



2020-2021 Annual Report

Contents

3. About ALSO
4. Our Board of Directors
5. A Year in Review
6. Success Stories
8. From the Board President
9. Financial Report



Our Employment Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills Programs are funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario and through the Canada – Ontario Job Fund Agreement.

The Children’s Program is funded by the City of Ottawa.

About ALSO

ALSO has been serving the Ottawa community since 1981. We are a safe and caring community learning center providing opportunities for both adults and families. We support the development of the skills needed for employment, future education or training, increased civic engagement and family life. ALSO students want to get a job, keep a job, finish high school, access training and/or participate more fully in their community.

The ALSO staff is a dedicated team of individuals. Their collective and individual contributions to the success of the students and families is greatly valued. We are always impressed by the level of caring and willingness to go the extra mile in order to serve our adults and families well. As in previous years, our volunteer Board of Directors gives generously of their time and expertise. We welcomed Pavithra Raja to the Board this year. She is a wonderful addition and has contributed greatly to policy development in the areas of IT and diversity and equity. Building on last year, the Board invested time and funds into working with Lois Graveline from Harmonia to continue our work on ALSO's donation strategy. We have made great strides towards our goals and are committed to continuing to elevate ALSO's profile with our donors and the community. We are fortunate to have the ongoing support of our Board. We thank them for their commitment.

This year we made the very difficult decision to close our social enterprise, EAT MORE SOUP! in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic. ALSO Board and staff went above and beyond during the pandemic allowing us to pivot and work remotely. We worked closely with both the City of Ottawa and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development to ensure continuity of programming and funding.

ALSO volunteers contribute significantly to the success of our program. We are very fortunate to receive support from the sign language interpreters at the Sign Language Interpreters Association of Ottawa. Cheryl Stephen has volunteered with ALSO for over 10 years. We are very grateful that she continues to share her knowledge, creativity and expertise with us. A huge thank you goes out to Shirley Trott, who continues to support our program. Thank you to all of our donors and contributors.

Our Board of Directors

Kevin Scully
Board President

Robert Mawako
Treasurer

Lynn Asselin
Member at Large

Laura Hillier
Member at Large

Pavithra Raja
Member at Large
(joined mid year)

Tim Klodt
Member at Large

Kim Oastler
Secretary/Executive Director

A Year in Review

During the 2020-2021 year we were actively engaged with our community through participation with the Local Employment Planning Council, the Rideau Valley Learning Network, the Deaf Literacy Initiative and the Heartwood House Collaboration Project Planning Committee.

We continue to build on our relationship with the Continuing Education Department of the Ottawa District School Board, allowing us to offer PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment Review) and high school credit study for students who cannot access the mainstream adult high school classroom. We continue to meet the expectations of our core funder, the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD). During this year we were able to successfully pivot and work remotely due to Covid-19. Teachers used a variety of on-line platforms, emails, phone calls and Canada Post to stay connected to ALSO students. We were among a small group of programs that met all funder targets for 2020-2021.

We are fortunate to have ongoing funding from the City of Ottawa for our Children's Program. Without the City's support we would not be able to offer our program to the families at Heartwood House. We worked with 3 placement students: Lily Toutounji – Carleton University – Psychology, Erika Zimperl – Northern College – Social Service Work, and Amy Frasier – Algonquin College – Social Service Work. It was a pleasure to have each of them in our program. Working closely with City staff this year allowed us to convey how we were continuing to support the families we serve, even though the program was closed. Program staff sent emails, made phone calls and mailed resources to families in an effort to provide support and stay connected.

We are grateful to the Ottawa Community Foundation and the Crabtree Foundation for funding the revision and relaunch of the ASL RAPP website in our next fiscal year. Having the funding to make the changes needed and relaunch this incredible resource for families with Deaf children was definitely a highlight.

We made the very difficult decision to close our social enterprise, EAT MORE SOUP!. Because of the pandemic, all current and prospective contracts were put on indefinite hold, we could not work in-person with any program participants and financially, without incoming revenue, we could not sustain the initiative.

Highlights:

The ALSO staff and Board are really the stars of the show this year. ALSO came through a very challenging time, meeting funder targets and successfully supporting the adults and families we serve.

- The Children's Program served 26 families with a total of 36 children.
- ALSO's Adult Upgrading Program served 79 adults.
- ALSO's Deaf Adult Upgrading Program served 26 adults.
- Funding was secured for the ASL RAPP website revision and relaunch in 2021-2022.

Success Stories

Children's Program

Due to closures during the Covid-19 pandemic, we didn't have our usual number of children participating, in-person, in our program - but we still managed to help all of our families educate children at home and prepare them for school. For our remote learners, we prepared worksheets that help develop language, cognitive and fine motor skills. We encouraged outdoor play and strategies for gross motor skills and social development. The same strategies were used for our in-person learners with a few more hands-on activities and a lot of outdoor play. The children also enjoyed our special activity of making bird feeders and bird houses.

- **Amy**, our placement student from Algonquin College, writes; "As an SSW student at Algonquin College, my program required students to attend a field placement. It was this past winter that I gratefully found myself at ALSO for my studies. My time spent in the children's centre gave me the opportunity to further explore one of my preferred career fields. Not only this, but ALSO granted me irreplaceable experiences and thorough teachings about ECE. I want to thank Farzana and Mina, as they both played a huge role in my newly equipped confidence towards ECE."

- **Erika**, our placement student from Northern College, writes; "I was fortunate enough to be able to complete my placement at ALSO. Going into a placement is very intimidating and scary, but right away Mina made me feel very at ease and welcome. I went into ALSO having very little experience working with children, but as my placement went on, I began to fall in love with it. Mina and Farzana made me feel like I fit right in and I loved being around every single child that came in! This placement had such a positive impact on me and made me realize that if I just be myself, then I will succeed. I woke up every morning excited to go and see the kids. This placement gave me the hands-on experience that I was looking for, and taught me new things about myself. I am so grateful that I kept an open mind, and I will forever be grateful to ALSO for giving me this experience and helping me grow, not only as a social worker, but as a person."

Adult and Deaf Adult Upgrading Programs

ALSO teachers and students continued to adapt this past year to the changing conditions brought on by the pandemic. ALSO began a hybrid model which saw many students choosing online schoolwork, and a smaller number of students choosing in-person learning. Online students chose to work through video-conferencing tools (such as Zoom) or chose to work independently and communicate with their teacher by phone and email. This change allowed for flexibility and ease for students, many of whom were trying to navigate schoolwork while managing demanding work schedules or caring for children during extensive shutdowns. In addition to direct instruction, teachers also provided students with mental

health supports, help with applying for CERB, and other pandemic related issues. However, after a very challenging year, students were able to persevere through these difficult changes, and in fact, a record number of students were able to graduate from high school.

Despite the many challenges of the pandemic, there were many student successes.

- **Williams:** He started with ALSO just before the pandemic and was working in the cafeteria at Carleton University. When the first shutdown began, Williams lost his employment, but through support from his teacher was able to access CERB. Williams had renewed energy to complete his high school and find employment in food services or as a chef. Williams worked hard, and with support from his teacher was able to earn equivalent maturity credits through the school board for his education from Nigeria, and completed his four remaining high school credits, including grade 12 college level English. Several weeks after completion, Williams's teacher was his reference for a successful job application with the Ottawa Hospital cafeteria, and shortly after that Williams celebrated the birth of his second daughter.
- **Stephen:** Stephen moved from the Philippines, and came to ALSO to improve his English because he wants to go to college/university to get a degree. He is also learning ASL because his sign language is from the Philippines. Now he is taking advanced English at George Brown College, and will take courses at University in the future. He works at Amazon part time.
- **Ramez:** Ramez moved from Syria and didn't know English or ASL. He attends ALSO's virtual classroom and is learning English and ASL. He feels he benefits from ALSO because he learns lots, and is motivated to learn more. He now works at FreshCo Grocery part time.
- **Emmanuelle:** A long-time student finally ended her time at ALSO. Emmanuelle started at the old Chapel St. location and we have had many successes and disappointments throughout the decade she was here. Some highlights of her work here at ALSO include studying and passing the Canadian citizen exam, much correspondence with the American immigration system and the US Embassy, obtaining employment and the 'cherry on top' – becoming a Canadian high school graduate. But the real highlight was always Emmanuelle's presence in the ALSO classroom and her constant smile and laugh, accompanied by a different hairstyle/hairpiece every week. She is currently using her loving nature and working with CAS to be a foster parent to the newborn of a relative who needs support.
- **Harmony:** Harmony was probably one of our first 'virtual' students due to her remote location west of Ottawa. She was working remotely well before the pandemic struck, so she was one of the few students who carried on seamlessly when everything turned upside down in March 2020. Harmony had dreams of starting her own business and had plans to attend college. But first was the issue of completing High School and that's where ALSO came in. Harmony arrived in Ontario from Nova Scotia and had struggled with school in the past. After a few stop-start moments early on, she began to build her confidence and her work began to gradually improve to a point where she was excelling when it came to her final graduating course – Grade 12 College English.

From the Board President

It's safe to say that the year 2020-2021 was one of the more challenging years ALSO has had to face. I am grateful that we were able to meet the challenge so effectively. I believe that the stability and steadiness that ALSO worked so hard to establish gave us the solid foundation we needed. And so we made it through the year, learned some lessons and, in my view, grew stronger than we had been.

The ALSO Board started work on implementing the recommendations of the consulting firms we had hired to look at new directions for the ASL RAPP Program and our fundraising strategy. Early results from our fundraising efforts are very promising. The revamped ASL RAPP is being launched as I write this, and should be fully implemented by the end of this month. Other work included the impressive new ALSO website - clean, pleasing to the eye and easy to navigate.

The Board spent quite a bit of time on staff matters. We are acutely aware that budget constraints have meant staff wages have been relatively stagnant in recent years. We are reaching out to our funders and are asking for some cost-of-living flexibility on their part. The ALSO Board has recently implemented a staff pension plan (defined benefit), and enhanced leave provisions, two items over which we have more control.

The great heartache of the past year was the need to end the Eat More Soup! Program. It was in the 5th year of a 5-year development plan. Unfortunately, our funders for the development period were unable to renew funding for the final year. Without that funding ALSO was unable to continue the program, and some hard decisions were needed.

ALSO ended the year somewhat battle-scarred, but stronger and wiser. Thank you to the ALSO Board, our outstanding staff, volunteers, and especially our amazing learners!

Kevin Scully,
Board President, ALSO

Financial Report

2020 was a highly unusual year with the rest of the world having to navigate through uncertain times, like we've all had to. From obvious decisions such as establishing simple work-from-home policies to more complex financial alternatives, the Board was kept on its feet to ensure the continued viability of ALSO. From a financial perspective, the main highlights included the difficult decision to terminate the Eat More Soup! (EMS) Program. Given the challenges that we had both faced and successfully overcome in establishing this program, and the fact that EMS was instrumental in fulfilling our mandate by helping transition 14 participants into full time employment, we weighed all possible alternatives before reaching the difficult conclusion that it was in our best interests to terminate the program, which had virtually come to a standstill due to COVID restrictions.

Financial investments in the Karma Dharma ASL RAPP strategy and the Harmonia Donation strategy have both proved to be good investments, as was seen with a 63% increase in Donation funds and the obtaining of valuable information for a final Board decision on ASL RAPP. Stand out changes from a quick browse of the year-end financial statements include a huge decrease in Foundations Revenue, the decrease in EMS revenue, and the addition of new line items to cater for the government's COVID wage subsidy and CEBA assistance programs. The decrease in EMS revenue has already been explained, but tied to its closure is that it affected our Foundations revenue as we had to return a portion of what was initially allotted for the now defunct program.

Special mention goes to our Executive Director whose Grant writing skills and knowledge of funding initiatives have ensured that ALSO continually makes use of all available alternatives, in pushing forward our vision. Although revenues were significantly lower due to COVID and the above-mentioned factors, she ensured that our savings in expenditures far exceeded the decreased revenue, allowing ALSO to close the year with a surplus.

Key financial indicators are continually being monitored with the agreed reserve balance well above the threshold \$85K. A significant portion of our funding is contingent on achieving required performance indicators. Meeting all accountabilities is therefore critical, and a testament to the contributions of especially our staff. From a key financial indicators standpoint, I'm glad to say that we continue to both meet and exceed expectations.

Robert Mowako
Treasurer, ALSO