

Abilities Centre 2024-2025 Impact Report

A Message from the Chair of the Board and President & CEO **On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of Abilities Centre, it is** **our pleasure to present the 2024-2025 Impact Report.**

Over the past year, Abilities Centre made meaningful progress toward our mission of building a better, barrier-free life for all Canadians. With an emphasis on creating and strengthening partnerships, Abilities Centre continues to be at the forefront of accessibility and inclusion. We are proud to collaborate with our community leaders in education, government, research and business who share our vision.

The Abilities Centre Impact Report provides insight into the success of our programs and showcases our renewed sense of unity. Driven by a clear purpose and strong fiscal management, the organization achieved its best financial year to date - enabling greater investment in our world-class facility and the incredible people who engage, learn, and grow in our space.

We saw significant growth in program participation, membership, events, and visitors to Abilities Centre. Taking greater control of our revenue generation allows us to “fuel our mission” and provide a wider range of programs for more participants. We have weathered the storm and now find the organization in a position not seen since before the global pandemic.

Despite a positive year, as with any non-profit organization, Abilities Centre still relies on the support of its funding partners. The Government of Ontario has provided the foundation for sustainability. Through several provincial ministries, we serve hundreds of individuals in much-needed programs such as Thrive™, Employment Services, Therapeutic Recreation, Post Rehabilitation, Research, Physical Literacy and Inclusion, and more. In addition to the Province, Abilities Centre is grateful to Canadian Tire Jumpstart, who continues to lead the way in supporting organizations who deliver youth sport and recreation programming.

The passion of our Board of Directors and staff is contagious. We are fortunate to be guided by leaders in accessibility and inclusion who not only champion our mission but understand the vital work still ahead. However, we recognize that more needs to be done. Success is only achievable through meaningful partnerships. We invite you to share our story and be a part of our mission.

Sincerely,

Sharon Cochran - Chair, Board of Directors

Michael Cvitkovic - President & CEO

Our purpose:

Unlock potential through accessibility

Our vision:

A better, barrier-free life for all Canadians

Our mission:

Reimagining accessibility and redefining the way Canadians live, work, and play

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Year in Review

This past year, Abilities Centre continued to challenge the status quo and uphold our mission of reimagining accessibility and redefining the way Canadians Live, Work, and Play. With the generous support of our partners and funders, we continued to deliver exceptional, innovative, and accessible programs, services, and events to our community and beyond.

Our annual Accessibility Awards were held on April 26, 2024, with Paralympian Joel Dembe acting as our emcee. Together, we celebrated our nominees and award winners whose efforts are changing lives and paving the way for a more accessible and inclusive society.

- Accessibility Award Winners
 - Accessibility Moment of the Year Award: Luca DeMontis, Canadian Blind Hockey
 - Trailblazer Award: Trevor Smith, Abilities Centre
 - Accessible Employer Award: Allison Hector-Alexander, The Regional Municipality of Durham
 - Community Champion Award: Julie Grant, Advocate for Inclusive Playgrounds
 - The Jim Flaherty Award: Lorin MacDonald, HearVue

Our other annual events, Golf Fore All on October 10, 2024 and the Holiday Market on November 2, 2024, successfully raised funds that support our programs and services and brought our Abilities Centre community together.

Abilities Centre continues to cultivate wonderful partnerships locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally. In May 2024, our President and CEO presented our mission at the Durham Regional Council meeting. As well, we were honoured to receive the Accessibility Award from the Region of Durham in September 2024. We were fortunate to host visiting colleagues from Sport Singapore in June 2024 and Activity Alliance (England) in March 2025. Leading up to International Day of Persons with Disabilities, many of our local partners came together to create and share video messages highlighting the role we all play in the Abilities Centre community and how we can work together to uphold inclusion, disability leadership, and human rights.

Abilities Centre has been grateful to receive funding from various government and private agencies to support development and delivery of programs. Thanks to the Skills Development Fund through the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development we successfully piloted our 'Pathways2Employment' (P2E) program. P2E supports individuals to gain meaningful employment through skill building and experiential learning. As well, through the Canadian

Women & Sport's *The Next Play* grant, Abilities Centre offered Women's Only hours in our fitness spaces.

Excitingly, our team was able to showcase original research and program evaluation around Physical Literacy and Inclusion, Therapeutic Recreation, and the Academy for Student Athlete Development (ASAD) with presentations at three research events: North American Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (NAFAPA) Conference; Sport for Life Summit; and Ontario Shores Research Day. Additionally, our Research Department hosted its inaugural Research Day in December with our internal teams.

To highlight our amazing, talented and hardworking team, this past year, Abilities Centre implemented an employee recognition program. This initiative culminated in an end-of-year staff event at a local theatre full of celebration, laughs, and renewed motivation to support our community.

Abilities Centre has remained focused on our mission and vision, while maintaining our commitment to excellence. We are excited to present this annual report, highlighting the outstanding work of our team members throughout this year. We hope this report offers a glimpse into the progress made this year and the lives impacted through our programs and partnerships.

Live

Abilities Centre's programs and services support people to participate meaningfully in their communities, work towards their goals, and engage in all aspects of life. This year, several programs worked to break down barriers and build people up, reimagining the way they **live**.

ASAD

The Academy for Student Athlete Development (ASAD) is a high-performance program that goes beyond sport. Student-athletes are empowered to achieve personal goals in academics, athletics, and life by living the ASAD values of leadership, inclusion, accountability, and respect. ASAD has supported student-athletes through two major branches this year: the daily high-school program based in Durham and London delivered in partnership with the Durham District School Board, Durham Catholic District School Board, and the Thames Valley District School Board, in addition to the monthly parasport hubs in Ottawa, Edmonton, Scarborough, and Durham.

More than **120 athletes** across **10 unique sports** were enrolled in ASAD high school programming for the 2024-2025 school year across the two locations.

“The coaches have helped me develop on and off the ice to improve the athlete that I am and the one I want to become!” ~Student-Athlete, Durham, Fall 2024 Evaluation

96% of student-athletes (participating in the survey) feel they have progressed towards their personal, athletic, AND academic goals through ASAD (through the fall semester)

During the spring semester, we successfully piloted a football stream in London that included eight (8) student-athletes,

- Three (3) student-athletes selected for Team Ontario
- Five (5) student-athletes committed to Canadian Universities to further their academic and athletic career.

This stream will continue to be a staple in London to maximize student-athlete development during the second semester outside of football season.

Expanding Access to Parasport

The ASAD monthly parasport hubs ran through the spring of 2025 across all four locations and returned for a new season in the fall at participating centres. Parasport athletes trained for competitions in Para Fencing, Wheelchair Basketball, Boccia, Wheelchair Racing, and Sledge Hockey.

This program continues to develop, with passionate partners working to address parasport athletes feedback and better fill gaps in wrap-around parasport athlete supports. Updates have been made to increase touchpoints for parasport athletes and enhance their access to pillars of support.

“I think that is one of the key things...Those conversations at ASAD [are] important in the para scene. Because no matter what, you have once a month where you know somebody is going to relate to you.” ~ ASAD Parasport Athlete

Looking Ahead

ASAD London has formed a new partnership with EPIC Sports and their Prep Team Academy to enhance opportunities for young student-athletes at a brand-new facility. This collaboration aims to combine ASAD's educational and athletic support programs with EPIC Sports' elite training and performance expertise. Together, they plan to offer student-athletes a comprehensive pathway that balances academic achievement with high-level sports development, ultimately preparing them for success both on and off the field of play. This partnership also aims for a longer-term goal of housing future Abilities Centre programs in Southwestern Ontario.

Therapeutic Recreation (TR)

Therapeutic Recreation programming supports our community members to build skills, explore leisure opportunities, and progress towards goals, while positively engaging in the community. Some well-loved programs continued this year, and some new additions were made to fill gaps in the community and offer more opportunities.

Within local schools, the social and movement activities of **Therapeutic Recreation in Schools (TRIS)** helped more than 200 students from 12 schools enhance their resiliency skills, engage in joyful movement, and find new leisure interests.

94% of TRIS students have demonstrated increased resiliency skills. This means more students initiated conversations with peers, self-advocated for needs, were willing to try new things, regulated their emotions independently, and worked collaboratively.

"[TRIS is] phenomenal. The staff are passionate, they are engaging, they're energetic, and it's so authentic, you can tell it's so real, the connections that they've built with these kids, and it's genuine.... You know that they just genuinely really care for the kids." ~TRIS Classroom Teacher

TR in the Summer was back for its third year in a row supporting an average of 25 students each week for the eight weeks of summer. This program fills an important gap for skill development support throughout students' summer vacation and works to enhance students' resiliency and well-being through physical activity, social connection, and a variety of skill-building activities.

TR in the Summer continued to improve its program offerings this year by piloting an assisted breakfast program and collaborating with local public transit to reduce participation barriers. They also restructured the enrollment process to allow for more flexibility and increase access to more activities and supported gradual integration for students working towards deeper community engagement.

"One of the most remarkable changes we noticed was in his confidence – he became much more comfortable initiating conversations with others, a skill he was previously hesitant to practice." ~ *Parent of TR in the Summer participant*

Within the walls of the Centre, there were different TR program offerings running throughout the year, engaging 100 participants in a variety of social, movement, and arts activities.

- Active Connection, Creative Café, and Nature Trek programs continued with some exciting updates.

- Active Connection ran a Game Show Mania session and a Mixed Ability Sport/Parasport session this year, bringing in new and exciting activities to a long-running program.
- Stronger Together, Girls Get Active, and our March Break TR Camp returned to the schedule.
- MasTR Chef was added to the Fall lineup to fill some gaps in programming for cooking and food preparation skills. This new program was very well-received, helping participants to build their confidence in the kitchen and enhance their independence.

"Learning new skills is very helpful and creates independence leading to confidence. My daughter is so proud of her accomplishments."

~ Parent of MasTR Chef participant

Looking Ahead

To offer more opportunities for social engagement in the community, the TR team also piloted new Social Nights this year including Valentine's Day and New Year dances. Check the Abilities Centre website or social media to see what is coming up in the TR social calendar.

Post Rehabilitation

Post-Rehabilitation programs support individuals managing chronic health conditions or transitioning from clinical rehabilitation into the community. With a focus on structured exercise, fall prevention, and social connection, the programs promote long-term physical and mental well-being while fostering meaningful peer support.

In 2024–2025, the Post-Rehabilitation Department continued to provide steady, high-quality service programs, helping participants maintain progress well beyond formal clinical treatment.

This year, a total of **528 participants** engaged in specialized programs across multiple streams:

- **Respiratory Cardiac Maintenance (RCM)**: 81 participants, including seven first-time participants.
- **Virtual Fitness for Breath (vFFB)**: 351 participants, including 66 first-time participants.
- **Together in Movement and Exercise (TIME, TIME+, TIME Lite)**: 96 participants, including 12 first-time participants.

Participants often describe the social aspect of the programs as equally valuable as the physical exercise: a space where friendships form, accountability grows, and motivation builds.

Whether through **vFFB**, which offers accessible online exercise for individuals with chronic respiratory conditions; **RCM**, which supports ongoing physical activity following clinical rehab for individuals with chronic heart and lung conditions; or **TIME**, which helps individuals with neuromuscular and age-related mobility challenges improve gait, lower body strength and balance—each program contributes meaningfully to improved health, confidence, and connection across our community. Together, these programs reflect Abilities Centre’s commitment to supporting long-term well-being through accessible, inclusive, and community-based rehabilitation.

Post-Rehabilitation programs continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of participants, supporting not just recovery, but a renewed sense of confidence, capability, and connection. For many, the journey begins with a simple goal: to move more easily, breathe more deeply, or feel stronger in their daily life. Through consistent participation, individuals report noticeable physical improvements in symptom management, endurance, mobility, and their ability to take on everyday tasks with less strain.

However, the impact extends well beyond physical gains. Many participants share that the programs offer a much-needed structure and routine, which

can be especially grounding during periods of transition or uncertainty. Regular interaction with instructors and peers fosters a sense of belonging.

Accessibility remains a cornerstone of the programs' approach. Virtual and hybrid options allow individuals to stay connected, whether at home, traveling, or managing other health needs. Participants find that this flexibility helps ensure that progress isn't disrupted, and that support remains within reach.

With a steady foundation, responsive delivery, and deep commitment to community well-being – strengthened by the support of organizations such as Lakeridge Health, University Health Network (UHN), and others— our Post-Rehabilitation programs continue to play a vital role in helping individuals live independently and thrive beyond clinical care.

Thrive™

Empowering Adults with Developmental Disabilities through Connection, Creativity, and Confidence

Thrive™ is a dynamic adult day program designed for individuals aged 18 and older with developmental disabilities. Through a diverse lineup of structured activities, participants engage in art, life skills, social recreation, and sport and fitness programming. At its core, Thrive™ aims to build independence, nurture confidence, and foster meaningful relationships – supporting individuals as they work toward their personal goals and lead active, fulfilling lives.

Each year, Thrive™ continues to grow – not just in numbers, but in **participant-led innovation, inclusivity, and community engagement**.

The 2024–2025 program year showcased this progress.

Over the past year, Thrive™ delivered three seasonal sessions (Winter, Spring, and Fall), in addition to a summer program designed for both adults and teens (ages 13+). Each seasonal session supported up to 70 participants, while the summer program welcomed a total of 82 individuals.

Reflecting the program's commitment to evolve with participant needs and interests, **37 unique program periods** were offered per session, with **22 newly developed program periods** introduced throughout the year:

6 new programs in Winter

7 new programs in Spring

9 new programs in Fall

A unique strength of Thrive™ lies in empowering participants to take leadership roles. This year, participants led several programs, including **Mixed Abilities Sport, DanceFit**, and the ever-popular **Thrive™ Newspress** – a participant-driven journalism initiative that showcases creativity, communication, and teamwork.

The Thrive™ team continues to focus on making programming more inclusive by adapting their communication styles and teaching methods to support diverse learning needs. New classes introduced throughout the year received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants and their families. A standout addition was the **drumming class led by staff member Elliot**, which became a favourite among participants for its rhythm, energy, and creativity.

The success of *Art with a Heart*, led by a professional artist, reflected Thrive's growing commitment to the arts. As one participant put it, "There's

no right way to do art – it comes from within.” This spirit of expression has inspired even more opportunities for creativity through visual art, dance, and movement.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, Thrive™ aims to continue expanding its community connections, with a focus on bringing certified professionals into the space to deliver high-quality, specialized programming. By inviting the broader community into their space, they hope to create more reciprocal experiences that benefit both the Thrive™ participants and the public.

Participant Spotlight: Jayde

Whether she’s dancing, cooking, or leading by example, Jayde is a vibrant force in the Thrive™ community. Her favourite classes – DanceFit and Spudtacular Cuisine – blend movement, creativity, and fun. *“I get to hang out with my friends and do different classes,”* she says. *“I like to make new friends – and I love using potatoes!”*

Jayde’s impact goes far beyond the Centre. As a wing for the Oshawa Vikings, she’s making history as part of the first Canadian Women’s Mixed Ability Rugby Team to participate in the International Mixed Ability Rugby Tournament in Spain. A proud Jamaican and the first in her family to play the sport, Jayde also brings her love for physical activity into the community by teaching students how to play rugby, curling, and kinball – championing inclusion and movement wherever she goes.

At Thrive™, Jayde is not only a participant, but a leader. From volunteering at the Holiday Market to supporting youth activities, she’s an example of how confidence, compassion, and community spirit can come together to inspire others. Her journey reflects the heart of Thrive™: a space where individuals can grow, connect, and lead with pride.

Community Partners:

The Thrive™ program relies on its connections with the broader community. Thank you to our partners:

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- Durham Community Health Centre
- Horizon’s Music
- Iroquois Park Sports Centre
- Therapeutic Paws of Canada
- Durham Regional Police Service
- Station Gallery
- Lakeridge Community Support
- Whitby Public Library
- Hillside Terrace Long-Term Care
- Reptilia
- Scientists in School

- Crave Doughnuts (Annual Fundraising Campaign)
- Jays Care Foundation (Challenger Baseball Grant)

Work

Abilities Centre offers programs and services to support, promote and guide access to meaningful employment, create communities of practice, and promote continuous learnings for our broader communities. This year, several of our programs challenged individuals and organizations to help build accessible and inclusive communities, reimagining the way they **work**.

Training and Education

The aim of Training & Education at Abilities Centre is to promote continuous learning. This department works to empower individuals in our community and provide them with the tools and resources that they need to build more accessible and inclusive communities. Some educational opportunities that Abilities Centre has offered in the past have been updated and have been made available this year under new names. The Training & Education team have connected with the community and kickstarted their continuous learning journey through **Accessibility Consulting**, our **Disability Inclusion Workshop**, **Accessible Communications** training, and **Accessible Spaces** facility audits.

Accessibility Consulting (previously known as LEAD)

This year, our Training & Education team supported 29 organizations on their Accessibility Consulting journey including: ten (10) municipalities, three (3) school boards, and 15 other non-profits including sport organizations, education and supportive collectives, and support service organizations.

Through this process, organizations self-identified some key actions to take along their inclusion journey to better support their communities. Some key actions that were implemented by participating organizations this year include:

- Shifting culture among staff to increase awareness of accessibility and pre-emptively eliminate barriers.
- Enhancing the accessibility of public-facing documents and websites to facilitate the flow of information.
- Collaborating with partners, advisory committees, and champions to inform service-specific accessibility practices.
- Auditing physical spaces to identify priorities for improvements and updates that will meet community needs for years to come.
- Updating work policies and procedures to ensure proactive inclusion, bolstering organization capacity to meet community needs and help employees thrive.

The continued commitment and effort organizations are putting into their accessibility journeys are particularly important this year – we have recently passed the January 1, 2025, date for Ontario to have achieved accessibility laid out in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Disability Inclusion and Accessible Communications Workshops

More than 750 people from 13 different organizations across Ontario engaged in Disability Inclusion or Accessible Communications workshops this

year. Through these workshops, our Training & Education facilitators supported individuals from a variety of sectors to enhance their understanding of core inclusion concepts and practices, reflect on their ways of doing, and bolster their confidence to take actions towards their organizations' ongoing inclusion journeys.

Through their participation in workshops, people:

- Increased their understanding of language and document design choices;
- Developed greater appreciation of the need for transformational change;
- Identified tangible strategies for shifting culture at work; and
- Enhanced their practical skills to support inclusion.

*After participating in the **Accessible Consulting** process in 2023, our collaborators at the Town of Ajax kept the momentum in their inclusion journey going by committing to **Accessible Communications** Training for 360 members of staff over 10 workshops.*

Accessible Spaces (previously known as Facility Audits)

Organizations have also engaged with our Accessible Spaces audit process to identify priority areas that will enhance the accessibility of their physical space and boost their capacity to meaningfully include community members. This process involves a fulsome review of chosen physical spaces to identify how organizations can meet and exceed legal requirements for compliance and improve the experiences of their clients.

Organizations that have completed in the Accessible Spaces audit process have used their reports to secure grant funding to enact large scale retrofit projects but also tackled quick win changes that are one-off actions or fit into existing procedures that remove barriers to participation.

After participating in the Accessible Consulting process in 2023, the Township of Uxbridge has demonstrated their commitment to improving accessibility by engaging in a number of Accessible Spaces audits of some of their important community spaces. Using the results of their Accessible Spaces audits, the Township of Uxbridge was able to secure funding for future improvements. Using the results of their Accessible Spaces audits, the Township of Uxbridge was able to secure funding for future improvements.

To learn more about how our Training & Education offerings can help you take the next step in your organization's accessibility and inclusion journey, check out [our website](#) or connect with the team at edu@abilitiescentre.org

Employment Services

Abilities Centre's Employment Services support individuals with disabilities in finding and maintaining meaningful employment by building job readiness skills, workplace confidence, and inclusive opportunities for career development. Through one-on-one coaching, experiential learning, tailored workshops, and strong community partnerships, the program creates a path to sustainable, independent participation in the workforce.

The Employment Services team provided one-on-one employment coaching to **42 participants**, offering individualized support tailored to their career goals. As a result, **six participants secured jobs** in sectors such as retail, food service, custodial services, and administration. One long-term participant achieved repeat contracts, demonstrating growth in workplace independence.

2024-2025 Workshops

- Topics: resume building, professional communication, interview preparation, understanding workplace accommodations.
- Outcome: Participants reported feeling more confident in their ability to advocate for themselves and navigate the job market after attending the workshops.
- Attendance: 30 workshops, 146 participants

Project Search®

Now in its second year, **Project SEARCH®** continued in partnership with the **Regional Municipality of Durham** and **Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB)**. **Ten (10) interns** completed work placements across regional departments including Legal, Social Services, Facilities, and more – gaining real-world job experience. Interns began their journey with Transit Awareness Training at Abilities Centre, learning how to plan a trip and independently use public transit. Throughout the year, regional staff showed increasing interest in mentoring interns, a strong signal of Project SEARCH®'s growing influence on inclusive workplace culture.

Pathways 2 Employment (P2E)

A key highlight for Employment Services this year was the launch and expansion of **Pathways 2 Employment (P2E)**, a person-centered program for youth aged 16 to 29 with disabilities who are seeking meaningful employment. Offered in both daytime and evening formats, the program combines in-class learning with real-world job experience. The daytime stream is an accelerated five-week in-class program, followed by 150 hours of supported workplace placements. The evening stream offers the same curriculum at a slower pace, delivered over 12 weekly sessions, designed for high school students or youth balancing multiple commitments. The in-class portion of both streams also featured visits from Durham Region Transit, Lake Ridge Community Support Services, and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Toronto, providing participants with practical insights

and exposure to community supports. To date, **28 participants** have completed the P2E program across both streams.

P2E was first piloted in-house at Abilities Centre, where participants received foundational instruction in job readiness, workplace expectations, and self-advocacy in various Abilities Centre departments. Based on the success of this initial cohort, the program expanded into the community through partnerships with the Town of Ajax, City of Pickering, and the Regional Municipality of Durham. The move off-site was a major milestone in scaling the program and was met with overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, staff, and host partners.

Across the first two cohorts, participants demonstrated measurable growth in self-confidence, not only in navigating transit systems and managing money, but also in communicating in professional settings, advocating for their needs, and stepping into leadership roles. Many participants also earned workplace certifications and training, including Food Handler Certification through A Poetic Health; Standard First Aid, CPR Level A or C, and AED through Durham First Aid; and Customer Service and Financial Literacy Workshops delivered by YWCA Toronto — all of which further strengthened their employability. Through structured training with real-world experience and principles of supported employment, P2E helped participants build the knowledge and confidence required to transition successfully into the workforce.

Employer Engagement & Community Impact

Beyond participant-focused programming, the Employment team also delivered employment workshops through the DCDSB Continuing Education – Custodial Services Training Program. Staff observed a rise in job interview invitations for students who participated in the training, underscoring the real-world application of the content. As part of the Pathways 2 Employment (P2E) program the team also led micro-credential training for employers with the Town of Ajax, City of Pickering, and the Regional Municipality of Durham to support inclusive hiring practices and disability awareness. Feedback highlighted the program's impact on shifting perspectives and increasing confidence in inclusive practices:

"The training was incredibly impactful. Rooted in universal design and lived experience, it offered eye-opening insights and diverse perspectives. While I was familiar with the tenets of inclusivity, the session really shifted my thinking and gave me tools to help foster a more inclusive and accessible community." -Kristen Fox, City of Pickering

Looking Ahead

Employment Services will continue to expand its presence across new industries, strengthen employer connections, and expand programs like P2E with additional host sites. With its holistic, person-centered approach and

focus on building inclusive communities, Employment Services remains a cornerstone of Abilities Centre's vision for a barrier-free future.

Play

Abilities Centre provides a diverse array of programs and services designed to foster experiences in a safe and welcoming environment. This year, several of our programs worked to actively promote community connection, inclusion, and equity by using **play**.

Physical Literacy & Inclusion

Advancing Inclusive Movement Across Communities

Abilities Centre's Physical Literacy & Inclusion (PL&I) Department continues to lead the way in building more inclusive, movement-based environments for children, youth, educators, and community leaders. Through evidence-informed workshops, experiential field trips, and new school-based programs, PL&I strengthens individuals' confidence and systemic capacity to embed physical literacy into everyday spaces.

This year, PL&I directly engaged more than 350 individuals through interactive workshops and reached 950+ students and educators through 41 inclusive field trips across Durham Region. The department also formally launched You.Me.We. in schools, a new program focused on fostering social inclusion through physical activity. From post-secondary classrooms to elementary school gyms, PL&I's reach has never been wider – or more impactful.

Workshops: Building Skills & Shifting Mindsets

PL&I workshops are designed to deepen individuals' understanding of physical literacy and equip participants with inclusive strategies they can apply in real-world settings. Each session combines practical tools, universal design principles, and space for reflection to ensure that all participants – regardless of background, role, or experience – can leave with confidence and clarity.

Workshops were delivered to educators, post-secondary students, camp counselors, and municipal staff. Post-session feedback indicates strong results:

- **100% of respondents** identified strategies they could apply in their work
- Participants highlighted “representation,” “practical activity adaptation,” and “inclusive communication” as key takeaways.
- Educators reported increased confidence in delivering inclusive physical activity programming.

Field Trips: Inclusive Experiences in Action

PL&I field trips provide immersive opportunities for students and educators to experience inclusive movement firsthand. Hosted at Abilities Centre and in schools, sessions featured inclusive activities such as KinBall, para-sport (e.g., wheelchair basketball, roller sledge hockey), and cooperative games. Each experience is designed to foster teamwork and a deeper appreciation for diverse ways of moving. These sessions reinforce the idea that physical activity can be welcoming, fun, and accessible to everyone.

This year, the Physical Literacy & Inclusion team expanded the reach of You.Me.We., a movement-based social recreation program designed to foster empathy, belonging, and social connection through inclusive physical activity. Delivered in both schools and clinical environments, the program

created meaningful opportunities for children and youth to engage with peers, build confidence, and experience the benefits of movement in supportive, low-barrier spaces.

In schools, You.Me.We. was piloted as a 12-week, classroom-based initiative in partnership with the Durham Catholic District School Board. Weekly sessions brought inclusive games and physical activities directly into the classroom – emphasizing cooperation over competition, and helping students build positive peer relationships, understand and respect diverse ways of moving, and take shared ownership of their classroom community.

In parallel, the program was also delivered within a hospital-based setting, offering movement and recreation to children and youth receiving care. Sessions focused on accessible, step-by-step activities designed to encourage participation and joy, even in more complex physical or medical contexts. Reflecting on the program's impact, a child life specialist noted:

"You.Me.We. shows that you can still access different forms of movement in many different capacities, and with that, demonstrates adaptability, accommodation and inclusion. These values and messages mirror the goals in our Child Life program, which focuses on the fact that children with illness and disabilities can still have a great quality of life, and it promotes the idea that they have a place in our community." ~ Child Life Specialist, pediatric hospital setting

Across both settings, You.Me.We. reinforced PL&I's broader vision: that physical literacy is about more than movement—it's about belonging, confidence, and connection.

Collaborations

PL&I expanded its network of partners this year, strengthening collaborations with:

- Durham College
- Appleby College
- Town of Whitby
- Township of Brock
- York Region Recreation Committee
- Durham District School Board
- Renfrew County Catholic District

These partnerships support broader systemic change by embedding inclusive physical literacy practices across education, recreation, and municipal services.

Looking Ahead

PL&I will continue to deepen its impact by:

- Expanding You.Me.We. into new school boards across the province.
- Delivering customized workshops for municipal and educational partners.
- Enhancing program evaluation tools to capture long-term outcomes.

- Engaging new sectors, including corporate wellness, in inclusive movement initiatives.

As the program continues to grow, PL&I remains grounded in its mission: to create confident, inclusive communities where physical literacy is not just a skill – but a shared value.

Sport & Recreation

The Abilities Centre Sport and Recreation team continues to offer unique opportunities for children and youth in our community. This year, they enhanced some favourite programs and got children and youth moving, trying new things, and having fun with friends. HYPE (Healthy Youth Program for Everyone), Sports Mania, Obstacle Course, and Wheelchair Basketball all returned to the schedule along with our popular Kids Summer Camp.

After being introduced in 2023 to fill a gap for 10-14-year-olds in our community, HYPE continues to be popular. Participation in this movement and social program took off this year, with more than 50% growth in enrollment since the fall.

Kids Camp once again filled the Centre with fun, themed activities and a lot of energy for all eight weeks of summer. Apart from the top-notch artists, mystery-solving detectives, and talented performers, our inclusive and enthusiastic camp staff were the stars of the show – feedback from 86% of families said the counsellors were kids' favourite part of camp.

"My son has loved camp a lot. I was worried if he would transition well to day camp, but it's been an amazing experience. He loves the [counsellors] and all the activities provided. Thank you!!" ~2024 Kids Camp Participant's Parent

Sports Mania once again got rave reviews from the eight participants who were introduced to 12 different sports during the fall session.

After a few seasons off, Obstacle Course returned to the schedule in the Winter by popular demand and saw a surge in enrollment with 15 participants coming to create and traverse new courses each week.

Wheelchair basketball continues to be a pillar of evening sport programming, bringing athletes both new and experienced together to build skills and play games on Tuesday evening. This group of athletes make up the Abilities Centre Eagles, a team name chosen by the athletes. The Eagles compete in tournaments across Ontario and hold themselves to persevere, be respectful, and be good teammates.

The Sport and Recreation team continues to find new ways to fill each and every day at Abilities Centre with fun and friendly competition. Check out the program list on [Sport & Recreation page](#) or email sportandrec@abilitiescentre.org to get more information.

Member Experience (Programs and services)

Our members are at the heart of the Abilities Centre community. This year, the membership team worked hard behind the scenes to increase offerings, remove access barriers, and increase opportunities across the Centre. Some of the actions taken this year include:

- Updating **membership options** to better tailor membership plans to community members needs, including changing the Senior membership age, diversifying the family-membership options, and adding a 30-day membership option.
- Increasing **pickleball** offerings to make getting started with pickleball more accessible and make it easier for people to play together by having dedicated pickleball court times five days per week and offering beginner and advanced times as well as open/mixed sessions.
- Bringing in new partners to maximize use of our unique facilities, including a long-term residency in our theatre with the Travelling Stage, and a full pilot season of tournaments with the Ontario Volleyball Association that brought 162 teams and more than 4000 athletes, coaches, officials, and spectators into the Centre, which helps keep membership fees accessible.

The partnership with the Ontario Volleyball Association generated an estimate \$300,000 of economic impact in Whitby and the Durham Region over the course of the 17-week pilot season.

Looking Ahead

To continue to offer a state-of-the-art environment for rehabilitation, healthy aging, and high-performance training, we will be looking to upgrade equipment and programming to match the increased needs of our members.

"[Joining Abilities Centre] has been one of the best decisions I've made. Love this facility, the staff are great and the people I've met are fabulous!" ~ Current Abilities Centre Member

"I enjoy the Abilities Centre! Very nice environment with great staff and wonderful members! [It's] my home away from home!" ~ Current Abilities Centre Member

Events

Events are one of our best ways to welcome the community into our space – they offer opportunities to connect, celebrate, and support inclusive programming. While you are taking the opportunity to learn, shop, or have fun, you are also supporting opportunities for other members of our community. Each dollar spent at an Abilities Centre event goes right back into creating programming and initiatives that further our mission of creating a better, barrier-free life for all Canadians.

In April, our second annual Accessibility Awards brought together guests representing local government, our own programs and membership, and our community partners to celebrate and re-inspire our commitment to accessibility.

In October, golfers took to the links in our annual tournament, celebrating local organizations and connecting with each other, while enjoying a full day of outdoor fun.

In November, more than 1,500 people visited our Holiday Market to kick off the winter holiday season and shop with 140 local vendors.

"The staff are fantastic, and the cause is fantastic. It was my first time being a part of this event and I'm already looking forward to next." ~Holiday Market Vendor

"I just enjoyed being there around other people helping support the [Abilities Centre] for a good cause...besides the cause I like the staff, I like everything that the [Abilities Centre] provides and to be able to support the community and others in a way that benefits myself as well is perfect." ~Holiday Market Vendor

Whether you joined us for one day or every day this year, we are grateful to have you as part of our community! Follow us on social media to stay up to date on upcoming 2025 events and opportunities to connect with our community.

"Accessibility and inclusion go hand in hand. By promoting these together, we create environments that are not only accessible but also welcoming and empowering for everyone. It's about building a society where all Canadians can fully participate, contribute, thrive, and belong." ~Accessibility Award-winner

Development

Every gift – big or small – helps us to deliver inclusive programs, expand services, and deepen our community impact. The generous support of our sponsors and donors enhances our capacity to continue improving our facility and our programs.

With the support of our community, we were able to purchase equipment and make upgrades within the Centre that will improve participation in fitness, wellness, and recreation programming, including:

- Increasing options for strength training with a new Crossover Cable Stack machine.
- Enhancing opportunity in the cardio section with the addition of three (3) new treadmills.
- Improving options in the free-weight area with new weights and benches.
- Upgrading pickleball nets to make sure the courts are ready with the expanded schedule of pickleball sessions on the court each week.

Financial (*unaudited)

Revenue Growth (Millions)

- 2025 - \$8.4M*
- 2024 - \$7.7M
- 2023 - \$7.1M
- 2022 - \$7.4M
- 2021 - \$6.13M

Expenditure Breakdown*

- 84% Programs
- 10% Administration
- 6% Development

Revenue Summary*

- 43.1% Provincial Govt. Funding
- 1.6% Federal Govt. Funding
- 0.5% Municipal Funding
- 4.5% Corporate Funding
- 15.5% Program fees
- 9.2% Def. Capital revenue
- 8.5% Membership revenue
- 6.7% Rentals
- 9.2% Fundraising
- 1.2% Other Income

Thank You

Over the past year, our community has engaged, fostered, and supported our work to reimagine accessibility and redefine the way we live, work and play. We are grateful for the amazing corporations, foundations, and individuals who have generously supported Abilities Centre. You have allowed us to give individuals the opportunity to achieve their goals through physical movement, life-skills, and employment programs as well as research.

Thank you to all our partners in government, health, research and education, sport, and various community groups. Your partnerships are critical to the work we do at Abilities Centre and would not be possible without your collaboration.

To support our organization, you can share this report, follow us on social media, or donate to our charitable organization so we can continue to build a better, barrier-free life for all. You can donate at <https://abilitiescentre.org/donate> or use our charitable registration number is: **88981 9116 RR0001**.

We'd love to welcome you to Abilities Centre – check out our website (<https://abilitiescentre.org/contact-us>).