



2025-2026
ANNUAL
REPORT

When There's No Place
That's Home, There's

Aunt Leah's



MISSION & VISION

Aunt Leah's helps prevent youth from foster care from becoming homeless and vulnerable mothers from losing custody of their children. To support them on their journey to self sufficiency, we provide housing, lifeskills, education and employment services.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Aunt Leah's acknowledges, respects and celebrates the Coast Salish Nations on whose territories we are fortunate to provide service. Specifically, the unceded, occupied, ancestral and traditional lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlilwətał / Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh), Stó:lō, and Qayqayt Nations.

We also recognize the Métis Nation of British Columbia, including the Charter Métis Communities connected to the areas in which Aunt Leah's operates, and honour the enduring presence, culture, and contributions of Métis people in this region.





SARAH STEWART | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your generous support over the past year. There is always a local impact in a turbulent world. The youth and families we serve depend on us as a consistent, stable and safe place for them to turn. Despite government funding cuts and staffing challenges, we maintained our services. Thank you for sharing our commitment to people affected by the foster care system.

Your gift improved the lives of **392** participants this year. They found community and connection at Aunt Leah's. They were able to find a home, further their education, learn skills essential to self care, prepare to find employment and pick up a bag of groceries when their money ran out. Thank you for taking part in our community – for caring, making a donation, volunteering and sharing your stories of commitment to our work. Because you took time to learn about the young people and families we serve and then chose to act, the entire community benefits.

One of our core values seems particularly relevant this year. Success is fragile and must be tended to and supported with care. We tend to our participants, our organization and you, our supporters. This past year we made good progress toward our goals which informed decisions that will pay off in the long term. We are on track and on budget with reserves which will ensure our services in difficult years. Maybe not exciting but certainly worthwhile.

In the past year our goal was to stabilize the organization. Our path has been steady and deliberate. We closed the Thrift Store and Donation Centre, and restructured Tree Lot operations to reduce the overall budget by 1.25%. Our approach is fiscally conservative with careful investment in core services, systems improvements that help ensure our long term stability and strategies that build a community of support.

We have already experienced cuts from BC government programs and foresee more on the horizon. We had a strong financial year and have made plans that will build our resilience and ability to continue to invest in our mission through changing times. Our ability to project fundraising revenue has improved, we have savings from restructuring and we have realized operational efficiencies because of improvements to our financial and human resources systems.

Continuing into 2026/27 we will consolidate our progress and focus on readiness for intentional growth. In addition we'll continue to align our staff compensation with sector benchmarks, develop our leadership team, improve our human resources systems and maintain our living wage employer status. We will review and develop our program service delivery models in order to better support expanded housing offerings.

We are thrilled with the success of Aunt Leah's Properties who have purchased an apartment block and are building new housing in New Westminster. Their project to build **89** units of affordable housing on Marine Way is well underway and will open in 2028.

Despite our gains we suffered some losses. Our founding mother Bridget Orford, passed away this May after a lengthy illness. She and Gale Stewart were the bricks in the foundation and the guiding lights of Aunt Leah's.



“At a time when young mothers often faced judgement and shame, Bridget was part of creating an environment where families were celebrated. She helped build spaces where young moms could feel proud of their children, while receiving support through the realities of parenting. Keeping families together and helping them thrive was not just part of the work—it reflected who Bridget was.

She created spaces that were warm, welcoming, and dignified for young mothers in care. She celebrated each baby, prepared nourishing meals, and made sure homes were filled with warmth, colour, and comfort.” — Sarah Stewart, Executive Director

Bridget's impact lives on in the work we do every day. Our Thresholds homes and the many women who benefit from our wrap around support are her legacy.

Here are the words of Sam, a young mother who lives in a Thresholds home.

“The leaders here at Thresholds, Aman, Nubia, Suzanne hold a special place in my heart because of their constant support, leadership and belief in me from the very beginning. For giving me the opportunity to open new doors and a chapter of my life beyond what I could have imagined. Since joining here last year in October, we’ve been in a safe, supportive and loving community of families and support workers. We have experienced and created so many memories here. It is so touching and heartwarming to feel the impact and influence I have experienced in the Aunt Leah’s community.”

SAM | PARTICIPANT



Thank you for making Sam's and all our participants' journey possible.

With gratitude,
Sarah and Megan



"This is my last year as Board Chair. My term ends next year. At the end of the AGM this year, a new chair will take over the helm. I loved my terms on the board and also my time sitting in the "big seat" as chair. It has been an honour and a privilege. I learned so much from the staff, the other board members, and the participants. The organization has continually evolved since I first began to volunteer. Aunt Leah's goal then and still is to improve the lives of those we serve. Every year hundreds of those impacted by the foster care system come through our doors. We all benefit because they are a part of our community. I look forward to serving Aunt Leah's in other capacities in the future." —Megan Halprin

ABOUT OUR PARTICIPANTS

We support participants with increasingly complex intersecting needs. Their housing instability, mental health concerns, substance use, inadequate and insecure finances and social isolation require us to further integrate our trauma informed services. We have increased our staff training and are improving our case management systems as a result.

As well as learning from the delivery of our programs we also ask the young people we serve about their identities. Here's what we learned:

46% identified as First Nations or Metis.

67% disclosed living with mental health concerns

24% disclosed substance use concerns

58% identify as women

100% of the participants in the Thresholds Program identify as women.



392 YOUTH, MOMS and
babies SERVED

189 YOUTH, MOMS &
CHILDREN HOUSED

240 RESOURCE CENTRE
PARTICIPANTS

81 EDUCATION SERVICES
PARTICIPANTS

YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE BUILDS COMMUNITY

“Community building means we all have a place to go when we need support” This rings true for us all but Aunt Leah’s 5th value statement is crucial.

One of the ways Aunt Leah’s builds community is through our Youth Advisory Committee (YAC). The members of the Youth Advisory Committee are past and current Aunt Leah’s participants who feel compelled to make life better for their community. Presently the committee has 12 core members who meet monthly.

The YAC gives Aunt Leah’s the ability to develop and offer the best experience possible to youth from care.

The voices of those with lived experience are key to understanding the lives of participants. Their input informs how Aunt Leah’s designs programs, develops space and services and approaches the issues that matter most to youth.

We interviewed Ashley Crossan, former youth from care and the current co-chair of the committee.



For Ashley one of the benefits of belonging to the committee is learning leadership skills.

The committee organized Aunt Leah’s booth at National Indigenous Day in New Westminster, came up with the plan for Heat Kits for youth living in poorly insulated housing, and offered suggestions for naming Aunt Leah’s Properties building currently under construction.

She enjoys meeting and mentoring younger members, and working on our advocacy efforts. Thank you Ashley and all the members of our Youth Advisory Committee! Aunt Leah’s benefits greatly from your knowledge, passion and commitment.

HOUSING

Aunt Leah's dedicates most of our resources and your gifts toward providing housing and wrap-around supports that preserve women led families and prevent a fall into homelessness for youth from care. The cost of the foster care system is devastating in terms of outright expense and damage to individual lives. Aunt Leah's is dedicated to preventing this travesty and ensuring our participants have the opportunity to learn the skills that give them the ability to live successfully in community.



Stable secure housing forms the basis of the journey to adulthood and self-sufficiency for all of us. We have learned that integrating support for mental health and wellness issues, tenancy skills and rent subsidies creates the conditions for housing success.

Aunt Leah's both provides supportive housing and helps young people find accessible, affordable housing. We increased the number of people who benefited from living in our supportive housing facilities and from our housing services by **39%**.

189 people housed

we offered housing services to **146** people and found housing for **124**

15 mothers and **15** children found a stable home in our Thresholds program

9 youth from care lived in our Lale Houses

10 youth in care lived in community with our support

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

We operate **5** homes and **2** laneway houses where **18** individuals and families find the stability and support they need. In addition we provide wrap around services for **10** youth in care who wish to experience independence in suites in community.

THRESHOLDS

15 women and **15** children lived in Thresholds homes. **14** women maintained custody of their children. **6** families successfully moved on to housing in the community after a **13** month average length of stay.

Our Thresholds homes offer a continuum of supported housing and services for women that prevent homelessness and support them in maintaining custody of their children. Women live in a safe, caring home environment where they learn how to care for and parent their child with the guidance and support of our Family Support Workers.

The program provides a continuum of individualized support that builds stability, strengthens parenting skills and enables each woman to work toward independent living with her children. Program participants are connected with programs at Aunt Leah's, community programs and resources. These supports include post-natal support, parenting education, cultural teachings, and scheduled weekly programming that encourages bonding between moms and their children while helping to strengthen parenting skills, independence, and overall family well-being.

LALE HOUSE

9 young people found a safe, secure home at Lale. **4** moved on to live in the community after spending an average of **22** months with us.

Lale Houses provide safe, affordable, communal housing for young people transitioning from foster care. The program supports youth, ages 19 to 27, offering stability as they pursue education, employment, and/or rehabilitation.

Many youth are not prepared to live independently at 19. In today's challenging economic climate, securing adequate housing and achieving financial independence can be especially difficult. Youth from care live with the challenges of a lifetime of trauma, neglect, instability and disruption. Lale House helps bridge the gap in lifeskills and experience.

Our support workers work with each young person to develop an individualized service plan tailored to their goals and needs. Through ongoing support, guidance, and coaching, the program empowers youth to build skills and confidence for long-term success.

SUPPORT LINK

Designed for youth aged 16 to 18 who are ready to take their first steps toward living independently, Support Link offers semi-independent, supported housing in **7** suites in the community. Rather than moving abruptly from care to full independence, participants are given the space and support to grow at their own pace, with caring adults alongside them every step of the way. Support Link is fully funded by the BC Ministry of Children and Families.

HOUSING SERVICES

Aunt Leah's housing services provide comprehensive, participant-centered support to help former youth-in-care find, secure, and maintain stable housing. Through a combination of housing readiness education, individualized housing search assistance, and financial support such as rent subsidies, we equip participants with the knowledge, tools, and confidence needed to navigate the private housing market.

We manage rent subsidy programs with funding from Federal Reaching Home and BC Housing.

This year we served **146** people, **124** found housing and **90%** remained housed after 12 months. **64** participants received a housing subsidy. The total amount of subsidies provided: **\$386,445**

SUPPORT SERVICES AND HOUSING STOCK

Aunt Leah's established Aunt Leah's Foundation in 2013 in response to the growing need for affordable housing for youth from care. Operating as Aunt Leah's Properties, the organization owns and manages properties and buys and builds housing. The two organizations hold a strategic leasing arrangement that enables Aunt Leah's to offer comprehensive programs and support services in the properties.



IN 2025/2026 AUNT LEAH'S PROPERTIES

Continues to manage, purchase and build housing that contributes to the stock of affordable housing in our community and in particular offers Aunt Leah's participants stable, secure, housing options.

Homes owned by Aunt Leah's Properties include

- **2** Thresholds homes and **2** laneway houses for women and children,
- Between their Telford Block and East Pender Apartments (**51** units) Properties provided long term rental for **16** participants last year – an increase from 11 the year previous.
- Construction is well underway for the **89** unit Marine Way apartment building in New Westminster.

Image: (Left to right) Minister of Labour, Jennifer Whiteside, City Councillor, Tasha Henderson, and New Westminster Mayor, Patrick Johnstone, and during the groundbreaking of the Marine Way apartment building

EDUCATION

Lifelong learning is a reality for many of us and very often the case for the young people we serve, although not for the same reasons. While we are inspired and



satisfied by our learning journey for many of our participants, schooling has been disrupted and successes have been few. Finding a path forward is often difficult and may take many twists and turns. Aunt Leah's stays the course as they explore options and develop plans that are grounded in their individual realities.

We offer education and employment planning, systems navigation coaching, assistance with funding applications and our own bursaries for those who need financial support beyond government tuition waivers.

Dr. Jacqueline Gahagan, Associate Vice-President of Research, Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

"While education is widely considered a key determinant of health and a human right, we continue to see those with experience in the child welfare system in Canada experiencing a disproportionate burden of low educational attainment. With this burden comes lifelong disadvantages in terms of health, social, and economic outcomes."

This year:

81 participants sought support with their education. Not all continued to pursue their plans. **53** continued to work toward their goals.

74 of 81 participants completed an education plan

8 participants completed post secondary programs

10 Thresholds women completed an education plan and **3** are on track to graduate high school.

MML FUND UPDATE

We are thrilled to report the activities of the second year of the MML Out of the Box Fund, a bursary created by the family of Monika Langer. Dr. Langer was Associate Professor Emerita (Philosophy) at University of Victoria. The Fund was created to honour her work as an educator and community leader.

Bursaries from the fund are available to women served by Aunt Leah's who are enrolled in higher education programs.

18 participants received **\$57,652** from the MML Out of the Box bursary fund this year. Our arms-length community based Education Advisory Team made the final decision on recommended amounts.

This year, in order of most prevalent needs, recipients received funds to support them with: food, tuition, rent, transportation, childcare, textbooks, medical assistance, exam fees, and program supplies.

"Thank you once again for believing in me and investing in my future. I sincerely appreciate your continued encouragement and support, and I look forward to making the most of every opportunity as I continue my journey in the Computer Studies and Information Systems program."

K.C. | MML BURSARY RECIPIENT

EMPLOYMENT

Just as finding and keeping a job can be a challenging process, our employment services met with difficulties this year. Despite government funding cuts 20 people were able to benefit from our support.



Ashley received the Rona Award for her determination as an entrepreneur and parent

We were pleased that two staff moved on to further their careers but we struggled to replace them. Always inventive in the face of adversity we moved learning content to interactive assignments on Google classrooms. Our resource centre staff and volunteers stepped up to support **6** youth who entered employment and **2** who started micro-businesses. **14** people participated in one on one individualized pre-employment services, resumé building and job search coaching.

In the year ahead, we will hire a part-time employment skills worker. We will actively recruit former youth from care from outside our programs and have set our goal at **30** participants. Pre-employment skills coaching will be on offer at the Resource Centre on a drop-in basis.

RESOURCE CENTRE

There is always a lot going on at Aunt Leah's Resource Centre. Participants find a welcoming space where they can ask for assistance from a caring worker. Representatives of our many service delivery partners are on hand to help with health, counselling and financial assistance. We thank Dan's Legacy for providing mental health counselling, our provincial income assistance liaison and the health team from the First Nations Health Authority.



Often participants need help to meet their basic needs – food, clothing, and someone to listen. We provide personal hygiene supplies, a place to take a shower, use a computer or find a quiet corner to read a book. Our intake workers are available to assess longer term needs and goals like appropriate housing, education and job readiness coaching. Participants then meet with staff to develop effective plans and find assistance to manage day to day realities.

Individuals Served at Resource Centre: 240

SERVICES AT THE CENTRE

811 visits to the emergency food and hygiene supply cupboards were recorded.

13 people took advantage of monthly virtual sharing circles which create an opportunity to build relationships and gain perspective on personal issues. We have plans to offer this program in person in 2026/27.

73 participants sought personalized navigation assistance from our weekly Provincial Income Assistance liaison worker with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction **197** times.

Health and mental wellness is crucial to the wellbeing of our participants. We actively explored counselling options with community organizations and we are thrilled to announce a new partnership with the First Nations Health Authority. A registered nurse and mental health care team will offer culturally appropriate services two days per week at the Resource Centre. Services will begin in August 2026.

FOOD SECURITY

The Wednesday meal and grocery program has become an important fallback when financial resources are stretched. Youth gather to pick up essentials and reconnect with friends and staff.

We are grateful for our new partnership with the Greater Vancouver Food Bank and have benefited greatly from their funding and regular donations of food.



Number of meals served: 3900

Number of bags of groceries: 1797

Number of people who received a meal/bag of groceries: 197

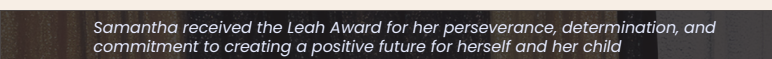
YOUTH SUCCESS STORIES



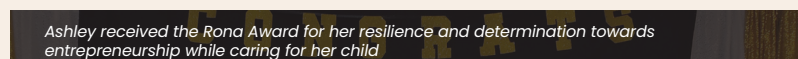
Sarah Stewart, Aunt Leah's Executive Director, with the award winners and their children



Thresholds Support Worker Vivian (right) next to the Champion Award Winner, Lin, (left) celebrating her leadership, advocacy and commitment to positive change



Samantha received the Leah Award for her perseverance, determination, and commitment to creating a positive future for herself and her child



Ashley received the Rona Award for her resilience and determination towards entrepreneurship while caring for her child



TREES

Our Christmas Tree sales were a huge success this year! Thank you for making this well-loved event possible. **200** volunteers turned out to set up our lots, unload and sell trees. **3450** trees were purchased by our loyal customers.



We were pleased to earn **\$650,313** in revenue and realize a profit of **\$129,214** which was directed toward our essential programs and services. While we know our Coquitlam customers were disappointed to lose their lot, the cost of logistics for three sites was prohibitive and we decided to centralize sales in Burnaby and South Vancouver.

Volunteers with Aunt Leah's sell trees at Christmas, prepare meals at the New Westminster Resource Centre, support students with their academic goals, assist with job search planning and resume writing, offer professional expertise, serve on our board of directors, and advise behind the scenes. Thank you!

221 volunteers helped make our services possible in 2025/26



YOUR GIFT IN ACTION

When you make a gift to Aunt Leah's you join a community of people who care deeply about our mission. Our work is made possible by your understanding of the damage done by the foster care system, and we are encouraged by your belief in us and your hope for the futures of the young people we serve.

You are in good company! By the end of the 2025/26 fiscal year **1,488** donors had given **\$3,266,062** to maintain our services.

Thank you all for your tremendous support.

On behalf of the Board of Ember Fund, we are proud to support the Thresholds Program and the vital work Aunt Leah's does for mothers and children in our community. It is wonderful to hear about the impact the program is having.

— Brett Marr, Chair Ember Fund

OUR SUPPORTERS

As a sustaining member of our community and whether you give once a year, monthly or plan for a future gift, your contribution is vital to our ability to prevent homelessness, poverty and isolation.

As always we recognize and deeply appreciate the long time and future commitment of our Leah's Legacy members. Our thanks to Gale Stewart, Aunt Leah's founder, who inspires this visionary group

LEAH'S LEGACY MEMBERS

Barbara Gauthier	Gillies Malnarich
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We are grateful for a bequest received from the Estate of Joan Kramer.

GOVERNMENT FUNDERS & PARTNERS

The housing subsidies and housing services that we provide to our participants would not be possible without the generous support of the federal Reaching Home and provincial government BC Housing and Ministry of Children and Families partners. Our services and site in Downtown Vancouver are supported by the City of Vancouver.

 Reaching Home



Ministry of Children and Family Development
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auntleahs.org/impact/reports

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LONG TIME DONORS

We are proud to recognize the individuals whose continued generosity has helped change the lives of youth and families at Aunt Leah's. This year, we celebrate the 64 extraordinary donors who have been giving for more than 20 years. Thank you for your unwavering commitment and lasting impact.

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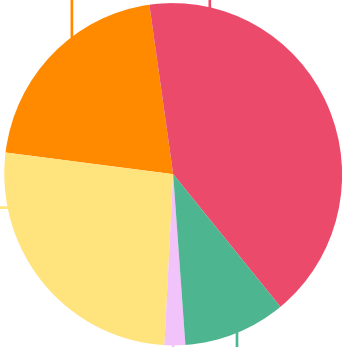
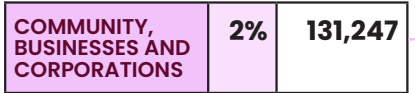
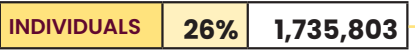
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Trevor Simpson

FINANCIALS

Revenue

\$6,639,227 | 100%



GOVERNMENT FUNDING	
Ministry of Children and Families	1,133,161
BC Housing	890,049
Reaching Home, Canada's Housing Strategy	464,494
BC Skills Training for Employment	131,909
BC Gaming Income	62,500
Municipal Funding	60,000
	41% 2,742,113

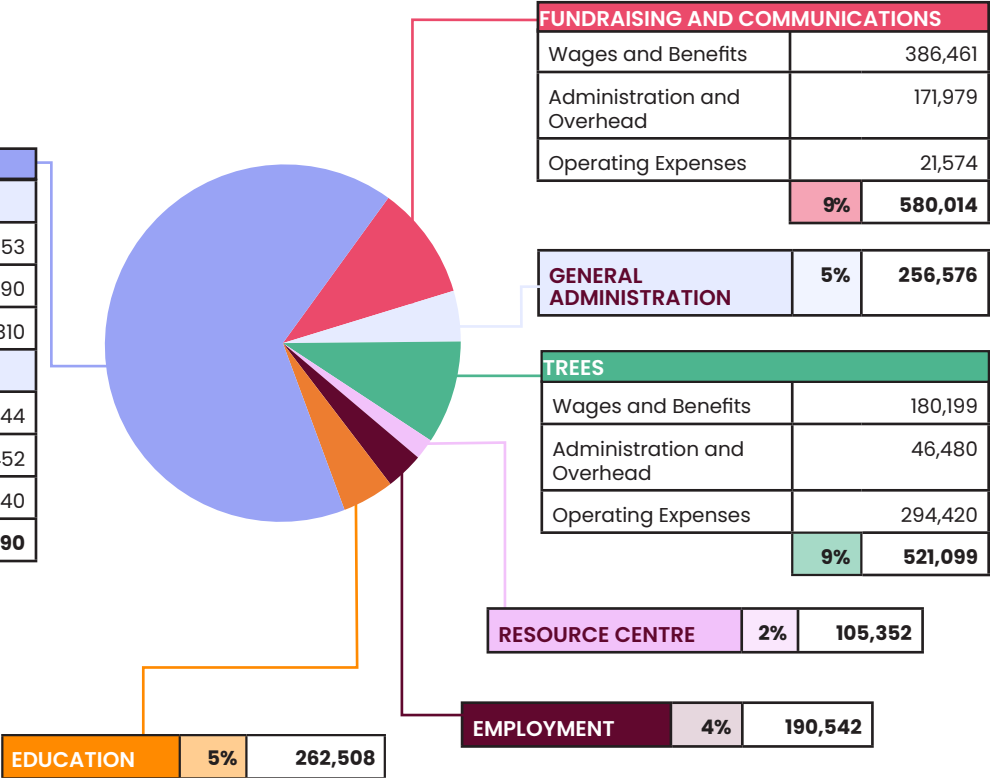


FINANCIALS

Expenses

\$ 5,593,581 | 100%

HOUSING		
SUPPORTED HOUSING		
Support Link	1,142,353	
Thresholds	759,790	
Lale Houses	269,310	
HOUSING SERVICES		
Link	160,544	
Reaching Home	481,452	
BC Housing	864,040	
	66%	3,677,490



**Aunt Leah's Resource
Centre & Main Office**

*Made possible by Central
City Foundation*

816 Twentieth Street
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604 525 1204

**Aunt Leah's Vancouver
Office**

*Made possible by the City
of Vancouver*

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Aunt
Leah's