

DISCOVERING
NEW CONNECTIONS

ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On behalf of Abrigo's Board of Directors and staff members we are proud to present our agency's 2020/21 Annual Report. This year's communique is an examination of our agency's move to the virtual world and the skill, versatility and resiliency demonstrated by our staff and clients to get through a most challenging fiscal year caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In essence, we've discovered growth and new possibilities within our organization and clients.

The spring of 2020 saw a title wave of clients, both new and old, reach out to Abrigo for support. Much of that need was financial as individuals and families lost jobs and their livelihoods because of the pandemic. With the doors of Abrigo closed to walk-in clients and booked appointments cancelled because of COVID, out of necessity, our agency deftly moved to virtual counselling. This transition, for both our clients and staff, had the early occasional bump in the road but the transition overall was remarkably smooth.

Although our agency didn't see the early increase in gender-based violence cases that some of our peer agencies did, the numbers continued to steadily climb throughout the fiscal year. The combination of increased call volumes and those clients presenting with more complicated cases proved to be a challenge for our skilled team of violence against women counsellors.

Abrigo's Board of Directors are incredibly proud of the work that's been done at our agency over the last year. Our staff members have worked longer and harder than ever before and each day they did their best to ensure that our client's needs were met, either by Abrigo or through referral to one of our external partners.

The pandemic significantly impacted our event-based fundraising activities with the cancellation of our annual gala and a series of events that were designed to celebrate the organization's thirtieth anniversary in 2020. Without looking back, staff began to look for other financial resources and spent significant time and energy to secure a number of grants to steady the agency financially.

Despite the hardships experienced by so many individuals, companies and organizations across Canada, the moral and financial support shown to Abrigo during the fiscal year was impressive. Many of our traditional funding partners like LiUNA Local 183, Lusogolf Fundraising Inc., CP24 CHUM Christmas Wish and Rama Toronto East Gaming House continued their very generous support. We thank all our donors, both big and small, for their belief in the work we do and for making Abrigo your charity of choice.

Finally, we must recognize the incredible generosity of Mr. Manuel DaCosta for his ongoing commitment to Abrigo's Life and Hope seniors' program. It's only because of his kind support that Abrigo has transformed our second floor to include a new, renovated computer room and a large multi-purpose room. These transformative changes, that will directly benefit our seniors, would not have been possible without his outstanding patronage.

The fiscal 2020/2021 year was like no other. The challenges presented and the resiliency to adapt, overcome and deliver outstanding virtual services should be a source of pride for all Abrigo staff and anyone who supports our agency. Although our doors were closed to walk-in clients and booked appointments, the work done virtually was exceptional. This is especially true for the care our counsellors provided to women facing gender-based violence. We never lost sight of their needs or our agency's primary purpose.

Our counsellors are always ready and available to assist you in your time of need. Never hesitate to reach out if necessary. Thank you for your ongoing support and generosity.

Lena Barreto
Board Chair

Ed Graça
Executive Director

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Our Motto Connecting People to Possibilities

Our Mission To build community capacity in west Toronto by helping individuals and families achieve their full potential.

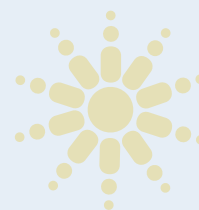
Our Vision To ensure our collaborative efforts result in socially integrated and empowered individuals, families and communities.



ABRIGO IN ACTION

Client and Volunteer Numbers (Fiscal 2020/21)

3,741	Total number of clients served
2,005	Number of clients served by the Community Development and Integration Program (CDIP)
1,671	Number of new, first-time clients to Abrigo
543	Number of clients served by the Youth Outreach program
697	Number of clients served by the Violence Against Women program
163	Number of clients served by the Partner Assault Response (PAR) program
121	Number of clients served by the Life and Hope Seniors group
79	Number of clients served by Parenting groups
43	Number of volunteers donating their time to Abrigo
4,714	Number of hours donated by Abrigo's volunteers



GOALS FOR FISCAL 2021/22

- Plan and implement a return-to-work strategy that will keep staff, clients and volunteers as safe as possible as the agency continues to contend with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Develop and incorporate a new hybrid model of client service delivery that effectively combines traditional in-person services while embracing the use of virtual platforms for future counselling service delivery .
- Embark on a renewed strategic planning process that will produce an updated Strategic Plan.
- Welcome back and celebrate the return of clients to Abrigo's "Life and Hope" seniors' program offering new, expanded facilities that will make their time spent in the program more engaging, rewarding and enjoyable.

DISCOVERING NEW CONNECTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

The doors to the Abrigo Centre essentially closed in mid-March 2020. It was a difficult but the right decision to make to keep us all safe. However, since that day, Abrigo staff members have worked virtually from home to connect people to possibilities. That phrase captures the essence of our work, giving people information and options and letting them decide how to proceed.

Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way our agency worked in fiscal 2020/21. However, it has not changed the incredible impact we made on our clients and the community. For the last fiscal year staff members worked remotely from home in order to stop the spread and keep everyone as safe as possible. Providing counselling sessions or assisting newcomers over the phone or virtually through the Zoom or Teams application has simply become the norm.

The transition to working remotely was not without its challenges. New laptops needed to be purchased for some staff members and all needed their computers to be configured to work in the virtual world.

Clients in our Violence Against Women and Community Development and Integration programs met as scheduled with their counsellors over the phone or virtually. What became clear early in the pandemic was that many in our community were worried about how to make ends meet after losing a job. Many who suddenly found themselves out of work and living with low English literacy levels needed assistance to sign up for government assistance programs. Women continue to be worried about their personal safety and that of their children as days in isolation turned to weeks and months with an abusive spouse. Many others simply worried about getting sick from the virus.

In-person activities of our dynamic Life and Hope seniors' program has been on hold since March 2020 as well. This has been one of the most heartbreaking results of the pandemic. Many seniors in our Life and Hope group live alone and rely on the companionship of their peers to get through the difficult times they face. Their happy chatter, laughter, singing and dancing was silenced by an invisible menace. Over the past year all group members received regular check-in calls from staff members or an inspiring array of volunteers from the community. A new online Facebook group created for the interim to replace in-person activities has been very well received by our tech savvy seniors.

Abrigo's Partner Assault Response (PAR) program postponed all in-person group activities in the early days of the pandemic. Participants caught in the middle of their program received individual one-on-one telephone sessions to graduate. Group sessions returned online via Zoom with participants reporting a positive response to the virtual program. As a continued priority, victims or partners received counselling via the telephone on a regular basis.

Delivering outstanding service remained a priority throughout a very challenging year. Special attention was paid to our most vulnerable clients. Despite the many challenges we faced, no one was left behind. Through it all, Abrigo continued to connect people to possibilities.

By *Ed Graça, Executive Director*



VIRTUAL COUNSELLING: Creating a Safe Space

Counselling entails creating a safe space for individuals to introspectively reflect, acknowledge, and process emotions and experiences. The creation of the safe space is often through verbal and non-verbal communication, which in turn, allows rapport to build in the therapist-client relationship.

Abrigo is fortunate to be able to provide a physical environment that allows individuals to leave their day-to-day busyness to enter into a new room whereby that safe space can be housed. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has made the building of a safe space more challenging. At first, it was instinctual to feel like adapting to a virtual world and not having a physical room was going to be a challenge. Abrigo staff quickly realized that the new reality was upon us and there was an importance in exploring new techniques to create a secure place for individuals to access therapy by means of telephone and virtual counselling.



It became immediately apparent that telephone counselling required tuning more into the words and tone individuals used rather than capturing non-verbal communication. For visual learners and communicators, this required counsellors to visualize individuals in their described world.

There was a need to adapt a therapeutic approach to build trust with new clients by being extra mindful of giving verbal validation that, as counsellors, we are actively listening and consciously communicating warmth through the tone of voice.

Another challenging aspect of phone counselling is silence, and when people seemingly become tearful. Sitting with silence when it is intuitively felt to be needed in a session is one skill, whereby tuning into an individual's voice and tone to feel that need is another. The conscious effort to listen for signs of a client being tearful, like sniffing, or check in with the client to allow space for individuals to express themselves through crying is crucial to building the virtual safe space. Additionally, ending sessions by inquiring what the individual took from the session became helpful to capture the individual's response to the session and emotionally understand where they are at.

As video counselling quickly became available, it allowed for additional techniques of in-person counselling to be re-introduced. Furthermore, Abrigo staff quickly realized the additional value virtual counselling had for some individuals. Simply, it allowed some clients, who typically may not be able to commute or find childcare, access to therapy.

Counsellors also noticed that when not having a physical therapy space, some individual clients created their own space within their home. This allowed clients to develop and practice new strategies.

On the contrary, for individuals experiencing domestic violence, video counselling is a barrier because access to the internet in a place they feel comfortable sharing may be limited. Being creative about how the client can access services in a safe environment then became crucial.

While video counselling needs internet use, which may not always be available, providing telephone counselling while the client goes for a walk became an option. Regular check-ins to see if a person is in a space where they feel comfortable chatting has become the new normal.

The transition to virtual counselling has allowed Abrigo counsellors to develop new therapeutic skills and serves as a reminder to consistently reflect on effective therapeutic approaches. Ultimately, COVID-19 has allowed for counselling services to expand to a greater audience and encouraged creativity in how safe spaces are created.

By *Martina Esteves, Intake Coordinator and Counsellor*

CLIENTS MAKE THE ONLINE CONNECTION

Isolation. It's a word that's been used endlessly over the last year and in many ways we all have experienced some degree of isolation since the start of the pandemic. However, for some women, isolation took on an added dimension as they shuttered their doors and windows from not only the virus but to an abusive partner as well.

Star, (not her real name) a native of Brazil, originally travelled to Canada to make a new life for herself. She came alone, with all her belongings in two suitcases and nowhere to sleep on her first night in her new country. That courage foreshadowed the drive and determination she would demonstrate years later.

In 2017, a friend recommended that Star contact Abrigo when she was looking to get assistance with registering for the federal child tax benefit. That experience cemented her trust in Abrigo's counsellors and the work done by the agency.

Today, Star's bright smile and the youthful energy of a 33-year-old belies the challenges she faced since originally visiting Abrigo. The physical violence, emotional and financial abuse and verbal threats she endured from her estranged partner that began just months after they met in 2019 are a thing of the past but the residue still lingers. "When I was with him, I couldn't speak. Now I can speak."



In December 2020 the police officer who responded to Star's call for help after yet another violent incident suggested she call Abrigo because of the agency's ability to serve clients in Portuguese. The trust Star had developed earlier in the agency to provide safe and confidential services made it easier for her to make the call.

"Society places a lot of guilt on us, as women and mothers, in these situations," says Star. "We are made to feel embarrassed and guilty about the errors of others. When there's abuse in the home, it's perceived to be the fault of the woman and we carry that with us."

Abrigo assisted Star with creating a safety plan, helped her create a video statement for the police, created a plan to obtain housing, and helped plan for the birth of her second child. Despite those efforts, Star made the decision to isolate herself away from the rest of the world. Aside from her contact with Abrigo, she spent most of her pregnancy alone. Her partner (the baby's father) had made threats against her and her unborn child and Star was terrified to see him or his friends on the street. "I was afraid to go outside," she says softly.

Abrigo has been working virtually since the start of the pandemic and our counsellors began supporting Star via phone calls and emails. The breadth of the assistance provided ranged from connecting with Legal Aid Ontario to Children's Aid to Toronto Police Victims Services. At their counselling sessions today, Abrigo Violence Against Women Counsellor Marta Santos and Star work through everyday scenarios that may come up in her life and how to regulate the accompanying emotions.

"For me, virtual counselling provides the same level of support as in-person counselling does," says Star. "It's always been confidential, I know that they are there for me and I feel safe. And with the baby, it's a lot easier because I don't have to travel or worry about the TTC or the weather."

With the ongoing individual counselling she has received, Star feels changed as a person, more regulated, and emotionally balanced. "People judge each other without knowing that person's circumstances. Women need to empower and support each other. Abrigo literally sheltered me. Marta and the agency give me all the support I need. I apply the strategies we talk about in our sessions. My life is better. Abrigo is everything to me."

By **Gerry Luciano**, Manager, Fundraising and Communications

TECHNOLOGY BARRIERS: A Reality for Abrigo Clients and Counsellors

Generation after generation around the world has never faced a pandemic like COVID-19. Yet, history records that those before us experienced the same destruction of health, heartbreak and family devastation that we are living through today. History has also proved that humanity is resilient and has the power to rebuild and grow. We are masters of the comeback, through ingenuity, creativity and most importantly love.

People are manufacturers of hope, and we must counter every blow by getting right back up. For this pandemic, we have the fortunate evolution of technology and the ability to harness the digital universe to guide and assist people find help or a better place in the world.

As counsellors at the Abrigo Centre, we provide support to women, youth, other adults and families that primarily speak Portuguese. We have witnessed first-hand the impact COVID-19 has on our clients. The endless months of social isolation caused a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of many individuals especially seniors, vulnerable individuals and those at risk.

Like most businesses navigating their way through this pandemic, Abrigo enabled its employees to work digitally from home. However, we are only half of the equation. It is important to recognize the significant percentage of the population we work with who do not have access to the digital world, a computer or an email address for example, because of financial constraints, lack of education, age, mental health issues or a variety of other reasons.

This creates obstacles to providing the best possible counselling services. My colleagues and I experience this more so around instrumental needs - obtaining information to file government forms for example rather than counseling needs, which can be completed via a telephone call. Over the last year, we found ourselves supporting and advocating for individuals with no technology capabilities, significantly more than in the pre-COVID days with in-person meetings when a client could simply hand us a stack of papers.

Owning an email address is now required for most activity through online government portals and institutions. For those individuals without an email address, and there are many, the result is a longer wait to receive the financial benefits they are entitled to. This directly causes a greater financial burden on that individual and their family.

A large percentage of the senior population Abrigo serves is dependent on others in some way. When discussing technology and its many options, we regularly hear "I don't know how to do that," from many seniors and others in need. Tech-savvy grandchildren, neighbors, community members, friends, and relatives need to help or show our seniors how to set up that email account or how to send or receive a virtual call. Doing so can help break social isolation by connecting them with family and friends around the world. A level of patience may be required... but it can be done!

We must remind ourselves we are not alone, and neither is our neighbor or client. The importance of connecting and sharing knowledge, providing access and information to newcomers, the illiterate, the under-educated, seniors, and those low-income workers who are not yet connected to technology in some form is crucial.

Humanity must come together to bring people together.

By *Marta Santos, Violence Against Women Counsellor*



OUR FUNDERS AND DONORS PROVIDE UNPARALLELED SUPPORT!

Each year Abrigo counts on the generous support of our funders and donors that allows us to deliver exceptional programs and services to thousands of individuals and families in Toronto and beyond. Their understanding and belief in the work we do means better care and outcomes for our clients. No matter the size of the gift each one makes a direct positive impact on the services we provide. Abrigo extends a heartfelt thank you to the institutions, corporations, organizations and individuals listed below.

Funding Partners

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
United Way Greater Toronto
Ministry of Attorney General
City of Toronto – Community Service Partnerships
Employment and Social Development Canada
Canadian Women's Foundation
Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Ontario Charitable Gaming Association
University Health Network
Regiao Autonoma Dos Acores

Corporate and Community Partners

17 Designs
2464624 Ontario Ltd.
BPA Financial Group CanadaHelps
Canadian Council of Construction Unions
Carpenters and Allied Workers Union Local 27
Charities Aid Foundation of Canada
CHUM Charitable Foundation
Flor de Sal Restaurant
Hallmark Housekeeping Services
Hoffman – La Roche Ltd.
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LiUNA Local 183
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Lusogolf Fundraising Inc.
Macedo Wine Grape Juice Ltd.
Mena Art Animation and Design Productions
PayPal Giving Fund Canada
Royal LePage Supreme Realty
The Benevity Community Impact Fund
Viana Roofing & Sheet Metal Ltd.
York Lions Club



Individuals

Ana Marcos	Gail Luciano	Maria Cristina Alves
Ana Carolina Sales-Foscarin	Gerald Luciano	Maria Coelho
Arnold Santos	Gil Amaral	Maria Freitas
Ashley Carvalho	Gilberto Oliveira	Maria Melo
Candido Vermelhudo	Humberto Carolo	Maria Odete Cerqueira
Carmina Pereira	Ilda Januario	Marie Moro
Cathy Brasil	Irene Regalado Graça	Margarida Pedro
Chloe Lamarche	Iria Bracelos	Mary-Lou Dejesus
Cidalia Pereira	Janis Alton	Michelle Brown Milton Reis
Daniel Salij	Jennifer Bettencourt	Odette Medeiros
David Pereira	John Peter Ferreira	Palmira Da Costa
Deyan Kostovski	Jorge Brasil	Patricia Harper
Diana Da Silva	Jose Ernesto Cabral	Paula DeJesus
Ed Graça	Jose Manuel Simoes	Paula Oliveira
Edith De Melo	Jose Silva	Paulo Luis
Emily Sadowski	Dr. Jose Silveira	Ricardina Nogueira
Elisio Jordao	Kanita Sichantha	Rosa Oliveira
Enir Bassani	Kathleen Teixeira	Samantha Graça
Fabian Viana	Laura Galeazza	Sandra Gamboias
Fr. Fernando Couto	Lena Barreto	Steve de Quintal
Fernando Nunes	Lesley Neves-Azenvedo	Susan Da Cruz
Francisco Leite	Lisa Melo	Teresa Pagnotta
Francisco Silva	Lisete Susano	Ulysses and Salomé Pratas
Francisco Varela	Luciana Pache de Faria	Valeria Sales
	Manuel Goncalves	



ABRIGO VOLUNTEERS: Delivering Services During Difficult Times

More than anyone else, the COVID-19 pandemic had the greatest impact on Abrigo's dedicated team of volunteers. With Abrigo staff members delivering programming and care virtually, all of our clients received the services they needed in one form or another. However, the vast majority of Abrigo volunteers were left on the sidelines for almost all of the fiscal year, unable to help our clients in an office that shuttered its physical doors.

Those listed below, for the most part, provided their time, energy and talents virtually. Whether it was making wellness and check-in calls to peers in the seniors' program or helping our Community Development and Integration program clients over the phone, they still delivered the kind of care, under difficult circumstances, that Abrigo earned its reputation for in our community.

Abrigo volunteers are passionate and steadfast in their commitment to the agency. All showed a desire to serve our community with compassion in the most challenging of times. In fiscal 2020/21, 43 devoted volunteers generously gave 4,714 hours of their valuable time to serve the clients of Abrigo and our community.

Thank you to all listed below for your unwavering support and assistance!

Agnes Barbosa
Amelia Moreira
Ana Maria Matos
Antonia Kieto
Anthony Harker
Carolina Silva
Carlos Melo
Cibele Agnelo
Debora Mayer
Dominic Martins
Elisabete Dias
Erika Dias Pascoal
Fabiana Camara
Fabiano Sales
Francisco Pegado
Iria Barcelos
Joana Nunes
Joaquina Vieira
Jorge Palhao
Ligia Sardo
Lucilia Maia
M. da Luz Ferreira

M. de Lourdes Jesus
M. Isabel Pereira
M. Jesus Machado
M. Norberta Oliveira
Maria Silva
M. Teresa Moura
Makayla Codinha
Murilo Salvador
Natalia Medeiros
Natalie Torrado
Nicholas Luciano
Odette Melo
Paulo Luis
Raquel Mazzeo
Regina Jordao
Rosa Machado
Rosana de Rezende
Sergio Sarmento
Sharon Weisbaum
Urania Silveira
Vanessa Alvim

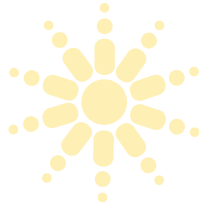


ABRIGO'S BOARD AND STAFF

Board of Directors

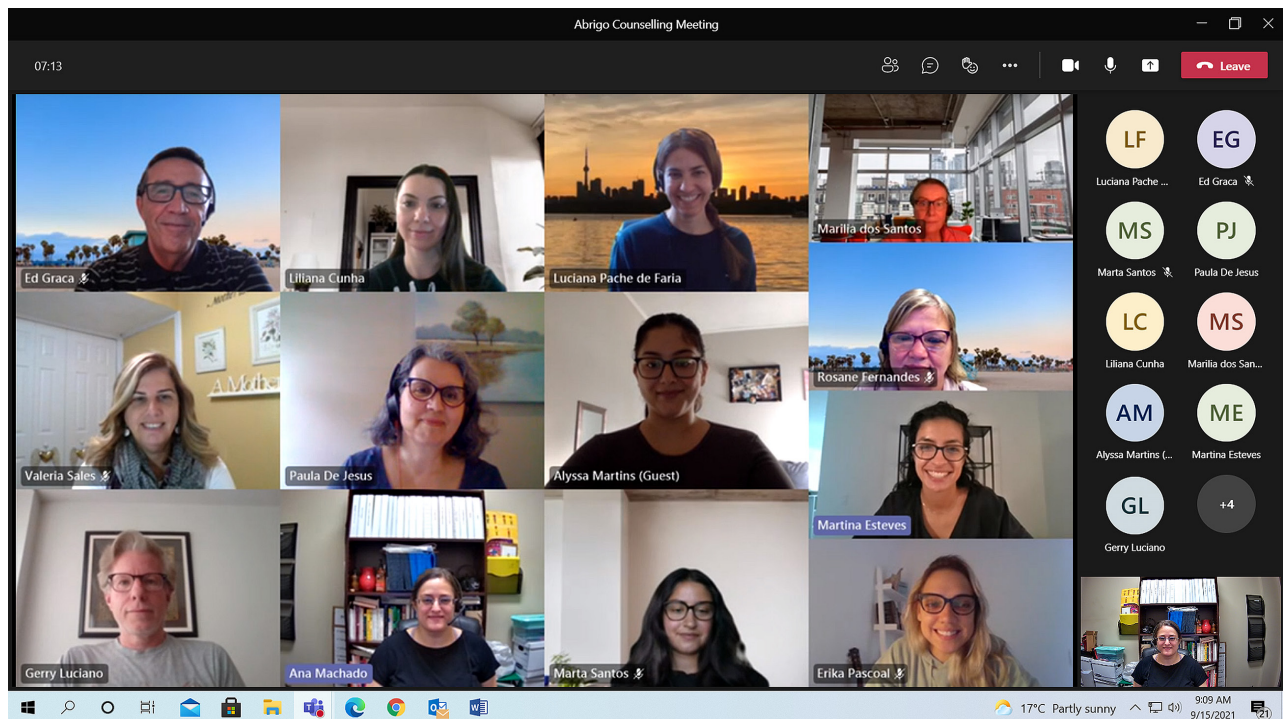
April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021

Deyan Kostovski
Diana Da Silva
Enir Bassani
Ilda Januario, Secretary
Kathleen Teixeira
Lena Barreto, Chair
Patricia Harper, Vice Chair
Paula Oliveira
Teresa Pagnotta



Abrigo Staff Members

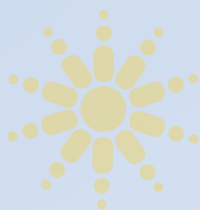
Ana Machado
Anderson Salvador
Cidalia Pereira
Ed Graca, Executive Director
Erika Pascoal
Gerald Luciano
Karina Santos
Liliana da Cunha
Luciana Pache de Faria
Marilia dos Santos
Marta Santos
Martina Esteves
Paula De Jesus
Rosane Fernandes
Teresa Emmanuel
Valeria Sales



OUR SERVICES

Community Development & Integration Program
Comprehensive Needs Assessment
Government form filling
Fathers Parenting Group
Individual Counselling
Information and Referral Services
Newcomer Services
Partner Assault Response (PAR) Program

Seniors Educational & Recreational Group
Seniors Helping Seniors
Success by Six (Parenting Group for Mothers)
Teens Against Gender-based Violence (TAG-V)
Violence Against Women Counselling
Volunteer Opportunities
Youth Outreach Services



ABRIGO CENTRE

Statement of Operations

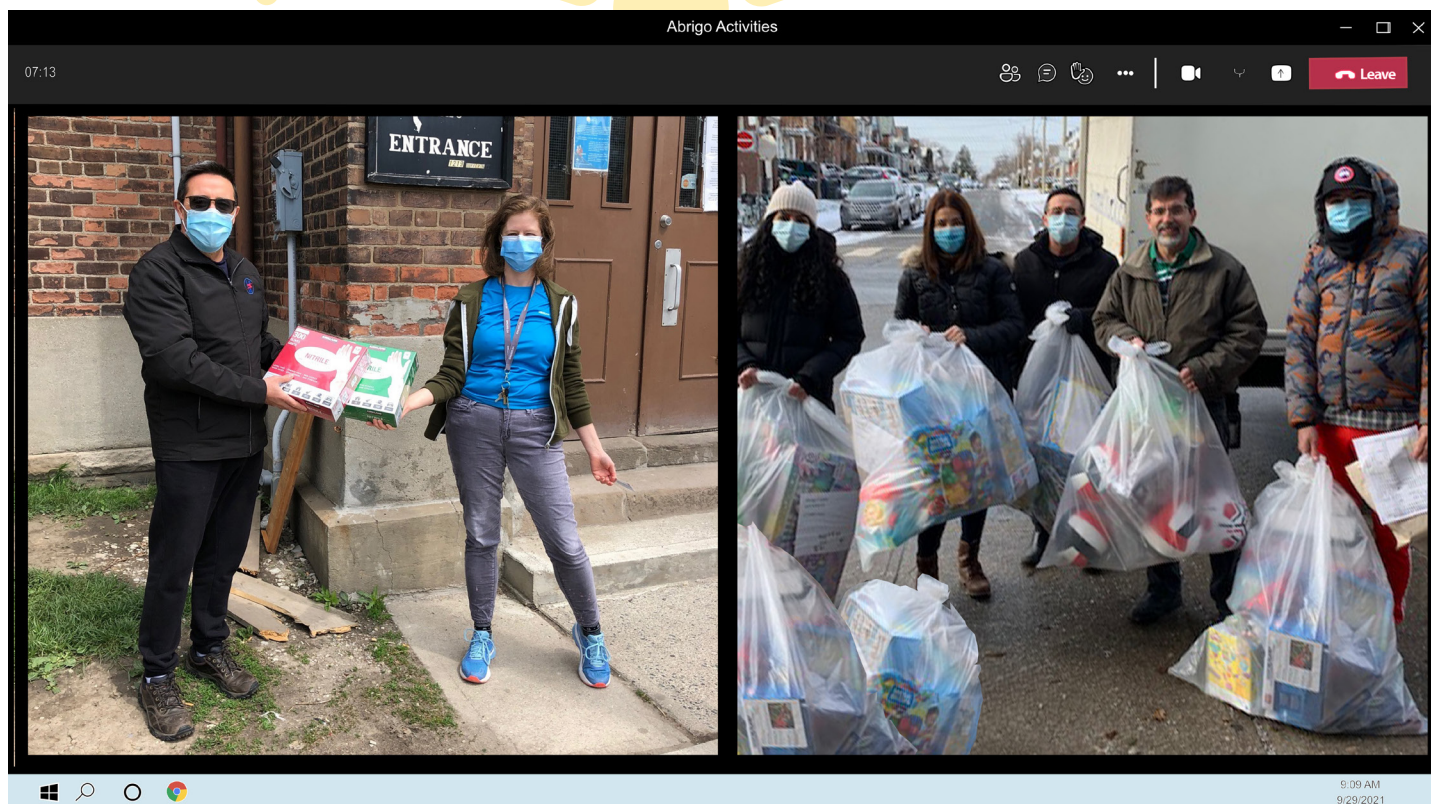
For the year ended March 31, 2021

	<u>2021</u>	<u>2020</u>
Revenue		
Funding from governments	\$ 814,647	\$ 777,968
Contributions from charitable organizations	329,715	278,905
Fundraising and donations	124,661	190,606
Fees and other	70,393	148,841
	1,339,416	1,396,320
Expenses		
Salaries	853,516	833,657
Employee benefits	110,952	118,103
Rent	171,176	165,904
Program delivery	20,257	66,340
Interpretation costs	8,029	53,767
Amortization	35,094	34,799
Office and general	28,717	9,486
Purchased services	22,935	15,776
Insurance	15,137	15,241
Repairs and maintenance	9,347	14,797
Information technology	8,420	14,673
Professional fees	12,233	11,433
Utilities	9,424	11,980
Staff training and travel	9,790	4,365
Direct supplies	5,720	7,166
Telecommunications	7,055	6,372
Promotion	5,117	5,965
Donations and fundraising	700	3,638
	1,333,619	1,393,462
Excess of revenue over expenses	\$ 5,797	\$ 2,858

(Excerpted from Abrigo Centre's audited financial statements prepared by Dixon, Gordon & Co. LLP, Chartered Accountants with an Auditor's Report dated June 30, 2021. Full audited financial statements available upon request.)

Community support is the lifeforce of our agency.
Your financial support today ensures that Abrigo will be
ready to help you in your time of need.

www.abrigo.ca



Designed by: Mena Nunes, MAAD Productions

Abrigo Centre

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On the Web: www.abrigo.ca Twitter: [@abrigocentre](https://twitter.com/abrigocentre)
Facebook & Instagram: [/abrigocentre](https://www.facebook.com/abrigocentre)

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