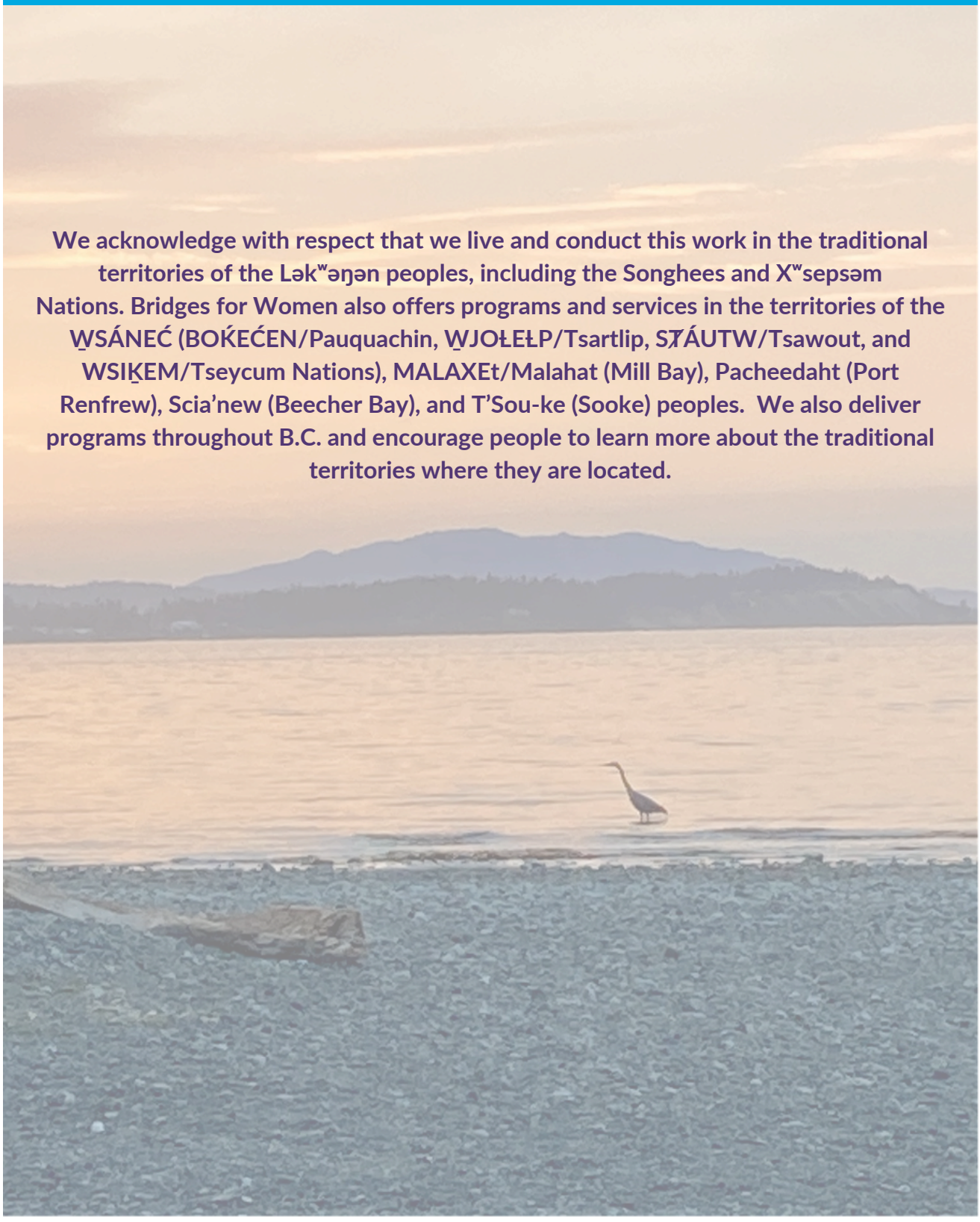
BRIDGES
FOR WOMEN SOCIETY

Annual Report 2025/2026



39 years. 3900 stories.
Bridges for Women
From surviving to thriving.

Territorial Acknowledgement



We acknowledge with respect that we live and conduct this work in the traditional territories of the Lək̓ʷəŋən peoples, including the Songhees and Xʷsepsəm Nations. Bridges for Women also offers programs and services in the territories of the W̱SÁNEĆ (BOḴEĆEN/Pauquachin, W̱JOŁEŁP/Tsartlip, SȾÁUTW/Tsawout, and WSIḴEM/Tseycum Nations), MALAXEt/Malahat (Mill Bay), Pacheedaht (Port Renfrew), Scia'new (Beecher Bay), and T'Sou-ke (Sooke) peoples. We also deliver programs throughout B.C. and encourage people to learn more about the traditional territories where they are located.

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Message from the Board Chair



As we once again reflect on our past year, we first and foremost extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the participants, partners, staff and Board members for their deep belief in our mission to improve women's lives in a world that can often feel uncertain.

2025/26 brought moments of courage, patience, adaptability and an unwavering commitment to our mission. It has been truly inspiring to witness the dedication that each one of you brings to this organization

his was a year of stabilization, building trust, and navigating financial challenges, all the while celebrating and settling into a new space - and developing broader and more accessible programs and partners.

The focus on "Turning shared Vision into Action" has brought a balance of compassion, creativity and professionalism that is deeply appreciated and can continue to be built upon.

To our Board members, thank you for your leadership, wisdom and stewardship and especially your willingness to contribute your time that helps guide this organization to move forward.

To our staff team, thank you for your dedication through these times of challenge and change. Your commitment and heart is the foundation of everything we accomplish.To our participants whose journeys are inspirational and filled with bravery, resilience and hope, we thank you for the strength and commitment to show up when it is not easy to see through these challenges.

And, special thanks to our advisory committee, volunteers, partners and donors - whose generosity and huge spirit is recognized and valued beyond just the words - we thank you for your outstanding dedication in supporting our mission and our staff team.

This sense of shared purpose is something that truly brings hope and encouragement to us all. To be part of a community of women who care not only about the work, but about one another is an honour to be a part of.

As we move into our 39th year, we look forward to our upcoming theme for 2027/28:
Lasting Change: Strong Roots for a Sustainable Future.

In appreciation,

Carolyn (Chair)

Message from the Executive Director



Anne Hodge

Looking Ahead: From Momentum to Action

As we enter the next year of our 39th anniversary journey, our focus is not simply on celebrating where Bridges for Women has been. It is on turning the momentum we have built into tangible opportunities for women and measurable progress for our organization and our community.
Our three-year strategic plan gives us a clear foundation. Over the coming year, we will concentrate our efforts in several specific areas.

Launch and Strengthen Our Victoria-Based Programming

We will move from planning to implementation of our new Victoria-specific employment readiness program, with groups launching in September and January. This program represents an important expansion of our reach into the City of Victoria and allows us to respond directly to the needs of women living in transitional housing and experiencing barriers to employment.
Our focus will be on building a strong program model, establishing referral and community partnerships, supporting participant engagement and carefully evaluating outcomes so that we can understand what is working and where the program can grow.

Build a Stronger Continuum of Support Through BEP

The evolution of BEP will continue. The addition of the Thursday Wellness Group is an important first step in moving beyond a traditional employment program toward a more comprehensive experience that recognizes the interconnectedness of healing, wellness, confidence, community and economic independence.
Over the coming year, we will continue to strengthen this model and explore how we can better support women before, during and after BEP. Our goal is to create a clearer continuum—from participation in BEP, to work experience, education or employment, and into longer-term community connection and support.

Expand Work Experience and Employment Pathways

We will build on the early success of our Work Experience initiative. For women graduating from BEP, the opportunity to gain current, meaningful workplace experience can be a critical bridge between training and sustainable employment.

Our priority will be to develop additional employer relationships and work experience opportunities, strengthen the transition process for graduates and identify ways, particularly in the tourism industry, to demonstrate the employment outcomes created through this initiative. We want Bridges to be increasingly recognized not only as a place where women prepare for work, but as a place that helps women make the transition into meaningful work.

Turn Our New Kitchen Into a Community Asset

With our kitchen now installed and equipped, the next step is to put this new space to work. We will launch our lunch program, creating regular opportunities for women to gather, share food and build relationships.

The lunch program is intentionally about more than providing a meal. It is an opportunity to reduce isolation, strengthen community, create informal connections and make Bridges a place where women feel they belong and have opportunities for learning and connections.

Give Voice and Leadership to Women 55+

Following the launch of the Wise Women Advisory Committee, we will continue to develop this initiative as a meaningful mechanism for leadership and community engagement. Our goal is not simply to create another advisory group. It is to ensure that the knowledge, experience and perspectives of women 55+ actively inform the work of Bridges.

Over the coming year, we will define the committee's role more clearly, identify opportunities for members to contribute to Bridges' programs and community work, and explore how we can strengthen intergenerational connection.

Strengthen Our Leadership on Gender-Based Violence

The creation of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Gender-Based Violence has established an important new area of leadership for Bridges. In the coming year, we will focus the Coalition's work on concrete advocacy and community action, including:

- advancing relevant recommendations from the Stanton Report
- building greater public and institutional understanding of Red Flag laws and advocating for their effective implementation
- continuing to recognize and educate our community about the December 6, 1989 École Polytechnique massacre and its continuing relevance to gender-based violence
- bringing together community organizations, advocates and decision-makers to strengthen a coordinated response to gender-based violence in Greater Victoria

This work is a natural extension of our mission. Economic security cannot be separated from safety, and supporting women means addressing both the opportunities available to women and the systems that continue to place women at risk.

Build Partnerships Needed for the Next Stage of Growth

We will continue to invest intentionally in relationships with organizations that can expand the supports available to women.

Our partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association and the launch of Living Life to the Full in January is one example of this approach.

Over the coming year, we will seek additional partnerships that strengthen access to mental wellness supports, employment opportunities, education, community connections and other resources that complement the work we do at Bridges.

Use Our 40th Anniversary to Build the Future

Finally, our 40th Anniversary Campaign will move beyond celebration and become an opportunity to build a stronger future for Bridges for Women.

We will use the campaign to reconnect with former participants and supporters, deepen relationships with donors and community partners, tell the story of Bridges' impact and build broader understanding of why our work remains essential.

Forty years gives us an extraordinary foundation.

The opportunity now is to translate that history, credibility and community goodwill into the resources and relationships required to sustain Bridges for the next 40 years.

Moving From Intention to Impact

The coming year will be about implementation. We have completed our three-year strategic plan and strengthened our programs as well as created new community initiatives and partnerships. We have launched the 40th Anniversary Campaign.
Our task now is to turn these investments into measurable impact.
We will measure our progress not simply by how many programs we deliver, but by whether women are experiencing stronger connections, greater confidence, improved wellness, meaningful work experience, employment and education opportunities, and greater economic security. That is the work ahead which will define the next chapter of Bridges for Women.

Respectfully submitted by



Executive Director

Strategic Plan 2025-2028

Statement of Intention

The philosophical foundation and framework for the strategic plan will support the holistic wellbeing of women affected by trauma – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually – so they are prepared, confident, and empowered to pursue meaningful and sustainable employment pathways.

This foundation is intended for wholeness, balance and continuity. To assist us to restore and enhance our founding values, ensure community accountability, honour past knowledge and lived experience and commit to women's self determination. Its the bridging of ideas and collective achievement in our dynamic workplace.

Mission

Bridges is a feminist, strength-based, gutsy, innovative, trauma-informed community agency. Our healing, education and employment programs inspire a diversity of women impacted by trauma, violence, abuse or neglect to reclaim their lives and build economic security.

Year 1: 2025-2026

Theme: Working Together: Standing Strong Building Foundations

FOCUS: Framework and infrastructure development

Year 2: 2026-2027

Theme: Building Trust Turning shared Vision into Action

FOCUS: Strengthening relationship and action plan implementation

Year 3: 2027-2028

Theme: Lasting Change Strong Roots for a Sustainable Future

FOCUS: Consolidation and sustainable integrations

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I came to Bridges for Women as a participant.
At that time, I didn't know what my future was going to look like. I only knew that I needed support—and that I needed someone to believe that there was more for me.
Bridges did that. It gave me a safe place to heal, to rebuild my confidence, and to start seeing myself differently.

And today, I have the extraordinary privilege of sitting in this room at a table, as a Board member. That full circle is not lost on me. Because when I sit in this room, I don't just think about policies, programs, or funding. I think about the woman who walks through those doors wondering if her life can really change. I was her.

And that's why this work matters so deeply to me. I know what it means to be on the receiving end of compassion, understanding and opportunity. And now I get to help make sure those things are there for the next woman. That is my gratitude to Bridges.

I didn't just receive support here. I found my way forward. And now I have the privilege of helping create a way forward for someone else. That's the power of Bridges for Women. And that's why I am so proud to be here.

Thank you for coming out for our 2026 AGM, as we are moving into our 39th year. Welcome to everyone.

Bonnie

Treasurer's Report

Fiscal Year 2025–2026

- Strategic Focus (2025–2026): Working Together: Stand Strong, Building Foundations
- Strategic Direction (2026–2027): Building Trust: Turning Shared Vision into Action
- Tenet Lens: Physical — Sustaining Safe, Accessible, and Resilient Operations

Executive Financial Summary

During FY 2025–2026, Bridges for Women Society faced changing funder priorities and broader economic shifts, leading to an unexpected revenue reduction. In response, the Board made a deliberate, mission-aligned decision to run an operating deficit.

Guided by our Physical Tenet—which prioritizes safe, accessible, and resilient operations—we intentionally deployed financial resources to protect our structural foundation. Rather than cutting infrastructure or essential services, we prioritized the continuity of our trauma-informed healing and employment programs, the safety of our physical and virtual spaces, and the security of our staff.

Key Financial Drivers & Strategic Considerations

1. Preserving Program Integrity & Participant Experience

Funding reductions created immediate operational pressure. Guided by our Mental Tenet—emphasizing organizational knowledge and high-quality service—the Board chose not to compromise participant care. Restricting services or programming would directly undermine the safe environment survivors need to rebuild their lives.

2. Staff Support as a Core Feminist Principle

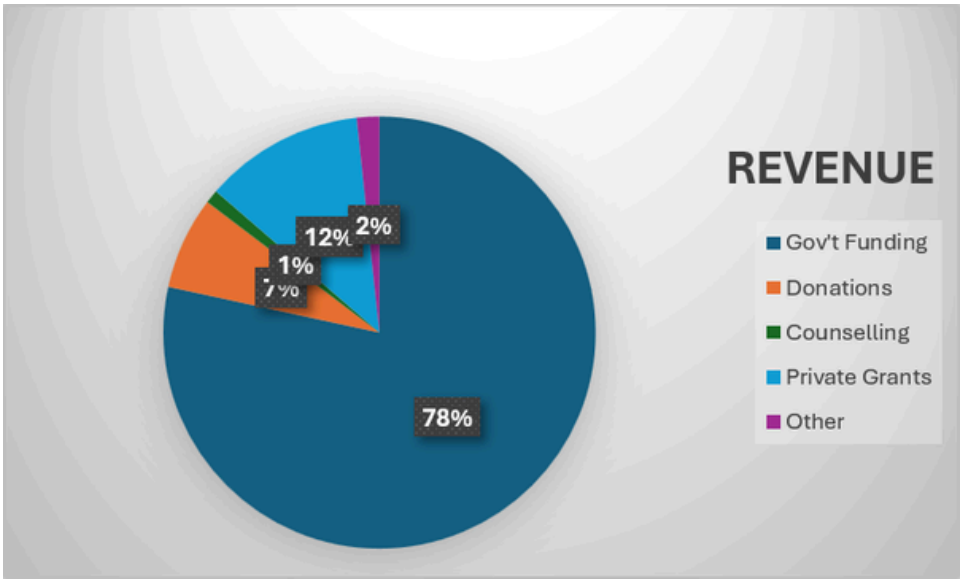
As a trauma-informed feminist organization, we recognize our staff as the backbone of our operations. True operational sustainability cannot rely on wage insecurity or burnout. Instead of layoffs or compensation cuts, we invested directly in staff retention, trauma support, and competitive pay, ensuring consistent, compassionate care for participants.

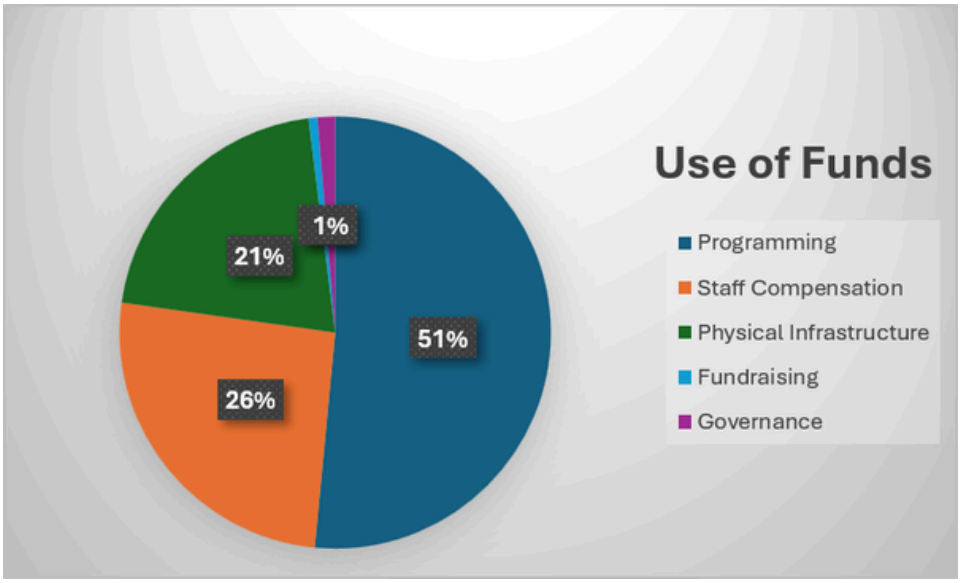
3. Compounding Long-Term Impacts of COVID-19

Our financial landscape reflects the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on the women, non-binary, and two-spirit individuals we serve. Rising gender-based violence, housing instability, inflation, and mental health challenges have intensified participant needs, requiring sustained operational capacity and resilient physical and digital spaces.

4. Strategic Reserve Fund Allocation

To bridge the shortfall, the Board approved drawing down reserve funds, fulfilling their primary purpose: maintaining organizational stability during external disruption. The Board remains committed to replenishing these reserves as revenue streams normalize under our multi-year sustainability plan.





Multi-Year Outlook: Transition to 2026–2027

As we move from *Working Together: Stand Strong, Building Foundations* into our 2026–2027 theme, *Building Trust: Turning Shared Vision into Action*, financial planning centers on long-term stability:

- **Controlled Transitional Deficit**: Bridges for Women anticipates a minor, controlled deficit into early FY 2026–2027 while newly initiated funding channels mature.
- **Turning Vision into Action**: To balance the budget and rebuild reserves, teams are executing targeted grant strategies, expanding donor partnerships, and diversifying revenue. This shifts our vision into action, keeping our physical infrastructure and programs fully funded and resilient.

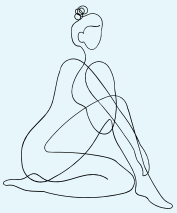
Administration & Operations Highlights

Building the Foundation for Service | 2025-2026

Behind every program, counselling appointment and connection with a woman at Bridges is an administrative and operational foundation that makes that work possible.

The Administration & Operations team supports the day-to-day functioning of Bridges through client reception, finance administration, human resources coordination, technology, facilities, health and safety, records management and organizational support.

This was a particularly significant year. Alongside regular operations, Administration coordinated Bridges' move into our new Douglas Street home, strengthened internal systems and financial processes, supported organizational growth and helped create a more integrated and welcoming environment for participants and staff.



PHYSICAL

Creating Space for Learning & Opportunity

The Physical tenet is about ensuring Bridges has a safe, accessible and welcoming environment in which women can receive services and staff can do their best work. One of the most significant accomplishments of 2025–2026 was the successful relocation of Bridges' operations to our new Douglas Street location.

Administration coordinated the many moving pieces involved in establishing the new office, including vendors, telecommunications, IT, furniture, security access, signage and workspace preparation. This was accomplished while maintaining continuity of services for women.

The new location brought counselling, employment programming, administration and community activities together under one roof, creating greater opportunities for collaboration and a more integrated experience for women accessing Bridges. Workplace health and safety also remained a priority. Administration supported the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee, emergency preparedness and workplace procedures, while coordinating First Aid/CPR and ASIST training for staff.

A building becomes a home when the people entering it feel safe, welcomed and supported. Administration helped create that home for Bridges this year.

MENTAL

Building Stronger Systems

The Mental tenet represents the systems, processes and organizational knowledge that allow Bridges to operate effectively and sustainably.

This year, Administration continued strengthening the infrastructure behind our work. Financial administration included payroll support, accounts payable and receivable, banking, purchasing, vendor management and improved reconciliation and tracking of petty cash, gift cards and bus passes.

Human Resources administration expanded through improved onboarding and orientation processes for staff, practicum students, volunteers and Work Experience Candidates. Administration coordinated documentation, criminal record checks, technology access, equipment and offboarding processes.

Technology and digital systems also continued to evolve, including Microsoft Teams, Payworks, electronic records management, telephone and internet services and ongoing IT coordination.

A key learning from the year has been the importance of standardized procedures, shared documentation and cross-training. Organizational knowledge needs to live within Bridges' systems rather than with any one individual. Strengthening these practices improves consistency, accountability and organizational resilience.

Good administration is often invisible—but strong systems allow everything else at Bridges to work better.



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EMOTIONAL

The Welcome at the Door

The Emotional tenet is about people, relationships and how women experience Bridges from their very first interaction with us.

Administration is often the first point of contact for a woman reaching out to Bridges. That first phone call, email or conversation matters. A woman may be contacting us while experiencing uncertainty, trauma, financial stress or significant change in her life. Responding with warmth, patience and respect helps establish the trauma-informed experience we want women to encounter throughout Bridges.

Administration helps women navigate services, connects them with appropriate staff and coordinates access to counselling, employment programs and other supports. Improved internal coordination and communication have helped reduce delays and create a more responsive participant experience.

This year, Administration also supported four Work Experience Candidate placements, providing opportunities for participants to gain practical workplace experience while contributing to Bridges' daily operations.

Internally, the department supports staff, volunteers, practicum students and leadership with the many practical details that allow them to concentrate on their primary roles. Trauma-informed service does not begin in the counselling room or classroom. It begins with the first person who answers the phone or welcomes someone through our door.

1,008 Client and Visitor interactions & Contacts	**240 Community Partners Engaged**	**6 Work Experience Candidates & Practicum Students**

All figures shown as yearly totals for the 2025/2026 reporting period.

SPIRITUAL

Supporting Our Purpose

The Spiritual tenet represents Bridges' purpose, leadership and commitment to ensuring our organizational practices reflect our values.

Administration plays an important role in translating those values into everyday practice. Strong financial controls support accountability to our funders and community. Effective human resource systems help us support our people. Health and safety practices demonstrate our commitment to creating a safe workplace. Reliable technology and records management protect information and enable staff to work effectively.

Administration also works closely with the Executive Director, leadership team and Board of Directors to support governance, organizational planning and the implementation of Bridges' strategic priorities.

Relationships with external partners and service providers—including benefits, payroll, technology, building management, contractors, vendors and community organizations—further strengthen the infrastructure that allows Bridges to fulfill its mission.

Our values are reflected not only in what we do for women, but in how we operate as an organization.



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Looking Ahead

In 2026–2027, Administration & Operations will build on the significant infrastructure work completed this year.

Priorities include further standardizing administrative procedures; strengthening onboarding and Human Resources processes; improving records management and document retention; continuing health, safety and emergency preparedness work; enhancing technology and digital workflows; and strengthening financial controls and operational efficiency.

The focus will increasingly move from building systems to refining them—ensuring that information is accessible, processes are consistent and Bridges has the operational resilience needed for continued growth.

As Bridges moves toward its 40th anniversary, a strong administrative foundation will help ensure that our programs, people and resources remain focused on what matters most: creating opportunities for women to heal, build economic security and imagine new possibilities for their lives.

Recognition & Gratitude

The strength of Administration & Operations this year came from the people who kept the many details of Bridges moving every day.

A special thank you to Oyindamola, our Administration Coordinator, whose organization, flexibility and commitment supported virtually every area of our operations during a year of significant change and growth. We also recognize Julie Ready, our Receptionist, for helping create a warm and welcoming first point of contact for participants, visitors and community partners.

Finally, we extend our sincere appreciation to our four Work Experience participants Chanel, Lori, Julie and Rebecca. Their contributions to reception, administration, organization and the many behind-the-scenes tasks of running Bridges were invaluable. They became an important part of our team and were truly indispensable in supporting Administration throughout the year.

Administration is a team effort, and we are deeply grateful to each of them for the care, reliability and energy they brought to Bridges.

Behind the Scenes



Quietly we build what others need,
Through every task, every form, every deed.
With steady hands and thoughtful care,
We create the systems that are always there.

Every record kept, every call returned,
Every lesson shared, each process learned.
Supporting women, purpose, and mission each day,
Helping Bridges for Women Society thrive in every way.

Though our work is often behind the scenes,
Its impact is felt in what it means:
A strong foundation, organized and true,
Empowering those we serve—and those who serve them, too.

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Counselling Program Highlights

Bridges for Women's Counselling Program provides trauma-specialized, strength-based, somatically informed and relational counselling for women and gender-diverse people whose lives have been shaped by violence, abuse, neglect, coercive control and economic insecurity.

Women come to Bridges at very different places in their journeys. Some need immediate stabilization and safety planning; others are processing long-standing trauma or rebuilding their lives after violence, poverty, housing instability or other significant challenges. Our role is to meet each person where they are and support them in strengthening safety, emotional regulation, self-trust and agency.

This year was also one of rebuilding and strengthening the Counselling Program itself—creating clearer clinical systems while protecting the relational, feminist and trauma-informed approach at the heart of our work.



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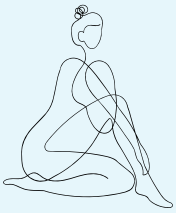


PHYSICAL

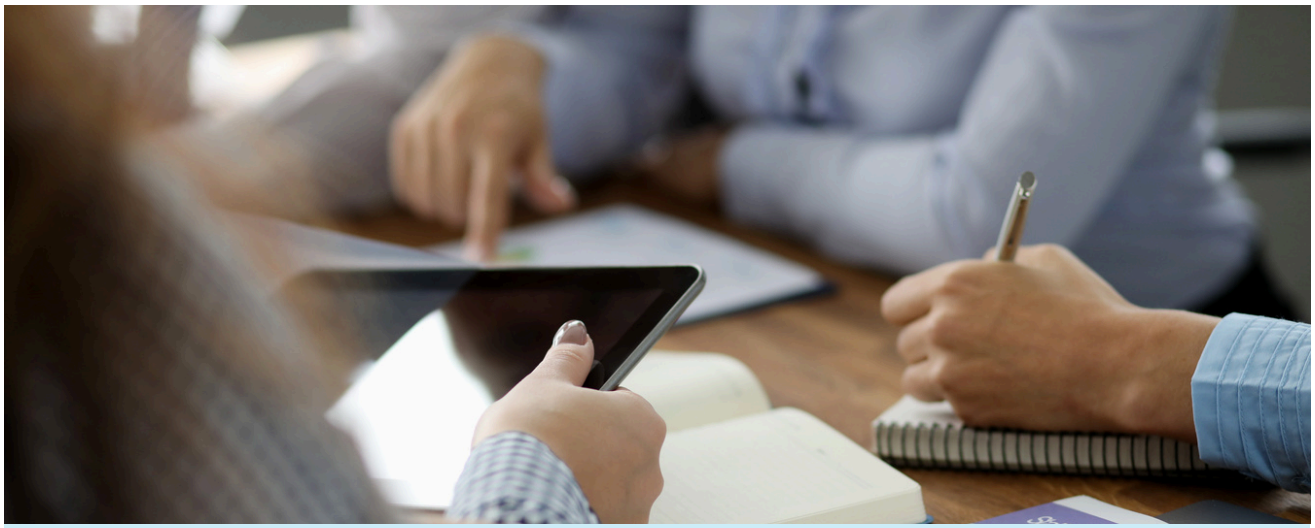
Creating Safety & Access

The Physical tenet is about creating environments where women feel safe, respected and able to access the support they need.

Counselling provides a confidential and welcoming space where clients can pause, stabilize and begin to determine what they need next. Our approach recognizes that readiness looks different for every woman. Counselling may include grounding and stabilization, emotional-regulation skills, psychoeducation, somatic awareness, narrative and relational work, boundaries, coping and future planning.

This year, we also worked to make counselling easier to access and navigate. Client assignment and follow-up became more structured, helping reduce wait times and better coordinate counselling with the Bridges Employment Program (BEP). Counsellors provided drop-in support during workshops, and counselling-only intake assessments moved directly to counsellors to support more clinically informed screening and matching.

Creating safety means more than providing a counselling room. It means meeting women where they are and reducing the barriers between asking for help and receiving it.



MENTAL

Building Skills & Pathways Forward

The Mental tenet focuses on the systems, knowledge and practices that allow us to provide consistent, high-quality counselling.

A significant focus this year was strengthening the clinical infrastructure behind our services. Bridges revised and expanded its Counselling Manual, standardized policies and procedures, developed clearer duty-to-report guidance and created a Client Counselling Guide outlining the counselling process, expectations and client rights.

Monthly external group supervision was re-established, while an internal supervision model and supervision manual were proposed. Regular counselling-team meetings and case consultation strengthened collaboration and reflective clinical practice.

We also began developing a Counselling Practicum Program, creating an opportunity to support future counsellors while expanding Bridges' contribution to professional training and development.

Together, these changes are helping move Bridges toward a more consistent and sustainable counselling model with stronger systems for intake, documentation, supervision, continuity of care and evaluation. Strong clinical systems allow our counsellors to focus on what matters most—the women sitting across from them.

EMOTIONAL

Healing Through Relationship

The Emotional tenet represents the heart of counselling: the therapeutic relationship.

Trauma rarely arrives as one isolated issue. Women may be navigating the combined effects of interpersonal or childhood trauma, poverty, housing instability, health or disability concerns, recovery challenges, disrupted relationships, neurodivergence and limited access to resources. These realities influence everything from attendance to readiness for employment or education.

Within our short-term counselling model, progress may therefore look different for every woman.

Clients described becoming more stable and regulated, developing greater self-understanding and self-compassion, experiencing less isolation and shame, reconnecting with their strengths and values, establishing clearer boundaries and becoming better able to take action in their lives.

For a woman affected by trauma, being able to make a decision, establish a boundary, trust herself, reconnect with another person or imagine a different future can represent significant change.

Our counsellors continued to hold this complex and emotionally demanding work with compassion and steadiness while navigating significant organizational change themselves. Their commitment to professional learning, reflective practice and trauma-informed care remains one of the program's greatest strengths.





SPIRITUAL

Voice, Agency and Possibility

The Spiritual tenet is about purpose, values and the possibilities women see for their futures.

Bridges' counselling model is grounded in our feminist roots and recognizes that healing does not happen separately from the conditions of women's lives. Poverty, inadequate housing, discrimination, childcare limitations, disability-related barriers and restricted employment opportunities cannot be resolved through counselling alone.

Our work therefore focuses not only on individual healing but on helping women reconnect with their voice, agency and ability to make meaningful choices.

Counselling remains closely connected to Bridges' employment and pre-employment mandate. Increased emotional regulation, confidence, boundaries, self-advocacy and hope can strengthen a woman's ability to participate in education, employment and community life.

Community referrals and partnerships help extend that support beyond Bridges, connecting women with housing, income assistance, employment, education, crisis intervention, advocacy, recovery and longer-term mental health services when needed.

Healing is not simply about reducing the effects of the past. It is about strengthening a woman's ability to imagine—and choose—what comes next.

Year at a Glance

Measure	Result
Women served	261
Completions (10-session)	126
Counselling Sessions	781
Community Partners Engaged	64

Looking Ahead

In 2026–2027, Bridges will build on the clinical foundation established this year by continuing to strengthen counselling accessibility, supervision, evaluation and continuity of care.

We will also continue exploring how our counselling model can respond to increasingly complex needs while remaining sustainable and within the scope of short-term counselling. This includes strengthening referral pathways, developing group-based opportunities, expanding professional and practicum partnerships, and continuing to integrate counselling with Bridges' broader employment, wellness and economic-security programming.

Our direction remains clear: to provide counselling that recognizes the whole woman—not only what she has experienced, but her strengths, her choices and the possibilities ahead.

Enna's story

Last summer I secured the mortgage on my house. As well, after I finished the employment program with Bridges, I was accepted into a 3 year entrepreneurial program. That helped me write a business plan which I'm hoping to launch spring in 2027.

The Bridges Employment Program changed my trajectory. It provided the space to look at what I had endured in the 17 year relationship I was healing from. I didn't think I would be able to return to the creativity of my previous career before I enrolled in the program. I was recently separated, dysregulated, traumatized and feeling deeply alone.

The program gave me the tools to find a way forward, for myself and my 3 kids. My oldest son has graduated from culinary arts school, my middle child was accepted this past year into an elite high school program (UWC international baccalaureate) and my youngest is developing their ceramic skills as a nascent sculptor. I would not have had the vision for giving them that support without healing myself.

The work Bridges does is important and deeply appreciated. I'm getting teary eyed as I remember my journey. So I'm gonna stop. Deeply grateful.

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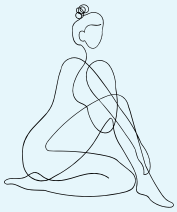
Employment Program Highlights

Healing, Growth & Economic Opportunity | 2025–2026

The Bridges Employment Program is a person centered, strengths based, trauma-informed employment program guided by feminist principles and the goal to create healing and growth opportunities that lead to employment and self-sufficiency for women trauma-survivors. While in the employment program students are encouraged to build an intentional community of support and acceptance within the classroom. They learn to normalize their feelings, behaviors, and experiences as impacts of trauma rather than personal flaws. Students develop life skills such as boundaries, communication and conflict management, learn about the impacts of trauma, power and control in relationships, detecting red flags and green flags in people and relationships, as well as understanding cycles of abuse and breaking cycles. In addition, valuable employability and career exploration skills are taught and practiced, providing a rich tapestry of topics that increase hope for the future, confidence, self-identity, and job-readiness BEP creates space for women to understand the impacts of trauma, rebuild confidence and strengthen skills in communication, boundaries, relationships and conflict management while developing practical employment and career-planning skills.

Measure	Result
Women Served	189
Intakes	93
Workshops Delivered	179
Graduates/Completions	36
Grads connected to training or employment	13
Grads who were still training or employed after 12 weeks	6



PHYSICAL

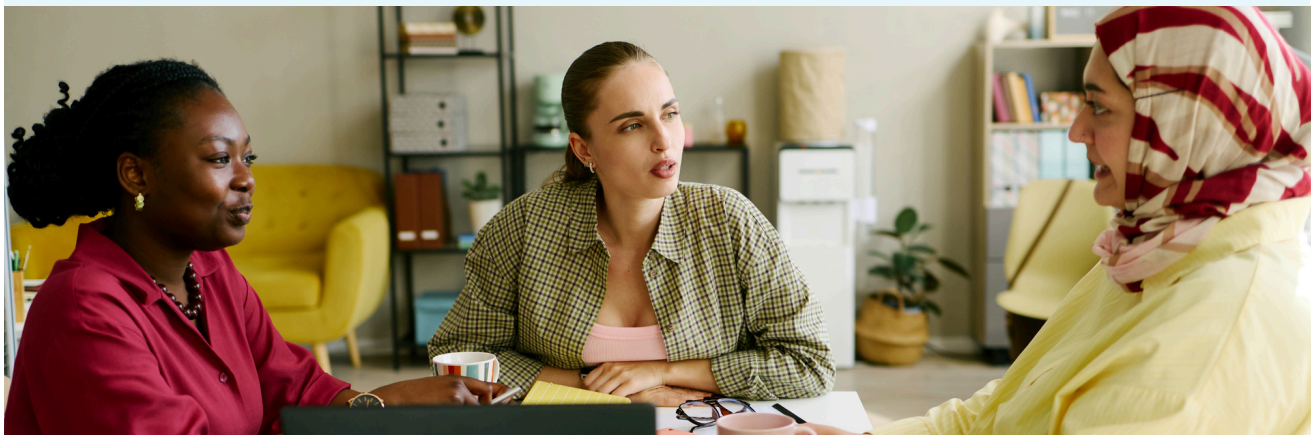
Creating Space for Learning & Opportunity

The Physical tenet is about creating accessible spaces and practical opportunities that allow women to participate, learn and move forward.

This year marked an important evolution for BEP. The program transitioned from four months to a more concentrated three-month, fully in-person model, with longer classroom sessions, increased one-to-one employment coaching and a new Thursday wellness group. Between October 2025 and March 2026, three classes were delivered, including two cohorts running concurrently.

Our new location created a dedicated classroom environment where women could learn together and develop an intentional community of support and acceptance. The year also highlighted opportunities for growth. Demand for BEP remains strong and wait times between programs can result in women disengaging before the next cohort begins. With one primary classroom, our capacity to add programming is limited. Future growth may therefore include additional space and partnerships that allow Bridges to deliver programs at community locations.

Creating access means having the right program, but also ensuring women can reach it when they are ready.



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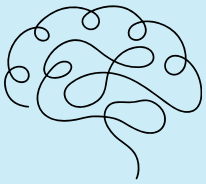

MENTAL

Building Skills & Pathways Forward

The Mental tenet represents learning, knowledge, skills and the systems that support women in moving toward their goals.

BEP combines trauma education and personal development with practical employment preparation. Women explore the impacts of trauma, power and control, healthy relationships, boundaries and communication while also developing employability skills, exploring careers and planning their next steps.

Program improvements this year included a stronger secondary assessment process led by facilitators, increased individual job coaching and expanded post-graduation follow-up. These changes strengthened connections with participants while improving our ability to understand and track outcomes.

Educational pathways also expanded. More BEP participants registered with Camosun College for Math and English upgrading, helping women address educational barriers while preparing for further training or employment.

Community partnerships remained central to BEP. Relationships with WorkBC, Camosun College, BEAMS, St. Vincent de Paul, Victoria Transition House, the Cridge Centre, Kiwanis Young Moms, Victoria Sexual Assault Centre, Elizabeth Fry Society and others help connect women with opportunities beyond Bridges.

A highlight was the Come As You Are Job Fair, hosted with St. Vincent de Paul and Work BC. More than 100 people attended, including a BEP class who had the opportunity to meet employers and experience a job fair together.

Employment readiness is not simply about finding a job. It is about developing the knowledge, skills, confidence and connections that make meaningful employment possible.

EMOTIONAL

Rebuilding Confidence & Connection

The Emotional tenet represents the heart of BEP: creating an environment where women can experience connection, acceptance and hope.

Many participants arrive carrying the impacts of trauma alongside housing instability, financial insecurity, safety concerns, family responsibilities, health challenges and other pressures. These are not separate from employment—they directly affect a woman's ability to participate in education, training and work.

Within the classroom, women are encouraged to build an intentional community where experiences can be understood as responses to trauma rather than personal shortcomings. Through learning and connection with others, women can begin to rebuild confidence, recognize their strengths and imagine new possibilities.

The program also recognizes that progress is rarely linear. Attendance and program completion can be affected by crises and circumstances outside a participant's control. Counsellors, facilitators and employment coaches work together to provide flexibility and support while maintaining the structure needed for women to move toward their goals. One graduate, Enna, described the impact of BEP on her own journey:

“The Bridges employment program changed my trajectory. It provided the space to look at what I had endured... The program gave me the tools to find a way forward, for myself and my three kids.”

Since completing BEP, Enna, a participant, secured the mortgage on her home, was accepted into a three-year entrepreneurial program and developed a business plan she is launching in 2027. Sometimes the first employment outcome is not a job, but the belief that a future is possible.



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SPIRITUAL

From Healing to Economic Possibility

The Spiritual tenet is about purpose, values and helping women reclaim the ability to determine what comes next.

BEP is grounded in the understanding that women's economic security cannot be separated from their experiences of trauma, violence, poverty and systemic inequality.

Our goal is therefore larger than employment placement alone. We want women to leave Bridges with greater confidence, self-understanding and agency—and with practical pathways toward education, training, employment or entrepreneurship.

This year, 36 women graduated from BEP, an increase of more than 70% from the previous year. Thirteen graduates connected with employment or further training, demonstrating the potential of combining trauma-informed healing with practical employment support.

The program's growth has also reinforced the importance of community. Sixteen community partners were engaged this year, creating pathways that Bridges could not provide alone.

When healing, education, community and employment support come together, economic security becomes more than an aspiration—it becomes a possibility.

Looking Ahead

In 2026–2027, BEP will build on the momentum of a year that saw significant program change and increased graduation outcomes. We will continue refining the three-month model, strengthening intake and participant follow-up, expanding one-to-one employment coaching and improving outcome measurement. We will also explore opportunities to increase program capacity through community partnerships and off-site delivery.

As the needs of participants become increasingly complex, closer integration between employment programming, counselling, wellness and community resources will remain essential.

Our goal remains clear: to meet women where they are, recognize the strengths they already carry, and help build the bridge from healing to learning, employment and economic security.

Recognition & Gratitude

The accomplishments of BEP this year reflect the commitment, creativity and compassion of a team deeply invested in the women we serve.

A special thank you to Kazia, our Program Manager, for her leadership, expertise and ability to guide the program through a year of significant growth and change.
We recognize Wendy, our Employment Program Coordinator, for her dedication to participants, community partnerships and the many details that keep BEP moving forward.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to Mariana and Sophie, our Facilitators, whose creativity, flexibility and compassion are at the heart of the classroom experience. Both delivered multiple programs this year while continuing their own professional education—Mariana in adult education and Sophie in counselling.

Together, this team creates much more than an employment program. They create an environment where women are welcomed, challenged, encouraged and supported as they rebuild confidence and move toward their goals.

We are deeply grateful for the skill, heart and commitment Kazia, Wendy, Mariana and Sophie bring to Bridges and to the women we serve.

Wise Women Advisory Committee

From Lived Experience to Leadership | 2025–2026

This year, Bridges for Women launched the Wise Women Advisory Committee, creating a meaningful role for women aged 55+ to bring their lived experience, knowledge and wisdom into the future of Bridges.

Approximately 25 women participated in the initial consultation process, and 11 women came together for the Committee's first meeting in February 2026. What began as a pilot has quickly evolved into an engaged group of women helping shape programs, strengthen community connections and identify new opportunities for leadership.

The Committee reflects an important principle at the heart of Bridges: women with lived experience are not simply recipients of services—they are advisors, mentors, storytellers, advocates and leaders.



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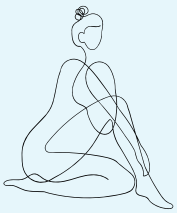

PHYSICAL

Creating a Place to Belong

The Physical tenet is about creating spaces and resources where women feel safe, welcomed and able to participate.

For the Wise Women, that began by creating a consistent gathering place where women could meet, connect and contribute. Members made it clear from the beginning that meetings should not be “all business.” Wellness activities, informal conversation and opportunities to build relationships became intentional parts of each gathering.

The Committee has also looked beyond Bridges' physical walls. Members identified practical ways Bridges can become more visible and accessible throughout the community, including presentations, mini-events, open houses and lunch-and-learns.

One of the most promising ideas to emerge is a Wise Women Speakers Bureau, through which members could represent Bridges at community events, build relationships with other organizations and connect more women with available services and supports.

This year we created not simply a place for women to meet, but a place where they know they belong and have something important to contribute.

MENTAL

Turning Experience into Knowledge

The Mental tenet is about how we learn, organize, make decisions and continuously improve. One of the Committee's first accomplishments was developing its own Terms of Reference and Group Agreement. Members helped define expectations around respect, safety, confidentiality, participation, communication and collaboration—establishing the foundation for a Committee that can increasingly guide its own work. Through a Conversation Café, members then applied their lived experience to several areas of Bridges' work. .

They recommended ways to make counselling more accessible and responsive, including sliding-scale fees, broader clinical expertise and meaningful evaluation of whether services are meeting women's needs.

For employment programming, members emphasized opportunities beyond traditional employment readiness, including mentorship, work experience, paid placements, career exploration, entrepreneurship and practical supports that remove barriers to participation.

The Committee also completed a lived-experience review of Bridges' website, identifying ways it could become clearer, more welcoming and more reflective of the women we serve. Their experience is becoming knowledge that can directly influence how Bridges designs and delivers services.



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EMOTIONAL

Connection, Confidence & Community

The Emotional tenet represents the relationships and sense of belonging at the heart of Bridges.

Women came to the Committee with diverse experiences of trauma, violence and abuse, housing and financial instability, employment barriers and significant life transitions. They also came with decades of knowledge, resilience, skills and experience.

From the beginning, relationship building was intentionally placed alongside the Committee's advisory work. Members identified connection, wellness and opportunities to share with one another as essential components of their participation.

The result has been the development of a respectful and supportive group culture and opportunities for social connection, belonging, confidence and renewed purpose. Members have also begun creating personal profiles based on three simple statements:

I am...
I am passionate about...
I'm here because...

These profiles provide another way for women to define themselves through their strengths, passions and contributions rather than solely through the challenges they have experienced.

Wise Women reminds us that belonging itself can be transformative—and that women thrive when they are seen not only for what they have experienced, but for what they have to offer.



SPIRITUAL

Voice, Purpose & Leadership

The Spiritual tenet is about our purpose, values and direction—and ensuring that the voices of women remain at the centre of Bridges. The Wise Women Advisory Committee is helping us put that commitment into practice.

Members have explored Bridges' feminist identity and what feminism means across generations. Their conversations acknowledged the intersecting effects of ageism, sexism, economic inequality and other systemic barriers while encouraging Bridges to make its feminist foundations more visible and accessible.

Most importantly, the Committee is beginning to move from advising to leading.

Three member-driven priorities are emerging:

- **Wise Women Speakers Bureau** — creating opportunities for members to represent Bridges and build connections throughout the community.
- **Storytelling & Herstory** — capturing women's stories and the history of Bridges as a potential legacy project leading to our 40th anniversary in 2028.
- **Training & Leadership Development** — providing members with opportunities to build skills and confidence through training in areas such as First Aid, harm reduction, project management, self-defence and mental wellness.

The longer-term vision is for Wise Women to become an increasingly self-directed voice within Bridges—helping identify emerging needs, influence organizational decisions, strengthen community relationships and create leadership opportunities for older women.

Wise Women Advisory Profiles

Jennifer

I am a 51 year old Indigenous Mother and survivor of domestic Violence. I am passionate about community, the earth, beading and swimming. I am here because I care deeply about our community and want to make a difference with the younger generations.

Marjorie

My name is Marjorie. I am a 55+ year old wise woman of color esteemed with lived experience and on a mission to create supportive, sustainable empowerment. I am passionate about well-being and strategically building stronger organizations. I am here because I want to encourage all women's voices in creating an optimistic outlook and strength for the movement forward. "I am a graduate of the Bridges Employment Program. Along with my passion for well-being, it is my mission to support empowerment by shaping the future with vision and heart. I am here to contribute positivity, strength and momentum."

Mary Jo

I am a big supporter of Bridges for Women. I'm passionate about working with other women in helping Bridges improve their programs. I'm here because Bridges helped me when I took the program and I want to work to see how it can best help other women.

Fransisca

I am 77 and retired from business. I am passionate about sharing my learned lessons and focused on my continued personal development. "

Theresa

I am involved with the Wise Women Advisory Committee because as a graduate of the BEP program, I know how much Bridges has helped me with my healing from trauma journey. This is my opportunity to give back to Bridges and to help out in any way that I can. I am passionate about helping Bridges to make improvements in any capacity that they feel is needed. Also, this is such an important organization for women of all ages, I want to help Bridges for Women to be able to keep their doors open for many more decades so that they will be able to help many more women who will need their important services.

Sally

I am a 71 year old continuing on my journey of healing and self discovery. I am passionate about continuing to learn and to understand about connection. Connection to oneself, connection with others and what connects us all in this life and this world. I am here because I believe we can learn from each other's experiences and beliefs. With this knowledge we are able to support and encourage others.

SHHINE Initiative

Reporting Period: November 2025 – October 2026

The Supporting Health and Healing with Information, Empowerment, and Navigation (SHHINE) Initiative, in partnership with Bridges for Women, continues to support women and gender-diverse individuals aged 50+ with lived experiences of housing insecurity or limited access to resources.

Project Interventions

- **Peer System Navigation:** PSNs have walked alongside peer participants to strengthen access to relevant resources within homelessness, housing, and mental, physical and social health services. Their guidance has helped peers navigate complex, fragmented systems.

- **Community Circles:** Regular sessions with peer participants have taken place since January 2026. These facilitated gatherings have provided opportunities for social connection, knowledge and resource sharing. The Community Circles have featured guest speakers and been co-designed based on participant input and interests.

- **Research Participation:** A sample of PSN peers and Community Circle participants have shared their experiences with the SHHINE research team through focus group and in-person interviews. Participants have been offered an honorarium, and confidentiality and anonymity have been strictly maintained.



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Project Findings – Individual Level

We have been guided by the “Housing First but Not Housing Only” approach.

1. The participants and circumstances they were in, reflected a much higher level of need and greater precarity than we had anticipated.

2. Within this context, our two interventions (PSN support and Community Circles) have supported peer participants by:

- Increasing knowledge of available resources and services
- Assisting several participants in accessing needed housing
- Providing advocacy where needed and supporting peer confidence in navigating complex systems
- Developing a greater sense of social connection and belonging
- Increasing agency in decision-making related to housing, health, and community supports

Project Findings – System Level

1. The current housing supply (supportive and subsidized) is inadequate and often not appropriate in meeting the needs of this demographic.

2. Wraparound services are fragmented and in need of greater resourcing.

3. The two interventions have the potential for broader sector and community impact with adequate and sustainable resourcing.

4. Significant gains in health in the face of large structural barriers for those who face housing precarity.

Partnership and Collaboration

SHHINE operates through a collaborative partnership between the University of Victoria and Bridges for Women, based on mutually aligned research and service goals. Bridges staff have played a key role in promoting the SHHINE project, identifying eligible participants, supporting intake processes, and providing accessible space for PSNs to meet with peers. In addition, Bridges has coordinated several joint training opportunities (Nalaxone and ASIST).

The project team is currently working to synthesize all research findings with plans for a Community Conversation to share insights and recommendations early in the new year, aligned with the project’s end date of February 28, 2027.

“I am an older woman in recovery from alcoholism. I was six months sober when the program started and in quite a depression. (I also suffer from bipolar disorder and trauma.) I also have temporary housing and am unsure what I’ll be doing next in my journey.

I was looking for a routine and ideas for a new start employment or schooling. This program gave me something to look forward to 3 days a week. I became more comfortable being in a group setting. Lots of focus on self-love, healing and compassion. New breathing and grounding techniques. Also, the new format for resumes and what to expect in the workplace.

I gained confidence. I am way less depressed and eager to explore through personal coaching and Work BC what schooling I may be suited for and what new career options are out there for me. I am also dealing with my trauma and working it out with my counsellor at Bridges for Women.”

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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.

This program is funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia.

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