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Celebration is one of the core values at Aunt Leah’s Place. We believe that it is foundational to a successful life. This year we celebrate 25 years of service and we are anticipating a great celebration. During these past 25 years we have cared for over 1000 kids and another 500 moms and babies. We have introduced celebration to a group of young people who were never celebrated themselves and who often lack the skills to know how to celebrate.

Our 25th Anniversary is an amazing milestone. Starting as a new service in the fall of 1988 and with full government funding, we were trained and educated by the moms and youth we served. We grew and for a full decade were able to provide a unique and valuable service. Going into our second decade, we experienced the beginnings of significant government cuts. Once again we educated ourselves (this time in fundraising) and were able to grow and survive to reach this important anniversary. Perhaps we are the little organizational “engine that could”. Many of you financially participated in this endeavor and for that I thank you.

In the early years of Aunt Leah’s, we knew that foster kids did not do well when they reached their nineteenth birthday and aged out of government care. We would see them return to our offices looking for connection, asking for help and support in gaining or maintaining their housing. They would ask for a phone to use, a bus ticket, or emergency food. In those days we could only minimally provide assistance. Today, what we have always known anecdotally about foster kids and their transition to adulthood has become fact and been proven by research. We now know that foster kids ageing out of government care are the next vulnerable group to enter the homeless population.

In this 25th year we can celebrate the existence of our Link program that provides a continuum of care for foster kids from age sixteen through to their mid-twenties. It mirrors what mainstream families provide for their adult children. We are so proud of this achievement. Please join me in celebrating a new awareness, a new understanding of the plight of foster children and spreading this message of hope - “Helping a foster child make a positive transition to adulthood will also create a better society for us all”. Thank you for being part of a steadily growing group of people who care about foster kids, show them support and strive to make a difference in their lives.

In the Spirit of Leah,

Gale Stewart
AUNT LEAH’S TREE LOTS

Christmas trees are a symbol that many of us associate with a time of giving, a time of family and love. For over 17 years at Aunt Leah’s place, we have been selling Christmas trees to support our programs. Our Christmas tree lots are the ONLY business enterprise in the Lower Mainland that dedicates 100% of its proceeds to fund programs that help children in foster care and young mothers.

Because of our tree lots, hundreds of children in the foster care system have been housed and hundreds of young mothers have been able to raise their children in a healthy, supportive environment.

To be part of this amazing program, buy a tree this Christmas at one of our three lots this holiday season. Or, if you would like to donate your time, try volunteering at one of our lots! And if your business would like to get involved, we also offer tree lot sponsorship opportunities. Contact us to enquire about the possibilities.

NATHAN’S STORY

Foster care can be tumultuous, a fact known only too well to Nathan, who bounced between six different foster homes as a child. Despite this constant turmoil, he was able to find some stability in military training. When he was nine years old, he signed up for cadets and spent the next seven years learning with them. The military training he received in the Army Cadets, Navy League, and Air Cadets led to his lifelong passion for rappelling.

Nathan is a past participant of Aunt Leah’s Support Link program. “I think all foster kids should go into independent living when they turn 16 or 17,” he says, expressing great respect for the Link program. Nathan has aged out of government care but continues his relationship with Aunt Leah’s. It was during a recent visit to Aunt Leah’s that Nathan was connected with Cori Creed, a local artist.

When Cori offered to paint his picture, Nathan was game. He didn’t imagine what the experience would be like. A couple weeks later he found himself literally, ‘showing her the ropes’. “She gave me a climbing harness and came rappelling with me,” he says, smiling. Her beautiful painting now hangs in the New Westminster office memorializing their rappelling expedition and Nathan’s long term connection to Aunt Leah’s.

To find out more about our Support Link program, see our Program Focus on page 6.
Tammy’s Story

Tammy was eleven years old when she shared her fears about her home life with a Sunday school teacher. Her teacher called the police and Tammy was taken into emergency foster care. “My bags were already packed, because I was planning to run away,” she admits.

Spending the next few years in various foster care placements, Tammy unexpectedly became pregnant despite having taken precautions.

Moving through three different homes during her pregnancy, she finally arrived at a group home for single mothers. Throughout the nine months, she continued to attend school and to build and plan for her, and her child’s future. She delivered a beautiful baby boy and named him Jesse. But after an argument with the manager of the group home, Tammy was on the move again. This time, her social worker suggested something different - Aunt Leah’s Place. “I finally found the stability I was searching for,” says Tammy, speaking of her move into our residential program.

Through Aunt Leah’s, Tammy was placed in her own suite where she learned to live independently with her infant son. “They gave me a home,” she remembers of Aunt Leah’s. Her new home was a fully furnished, self-contained suite with utilities included. She had a caring landlord for safety and emergencies, a support worker, and an individualized support plan created with her input. She had the community and foundation laid to move ahead with her life.

“The staff at Aunt Leah’s never told me what to do,” Tammy explains. “They helped me to discover my options and let me make my own choices.” With a stable home and a strong support network in place, Tammy continued to attend high school between caring for her newborn son and learning
to live on her own. She participated in many of Aunt Leah’s programs including life skills training, job training, baby workshops, and cooking classes. She learned how to manage her money and make a budget, how to apply for identification for herself and Jesse, and how to find a good daycare. Tammy felt empowered to make her own decisions. She valued the consistency she found at Aunt Leah’s and appreciated the friendly, approachable staff.

“Aunt Leah’s gave me a sense of normalcy because of the chaos I was in before. There was something about it — the whole atmosphere was very comforting and they helped give me structure and routine,” she says. That structure and routine, along with workshops around caring for newborns and other important life skills, gave Tammy the tools she needed to parent her child. “I don’t think I could have raised my son on my own without that help.”

Tammy stayed with Aunt Leah’s until she was almost 19. She became an adult and got into the helping field as a Community Resource Worker, then a Family Support Worker. She also trained in Early Childhood Development. Tammy lost touch with Aunt Leah’s for several years, until one day her and Gale Stewart, our Executive Director, were both attending a Ministry of Children and Families event.

This chance meeting brought Tammy back to Aunt Leah’s. She worked at Aunt Leah’s House for a while. She also volunteered as Board Chair for a few years and continues to volunteer each year at Aunt Leah’s Christmas Tree Lots. She enjoys supporting the organization that became part of her extended family all those years ago.

Today, the baby that brought Tammy to Aunt Leah’s is 20 years old. Tammy works in a leadership role for the YWCA Crabtree Corner in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.

“I work with moms and their babies,” Tammy explains of the job she loves. “I enjoy supporting them to make positive changes in their lives and to raise healthy babies.”

Her work is reminiscent of the strong foundation she says that Aunt Leah’s gave her and her infant son. “Once the housing was there, that gave me the foundation for what else I had to work on,” says Tammy. “It was quite a blessing.”
Moving out on your own for the first time is often challenging for the most confident and the supported young person. Heading off to university, to a new city or into a first apartment is a big step. For those teenagers who have aged out of foster care and no longer receive support from their government ‘parent’ this can be a terrifying ordeal. Without knowing the basics of budgeting, cooking, job and apartment searching, it is easy for them to feel adrift and alone. Youth coming from mainstream homes have the benefit of basic life skills and usually have support in making independent decisions. For those exiting foster care, it is more than likely that they will have a troubled transition to adulthood.

Aunt Leah’s Place is able to offer two programs to support youth in becoming healthy independent adults. The Support Link Program was created for teens 16 - 18 years of age to encourage healthy independence while still receiving support. Aunt Leah’s provide them with a basement suite to live in and a supportive onsite landlord. They are also provided with essential skills training, pre-employment training, positive social opportunities and a supportive network to guide them on their journey towards independence.

For the past three years, we have been able to offer a continuum of support to our Support Link Residents through the new Link Program. Youth who are exiting the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development at 19 years of age can now have ongoing support as they move out on their own. Through Link, we are able to help these youth in finding permanent and affordable housing, educational opportunities and employment. LINK becomes a mirror of the support offered in mainstream homes.

The Support Link and The Link are incredibly unique programs in the lower mainland. We need your help so we can continue to walk alongside youth on their journey to become independent, healthy adults. Join us in protecting Foster Kids from becoming homeless.
In 1977, Gale and Paul Stewart became foster parents for the first time. Over the next 11 years, they fostered a mother and her child, a hearing-impaired teenager, a preschooler, and several First Nations children. Through fostering and eventually using their downstairs suite to facilitate supported yet independent youth living, the dream of Aunt Leah’s was born.

Gale Stewart founded Aunt Leah’s Independent Lifeskills Society. **Aunt Leah’s House opened** - a licensed residential program for pregnant and parenting teens to provide a place for safe beginnings, and an opportunity to succeed at parenting.

The Community Meal Program was started to bring people together as equals.

Gale Stewart is nominated for a YWCA Woman of Distinction Award in the category of Social Justice.

**Shiloh House began as the first residential program for HIV positive youth in BC.**

**Thresholds, a supported housing program for adult mothers is opened.**

Aunt Leah’s Society was honoured with a Service Provider Award of Excellence through the Representative for Children and Youth.

**ALP started selling Christmas trees as a social enterprise.**

**Gale Stewart receives the Golden Jubilee Award.**

**ALP’s first thrift store opens. ALP first Retail Training Program begins.**

Aunt Leah’s Place is chosen by Charity Intelligence as a Top Pick in their survey of Canadian Charities. Aunt Leah’s ETC Thrift Store opened in New Westminster.

Aunt Leah’s Place turns 25!
Aunt Leah’s Place chosen as a “Top Pick” by Charity Intelligence!

We are honoured to have been chosen by Charity Intelligence as a Top Pick in their survey of Canadian charities. Charity Intelligence is a registered nonprofit group that researches charities to help donors decide where to direct their giving.

Aunt Leah’s Place was one of 45 charities chosen from across Canada that “stand out for their leadership, cost-efficiency, and, most importantly, their bottom-line results in getting the job done in helping their clients.” As Aunt Leah’s staff, we see the impact that your donations have every day in the lives of the kids we work with. Being recognized by Charity Intelligence allows more people, all across Canada to see the difference you are making as well.

By donating today, you are not only giving to an nationally recognized charity, you are giving hope and support to hundreds of foster youth and young mothers throughout the lower mainland.

Please give today to change the lives of youth for tomorrow.

Give it your way. Donate today.

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