Stronger Together



Helping children, youth and families thrive

2019-2020 Annual Report On January 1, 2020, Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre and East Metro Youth Services amalgamated to form Strides Toronto. A multi-service agency addressing the needs of infants, children, youth, their parents and families, Strides Toronto is located in east Toronto.

Helping children, youth and families thrive.

Moving forward together with purpose and agility

Fostering our clients' personal strength and resilience is central to the work of Strides Toronto. This year, strength and resilience also shone through in the staff who deliver our services.

The amalgamation on January 1, 2020 of East Metro Youth Services and Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre to become Strides Toronto made this year particularly historic. The merger reflects the shared commitment each agency had to improving the lives of children, youth and families in east Toronto, and the recognition that we could achieve our goals more fully together.

Stronger Together is both the theme of this report and a mantra our staff adopted as we became one. Stronger because we now provide a broader continuum of care for those who need us, from the prenatal stage to age 29. It enables us to have a bigger voice at tables of influence, advocating for changes that benefit the people that we serve. And Strides Toronto can adapt the best ideas and approaches from each legacy agency to create effective responses to evolving needs.

Along with others around the globe, we have renewed our commitment to addressing issues of racism and oppression within our organization and in the region. We recognize the tremendously damaging effects of racism on physical and mental health. As the Lead Agency for Infant, Children and Youth Mental Health, Strides Toronto is using our voice to speak out against racism and champion system changes. We have formed a sector Task Force to develop a road map for measurable impact in combating anti-Black racism. Internally, we are implementing organization-wide anti-Black racism training and are recruiting expertise to advise us on strengthening our programs, policies and processes related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Perhaps the biggest test of our strength and resilience came in March as the coronavirus pandemic hit Toronto. We are thankful to our residential programs staff, who never stopped providing in-person service, and to the rest of our teams, who quickly adapted to remote service delivery. For several programs, telephone and virtual care options enhanced clients' experience with us and there is no doubt these new modes will remain a part of our service mix moving forward. We are very appreciative of our staff members' enduring commitment to providing the best possible service to the people we serve. Thank you!

We are also incredibly grateful to the committed Board volunteers of EMYS, Aisling Discoveries and now Strides Toronto. Your extraordinary leadership guided us through a complex process to become a new organization with boundless potential. This eventful year has proven that as one agency with incredible skill, heart, and desire to do whatever it takes to improve the lives of our clients, Strides Toronto is stronger together and greater than the sum of our parts.



Mary Jarrell Co-Chair



Jordan Ross Co-Chair



Janet McCrimmon
Chief Executive Officer

01. Plan

The Boards of Directors of Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre and East Metro Youth Services begin formal discussions to explore the opportunity to join together

Consultations with staff, clients and board members

Due diligence work

Strides Toronto chosen as new agency's name

02. Build

> Strides Toronto officially incorporates January 1, 2020

Branding work begins

Building connections between programs

Unifying roles, policies and procedures

Developing a quality improvement framework begins

03. Imagine

Launch publicly as Strides Toronto

Work with clients, community, partners and staff to develop Strides Toronto Strategic Plan

Identify new and improved opportunities to increase impact

The steps to Strides Toronto



04.

Transform

Build on new opportunities from amalgamation

Strengthen partnerships, community engagement and action on issues affecting communities we serve



Ready for the future together

Together, as a more robust organization, Strides Toronto is better able to respond to new demands and contribute to building vibrant, strong and healthy communities that uplift the people who live in them.



Broader Continuum of Care

We expand the ages we serve to encompass pre-birth, infants, children, youth, young adults up to age 29, and their families.



Expanded Services

We deepen our impact on clients through a broader range of integrated, high-quality services for children, youth and their families.



Greater Efficiency

We have the size to reduce costs and invest in the technology and infrastructure needed for the modern service environment.



High-Quality Staff

With the wide range of programs, services and opportunities for growth, we increase our ability to attract and keep the best talent.



A Bigger Voice

Being involved in partnerships across the spectrum of our work increases our ability to influence policy and make system-level change.

AGES SERVED BY YEAR

Healthy Babies, Healthy Children - Family Home Visiting Support Services **Growing Healthy Together - Prenatal Nutrition and Early Parenting Psycho-Education Programs Targeted Prevention Programs - Class-Wide School Programs and Parent Workshops** Overview Early Abilities Preschool Speech and Language* Ready, Set, Go* **Every Child Belongs - Child Care Consultation Infant Mental Health Group Counselling for Parents and/or Children/Youth Counselling and Therapy Service Coordination/Whatever It Takes Program Urban Tele-Mental Health** Brief Therapy Services, including What's Up Walk-In® Clinic** **Youth and Family Counselling and Therapy** Mental Health T.O.: Access for Infants, Children, Youth & Families **Provincial Program Management - Youth Outreach Worker Program Intensive Autism Services Group-based Autism Services Parent and Caregiver Training* Developmental Services Day Treatment Live-in Treatment Intensive Child and Family Service - In-Home Supports Youth Outreach Worker Program Youth in Transition** Respect in Schools Everywhere - Youth Violence Prevention Program **Volunteer Readiness Program New Mentality Youth Group** The Zone Youth Space Drop In Prevention Programs for Children, Youth and Parents **Intensive Services Studio 2 Multimedia Program** Early Intervention for Children Community Engagement and Outreach Services **East Qrew LGBTQ Youth Group** Child and Youth Mental Health Youth Wellness Hubs (Scarborough and Toronto East sites) * Program eligibility is related to non-age factors. Early Abilities Preschool Speech and Language is available for children up until Lead Agency for Infant, Children and Youth Mental Health **Gender-Based Violence Supports** they enter junior kindergarten. Ready, Set, Go is available in the summer prior to junior kindergarten. **Autism and Developmental Services Newcomer Youth Engagement Program** **Funding for service to clients over 18 years of age provided by RBC.

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STRONGER TOGETHER 2020

Services to meet every need

Lead Agency for Infant, Children and Youth Mental Health

Strides Toronto is the city's Lead Agency for infant, children and youth mental health. Since 2015, the Lead Agency team has partnered with sector agencies to develop and put into action system-wide changes to transform the experience of infants, children, youth and families with mental health challenges. Our system planning efforts strive to ensure that available supports are accessible, effective and empower individuals and families to reach their full potential.

We support 26 agencies to develop new programming and improve pathways for Toronto's diverse communities to access mental health services. In addition to these agencies, we collaborate with five Indigenous partner agencies in what is the largest and most diverse Lead Agency catchment in the province. Our work also includes supporting, consulting and partnering with the child welfare, education, and justice sectors as well as Ontario Health Teams with regard to children's mental health. The Lead Agency also manages the various education and evaluation aspects of the Provincial Youth Outreach Worker program.

Autism Services

Autism Services provides a range of supports for children and youth with an autism diagnosis, using evidence-based interventions to meaningfully improve the person's quality of life and develop behaviours that lead to independence, such as functional communication, toilet training or behaviour modification. We also offer Foundational Family Services in a variety of formats including group, individual, self-directed, virtual, and in-person services as part of the new needs-based Ontario Autism Program (OAP). All families registered in the OAP are eligible to receive these services and supports at no cost. Our Autism Services program operates with a high degree of interprofessional partnership to support information sharing and collaboration among services and the community. Each client receives an assessment to help determine a plan for their service, which may include intensive individualized services, group services from early interventions to pre-employment skills, family and caregiver training and respite services, such as afterschool programing, summer camps and Saturday service. Interventions are designed to help clients learn and use new skills every day and are frequently evaluated to respond to changing evidence and practice. Once service is complete, each family receives a report on progress and future recommendations for service. We offer both free services (funded by the Ontario Government) and services on a fee-for-service basis.

For more information, please contact 416-321-5464, ext. 236 or email autism@stridestoronto.ca.

Child and Youth Mental Health

Our mental health programs support infants, children, youth and families to identify and treat mental health concerns as they emerge so that they can improve their relationships and functioning in the home, school and community.

Individuals can access these services by calling Mental Health Toronto at 1-866-585-6486 or contacting Strides Toronto directly.

Services range from supports for parents with infants exhibiting concerning behaviours, such as separation anxiety and eating problems, to individual and family counselling. We also offer short-term intensive case management services for complex, clinical situations.

Strides Toronto also operates one of the city's six What's Up Walk-In clinics, a walk-in counselling service for children, youth, young adults and families to receive immediate help with anything that might be on their mind, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, sexual identity matters, behavioural concerns, and addictions. Strides Toronto also partners with Sick Kids Hospital on the Urban Tele-Mental Health initiative, which offers clients and their mental health practitioners access to psychiatrists through live video conferencing.



2,365
Early Abilities
clients served

Early Intervention for Children

We work with children and their families from before birth to 12 years of age to help them meet developmental milestones and achieve their full potential. Our Community Support program provides services that facilitate prevention, early intervention and public education related to children's mental health issues by building skills and competencies. The program provides early intervention workshops, groups and consultations for children, parents and community professionals.

Our Speech and Language program helps support preschoolers to build their language skills by providing speech and language assessments, individual and group treatment, consultations with parents and community-based children's programs, and referral to a wide range of child and family services in the community. The Ready, Set, Go! program supports children's transition to the school system by helping the child understand separation from caregiver, rules and routines in the classroom and social skills, and by familiarizing parents with the school system and how to support their child.

Our Child Care Consultation service responds to children with special needs by providing individual and program consultation to a designated group of child care centres. Along with direct service to children in the child care programs, we offer workshops and presentations to families, child care centres, and home child care programs to enable all children with special needs to be fully included in quality child care programs.

STRIDES TORONTO

Intensive Services

Strides Toronto provides intensive services to children, youth and families experiencing social, emotional, or behavioural challenges that significantly interfere with their daily lives. We offer in-home supports to address family breakdown or problems at school or in the community. Our Priority Access programs for schools and child welfare provide individual and family-focused counselling and case management to students identified by their schools as needing support, and help for children and youth that are at risk of being placed in child welfare. Our Day Treatment school program combines the school board curriculum with therapy to help young people deal with a variety of issues, with the goal of returning them to the regular school system. In addition, we operate two coed Residential Treatment programs for children and youth who are coping with an array of psychiatric, emotional, and/or behavioural challenges.

"I like the fact that you can tell if someone actually cares. They put their effort into things. Based on staff and the roles they play, they don't have to take us out but they go out of their way to make sure we are okay - like check on us when we are in our room for a long time and take us out into the community."

- Client, Residential Treatment

Prevention Programs for Children, Youth and Parents

In addition to addressing mental health, developmental and social issues, Strides Toronto offers a number of prevention programs to share skills and information that empower children, youth and their families to have the strongest possible outcomes in their development, relationships, community engagement and productivity. Working with clients in their homes and in the community, we offer prenatal supports for a healthy pregnancy and birth, and new parent services to meet early relationship, nutritional and developmental milestones. We also offer family home visiting and parenting groups designed for families with young children who may be new to Canada, are living on a low income, or may be feeling alone or overwhelmed.

Through workshops and education programs across a range of subjects, we provide opportunities for children, youth and parents to learn more about issues that may be affecting them.

"I've been through a lot in my life. Strides Toronto [...] helped me feel comfortable being a mother. They gave me a lot of support I didn't have."

- Client, Healthy Babies Healthy Children program





Community Engagement and Outreach Services

Strides Toronto offers a wide range of community engagement and outreach programs to meet young people and families where they are emotionally and situationally, foster connections and build skills in ways that are meaningful and effective for them. Through a combination of one-on-one supports, facilitated activities, participant-led groups, and drop-in programs, Strides Toronto's outreach programs address such individual and community issues as violence, homophobia, unemployment, bullying, healthy relationships, racism and poverty. Participants receive support to adapt to a new country, strengthen bonds within their family, celebrate their LGBTQ+ identity, learn marketable skills, advocate for themselves, and more.

5,488 participants in community events

Nine of the city's 31 designated Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) are located in Strides Toronto's catchment area. NIAs have been identified by the City of Toronto as neighbourhoods that require more support and investments to foster resident well-being.

6,306
clients received
service from Strides
Toronto

327 staff

23+
languages
spoken by staff

8,277
participants accessed Strides
Toronto community services

STRIDES TORONTO
STRONGER TOGETHER 2020

2019/20 Programs Spotlight

Babies Best Start

Strides Toronto's Babies Best Start program is part of the City of Toronto's Healthy Babies Healthy Children initiative. Staffed by a team of family home visitors who bring a wealth of knowledge about pregnancy, early childhood development, parenting and system navigation, the program serves families that are expecting a baby or have a child under three years of age and are facing life challenges. Following an initial consultation with a Toronto Public Health nurse, the family is referred to our program where they are matched with one of Strides Toronto's 13 family home visitors who work directly with the families in coordination with the Public Health nurse to address their specific needs and goals.

"The family home visitor's main job is to provide support around parenting and preparing to be a parent," says program supervisor Melissa Shannahan. "They help with a range of things, such as breastfeeding, building a healthy attachment between parent and baby, healthy eating, and positive parenting." Since eligible families may have few supports, are newcomers or are facing challenging life situations, home visitors are also a valuable connection to other services, such as employment, housing, food banks



and shelters, and provide information about financial support, schooling and daycare as well.

This year, the team participated in a range of training opportunities to continue to build their skills, including diversity and inclusion training, parenting and child development programs, the duty to report, and more.

On average, each family home visitor conducts more than 400 visits to homes each year, but when the city went into lockdown in March due to the coronavirus pandemic, they had to shift their approach. "We provided extra check-ins, maintaining contact through phone and email. There has been a lot of social support—listening to family concerns," says Melissa. "It's not ideal but we've received a lot of positive feedback and we see the positive impact it is having on our clients."

"I felt very comfortable from the beginning. They came [to my house] every week because that was what I needed, but later I could do a lot more by myself, so they reduced their visits. But that's good so that they can use the time to help other families who need them. It shows how professional they are because they know when they are needed and when to give you more independence."

- Client, Healthy Babies Healthy Children program

Autism Services

In the last year, our Autism Services team has been responding to shifts in the Province of Ontario's funding approach to autism services and supporting clients to understand each new stage. As the government has enacted a fee-for-service delivery model that provides funding to families with an autism diagnosis, our team has continued to provide a wide range of services to existing clients while innovating to suit the new model.

"Our team produced parent workshops and information resources in video and online formats this year," notes Darryl Nurse, Director of Autism Services. "As the coronavirus pandemic set in, the team was able to quickly transition its parent training models to be delivered virtually and it's been very successful." The Improving Parents as Communication Teachers (ImPACT) program was one such model. Parents receive a one-hour training session via Zoom and homework to do with their child over the week. The following week, both parent and child receive a one-hour coaching session with a therapist to support the child's engagement and communication, reinforce learning and help build the parent-child bond. This weekly schedule is then repeated.

The need to make information and services available virtually has resulted in some surprising outcomes. "The virtual services have revealed a cohort of kids that respond more successfully to virtual sessions than inperson sessions. They may not have been previously engaged in the group sessions but virtually they have just bloomed," says Darryl. And the team has embraced the new opportunities too, hosting Facebook Live sessions for parents on several topics. "We have created an online parent education platform with great content where parents can always find support."

"Virtual service has helped so much, just for the sake of us not being cut off. Just being able to talk to someone who is trying to help our child has been very important for feeling that we are not completely isolated from help."

- Parent, Autism Services



STRIDES TORONTO
STRONGER TOGETHER 2020

Residential Treatment

The coronavirus pandemic locked the majority of people in their homes except for essential workers. Among those workers were Strides Toronto staff in our two live-in programs—Betty's Place (for children ages 6-12) and Megan Residence (ages 12-18). These residences support children and youth who are coping with an array of significant psychiatric, emotional, or behavioural challenges. Staff at Betty's Place treat up to six children and their families at a time with the goal of family reunification and sustainability, while Megan Residence staff focus on supporting up to seven youth at a time to achieve their personal best, whether back with family or living independently.

When the pandemic hit, both teams sprung into action. Fortunately, many of the children at Betty's Place had been scheduled for discharge in the coming weeks, so their return to home was accelerated and the team provided virtual support to those who were returned home and their families.

At Megan Residence, all youth remained in the residence and, in addition to their regular workload, staff took on new and frequently updated cleaning and safety measures as per public health guidelines. Putting aside their own anxiety, the staff demonstrated continued creativity to make the lockdown bearable for the residents. From special dinners to movie nights and a birthday party featuring a cotton candy machine, the staff demonstrated creativity to occupy the youth and make the time special.

"These are 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year operations and the staff were phenomenal; I cannot stress enough how phenomenal they were," notes Dawn Scott, Manager of Megan Residence. Kathleen Jobin, who manages Betty's Place, echoes that sentiment and the value of coming together. "With the merger, we were just developing our relationship, but COVID solidified it. It was so helpful having another manager and our directors who just get it. All of us knew it was unprecedented and the journey brought us closer across all levels. The staff were troopers about it—we took it in stride," she laughs.



"I've learned a lot of positive coping skills. I can see how much I've grown as a person over the last year. I used to do negative things but with staff supporting me, I was able to leave the negative in the past and now when I'm not heard, I know how to let my voice be heard. When I first came here, I didn't really like myself but now I have self-love."

- Youth Client

Youth Outreach Worker Program

Six youth outreach workers (YOWs) operate from Strides Toronto as part of a provincial program of more than 200. The YOWs provide tailored services to at-risk youth, ages 12 to 24 years old, and their families, supporting their needs and connecting them with other services in the community. Strides Toronto's program includes YOWs who focus on specific populations in Toronto, such as the Syrian, Afghan and Tamil communities, and others who provide specific outreach, such as Jessica Valleau, our social media YOW. Using the platforms of Facebook, Instagram and occasionally Twitter, Jessica shares helpful information with youth through her posts and direct messages.

"I generally try to post a Monday Motivation, Tuesday
Tips, Wellness Wednesday post and Skills Saturday items,"
she notes. She also conducts polls to find out what is
of interest to the youth and what they need at a given
time. From these activities, potential clients reach out to
her and she is able to build a relationship and provide
or connect them to the support they need. "Most of the
time it's about making the connection and just getting
them comfortable with accessing a service provider, then
getting them to the appropriate service. We're really the
starting point."

STRIDES TORONTO STRONGER TOGETHER 2020

While the pandemic drove many services online, Jessica already had an established presence there, but she still took the opportunity to reimagine how her role could engage youth who were feeling elevated levels of anxiety. As a result, she hosted a virtual talent show inviting youth to share their talent and she reposted their posts. "Part of our role is also to highlight the positive things that young people are doing, so this was a good way to do that." Other creative initiatives included a physical activity and mental health-focused "planking challenge" and information around life skills, such as legal rights regarding COVID-19, how to properly wear a mask, and financial literacy information.

"We want to teach our clients the skills they need and provide them with a tool bag of knowledge so that they know how to get to where they want to go. Everything is very individualized." Due to the pandemic, many more YOWs are now online and Jessica sees this is a great benefit to communities that weren't being serviced as well online before. "If we continue to build and develop the ways we are online, we'll be doing an amazing service to the community. There are always young people in need. It's about building a sense in the community that asking for help is not so negative. We are here for a reason—because everybody needs some help in their lives," she says.

"Thank you so much for organizing such a great event last night. It was really stunning, worthwhile and wonderful. We enjoyed a lot with the dinner supplied and managed by you. We've got a big new family like you all."

- Youth Participant, Newcomer Youth Engagement program

engagement workers and understand how they support their youth and provide resources in the community.

The basic need for newcomer youth is socialization and, like so many in-person programs, the pandemic created challenges that the team had to address creatively. "Our focus switched to more emotional support and socialization," says Rocky Chu, another Youth Engagement Worker. To this end, the team has continued its gatherings in new ways. They hosted a virtual family night over Zoom that included virtual games that everyone could play. "The event was an opportunity for attendees to bond within their family and get to know others."

The team also arranged for a guest speaker to present each other and share information and resources."

The online engagement has led to an increase in participation in the Newcomer Youth Engagement Program since there are no geographic barriers online. The team plans to keep this line of programming as part of its service mix after the pandemic is over. They are also excited about the new range of services that Strides Toronto offers. "We often work with youth who can't participate in activities because they have to take care of younger siblings who aren't yet eligible for this program. With the expanded services, we're hoping more families and youth can participate in our program and everything

to parents about starting a small business—an area of interest for a number of families. "The message that families received was 'We are here for you as well,'" says Mitra Mosehni, another Youth Engagement Worker. "The parents were so appreciative, and the adults have connected through our events and have started to support

Strides Toronto has to offer."

Newcomer Youth Engagement Program

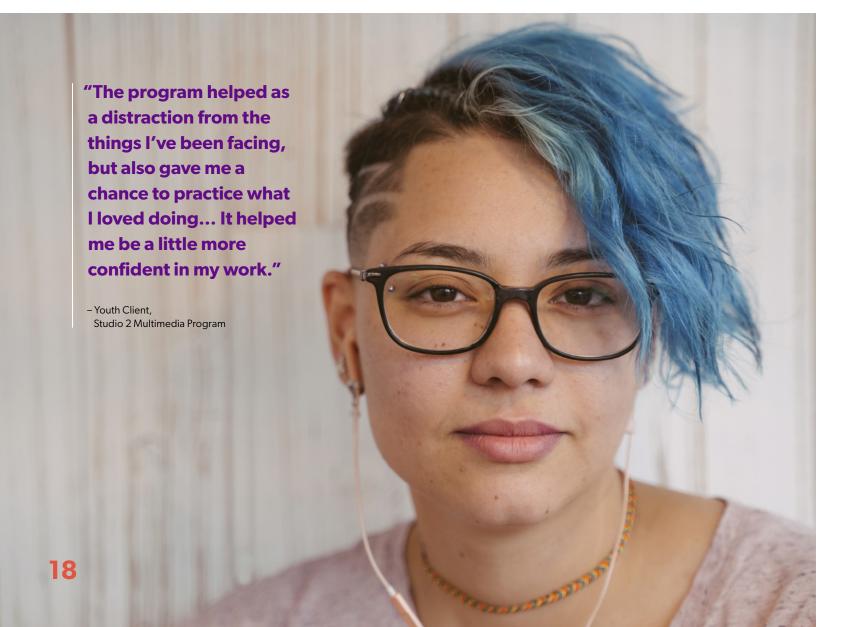
Newcomer youth and their families face a variety of challenges to adapt to a new country. Our Newcomer Youth Engagement program offers participants from ages 12 to 21 a range of mental health workshops, volunteer opportunities, and free community outings to support their transition. It also provides youth and their families with support, information, skills and training to help them adapt, settle, and integrate into Canadian life.

Strides Toronto's three Youth Engagement Workers do outreach in schools, faith groups, community agencies and with settlement workers to identify new program participants. The youth take part in field trips to such places as the CN Tower, Ripley's Aquarium and Niagara Falls. They also attend workshops to build skills and make connections, and volunteer in the community.

While the program is focused on youth, it also engages their parents to strengthen the family's ability to support the youth to succeed. "This past year we have been doing a lot more family engagement," says Shetal Singh, one of the Youth Engagement Workers. Prior to the pandemic, the team hosted two family nights, which included dinner and various activities. The focus on family engagement has helped build trust as the parents get to know the youth

"I feel a lot less lonely when I go there [What's Up Walk-In]."

- Youth Client



Funders and Donors

Strides Toronto thanks the Funders and Donors whose financial support enables us to help children, youth and families thrive.

Funders

City of Toronto
Human Resources and Skills
Development Canada
Immigration, Refugees and
Citizenship Canada
Ministry of Children, Community
and Social Services
Ministry of Health
Public Health Agency of Canada
United Way Greater Toronto
YWCA of Toronto

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Donna Chow Lauren Dade Jason Pilz Jordan Ross Lois Patricia Sinclair

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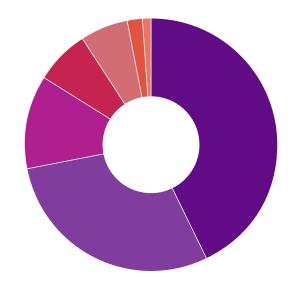
DeeBee's Organics Hazell and Collins Associates Katie Rogers

Financial Overview

The following charts outline the projected revenue sources and expenses for Strides Toronto's 2020-2021 fiscal year.

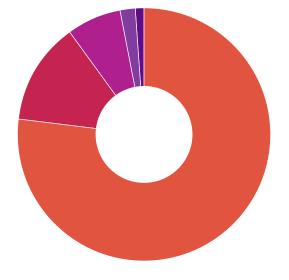
Revenue Sources

•	Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC)	43%
	Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)	29%
	City of Toronto	12%
	Fee-for-Service Programs	7%
	Special Program Funding	6%
	United Way	2%
	Other Revenue	1%



Expenses

Salaries and Benefits	77%
Services	13%
Flow-through Expenses	7%
Supplies and Equipment	2%
Travel and Communication	1%



Thank You!

We are grateful to the dedicated volunteers who served as board members for Aisling Discoveries and East Metro Youth Services this year, providing wisdom and guidance through our amalgamation. We are equally fortunate that the Strides Toronto board benefits from having equal representation from the legacy organizations' boards. Thank you to all for your service.

Boards of Directors

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 $\begin{array}{ll} \mbox{Monday to Thursday} & \mbox{9 am} - 8 \mbox{ pm} \\ \mbox{Friday} & \mbox{9 am} - 5 \mbox{ pm} \end{array}$

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Fax: 416-321-1510

 $\begin{array}{ll} \mbox{Monday to Thursday.} & \mbox{9 am} - 7 \mbox{ pm} \\ \mbox{Friday.} & \mbox{9 am} - 4 \mbox{ pm} \end{array}$

Have a question? Want more information? **contactus@stridestoronto.ca**

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