother Outreach Workers also distributed PPE’s and also implemented virtual educational programs, counseling and clinical support. MCIS supported and provided resources to over 600 families, youth and seniors. Through this initiative Mothers were able to engage and increased participation in the community. The project focus was to support the community in accessing resources and support. We learned that COVID-19 pandemic has further isolated our already vulnerable community, and it has made it difficult to reach and support our most high-need clients. We learned there is serious poverty in our community and we learned that the need more resources to support families. Housing is a major concern among the families that we served. Overcrowded in small units and also learned that lots of undocumented clients were left out of the process and support. Mental health issues among marginalised community especially seniors.”



# COVID-19 FUNDING AND SUPPORTS

## TO Supports Emergency Response Funding

In April 2020, Midaynta Community Services and Mending a Crack in the Sky was able to receive TO support Emergency Response Fund. The fund was to support in the urgent, emergency, unmet of Vulnerable Torontonians as part community response to COVID-19.

This funding supported youth, isolated seniors and families living in North York and Etobicoke Area. Our Staff and Mothers from Mending a Crack in the sky mobilized and delivered PPE's and food vouchers to the community. We supported community members in navigating resources and provided virtual education session including counselling and clinical support. Through this initiative many families reported feeling hopeful and cared for and we noticed increase in participation at our weekly virtual information and counselling sessions. Youth and families were more engaged and acknowledge the support and impact of the funding. Mothers were motivated that they were making a difference volunteering to distribute food vouchers and resources in their community. These projects brought awareness and increased youth and family engagement

## United Way Grant

COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated the already existing challenges as well as creating new traumatic experiences for the demograph-

ic we targeted. Through the United Way Grant, we were able to provide mental health and wellness support to address rapid increase of mental health cases in the community. Members of the community were given the opportunity to work on their mental health issues through individual and group counselling by a trained professional. The workshops provided lessons on social inclusion and information on how to improve the terms of participation in the community. Members of the demographic targeted were able to virtually connect with other people in the community who are also struggling with social isolation and mental health issues related to Covid-19. They were able to connect to a community of people and build relationships. The workshops also provided information on coping mechanization with regards to multiple Mental health related issues such as self-care, community engagement, time management and anti-racism.

Staff and volunteers were able to learn more about COVID -19 protocols. The Mental Health and Social Inclusion workshops provided participants with the necessary knowledge on mental health and how to cope with the illness and /or interact with a person suffering from mental illness. This information was lost to the participants and through this project was able to learn more and also teach other. Through the project, there was a decrease in stereotypes regarding the pandemic and its ramifications in the community. The community are now better informed on the virus which

is key in fighting stereotypes. There are also reduced mental health induced incidents as a result of counselling and an increased use of personal protective equipment by community members as a result of PPEs distribution and education through our program.

## Network for the Advancement of Black Communities- Emergency Fund

Seniors were experiencing social isolation before the pandemic, and now that they are not receiving any visitors or going out, they feel isolated. Many seniors do not have access to technology or know-how to access different platforms like skype, and facetime. All programming has moved online and thus through the project we provide seniors with the knowledge or tools to access these services.

The project was to educate black seniors, women, and families about digital literacy and helping them maintain physical and mental health. This enabled the seniors to feel comfortable in using technology and access resources online. We were able to purchase Laptop for the seniors who don't have access to technologies, gave seniors the opportunity to connect to the many programs and services the agency provides.

With all programming moving online, through this program, staff were able to support their clients with their needs virtually. Staff were able to get their clients trained in digital literacy, so they

don't miss out. Volunteers also supported staff by taking some of the workload of training and supporting the seniors.

## Canadian Red Cross

Midaynta is grateful to have received Preventing Disease Transmission training virtual from Canadian Red Cross that enabled our staff, volunteers and students. The Preventing Disease Transmission course was developed by the Canadian Red Cross and supports front-line workers responding to COVID-19 in low and medium-risk environments. Through this training our staff and volunteers were able to learn more about how infection occurred, how to use personal Protective Equipment's correctly and best practices to reduce the risk of infection

We were also fortunate to receive Personal Protective Equipment kits for our team members. We thank all the funders that supported the organization and community in acquiring all the above resources and support through this challenging time



# TESTIMONIALS

“The workshops were really helpful to me and my self-growth during the ongoing pandemic. I met many new people and looked forward to the discussions at the end of the workshops. I was able to learn a variety of different ways to practice self-care, learn about different cultures, how to service my own community, and ways I could participate in making our city a better place. I also learned about the various technologies out there that can support me in staying connected with family and friends. We also spent some time learning about various mental health issues that may appear in myself, my loved ones, colleagues, and peers and the symptoms to recognize when someone or myself should reach out for help. Tech support was a skill I hoped to work on and that workshop truly supported me in developing it further.”

- **Farida Farah**

“My family has greatly benefitted from my time spent in the workshops. I share about what I learned and teach them how to apply the skills. It also has promoted more topics of discussion in my household and how we can all better support each other in our personal growth journeys. I have developed more confidence and enjoy connecting with people in my community to continue conversations about some of the more sensitive subjects we discussed like mental health, and have been able to help myself and others become more vulnerable.”

- **Mohamed Abdi**

“The workshops consisting of contributors that were from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences helped the workshops feel more stimulating. Whenever someone shared a story or an experience it was distinct and I felt more connected to those participating in the workshop because we were all learning something new about one another. I felt comfortable and I am grateful the organizers created an environment that felt like a safe space for everyone.”

- **Asha Abdow**

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University of Toronto (Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, Munk School of Global Affairs)  
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## SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS:









One People.

One Voice

One Community.

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