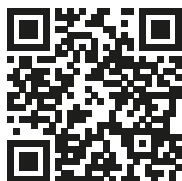


2025 COMMUNITY REPORT



empowermentsquared.org

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WHO WE ARE

Empowerment Squared is a Canadian charitable organization dedicated to expanding access to education, mentorship, and opportunity. Our mission focuses on addressing barriers faced by marginalized communities, and our work is driven by its roots in our partnership with newcomers, youth, and families building their futures on their own terms. Grounded in the values of UBUNTU, "I am because WE are", our committed team supports our growing community through pathways shaped by connection, dignity, and shared success.

WHAT WE DO

Empowerment Squared breaks barriers and fosters sustainable change for marginalized families and communities. Across education, sports and recreation, entrepreneurship, thought leadership, and culturally-relevant supports, our programs are designed to meet people where they are and grow with them. From leadership development locally to international initiatives like the Liberian Learning Center and the International Youth Internship Program, through to partnerships that connect us globally, like Hamilton's first Sister City Relationship with Paynesville in Liberia,



our focus is on what people can build, contribute, and carry forward. Through strong partnerships and a willingness to innovate, we help create pathways for our participants and work with them to turn that access into pathways for success and lasting impact.



2025 REFLECTION FROM THE CHIEF EMPOWERMENT OFFICER

There is a quiet but powerful truth that continues to shape the work of Empowerment Squared: communities are not empty spaces waiting to be rescued. They are places of knowledge, resilience, culture, leadership, and possibility. At Empowerment Squared, we believe community development is about removing barriers, restoring dignity, creating access, and investing in leadership that already exist within communities.

In 2025, more than 1,300 participants engaged in programs and events across Canada, while thousands more benefited through our international initiatives in Liberia and Ghana. Together with our staff, volunteers, partners, donors, and participants, we continued building ecosystems of belonging where people are not treated as passive recipients of services, but as co-creators of solutions. We witnessed newcomer youth grow in confidence in classrooms, on basketball courts, in leadership circles, and through post-secondary pathways. We saw families navigating unfamiliar systems rediscover their voice and agency. We saw young entrepreneurs in Liberia turn informal hustle into structured opportunity through the “Harnessing Opportunities to Promote Entrepreneurship” (H.O.P.E) Program.

We saw students receive scholarships, mentorship, and affirmation through the Transformation Fund. And through the Liberian Learning Center, we saw children access not only books or computers, but many for the first time experienced what it feels like to be seen, valued, and inspired.

We also continue learning that sustainable change cannot happen through isolated programs alone. Real transformation requires systems-level innovation rooted in trust, reciprocity, and shared ownership. This is reflected in initiatives like McMaster University’s credited community engagement course based on Empowerment Squared’s model that moves beyond charity toward mutual learning and collective impact.

To our participants, families, staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters: thank you for believing in long-term transformation and walking alongside us in this journey. In a world facing growing inequality, polarization, and social fragmentation, we remain hopeful because we continue to witness resilience and innovation emerging directly from communities themselves. We believe another world is possible, one where dignity is not conditional, opportunity is not reserved for a few, and every young person has the chance not only to survive, but to thrive. This is what UBUNTU looks like!

~Leo Nupolu Johnson

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

On behalf of the Empowerment Squared Board of Directors, it is a profound honor to present the 2025 Community Report. This year has been a powerful reminder of what becomes possible when people unite around a shared purpose. The dedication of our staff, volunteers, partners, and community members continues to move our mission and vision forward with unwavering commitment.

Reflecting on 2025, I am inspired by the strength and determination of the communities we serve in both Canada and Liberia. The Liberian Learning center continues to have a transformative impact for the people of Liberia with exponential growth in programs and activities being delivered within one year of its opening and operations. What began as a bold vision has grown into a thriving hub of curiosity, creativity, and opportunity, proof of the deep desire for knowledge and the collective spirit that defines Liberia. The Center's evolution stands as a living example of what hope, partnership, and perseverance can build.

Here in Hamilton, our work and impact have continued to expand and deepen in meaningful ways. Our Educational programs are reaching more learners than ever. The Babb Ubuntu Athletic Centre is increasing access to recreation and sporting activities. With our Professional Skills and Entre-



preneurship program, we are supporting innovators, entrepreneurs and business leaders across Hamilton and Southwestern Ontario. The System Navigation program reflects our efforts to guide youth and families toward post-secondary pathways which remains a cornerstone of our commitment to empowerment. We continue to expand our international collaborative efforts with the International Youth Internship program in Ghana and Liberia.

None of this progress would be possible without the generosity and belief of our supporters, donors, staff, and volunteers. To the community, thank you for trust.

~Trevor Jaundoo



**EMPOWERMENT
SQUARED**



2025 IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS - CANADA

772

2025 Program
Participants

439

2025 Event
Attendees

42

Programs
Offered

6

Events
Hosted

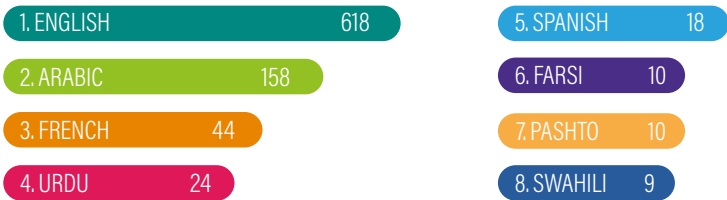
107

Participants registered in 2
or more programs

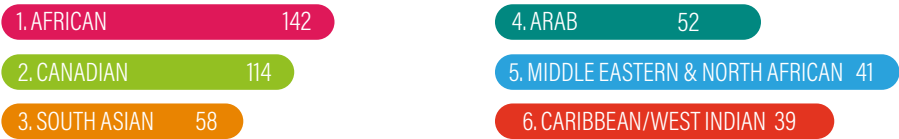
2000+

Community members accessed the BABB
Ubuntu Centre outside of our programs

Most Frequent Languages Spoken by Participants as a Primary or Secondary Language



Most Common Cultural Backgrounds of Program Participants





2025 IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS - INTERNATIONAL

221

2025 Program
Participants

7

Programs
Offered

13,499

Community members who accessed the Liberian
Learning Center outside of our programs

19

Volunteers Participated

29,232

Hours contributed by volunteers at
the Liberian Learning Center

Employment of Program Participants

STUDENT

53.44%

EMPLOYED (FULL TIME)

21.10%

SELF-EMPLOYED

14.68%

UNEMPLOYED

6.42%

EMPLOYED PART-TIME

4.36%



*"I left this internship with new transferable skill sets while refining existing ones, learning how to thrive in an unfamiliar environment, how to collaborate with coworkers on foreign soil you've never met before, and how to immerse yourself in a society you have no prior connection to
International Youth Internship Program (IYIP) Participant, 2025*

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

Empowerment Squared’s Board of Directors and management remain committed to strong governance, responsible stewardship, and long-term sustainability in support of our mission and community impact. Through careful financial planning and strategic investments, the organization continues to strengthen programs and services while maintaining a balanced and resilient financial position.

A BALANCED BUDGET AND GROWING IMPACT

In 2025, Empowerment Squared continued its strong trajectory of growth while maintaining a balanced and sustainable financial position. Total revenues for the 2025 calendar fiscal year were approximately \$3.0 million, reflecting the organization’s continued operational strength and

ability to sustain impactful programming and community services. While revenue remained stable compared to the previous year, Empowerment Squared continued to expand its long-term capacity and infrastructure to support future growth and community impact.

\$6M+

Total Assets

Up from \$64,000
in 2015

\$3M

Consistent Revenues

Up from \$50,000
in 2015

STRATEGIC

Investments

Into programs, staffing,
infrastructure, and
community services

SUSTAINABLE

Growth

Liabilities increased proportionally
with expansion initiatives
and strategic investments

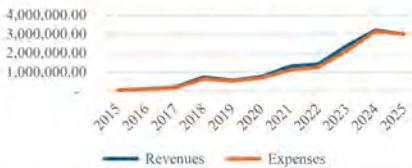
ASSETS & LIABILITIES (2015–2025)

Assets & Liabilities



REVENUES & EXPENSES (2015–2025)

Revenues & Expenses



TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND TRUST

Our financial statements are independently audited by Vine and Partners LLP. Financial information is also publicly available through the Canada Revenue Agency’s charitable reporting database, reinforcing our commitment to transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship.



Board of Directors - Canada

Trevor Jaundoo – Chair
Kate Lazier – Vice Chair
Krystena Wan – Treasurer
Reverend Emmett Dunn – Director
Francis Hinnah – Director
JoAnne Barresi – Director
Kara Kennish – Director
Dr. Clare Warner – Director

Staff - Canada

Leo Nupolu Johnson
Chief Empowerment Officer
Priya Goorbarry
VP, Operations and Administration
Norma Nazi
Controller
Ann-Marie Anie
Director, Programs
Rebecca Morikawa-Hayes
Manager, System Navigation
Chantelle Ashley
Manager, International
Kwbana Beckles
Manager, Sports and Recreation
Francoise Yesaya-Keddy
Manager, Professional Skills and Entrepreneurship
Cherie Warner-Richard
Manager, Education
Emily-Rose Bell
Senior Coordinator, Education (Career Discovery)
Faid Adil
Senior Coordinator, System Navigation
Cladette Uyigue
Executive Assistant & Senior Administrator
Tabeer Khan
Development Officer
Lindsay Richardson
Coordinator, Education

Board of Directors - Liberia

Reverend Emmett Dunn – Chair
Dr. George Fonderson – Director
Deontee King – Sackie – Director

OUR TEAM

Radwan AL-Nachawati
Coordinator, Systems and Design
Dakar Charles
Coordinator, Sports and Recreation
Johannah Abcede
Coordinator, International
Navjeet Dhillon
Coordinator, Community Engagement
Imogene Osoro
Coordinator, Finance
Morola Solar
Coordinator, System Navigation
Ethar Moshin
Coordinator, Education

Staff - Liberia

Tukus Ama Harris
Manager, Empowerment Squared Liberia
Sele Max Fuah
Senior Program Officer, Empowerment Squared Liberia
Christopher B Jones
Program Officer, Empowerment Squared Liberia
Joseph T Smith
Program Officer, Empowerment Squared Liberia

A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS



There's an African proverb that embodies my love for Empowerment Squared and the work that we do: "If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together."

In 2025, the dynamic community we are proud to serve lives by this principle and we are proud to share the achievements, both nationally and internationally, that have come from this work we do together. We are always learning from our community and seeking to truly understand what they need and, more importantly, what we can empower them to make possible. The support we provide is only possible with the collaboration from our dedicated partners, funders, and donors. And YOU!

In these pages, you will read descriptions of our intentional, culturally-relevant programs. I hope you will experience how they have provided so much more than skills training, community, the wrap-around support we provide with a commitment to dignity. We create spaces in which opportunities for positive interactions with peers, self awareness, self improvement and resilience thrive. It is through the support of diverse populations and a responsive team that we continue to create positive change that we know will last for generations.

Our strong partnerships demonstrate the Power of People and make me proud to support a team that embodies the leadership ethos of care, agility, and support, that brings so many to Empowerment Squared.

To the programming teams, your continuous hard work, dedication to our participants, families and the greater community is unwavering. Enjoy reliving the many successes shared in this year's report and the transformative experiences made possible through our shared dedication.

I am thankful to our Teams, Board Members, Volunteers, and Partners. It is because of you that Empowerment Squared can innovate, be a thought leader, and support the needs of each participant and member of staff, with inclusivity, responsiveness, collaboration, and safety. As they say at the Liberian Learning Centre, "This is what Empowerment Looks Like".

~Ann-Marie Anie



OUR PROGRAMS

Empowerment Squared continues to offer a diversity of programs for youth and adults in support of academic achievement, professional development, sports and recreation, and more.

We strive to remove barriers to participation by providing free programs, transportation support, nutritional support including lunch for full day programs and program supplies.

"I am most proud of [being] able to understand math and my grades have been good and other students have said how smart I am. Even when I understood 1 part of a unit, the mentors helped me work and learn ahead which made learning that unit easier and more time for practice."

~Student Participant

EDUCATION

Starting over in a new school system can be overwhelming for students and their families, and even students who are not as new can find it difficult to find and access the right support. The programs offered by our Education Department support newcomer and marginalized youth from grades 1 to 12 and their families find their place in Hamilton, through supports that build self confidence, school readiness, connection, and positive engagement in the education system. With consistent mentoring, tutoring, and academic support, the students we support are not just “keeping up”, they’re gaining the tools to move forward with purpose toward post-secondary opportunities.

174
Participants
supported
in 2025

HOMEWORK CIRCLE

With youth making up around 20% of Hamilton’s population, creating spaces where they feel supported and connected remained essential to their success in 2025. Empowerment Squared’s Homework Circle program provided consistent, hands-on support for students to complete assignments, strengthen academic skills, and build confidence beyond the classroom. This continued to be a space where friendships took shape, and resilience and problem-solving were developed through both academic work and peer connection. Delivered across three cohorts throughout the year, the program served four distinct groups of young participants:

- Homework Circle (Grades 1 - 5)
- Homework Circle (Grades 6 - 8)
- Homework Circle (Grades 9 - 12 In Person)
- Homework Circle (Grades 9 - 12 Virtual)





SCHOOL READINESS

In 2025, communication and connection continued to play a critical role in helping newcomer families feel a sense of belonging. With a significant number of Hamilton residents reporting a non-official language as their mother tongue, the need for accessible, relationship-centered support remained clear. Empowerment Squared's School

Readiness Program supported youth in building language skills, confidence, and familiarity with their new learning environment. Through interactive activities and mentorship from individuals with shared lived experiences, participants strengthened reading, writing, social skills, and cultural understanding in ways that felt relevant and affirming.

SUMMER LITERACY

The Summer Literacy Program remained a favorite for students and families seeking both academic support and spaces for connection. In 2025, we continued to engage students from grades 3-8 through four-week experiences led by our committed team of staff and volunteers. The program followed an intentional curriculum designed to strengthen learning habits, build confidence, and support language development in a nurturing environment.

Students took part in outdoor activities, project-based learning, and interactive writing exercises to create opportunities for both skill-building and creativity to thrive!

In Summer 2025 - One participant highlighted that this program helped them to "[learn] how kindness can help me solve challenges", looking at the development of interpersonal relationships that occurred over the 4 weeks.

EDUCATION: MISSION MOMENTS



Both mentors and participants exhibited increased confidence as the term progressed. One mentor, who was very shy and reserved at the start of the program, became more interactive and engaged with participants in a more effective and meaningful way. He developed the skill to guide/correct participants using an asset-based approach. e.g. He focused on the work the participant did correctly, while mentioning there was room for improvement. He then guided the participant to the correct answer by asking critical questions. Additionally, some participants who initially shied away from interactive group activities, eventually opted to participate in said activities and also took a leadership role in the activity. e.g. leading the entire group of participants and volunteer mentors in warm-up exercises.

At the beginning, we welcomed a grade 1 participant who was having some challenges in school both academically and with learning skills. During our first two terms, we worked

on establishing boundaries and expectations through positive reinforcement. We also learned through experience what learning strategies and redirection strategies were most effective for this individual. This knowledge was now re-applied this term, but we were able to reinforce it by pairing them with consistent mentors due to our steady number of volunteers thanks to the partnership with Community Volunteer Circles (CVC) at McMaster University. The participants working with the same mentors each week allowed for them to get to know each other, and build upon strategies we found effective in the previous school year. The consistency helped the participant in understanding their mentors expectations, and that they would keep the participant accountable to them. This in turn allowed them to more effectively work together by having a shared understanding of the participant's learning level, skills to improve, and identifying opportunities for brain breaks in a way that supported their learning, and were able to consistently apply all these concepts.





SPORTS & RECREATION

Our Sports and Recreation programs provide children and youth aged 4 to 18 with spaces to move, connect, and grow. Through participation in sports and structured physical activities, participants develop not only physical skills, but also resilience, teamwork, and confidence and learn creative strategies to overcome challenges, build relationships and community, and make healthy choices.

259
Participants
supported
in 2025

Our holistic approach coaches participants in developing leadership, interpersonal, team-building, and athletic skills, while building confidence and self-esteem.

"Last year I made friends and they were here this year too, so I loved that—and making more friends." -
CAMP UBUNTU Participant - March Break 2025

"Thank you for teaching our son how to play soccer, he really enjoyed his time here. I also loved how you disciplined him when necessary and how you gave him tips to improve as well" -
Parent of Soccer Participant, Summer 2025

BASKETBALL DEVELOPMENT & FUNDAMENTALS

Throughout 2025, our basketball program engaged students from grades 6-8 in developing both their skills and their love of the game. Designed for all experience levels, this co-ed program focused on core fundamentals like dribbling, passing, shooting, and game play, while creating a positive, team-oriented environment where participants could grow in confidence and connection on and off the court.



P.A. DAY CAMP

When school doors closed for teacher Professional Activity (PA) days in 2025, our PA Day Camp offered families a supportive alternative that kept youth engaged, active, and connected. Designed as a full-day experience, the camp combined art, sports, and creative activities in a space where participants could try new things and express themselves freely. Supported by a team of staff and volunteers, the camp was offered in October and November.

CAMP UBUNTU

Camp Ubuntu provided a fun and safe environment for youth to learn, grow, and make new friends during school breaks, through two week-long programs. Offered in March and July, the camp experience combined sports, creativity, and leadership in an environment where youth could learn, grow, and connect. Participants enjoyed the chance to try new things while building confidence and friendships with the guidance of staff and volunteers who served as mentors and positive role models. To promote access to as many youth as possible, our shuttle bus offered two pick-up locations: Central and Lake Avenue Elementary school.

SOCCER - DEVELOPMENT & FUNDAMENTALS

Designed for all experience levels, the co-ed Youth Soccer Program promoted health, skills-development, and connection for newcomer youth. The program is built to help attendees develop soccer skills in a non-competitive environment through use of scrimmages, skill based training, and team building activities aimed at encouraging healthy self-esteem & positive social interaction. Sessions were held at Corktown Park, with programming offered on Tuesdays for ages 8-11 and Thursdays for ages 12-14.



VOLLEYBALL- DEVELOPMENT & FUNDAMENTALS

Throughout 2025, the Volleyball Program provided youth aged 10-13 with an introduction to the sport through hands-on learning and game play. Weekly sessions focused on building foundational skills, including positioning, bumping, passing, setting and serving with, supporting the development of both skills and confidence, to encourage youth to stay active and engaged.

BASKETBALL - DROP IN PROGRAMS

During the summer months of 2025, drop-in gym sessions provided youth aged 11-14 with a safe and welcoming space to stay active and connected. Participants developed basketball skills in a non-competitive environment through scrimmages, skill-building activities, and team-

based play. Beyond physical activity, the sessions supported confidence, positive social interaction, and the development of resilience and problem-solving skills during a time when structured school-day supports were less available.



2025 BALLERS NIGHT OUT & HOLIDAY YOUTH SOCIAL

In December 2025, Empowerment Squared hosted a youth 3v3 Basketball Tournament and youth social. Held during the school holiday closure in December, the event provided a space for youth to positively engage with each other, and compete in a friendly competition. For a small fee, participants received entry into the tournament, shooting competition, and social, and a reversible jersey.



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING - NIAGARA RIVER LIONS BASKETBALL GAME

This was our first installment of an annual field trip to spectate a professional basketball game. Niagara River Lions basketball organization based out of St. Catharines Ontario provided E2 with a gracious opportunity to help cheer on their team during a home game. All participants were provided their admission ticket, food, snacks/

drinks and transportation for free. This is a great event as it removes barriers for participants to view, observe and interact with professional athletes and coaches. Many of the participants made reference to how much fun they had on their first outing to a professional basketball game and that the food was great.

ART COLLABORATION WITH VU NGO

Empowerment Squared collaborated with local community member, Vu Ngo who brought in local artists to work with participants during Camp UBUNTU and the summer soccer program to design artwork that now lives on our backboards in the BABB Ubuntu Athletic Centre.



PROFESSIONAL SKILLS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Many of the community members we serve want to aspire to establish their own businesses or enter skilled professions. The Professional Skills and Entrepreneurship department responds to this need by offering a range of programs for youth and adults to help them build skills, explore career pathways, and pursue entrepreneurial goals. Through a combination of group programming, individualized guidance, and connections to mentors and industry opportunities, the department supports newcomer youth aged 12 to 20, as well as aspiring and established professionals, in making informed decisions about their futures.

Across all programming, there is a strong emphasis on self-discovery as a foundation for growth. Participants are encouraged to reflect on their strengths, interests, and goals, with culturally-relevant supports to ensure that learning and exploration feel meaningful, practical, and connected to their lived experiences.



51
PARTICIPANTS
SUPPORTED IN 2025

"One of the best things I did this summer was sign up for Career Discovery. I have so much more confidence now when talking to people and asking questions. I feel more open-minded about career pathways. You have provided me with so much support."

**- Career Discovery - Individual Coaching
Participant, Summer 2025**

CHEF APPRENTICESHIP

We learn from our community to create responsive programming through collaboration with partners. In 2025, the Chef Apprenticeship Program, developed with **The Other Bird**, supported newcomers, racialized, and marginalized individuals in building culinary arts careers.

The program offered practical industry experience and mentorship, helping its first participant navigate technical expectations and new environments. It built on participants' strong foundations and cultural richness by addressing workplace integration and opportunity barriers.



The second apprentice, a recent newcomer from Liberia with hospitality experience, worked at The Mule, developing skills in a professional kitchen. Her goal of becoming a certified chef and opening her own restaurant reflects the program's long-term potential.

KEYS TO BUSINESS

In Fall 2025, the Keys to Business program supported aspiring and current entrepreneurs in developing the mindset, tools, and frameworks needed to launch and grow sustainable ventures. Delivered over 12 weeks with biweekly group sessions, the program combined videos, case studies, quizzes, and collaborative learning for an engaging experience.

The program concluded with a Connect & Pitch event in December, welcoming 28 participants and community members. Participants described the program as valuable, practical, and relevant, and all recommended it. While 40% started at the ideation stage, none



remained there by the end. The number of participants validating their business ideas grew from 20% to 50%, indicating clear progression. Many expressed interests in continuing their engagement with Empowerment Squared through future programming and mentorship.



CAREER DISCOVERY - WESTDALE SECONDARY

The most successful partnerships align with the systems that provide support and the needs of the people implementing them to create measurable and sustainable success. Demonstrating this, in 2025, Empowerment Squared's Career Discovery Program was delivered in partnership with Westdale Secondary School as part of the school's Careers course. Working alongside classroom teachers, we helped students

develop key career skills, with a focus on networking, goal-setting, and exploring future pathways. Through guided reflection and practical activities students better understand their interests and options, while building connections to community support through our other programs and partner organizations. Learning was authentic and linked to the world beyond the classroom for which they were preparing.

CAREER DISCOVERY - INDIVIDUAL COACHING

In 2025, the Career Discovery Coaching program provided tailored, one-on-one support to youth navigating their individual career development journeys. Sessions were structured around each participant's goals, availability, and areas of focus, allowing each engagement to be flexible and responsive to individual needs.

Youth explored their interests, values, and skills while gaining clarity on potential career and education pathways and the steps they need to take to get there. Participants also received practical support to develop resumes and other key documents, helping strengthen their overall career readiness.

KPMG - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Community Development Leadership Program (CDLP) is a unique leadership-building project created in partnership with Empowerment Squared, KPMG Canada, and McMaster University's Access Program (Access). The project is an opportunity designed for early-career university students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds; are completing their first or second year at any University in Ontario; and have demonstrated leadership capacity through their involvement as a volunteer or participant (either at Empowerment Squared or Access). In addition to an 8-week summer internship at KPMG Toronto, participants received wraparound career development and wellbeing support from Empowerment Squared, Access, and community members. This project strives to help

students grow as leaders, gain real-world experience in the corporate sector, and make a lasting impact in their communities.

In Spring 2025, Empowerment Squared's Career Discovery team collaborated with KPMG's CDLP team to support Empowerment Squared volunteers and participants, and participants from McMaster's Access Program in the application process. They provided support through facilitating a virtual information session, bridging communication from participants to KPMG, and offering resume and interview support. From July - August, 2 participants completed an 8-week in-person internship at KPMG Toronto, receiving wraparound support from the KPMG CDLP team and Empowerment Squared through biweekly check-ins.

ORGANIZATIONAL MENTORSHIP

Through the Organizational Mentorship program, Empowerment Squared supports organizations that work on empowering communities (youth and families) in various ways. This occurs by accompanying these young organizations through their program delivery, providing mentorship and coaching in various areas such as program operations, service delivery, financial planning/management and reporting.

In 2025, 187 participants were supported through programs and activities offered by Guided Roots and Transitions Supportive Housing Programs, two organizations that are



part of Empowerment Squared's organizational mentorship program.

SYSTEM NAVIGATION

Many of the families we serve face challenges in understanding and accessing the supports available across Hamilton's systems and institutions. Our System Navigation Department provides trusted, culturally-grounded support to black and newcomer students and families across Hamilton. Whether helping a parent understand school processes, supporting communication between families and institutions, or guiding participants through government systems, the team works to make complex systems more accessible and less overwhelming. This hands-on approach helps families feel more confident, informed, and able to access the supports available to them. To make consistent



participation more possible, all our programs included wrap-around supports such as snacks and transportation assistance. By addressing these practical needs up front, participants are able to engage fully without having to navigate additional barriers.

301
Participants
supported
in 2025

STUDENT AND FAMILY ADVOCACY

Many families have shared experiences of confusion, frustration, and misunderstanding in their early interactions with the school system. Empowerment Squared's Student & Family Advocacy (SFA) Program provided individualized support to students and families navigating these challenges in Hamilton. The program focused on helping newcomer and

racialized families access equitable educational opportunities and feel more confident engaging with the system. Through support tailored to each family's unique circumstances, the SFA team worked collaboratively with participants to set goals, identify next steps, and provide guidance aligned with their specific needs and availability.

UBUNTU

rites of passage program

Ubuntu
I AM BECAUSE WE ARE

In 2025, the UBUNTU Rites of Passage program created a consistent, supportive space for youth and their families as they navigated the transition from adolescence into adulthood. Grounded in the African philosophy of “Ubuntu”, this program embodied the idea that “I am because we are”, the program focused on building self-awareness, confidence, and a strong sense of identity within a community context. Through interre-

lated sessions, youth explored topics such as self-esteem, values, mental wellness, healthy relationships, and career pathways, while also strengthening their information literacy and life skills. Regular sports and recreation activities complemented this learning to create balance and connection in spaces kept judgment-free by our community agreements to allow safety for personal expression.

UBUNTU RITES OF PASSAGE CAMP

Building on the foundation of the UBUNTU Rites of Passage program, the UBUNTU Rites of Passage Summer Camp offered a more immersive experience in 2025 for secondary school students aged 14-19. Over the course of the program, youth engaged in a concentrated series of workshops and group activities designed to deepen reflection, strengthen peer connections, and build practical skills for navigating adolescence. Sessions combined discussions on topics like communication, relationships, and



self-esteem with hands-on learning in areas such as self-care and leadership. The camp also created space for recreation and shared experiences, reinforcing a sense of community among participants.



PARENT SUPPORT WORKSHOP

In 2025, the Parent Support Workshop brought families together for a five-week series designed to strengthen confidence and connection in their parenting journeys and their shared experience of parenting in a new time and a new

country. The sessions created a welcoming space where participants could openly discuss experiences and learn from one another. Topics included maintaining balance at home, healthy communication, and approaches to discipline, alongside practical tools to support positive parent-child relationships. Throughout the journey, the importance of maintaining and celebrating cultural traditions while navigating parenting in Canada was affirmed, and a guest speaker from Hamilton Child & Family Supports contributed additional practical insights. The series concluded with a small celebration, where participants were recognized with a certificate and gift card in acknowledgment of their commitment.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE APPLICATION WORKSHOP & DROP IN

In Fall 2025, the System Navigation Department worked alongside our partners at McMaster University and Mohawk College to host two workshops and several “drop-in support” time slots designed to demystify the post-secondary application process. Open to secondary students and other prospective applicants, the sessions walked participants through available pathways, how to navigate the application portal, and what to expect at each step. Participants also received hands-on support planning, drafting, or submitting their applications, with language interpretation available upon request to ensure access and understanding for all.

ACCESS DISTRIBUTION

In 2020, Empowerment Squared distributed household goods, supplies, and basic needs support to participants in Hamilton to address the rising cost of living during the pandemic. This initiative continues annually, with multiple distributions. In 2025, two gift card donations occurred in March and December, providing educational supplies to 126 families. In August 2025, Empowerment Squared partnered with the Hamilton Police Service to distribute backpacks and school supplies to participants in the East End of Hamilton from the Rona on Barton and Woodworth.





TRANSFORMATION FUND

Empowerment Squared is grateful for the partnerships that help us expand our reach to meet the needs of our communities. The Transformation Fund was launched in 2025 as part of our commitment to bridge the barriers many of our participants face in building their futures. It provides financial support, mentorship, and resources to help newcomer, racialized and marginalized students succeed in post-secondary education.

Recipients were selected based on demonstrated academic commitment, community leadership, and a strong alignment with the spirit of UBUNTU. Beyond financial support, students also accessed a range of wrap-around services designed to strengthen their transition into and through post-secondary education, including: **mentorship and career guidance, community engagement, and wellness support.**

The Transformation Fund accepted applications in 2025 for the first time, and awarded over \$30,000 to 8 outstanding youth leaders in Hamilton.

Khue Huynh: Multi-Year Scholarship (up to 4 years)

Leilani Xue: Multi-Year Scholarship (up to 4 years)

Saniyah Farzeen: One-Year Bursary

Ayesha Awan: One-Year Bursary

Bethel Pedro: One-Year Bursary

Mohlil Imran: One-Year Bursary

Mice Cibangu-Cibangu: One-Year Bursary

Tashif Mahmood: One Year Honorarium

LEARN MORE



I am a part of history



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#buildingthedream

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LIBERIAN

INTERNATIONAL

The International Department focuses on equipping youth and young adults with the skills, experience, and support needed to navigate complex local and global contexts with confidence and cultural competence. Through a combination of community-based programming, information literacy, and international development opportunities, the department supports emerging leaders to build practical skills, expand their perspectives, and strengthen their ability to contribute meaningfully in diverse environments.

Programming emphasizes leadership development, cross-cultural engagement, entrepreneurship and experiential learning, creating pathways to employment, self-employment, and long-term career growth. Across all initiatives, the department prioritizes partnerships, reflective practice, and real-world experience to ensure participants in both Africa and Canada are prepared to both receive and shape opportunities for success.

281
PARTICIPANTS
SUPPORTED IN 2025

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (IYIP)

In 2025, the Empowerment Squared International Youth Internship Program (IYIP), funded by Global Affairs Canada and delivered in partnership with McMaster University, continued to create meaningful pathways for Canadian youth aged 18-30 facing barriers to employment. Through three-month placements in Ghana and Liberia, participants engaged in community-centered development work alongside local partners, contributing to grassroots research and gaining hands-on experience that strengthened both professional and transferable skills.

Interns were placed with Schools of Dreams in Ghana as part of Team Sankofa, or with the Liberian Learning Center in Liberia as part of Team Kúkátónón. Across both placements, participants' experiential learning included project and programming work for their host organizations, contributions to local-



ly-led research, and the development of individual passion projects aligned with each intern's interests and leadership goals. Immersive cultural engagement and ongoing reflection further supported the development of cross-cultural competence, adaptability, and resilience to fuel participants' long-term career pathways.

HARNESSING OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE ENTREPRENEURSHIP (HOPE)

Funded by the MasterCard Foundation, the program empowered 208 youth and young adult entrepreneurs with the skills and support to transform their small-scale commercial activities into viable, income-generating ventures. 166 of these participants completed the program in 2025, receiving the seed funding provided on successful completion to support them in launching their businesses. Participants developed foundational skills in entrepreneurship, finan-



cial and digital literacy, learning how to track profits, document their growth, and understand their business trajectories using digital tools.

The program concluded with a trade fair where all 208 graduate entrepreneurs showcased their products and services. This event highlighted not only their progress, but also their readiness to engage with broader markets, customers, and stakeholders.



The Born Before Computers (BBC) Program created a supportive entry point into the digital world for adults with little or no prior experience using technology. Recognizing the pace at which everyday life has

become technology-driven, the program focused on building practical skills and confidence that could support both personal and professional growth. Through hands-on sessions, participants learned to navigate devices and online platforms for communication, accessing services, managing finances, and completing essential tasks. These day-to-day skills are not often included in formal training programs and those who haven't developed them would often be excluded from many learning and social situations.

Delivered in two-month cohorts, the program combined interactive learning with real-life application, allowing participants to practice skills in ways that felt relevant and immediately useful. By the end of each cohort, participants were not only more confident using digital tools, but also better equipped to continue learning and adapting in a rapidly-changing environment.

LAC VOKER MISSION COMPUTER TRAINING

The Liberian Association of Canada Basic Computer Program supported 75 students from Paynesville City High School in building essential digital skills for the future. Sponsored by the Liberian Association of Canada Women Convention and implemented in collaboration with the Rotaract Club of Congo Town and Rosetta Steps Educational Center, this initiative focused on equipping students with practical knowledge they could apply in both their studies and everyday life.



Through interactive, hands-on sessions, participants developed skills in computer fundamentals, typing, and key software tools including Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Canva. The program created a strong foundation for continued learning, helping students engage more confidently with technology in school and beyond.

LLC VACATION SCHOOL

During the 2025 school break, the Liberian Learning Center piloted a two-month Vacation School program, bringing together 15 children from different schools in a safe and engaging learning space. The program offered a blend of academic support and creative exploration to build skills in reading, mathematics, typing, digital design, and cultural dance.

At the program's closing celebration, children shared what they had learned and demonstrated their growth. Beyond keeping students engaged during the break, the program created a space for continued learning, confidence-building, and creative expression outside the classroom. Its early success has positioned it as a promising annual initiative that will grow into a flagship program to support literacy and creativity within the Paynesville community.



FRENCH PROGRAM

The French Language Tutorial Program, launched in October 2025, was a collaboration between the Liberian Learning Centre and Centre Univers Français. It aimed to build French language skills among community members, enhancing communication, cultural understanding, and access to education and jobs.

Participants included members of the Armed Forces of Liberia, high school students, and working professionals, showcasing the program's inclusivity. The first cycle, from October to December 2025, engaged nine participants (seven adults and two teens) with three facilitators. Evening classes, small group sessions, and one-on-one instruction focused on speaking, reading comprehension, and writing, fostering language proficiency and cross-cultural communication confidence.

COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAMS

The Liberian Learning Centre offers space, support, and guidance to several community-led programs, which helped 190 participants in 2025. These programs, hosted in partnership with passionate partners, now have access to resources to share their skills and knowledge. In 2025, the programs included:

Saturday Reading Sessions: a free, open program to support children's reading skills and foundational literacy in a fun environment. The team provided transportation for participants.

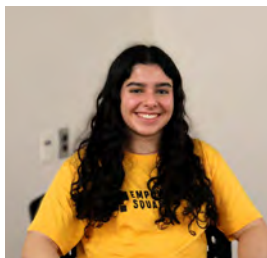
The Kpelleh Language Project: which provides literacy programs in local Liberian languages for children and adults as many face the threat of extinction.

VOLUNTEERS



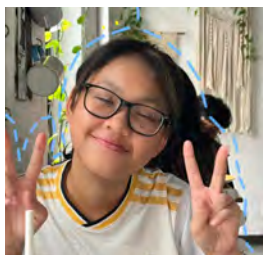
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Victor contributed more than 70 hours in a variety of Empowerment Squared Programs during the year. He participated in Basketball, In-School Career Discovery, PA Day Camps, Ubuntu Rites of Passage, Volleyball & Camp Ubuntu during March Break.



302
VOLUNTEERS IN 2025

2464.50
HOURS DONATED BY VOLUNTEERS



'A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A VIRTUAL MENTOR'

Article by Samara Liao



READ THE ARTICLE

VOLUNTEER TESTIMONIALS

"Being a volunteer at E2 has helped me grow personally as it made me realize that I am at a stage of my life where I too have knowledge to share. It really helped me realize that my communication skills needed to be improved as I convey topics that might seem complex to students at their level. On top of that I also learned how to build rapport which is a skill that will be useful to me in the professional setting as well!"

Spring Volunteer, 2025

"Everyone was treated with respect and care. Oftentimes when working within organizations for kids the focus is to ensure kids are having the best experience but staff here really made the volunteers feel safe and prepared to be able to handle any situation and always offered guidance and a helping hand when needed."

Spring Volunteer, 2025

"I'd like to thank E2 for giving me the opportunity to volunteer for such a great cause. Being a student at McMaster, one of my goals was to help create an impact in the Hamilton community, and I believe that through this program I was definitely able to do that. I hope to come back again next year!"

Spring Volunteer, 2025

"My mentee became much more comfortable talking to us, and really came out of his shell, which was nice to see and be a part of."

School Readiness Project Volunteer, Fall 2025

"My student would often say, 'I cannot do this.' My response was always, 'No, you can do it,' and I meant it. Now, when I face a challenge and think, 'This is hard,' I hear my own words coming back to me, and I say, 'No, I can do this. You must believe in yourself like you do believe in your students.' Honestly, that is a nice part of my personality, and it was built through volunteering with Empowerment Squared."

Homework Circle Volunteer, Fall 2025

COMMUNITY EVENTS



EMPOWERMENT SQUARED FAIR & OPEN HOUSE

In August 2025, the first annual Empowerment Squared Fair and Open House was held at our Empowerment Squared East location. Over 159 community members attended the event, which featured free activities for all ages. Children enjoyed a bouncy castle, face painting, and balloon animals. Families shared complimentary meals, including a barbecue and vegetarian samosas from Himalaya Restaurant. The Styling Zone, supported by Trims Barbershop and Kairos Cuts, provided free haircuts and personal styling. Draga Vision Care shared eye care information and resources for children and youth under 19. Parents registered for Empowerment Squared Fall programming, while children discovered new activities and families strengthened their community connections.

We are grateful to the Empowerment Squared team, volunteers, donors, and community partners for their generosity and dedication. Scan the QR code to learn more about the community partners who have donate their services to Empowerment Squared:



POST-SECONDARY INFORMATION FAIR

Empowerment Squared hosted a Post-Secondary Information Fair in October 2025. The event offered college and university information, educational pathway support, and networking opportunities for youth and adults interested in post-secondary and continuing education. Representatives from McMaster University, University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, York

University, Mohawk College, and Skilled Trades Ontario shared information about their post-secondary pathway options, culturally relevant support services, and campus activities. The fair attracted middle school students, their caregivers, and adult participants interested in trade school or post-secondary education.



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2025 ANNUAL CELEBRATION

On May 23, 2025 Empowerment Squared hosted the first in-person Annual Celebration, celebration since 2019. The event featured 2024 programming highlights, and featured the launch and announcement of the Transformation Fund - Empowerment Squared's Scholarship & Bursary program. The evening also showcased Empowerment Squared youth speakers, as well as musical performances. In addition

to the announcement of our first eight Transformation Fund recipients, a surprise donation of One Million Dollars for the Liberian Learning Centre was presented by Mr. Tony Anderson. This very meaningful contribution from the Anderson Family is the largest single donation that Empowerment Squared has ever received, and set the stage perfectly for an evening of celebration and joy.



CELEBRATING THE POWER OF PEOPLE

To support cross-team learning, **Ama Harris**, Manager of Empowerment Squared Liberia visited Empowerment Squared Headquarters in Hamilton. Over two weeks, Ama connected with colleagues across Empowerment Squared. She also had the opportunity to engage closely with the Hamilton Public Library, McMaster University, and Mohawk College, exploring areas including program planning, library operations, partnership development, and strategy. Making the most of Ama's visit, Empowerment Squared hosted an event with our partners and community, to give stakeholders the opportunity to learn more about Ama, the powerful work being done in Liberia, and facilitate intentional networking.

CELEBRATING SYSTEM LEVEL INNOVATION

Spring 2025 marked a defining moment in community-engaged learning in Hamilton. Empowerment Squared, in partnership with McMaster University's Office of Community Engagement, proudly launched its first credited course: CMTYENGA 3E03 - Community Engagement in Practice with Empowerment Squared. More than a new academic offering, this course represents a powerful model of system-level innovation. It is a bold example of what happens when education and community impact truly intersect.

Co-created by Empowerment Squared's Educational Programming Department and Dr. Emily Scherzinger of McMaster University's Office of Community Engagement, the course was designed to blend theory

with meaningful, real-world application. Students explored culturally responsive approaches to community engagement, grounded in the African philosophy of UBUNTU; "I am because we are." Through this lens, they developed practical skills while contributing directly to Empowerment Squared's programs

Homework Circle has long been a cornerstone of Empowerment Squared's educational programming, connecting young learners with consistent, caring mentors who support both academic success and personal growth. For years, university student volunteers have powered the program. For years, the program has relied heavily on university student volunteers. While this has been a tremendous asset, it has also presented a structural challenge: many volunteers leave Hamilton at the end of the winter term, creating a critical gap in mentorship during the spring and early summer months; precisely when elementary and secondary school students continue to need support.

CMTYENGA 3E03 was intentionally designed with that reality in mind. By aligning the academic calendar with community needs, the course ensures a steady, reliable presence of trained mentors during a traditionally underserved period. The results have been remarkable. Since the course's inception, Homework Circle has experienced a significant increase in volun-





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teen engagement, strengthening program consistency and deepening its impact on participating youth.

The innovation did not stop there. Building on the success of the Spring term, the program evolved further in Fall 2025. Empowerment Squared's Education Program Coordinator, Lindsay Richardson, played a key role in co-developing a curriculum-based assignment that directly aligns with Homework Circle activities. This enhancement not only enriched student learning but also reinforced program quality, ensuring that mentorship remains both intentional and impactful. Under LR's leadership, Homework Circle continues to thrive as a dynamic after-school program operating three days a week at Empowerment Squared's central office.

This initiative is a clear embodiment of system-level innovation- where challenges are not simply addressed in isolation, but reimagined through collaboration, creativity, and shared purpose. It reflects a true "win-win" model: students gain hands-on, transformative learning experiences, while the community benefits from sustained, high-quality support.

The impact of CMTYENGA 3E03 has resonated far beyond the classroom. The Empowerment Squared and McMaster team was invited to present this work at the 2025 Innovations in Education Conference hosted by the McPherson Institute, highlighting the course as a leading



example of experiential and community-integrated learning. Additionally, the initiative has been recognized with the McMaster Students Union Community Engagement Award, presented to Carrie McMullin., Dr. Emily Scherzinger, and Dr. Sarah Whitwell. for their outstanding contributions.

As Empowerment Squared CEO Leo Nupolu Johnson aptly described, "This is more than a course; it's a movement of learning through doing, rooted in equity, empathy, and impact." That movement is already shaping the next generation of socially conscious, community-rooted leaders.

Looking ahead, the future is bright. With plans to welcome new cohorts and continue refining the model, CMTYENGA 3E03 stands as a testament to what is possible when institutions and communities come together with a shared vision. It is not only transforming how students learn, it is strengthening how communities grow together.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP



SISTER CITY RELATIONSHIP SIGNING

On September 23, 2025, Empowerment Squared and the City of Hamilton hosted a virtual Sister City Relationship Signing Ceremony between Hamilton, Ontario, Canada and Paynesville City Corporation, Liberia that will foster a growing relationship between the two municipalities. This event follows a motion by Hamilton City Council on February 14, 2024 to establish this relationship.

The purpose of this Sister City Relationship Agreement is to establish a collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship between Hamilton and Paynesville, with Empowerment Squared as the official facilitator. This relationship aims to foster

cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and cooperation in various domains, including economic development, education, health, and community development.

This signing was completed by the Mayor of Hamilton, Andrea Horwath, and the Mayor of Paynesville, Robert Soluntul Bestman. This is the City of Hamilton's 11th Sister City relationship and is historic as it marks the first Sister City relationship between Hamilton and a city in Africa, reflecting Hamilton's growing diversity, contributions of newcomers, and international engagement. The relationship between Hamilton and Paynesville is highlighted by the Liberian Learning

Center. The Liberian Learning Center is a collaborative project led by Empowerment Squared in partnership with Rotary International, Rotary Club of Hamilton, Rotary Club of Monrovia, Paynesville City Corporation, McCallumSather, Hamilton Public Library, and Tri Buchanan Development Corporation.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Empowerment Squared is fortunate to be included at many community advocacy and leadership tables in Hamilton. Working collaboratively with other organizations, membership to these communities of practice and committees give our team the opportunity to shape support services and systemic change. Some of the groups that Empowerment Squared contributed to in 2025 include:

- Hamilton Community Foundation ABACUS Community of Practice
- Hamilton Child And Youth Network
- Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services - Youth Justice Services for Black Youth Community of Practice
- Ontario Ministry of Citizenship & Multiculturalism - Student & Family Advocacy Community of Practice
- Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Human Rights & Equity Committee
- Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC)



FUNDERS, PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS



Our work continues to be made possible through the generosity and shared vision of individuals, corporations, foundations, and governments who believe deeply in creating equitable opportunities for youth and families.

We are especially honoured to recognize the extraordinary leadership of Tony Anderson, whose transformational \$1M gift, announced at our 2025 Annual Celebration, supports the continued growth and expansion of the Liberian Learning Center. This investment represents more than infrastructure, it is a bold commitment to education, innovation, and long-term community impact in Paynesville, Liberia.

We are also deeply grateful to Nancy Kumpf, a longstanding ambassador of Empowerment Squared, for becoming our first planned giving donor. By

including Empowerment Squared in her will, Nancy has demonstrated a powerful legacy of generosity that will continue to shape lives for generations to come.

In celebration of a remarkable milestone, Dr. Joseph Diggs, Liberia's first radiologist and founder of the nation's first School of X-Ray Technology, marked his 90th birthday by mobilizing a peer fundraising campaign in support of the Liberian Learning Center. Dr. Diggs and his family rallied their community to raise \$19,000 USD, exemplifying a lifelong commitment to service, education, and nation-building.

We also celebrate the successful conclusion of our multi-year Smile Cookie Campaign in partnership with Tim Hortons Binbrook, which has now raised over \$150,000 in support of our local programming. This achievement reflects the power of community part-

nership and grassroots generosity. Together, these contributions are not only advancing our mission, they are

strengthening a global movement of impact, rooted in collaboration, generosity, and hope.

MISSION MOMENT

We are also proud to recognize our partnership with Hillfield Strathallan College, whose exceptional support has meaningfully enhanced our local programming. Through their generous provision of buses for our week long Camp Ubuntu camp, both during March Break and in July 2025, Summer Literacy as well as ongoing shuttle transportation for our 2025 FAIR and Open House, HSC helped remove critical barriers to access, ensuring that more youth can



fully participate in and benefit from these transformative experiences.





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