



Traverse Independence Annual Report 2020-2021

Our Mission

We maximize our clients' ability to live independently by providing support services for adults with a physical disability or brain injury.

Board of Directors

Stephen Gross, President

Dr. Nicole Didyk, Vice-President

Gayle Asselstine, CPA, CMA, Secretary-Treasurer

Zack Enriquez

Adrienne Farrell

Len MacIvor

Margaret Penner

Deb Randall

Jamie Westover

Management Team

Toby Harris, CEO

Aaron Willmott, Director Client Services

Alyssa Nelson, Manager Human Resources

Jim Izzard, Manager Transitional Living

Sabrina Jesso, Manager Residential Services

Karen Liphard, Manager Community Services

Brenden Bellai, CPA, CA, Senior Manager, RLB Chartered Professional Accountants, Traverse
Financial Controller

Programs

Supportive Housing for adults with physical disabilities

- Union Lane, Kitchener
- Strasburg Road, Kitchener

ABI Transitional Living

- Stanley Avenue, Kitchener
- Gordon Street, Fergus

ABI Group Home

- Tagge Street, Kitchener

ABI Adult Day Program

- Opportunity Centre and Beginnings, Westheights Drive, Kitchener

ABI Outreach Services

- Waterloo Region
- Wellington County

ABI Affordable Housing

- Bowman Street, Waterloo

Message from the CEO

Well, I must say, it has been one hummer of a year.. Not only have we traversed through the minefield of COVID-19, but we have done it by following every ounce of advice, guidelines, and preventive measures we could find, either published or through our amazing partnerships in the community and around the province. Our membership in the local Ontario Health Teams in Cambridge and North Dumfries, Guelph Wellington and KW4 was instrumental in our success as we battled COVID over the past year, where support was quickly offered when we were in need.

Despite the raging pandemic and all that was expected to stay healthy and keep our staff and clients safe, we managed to expand our board expertise and vision by bringing on two new members as two long-time members retired. These new members have brought some new insight and a fresh set of eyes to the board work of strategic planning, supporting our mission and our vision, and overseeing our properties.

Some of our programs and services moved to a virtual platform and staff worked tirelessly to connect with our clients in the community as did our front-line staff in the residential programs who worked extra shifts, long hours, and endless days to keep our clients supported and independent. We stayed the course and, to the credit of staff, our exposure to COVID for both staff and clients was minimal. We had a few dicey moments, but our excellent infection prevention and control measures (IPAC) and our personal protective equipment ensured the impact was minimal.

Diversity and Black Lives Matter became a daily, weekly and monthly topic as we worked to start the journey on understanding, talking and moving forward. Staff attended diversity training as did

the board of directors. Traverse made a commitment to consider diversity in all that we do and to keep the conversation going.

As well, a new model of service called "ABI in the Streets" was proposed to the mental health and addictions providers across our catchment area and was widely endorsed as a concept for the future. This service would pair our outreach staff with mental health and addictions staff, to offer the disenfranchised, vulnerable, and homeless populations in our community brain injury support. It is widely known that folks with mental health and addictions commonly have a brain injury as well, but it often goes undiagnosed due to the other underlying disabilities.

Several capital projects were undertaken and completed, such as the installation of sprinklers at our Stanley Ave. property and a fire-retardant range hood in our day program kitchen. Smaller improvements to properties were also undertaken to improve the enjoyment of the properties, such as the building of an outdoor gazebo and the improvement of our gardens,

where clients, staff, and families worked together to improve the landscaping. We are looking forward to a year full of "recovery, renewal and reconnections where things move back to some semblance of what we had prior to COVID, such as an opening of the day program, face to face visits with our outreach staff and a full staffing complement for our residential programs.

We would like to thank the employees from the staff who have kept the services flowing to the incredible schedulers, to those working a home to support our administrative processes.

The management team is to be commended, as this has been a stressful year full of unknowns and decision making without any precedent. They hit the ball out of the park time and time again and we have rounded many corners to stay afloat.

Finally, thank you to the families and caregivers who entrusted us to do the right thing and do the best we could to keep their loved ones safe. Now, we look forward to the future and to the next chapter.

Toby Harris
CEO

Message from the President of the Board

It has been a year of firsts that none of us could have possibly expected. The pandemic has called upon us all to learn new ways of working, supporting the people we serve and caring for our friends and families. As the board, we have been very impressed with the creativity, commitment and collaborative spirit demonstrated by the staff to the many challenges that we have had to face during this pandemic. On behalf of the board of directors, I want to thank you and celebrate all

your efforts to respond to the endless changes and challenges, while continuing to provide excellent support and care for the clients of Traverse.

The members of the board have been kept up to date on the work that has been done to keep you as staff and clients safe. We want to thank all the

Staff, the managers and senior leaders for their excellent work in responding to the issues brought on by the pandemic. In the midst of this public health crisis, Traverse has continued to provide quality and safe service and supports. I hope that you are proud of the work you have done; as a board we are certainly proud of all of you.

During this time, the board has continued the work of ensuring the mission of Traverse has been honoured and enhanced. As a board, we have worked hard over the past year to be engaged in the Ontario Health Team processes in KW4, Cambridge and North Dumfries, and Guelph Wellington. We have, along with the really hard work by our CEO Toby Harris, made sure that we are well represented in these three OHTs, ensuring that Traverse will be an active participant in the work of these new OHT processes.

I want to thank the ongoing and new members of the board for their excellent work in overseeing the work of Traverse. We have adapted to online meetings and continue to learn how to make those meetings engaging and effective.

In spite of the challenges of the last year, Traverse is in great shape as an organization and as an effective and important partner in the larger community. It is my honour to serve the organization and the board as the president. I am grateful to the board members for their commitment and support. I look forward to a bright future and the important contributions Traverse will make in service to our clients and in contributing to the health and wellness of the communities we work in.

With thanks and gratitude,

Stephen Gross

President, board of directors

ABI in the Streets

Traditionally, our typical service model creates an insurmountable barrier for those who are homeless or precariously housed to access brain injury services.

Due to their homelessness and serious intensive illness they are not able to show up for intake appointments, are often unattached from primary care, travel from area to area, do not have stability in housing and food sourcing, may actively use drugs and be challenged by mental health instability. As a result we designed a non-traditional program that starts with building a trusted relationship with a worker and then moves slowly towards a more formal assessment and

diagnosis. This will be accomplished by positioning brain injury specialized outreach staff alongside mental health and addictions outreach staff. Traverse staff will be housed in safe injection sites, ride along on the safe supply vans, spend days in the shelters, walk the streets with outreach nurses, and visit the encampments. As they connect with the clients and build a trusting relationship, they will gradually work to support the clients to access the brain injury services available, such as ABI specialized psychiatry for a review and diagnosis.

During the year, this model of service was proposed and endorsed by not only the Ministry of Health, but mental health and addictions providers and advocates. Unfortunately, due to COVID, the launch of the program was put on hold, but Traverse is poised to push forward as soon as the pandemic allows.

Resources:

Homeless Hub - Brain Injury Study

Global News - Half of Homeless People Have Experienced Traumatic Brain Injury

A Client's Journey through Intensive Case Coordination

The Intensive Case Coordination program (ICC) at Traverse is comprised of an ABI intensive case coordinator and an occupational therapist (OT). Mike, a young gentleman who had experienced a traumatic brain bleed of unknown origin over the summer, was referred to the ICC. He needed to be connected with community supports and resources during his recovery process. After a brief stay in hospital, he had been discharged and placed on a waiting list for outpatient rehabilitation. Upon discharge, he had moved home with his parents for additional supports during his recovery.

The intensive case coordinator worked with Mike to determine his needs for connection to community resources. He was offered information on how to apply to ODSP as he was unable to return to school or hold employment and needed an income. We gave him a list of available housing options to assist with making housing choices for the time he would be ready to move out on his own again.

The intensive case coordinator referred Mike to occupational therapy services for assistance with functional needs while he waited for further rehabilitation services. The OT assessment revealed that Mike had been a very physically active person, and he was struggling to determine the level of physical exertion that was safe during his recovery. He was also struggling with finding enough meaningful activities while home alone during the day. The OT worked with Mike

to develop a daily routine that balanced rest and activity to facilitate recovery, and to give him a sufficient variety of activities to prevent boredom. With the OT's encouragement, Mike picked up a

musical instrument he had been nervous to play since the injury and was successful in returning to simpler music as part of his rehabilitation. He also arranged for private physiotherapy at the encouragement of the OT, to return to safe levels of physical activity. The OT's virtual services also provided supportive counselling and education on ABI and recovery to assist Mike with adjusting to the changes he was experiencing because of his brain injury.

Mike was discharged from ICC supports once outpatient ABI services that included social work, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech language pathology were initiated. He remains on the waiting list for Outreach and Transitional Living services to assist with his ongoing recovery needs.

ABI Psychiatry Clinic

Traverse Independence was thrilled to develop one-time psychiatric assessments through the ABI Psychiatry Clinic during the year. This support is available to any client of Traverse Independence who has a diagnosis of an acquired brain injury.

Assessments are completed virtually with psychiatrist Dr. Alexandra Douglas. Dr. Douglas has many years of experience with the Homewood Health Sciences and CMHA First Psychosis Programs. She also has over 10 years of teaching experience in a variety of settings.

The virtual consultation includes a full and comprehensive psychiatric assessment with a detailed report. That report is then sent to the individual's primary care contact and may include medication suggestions along with a bio/psycho/social assessment that includes short- and long-term recommendations.

A New Home for Kenneth

Kenneth sustained an anoxic brain injury in 2018 at the age of 33, losing his ability to live independently. The availability for ABI housing is so limited that Kenneth was placed into a long-term care Facility here in Kitchener. Although he was doing well, he was surrounded by older clients and received no ABI supports. We welcomed Kenneth into our ABI Group Home on March 11th, his 36th birthday. He enjoys his independence, including assisting in meal prep and playing his guitar. He is very kind-hearted, and we are so lucky to have him as part of our program!

This picture shows Danny seated on the new garden bench that was donated by a local furniture company for the enjoyment of the Traverse Independence Group Home clients. The ABI Group Home is very well integrated into a lovely residential area of Kitchener and the clients and staff feel well respected by the surrounding neighbours. Most of the clients have lived in the Group Home for many years. Danny is the newest addition, and he is already fitting in perfectly. Sadly, in the past

year we have had to say goodbye to a long-time client who passed away after an illness. The Traverse board of directors is planning a memorial project to remember and play tribute to our deceased Group Home clients.

Administrative Advances

MS 365

When, at the start of 2020, we moved our administration and record keeping from our on-site server to the MS 365 cloud, we had no idea how visionary that decision would be until COVID-19 put our offices in lockdown, sent our administrative staff home with their laptops in hand, and remote working became a long-term reality.

MS 365 has been a godsend. It has allowed us easy access to all our records and documents, to communicate with our staff daily to keep them informed of all the new health and safety measures, to collaborate on projects, to chat, video chat or phone with each other on MS Teams, and so much more.

Since that first day we went home, March 17, 2020, our way of working in the MS cloud has changed and evolved substantially. We have finetuned our document libraries, familiarized ourselves with new ways of remote communication, and installed some very efficient automated work flows in various aspects of our organization. HR has been the focus of many process improvements, such as in the areas of performance reviews, records of absence, and recruitment.

Another area of focus has been accounts payable. Nancy Nowakowski, Traverse accounts payable administrator, has collaborated with our IT specialists for months to establish a new way of doing things in her area of expertise. Nancy's prime responsibility is to pay the invoices and ensure that all the related records are saved and accessible for future reference. Aside from adding all the payables into the Great Plains (GP) accounting program this mostly was a paper intensive process – until now.

Paper has all but disappeared from Nancy's office. The paperwork and manual approval signatures have been replaced by a new system of record keeping and automated on-line approval flow in MS 365. The accounting libraries that have been set up in 365 with the necessary lists of cost centres and meta-tags are still Nancy's responsibility to manage, and she is still in charge of the reconciliation of invoices to receipts and assigning costs to a multitude of cost centres, but managers are responsible for uploading receipts for their own purchases and for reporting deliveries.

This new accounting process is still in its infancy, and Nancy works with IT to tweak and improve it on a weekly basis. The new system allows for better record keeping, and better access to all the back-up information. It is also a perfect foundation for a successful audit. As for Nancy, she says

that some processes are better, others a bit more labour intensive, but she just loves that fact that there is no more paper filing to be done. Except, what on earth shall we do with that huge filing cabinet now?

Human Resources Update

This has certainly been a tough year from an HR point of view. On the bright side, the challenges have led to various improvements that will benefit us for years to come. One major challenge was filling in the gaps left by employee cohorting with one single employer, and those who – for a variety of other reasons relating to COVID-19 – could not come to work. Our team of scheduling specialists had their work cut out for them to fill in the empty shifts and to make sure that all sites were covered, and all clients received the support they needed. Credit is due as well to the staff who took on extra shifts and worked many more hours than they normally would to cover those vacant lines. A significant recruitment effort led to a boost in hiring numbers. In the past year, we have succeeded in bringing a total of 18 new employees on board, and in the process, we have achieved an amazing level of diversity in our workforce, giving us many different points of view in caring for a diverse group of clients.

Our employees have proven to be a tremendous team during these trying times, and we are very thankful for all their dedication, hard work, and collaboration with one another to keep themselves and our clients safe and COVID-free. In this Wordle, they have described in their own words which attributes came to mind when considering the team, they worked with most closely during 2020-2021.

Even though we could not celebrate in person, the Social Committee organized a virtual Employee Gala in the fall of 2020 and dedicated a special moment to congratulate all those employees who reached a milestone in their career with Traverse Independence.

When we asked our employees to describe their team over the past year, using just one word, these were the amazing superlatives they shared. Tired, for sure, after the year we have had. But hats off to our staff! They are truly spectacular, working together to achieve the best quality of services for our clients and caring for each other in the process. What a year indeed!

Milestone Celebrations

30 Years of Service

Tracey Brown
Brenda Schultz

20 Years of Service

Perry Curnew

10 Years of Service

Leah Swann

Adriana Francu

Marie Kennedy

Matthew Henderson

Rosalina Baluyot

5 Years of Service

Tyler Fahlenbock

Daniel Holisek

Amanda Watson (7)

Sua Ortiz-Yang

Ranjanbala Christian

Andrew Ziolkowski

Elena Arsenault

Alexandra Beggs

Resilience

When we asked our employees to describe their team over the past year, using just one word, these were the amazing superlatives they shared. Tires, for sure, after the year we have had. But hats off to our staff! They are truly spectacular, working together to achieve the best quality of services for our clients and caring for each other in the process. What a year indeed!

RESILIENT

ADAPTABLE

SUPPORTIVE

ACCOMMODATING

FLEXIBLE

TEAM PLAYERS

SEMBRACE

SPECTACULAR

FAMILY

PROFESSIONAL

TOGETHER

COMPLEMENTARY

RESOURCEFUL

RELENTLESS
SUPER
TIRED
FANTASTIC
CARING
STRONG
DEDICATED

Financial Statements

If you wish to obtain the financial statement summary from our annual report in an accessible format, please contact us at info@travind.ca.

Program Report

Traverse clients in Supportive Housing, the ABI Group Home, and ABI Transitional Living are offered support on a scheduled and check-in basis throughout the day.

During COVID-19, all day programs had to remain closed to prevent further spread of the virus. Staff of the ABI day programs set up a system of virtual check-ins with their Beginnings and Opportunity Centre clients to ensure their wellbeing and provide moral support during what has been a very lonely time for many. A Traverse food support program was instituted during the pandemic to provide much needed food hampers to Day Program clients in need.

Program Report

Traverse clients who live in the community receive weekly Outreach services a week from our Community Facilitators. Over the past year, most of these interactions between Outreach clients and their workers have been on a virtual basis, and there has been many a socially distanced “porch” visit when allowed by the Ontario guidelines, in an effort to keep our clients connected during the pandemic and to support their progress on their journey to independence after brain injury. Efficiencies achieved through the virtual program allowed for many more interactions with clients on a weekly basis. While fewer clients were served, they required more support due to the pandemic.