

2023 *Annual Report*



Project ABRAHAM





The Year of Accomplishment

With a significant boost in funding from IRCC, Project Abraham was able to retain two key staff members as part of our team: Trudi Rutherford as Programs Manager and Varun Midha as Client Support Coordinator. With the additional engagement of Faheemah Qaaydi as our Kurmanji/Arabic interpreter and liaison with the Yezidi community, 2023 was the year that we were able to improve our infrastructure, bring in objective measures of performance, and both expand and improve upon the delivery of our services to vulnerable clients. We also saw more diversification in the clients we serve welcoming people from: Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iran, Ethiopia among other countries. These clients all face complex and trauma-based challenges, which Project Abraham is well-equipped to address, given our past successes with Yezidi refugees.

An employee health plan was initiated. New forms and procedures were added to the Homework Club and the YES! program which streamlined our processes and prepared the basis for more in-depth assessment of client demographics, the progress of our clients and the overall success of our programs. IXL Learning platform diagnostics and student/parent surveys brought impressive information on the value of the Homework Club. A third-party evaluator was hired to assess YES!, the results of which also emphasized the outstanding support this individualized English language acquisition program has given to our clients with barriers to learning.

Our client support services increased exponentially, providing wrap-around services to client families. Gift cards continued to be delivered to the Yezidi community, and many were provided with new shoes, sewing machines and bicycles. A new partnership with Value Village provided children's clothing to more than 30 children and teens. Celebrations and trips brought clients, staff, and volunteers together and expanded clients' appreciation for their new home.

We are grateful to Immigration, Refugee, Citizenship Canada (IRCC), TD Ready Commitment, York Region District School Board (YRDSB), York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB), Zita and Mark Bernstein Family Foundation, J. Armand Bombardier Foundation, York Region Community Investment Fund, CAMH, and all our donors and volunteers for their stalwart support of Project Abraham's programs in support of vulnerable newcomers.

We are proud and deeply appreciative of our dedicated staff and Board of Directors for their commitment and dedication to improving the lives of our clients. We look forward to the continuation of your collaborative work throughout 2024.

Anat Wertheim
Chair

Debbie Rose
Executive Director



Our Mission

To provide aid and assistance to refugees and immigrants in need that are victims of war, persecution, unfair discrimination, or natural disasters by providing settlement services, education, counselling, and other support services for immigrants and refugees in need, including language instruction, employment training, job search programs, translation services, referral services, and information programs on Canadian culture and life.





Yezidi Education Support (YES!) Program

New targets were set for participation in YES! for 2023 and by the end of December we had 94 unique clients who had either continued or joined the program, an increase of 30% over the previous year. Over 2,000 YES! classes are provided each year.

In 2023, Project Abraham engaged a Program Evaluation Consultant to assess the YES! program.

Key findings from the report:

- The program is found to be suitable for meeting the diverse needs of the target population by offering a flexible schedule, an online format, smaller class sizes, and emphasizing relationship building. Student satisfaction with the program is comparable to satisfaction with the GOC-sponsored LINC program.
- On average, students have experienced improvements in all four skill areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, with the most significant improvements in speaking and the least improvements in writing.
- The most common theme to arise [in the survey] was satisfaction with the instructor, followed by enjoying peers and socializing with others. The fact that the two most common themes to arise pertain to relationships with others, both the instructor and peers, signals that positive, trusting relationships have been built through this program, which is critical in a trauma-informed learning approach and aligned with the needs of the students who have a trauma history.
- YES! participants were graded by their teachers to have progressed more significantly with 4 hours per week of instruction compared to 20 hours per week of instruction in the LINC program. Although this first evaluation was with a small sample size (27 participants), the results are very encouraging.

LINC	YES!
• Listening 32.7%	• Listening 59%
• Speaking 49.2%	• Speaking 59%
• Reading 38.2	• Reading 45%
• Writing 37.3%	• Writing 44%



Community Connection Events

A wonderful adjunct to the YES! program, our Community Connection events expand our clients' awareness of their new home, their fellow Canadians, and the resources and services available to them. This contributes greatly to their healing, helps them with integration, and provides opportunities for learning in and out of the classroom.

In 2023, there were four community connection events:

March 2023

The Science Centre

Our trip to the Science Centre was a great success including the attendance of a Yazidi woman whose history with trauma symptoms did not allow for such participation in the past. With some small measure of trepidation on our part that she might be triggered by crowds and/or IMAX, and taking preparatory steps to address it should it happen, in the end she went through the day without incident. This was a heartwarming and hopeful story of recovery.

July 2023

July 3rd Shoe Fest

We are grateful to Stan Chik from Promotion Healthcare for his generous donation of over 200 new high-end shoes to Project Abraham. We combined a Canada Day celebration with the distribution of the shoes to the community. Clients enjoyed socializing, watching a magician, engaging in games, eating pizza and browsing through shoes. We were delighted to see many of our volunteers helping out at this event.

Project Abraham Picnic

Our July 29th potluck picnic at Richmond Green Park in Richmond Hill had a great turnout of 39 participants considering it was a rainy day and we weren't sure if anyone would come at all. Staff did an outstanding job of planning and executing a lovely day.

September 2023

Pioneer Village

For the adult Yazidis in the group, Pioneer Village was reminiscent of life in the villages in Iraq where they grew up. The gristmill used to grind grain into flour, the antique farming equipment, and even the recreated interiors of the old houses were all familiar sights. "Everywhere they went sparked some memory," observed Faheema: "They loved it." It was a beautiful fall day, so everyone enjoyed a picnic lunch outdoors among the colourful fall leaves.



The Homework Club

At the peak of participation in 2023, 150 K-12 newcomer children from families living below the poverty line were benefiting from our Homework Club tutoring program. At the end of the year, we welcomed Saadi Mado as one of the two Yezidi tutors now supporting Yezidi children in catching up to their peers. Nadia Naso has been with us since the beginning of the Homework Club in 2021, both coordinating the program and tutoring Yezidi children in London, ON.

In 2023, we invested in licenses for the IXL Learning Program which assesses each student's starting point in math and English relative to their grade, provides recommendations for lesson plans, and tracks the students' progress. This added a new level of professionalism to our program and ensures that we have program assessment that we can share with our funders.

From a survey done of 26 students who responded in April 2023:

- 96.2% agreed that they learned a great deal/quite a bit
- 96.2% strongly agreed/agreed their engagement with the subject improved
- 88.5% strongly agreed/agreed their confidence had improved
- 100% strongly agreed/agreed their attitude toward the subject improved
- 96.2% agreed the tutoring contributed to overall success in the classroom
- 92.3% agreed they had improved their overall grade level

Of 31 parents who responded to the same survey:

- 83.9% found the overall program helpful and felt their child's engagement and attitude toward the subject had improved
- 71% believed the program had contributed to the overall success in class and improved grade level



**TD READY
COMMITMENT**





Care Packages

Throughout the pandemic, Project Abraham, in partnership with Family Services York Region (FSYR), delivered care packages to the Yezidi community twice per month. These care packages were composed of many different items including gift cards, food items, cleaning products, and toys. Project Abraham also continued to distribute sewing machines to Yezidi women and bicycles to Yezidi children. This program continued throughout the entirety of 2023.

The Community Garden

In the summer of 2023, members of the Yezidi community were back at St. Paul's Lutheran Church enjoying the tilling, maintenance, and harvest of their Community Garden. We are grateful to the **Zita & Mark Bernstein Family Foundation** for their continuing support of this wonderful opportunity for the Yezidis to connect to the earth and the lives they lost through the genocide.

Sponsorship

Project Abraham raised funds in 2021 for the sponsorship of two Yezidi families to come to Canada. We were delighted to welcome a single mother with two children and a couple with two children on their arrival in Canada in February and May 2023 respectively. Parents enrolled in our YES! program and the children joined the Homework Club.



Settlement Work

Project Abraham has delivered over 400 settlement services each year to our vulnerable newcomers. With the addition of two social workers to provide this support, we ramped up our ability to meet their needs. Among the many services provided included but not limited to:

- Clothing drives for babies and older children
- Crisis support
- Supporting the search for employment
- Help filling in applications for Citizenship, sickness benefits, EI etc.
- Continuing education
- Help accessing food and furniture banks
- Housing
- Interpretation
- Dental and medical referrals
- Program registrations
- Distribution of 80 duo-purpose fire and carbon monoxide alarms provided by York Region Police Department

CAMH

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) has been a committed partner to Project Abraham for the four years that the YES! program has been in existence. Once per month, a social worker from CAMH joins our YES! Teacher's meetings and provides training and support to assist teachers in dealing with challenges arising from client trauma as well as protecting themselves from experiencing vicarious trauma. In October, CAMH went beyond this monthly support and facilitated a 4-week training program in trauma-informed client care to teaching staff. The response from the teachers was very positive.



Value Village

In September 2023, a local Value Village accepted Project Abraham as a charitable partner and immediately provided us with 8 large boxes of children's clothing - all in good condition - that were distributed to a dozen families. The donations continued in large numbers through to the end of the year clothing to 25 families representing over 40 children and teens. This has enabled us to deliver this service at a much greater level than in our prior capacity.

Ride for Refuge

Project Abraham would like to thank Board member and Fundraising Committee Chair, Deborah Glatter, for her stellar work in organizing our *Ride for Refuge* fundraising event on September 26th. With her efforts and the support of so many donors, walkers, and riders, we exceeded our original goal of \$20,000 and raised \$24,416 in total!

Greg Bender, who co-captained Team Glenview with his wife, Kalla, had this to say about the event:

"What a beautiful day and way to embrace the first day of Fall with a 5k walk (and some 10k bikers) in support of Project Abraham and the Ride for Refuge... I had both the privilege and self-imposed responsibility of walking with and trying to "keep up" with Dany a nine-year-old boy, eldest of three children of a young Yezidi family...it was heartwarming to chat with Dany as a well-adjusted, curious, smart, and energetic going concern. We talked sports (soccer is his favourite), school (he wants to be smart like Albert Einstein), and Terry Fox (he knew he ran a marathon each day on one leg to raise money for cancer research). Needless to say, it became our goal to complete the 5K in first place..."





Looking ahead to 2024...

RYSE

The York Region Community Investment Fund (CIF) has granted Project Abraham funding for a Mental Health and Well-being project called Reaching Yezidis: Support and Empowerment (RYSE) which is to begin in April 2024. RYSE will deliver two in-person cohorts, 12-weeks long, 2 days/week, trauma-informed programs for 30 (15 participants per cohort) Yezidi women to address an important and pressing community need: a lack of culturally specific, trauma informed and developmentally appropriate life management skills program for survivors of genocide.

Upgraded Website

So many changes have occurred in our organization since our website was first initiated in 2017. An upgrade that better reflects what we do is planned for the coming year.

Volunteer Engagement

Prior to the pandemic, Project Abraham had up to 300 volunteers in our database, with 50 actively involved in the support of Yezidi families. After the loss of volunteer engagement because of Covid19, most of Project Abraham's programs are implemented through staff. In 2024, we hope to revive the many ways volunteers contribute to the success of our mission.



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Trudi Rutherford, Programs Manager
Aimee Nikmard, YES! Program Delivery
Varun Midha, Client Support Coordinator
Faheemah Qaaydi, Client Support Worker
Nadia Naso, Homework Club Coordinator
Dave Kushner, Bookkeeper/Accountant

Teaching Staff

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**Special thanks to our Board members and the many others who generously
donated gifts in kind and funds to special projects
and our general campaign.
Together we have made a difference.**



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[www. projectabraham.ca](http://www.projectabraham.ca)

Contact

Helen Latimer, Executive Director effective April, 2024

416-556-8287

helenlatimer@projectabraham.ca