Building a Brighter Future for Foster Kids

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Poem by Cori Creed

“N”

N’s hands have worked off fingernails
he has a photo on his small phone of a huge earthworm
and some pictures of a red tree fort.

N’s eyes light up and he sits up straight when he talks about rappelling from the tree
fort and sometimes from the bridge
he has a carabiner strapped to a belt
He has pictures of his buddy’s tag on the tree fort
His tag is a tribute to 9/11
he has an American flag badge on his ball cap
almost falling off his right shoulder
He is wearing a yellow safety type shirt with orange and reflective bits
The shirt says CURTIS across the chest
N wrote it there with a black marker because it is his dad’s name
he has never met his dad, but he is trying to find him
every boy needs a dad
his dad is american so he is half american
he was in the cadets, but the army wouldn’t take him
he had leukemia when he was 7 and his ticker isn’t good enough
N pours concrete
they call him at 6 in the morning if they need him
N’s mom and grandparents are near williams lake
horsey

He bows his head and stops talking for a bit
his grandfather is sick and he can’t stand to think that his grandparents might get
taken away
He spent his life in foster homes
good people
Aunt Leah’s has been a rock for him
He found some abandoned boats with his buddies
they entered them just like commandos and found some flares
down this bike path there are these rope swings
you have to pick up your feet or you’ll bash your legs
N swung and swung till his stomach clenched and his muscles were sore
that’s another one of his favourite places
Aunt Leah’s Independent Lifeskills Society depends on your support to provide programs and services for vulnerable youth and families. Please call us at 604-525-1204.

**Financial Donations** – Make a donation; become a monthly donor or a multi-year pledge donor by calling us today! Karin King kking@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 228 or Chloe Dunn cdunn@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 224.

**Host a Fundraiser** – Host a fundraising event with your friends or co-workers and raise money for Aunt Leah’s. Ask us for our helpful event kit full of tips and suggestions. Karin King kking@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 228 or Chloe Dunn cdunn@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 224.

**Circle of Friends** – Invite a small group of friends to your house or other venue to enjoy an interactive presentation by one of our staff. Learn about the amazing work Aunt Leah’s is doing and the many ways you and your friends can help foster youth, moms, and babies! Karin King kking@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 228 or Chloe Dunn cdunn@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 224.

**Sponsorship** – Promote your business in the community through sponsorship of an event or program. Drew Stewart dstewart@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 225.

**Thrift Store Donations** – Donate your gently-used clothing and household items to our Thrift Store social enterprises. Pick up is available! Chloe Dunn cdunn@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 224.

**Christmas Tree Lots** – Buy a tree at our Burnaby, Vancouver, North Vancouver or Coquitlam Christmas Tree Lots. More locations opening soon! Angelina Oates aoates@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 232.

**Aunt Leah’s Events** – Attend our fundraising events including our Trivia Night featuring lively competition and prizes! Chloe Dunn cdunn@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 224.

**Volunteering** – Sign up to volunteer at our thrift store, tree lots or fundraising events. We could really use your help! Chloe Dunn cdunn@auntleahs.org, 604-525-1204 ext 224.
What We Do

Aunt Leah’s offers four main areas of support services in Metro Vancouver for youth and young moms to help them transition to independent living.

**Housing**
The housing we provide consists of semi-independent living suites, as well as communal living for young single moms and their babies.

**Job Training**
Job Training opportunities are available for work in Restaurants and retail stores. Training includes work experience, help with resumes, interviewing and help finding jobs for youth.

**Life Skills Training**
We teach basic life management skills necessary for independent living, including banking, budgeting, health and well-being, laundry, cleaning, shopping, and cooking.

**Plus-19 Services**
Aunt Leah’s Place is one of the few childcare providers in Canada that guarantees a continuum of care and planning past age 19 for the foster children we serve. We provide support based upon the individual challenges faced by each youth.

What Participants Say

“Thank you all for all that you’ve done for all of us who came through your doors!”
– Former Participant, quote on our Facebook page

“[Link has] helped me through some tough struggles. It’s gotten harder as I’ve gotten older and they were really supportive.”
– Youth participant

“I needed a place [to live] and they got me a place in a week.”
– Youth participant

“If places like Aunt Leah’s were everywhere, there would be a lot less kids on the street.”
– Youth participant

“I had no food, I was starving, so they helped me out a lot!”
– Youth participant

“It’s nice to know you have another person in the same situation to talk to.”
– Young mother

“Whenever I need anything, Aunt Leah’s [Link] staff are there to happily help.”
– Youth participant
Trivia Night, Tree Lot Sponsors

Vancity

marpole optometry clinic

GRANVILLE & AVERY AUTOMOTIVE

Progressive Sealing

In Kind Sponsors

- Anita Webster Communications
- Ann Gibbon Communications
- Beyond Expectations Communications and Design Solutions
- Burley Boys
- Hazmasters Inc.
- Judy Rudin Communications
- Madalaine Hatch Granville Communications
- Modu-Loc Fencing
- Northern Building Supply
- Precision Impressions
- Starbucks
- Thunderbird Press

Also, a special thank-you to all of the businesses and individuals who donated cash and in-kind items to the Trivia Night prizes and auction.

Message from the Board Chair
Bina Bawa

The year 2013 – 2014 marked Aunt Leah’s 26th year working with youth. Notable events this past year included the conclusion and presentation of Dr. Deborah Rutman’s study Avoiding the Precipice: An Evaluation of Aunt Leah’s Link Program in Supporting Youth from Foster Care; the success of another CARF accreditation whereby Aunt Leah’s received a three-year accreditation; and the relocation of Aunt Leah’s head office to 20th Street in New Westminster.

The move to 20th Street included a major renovation of the building that was previously used as a second location for the Thrift Store. With the support of our landlord, the Central City Foundation, and the dedication of the team who completed the renovations, the building was completed on budget and on schedule.

The board had turnover with the departure of Andrea Harris, Margaret Ross, Rob Jackes and Sharon Smith. We thank them for their time and valuable contributions. During the year the board appointed three new board members, Curtis Leong, Jennifer Boey and Brian Moir, who have brought diverse backgrounds and experience. The board continues to actively recruit new directors.

As we look forward there is a focus on governance and succession. Aunt Leah’s Foundation has recently been created. Consideration is now being given to determine how Aunt Leah’s Lifeskills Society will be able to effectively partner with the Foundation. Succession is also a key topic for the organization to continue to provide programming and services for many years to come.

Aunt Leah’s success is the result of the hard work of its management, staff, membership, supporters and friends. On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for your ongoing support of Aunt Leah’s.

Bina Bawa
Aunt Leah’s Place
Board Chair
On a beautiful summer night last July, we celebrated the beginning of our 25th anniversary year at the Hart House Restaurant in Burnaby, on the grass overlooking Deer Lake. Founding members, past youth and moms, colleagues and friends all entered into the celebration. We drank, we ate and we remembered 25 extraordinary years.

And when things start to happen, don’t worry, don’t stew. Just go right along, you’ll start happening too.

The quote from the Dr. Seuss Book, *The Places We Will Go* describes our experience since last summer’s event. At time of writing, Aunt Leah’s is in a “new place” – a beautiful and newly renovated building in New Westminster just a five minute walk from the 22nd Street Sky Train Station. Thanks go out to the Central City Foundation and the Maria Marina Foundation for making this new place possible for us.

The end of our 25th year also finds us in a new place of understanding and part of a new conversation about foster children and youth homelessness. In partnership with the University of Victoria we launched our first research project. What we have known anecdotally for a quarter of a century, this new research has confirmed. That foster children will enter the homeless population without continued support past their 19th birthdays.

By giving assistance to just a few of our young adults (those children ageing out of the foster care system) we can dramatically alter the course of homelessness in the Lower Mainland simply by filling a need that every parented home provides:

• A continued connection
• A consistent network of support
• A tangible direction offered by individuals who know and care for them.

It has been an amazing anniversary year and I thank you, the reader, for participating in and continuing the conversation about foster kids needing this extra support.

As we begin the new fiscal year, we are introducing a new program called SEFFY (Supporting Education for Foster Youth). The name describes an incredibly important service – education planning and educational support – the doorway for our youth and young moms to experience a future without poverty. And now, thanks to many individual, organizational, corporate and foundation gifts, Aunt Leah’s Place can provide this individual support to every youth & mom in our residential programs.

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Whether facilitating programs at their inception, organizing the tree lot appreciation dinners or ensuring the independent living suites are ready for foster youth to move in, Bridget Orford has been involved in different aspects of Aunt Leah’s since before it became a society, more than 25 years ago.

Retired now as an employee, Bridget keeps her hand in things, working on a contract basis as the society’s purchasing manager.

“It has become such a major and key part of my life,” says Bridget. “Right from the day Gale suggested we form a society, I knew it would be something that could change lives.”

Bridget and husband Tony founded Aunt Leah’s Place with Gale Stewart and her husband Paul. Bridget helped Gale take care of a girl with a baby and the two couples recognized young moms needed a place to go in addition to foster kids ageing out of care.

“Tony and I became foster parents, just like Gale and Paul, so the drive for that sort of work ran through all of us.”

At 71 years old she has no intention of leaving Aunt Leah’s.

“I’ve always loved being involved and I don’t see myself stopping. My role is one that ebbs and flows, changing to fit what the society needs at that time. I’m happy to be the person who can do the general running around. It suits me and it allows me to stay involved in something that I have cared about deeply for more than 25 years.”

This year we are laying out plans for an Aunt Leah’s Foundation and another business entity to house our two social enterprises. Our hope is that the foundation will hold our current assets while the “for profit” structure will run our social business enterprises. The existing organization will then be unencumbered and focus only on providing services to the youth and moms. By this time next year there will be a threesome.

This year we sadly said good-bye to Lionel Friess. Lionel was a great supporter of Aunt Leah’s, a Christmas Tree Lot Manager Extraordinaire and a dear friend. We miss you Lionel and we wish you a new and expansive “place” for your spirit to reside.

As always, I thank the staff for their continued commitment to the Aunt Leah’s mandate and their demonstration of the values we hold. They are the hands and feet of the organization. They perform the tasks that ensure the safe and caring delivery of services to this community of young people.

I thank the board for its leadership and in particular to our Board Chair, Bina Bawa who has served for five years and in these past two years gave leadership through one of the organization’s biggest transitions.

And to the reader, thank you for your participation in this new conversation about the future of foster children in BC. Continue to share your thoughts, engage new conversations and make sure the discussion continues. May we together advocate for a day when foster kids will have the same entitlement as children in parented homes.

In the spirit of Leah,

**Gale Stewart**

*Executive Director*

*Aunt Leah’s Place*
Message from the Program Director
Sarah Stewart

This past fiscal year started with Aunt Leah’s Place completing a housing search of its own. A new location was needed for our youth resource space, programming offices and administrative offices. Thanks to the support of the Central City Foundation and the Maria Marina Foundation, Aunt Leah’s place was able to make plans to renovate its ETC building located in New Westminster. With exciting plans for our new building that will meet programming’s expanding need to prevent children in foster care from becoming homeless, and mothers in need from losing custody of their children, Aunt Leah’s entered its 25th year.

“None of the above highlights would have occurred if it were not for the dedication of Aunt Leah’s staff who care passionately about the young people and moms we work with.”

For 25 years Aunt Leah’s has been providing programming to work with children who are in foster care and assisting them in transitioning out of government care and onto independence. Five years ago Aunt Leah’s completed a rebranding and a refocusing of its mandate to highlight the needs of foster children and mothers in need – with the focus on ensuring youth in foster care have the same quality of care that their counterparts receive from parented homes. Aunt Leah’s programming has grown and developed since it started in 1988. Now in 2014, Aunt Leah’s is working hard to ensure that a teenage mom or teenage boy who comes through its door is able to continue to have an adult that will provide emotional and physical support into their 20’s.

This past year Aunt Leah’s embarked on a partnership with the University of Victoria, School of Social Work, resulting in an evaluation of Aunt Leah’s Link Program and the report “Avoiding the Precipice; An Evaluation of Aunt Leah’s Link Program in Supporting Youth from Foster Care.” This research paper is a first for Aunt Leah’s and one of the few pieces of research to follow foster children after they leave government care. For 25 years Aunt Leah’s has been providing programming to work with children who are in foster care and assisting them in transitioning out of government care and onto independence. Five years ago Aunt Leah’s completed a rebranding and a refocusing of its mandate to highlight the needs of foster children and mothers in need – with the focus on ensuring youth in foster care have the same quality of care that their counterparts receive from parented homes. Aunt Leah’s programming has grown and developed since it started in 1988. Now in 2014, Aunt Leah’s is working hard to ensure that a teenage mom or teenage boy who comes through its door is able to continue to have an adult that will provide emotional and physical support into their 20’s.

In Memory

Lionel Anthony Friess
Longtime donor, friend and volunteer
Jan. 20th, 1949 – March 9th, 2014

There are places I remember
All my life, though some have changed
Some forever not for better
Some have gone and some remain
All these places had their moments
With lovers and friends
I still can recall
Some are dead and some are living
In my life I’ve loved them all
But of all these friends and lovers
There is no one compares with you
And these memories lose their meaning
When I think of love as something new
Though I know I’ll never lose affection
For people and things that went before
I know I’ll often stop and think about them
In my life I love you more
Though I know I’ll never lose affection
For people and things that went before
I know I’ll often stop and think about them
In my life I love you more
In my life I love you more

– The Beatles

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This award is presented in honour of Rona Castagnier, a long time co-worker and friend of Aunt Leah’s Society. Rona was a very strong, kind, compassionate and proud person. Rona wouldn’t hesitate to give someone her last dollar if they were in need, even if it meant that she would go without.

In honour of Rona, Aunt Leah’s gives an annual award and bursary to a student from one of Aunt Leah’s Training Programs who has shown the characteristics that Rona appreciated the most.

2014 Recipient of the Rona Award

Willow Tew

It was apparent to her trainers that Willow took great pride in her work. Consistent in her attendance, she never skipped a beat when it came to being present for her shift, unless it was a pre-arranged absence. Always on time and ready to get going, Willow approached her assigned tasks with enthusiasm, many of the times taking the initiative to work on a chore that she recognised needed to be done. She displayed a philosophy of wanting to see a task completed to the end. Willow interacted well not only with customers but also with her peers and supervisors. She loved assisting customers and was always willing to help, never mind that it could possibly involve dragging a 10-foot tree off the tree lot and attempting to tie it to the smallest or biggest vehicle – she was a willing and personable helper – not to mention a hard worker.

Without a doubt Willow displayed kindness, compassion, dedication, pride, consistency and strength. And based on this, Aunt Leah’s believes that she is very deserving of the Rona Award.

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Bank and the United Way. Staff were honored to be at the ceremony and receive the Celebration of Community Award. Aunt Leah’s programming for mothers in need was further recognized by a capital grant from the Homelessness Partnership Strategy to renovate our space in our Thresholds Program. Our newly renovated space will allow us to continue and expand our programming for moms in need in a warm and fun environment for their little ones.

“They are doing some heavy lifting. Without family support and living on their own at 17 years old, Aunt Leah’s young people are continuing to go to school and are passionate about their futures.”

Our staff’s passion and commitment was highlighted as strengths in the University of Victoria’s research paper Avoiding the Precipice. Staff continues to be a strong voice for young people in and from government care and mothers in need. I would like to personally thank them for the dedication and hard work over the past year.

Finally, I would like to highlight the passion and hard work of the young people connected to Aunt Leah’s. They are doing some heavy lifting. Without family support and living on their own at 17 years old, Aunt Leah’s young people continue to go to school and stay passionate about their futures. They overcome some deep sadness and my wish is that Aunt Leah’s staff can meet them where they are at and help them with their load in a way that works for them as they establish their own supportive community for as long as they require.

Sarah Stewart
Program Director
Aunt Leah’s Place
25th Anniversary

Last July, 25 years of helping foster kids and moms in need was celebrated by Aunt Leah’s Place at the Hart House in Burnaby, along with founding members, friends and former youth and moms. Highlights included a passionate speech by Board Chair Bina Bawa and a dedication to Bridget Orford, who has served Aunt Leah’s in numerous capacities.

The Jeremy Wright Award

Character and Determination
In honour of Jeremy Wright

The Jeremy Wright Award was created to honour the memory of Jeremy Wright, a Support Worker who was very special to the organization. The award is to recognize and support a Support Link youth with goals that they have set and are actively working towards. It is presented to a youth living in the Support Link Program who has strived to achieve their personal best and who most “follows their bliss”

2014 Recipient of the Jeremy Wright Award

Moepreet Jawanda

Moepreet came to Aunt Leah’s with only six short months to gain the skills necessary to survive on her own. Because Moepreet is already a survivor, this made working with her nothing short of enjoyable for her support worker. From day one she knew exactly what she wanted to take from the program and became a strong advocate for herself. Although Moepreet is a soft-spoken, well-mannered young lady, she is not afraid to stand up for herself and insist she be given the opportunities she knows she deserves.

Considering all the last 18 years held for Moepreet, she kept herself on a good track, setting goals and reaching them. She demonstrated a strong sense of self by seeking out counseling without any assistance when she knew she felt her past catching up with her. During her time in the program she worked two jobs while attending university. She has a passion for people and after completing her first year of university, she applied to another school to persue a career in social work. Moepreet also made time to complete her first aid and food safe certificates, which is another great example of how she maximizes the opportunities she is given.
The Leah Award
Unconditional Love and Support
In honour of Bruce Ambrose

Bruce was a friend and longtime supporter of Aunt Leah’s who passed away on March 6, 2010. It was important to Bruce to be more than a donor. He also gave his time as a volunteer and shared his wisdom, helping Aunt Leah’s in various fundraising endeavors. Bruce was known among his family for giving them his unconditional love and support and was always proud of their achievements.

2014 Recipient of the Leah Award

Jacqueline Parker

Jacqueline Parker moved into Aunt Leah’s House on August 2013. She was pregnant with her first child, Isabella Parker who was born January 2014. We have seen Jacqueline transform into a loving and caring mother towards Isabella. She continues to show growth and independence in caring for her daughter. Jacqueline has encountered many obstacles in her life. However, she is willing to do whatever it takes to put her daughter’s needs first. Despite all the challenges she has faced, Jacqueline has never lost sight of her goals. She attended Burnaby South secondary school and made the honor roll. She is a courageous young lady who has continued to progress. Jacqueline is now on the journey of expanding her parenting and life skills. Jacqueline and Isabella will be moving onto independent living through the Aunt Leah’s Support Link Program. Jacqueline has shown determination and unconditional love and support to her daughter. For this and many other reasons, Jacqueline was chosen for The Leah Award. Congratulations!

Board of Directors 2013-2014

Bina Bawa
Board Chair

Bina grew up in Vancouver. She holds a BA and a Masters of Business Administration from Simon Fraser University.

Jennifer Boey
Member

Jennifer grew up in Vancouver and holds a BA in Psychology from the University of B.C. She has worked on the frontlines of non-profit organizations for youth in care, people with addictions and people with mental health issues.

Elizabeth Bowker
Member

Elizabeth is a full time lecturer in Business Communications at the Sauder School of Business, UBC, where she is a leader in the development of aboriginal content for the core curriculum, and flexible learning initiatives that blend online learning with traditional learning models.

Curtis Leong
Member

Curtis is an entrepreneur currently working to establish a wine tasting business in B.C. He previously worked as the Chief Financial Officer for the Girl Scouts of Hawaii from 1997 to 2012.
Aunt Leah's Staff

Management Team
- Gale Stewart, Executive Director
- Sarah Stewart, Program Director
- Angelina Oates, Director of Training and Social Enterprises

Program Coordinators
- Pam Costello, Support Link Program Coordinator
- Roshine Morrison, Link Coordinator
- Autumn Moreno, Aunt Leah’s House & Thresholds House Coordinator

Programming Staff
- Aunt Leah’s House
  - Amanjot Mohem
  - Cindy Reinhold
  - Veronica Valade

Support Link
- Michelle Roque, Team Leader
- Andrew Newman, Support Worker
- Rikki Nelson, Support Worker
- Brittany Timmons, Support Worker

Support Staff
- Jennifer McFarlane, Human Resources Coordinator
- Karen Sorenson, IT Administration
- Paul Stewart, Maintenance Manager
- Bridget Orford, Purchasing Manager

Development
- Drew Stewart, Development Officer
- Chloe Dunn, Volunteer and Event Coordinator
- Michael McQuillan, Communications Coordinator
- Dumisile Owane, Administration and Database Coordinator
- Karin King, Fundraising Assistant

Aunt Leah’s Urban Thrift Store
- Ali Andeku, Manager
- Caede Pungente, Assistant
- Kristina McKenzie, Store and Warehouse Assistant

Volunteers
Aunt Leah’s Place relies on dedicated volunteers, who are essential to the day-to-day running of our office, Urban Thrift and our once a year Christmas Tree Lots.

Demographics
The Link Participants per Annum, 2010-2014

Life Skills
Numbers of Youth Certified, 2012-13
Outcomes

The Link: A Continuum of Care (2013-14)

- 87% Current or Former Youth In Care
- 13% Non-foster Youth

Education

Does participant report improvement in quality of life due to being in school?

The Link 2013-14

- 25% Yes
- 75% No

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

– Margaret Mead
Statement of Operations

Homelessness
The Link: Housed vs. Homeless, 2013-2014
- Percentage of The Link Participants in safe, independent housing (month over month average)
- Percentage of The Link Participants experiencing homelessness (month over month average)

Demographics
The Link and Thresholds, Adults and Children
Total Served: 121
- The Link Adults
- The Link Children
- Thresholds Adults
- Thresholds Children
**Outcomes**

**Demographics**

**Youth Aging Out of Care in BC Annual**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aunt Leah's Youth</th>
<th>Total, BC</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>700</td>
<td>30</td>
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**Child Custody**

**Child Custody: The Link & Thresholds 2013-14**

- Percentage of moms that had and maintained child custody this year: 85%
- Percentage of moms that had and did not maintain child custody this year: 15%

**Avoiding the Precipice**

Aunt Leah’s Place new offices hosted the unveiling of the report **Avoiding the Precipice: An Evaluation of Aunt Leah’s Link Program in Supporting Youth from Foster Care in June**. The study, conducted by Dr. Deborah Rutman and researchers from the University of Victoria’s School of Social Work, showed Aunt Leah’s Link program was effective in yielding positive outcomes.

Photo below: Kevin McCort, CEO and president of the Vancouver Foundation speaks.

Below right: Resident elder Shar Silveira leads those attending in prayer at the start of the report presentation.
Aunt Leah’s House is a licensed residential program that provides 24-hour housing and support services in a safe, healthy and positive environment for four pregnant or parenting Aboriginal teen mothers and their babies.

“We provide workshops designed around essential life skills, including information to support the mothers in caring for their children.”

At Aunt Leah’s House, moms are supported through the changes that are happening in their lives. They have an opportunity to learn the parenting and life skills needed for a healthy start. We provide workshops designed around essential life skills, including information to support the mothers in caring for their children. We also provide practical support, such as meals, housekeeping, and child care. We arrange for a variety of art and craft programs and support moms in learning to incorporate creativity and self-expression skills into their lives. We also provide guidance and opportunities for moms to learn and practice positive coping skills and self-care.

To facilitate a sense of connectedness and spiritual growth, moms learn about and incorporate their Aboriginal culture and spirituality into their lives.

Moms and babies are also connected to a public health nurse, alcohol and drug counselors and other professionals. An outreach worker is available to provide support and referrals to resources and services provided outside of the program.

Moms at Aunt Leah’s House have their own key support worker who works one-on-one with them. This enables the support workers to develop close relationships with the moms while supporting them to become more successful both as parents and as individuals.

“Moms accessing Aunt Leah’s House often come from unstable and unhealthy environments.”

Moms accessing Aunt Leah’s House often come from unstable and unhealthy environments. They are in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development and they have had very little, if any, experience receiving the support that ideally, an extended

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Fundraisers & Events

Here are a few photos from the many events and fundraisers Aunt Leah’s has been involved in this year. (left) Runners and walkers raised funds taking part in the Scotiabank Half-Marathon and 5K. (below) Staff at DHX Media had their curly locks shorn as part of a fundraiser for Aunt Leah’s.

A sketch of Aunt Leah’s House, which provides housing and programming for four pregnant or parenting Aboriginal teen mothers and their babies.

Continued from previous page

family would provide. Many have had the traumatic experience of being removed from their parents’ care and now they risk losing custody of their own child.

While living at Aunt Leah’s House, Moms have an opportunity to experience positive attachment, to be supported through this difficult time, and to learn how to support each other.

On average 12 moms and babies have lived at Aunt Leah’s House annually. Many of those moms transitioned successfully into independence with their babies and we believe the skills they learned, as well as the experience of being supported and cared for will continue to benefit them for a long time after they have left.

For a variety of reasons, not all babies remain in the custody of their moms, but because of the support of Aunt Leah’s House, all babies have had the opportunity to experience healthy bonding and positive attachment, while they are safe, loved and well-cared for. Research shows these experiences, along with nutrition and health care, have a significant impact on brain development, cognitive and language skills, as well as their overall emotional and physical health.

(above) UBC students involved in the 5 Days for the Homeless campaign raised $14,500 for Aunt Leah’s programs and services. (upper left) Young mom Shaelyn attended the United Way’s Spirit Awards where Aunt Leah’s Cooking Club received one of the awards.
Support Link is a semi-independent residential program that integrates housing with Life Skills Training and Pre-Employment Opportunities. Program participants live in a basement suite under the supervision of a friendly landlord and have a support worker to help them learn how to set goals and live on their own.

Children who are in the care of the Ministry of Children & Family Development (MCFD) must learn how to live on their own by their 19th birthday. Aunt Leah’s Place developed the Support Link Program to meet this need. The Support Link Program helps foster children between the ages of 15 and 18 years old to make the transition from government care to independent living.

We have a total of 15 Support Link suites under contract with Vancouver Coastal, Metis Family Services and South Fraser MCFD regions. Two Support Link suites are dedicated to youth needing additional one-on-one supports.

In addition to housing and one-on-one support, the youth in the program are provided with opportunities to improve social connections to family, adults, friends and community; on-call staff for emergencies 24-hours a day; a monthly clothing allowance; a weekly food allowance; support learning how to budget and manage time; and access to all of Aunt Leah’s training and life skills programs.

This past fiscal year we had a total of six of the 21 youth who were in the program graduate high school. Of the six who graduated from high school, four are attending post-secondary. Nine youth will be completing high school in June of this year.
Aunt Leah’s Thresholds program provides new moms, who are at risk of losing their babies to the foster care system, with supported housing, help learning how to care for their baby and support in creating a healthy environment for themselves as well as their child.

Eight moms and 10 children were served in Aunt Leah’s Thresholds Program in 2013-2014. The majority of these families were struggling with addiction and homelessness issues.

The risk of losing housing and the challenge of overcoming addictions create significant anxiety for the women involved with Thresholds. This can often hamper them in their roles as mothers and trigger significant setbacks.

The Thresholds Program begins its work with participants by removing these anxieties/ triggers with the provision of safe affordable housing and support.

When a family first settles into the Thresholds House, staff members work to establish a professional and trusting relationship. Then they begin teaching parenting skills and life skills that will enable moms to envision and create their own positive traditions and routines.
The Link Program continues to provide support to youth who have aged out of the foster care system and are now transitioning into adulthood.

Link has expanded in the last two years, thanks to continued funding from the Vancouver Foundation, Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and the City of Vancouver. The program continues to have a flourishing partnership with The Broadway Youth Resource Center providing an office space allowing many Vancouver youth to access valuable support as they need it.

“The emergency food cupboard is still a vital part of the Link program. This support alleviates some of the burden they carry allowing the individual to focus on other important supports that they are in need of.”

The Link Program continues to have staffed-set drop-in days (Wednesdays and Thursdays) although many youth are also accessing the program the other days of the week to receive support in areas such as schooling, housing based on the “Housing First Model Principles,” job search, budgeting, emotional/mental health support, filing taxes, finding a doctor, preparing for a job interview and other life-skill supports.

On Mondays the Link program offers a Mom & Baby/Fresh Food Program. This program gives moms and their babies the opportunity to build valuable relationships with their peers while having access to fresh milk, bread, eggs and a variety of seasonal produce.

In 2012-13 there were 77 youth who accessed support from the Link team. In the past 2013-14 fiscal year those numbers have increased to 121, a notable increase – a clear indication that the Link Program is a successful and important program to the youth and young adults accessing Aunt Leah’s services.

The emergency food cupboard is still a vital part of the Link program. This support alleviates some of the burden they carry, allowing the individual to focus on other important supports that they are in need of. A total 167 of bags of food were given to Link youth in 2012-13 and total of 242 bags of food were given out this past 2013-14 fiscal year. This growth coincides with the increase

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The emergency food cupboard is still a vital part of the Link program. This support alleviates some of the burden they carry allowing the individual to focus on other important supports that they are in need of.

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Volunteers play an important role in our store. We simply could not operate without the selfless support of our volunteers. Sorting and receiving donations, merchandising, cleaning, organizing and giving great customer service are just a few of the many ways that volunteers assist us. Our volunteers have contributed more than 3,000 hours of loyal service.

We are always accepting valued gently used fashionable clothing and charming home furnishings. Your donations are essential and much appreciated. Please consider collecting items or hosting donation parties amongst your social circles where guests bring preloved items for Aunt Leah’s Urban Thrift.
Aunt Leah’s Urban Thrift is a unique thrift store boutique and social enterprise. What that means is you will be able to find fabulous wares without breaking the bank – all while helping a great cause.

Aunt Leah’s Urban Thrift features both modern and antique home furnishings. Our clothing and accessories can range from fun weekend wares to sophisticated and elegant chic. For the thrifty digger out there, our store also features rare treasures, trinkets and jewels that most shoppers would be hard pressed to find anywhere else.

Staff and dedicated volunteers create a pleasant and considerate social environment. With the great support of a large donor base, we have been able to cultivate a great shopping experience for an ever-growing customer base in our third year of operation.

It is also important to note that profits from this social enterprise support Aunt Leah’s Thresholds program, which helps in preventing mothers in need from losing custody of their children. We also provide youth in our programs

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of participants and their needs.

Aunt Leah’s recently released Avoiding the Precipice, An Evaluation of Aunt Leah’s Link Program. The evaluation was conducted by University of Victoria’s Research Initiatives for Social Change Unit.

The 18-month evaluation involved a quasi-experimental design. Individual interviews were conducted with a sample of Link participants and a sample of youth from foster care who did not access the Link. Evaluation findings revealed that the guiding principles underlying the Link’s service model included being relationship-based, emphasizing non-judgmental, caring relationships and a welcoming environment, youth-directed and flexible, outreach-based, wholistic and using a developmental lens.

This year the Vancouver Sun ran a series of articles devoted to exploring the issue of youth aging out of foster care. Three Aunt Leah’s youth participants were profiled in the series.

The articles can be found on the society’s website.

Annual camping trips and other excursions are part of the Link program, which is a successful and important service for youth and young adults.
Aunt Leah’s Training Programs are typically five to 12-week programs designed to provide students with an overview of some of the most in demand industries and teach them the basic skills they will need to obtain a job in that field.

Trainers follow a specific curriculum but also customize the program for each student, based on their strengths and abilities. These reasonable accommodations are made whenever possible to facilitate those students that have challenges obtaining employment. Students leave the program with experience in many different skills.

They will also complete eight hours of World Host training or Foodsafe training. Upon successful completion of the program, students are invited to attend a graduation ceremony and are provided with a job reference from their trainer.

Aunt Leah’s has successfully completed the third year of the Retail Tree Lot Training Program. Youth trained 96 hours over five weeks at our Christmas Tree Lot in Burnaby and learned skills such as customer service, cash handling, sales, promotions, inventory, stock, opening/closing procedures, communication, organization, professionalism, efficiency, following directions, and initiative. Youth also engaged in physical labour setting up and taking down the lot. They also had the chance to experience some holiday spirit.

This year we had a student come back to us for a second year in a row and participated as a leader in helping training the new students of 2013. This year we more than doubled our number of graduates from two to five. We had fun at our graduation ceremony in January celebrating the student’s successes.

We improved our Food Service Training Program and Aunt Leah’s received the 2014 United Way Community Spirit Awards, Celebration of Community award for Children 0-6 for our Cooking Club and Fresh Food programs.

“*Our youth learned skills such as customer service, cash handling, sales, promotions, inventory, stock, opening/closing procedures, communication, organization, professionalism, efficiency, following directions, and initiative.*”

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The Cooking Club is specifically designed to work with moms from our Aunt Leah’s House and Thresholds programs. We focus on developing the culinary skills of the youth and young moms who take part. Participants prepare tasty, low-cost, easy meals for themselves and their families. We ran a small summer session for our Thresholds moms and started new sessions for both houses back in October. All together we had 10 moms participate and three graduate from the program.

On Mondays the Link program offers a Mom & Baby/Fresh Food Program. This program gives our moms and their babies the opportunity to build valuable relationships with their peers while having access to fresh milk, bread, eggs and a variety of seasonal produce.

Our plans for the up and coming year are to reestablish our Retail Training program and expand our Cooking Club program.