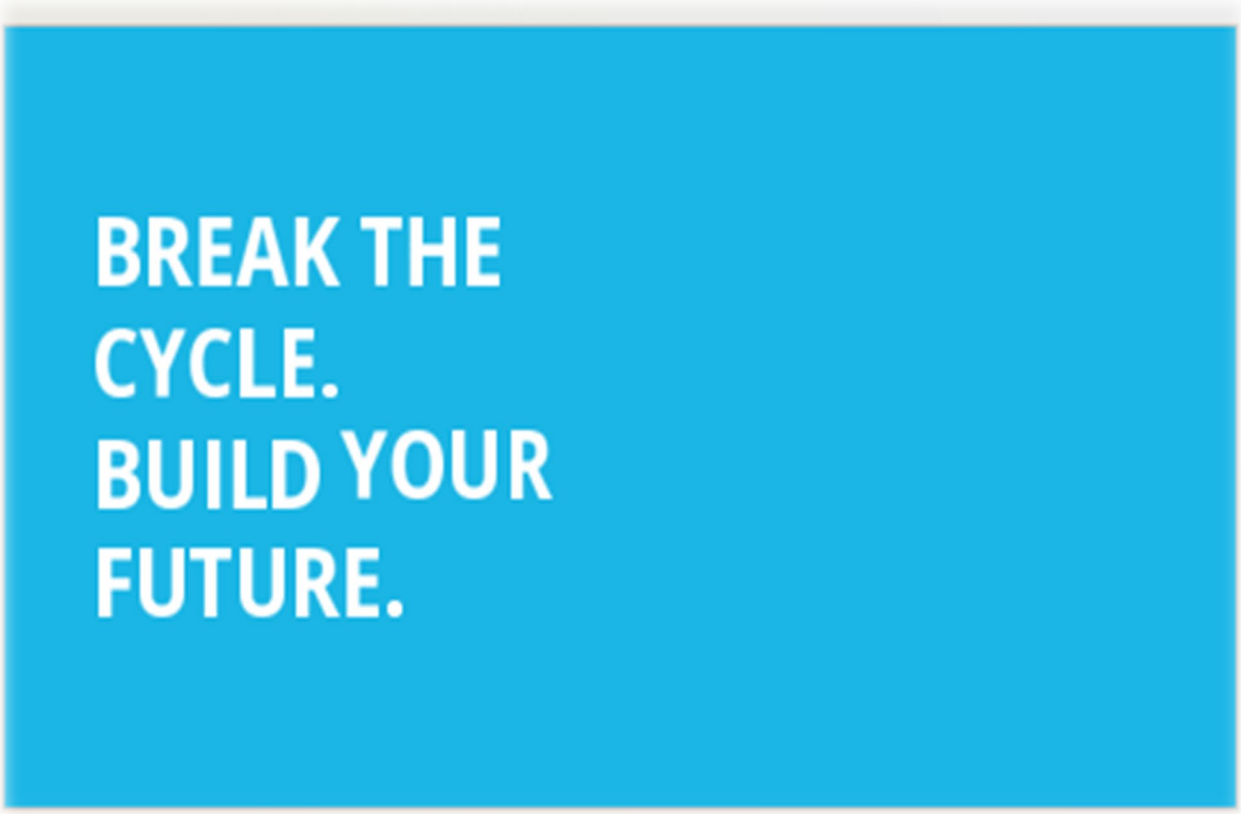
BRIDGES
FOR WOMEN SOCIETY

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR 3
MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 4
ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONS HIGHLIGHTS 6
COUNSELLING PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS 8
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS 11
ADVISORY COUNCIL: HONORING WISDOM, SHAPING THE FUTURE 13
CRYSTAL'S STORY OF SUCCESS AND DISCOVERY 15
LAUGHTER IN THE HALLS OF BRIDGES 16
SHHINE INITIATIVE 17
WORK EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES GRANT (WEOG) 18
AURICULAR ACU-TECHNICIAN (AAT) TRAINING INITIATIVE 19
IN GRATITUDE 21



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Dear members, partners and friends,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, it is a privilege to share a few words as we reflect on a year of change and growth. The momentum displayed in this past year has been nothing short of remarkable and has brought a breath of fresh air and perspective to Bridges. The result of this strong collective energy moved us past the impacts of the Covid years and into an exciting new era.

This year we overcame unforeseen challenges and celebrated meaningful milestones. The biggest being a new home. None of this is possible without the dedication of the team as a whole.

First, we want to acknowledge the incredible resilience and creativity shown by this team while navigating the challenges of relocating two offices into one new space. Programs are now housed together - and the team is stronger and full of enthusiasm for the future.

This move required much patience, commitment and a solid vision to advance women's equity and wellbeing all while ensuring a sense of safety for program participants.

Huge thanks for all the dedication and contributions to making this transition happen in as seamless a way as possible. It is very exciting for us all to have a new home and open a whole new world of creative possibilities.

And, big thanks to all the board members who worked so closely alongside the Executive Director and the Bridges team. This unwavering support to guide strategic priorities, deepen accountability and ensure our work remains grounded in the values that brought us here, is truly inspiring.

Carolyn Mandrusiak

As we now look ahead, we focus on building sustainable momentum: strengthening partnerships, engaging in new voices at the table, and ensuring our programs continue to meet the evolving needs of women in our communities.

So, again, on behalf of the Board I want to express our sincere thanks to everyone who has contributed their time, expertise, and heart to Bridges - especially to all our outgoing and incoming board members. Your contributions continue to shape a future where women's voices and leadership thrive. You are always welcome to continue sharing in this journey. Our vision remains bold and full of hope. Together, we will continue to enhance community partnerships and trust our work is rooted in purpose and spirit.

With appreciation and optimism,

Carolyn Mandrusiak

BOARD CHAIR

MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I reflect on my first year as Executive Director of Bridges for Women, I am filled with gratitude and pride. This year has been one of transition, growth, and renewed focus, made possible by the extraordinary dedication, resilience, and expertise of our staff, past and present, Board members, volunteers, and community partners. Together, we have strengthened programs, supported women in our community, and ensured Bridges continues to be a trauma-informed, strength-based, and gutsy feminist organization.

Having said that, we are also seeing that across our communities, demand for nonprofit services is higher than ever, while funding is shrinking. Organizations such as ours face difficult choices, cutting programs, reducing staff, or struggling to keep doors open—just when the women we serve need us most. Staff are working harder, often with fewer resources. For nonprofits supporting women affected by trauma, violence, and systemic inequities, this pressure can put critical programs at risk.

Despite these challenges, nonprofits, and Briges for Women remain the lifeline for the most vulnerable. Stable, flexible funding allows us to support programming, strengthen operations, and plan for the long term. Even small, consistent contributions make a tremendous difference, helping programs remain effective, adaptable and accessible.

At Bridges for Women, we know that great services depend on strong organizational foundations. By investing in people, systems, and governance, we continue to help women reclaim their lives, build economic security, and break cycles of violence. Together, we ensure that women facing trauma and adversity are not left behind. Bridges updated the 2025–2028 Strategic Plan, engaging staff and Board members in collaborative process to define priorities, including office relocation, financial sustainability, and program development. Staff and Board are working together to identify gaps, set actionable objectives, and establish a clear roadmap for growth, program excellence, and long-term stability.

Anne Hodge

A major milestone was the relocation from 645 Fort Street and 2830 Aldwyn street to 201-3045 Douglas Street. Through careful planning and staff coordination, we transitioned operations with minimal disruption. The new location provides a safe, welcoming, and accessible environment with offices, a classroom, and a meeting room to support staff and programs.

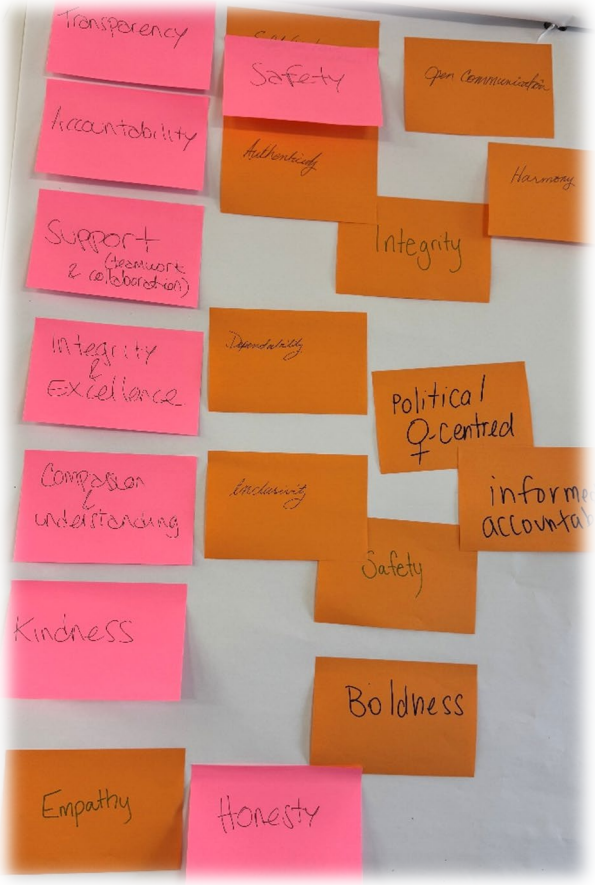
The HOME Committee ensured both short-term and long-term operational needs were met, from office layouts to program classrooms, creating optimal spaces for staff and participants and enabling our programs evolution to meet the needs of women survivors of trauma:

Our staff are the heart of Bridges. This year we focused on engagement, development, and wellbeing through wellness initiatives, coaching, workshops, and professional training. Recruitment of key positions, including Administrative Staff, Clinical Counsellors, Program Facilitators, and Program Manager, ensured continuity of services and strengthened program delivery.

This year's achievements would not have been possible without the extraordinary dedication, skill, and heart of our staff—past and present. Every administrative team, coordinators, counsellors, facilitators, and intake staff member has shown remarkable resilience, professionalism, and commitment to trauma-informed, feminist practice, helping make Bridges a place of safety, hope, and growth.

Our staff carried us through office moves, program expansions, system upgrades, and rising community need, navigating complexity with compassion, creativity, and an unwavering belief in the strength of the women we serve. They are the engine of this organization, translating our mission into daily action.

Bridges for Women Values



I also extend heartfelt thanks to our Board members, volunteers, and community partners. Their support is the foundation upon which all our successes are built. The guidance of our Board ensures thoughtful governance and strategic vision, while our volunteers bring energy, compassion, and hands-on support that enrich every program. Our community partners collaborate with us to expand opportunities and services for women, creating lasting impact together.

As we look to the future, I am energized to strengthen programs, deepen partnerships, and continue supporting our staff in delivering high-quality services. Together, we will ensure that women facing trauma, abuse, and adversity are supported, empowered, and not left behind.

Bridges for Women remains steadfast in its mission to empower women to reclaim their lives, build economic security, and break cycles of violence. I am honored to lead such a passionate, capable, and committed team.

Submitted by,

ANNE HODGE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

The Administration & Operations Department is the quiet engine that keeps Bridges for Women moving forward every single day. Rooted in feminist values of collaboration, care, and accountability, this team ensures that the organization can continue offering trauma-informed, life-changing programs for women, non-binary, and Two-Spirit participants. Over the past year, we focused on strengthening internal systems, increasing organizational resilience, and creating conditions where both staff and participants can thrive.

Administration Structure

The administrative functions are structured around four core areas—Administration, Operations, Finance, and Human Resources. Together, these teams form the organizational backbone of Bridges, supporting program delivery, safeguarding financial accountability, and ensuring effective staff and systems management across the Society.

Major Achievements

Successful Office Relocation: A major milestone this year was the relocation and consolidation of our offices from Fort Street and Langford into our new home at 201–3045 Douglas Street. This move required months of coordination, planning, and teamwork, coordination with service providers, and hands-on logistical support. Through strong collaboration across the organization, the transition was completed smoothly, with minimal disruption to staff and clients. The new space provides improved accessibility, upgraded facilities, and a more functional environment for program and administrative operations

Strengthening Internal Systems

Improved Administrative Processes: This year, the Administration & Operations Team undertook a major refresh of our internal systems—strengthening not just efficiency, but equity, clarity, and transparency.

Key improvements included:

- Streamlining communication workflows to reduce administrative burden
- Updating procedures and documentation to improve consistency
- Strengthening digital record-keeping and data management
- Revamping Payworks for accurate and reliable salary processing
- Streamlining payment systems to reduce errors and support efficiency.

Our investments in KEELA, Sage 50 Premium Accounting, Payworks, SurveyMonkey, and the MyBridges database enhanced reporting accuracy, strengthened intake management, and improved coordination between departments. These upgrades created smoother, more empowered workflows, supporting both staff well-being and organizational accountability.

Training Coordination

Professional development remains essential to our feminist and trauma-informed practice. This year, the department coordinated a range of training opportunities, including First Aid, ASIST Suicide Intervention, ASPECT Conference participation, and other skill-building sessions. These opportunities help staff deepen their practice, expand their knowledge, and stay grounded in the values that guide Bridges' work.

Health, Safety & Facility Management

Safety at Bridges is not just a compliance requirement; it is an expression of care. This year, our Administration & Operations Coordinator:

Ensured compliance with safety standards, including the fire inspection at the new location

Coordinated building access, emergency planning, and safety protocols

Supported repairs, maintenance, and facility updates

Fostered a safe, welcoming environment for clients, visitors, volunteers, and staff

Our work in health and safety is ongoing, and we remain committed to building systems that reflect our responsibility to protect and uplift everyone who enters our space.

Human Resources & Organizational Support

Human Resources support continued to grow in scope and depth this year. The Administration & Operations Coordinator and team:

Developed and implemented updated onboarding and offboarding procedures, including systems to support the organization's transition back to in-person operations

Supported HR policy reviews and ongoing modernization of HR processes

Work Experience Opportunity Program & Student Support

The Administrative Coordinator and program team oversaw the Work Experience Opportunity Program, offering hands-on opportunities in administration, marketing, and community engagement. Participants gained valuable workplace skills while contributing meaningfully to the organization.

We also supported counselling practicum students and continued development of the Women's Journey Tracking System, aligning administrative processes with program priorities and participant outcomes.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, the Administration & Operations Team will continue strengthening the foundation that allows Bridges to serve more women and gender-diverse survivors with dignity and care. Our priorities include:

- Strengthening the operational structure across HR, finance, operations, and administration
- Enhancing contractor and vendor management
- Continuing to build staff capacity, as well as supporting workplace program students and counselling practicum students
- Expanding our health and safety framework
- Exploring digital tools—including the Jane App—to streamline booking for counselling, programs, and administrative services

As Bridges for Women continues to grow, the Administration & Operations Team remains deeply committed to building strong, sustainable systems grounded in feminist practice, financial stewardship, and the well-being of staff and participants. Our work behind the scenes ensures that every program, service, and connection made at Bridges is supported by a solid foundation of care.

Submitted by,

ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR

DAMOLA OGINNI

COUNSELLING PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The Counselling Program at Bridges for Women continued to provide a compassionate and stabilizing presence for women and gender-diverse individuals navigating trauma, life transitions, and systemic barriers. Every client who comes through our doors brings a rich and complex story, and our team strives to create an environment that fosters safety, connection, and the rediscovery of personal agency. This report highlights the individuals we served, the challenges they faced, the counselling work undertaken, and the progress many were able to make despite significant adversity.

Our Counselling Team

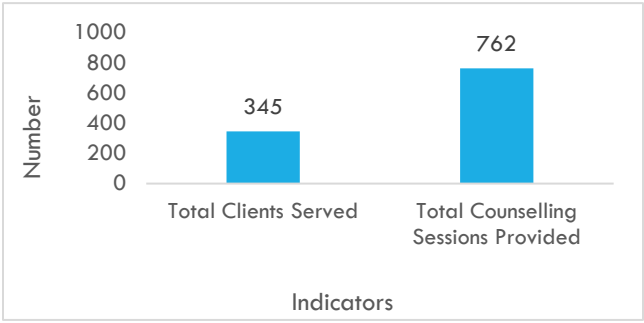
This year's program was delivered by a six-member team of clinicians who have expertise across a wide spectrum of therapeutic approaches. Their professional backgrounds span counselling psychology, social work, expressive arts therapies, and trauma-focused modalities. Two counsellors who completed their practicums at Bridges successfully transitioned into staff roles, demonstrating remarkable readiness, insight, and commitment to trauma-informed care.

Individual counselling through a 10-session model focused on emotional regulation, safety, and long-term self-efficacy

All clinicians are either fully registered with BCACC or have completed the required academic and clinical qualifications. Beyond formal credentials, each counsellor brings important lived experience and cultural knowledge, supporting a team environment where intersectionality and diversity are treated as essential components of quality care rather than add-ons.

Clinical supervision is provided by an external clinical supervisor, whose somatic-oriented approach supports counsellors in deepening their awareness of trauma patterns, countertransference, and embodied therapeutic presence. In addition to individual supervision, weekly case management meetings give staff opportunities to collaborate, reflect on complex cases, strengthen ethical decision-making, and ensure a consistent standard of service across all client interactions. This collaborative supervision model remains foundational to our ability to offer steady, grounded care in a community agency setting.

Client Profile and Service Activity



Session formats: Individual counselling (in-person, virtual through the Doxy Platform, and phone), crisis intervention, emotional support check-ins, and advocacy.

Demographics: Primarily adults aged 23–65, representing diverse cultural identities, gender identities, and neurodiverse experiences.

Clients accessed the counselling program at different level of readiness. Some arrived in acute crisis, seeking stabilization and safety planning; others were looking for deeper therapeutic processing related to long-standing trauma; and many simply needed a space to pause, breathe, and reconnect with themselves as they worked to rebuild stability in their daily lives.

Demand for counselling continued to grow this year, reflecting not only ongoing post-pandemic mental health pressures but also the increasing visibility of Bridges as a trauma-informed, culturally attuned service provider in the region.

Presenting Concerns and Trauma Themes

The concerns clients brought forward were highly varied yet frequently connected to the deeper impacts of trauma. Many arrived describing immediate stressors that appeared "surface level," but through assessment and

exploration, these concerns often revealed more complex psychological histories.

Common presenting concerns included:

- Chronic financial stress and economic instability
- Diminished sense of self, including identity confusion, loss of agency, or internalized shame
- Emotional dysregulation (anxiety, overwhelm, irritability, or emotional numbness)
- Difficulties with boundaries, communication, memory, or executive function
- Challenges navigating relationships, caregiving roles, and community belonging:
- Childhood abuse or neglect
- Intimate partner violence and coercive control
- Systemic discrimination and cultural or gender-based oppression
- Disruptions in attachment, belonging, and relational safety during formative years

For many clients, trauma was multi-layered, intersecting with housing instability, poverty, immigration challenges, disability, and limited access to external support networks. These intersections shaped every stage of the counselling process and required a flexible, highly attuned therapeutic approach.

Crisis intervention for clients in acute distress or unsafe situations

- Psychoeducation on grounding, somatic tools, trauma responses, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping
- Reflective and self-guided practices between sessions to reinforce learning and autonomy
- Advocacy and navigation, including referrals to community services, legal and medical support, and settlement resources
- Supportive check-ins for clients requiring brief stabilization rather than full sessions
- This multi-pronged approach allowed counsellors to remain responsive to clients' fluctuating capacities while still supporting longer-term therapeutic goals.

Counselling Approaches and Therapeutic Modalities

All counselling was grounded in trauma-informed, client-centered care. Clinicians drew from a wide range of evidence-based and holistic modalities tailored to each client's cultural background, learning style, and emotional readiness. Approaches included:

- Somatic grounding and sensory-based stabilization
- Emotion regulation and distress tolerance strategies
- Cognitive reframing and existential exploration
- Psychodynamic and attachment-focused interventions
- Mentalization, narrative approaches, and re-authoring work
- Expressive and creative therapeutic tools, including drawing, movement, and guided imagery

The flexibility of modalities allowed counsellors to meet clients where they were—whether they needed structure, reflection, skills development, processing space, or relational co-regulation.

Outcomes and Progress Highlights

Despite the complexity of clients' experiences, many reported meaningful improvements across emotional, relational, and practical domains. Clients demonstrated more confidence in applying for jobs, preparing for interviews, advocating for their needs in the workplace, and maintaining employment over time. Some reported moving into more aligned or stable roles, while others re-entered the workforce after long periods of unemployment

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Barriers and Systemic Challenges

Although many clients made strides, several systemic barriers affected engagement and session attendance. These included:

- Irregular attendance due to cognitive overload, competing responsibilities, or unpredictable crises
- Co-occurring mental health conditions (diagnosed or undiagnosed)
- Physical health challenges impacting concentration, stamina, or mobility
- Limited access to external support, long waitlists, or funding barriers
- Deep-rooted coping patterns, including avoidance or hopelessness, that slowed therapeutic momentum

These barriers reinforce the need for continued trauma-aware flexibility, accessible service delivery, and stable funding for mental health programs within community-based organizations.

Submitted by,

CLINICAL COUNSELLOR

GULCAN AKIRMAK

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

At Bridges for Women, the Employment Readiness Program is rooted in feminist principles, trauma-informed practice, and a strengths-based approach. We are committed to supporting women, non-binary, and Two-Spirit individuals to reclaim their personal power, build confidence, and access sustainable employment. By recognizing the unique barriers participants face, we create spaces that foster safety, skill development, resilience, and self-determination. Our work emphasizes collaboration, mentorship, and community engagement, ensuring participants are supported by every step of their journey.

Program Highlights and Innovations

This year, the Employment Readiness Program expanded its reach and flexibility through several key initiatives:

B2E Employment Program Pilot: A short-term, intensive initiative designed for participants seeking rapid skill-building and employment readiness. The pilot successfully engaged 14 participants, providing concentrated opportunities for learning, mentorship, and peer connection.

Bridges Employment Program (BEP) Adjustments: The traditional six-month program was streamlined to four months, enabling more cohorts per year, increased flexibility for participants, and greater access to services.

Hybrid Program Delivery: Beginning in February 2025, BEP shifted to a hybrid model combining virtual and in-person instruction. By mid-year, the program evolved to three in-person days and two virtual days weekly, supported by two facilitators per group. This approach doubled program capacity, fostering rich peer interaction and collaborative learning.

Expanded Learning Opportunities: Participants engaged in individualized coaching, skills workshops, employer visits, and community-based experiential learning. Complementary services, including ACUDETOX therapy and self-paced Bridges Online Employment Program (BOP) modules, addressed holistic well-being alongside career readiness.

Participant Engagement and Outcomes

The Employment Readiness Program responded to a diverse range of participant needs, recognizing that each person brings unique strengths, experiences, and challenges. Many participants navigated systemic and personal barriers, including housing insecurity, caregiving responsibilities, partner-based violence, financial stress, and mental health challenges. Our trauma-informed approach supported participants in building resilience, confidence, and professional skills in ways that honored their lived experiences.

Through this work, participants strengthened digital literacy, communication, organization, goal-setting, and professional identity. Several secured employments, pursued further education, or transitioned to new opportunities with ongoing mentorship and support.

Program Statistics:

Metric	Count
First contact calls	320
Intakes	104
Participants in employment services	78
Graduates	47
Total groups delivered	4
B2E pilot participants	14
BOP self-paced participants	7

Team Excellence and Professional Development
The success of the Employment Readiness Program rests on the dedication, expertise, and compassion of our team consisting of our Program Coordinator, our Intake & Service Navigator, Administration Team and of course our Facilitators. We could not do this without their hard work and dedication. Feeback from the women is appreciation of their warmth, caring, and concerns throughout the whole experience from Intake to completion of the program. Staff are committed to their own professional development and in the last year have become certified in ACUDETOX, First Aid, and the ASSIST Suicide Prevention training Furthermore, Attendance at the ASPECT Employment Services Delivery Conference enriched program design and informed evidence-based practice. Staff creativity, warmth, and individualized guidance consistently foster trust, engagement, and meaningful learning for participants.

Community Partnerships and Collaborations
Strategic partnerships amplified the program's impact:

- **Camosun College:** Educational upgrading and skill development. They come twice a week to provide upgrading education to grade 12. We are seeing an increase in women turning to their services.
- **SHHINE Project**: Working in partnership to provide Peer navigation and community support.
- **Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR):** We have established contact with this ministry to facilitate greater access to financial resources.
- **Women in Need:** Wardrobe supports, including gift certificates, to prepare participants for employment.
- **Ombudsperson:** Actively reaching out to community partners such as the Ombudsperson to create relationships and support network
- **Times Colonist**: Gifts certificates for food security are very much appreciated

Program Successes

- Successful relocation to an accessible and welcoming Bridges facility.
- Graduation celebrations recognizing achievements and reinforcing community connections.
- Expansion of programming via the B2E pilot as it evolved into one-on-one employment coaching.
- BEP Group Recently increased our programing to twice a day. Two hybrid programs are running concurrently thus doubling our capacity. This has also provided us with more flexibility in scheduling to better respond to the women's needs.

Challenges and Resilience
Participants and staff navigated ongoing systemic challenges, including rising housing costs, increased cost of living leading to increased caregiving responsibilities. The women we work with are reporting a significant impact on mental health. These realities reinforced the importance of flexible, trauma-informed, and community-supported programming. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated remarkable resilience, growth, and empowerment.

The Employment Readiness Program remains committed to feminist, inclusive, trauma and participant-centered practices. By combining practical skill-building, mentorship, and community connection, we continue to support women, non-binary, and Two-Spirit individuals in reclaiming their agency, overcoming barriers, and achieving meaningful employment and economic security.

Submitted by,

EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM COORDINATOR

WENDY SCHULTZ

ADVISORY COUNCIL: HONORING WISDOM, SHAPING THE FUTURE

In 2025, Bridges for Women Society launched the (Wise Women/ Grandmothers) Advisory Council a seniors' advisory group created to celebrate the leadership, knowledge, and lived experience of women over the age of 55. This initiative was supported through the New Horizons for Seniors Program and reflects Bridges' commitment to feminist values, intergenerational mentorship, and the inclusion of seniors in shaping community services.

Women and gender-diverse Seniors with lived experience of poverty, trauma, and marginalization guide Bridges' programs and policies while mentoring participants, ensuring seniors' voices remain central to the organization's future.

Goals and Objectives
The Advisory Council was founded on three key goals:

- Strengthen Intergenerational Connections – By mentoring younger program participants and participating in community events, Council members bridge the gap between generations, promoting shared learning and mutual respect.
- Elevate Seniors' Voices – Members actively contribute to decision-making within Bridges, sharing their expertise and lived experiences to inform programs, policies, and organizational strategy.
- Guide Organizational Growth – The Council provides strategic advice on program development, outreach initiatives, and long-term planning, ensuring Bridges' services remain responsive, inclusive, and forward-looking.

The Council works with the Board and staff to provide strategic feedback, ensuring seniors play an active role in shaping the organization.

2025–2026 Work Plan and Achievements
Over the first year, the Council focused on establishing a strong foundation and formal structure:

- **Recruitment and Orientation**: Council members were recruited from across the community, ensuring diversity in cultural background, experience, and professional expertise. Orientation sessions introduced members to Bridges' mission, programs, and governance processes.
- **Terms of Reference**: Members will co-creat a Terms of Reference that outline the Council's role, responsibilities, meeting schedule, and decision-making processes.
- **Regular Meetings and Mentorship**: The Council will meet monthly to review programs, provide advice, and plan mentorship activities. Members began connecting with program participants, offering guidance, support, and encouragement.
- **Community Introduction**: In September 2026, the Council will formally be introduced to the broader community during Bridges' Annual General Meeting, highlighting their advisory role and commitment to intergenerational mentorship.

These foundational steps ensured that the Council is not only functional but positioned to be a permanent advisory body within Bridges.

Impact and Benefits
The Council has already made a tangible difference for both seniors and the broader community:

- **For Seniors**: Council members report increased social participation, purpose, and recognition. Participation combats isolation and affirms their expertise, fostering confidence and mental well-being.
- **For Program Participants**: Mentorship provided by the Council enhances employability, life skills, and resilience for women and gender-diverse people navigating trauma and systemic barriers.
- **For Bridges and the Community**: Seniors' guidance strengthens program design, outreach strategies, and organizational planning. By modeling intergenerational collaboration, the Council encourages other organizations to recognize seniors' leadership in community life.

Looking Ahead

In the next phase (April 2026 – March 2027), the Grandmothers Council will:

- Solidify operational practices and increase engagement with Board and staff.
- Expand mentorship opportunities and community presentations.
- Continue advising on programs, policies, and long-term organizational strategies.
- Explore opportunities to involve additional seniors, further diversifying the Council's perspectives.

The Grandmothers / Wise Women Council reflects Bridges' commitment to feminist, inclusive, and intergenerational values, ensuring the wisdom of older women and gender-diverse Seniors continues to guide and strengthen the community. These collaborations strengthened participant networks, expanded practical opportunities, and deepened connections to local resources.

Submitted by,

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANNE HODGE

CRYSTAL'S STORY OF SUCCESS AND DISCOVERY

My Experience with Bridges for Women - Crystal's Review Starting the Bridges for Women program in the spring of 2024 was both terrifying and exciting. I was relieved to be accepted, feeling hopeful about gaining the tools and understanding needed to create a more well-rounded and fulfilling life. Attending classes three days a week for two hours each session, I found the program to be deeply transformative. The mix of grounding techniques, understanding brain chemistry, attachment theories, and trauma responses created a safe space for growth. It was inspiring to connect with other women seeking clarity and self-awareness, fostering friendships and a supportive community. The program encouraged me to be vulnerable and to dive deep into my inner world. By the end of most classes, I often felt exhausted, sometimes needing a nap or a moment to cry, but I also felt supported and validated in my passions and the process of healing. Over the years, I have read countless books, listened to podcasts, and watched many TED Talks in my quest for self-understanding. Bridges for Women beautifully synthesized much of this knowledge and delivered it in a compassionate, accessible way, allowing me to be gentle with myself while confronting difficult truths. What made this experience even more meaningful was the community we built together. The classroom became a space of collective healing, where we supported each other beyond the traditional boundaries of therapy or education. Now, eight months later, I continue to practice many of the techniques I learned. I share them with my family, and I've noticed significant improvements in my emotional stability and self-regulation. I'm able to respond more thoughtfully, communicate with more "I" statements, and create healthier dynamics within my family. My children and partner have observed these changes, which have been incredibly rewarding. Professionally, after I left the program, I initially worked in home care on Gabriola but found it overwhelming and in the future will only take on one to two clients at a time, as the overwhelm prompted me to take a break from that setting. Recently, I transitioned into landscaping and co-own a market flower gardening business with another woman. Equipped with the awareness of my triggers and how I want to communicate, I feel confident and excited about this new venture. For my winter work I have applied to be a dock manager, where I will be managing boat slots, payments and upkeep of the docks. It was down the road from my house, so fingers crossed for that possible winter job. Bridges for Women helped me recognize my worth, dream big, and pursue my goals—reminding me that my past does not define me. The counseling component, facilitated by two incredible counselors, was instrumental in supporting my growth. Their compassionate challenge—asking tough questions within a safe environment was a true blessing in my journey. In closing, I am deeply grateful for this program and look forward to seeing how it continues to grow. I do wish there were similar programs for men, and I believe such teachings should be integrated into school curricula. Thank you, Bridges for Women, for transforming my life.

Written by,

CRYSTAL

LAUGHTER IN THE HALLS OF BRIDGES

Laughter, Bridges knows the language of laughter.

It rings through the hallways

It escapes from under doorways

roars from the kitchen

trickles through the water cooler

colours the coffee

Slices up the breakfast treats

and tickles every meeting with ferocious glee.

Laughter heals

It challenges shame to an arm wrestle,

Igniting imagination

Soothing nerves

Caressing ears

Awakening long lost wonder, spirit, soul

It lights up every crack and crevice as it chases away scary thoughts with lightness and positive regard

Laughter brightens the atmosphere, as it lifts negativity from even the darkest despair

Laughter banishes tears and fears and regret

for awhile until they lose power

Replaced by hope, and joy, and possibility

Giggles, snorts, guffaws, chuckles, cackles, squeals

Laughter, in the halls of Bridges

Pandemic addition:

In the time when the world stood still,

When fear and worry and isolation threatened to overwhelm,

A new Bridge was built

A bridge built on technology and wielded with heart

A bridge of connection and community, and healing, and hope

A new link to laughter in the halls of Bridges

Rippling out into the world

Written by,

WENDY SCHULTZ

SHHINE INITIATIVE

Introduction
The Supporting Health and Healing with Information, Empowerment, and Navigation (SHHINE) Initiative, in partnership with Bridges for Women, supports women and gender-diverse individuals aged 50+ with lived experiences of housing insecurity or limited access to resources. The program focuses on individuals living with sufficient stability to not require ongoing crisis support. SHHINE aims to provide guidance, connection, and empowerment through peer navigation and community-based engagement.

Program Team
The SHHINE team includes Peer System Navigators (PSNs), a Circle Coordinator, and research staff from the University of Victoria. Staff and partners work collaboratively with Bridges for Women to deliver services and co-create community engagement opportunities. PSNs provide direct support, guidance, and referrals, helping participants navigate barriers to housing, health, and social services. Community Circles are developed jointly to foster social inclusion, belonging, and empowerment for participants.

Program Activities

- **Peer System Navigation**: PSNs guide participants to relevant resources within homelessness, housing, and gender-based violence sectors, helping them navigate complex systems effectively.
- **Community Circles**: Co-designed, facilitated sessions provide opportunities for social connection, knowledge sharing, and peer support.
- **Research Participation**: A voluntary sample of participants is invited to share experiences with the SHHINE research team through interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity are strictly maintained.

Client Engagement
SHHINE supports participants through one-on-one navigation and group sessions. Eligible participants are women and gender-diverse individuals aged 50+ who experience housing instability or limited access to information and resources. Bridges staff play a key role in identifying eligible participants, supporting intake processes, and providing accessible space for PSNs to meet with peers.

Program Outcomes

Indicator	2024–2025
Total participants engaged	54
Peer system navigation sessions	128
Community Circles held	1
Average session attendance	8–10 participants

Participants have reported:

- Increased knowledge of available resources and services
- Greater confidence in navigating complex systems
- Enhanced sense of connection and belonging through Community Circles
- Increased agency in decision-making related to housing, health, and community support

Partnership and Collaboration
SHHINE operates through a collaborative partnership between the University of Victoria, Bridges for Women. Ongoing communication and monthly meetings ensure coordination, feedback sharing, and alignment with research and service goals. Bridges for Women provides vital support through participant referrals, promotion of activities, and accessible meeting spaces.

The SHHINE Initiative continues to provide meaningful support to women and gender-diverse individuals navigating systemic barriers. Through the combined efforts of PSNs, researchers, and Bridges staff, participants gain practical navigation skills, social inclusion, and empowerment. This partnership model strengthens both service delivery and research insights, ensuring SHHINE remains a valuable resource in the Greater Victoria community.

Submitted by,

SHHINE TEAM

WORK EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES GRANT (WEOG)

Introduction

The Work Experience Opportunities Grant (WEOG) program was launched this year to provide structured, trauma-informed, paid work placements for graduates of the Bridges Employment Program (BEP). This initiative bridges the gap between employment training and sustainable workforce participation, offering participants real-world professional experience while strengthening Bridges' organizational capacity. The program supports women, non-binary, and Two-Spirit individuals who have experienced trauma, violence, or systemic barriers, providing skill development, mentorship, and workplace exposure to promote confidence, adaptability, and employment readiness.

The WEOG placements are supervised and supported by Bridges' trained staff, including program coordinators and administrative coordinator. Weekly mentorship, counselling, and professional guidance are provided to ensure participants integrate skills learned during BEP into practical, workplace-ready experience. Participants benefit from ongoing feedback, coaching, and access to career development workshops.

Participant Profile and Engagement

The program currently supports three Bridges graduates who have started in placement roles, providing front-line coverage in reception, administrative support, and program assistance, including oversight of the Wednesday evening sessions. Participants are actively engaged in a 10-week structured placement, receiving individualized support in trauma-informed practices, professional communication, and workplace organization.

Program Activities and Supports Participants receive a comprehensive package of support and skill development including:

- Weekly in-person counselling and peer check-ins
- Mentorship and guidance from trained staff
- Access to employment workshops, including workplace communication, networking, and digital literacy
- Opportunities to gain certifications such as First Aid and ASSIST suicide prevention
- Community networking and guided skill-building exercises
- Feedback and evaluation through placement evaluations, personal development plans, and exit interviews

Skills Development Through the placements, participants develop competencies in:

- Administrative functions, data management, and client services
- Trauma-informed workplace practices
- Event planning, public speaking, and professional communication
- Workplace professionalism, accountability, and team collaboration

The placements enhance participants' confidence, workplace adaptability, and preparedness for sustainable employment opportunities.

The WEOG placements are successfully providing meaningful, trauma-informed employment experiences for BEP graduates while strengthening Bridges' operational capacity. Through mentorship, structured workplace experience, and skills development, participants are gaining confidence, professional competence, and readiness to transition into long-term employment. This initiative complements Bridges' ongoing mission to empower women and gender-diverse individuals to reclaim their lives, build economic security, and break cycles of trauma and systemic barriers.

Submitted by,

ANNE HODGE

AURICULAR ACU-TECHNICIAN (AAT) TRAINING INITIATIVE

This year marked a meaningful step forward in our organization's commitment to healing, community care, and compassion-driven service. We began the journey of training our team in the Auricular Acu-Technician (AAT) model, an approach rooted in a powerful legacy of grassroots healing movements that center dignity, accessibility, and community empowerment. We are proud to continue that legacy within our own programs.

Through a partnership with POCA, our staff and leadership gained access to training in the 5-Needle Protocol (5NP), a gentle, affordable, and deeply supportive ear seed acupuncture technique healing individuals facing addiction, trauma, toxic stress, pain, and emotional hardship, affirming its place as a trusted, evidence-supported tool for recovery.

This year, we began the certification process for five staff members and one board member. Their willingness to learn, grow, and bring this practice into our space speaks to the heart of our organization: The POCA program is designed to meet high standards of training, and our team is fully engaged in offering this service from a trauma informed lens.

Integration Into Our Programs

Even as training continues, we have already begun integrating ear seeds into our day-to-day work. Early implementation has included:

- Providing supervised practice time for staff as they strengthen their skills
- Exploring how AAT can complement existing program offerings

Although certification is still in progress, the impact is already heartfelt. Staff have expressed excitement and gratitude for learning a modality that aligns so closely with our values: accessible healing, respect for lived experience, and support for the whole person. In the coming year, we look forward to:

- Completing the certification of all trainees and expanding training opportunities to more team members
- Deepening the presence of AAT within our groups, events, and daily interactions.

The AAT training initiative has brought new energy, purpose, and possibility into our organization. By embracing a practice rooted in community resilience and mutual care, we are strengthening not just our programs but the bonds we share with the people we serve. This work is a reminder that healing can be simple, collective, and profoundly human—and that we are at our best when we learn and grow together.

Submitted by,

ANNE HODGE

Bridges was my next healing program. I learned about grounding, emotional regulation, self-care, transferable skills for work, acceptance and knowing that even though we have different roads, ages, backgrounds, religions, we can all still bond and love each other

IN GRATITUDE

Bridges for Women Society is 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

Camosun College

Mac Zen

University of Victoria

BRIDGES
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Bridges for Women Society acknowledges with respect that our offices are located in the traditional territories of the Lək^{w}əŋən peoples (Esquimalt and Songhees nations). Bridges for Women also offers programs and services in the territories of the W̱SÁNEĆ (Pauquachin, Tsar- tlip, 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 ser- vices throughout British Columbia, which is located on the traditional territories of 198 distinct First Nations.