



Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies
serving infants, children and young parents - together

l'Association Ontarienne des Agences pour Jeunes Parents
servir nourrissons, enfants et jeunes parents - ensemble

MAY 2025

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Children's Mental Health Week



As we mark Children's Mental Health Week (CMHW), May 2 – 7, and National Child and Youth Mental Health Day on May 7, we want to take a moment to highlight the principle that guides our work every day: mental health is essential at every age and every family deserves support, especially our young parents and their children.

OAYPA's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan is centered on building a comprehensive system of prevention, early intervention, and treatment services. This Strategic Plan guides our priorities and positions us to advocate and work effectively with government and continue to lead change to ensure timely, equitable care, early identification and support for young parents and their infants/children at risk of poor mental health outcomes in Ontario.

This year's theme *Voices Unheard, Stories Told: Centering the Diversity of Ontario's Infants, Children & Youth* recognizes that many children, youth and families continue to face disproportionate barriers

when accessing mental health care. As we know, our young parents are navigating parenthood while still growing into adulthood themselves. They face unique pressures from school and parenting demands to financial stress and social stigma, all while doing their best to provide a loving, stable environment for their children. This week, we reaffirm our commitment to supporting young families by ensuring they have access to the tools, resources, and compassionate care they need to thrive. Through our Ujima Project funding, OAYPA is covering registration fees, travel, and hotel costs for staff from 15 agencies to attend the *Expanding Horizons* Conference, presented by Infant and Early Mental Health Promotion (IEMHP) at The Hospital for Sick Children. As Canada's only national event dedicated to advancing the science and practice of infant and early mental health, this conference offers an exceptional professional development opportunity for staff working in this critical area. By investing in young families, we're not only improving mental health outcomes — we're strengthening communities and creating brighter futures for all.

Find more information and resources to help promote CMHW at [Children's Mental Health Ontario \(CMHO\)](#).

Young Parent Perspectives

Policy Webinar Recap

At OAYPA, we believe young parents are not only the heart of our work—but powerful storytellers, leaders, and change-makers. In this month, we're honoured to share a personal reflection written by Nim K, one of the two young parents who participated in OAYPA's policy brief webinar and shared their journey through early parenthood, the challenges they've overcome, and the support that helped them thrive. Their voice reminds us why youth-led stories matter—and how much we all can learn when we listen.

Building Strong Foundations By: Nim K

On April 3rd, 2025, the Ontario Association of Young Parent Agencies (OAYPA) held a webinar with over 100 registrants and attended by over 70 participants from various sectors. The webinar was called: [Building Strong Foundations: Recommendations from Wilfred Laurier University Policy Brief](#). The purpose of the webinar was to present the key findings of the research conducted by Wilfred Laurier University (WLU). In particular, it highlights the challenges faced by young families in Ontario. The webinar included presenters and experts in no particular order included Ekua Asabea Blair (President, OAYPA; President & CEO, Abiona Centre For Infant & Early Mental Health), Alexandra Burman (Researcher, WLU), Hannah Denberg (Researcher, WLU), Jane Kenny (Vice President, OAYPA; Executive Director, Rosalie Hall), Tamar Meyer, Co-Director, OAYPA), Dr. Melody Morton Ninomiya (Researcher, WLU), Promise U Now (Researcher and Young Parent), AND Gillian Thompson (Nurse Practitioner, Young Families Program, SickKids), and myself.



(L-R: Tamar Meyer, Nim K, Promise U Now, Ekua Asabea Blair)

As a single parent to a four-year-old, I can say that affordability is definitely at the top of my list of hardships. Accessing stable housing, stable food security, and paying the bills are the daily stresses. But what I think adds to all the pressures of survival is the mental health of my child and myself.

An article published in December 2024 by Statistics Canada called: [“Despite progress, one-parent families headed by mothers continue to face labor market affordability challenges”](#) says that “Affordability continues to be a top concern for households. In spring 2024, more than half (55%) of multiple-person households with children reported that their ability to meet day-to-day expenses is greatly affected by rising prices. This was higher than those with no children (42%) and those with one person living alone (37%).

Promise U Now, a young parent, mother of three, and an advocate for young parents and marginalized youth was my co-panelist. She has a Master’s in Child and Youth Care and has dedicated her research to understanding the experiences of young Black mothers involved in Ontario’s child welfare system. Currently, she works as a Mentorship Coordinator at a youth shelter in Toronto.

While reflecting on the recommendations at the webinar on the policy, Promise said “It took me back to a time when I entered motherhood as a young parent and I was experiencing homelessness. So the fact that I had to navigate the beginnings of my pregnancy without any stability or stable housing brought on a lot of stress. It affected my relationships with my family.”

As a young mother accessing services through one of OAYPA’s member agencies, I can say that without a doubt mental health is a big issue. A fact in Ontario according to an article published by McMaster University in 2020 called [“Mental health four times higher in young mothers”](#) states that almost 40 % of young mothers have more than one mental health issue.

In a follow-up interview conducted with Ekua Asabea Blair, she explained after Covid-19, people were talking more about mental health in a very open, and less stigmatizing way because often people are so worried about the social determinants of health such as clothing, housing, and food.

“I’m seeing that even in our organization the uptake on mental health counseling has increased I would say a hundredfold. We used to struggle to get women to meet with counselors and now they want it.

Young parents are asking for mental health services and I'm excited about it!" said Ekua.

Ekua has been working at Abiona Centre for 16 years and serving as President of OAYPA for the last 3-4 years. Ekua is a single mother by choice of an adopted child whom she later discovered that the birth mother was a previous young mother at Abiona Centre. Ekua attributes her career path to her mother's influence, who worked as a nurse and was dedicated to community building. Ekua explains that this value of giving back was inherently passed down to her, aligned with the Kwanzaa principles of Kuumba.

Looking into the future, Ekua outlines her vision for expanding young parent services across Ontario. She emphasizes the need for adequate funding for all 22 member organizations and advocates for establishing centers in underserved areas like Thunder Bay and Sudbury. She also highlights the critical need for permanent housing solutions for young parents in Toronto.

Regarding her own organization's work, Ekua emphasizes the importance of supporting young mothers and their children. She discusses how Abiona Center focuses on facilitating growth and development for both mother and child, particularly through attachment and bonding programs.

"We need to respect the expertise of the young moms that we serve and create that space for them to speak. And we need to listen so that we can respond to those issues," said Ekua.

"As a researcher one of the things we aim to do is capture lived experiences from the participants that we are trying to support. Making changes to the funding, policies, and all those things allows for young parents' voices to be included, and they can feel like they are being supported, and that can help them with their parenting, confidence, self-esteem, relationships with their children," said Promise U Now.

Jane Kenny, Vice President of OAYPA and Executive Director of Rosalie Hall which is a young parent/infant-focused mental health organization in East Toronto. Jane has a Master's degree in Nursing Science and has over 30 years of experience working in the health care and social service sector addressing women's and children's needs including stigma and mental health.

"I think it is a deep desire within all our members to be responsive to the needs of young parents to be able to offer those services what you need when you need it. I think the recommendations pinpoint what we see every day in finding trained and experienced staff. Making sure we can pay staff enough to live in the city directly and to be competitive with health and education. To make sure we have resources and funding to pursue new areas. To make sure the young parent and child have the resources to make the life that is most meaningful to them" said Jane Kenny.

I am the co-chair of the Young Parents Advisory Committee at Abiona Centre, a group of young mothers dedicated to helping shape the services in a more equitable, non-stigmatizing way with a transformative effect. Lived experiences are a beneficial way to provide reviews on what worked, and what could be improved. Reflecting on the webinar, I am very thankful and happy that there is a team of people I don't know very well who cares. That is what made this webinar so special to me. I feel like if we can help even one mother, father, parent, child feel like they belong, and someone cares about them, that small spark of hope can lead to an invaluable contribution to the future of our society.

Free Training

Fully Funded ASQ/DSP Training

Through funding from the Ujima Project, we are pleased to offer free training through IEMHP for **Ages and Stages Questionnaire and Developmental Support Plans** to OAYPA member staff (\$600 value/staff) in 2025/26. A Toronto-based in person training will be held on take place on June 17, 18th and a virtual training is being finalized. Please contact Bev (bmackillop@Abionacentre.ca) to be added to the list.

Fully Funded SafeGuards Training

As part of your membership benefits, OAYPA is thrilled to offer free Trauma-Informed Supervision training through Safeguards, available to one member per agency. This training is designed specifically for supervisors from our sector. This virtual training will take place over two, 3-hour sessions; Wednesday June 4th (9:30 am – 12:30 pm) and Friday June 6th (9:30 am – 12:30 pm). Please send the name of the person from your agency, their position and their email address to Bev (bmackillop@Abionacentre.ca) by **Monday May 5, 2025**.

In the News

Effective October 1, 2025, [Ontario's minimum wage](#) will rise from \$17.20 to \$17.60 per hour, based on a 2.4 % increase tied to the Ontario Consumer Price Index. This change will give full-time minimum wage workers an annual boost of up to \$835 and position Ontario's rate as the second highest among Canadian provinces. However, according to the [Ontario Living Wage formula](#), this new increase still misses the mark when considering what is required to afford basic needs in a community.

Resources

Mental Health Research Canada



[A Generation at Risk: The State of Youth Mental Health in Canada](#), is the first comprehensive and collaborative national report of its kind to be released in at least five years. Created in partnership with Bell Let's Talk and several mental health organizations, this report provides an unprecedented look into the state of youth mental health across Canada. It combines data from national polling, interviews with Canadian youth, and input from key mental health providers to deliver a clear and actionable picture to improve youth mental health.

Youth Mental Health Data Hub

Developed in partnership between Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) and GreenShield, the [Youth Mental Health Data Hub](#) aims to bring together reliable information from across the country and make it available in one place. The Hub features an interactive data dashboard that can be used to explore key trends in mental health indicators, critical gaps, and barriers to support for young Canadians.

Community Living Ontario

Community Living Ontario is a non-profit provincial association that has been advocating for people who have an intellectual disability and their families for **70+ years**. They proudly work alongside **124 local agencies** and advocate with **250,000+ people** who have intellectual disabilities and their families across Ontario. There are often many questions from our young parents about the special education programs for their children. In Ontario, there are specific laws, regulations, policies, and resources that affect students with a disability and neurodiverse students. Community Living Ontario, in collaboration with PooranLaw developed a guidebook; [Strategies for Success: Navigating Special Education in Ontario: A Guide for Students, Parents and Caregivers](#). This guide is intended to provide information for parents, caregivers, and community organizations. They examine the key legislation and policies that govern schools and school boards, the different roles and responsibilities within the education system, human rights considerations, and the right to be in school.

FUNDRAISING/ GRANTS

Resource Sharing

As part of our Strategic Plan Actions, we've created a shared folder where we will place grant proposals and best practices to support our member agencies. You're invited to explore the folder [here](#). It is our hope that this will become a valuable resource where you can find inspiration and language to help strengthen your own grant applications.

The following grants may be of interest to you.

| GRANTING INSTITUTION | NAME OF GRANT | DATES |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Ontario Trillium Foundation | Grow Grant | October 8 - November 5, 2025 |
| Ontario Trillium Foundation | Seed Grant | July 23 - August 20, 2025 |
| Ontario Trillium Foundation | Youth Opportunities Grant | July 9, 2025 |

Significant Dates

- May 5, 2025 [National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women](#); Red Dress Day
- May 5-11 [Mental Health Week](#)
- May 7, 2025 [National Child and Youth Mental Health Day](#)
- May 11, 2025 Mother's Day
- May 15, 2025 [International Day of Families](#)
- May 14, 2025 [Ontario Child and Youth in Care Day](#)
- May 29, 2025 Member Meeting (Virtual, 1:00 – 3:30pm)

Professional Development

National Grand Rounds – Special Edition: Clinical Guidance for Healthy Screen Use in Children and Youth May 15, 2025 3:00 pm

This special edition of National Grand Rounds is open to all. [Click here to register.](#)

Ce webinaire sera également présenté en français par Stacey Bélanger, MD à 12h. [Cliquez ici pour vous inscrire](#)

Presenter: Dr. Michelle Ponti

At the end of this webinar, participants will be able to:

- Determine the physical, mental and developmental risks and potential benefits of digital screen media for children and adolescents.
- Review the Canadian guidelines on screen time and use for children 0-18.
- Recognize the different impacts of social media and gaming on youth.

Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN)

Ontario Nonprofit Network is the independent network for Ontario's 58,000 nonprofit organizations. They engage with members to address issues and to ensure the voices of our communities reach governments, funders, and other stakeholders.

May 15, 2025 4:00 – 6:00 pm (\$25.57); **An Introduction to Nonprofit Governance:** This session will cover the roles, duties, and responsibilities of members, directors, and officers. Register [here](#).

Charity Village

June 12, 2025 1:00pm (Free); **Permission to Lead Differently: A New Model for Nonprofit Women Leaders**; Based on Kathy Archer’s book *Character Driven Leadership for Women*, this session will help you lead with confidence, clarity, and purpose by reconnecting with who you really are. Register [here](#).

ICD-RBC Foundation Scholarship

The goal of this scholarship to help underrepresented organizations to elevate their governance oversight. Executive Directors or board directors can apply. This needs-based financial assistance will provide the opportunity to attend the [ICD-Rotman Governance Essentials Program](#) (GEP). GEP is an intensive two-day, instructor-led, online program focused on the key accountabilities, responsibilities and critical skills of board directors. Developed with the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, the GEP equips participants with the fundamentals of board governance through team-based learning, enhancing their contributions to board discussions and boosting their effectiveness as directors. Scholarships for the 2025 academic year are now available, with preference given to equity-seeking organizations that serve the underrepresented. Please visit [Apply Online](#) for current offerings.

SickKids Education Sessions

Below are the confirmed dates and topics for the 2024-2025 academic year. **Registration links and session details will be added as they become available.**

| <u>TOPIC</u> | <u>PRESENTER</u> | <u>DATE</u> | <u>TIME</u> |
|---|--|------------------|----------------------|
| Life Pathways and Building Community Part 3 Register Here | Dr. Deb Denard | May 13, 2025 | 1:00 – 2:30pm EST |
| Substance Use and Concurrent Disorders: Clinical Pearls for the Child and Youth Clinician Register Here | Dr. Tea Rosic | May 27, 2025 | 1:00 – 2:30pm EST |
| Creating Safer Spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ Clients and Families | Cathy Maser, NP | Jun 10, 2025 | 1:00 – 2:30pm EST |
| Dissociation | Dr. Upasana Krishnadev and Janine Lawford | June 24, 2025 | 1:00 – 2:30pm EST |

SafeGuards Training

SafeGuards is a partnership of provincial associations dedicated to providing culturally informed training on trauma informed practice, trauma assessment and treatment and related effects of trauma. OAYYPA is an Association Member of SafeGuards with two of our members on the Board of Directors; Pete Embleton (Youville Centre) and Tamar Meyer (Abiona Centre).

Staff of agencies who are members of OAYPA receive the Members Fee which is 12-23% off on SafeGuards training's fees. Save an additional 20% off individual member fee with group registration of 4 or more participants. Download the group registration form [here](#). For more information and to browse their list of courses, click [here](#). ***The following May/June courses may be of interest to you.***

| <u>TOPIC</u> | <u>PRESENTER</u> | <u>DATE(S)</u> | <u>TIME</u> |
|--|--|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Regulation, Relationships, and Resilience: How to Support Students Affected by Trauma Access this Free Webinar Here | Anne Martin, BA, MA | Recorded Webinar | NA |
| Compassionate Leadership: Fostering Self-Care and Well-Being in Staff Teams and Organizations Learn more and register here | Joanne Barnes Smith, MSW, RSW | May 6, 2025 | 1:00 – 4:00pm ET |
| In Between the Missing and Murdered: The need for Indigenous Led Responses to Human Trafficking Learn more and register here | Cyndy Baskin, Ph.D. | May 7 & 8, 2025 | 1:00 – 4:00pm ET |
| Confronting Suicidal Ideation and High-Risk Behaviour Learn more and register here | Elizabeth Scarlett, RP, CFRC (Certified First Responder Counselor) | May 13 & 14, 2025 | 1:00 – 3:00pm ET |
| Embrace Trauma-Informed Care with Children and Youth Learn more and register here | Colleen Kamps, MA, CYC (Registered Psychotherapist) | May 14 & 15, 2025 | 1:00 – 4:00pm ET |
| Introduction to Motivational Interviewing Learn more and register here | Marie Delorme, M.Ed., RSW, Certified Motivational Interviewing Trainer | May 21, 22, 28 & 29, 2025 | 12:30 – 4:00 pm ET |
| Advanced Skills for Brief Therapy Practitioners: Managing Complex and High-Risk Issues Learn more and register here | Alesya Courtnage, MA, RP, CCC | June 9,10,16 & 17, 2025 | 1:00 – 4:00pm ET |

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