



ANNUAL
REPORT
2020/2021

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Letter from our Co-Chairs

Karin Landra & Erin Oscienny

Wow, what a year it has been for all of us! As we take this opportunity to reflect on the time since our 2020 Annual General Meeting, it is truly inspiring to see the courage and accomplishments demonstrated within the Bridges community.

It has been a year of innovation, frustration, humour and significant learning. Employment programs and counseling continued throughout the pandemic and shifted to online formats. The staff, volunteers and clients of Bridges demonstrated incredible resiliency during these unprecedented times and we commend everyone for adapting so well.

Bridges relocated over the winter. The large programming spaces and number of offices were no longer needed with pandemic restrictions in place. The move to a smaller space provided an opportunity for off-season 'spring cleaning' and the dedicated staff shifted to working at home or amongst the boxes. The smaller space will serve Bridges well for the short term while we explore options for our long term home.

The year has brought so much more than pandemic challenges. There have also been opportunities to diversify online programming and reach participants further across the province, to upgrade internal technology, as well as seek increased funding sources to support ongoing work and online shifting.

Although we have many achievements to celebrate, we know the pandemic has disproportionately impacted those who identify as women, Two-Spirit and non-binary. The heartbreaking stories and statistics that have emerged reinforce the importance of programs that are offered by Bridges and indicate that we still have so much work to do. The pre-pandemic cracks that showed the disparities and hardship of Bridges clients have become gaping valleys of division and hurdles.

We feel confident that the foundation of strong understanding and programming, built by the Founding Mothers, will continue to guide us well as we navigate through our next year. There is incredible

strength and hope in the strong connections and dedication of the Bridges community.

We would like to thank the commitment, expertise and passions of the staff, volunteers and board. Your service to those who have experienced abuse and trauma provide valuable learning skills and strategies to work towards a future of financial independence. Your contributions support the leaders of today and in the future to find their voice and place in the world.

Thank you to each of you for your support of Bridges. We send wishes of health, safety and growth to the entire Bridges community and look forward to the next time we meet again in 2022. Thank you.



Karin Landra
Board Co-Chair



Erin Oscienny
Board Co-Chair

Leadership Team



Patricia Rawson
Executive Director,
Interim



Carrie Everett
Director of Programs,
Interim



Elizabeth Skillings
Director of Finance



Gwen Davies
Counselling Coordinator



Heather Forbes
Development Manager

Message from Interim Executive Director

Patricia Rawson

This year Bridges for Women Society celebrates its 33rd year! The longevity of Bridges is, like other long-term organizations, due to a combination of vision, adaptability, dedication and a lot of hard work. All of this was tested this year because of the global pandemic. 2020 is a year to remember!

An outstanding accomplishment of the year was moving our services to a virtual environment. As much as we could, we replicated our in-person services. Though we have an online self-paced program, we decided to create a live classroom experience. At first clients were hesitant, but by the end of the fiscal year, we were back up to pre-pandemic enrollment. Similarly, counselling initially decreased at the onset of the pandemic but later grew.

Our vision guided us through each step of the transition. This vision that was created in 1988 by our 5 Founding Mothers remains a key part of everything we do. We are

delighted this year to launch a bursary in honour of our Founding Mothers. The legacy that they left us will be carried forward to women who are looking at their next steps for self-sufficiency.

Bridges has always adapted to a changing environment. This year as we looked ahead at the restrictions due to the pandemic and our office lease came for renewal, we considered different space possibilities. We decided to downsize temporarily and in December we moved to a new space with 5 offices. Staff have primarily worked from home during this year, but we have also had some in-house counselling and administrative functions at our new location. We are now exploring options for a permanent home.

During the shift to our new space, we also changed our IT systems, one where we can work in a secure way from home as well as the office. This was a significant change and offered some new learnings! We also adapted to hiring in a virtual world.

One of the unexpected outcomes from the pandemic was our vision for provincial program delivery. For years, Bridges has been exploring an expanded service delivery model. With the success of our move to a virtual environment, we could see it happening. In the spring of 2021, we applied for and received funding for a provincial pilot program. We will be offering 2 programs in the next year.

This year also provided us the opportunity to bring another dream to the forefront – an update of our workbook – Bridges to Healing. We are excited to launch this at this year's Annual General Meeting.

Some of the work we did was staying steady on the course from programming to other initiatives such as our Indigenous cultural sensitivity training, which we began the year before.

What especially stands out this year is our work with clients, and how we needed to be present in new (and old) ways. For some, the unseen

threat of the virus triggered old patterns or memories; some were isolated in stressful and dangerous situations; some suddenly had none of their former supports. At Bridges, we did as we have always done, meet the clients where they are. We also spent more time settling nervous systems and supporting clients in feeling safe. They showed us time and time again their adaptability, determination and a vision for themselves. We are so inspired when women embark on the journey of healing from the impacts of trauma, how beautifully they leap into the driver's seat of their lives.

At Bridges, we are keenly aware of the continuum of service for the women we work with; we are part of a deeply caring community. I would like to thank everyone who contributes in so many ways to support our clients. Thank you to employers, other organizations, funders, individuals who help us in a multitude of ways including donations and volunteer. I am grateful to our dedicated board and amazing staff! Our strength stems from each and every one of you!

Programs



7

groups



320

individuals served

“Bridges gave me a space to work on myself and my struggles that was supportive and non-judgmental, someone on my side...Working through the Bridges materials and with my Bridges coordinator Christine have helped me to let go of a lot of trauma I was holding onto and to have renewed faith in my ability to move forward in a positive way in my life.”

2020 BOP Program Graduate

Message from Interim Director of Programs

Carrie Everett

This past year has been dominated by the ongoing pandemic and its impact on both staffing and program delivery.

Given the in-person nature of our long-standing service delivery model, the move to a primarily virtual model in March/April 2020 was a shock to our organization on many levels. From a programming perspective, facilitators needed to become Zoom experts, from their home offices, very quickly. Our team oriented to new workflows and technologies. Staff immediately began the process of adapting our curriculum for the virtual learning environment.

We learned that virtual learning reduced barriers for many participants while creating barriers for others. Participating from the comfort of home and not needing to commute to our office increased participation for some, but others were impacted by lack of safety and privacy at home, technology-related anxiety and a lack of technology and internet connectivity. Staff and participants alike grappled with the very real emotional and tangible

impacts of COVID-19. Together, our staff and community navigated these challenges. We listened to our participants and their concerns and spent this past year filling in the gaps related to computer connectivity and reducing other barriers to program participation.

We continued to engage with employers and the community as much as possible. This included a very well attended virtual Employer Panel in November 2020. The panel was delivered in partnership with the Victoria WorkBC office and included 5 local employers. Local employers and guest speakers zoomed into smaller group sessions and shared labour market, self-employment and general life wisdom with participants; these guest speakers continued to create meaningful sparks of inspiration propelling participants in new directions of interest!

A notable highlight of the year was the expansion of our virtual Bridges Employment Program (BEP), reaching survivors of domestic and sexualized violence across all regions of our province. This funding was secured March 2021 with

program delivery occurring during the 2021/2022 fiscal year. We are incredibly grateful and excited to pilot this provincial offering.

The Indigenous Bridging Program adapted to virtual learning with incredible success, and integrated many culturally relevant, creative, and engaging Zoom sessions including bannock making!

A standout cohort of our Urban Indigenous program saw all 8 participants completing the program. This group showed us the power of

connection while meeting online and that healing can occur in this new way.

Our traditional self-paced Bridges Online Program (BOP) continued under the WorkBC model serving Northern Vancouver Island. With enthusiasm we embarked on a Moodle upgrade and are continuing to modernize the program's look, content, and functionality. As is true for all programs, we are updating our curriculum to reflect gender and racial diversity with the goal of creating safer classroom spaces.





59

Graduates



19

Individuals who
secured employment or
education after gradu-
ation



89%

Percentage of grads who
retained new school/
work positions after 3
months

“Without the online option there would have been days I simply would not have been able to attend. Multiple days I attended from my bed, in my jammies, levelled by emotion/trauma. By the end of class I had gathered enough reserves to continue thanks to the support of my sisters. More than once in the first half, I attended by voice only, from the trails (while on a trail run). Why? To cope. I needed to run, in order to ground myself and cope with the subject matter. The online format allowed me to do this. When I needed to participate, I could stop, unmute, say what I needed to, and then mute and carry on. This was so valuable, it’s impossible to put into words. Only a couple times did I do this... but the times I did, I will never forget those moments.

Thank you for this incredible program. My life is forever changed... and will keep changing as a result of what I have learned and will now continue to learn, as a result of the Bridges program. Once I am more stable, I look forward to giving back to this program.”

2021 BEP Program Graduate

Counselling



1221

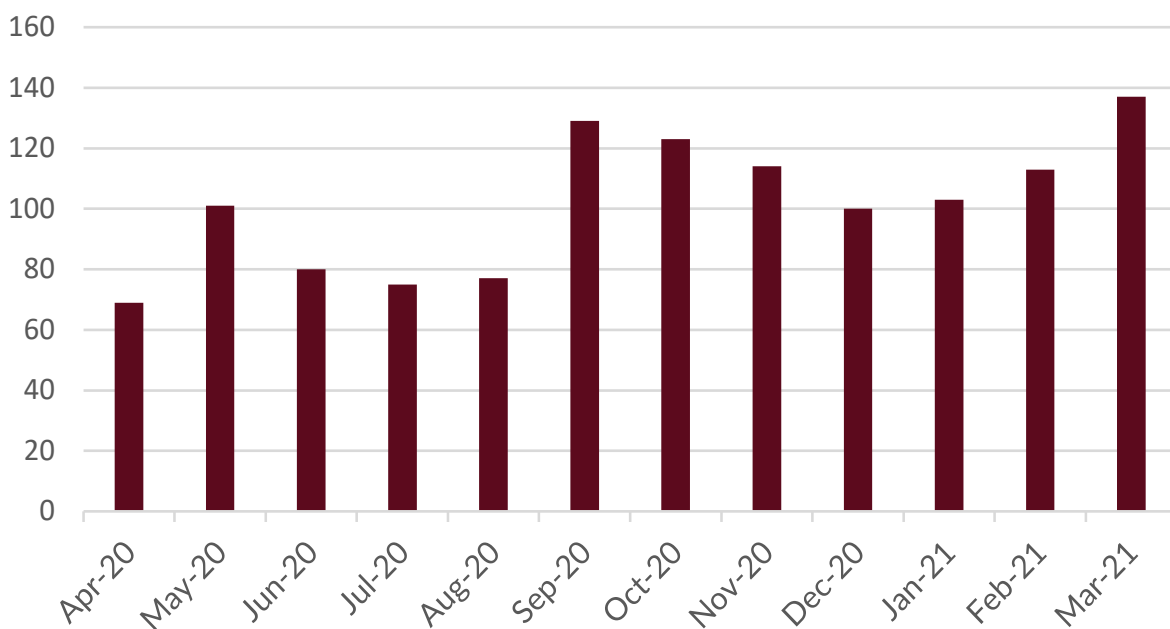
Total sessions offered



12

Funding options

Counselling Sessions Per Month



This graph illustrates how counselling numbers dropped significantly at the outset of the pandemic and rebounded in September. They are now trending at or above pre-pandemic levels.

Message from Counselling Coordinator

Gwen Davies

One of this year's highlights and challenges has been moving to on-line services. There was hesitancy in trying to access counselling online from many of our clients. However, as the pandemic deepened, and it became clear that this was now the new normal, clients started to reach out and join us online. It has been a rich experience for both counsellors and clients.

Since a lot of our counselling includes Somatic Experiencing, we were unsure how this would translate to an online environment. We were delighted to find that it works well! In fact, some clients feel less anxious working this way because they are in the safety of their own home, and they feel they can work more deeply.

There have been a few exceptions where due to space, children or capacity clients needed to come in face to face and we were able to accommodate that while keeping in line with the health guidelines and orders. Our numbers returned to near normal in September and have

been building ever since.

Another challenge is that the daily interactions and support between team members is not as easy when we are all working virtually. We have increased our counselling meetings and supervision to help with the isolation that can be felt when working from home. We pursued some virtual training with Peter Levine and Dianne Heller, and continue to meet with Linda Jennings monthly for in-depth case consulting. Our team is doing well despite the challenges.

Thanks to new funding, we were able to expand our services. This has allowed us to work with clients who are not eligible for our programs but are reaching out for help, and to offer more sessions to clients who are struggling. Our counselling program continues to grow, and we now have 12 different funding sources for clients. With these multiple streams of funding, we hope to continue to offer deep and meaningful counselling that works towards healing from the impacts of trauma, neglect, and abuse.

Development



322

individual donors



41

Monthly donors



Ocean 98.5 Host Robin Farrell (L) was our rousing MC and Victoria Artist In Residence Kathryn Calder (R) was one of our inspiring speakers at IWD 2021.

Message from Development Manager

Heather Forbes

This year was a testament to the strong relationships and inspiring partnerships that Bridges has built over the decades. We received significant financial support from our long-term partners, including the federal, provincial and municipal governments, United Way of Greater Victoria and numerous foundations, including the Victoria Foundation, Canadian Women's Foundation, Vancouver Foundation, Hamber Foundation, Lobstick Foundation, and others. Much of the funding received this year was flexible support designed to help us navigate the constantly evolving needs presented by the pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, our volunteer program was significantly scaled back. We are so grateful for the volunteers on the board and our policy development team who worked tirelessly over the year.

Despite prevailing uncertainty, support from small businesses and individuals remained firmly committed and we were able to exceed our donations and fundraising revenue over the previous year. This is a tes-

tament to Bridges' strong reputation in the community, as well as the immense generosity of our network of supporters. We are so grateful!

The 11th Annual International Women's Day event was a celebration like none that had come before it. It was a fully online event that managed to retain the vitality and joy long associated with the event. It was a rousing success, with 125 registrants and over \$12,000 raised. Speakers included Dr. Danièle Behn-Smith, Kathryn Calder, emcee Robin Farrell, with remarks from the Honourable Anne Kang. Special thanks to the generous local small business owners who donated generously to the silent auction.

To be frank, we started the year with trepidation, unsure how the global health crisis would affect our financial stability. Thanks to the commitment and care of our outstanding community, we have wrapped up the year feeling strong, ready to face any challenges, and enthusiastic about pursuing new opportunities.

Research

Market Readiness Investigation

A key goal of our Strategic Plan is to diversify our funding streams. To this end, we secured an Investment Readiness Grant from the Canadian Women's Foundation to explore expanding our online programs. As part of this project, we contracted Nota Bene Consulting to perform a scan and provide recommendations. This research proved timely, as we were able to immediately apply our findings to inform program expansions for the 2021/22 year. At the end of March 2021, we were successful in securing a contract to pilot province-wide online Bridges to Employment programs.

Sisters' Stories

Our Promising Indigenous Practices research project, funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada, made significant headway this year and had some great successes. We completed our first group, collecting and analyzing knowledge from eight women, as well as one facilitator. All knowledge was reviewed by the past participants and our Indigenous Advisory Council and then provided back to Bridges for Women senior staff for review and to help inform updates for future programs. We are looking forward to learning more from future cohorts and continuing to integrate their wisdom into the research project and future programs.

Community Engagement

Bridges' staff found creative ways to connect with the community. Some notable outreach events included presenting at the Soroptimists International conference, a workshop with VIRCS, and Instagram Live events with Camosun College and WorkBC (Beacon Community Services).

We continued to use our platform to advocate for social change. Interim Executive Director Patricia Rawson participated in numerous media interviews, sharing the inspiring stories of Bridges graduates and calling for public investments in trauma-informed care. It was also a year of learning and reflection. As the pandemic and other events highlighted ongoing systemic injustice, the board and staff committed to continuing our work to reflect and live up to our anti-racist, anti-oppressive values.



Patricia and Lydia participating in a Vital Peoples interview with CHEK TV.

Financial Highlights

Statement of Financial Position, March 31, 2021

Assets

Cash	853,576
Accounts Receivable	111,456
Other Assets	19,725
Capital Assets	70,877
Total Assets	1,055,634

Liabilities

Accounts Payable & Accrued Liabilities	100,291
Deferred Revenue	499,666
Deferred Capital Contributions	67,351
Total Liabilities	667,308

Net Assets

General Fund	161,979
Internally Restricted Funds	226,347
Total Net Assets	388,326

Total Liabilities & Net Assets **1,055,634**

Statement of Operations, Year ended March 31, 2021

Revenue

Government Funding	1,251,616
Grants	191,326
Fixed Fee & Counselling	165,128
Donations & Fundraising	110,278
Other	1,272
Total Revenue	1,719,620

Expense

Salaries & Benefits	1,109,268
Facilities Costs	192,463
Participant Supports	74,660
Office & General	42,699
Professional & Consulting	40,398
Advertising & Promotion	23,251
Amortization	18,985
Total Expense	1,501,724

Excess of Revenue Over Expenses **217,896**

Complete audited financial statements available by request.

Gratitude

Bridges for Women is a community in the truest sense of the word. We are deeply grateful for our wide network of supporters, partners, and friends. Thank you to everyone who contributed to our collective vision of a world where all women impacted by trauma have the choice to break free from the cycles of violence, poverty and isolation, and the opportunity to achieve safety, health and personal control in their lives.



Government of Canada



Province of British Columbia



WorkBC



Victoria Foundation



United Way of Greater Victoria



Vancouver Foundation



City of Victoria



Canadian Women's Foundation



Lobstick Foundation



Camosun College



Mac Zen

Mayfair Mall



Hamber Foundation



Unifor Social Justice Fund



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Bridges for Women Society acknowledges with respect that our offices are located in the traditional territories of the Ləkʷəŋən peoples (Esquimalt and Songhees nations). Bridges for Women also offers programs and services in the territories of the WSÁNEĆ (Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Tsawout, and Tseycum nations), Malahat (Mill Bay), Pacheedaht (Port Renfrew), Scia'new (Beecher Bay), and T'Sou-ke (Sooke) peoples. Through our online programs, we also deliver services throughout British Columbia, which is located on the traditional territories of 198 distinct First Nations.