



## Arden's Story

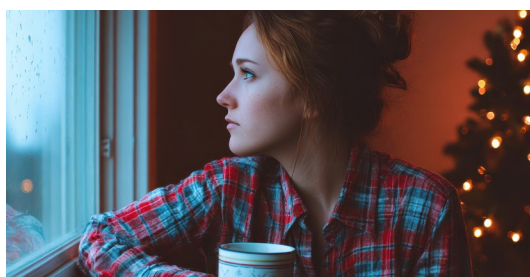
The rain fell gently on Christmas Eve, pattering on the windows of Arden's small apartment. Inside, she sat cross-legged on the floor, a half-decorated tree glowing in front of her. A mug of tea warmed her hands but did little to steady her nerves as the Holidays approached. She cuddled her kitty, Choco.

A year ago, there was no Christmas tree at all. No laughter. No freedom. Only violence and fear. Her partner's voice had filled every room – loud, sharp, controlling.

One night after another violent assault, Arden decided to leave. He had gone to the bar, and she called the Crisis Line, knowing there was a spot at the Emergency Transition House. She pulled out a small, pre-packed bag and slipped her keys into her coat pocket. Leaving the building with her heart pounding, she ran to the corner to catch the bus. Later, standing

in the Transition House doorway, she sighed with relief, thankful for her escape.

Now, a year later, it's been a long journey, but Arden is safe and free. The glow of the tiny lights in her apartment made her feel relief. These weren't just



decorations – they were proof that she had survived. Proof that she had chosen herself.

Her phone buzzed with a message from Lisa, another survivor she met at VWTH group counselling: "Merry Christmas, Arden. One year free!"

Smiling, tears catching the light, Arden hung the last ornament – a small silver star she'd bought that morning. For the first time in a long while, she whispered her own wish: May every woman who hides in the darkness find the courage to walk toward brightness.

Drinking in the beautiful, lit tree with a sleeping Choco in her arms and the quiet hum of the world outside, Arden finally felt what Christmas was meant to bring – peace.

### Our Mission

Victoria Women's Transition House Society (VWTH) 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.

### Holiday Support

Tips to support a friend impacted by intimate partner violence (IPV).

- 1. Believe and Listen Without Judgment**  
Survivors often need to feel validated and supported. Telling them "You're not alone" and affirming that the abuse is not their fault can be powerful.
- 2. Create a Safety and Support Plan**  
Help the survivor develop a safety plan for festive periods, including discreet ways to communicate with trusted friends or family, and establish a code word for emergencies. Planning ahead can help them feel more in control and prepared for potential triggers or dangerous situations.
- 3. Respect Boundaries and Offer Flexibility**  
Respect their choices about social interactions or activities, acknowledging that the Holidays can be emotionally challenging. Offer support without pushing, and encourage them to participate in activities that they find comforting.
- 4. Encourage Self-Care and Self-Compassion**  
Support women to engage in self-care practices that foster healing, such as mindfulness, physical activity, or creative outlets. Remind them it's okay to prioritize their needs and take breaks from stressful situations.
- 5. Stay Connected and Offer Ongoing Support**  
Survivors benefit from knowing they are not alone beyond the Holiday season. Keep in touch, regularly check in, and offer information about community resources and counselling services specializing in IPV recovery – including the counselling and support services offered by Victoria Women's Transition House.

Victoria Women's Transition House  
Crisis and Information Line (250-385-6611)  
is open 24/7. In an emergency, call 911.



# A New Chapter of Leadership at VWTH

## INTRODUCING BAHAR DEHNADI

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Bahar Dehnadi as the new Executive Director of Victoria Women's Transition House. Bahar brings a deep commitment to gender justice, compassionate leadership, and a vision for strengthening our services and community impact. As we welcome Bahar, we also extend our heartfelt gratitude to Makenna Rielly, who has served VWTH with dedication, empathy, and transformative leadership over the past 15 years. We thank Makenna for her unwavering service and wish her every success in her next chapter.



Bahar Dehnadi

### Bahar's Message

It is with great honour and excitement that I step into my role as the new Executive Director of Victoria Women's Transition House Society.

Thanks to Makenna Rielly's visionary leadership in her role over the past 15 years, and the incredibly hardworking and dedicated team of staff and volunteers, VWTH has built a stellar reputation for advocacy and support for victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in our community.

As an intersectional feminist and advocate who has dedicated her career to advancing gender justice and supporting women, children, and gender-diverse people impacted by violence, this position represents the convergence of my deepest values and professional calling. I was already familiar with the exceptional work

that the organization has been doing from my previous role at BC Housing, and I knew this was an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

What excites me most is the chance to work alongside a team that doesn't just talk about change – they create it every single day. The prospect of adding to VWTH's exceptional foundation while exploring new ways to expand our reach and deepen our impact fills me with tremendous energy and purpose.

Over the past couple of months, I have witnessed firsthand the passion and dedication of each and every staff member who works tirelessly to ensure that women, children, and gender-diverse people impacted by violence have access to safety and security. What inspires me most is

not just their commitment, but the compassion, resilience, and innovation they bring to this critical work.

Being part of an organization where every person – from front-line workers to volunteers – shows up with such profound care and expertise is both humbling and invigorating.

***"What excites me most is the chance to work alongside a team that doesn't just talk about change – they create it every single day."***

I am energized by the opportunity to support this remarkable team, to learn from their experience,

and to collaborate on new initiatives that will strengthen our community's response to gender-based violence. Together, I believe we can continue to be a beacon of hope and transformation for those who need it most.

### Makenna's Message

After 15 years of service, I have decided to retire as the Executive Director of Victoria Women's Transition House. This decision was not met lightly, as my time with the organization has been incredibly rewarding.

I am proud of what we have accomplished together, particularly with the opening of our Second Stage Transitional Housing program in the

Westshore. I am also proud of the diversity, equity, and inclusion work, and our reconciliation work with the support of an Advisory Circle of Indigenous Women leaders, to promote safety within our services and for our staff to experience a respectful workplace.

A new Executive Director offers us the opportunity to reignite our enthusiasm for pursuing our ambitions and dreams. It is also a time to reflect on the past year – learning from our mistakes and

***"Let us choose to create a world free from gender-based violence. A world where everyone can thrive."***

celebrating our achievements. Embracing opportunities and moving forward under new leadership, we must remember that our actions, or inactions, shape the world we live in. Let us choose to create a world free from gender-based violence. A world where everyone can thrive.

No single organization, group or individual can tackle GBV alone. It requires a workplace committed to equity and fairness, leaders who listen to survivors and

craft policies that reflect their realities, and communities standing together to declare, "This violence is unacceptable and must stop now."

When we unite through action, advocacy, conversations and education, we create the momentum needed for real, lasting change. GBV is not just about protecting women and girls; it's about building a society where everyone, regardless of gender, can live free from fear. It's about valuing each other's humanity.



Makenna Rielly

Over the past 51 years, VWTH has taken great pride in our identity as a feminist organization. It is with deep gratitude that we recognize the exceptional individuals that comprise our

team. The community's commitment to our mission has not only shaped the success of our organization but has also positively impacted the lives of countless individuals.

It has been an honour to serve VWTH for fifteen years, and I am leaving with great confidence that Bahar Dehnadi will carry the vision forward for many years to come with the help of the VWTH staff, volunteers, board and community supporters.



# *The Effects of Witnessing Family Violence on Children*

## **SPECIALIZED SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH**

Research shows that witnessing family violence can be as harmful to children as experiencing it directly. Parents may believe that they have protected their children from intimate partner abuse. In fact, children who see or even hear many of the incidents, may suffer the same consequences as those who are directly abused.

Children and youth who accompany their mothers to the Victoria Women's Transition House Emergency Transition

House or come to our PEACE/Children Who Witness Abuse Counselling program are offered specialized counselling support. In this safe, supported environment, a child or youth who has witnessed violence in the home is encouraged to express their feelings and experiences with a professional children's counsellor.

Children learn that they are not to blame for the conflict between their parents, and that there are ways to



stay safe and get help from trusting adults. Many young people who have lived with violence and abuse in their families have unresolved feelings of guilt, confusion, loss and fear. They have received unhealthy messages about how to cope with anger, the use of power and control, and what is acceptable behaviour.

Children who are exposed to abuse may have a higher potential for becoming an abuser or being abused themselves in future intimate relationships. Early intervention by caring and informed adults can prevent this cycle of abuse and aggressive, bullying behaviour.

With proper intervention, including individual and group counselling from VWTH counselling staff, these children and youth can go on to live healthy lives where they are neither a victim nor a perpetrator of abuse.



### **Supporting Clients**

**Wonderful news! Victoria Women's Transition House has received funding from the Victoria Foundation Community Grants Program for our Stopping the Violence Women's Counselling Program, to provide additional support to help our clients – survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) – who also have substance use challenges.**

**This funding will provide our team additional hours to address counselling wait lists, see more clients, and offer the team more time for in-house learning, case consultation, and coordination with substance-use service providers. Our counselling staff can address these issues in more depth with survivors, rather than relying on external referrals alone.**

**Survivors of IPV often face substance use challenges for multiple interconnected reasons. IPV can cause profound psychological trauma, including PTSD and depression, as well as leading survivors to use substances as a coping mechanism to alleviate emotional pain and distress. Additionally, abusive partners may coerce or pressure survivors to use substances, either to incapacitate them or maintain control over them.**

**Thank you to the Victoria Foundation Community Grants Program and many generous individual donors for your support of this important community counselling program.**

### **Territory Acknowledgement**

**It is with much respect to the Lekwungen and SENĆOŦEN speaking peoples of the WSÁNEĆ, Esquimalt, and Songhees Nations, on whose traditional territories the Victoria Women's Transition House Society is located, that we make this acknowledgment with the expressed shared hope to live in communities free of intimate partner violence.**



# Spreading Warmth This Holiday Season

## HOLIDAY HAMPERS

*This winter, we're proud to continue our annual **Holiday Hamper Program**, bringing cheer, gifts, and care to women and children rebuilding their lives after abuse. A heartfelt thank you to **Heidi Gayleard**, whose dedicated coordination ensures this program continues to brighten the holidays for so many. With the support of our generous community, hope and kindness are once again at the heart of the season.*

**For those who may be unfamiliar, how would you describe the Hamper Program and who it supports?**



Holidays can be challenging for many, and the women and children we serve are no exception. The Holiday Hamper gift card program allows for a little bit of stress to be removed from an already stressful time, and takes away some of the concern about how our clients will find the funds to buy food and gifts. It empowers our women with a sense of independence and gives them the ability to choose personalized gifts for their families, providing comfort and relief. I really enjoy matching community donors with VWTH client families in need.

**How long have you been involved with the Hamper Program, and what first inspired you to take on this role?**

I started working at Victoria Women's Transition House as the Administrative

Assistant at the Emergency Transition House over 17 years ago, and was honoured to work on this program there and have continued ever since. Our Holiday Hamper program is one of my favourite programs with VWTH because to me, this is what the holidays are about. We are so grateful for the generosity of our Hamper donors and I love coordinating with our clients, the women and children who receive these special Hamper gifts. The amount of joy in

giving and thankfulness in receiving is amazing and very fulfilling to witness.

**Is there a story from a client or family that has stayed with you over the years?**

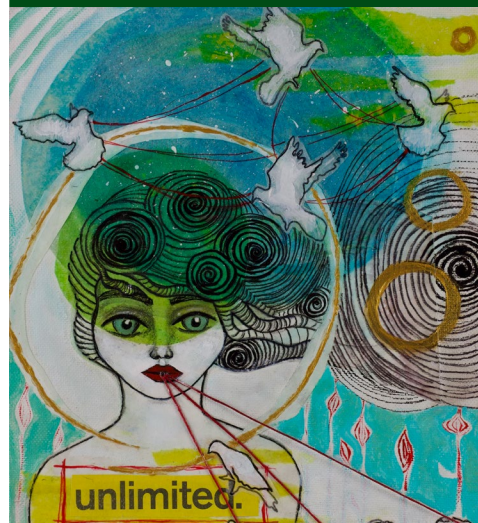
During Covid I was working at the Emergency Transition House again. During that time, no physical contact was allowed but I still got to know a mother and two boys that stayed there. One of the boys was extremely shy and would not speak unless he felt very comfortable with a person. I happened to be lucky enough to be one of the people he felt comfortable with and so got to spend some time with him and get to know him a little before they moved on. That year, I was able to give this family their Hamper and when they came to pick it up, the boy started running around me over and over again. His Mom reminded him that he was not allowed to give me a hug, and his response was "I know Mom, why do you think I am doing this?" Just knowing that our Hamper program was helping make their Holiday a little bit better was such a joy.

**How can people get involved or support this year's program?**

There's still time to get involved and make a real difference this holiday season! Simply visit our website at [www.transitionhouse.net/support-us/holidayhamper/](http://www.transitionhouse.net/support-us/holidayhamper/) and complete the online form to become a donor.

## 50+ Outreach

**Older women experiencing intimate partner violence face unique challenges – financial dependency, isolation, and compound trauma, potentially from many years of abuse. At VWTH, our programs specific to women over 50 years of age focus on empowerment, creativity, and connection.**



*Creative self-portrait by  
VWTH 50+ group participant*

**Through group programs like Turning the Tide, Healing Through the Arts, PhotoVoice and Strength: A Health and Wellness program, women gain tools to express themselves and rebuild confidence. These programs offer a safe and welcoming space where participants can share experiences, explore creativity, and learn new skills that support both healing and independence.**

**For more information on all our group programs, please call our Community Office at 250-592-2927.**

**Crisis and Information Line  
250.385.6611**

**Community Office**

Suite 100–3060 Cedar Hill Road  
Victoria, BC V8T 3J5

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## A Sweet Taste of Kindness

### OOH-LA-LA CUPCAKES & THE CUPCAKE CREW

Nearly two years ago, local bakery, Ooh-La-La Cupcakes, generously offered to donate cupcakes to our Emergency Transition House each week. There was just one small hitch: since our Emergency Transition House location is confidential for the safety of our

residents, only approved individuals can deliver donations directly.

Enter: the **Cupcake Crew**.

Formed in response to this unique challenge, the Cupcake Crew is a dedicated team of three volunteers who

have faithfully rotated Saturday pick-ups from Ooh-La-La Cupcakes and delivered them to our Emergency Transition House. From the very beginning, this sweet task has been carried out with care, consistency, and lots of love.

During this time, the team has only seen one change in its membership – a testament to

the commitment and passion of these volunteers. From one Saturday to the next, they've ensured that our residents receive a sweet treat, brightening spirits with each delivery.

The largest single pick-up by the crew? A whopping 53 cupcakes! That's a delicious record that still brings smiles all around.

But the true impact goes far beyond numbers.

Clients have shared how special and spoiled they feel receiving these beautifully made cupcakes, calling them a "luxury" they never expected. One client movingly said:

*"I've always wanted a cupcake but could never afford to buy one. I was so happy."*

A heartfelt thanks to Ooh-La-La Cupcakes and the Cupcake Crew, showing that something as simple as a cupcake has become a symbol of care, dignity, and a reminder that everyone deserves a little sweetness in their life.



## Food Security Project

The VWTH Food Security Project helps provide healthy, nutritious, culturally appropriate food to VWTH clients, women and their children as well as older women, impacted by intimate partner violence (IPV).

Our VWTH Food Co-ordinator secures and distributes food donated by community members and businesses, and works to build and expand a network of local partnerships to support food security for VWTH and the clients we serve.

Food insecurity is a critical risk factor for individuals facing or recovering from IPV. The increased cost of living, including rent and groceries, leads many women survivors and their children to cut down on the quantity and quality of their food consumption and forces many women to choose between paying their rent or buying food, putting their mental and physical health at risk due to food insecurity. Some women will not leave their abusive partner because they feel they can't afford the cost of living on their own and providing for their children.

Our thanks to the **Times Colonist Christmas Fund** (Ed Kennedy from the TC is with VWTH's Susan Howard, right), the **Provincial Employees Community Services Fund** (PECSF), and individual donors for their support of our Food Security Project.





## Meet VVTH Board Member, Kimiya Missaghi

Kimiya Missaghi is a doctoral candidate in Feminist and Gender Studies at the University of Ottawa, a research affiliate at the University of Victoria, and a new mom to a beautiful baby girl.

Kimiya's dissertation examines the intersection of forced migration, displacement, and gender, focusing on the experiences of Afghan women and girl refugees in transit to Canada, and is grounded in feminist and intersectional, and decolonial methodologies.

"I research how gender shapes experiences of forced migration and resettlement," Kimiya explains. "My doctoral work at the University of Ottawa examines the experiences of Afghan women and girl refugees in Canada following the Taliban resurgence."

"I also conduct community-based participatory research on refugee men's mental health through the Social Dimensions of Health program at the University of Victoria. My work draws on intersectional, decolonial, and feminist migration studies to foreground migrant agency and critique Eurocentric and securitized approaches to migration governance."

Outside of academia, Kimiya leads UX research for digital platforms that support forcibly displaced communities through accessible, trauma-informed and gender responsive design technologies. She conducts user research with newcomers and settlement organizations to understand diverse needs.

Kimiya works with a team of newcomers and immigrants on this UX research, combining personal experience and empathy into her work. For Kimiya, who leads user research for the Virtual Career Coach and on the Welcome

to Canada app, this approach is at the heart of her role as she informs the platform and tools to support both newcomers building their new lives and the staff helping them succeed.

Kimiya's journey is deeply personal. Growing up in a refugee family fleeing religious persecution and as an advocate for her stateless

brother, she saw firsthand the barriers displaced individuals face. "I have lived experience of some of the challenges many users face, giving me a unique perspective on the cultural, social, and systemic factors that influence their decisions and behaviours," she shares. These experiences drive her passion for designing tools that are not only practical but deeply reflective of users' realities.

Kimiya Missaghi is currently in her fourth year of service on the Victoria Women's Transition House Board of

Directors. She is committed to the organization and its mission and shares:

"I am honoured to serve as a Board Director at an organization that advances gender equity and works to end violence against women through person-centred, trauma-informed care. Intimate partner violence remains a deeply embedded structural issue, and the Victoria Women's Transition House plays a vital role in disrupting these inequities by centering women's agency, safety, and right to rebuild their lives with dignity. The new 50-unit Westshore Second Stage transitional house program stands as a testament to our community's commitment to safety and dignity, even as we continue striving for a future where such spaces are no longer needed."



VVTH Board Member,  
Kimiya Missaghi



Victoria Women's Transition House Board of Directors

### Annual General Meeting

In September, Victoria Women's Transition House hosted a successful Annual General Meeting where the Society membership heard organizational updates from the 2024-25 fiscal, including a report indicating the organization's strong financial position.

PEACE children's counsellor, Haylee, gave a program overview on the PEACE/Children Who Witness Abuse program and the work that team is doing to help break the cycle of gender-based violence.

The AGM included the re-election of Board Directors May Han, Lauryn Kerr, Lori Ann Smith, Rosalie Walls and Sandra Hudson; joining current directors Kimiya Missaghi and Nicole (Nikki) Petersen; with new directors Donna Hobbs, Kate Donahue and Nicola Lemmer.

Victoria Women's Transition House acknowledged and thanked our retiring Board members Kerrilee Jones, Hollie McKeil and Liette Bates-Eamer for their leadership, dedication and work on the Board of Directors.

We are deeply grateful to all of these remarkable women for their commitment and support.



# With Our Thanks

## GRATITUDE FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Victoria Women's Transition House extends our sincere thanks to The **Ferreira Family Fund** through Victoria Foundation; the **Eldon and Anne Foote Fund** held at Edmonton Community Foundation; the **Price Family Charitable Gift Fund**; **Terry and Sherril Medd**; **Arlene Anderson**; **Helen Volkady**; and to the **ALACS Foundation Fund** for your leadership support. We are deeply grateful to the **Victoria Foundation Community Grants Program** for support our the **Stopping the Violence Women's Counselling**.

Thank you to the **Provincial Employees Community Service Fund (PECSF)** for the continuing support of our **Food Security Project**; to the **Potash Family Fund** for directing your gift to our **Families in House** program at our Emergency Transition House and our **PEACE children's camps**; and to **Thrifty Foods/Sobeys** for the donation of grocery gift cards in support of our **Holiday Hamper** Program and to give our client families the opportunity for fresh produce, dairy, meat and other groceries, throughout the year.



*The Modern Real Estate Team hosting their 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Raise the Roof for Shelter event*

It's been a busy season for fundraising events. Thank you to the **Modern Real Estate Team** that successfully hosted its 11<sup>th</sup> annual **Raise the Roof for Shelter** event in October at John Fluevog Shoes raising funds through donations, a silent auction, and sales of John Fluevog shoes, which donated 50% of the proceeds, all in support local women's shelters, including VWTH.



Thank you to VWTH donor and supporter Tara and her family in Fairfield who created an unforgettable, **hand-crafted Halloween Lawn Display** with donations collected on-site directed to VWTH. Our thanks to **Uptown Centre**, **lululemon**, and local yoga instructor and lululemon Ambassador, **Caleigh Hunter**, along with 80 enthusiastic yogis for **Breathe and Be**, a two-hour health and wellness workshop combining journaling, reflection, slow flow yoga, breath, and meditation. Thank you **Urban Barn Uptown staff** for nominating VWTH to be the local charity of choice for the **"Blanket the Country"** fundraiser, matching customer donations in-store



*Urban Barn Uptown named VWTH local charity of choice for the "Blanket the Country" fundraiser*

at Uptown or online throughout the month of October, with Urban Barn continuing to collect donations for VWTH from customers until September 2026. And thank you to the organizers of **Aged to Perfection**, an upbeat burlesque gala and auction at the Elements Casino, attending by a glittering array of performers and guests with partial proceeds directed to VWTH.



We are always grateful to local businesses and community members for donating **gifts-in-kind**. Thank you to **Refire Kitchen** for their delicious **Harvest Dinner** contributions of casseroles for the women at our third stage transitional housing program; to **Thrifty Foods Cloverdale** for multiple deliveries of fresh produce and other groceries as part of the "fill the fridge" campaign at our Emergency Transition House and for clients at our other locations. We are grateful to the many donors who dropped off everything from **fresh organic apples and grapes**; **original art greeting cards**; **boxes of diapers**; **beautiful hand knit sweaters, hats, and jewellery**; to coupons for **complimentary haircuts and hair styling**; and **personal care items**. And a Big Thank You to the dozens of people who answered our call-out for **children's clothing**. We are grateful to all of you for the support!



# 16 Days of Activism

## STANDING TOGETHER TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The **National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women** in Canada is observed annually on **December 6**. It commemorates the murder of 14 young women at École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989, a tragic act of gender-based violence, also known as femicide. This day is dedicated to remembering these women and all who have experienced

gender-based violence and to taking action against such violence in society. The day was officially designated by the Parliament of Canada in 1991. It also serves as a platform to raise awareness about ongoing gender-based violence issues affecting women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals in Canada.

On this day, we encourage you to observe a moment of silence, wear a

white ribbon as a symbol of commitment to ending violence against women, attend a vigil, and participate in advocacy and education to combat gender-based violence. The day underscores

**National Day of Remembrance & Action on Violence Against Women**



the importance of addressing not only misogyny but also intersecting forms of discrimination such as racism, ableism, and homophobia, which exacerbate violence against marginalized groups.

The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women is part of broader efforts including the **16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence** campaign from **November 25 to December 10**, and national initiatives aimed at ending gender-based violence in Canada. It honours the victims by reaffirming commitment to fight the hatred and discrimination that lead to these tragedies and supports survivors' voices in ongoing actions for change.



*YES! I wish to support Victoria Women's Transition House*

### I would like to give a gift of:

☐ \$50   ☐ \$100   ☐ \$500   ☐ \$1000   ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

A tax receipt will be issued for all donations over \$10

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**250.385.6611**

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