

Meeting Crisis with Courage



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MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD CHAIRS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



This unprecedented and unexpectedly trying year meant that the Victoria Women's Transition House (VWTH) Society, like many others, had to develop new ways to offer support and compassion. Family isolation and a corresponding increase in intimate partner violence meant that our services were needed more than ever. Throughout this extremely challenging time, VWTH has endeavoured to

maintain safety for staff, safe accessibility for clients and necessary expansions to address a surge in needs. Our work, while challenging and rewarding, could not have been done without the assistance and generosity of government, community partners, our amazing donors and our wonderful staff.

While no one could have foreseen the depth and breadth this year of crisis would bring, our management team, in particular, stepped up with courage and conviction to ensure that our many services could be available and maintained at a high level. This included adhering to new and stringent safety protocols for clients and staff, adapting to a myriad of details including physical and location changes, designing and adopting new routines and service delivery models and also learning and using new technology. We are extremely proud of our team. Under very difficult circumstances and overlaid by the constant concern for personal and family safety, VWTH staff courageously enabled continuity, attended to increases in service needs and found time to support organizational growth.

Simultaneous to addressing a multitude of complex issues, VWTH has also been attending to expansion. Our much-needed second stage housing project in the Western Communities has undergone some exciting developments. We are very grateful for the support of federal, provincial and municipal governments as we undertake this major project. BC Housing has provided continued assistance and collaboration as we move forward with the building development. We have also been fortunate to receive wonderful advice and suggestions from staff, local experts and provincial agencies. There is a great deal of anticipation and hope for the wonderful new and expanded services we will be able to provide once the project is completed.

Along with the pandemic, other global events occurring over the past year have negatively affected our local community. Thankfully, with enhanced training for staff and volunteers, including Board members, our team at VWTH had already begun programs to assist those affected by extreme events and trauma. The Indigenous Advisory Circle, for example, has offered invaluable advice about how to best design and shape services that are suited to and can effectively support every woman and child who needs them. We have continued our mission of living life violence-free through careful, thoughtful and strategic shifts designed specifically to address diversity, to advocate, collaborate and educate. This challenging and extremely busy year has underscored our desire to offer the best possible services within an inclusive, welcoming and safe environment. It is with hope, continued courage and optimism that we continue to envision a society free of intimate partner violence and we are very grateful to those who support this vision.

Dawn Robson, Chair

Makenna Rielly, Executive Director

Shirley Elm, Past-Chair

OUR MISSION

Victoria Women's Transition House (VWTH) Society collaborates, advocates and educates to address and prevent intimate partner violence and abuse of women and children through supportive shelter, housing, counselling and other community-based services.

NOTE ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic and brought forward stressful and unprecedented times, impacting communities everywhere.

As an essential service, VWTH remained open and initiated protocols and actions to address and respond to the situation, staying committed to the health and safety of our clients, staff, volunteers and community. In following municipal and provincial guidelines, we carefully and continuously adapted our programs and services throughout the 2020–21 fiscal period (April 1, 2020–March 31, 2021). Some programs, such as the Volunteer Program, were temporarily put on hold. Navigating various barriers, VWTH continued to provide Emergency Shelter, counselling, support services and referrals to women and their children escaping intimate partner violence.

At this time, safety measures remain in place. For more information, visit [transitionhouse.net/vwth-s-response-to-covid-19](https://www.transitionhouse.net/vwth-s-response-to-covid-19)

♥ SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN CRISIS

During 2020–21, the **Emergency Shelter Program** provided wrap-around support and care to **161 women** and **99 children** escaping abuse. In addition to stable and safe 30-day housing, individuals and families accessing services were provided with nourishing meals, basic care necessities, advocacy, legal and housing assistance, as well as trauma-informed counselling and community referrals. The **Children's Shelter Program** also offered crisis counselling, caregiver support and referrals to women and children accessing Shelter services.

EXTENDED SHELTER PROGRAM

Working collaboratively with our community partners and funders and with the generous support of community members and organizations, VWTH expanded the Emergency Shelter Program to include a

second location. The added site allowed for continuity in our services despite COVID-19 related capacity limits.

VWTH's **24-hour Crisis & Information Line** fielded **3117 crisis calls**. Operated by trained counsellors, client-centred, confidential and compassionate support was provided to all callers seeking information, resources and support services.

EMPOWERING WOMEN TO OVERCOME ABUSE

Like our Shelter services, the **Women's Drop-in Support Group** saw a significant influx in need. **92 women** were supported during **52 online group sessions** of a psycho-educational counselling project. Facilitated by two specialized counsellors, each group session explored topics such as abuse, healthy relationships, stress management and communication skills—delivering virtual support to women who were leaving the Emergency Shelter or waiting to access individual counselling.

The **Stopping the Violence (STV) Program** pivoted from in-person to virtual or over-the-phone counselling, providing essential supports to many during these uncertain times through one-to-one and group sessions. The Program provided support to a total of **189 women** through **1315 individual counselling sessions**. The team offered **eight psychoeducational and wellness groups** this past year, with participants attending **56 group sessions**. As well, VWTH offered weekly, trauma-informed yoga classes to clients through the digital Zoom platform.

STAFF REFLECTION

Jane came to VWTH after leaving her partner of 20 years and a difficult one-year legal process that was very stressful. With the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, she reached out for some emotional support and was connected to our STV counsellors.*

Jane participated in counselling supports through Victoria Women's Transition House and was grateful to be connected to additional community groups to build skills and confidence to return to work full time. She is learning to set healthy boundaries and manage the ongoing stress of co-parenting with her ex-spouse, with the focus on keeping her children safe.

Jane found the counselling support helpful to build courage, find her voice and focus on both her own and her children's needs.

*Name has been changed for confidentiality.



EMERGENCY SHELTERS SUPPORTED

+260

WOMEN AND CHILDREN ESCAPING ABUSE



CRISIS LINE FIELDED

+3110

CALLS



52

ONLINE WOMEN'S DROP-IN SUPPORT GROUP SESSIONS



1315

INDIVIDUAL STV COUNSELLING SESSIONS

♥ CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION

VWTH's Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling & Empowerment (PEACE)/Children Who Witness Abuse Program provides services to children, youth and their caregivers. The team consists of experienced counsellors who offer one-to-one and group counselling to children, age 3–18, who have witnessed abuse in their home. The team assists caregivers by providing support and skill development to reduce the impact of violence and abuse. During the pandemic, staff adapted to new support and delivery models and overcame barriers to ensure children and youth could continue to be supported.

During 2020–21, the program served **183 children** and **134 caregivers**. Clients participated in **85 group sessions** and **751 individual sessions**. PEACE Camps were adapted to ensure the safety of participants and staff. In contrast to week-long sessions, the team provided fun, individualized outdoor camp day sessions in one-to-one and small family group formats. In total, **64 Summer Camp 2020 sessions** and **24 Spring Camp 2021 sessions** were held.

STAFF REFLECTION

Although the children and youth did not have the group experience typically provided in Camp, having time with their counsellor to enjoy activities such as hiking, going to the beach or trampoline park, kayaking and painting pottery in the community, provided opportunities for them to build confidence, express their feelings, process some of their life experiences and strengthen family relationships. One client commented, 'I've never experienced something like this in my life. I'll never forget this.'

As part of the **Violence is Preventable (VIP) program**, counsellors facilitated **42 VIP workshop presentations** to schools and community groups, reaching over **840 individuals**. To increase reach, the team collaborated with a local high school to create a series of VIP videos. With thoughtful scripts to illustrate the cycle of violence and answer important questions about relationship violence, the team engaged high school actors and a professional film crew to produce the videos.



♥ REBUILDING LIVES OF OLDER WOMEN

In 2020–21, the VWTH **Second/Third Stage Transitional Housing Program** provided housing to **25 women** and continued to offer one-to-one and group support to residents. Programs and services were safely adapted to address COVID-19 concerns and staff continued to offer counselling via VWTH's secure online video counselling platform or by phone. **60 participants** attended groups and programs that continued with adaptations including weekly **Coffee Groups, Outdoor Walk & Talk; STRIDE: Active Living for Senior Women** and **STRETCH: Money Management for Senior Women**.

Residents also found new ways to connect, establishing a safe, outdoor meeting area adorned with flowers and comfortable chairs. This is a lovely spot where residents can continue to connect with each other throughout the year.



Watercolour painting in VWTH Emergency Shelter.
Artist Phil Friesen.



840

CHILD AND YOUTH
OUTREACH



88

CAMP SESSIONS



249

OLDER WOMEN'S
INDIVIDUAL
COUNSELLING
SESSIONS



836

CHILD AND
CAREGIVER
SESSIONS



Clay art pieces created by a Healing Through the Arts program participant.

The **Older Women’s Program (OWP)** continues to offer support services tailored to the needs of older women survivors in our community. Adapting and evolving to the ever-changing needs identified by our counsellors and the women in the program, OWP provided **249 individual counselling sessions**.

As well, the OWP hosted several groups throughout the year. **Turning the Tide: A Program for Older Women Survivors of Domestic Abuse** provided women with an opportunity to explore their experiences and strengths through art and storytelling. **Healing Through the Arts: Creativity and Resilience for Older Women** encouraged participants to create artwork and express themselves using clay and other mediums. **Self Sufficiency and Assets through Financial Education (SAFE)**, a popular project that focused on goal setting and financial literacy, was also offered.

CLIENT STORY

During the Healing Through the Arts program, Jill decided to take the tools, techniques, and strategies from the program home to engage her son in the process she had learned. As a result, not only did the program help with Jill’s healing journey, but it also provided an opportunity for her experience to be shared with her son. She recognized it was not only about healing the self, but it was also about using these tools and strategies to help heal her family.*

**Name has been changed for confidentiality.*

♥ SUPPORT THROUGH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The **Spousal Assault Victim Support Program (SAVSP)** helps clients through the criminal justice system, providing information and assistance to victims of assault, threats or criminal harassment by an intimate partner or ex-partner. The Program provides women with emotional, financial and social supports needed to recover from trauma. During 2020–21, the SAVSP team assisted **701 new clients** and responded to over **1305 general inquiries**. During the pandemic, client contact continued through telephone, text and digital platforms.

The **Regional Domestic Violence Unit (RDVU)** addresses intimate partner violence cases where high-risk factors are present, or where there is an elevated level of risk to survivors and/or their children. In 2020–21 the RDVU received **112 case referrals**. From this, the team identified and actively pursued **73 highest-risk files**. The RDVU is a collaborative team of police, community-based victim services, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Community Corrections working to provide a full range of supports to clients and their children. Services include risk assessment, offender management, safety planning and intensive client support.

FAMILY LAW ADVOCACY PROGRAM

The **Family Law Advocate (FLA)** delivers direct, specialized family law support, advocacy and education to survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse. In 2020–21 the Family Law Advocate **supported 110 clients**. She assisted with the completion of forms, procuring support documentation and educated clients about court processes and how court documents (e.g., orders, agreements) may impact the client’s rights and obligations.

The art in this Report was created by VWTH clients and donors and is presented with their permission.

In this Report, individuals in photos have given their permission for publication.



SAVSP TEAM SUPPORTED

701
NEW CLIENTS



RESPONDED TO
+1300
GENERAL INQUIRIES



RDVU TEAM PURSUED

73
HIGHEST-RISK FILES



FLA SUPPORTED

110
CLIENTS

♥ BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES

The VWTH **Homeless Prevention Program (HPP)** assists women and children to secure safe, stable housing. In 2020–21, the Program **assisted 83 women**, with a total of **293 remittances issued**. The subsidies helped cover critical expenses such as utility bills, moving and storage fees, as well as rent and security deposits.

While most clients required short-term assistance for 3–6 months, others needed support for longer. Extended economic uncertainty and partial scaling of government relief programs due to the pandemic also resulted in some longer-term subsidies. Throughout the year, HPP met this rising demand, thanks to additional funding from joint Federal-Provincial housing initiatives and other donation supports.

♥ ENGAGING COMMUNITIES TO END VIOLENCE

PUBLIC EDUCATION

In 2020–21, **15 workshops** were presented to the community over digital platforms, with a strong focus on older adult abuse awareness and neglect. To complement these presentations, a video, pamphlet and web content were also developed.

INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

As an organization that works to create a society free from violence, Victoria Women's Transition House strives to foster cultural awareness and work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people towards reconciliation. In 2020, VWTH established a **Working Group** and **Advisory Circle** to provide advice and recommendations to support culturally sensitive, strengths-based services for all clients, including Indigenous women and children. As we continue to identify our roles and responsibilities as an organization, these resources will also empower staff and volunteers to better understand Indigenous perspectives and respect diversity through a trauma-informed lens.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

We greatly appreciate the generous contributions of our VWTH volunteers. Between June–November 2020 when lockdown restrictions were eased, **92 volunteers** offered **888 hours of service**. At this time and following strict safety protocols, volunteers prepared and portioned individual meals for residents at all Transition House sites. As well, volunteers supported staff on the Crisis and Information Line, organized grocery shopping tasks and helped with household maintenance. Volunteers also supported the STRIDE: Active Living for Senior Women project and Christmas Hampers—holiday cheer for **414 clients** and their families.

VOLUNTEER REFLECTION

VWTH is a vibrant organization [and I enjoy] getting know the staff and routines at the Shelter. I appreciate the diversity of women who come to the Shelter and that the women feel it is a safe place. It is inspiring, humbling, and an honour to be a part of this organization.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Every year, VWTH relies on and is grateful for the support of the community. This year, during a time of unprecedented rates of intimate partner violence, we were overwhelmed with the kindness and generosity shown. Folks came together to offer individual, corporate and foundation gifts and found unique ways to organize and safely host virtual and in-person fundraising initiatives and special projects. This included online sales and proceeds from events, auctions and raffles; yoga retreats; music events and much more. **To all who help us in our work to support and empower survivors escaping intimate partner violence and abuse, thank you.**



\$122,679

GIVEN DIRECTLY TO CLIENTS FOR HOMELESS PREVENTION



92

VOLUNTEERS



+888

VOLUNTEER HOURS



CHRISTMAS HAMPER PROGRAM SERVED

414

CLIENTS

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Transition House is grateful to everyone who organized and participated in fundraising initiatives in support of VWTH. Below are a few highlights of the community initiatives organized in 2020–21.

8th ANNUAL RAISE THE ROOF FOR SHELTER | MODERN REAL ESTATE TEAM PUMPKINS FOR SHELTER | ROYAL LEPAGE SHELTER FOUNDATION

The **Modern Real Estate Team** continued their support of VWTH with an online silent auction in June 2020 followed by an outdoor, pandemic-friendly **Pumpkin Patch** party in October. Activities included pumpkins for pick up, treats provided by Ruth+Dean and a great family “photo op” with Nunn Other Photography, all by donation. Both events raised funds for the **Royal LePage Foundation** in support of four local women’s shelters, including VWTH.

LOWE’S TILLICUM CENTRE | #HEROESCAMPAIN

In 2020, Lowe’s at Tillicum Centre selected VWTH as their **#Heroescampaign** recipient! Throughout September, staff helped raise funds to support VWTH. For every customer donation of two dollars, Lowe’s Canada matched one dollar, surpassing fundraising goals.

ODD FELLOWS BASTION 4 | CHEF’S TABLE: 7-COURSE HARVEST EDITION AT THE COLLECTIVE

Odd Fellows Bastion 4 hosted an October harvest edition fundraiser at The Collective Wine Bar & Kitchen where Chef Branko and his culinary team prepared a fantastic seven-course menu, expertly paired with wines and cocktails. The tasting experience showcased the very best of Vancouver Island’s harvest and raised funds in support of Transition House programs and services.

TREAT YOURSELF TREATS

Singing Bowl Granola, in collaboration with **Sweetly Raw**, created several healthy vegan treats that were sold online and in-store. A percentage of the sales profits collected over six months were donated to VWTH. We are grateful to Singing Bowl Granola for their ongoing support.

DANCE VICTORIA | UKRAINIAN SHUMKA DANCERS’ NUTCRACKER

During the winter holiday period in 2020, **Dance Victoria** presented the **Ukrainian Shumka Dancers’ Nutcracker** ballet performance online with complimentary access to Transition House clients, client families and staff. Combining the digital presentation with additional fun, Dance Victoria offered online holiday activities for children and adults, including *Nutcracker* storytime and draw prizes.

EMERALD DAY SPA | WOMEN EMPOWERED – DEVOTED TO STRENGTHENING US ALL

In December 2020, **Emerald Day Spa** hosted a **Women Empowered** virtual fundraiser. The two-day, online event included community-focused workshop sessions and presentations with yoga, nutrition specialists, naturopaths and giveaways.

DONOR REFLECTION

I believe strongly in the work of Victoria Women’s Transition House and their support for women and children looking for safety and shelter. Places like Transition House are so important in our community.

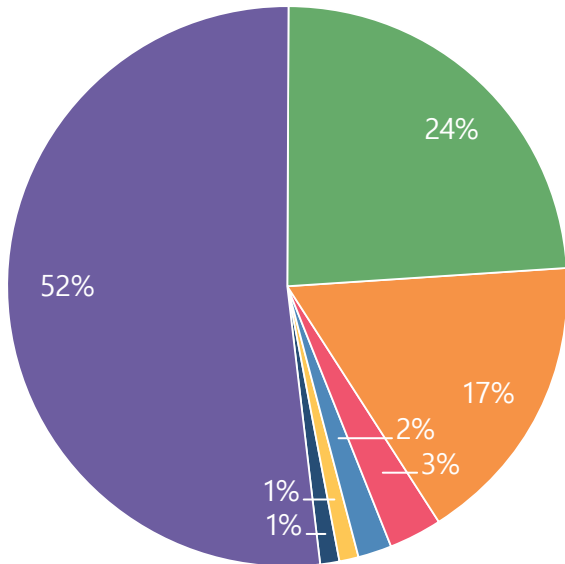
-Tanya Higgin, Emerald Day Spa



HOW WE RAISED AND SPENT OUR FUNDS AND YOUR DONATIONS

REVENUES **\$4,442,729**

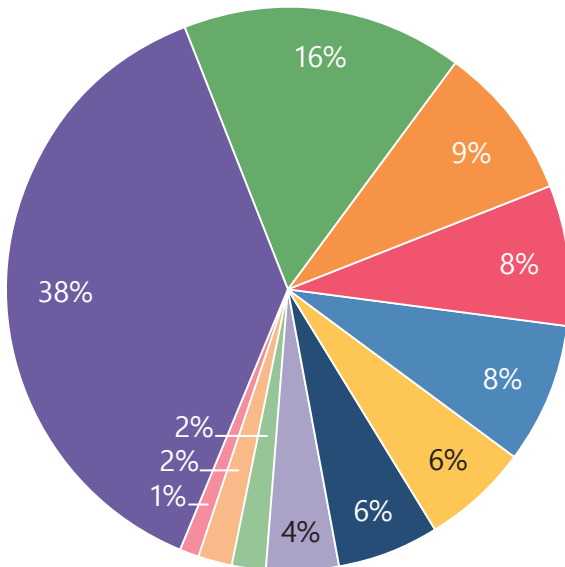
HOW WE RAISED OUR FUNDS



- Provincial Funding 52%
- Donations 24%
- Grants 17%
- Rent Revenue 3%
- Other Income 2%
- Bequests 1%
- Special Events 1%

EXPENSES **\$3,961,281**

HOW WE SPENT OUR FUNDS BY PROGRAM



- Transition House (Shelter) 38%
- Spousal Assault Victim Support 16%
- PEACE/Children Who Witness Abuse 9%
- Third Stage Transitional Housing 8%
- Development 8%
- Stopping the Violence 6%
- Homeless Prevention 6%
- Older Women's Outreach 4%
- Volunteer Program 2%
- Family Law Advocacy 2%
- Public Education 1%

Net Amortization **\$ (69,727)**
 Unrealized Gain Investments . . **\$ 49,967**
 Surplus (Deficit) **\$461,688**

*YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2021

The 2020–21 surplus includes extraordinary and bequest gifts that will be used to meet ongoing needs and fill program gaps. Full audited financial information is available by request. Please contact our Finance Director at info@vwth.bc.ca

Thank you sincerely to our donors, funders, and supporters.

We wish we could name all of you here, but please know that we are immensely grateful to everyone! Please contact our Development and Communications Director if you have any questions about our fundraising initiatives and the impact that your donations make in our community at 250.592.2927 ext. 210

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PROGRAMS AND SERVICES



24-Hour Crisis & Information Line (250.385.6611)

Compassionate, judgement-free support and information for women who are experiencing or have experienced intimate partner violence and abuse. Concerned family and friends, as well as professionals, can call for support and information. The Crisis Line is operated by trained staff and volunteers.



Emergency Shelter Program

Safe accommodation for women of all ages, with or without children, escaping abuse and violence. Services offered include counselling, legal advocacy, referrals, childcare and children's programs, dedicated support to find and apply for stable housing and advocating with landlords. The Shelters house women and their children for up to 30 days.



Stopping the Violence (STV) Program

One-to-one and group trauma-informed counselling for women currently experiencing abuse or who are leaving or have left an abusive relationship. Women are guided to recognize the different forms of abuse and to explore the impacts of abuse. Counsellors help to develop a safety plan, set boundaries and build self-esteem. Women are also connected to other community services and programs.



Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling & Empowerment (PEACE)/Children Who Witness Abuse Program

This program helps to stop the intergenerational cycle of abuse for children, age 3–18, who have witnessed domestic violence and abuse at home. One-to-one and group counselling and seasonal camps help children recognize abusive behaviour, learn the tools to cope with their experiences and emotions and consider alternatives to violence in their own behaviour.

The **Violence Is Preventable (VIP) program** provides public education and workshops on the impact of witnessing abuse and dating violence for school students and educators.



Older Women's Program (OWP)

Support for women over 45 as they navigate the unique challenges of establishing a life free of violence and abuse. Supports include an emergency safe home, advocacy, counselling and specialty programs.



Second/Third Stage Transitional Housing

Transitional housing for women aged 45–65 who have left an abusive relationship. Affordable one-bedroom suites are available for women to stay for up to three years. This housing supports residents to become independent and self-reliant through supportive counselling, activities, programs and life skills training.



Spousal Assault Victim Support Program (SAVSP)

Support for survivors of assault, threats, or criminal harassment by an intimate partner or ex-partner. Women are provided with short-term counselling, safety planning, emotional support, court accompaniment and referrals to community agencies as their cases proceed through the criminal justice system. This program is located in Victoria and Western Communities courthouse locations.



Regional Domestic Violence Unit (RDVU)

The RDVU works as a collaborative team that includes police, community-based victim services, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Community Corrections. The unit addresses intimate partner violence cases where high-risk factors are present, or in cases where there is an elevated level of risk to survivors and their children.



Family Law Advocacy Program

The Family Law Advocate (FLA) delivers specialized family law support, advocacy and education to survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse. The FLA educates clients around family law and court processes and provides a range of support services to inform and assist a client's access to the justice system and facilitate the resolution of their legal issues.



Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP)

HPP assists clients to secure safe, stable housing for themselves and their children. Through temporary financial support, the program helps remove obstacles to acquiring or maintaining housing. Subsidies can help to cover crucial expenses such as utility bills, moving and storage fees, as well as rent and security deposits.



Public Education

Education and training for professionals, such as social workers, lawyers, health care providers, counsellors, and police groups on violence against women. In-person and online presentations and workshops on intimate partner violence and abuse are presented to university and college students, community groups, service clubs, church groups and businesses.



Volunteer Program

Volunteers are integral to supporting VVTH's programs and services. All volunteers complete an extensive training program that provides opportunities to learn about the issues and effects of abuse against women and outlines the roles of staff and volunteers. Training programs are interactive, combine theory with practice, and provide volunteers with tools needed for the specific placement.

* All Victoria Women's Transition House programs and services are offered free of charge.