



Annual
Report
2021/2022

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Letter from Co-Chairs

Karin Landra & Erin Oscienny

Celebrating another successful year at Bridges for Women Society.

This year, we continued our work together to empower and support women into financial independence through a strength-based, trauma informed, anti-oppressive approach. We would like to honour all of the women, transgender and cisgender, non-binary and two-spirit people, who identify as part of the women's community that inspire, teach, and mentor us, in our everyday lives. Our vision is for women to live free of violence, poverty, and hardship, and to participate in the career and life that they deserve.

We all know that gender equality still has a long road to go and that events over the past couple of years have only further widened the gender gap. We would like to acknowledge women around the world who are struggling right now and facing enormous hurdles – those that are close to home and those in the far corners of the world, like

Afghanistan and Ukraine. Education, employment, and empowerment for women and girls is a necessary part of a thriving future, global and local, and for helping to break the cycle of violence, abuse, and trauma.

Thank you to our many generous supporters and collaborators of Bridges who have joined us to give the gift of opportunity for those who are a part of our community of women and for the generations to follow. We express gratitude to each of you for making these programs and services possible through your time, your donations, and your advocacy.

We are so grateful for the generous nature, wisdom, and commitment of the Bridges staff team for another successful year and for creating an environment of belonging, safety, and respect for the Bridges commu-

nity. We acknowledge and appreciate our diligent and thoughtful Executive Director, Patricia Rawson, and her leadership team ... and so many more who have made our progress possible.

And as always, together, we all gather around our inspirational Founding Mothers whose courage, charisma, tireless work, and resolute determination brought us together.

This has been another extraordinary year for Bridges for Women Society and we look forward to what we can achieve in the year ahead, full of new possibilities! It is with pleasure that we present the 2022 Annual Report to you – thank you one and all for the difference you are making alongside us.

Erin & Karin



Karin Landra
Board Co-Chair



Erin Oscienny
Board Co-Chair

Leadership Team



Patricia Rawson
Executive Director



Angela McNulty-Buell
Director of Programs



Elizabeth Skillings
Director of Finance



Gwen Davies
Counselling Coordinator



Heather Forbes
Director of Development

Message from Executive Director

Patricia Rawson

“What have you learned?”

One of the highlights of the Bridges program is the graduation ceremony. In preparation for the event, participants are asked to reflect on their journey and what they have learned. Our annual report offers a similar opportunity for us to ask what we have learned over the past year.

Twelve months ago, when we were looking ahead, we expected that the pandemic would have blown over and we would be back to our regular scheduled programming. Unfortunately, it did not. So, like we reported a year ago, Bridges’ services are still being delivered virtually. Both clients and staff were amazed at how well they all adapted and continued to adapt through even more measures than the year before.

But as we have come to see globally, the effects of two years of a pandemic have disproportionately affected women. The isola-

tion that vulnerable women were feeling prior to COVID-19 was compounded, resulting in stresses on mental health and exposure to further trauma. What we reported last year continues to reverberate throughout our programming, and we continue to support our clients in a variety of ways. We are grateful to funders who have provided supports so that we can offer more counselling and advocacy.

The staff at Bridges have demonstrated again and again how creative they are in delivering dynamic and engaging programs that are also meaningful and life changing.

Our provincial pilot program was launched in the 2021-22 fiscal year with two cohorts from participants all over the province. This was a wonderful success. We will continue to take what we learned through that programming and explore possibilities for the future.

During the past year, we also began our journey to being more inclusive. With guidance from consultants in the community, we formed a steering committee to ensure we are doing this in a thorough way. The committee is developing their framework, and this will form the basis for our ongoing Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (JEDI) committee.

During this past year, the steering committee also set up staff learning events for Black History Month and National Day of Awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ Peoples.

What we also learned through this year is the complexities of considering our next home. Though our current downtown location worked well in the middle of a pandemic, it does not have the classroom space

for us to do in-person programming. Part of our future location consideration is a permanent home. During this year, we engaged a real estate consulting company to provide us a map to look at our options. The New Home Project Committee is working with these recommendations and strategizing next steps.

As we look forward to our next year at Bridges, we can see that there will be many more learning opportunities as we navigate uncertain times. We will be focussing on the transition to in-person delivery and continue the initiatives we introduced in the last year.

I am grateful for the strong foundation that has led Bridges to where it is today, to all the women who have come before us and taught us about healing, trauma, and community. I thank each of you who has supported Bridges along the way.



Programs

8

groups

66

graduates

“Before Bridges, I really struggled with the idea of a future. It was so terrifying that I could barely leave the house or take care of my own basic needs. I graduated from Bridges three months ago, and my life has changed a lot. I can set boundaries and stay calm in stressful situations. I’m better at decision-making. With all of the help from Bridges, I am finally able to see a future that isn’t ruled by fear.”

-Provincial Pilot participant

Message from Director of Programs

Angela McNulty-Buell

This past year has brought about new opportunities, continued ingenuity and some significant changes for Bridges. Some constants through all the change and the unpredictable environment of the past year, however, have been the dedication of staff, the quality of our programming and supports, and most importantly, the amazing and resilient participants who remind us daily why we do the work we do.

The ongoing impacts of the pandemic have kept the teams on their toes. With that said, groups were able to meet in person on a few occasions which was exciting for both staff and program participants. Planning is underway to determine a new way forward where we will continue to be accessible to individuals online, as well as provide the opportunity for in class workshops. Throughout the pandemic we have learned that offering different pathways for participation has made our programs more accessible to some. This important discovery will be carried into future program design and delivery.

Despite the impacts of COVID 19, program numbers remained consistent throughout the year with all targets and progress markers being met or exceeded. Bridges had 5 unique programs running in 2021-2022. These included: Bridges Employment Program (BEP), Bridges Online Program (BOP), Indigenous Women's Bridging Program (IWBP), Mentorship Program and the Sisters' Stories Evaluation Project.

A few important statistics to highlight: 185 women completed an intake and were assessed and supported to either enter an employment program, counselling or they received a community referral. Of 66 women completed and graduated from our employment programs. This represents 66 unique women who have experienced significant trauma, completing a program which supported them towards independence. Of these 66 women, 54% secured full or part time employment and 79% retained this employment.

Although statistics are important to highlight, the experiences of the programs are equally impactful. One such experience from the IWBP group was an in-person medicine walk through Meegan (Beacon Hill) lead by a local Songhees facilitator. It provided rich cultural learning and a coming together for the group in a safe outdoor environment.

Another notable highlight was the online provincial pilot project initiated this fiscal. It was a success on many levels, and we plan to continue working with regions throughout BC to broaden our reach.

Now about some changes here at Bridges. As I write this report, I am three weeks into my journey as Director of Programs with Bridges for Women. I would like to introduce myself and provide a narrative focused on my initial experience.

Upon entering the offices at Bridges, I felt an immediate sense of belonging and purpose. I have a strong belief that every woman who enters this space (both virtually and in person) is overcome with this same feeling. This is the feeling that drives so much of the programming Bridges offers and is the appeal for the clients and staff who want to be part of a truly heart-centered agency.

I have spent my career working within the support service sector, primarily with a focus on housing insecurity, substance misuse, poverty and with trauma impacted community members. This work is equally hopeful and heavy. My experience over the last few weeks has been that space if truly held for the heavy in this work. Staff are supported and empowered to balance life and work. It has been refreshing to witness women supporting women to do great work in the office, in the community and at home.

This approach to supporting people as whole and complete individuals when replicated within programs allows for participants to truly show up, participate, and discover their authentic selves. The course work and program agendas are fluid and truly person centered based on the needs of women within any given program. This is another instance of Bridges living its values and offering a safe place for trauma informed care/programming that is meeting the needs of the clients.

When I think of Bridges for Women, I think of opportunity! The possibilities feel endless and exciting. I am confident this next year will be filled with movement, success, support and smiles.

Program Stories

“I think what has stood out the most to me in regards to what I have learned through Bridges is that it’s okay to embrace life for what it is in the moment. It’s okay to have a good day, a bad day, a sad day. For a long time I have put on the tough-girl facade to be able to get by, but I didn’t have to do that here at Bridges.

The other valuable gift I have taken from this program is how much my social anxiety has improved. I spent so much time isolating myself away from interacting with anyone that the thought of being in any sort of social/group situation was too intimidating to handle. But everyone in the group was a part of making me feel safe to be vulnerable. They validated that it’s OK to be ME. They showed me genuine kindness and consideration, encouraged my ideas, laughed with me, and that’s probably the thing I am most grateful for.

I am looking forward to what the future holds for me. I am still “not sure what I want to be when I grow up”, but I know that whatever road life leads me down, I will be able to handle it much more gracefully thanks to the coping skills, insight, and experiences I’ve had here in our Bridges group.”

Bridges to Employment Graduate 2022

Message from Counselling Coordinator

Gwen Davies

1616

Total sessions offered

539

Sessions delivered to clients who historically would have been ineligible for services

Our new funding through Canadian Women's Foundation and the BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions contributed to 539 sessions that we were not able to fund in the past. This allowed us to work with clients who were not able or ready to enter group and to extend individual counselling sessions for group members who needed more support. We feel that this is truly a great service and something that we have needed for a long time.

Our referrals from outside the region have been more active this year and growing as virtual counselling has been received well in remote communities due to COVID-19 measures keeping people close to home. Overall, it was another year of recognizing and meeting challenges, and walking alongside our inspiring clients as they heal and build resilience.



Counselling Stories

A graduate from our program who then accessed further counselling through the support offered by the Canadian Women's Foundation, has historical trauma from her family of origin that resulted in trauma reactions of freeze and dissociation. Since Bridges she has been able to set and maintain safe boundaries with her family and prioritize self-care and healing, live independently, gain employment, and enjoy art and nature. Recently, she was in an unsafe situation and felt "her body shut down" and was able to ground, remain present and make a safe exit. In addition, she was able to inform authorities, access support, maintain safety and prevent further traumatic experiences.

A client started counselling sessions from her vehicle for privacy, she continued trauma counselling and joined and graduated from BEP. After that, she found safe, secure housing, put a protection order in place with her ex and MCFD returned her children to her care. She also started a successful home business which allows her the flexibility and income she needs as a single parent. She has created safety and stability for herself and her children and has advocated for counselling and support for her family to heal and stop the intergenerational cycle of abuse.

Development

492

individual donors

41

Monthly donors

“My first impression at Bridges was that this was such a warm, welcoming and safe community of people. It was so amazing to be with other recovering people, and to get to know everyone. It was different than other job programs, because it was from a trauma informed lens. We covered all different kinds of topics including our pasts, values, goals, among many other things. I am so happy to have participated in Bridges, and my life has been so enriched by meeting everyone here.”

Bridges to Employment Graduate 2022



Message from Director of Development

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 Southern Vancouver Island and numerous foundations and service groups, including the Victoria Foundation, Canadian Women's Foundation, Hamber Foundation, FK Morrow Foundation, GROW Fund, Westshore Rotary Club, and others.

Members of the board and Leadership team participated in the Thriving Non-Profits program, forwarding our strategic goal of pursuing mission-aligned activities to diversify our revenue streams. The insights gained have helped inform our fundraising events, New Home Project and other initiatives.

Thanks to a series of excellent Canada Summer Jobs funded employees, we energized our communications and engagement efforts. We are so grateful for their talents and fresh perspectives. We also benefitted

tremendously from our small but mighty team of volunteers on the board and our policy development team. We look forward to expanding our volunteer program in the future.

The 12th Annual International Women's Day event brought together friends and allies to celebrate our collective achievements and honour the women we exist to serve and support. It was a fully online event that managed to retain the vitality and joy long associated with the event. Speakers included Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development & Non-Profits Niki Sharma, Greater Victoria Teachers Association President Winona Waldron, BC Nurses Union Treasurer Sharon Sponton, MP Laurel Collins and Ocean 98.5 host Lisa Daigneault. Special thanks to the generous local small business owners who donated generously to the silent auction.

We look forward to re-emerging and re-engaging with our amazing community in the coming year. We are humbled by the sustained and creative care of our supporters, and can't wait to say thanks in person!

Reflection, Research & Engagement

Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

In August 2021, Bridges conducted an anonymous survey with staff about Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) as part of developing a Bridges' JEDI Committee. The survey was reviewed, and results compiled by Dr. Lisa Gunderson, who also did diversity work with all staff prior to the survey.

The next step was to have a small group develop a framework, including terms of reference, ground rules, goals, committee composition and conflict resolution. The 'first stage' committee met first on November 19th, 2021 and continues to meet regularly. The timelines first proposed for this work to roll out have been amended as it became clear that such important, multi-faceted work could not be rushed.

While continuing to develop the JEDI framework together, the committee has also developed and delivered two all-staff workshops: the first exploring Black History in Canada, as part of Black History Month, and the second to acknowledge Red Dress Day, which commemorates missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2-Spirit people.

The committee is also compiling recommended resources for staff to reference and have proposed a second survey to further engage staff in this process. The staff and board look forward to continuing to pursue and integrate this work in the coming year.

Community Engagement

Bridges' staff found creative ways to connect with the community. Some notable outreach events included numerous Facebook Live events presented in partnership with WorkBC and a presentation at the ASPECT Conference.

We continued to use our platform to advocate for social change. 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.

Sisters' Stories

Our Promising Indigenous Practices research project, funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada, has continued to progress as we have entered another year of this exciting evaluation project. Our research team has collected and analyzed knowledge and feedback from two pilot programs; we are currently at the mid-way point through our third program. Indigenous participants continue to express a strong willingness to share knowledge and expertise and contribute to the development and improvement of support services for fellow gender-based violence survivors. Preliminary findings are producing robust results which are vital in supporting the transformative learning about the strengths of the program, if/how it affected the participants, and how they experienced the delivery of the promising practice model. We look forward to working closely with our Indigenous Advisory Committee and our fabulous program participants to celebrate and share this knowledge with our local community and project stakeholders.



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



Rotary Club of West Shore



Camosun College



GROW Fund



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 W̱SÁNEĆ (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.