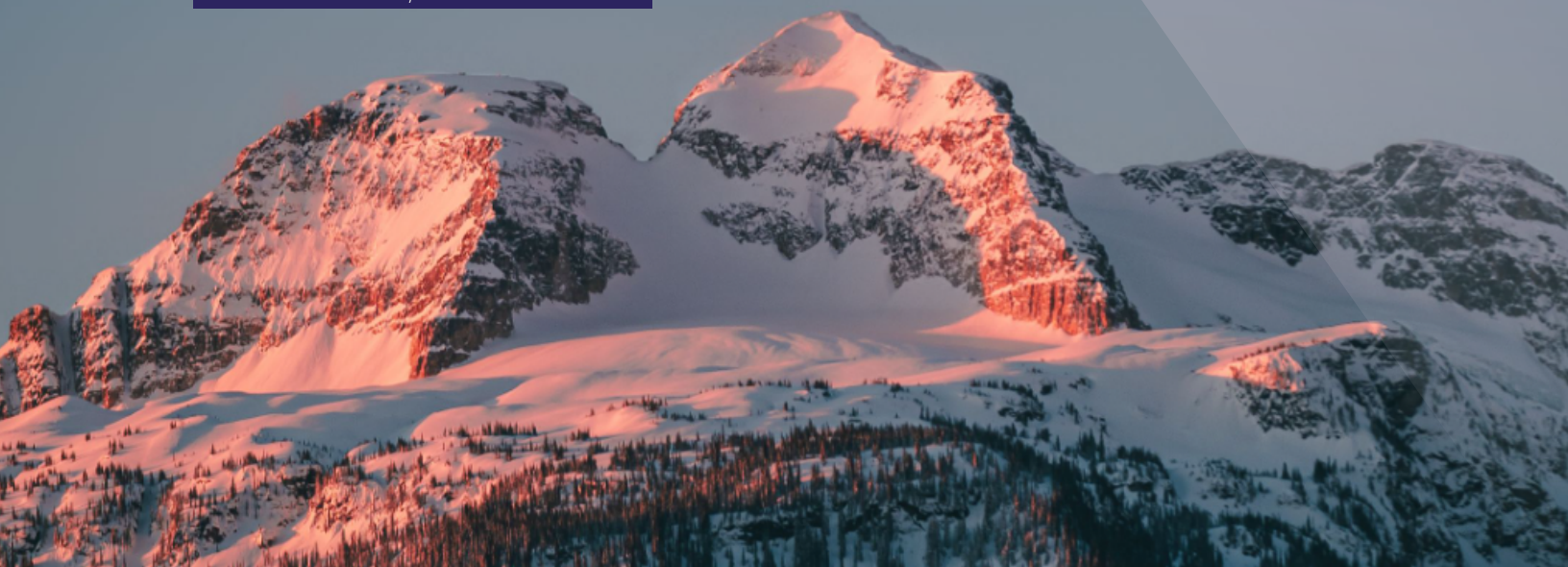


Annual Report

2021 / 2022



REVELSTOKE
Women's Shelter
Society

TABLE OF CONTENTS

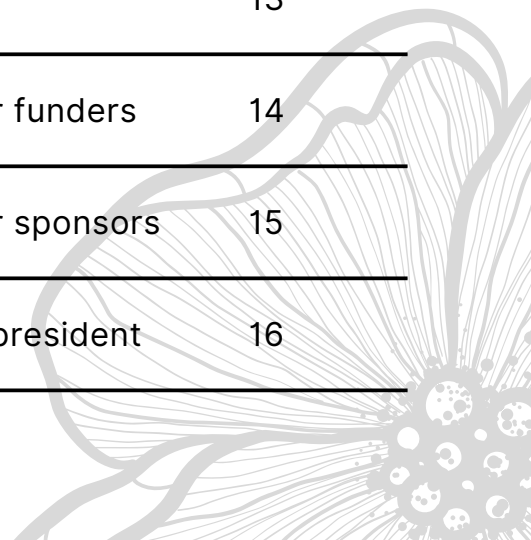
MISSION

The Revelstoke Women's Shelter Society exists to offer support, assistance, information and referrals in a courteous and compassionate manner that respects the dignity, privacy, culture and diversity of women and children who are victims of abuse

MANDATE

The society established Forsythe House as a safe home to provide women and children in our community with temporary shelter. The board of directors and staff of the society work in a non-judgemental manner to support women and their children while exploring their options.

Leadership message	2
<hr/>	
Our board members	4
<hr/>	
Who we are	5
<hr/>	
Gratitude (House report)	6
<hr/>	
The year in numbers	7
<hr/>	
Healthy relationships and consent workshops	8
<hr/>	
Moving Forward & Outreach	9
<hr/>	
Moving Mountains	11
<hr/>	
Counselling services	12
<hr/>	
CRN	13
<hr/>	
Thank you to our funders	14
<hr/>	
Thank you to our sponsors	15
<hr/>	
From the board president	16
<hr/>	



Leadership message

Lynn Loepky, Executive Director

For most, a house is a home that represents security, love and support. For women fleeing violence their home is unsafe, toxic and a place where love and support are conditional. We cannot change that but we can offer a safe place, if only for an hour, a day or longer.

Women are on a journey when they enter our doors. This journey is not easy and often the kindness of others brings them here. When they step inside we strive to make them feel safe and valued.

Over the past year, our conversations often turned to the kindness and generosity of our co-workers, our partners and our community. The pandemic made us think outside the box, promoting creativity as we navigated through it. We learned how to be kind to the women we serve, to each other and to ourselves.

The pandemic sometimes made the little things in life more pleasurable, things like buying a stranger coffee while going through the Tim Hortons drive-thru or banging pots and pans for our health care workers.

Other things became more challenging. Speaking with family over zoom or Facetime was often the only way to communicate with others during this time. This is the daily reality of women who experience violence. They have to find creative ways to connect with those

they desperately need, a quest that never ends until they find a way out.

The transition house is often not the only way out of the abuse. Connection through our Moving Forward Program became a vital service and numbers of participants increased. Community members were generous, offering to lead workshops, donate items or fundraise.

Our fundraising efforts through a national family fun fundraiser called the Coldest Night of the Year brought businesses, community members, and community partners together to raise funds for the Moving Forward program, which includes counselling and community-wide education. We raised just over \$14,000 with the help of the community. These programs are essential to building that house that will become a home with kindness and generosity.



With the easing of restrictions we were able to reconnect with local schools. In partnership with Community Connections, we were able to offer workshops on healthy relationships and violence prevention and awareness.

As the pandemic, higher overdose rates and greater awareness of the residential school horror unfolded, the negative impact on people's mental health became a pandemic in itself. Recognizing the need for counselling services, we increased our services for in-house and outreach clients from two to three days.

We were impressed by the kindness and generosity of volunteers who reached out to help in meaningful ways, many of them delivering essential goods and services to community members. They responded to our call for volunteers even though we were right in the middle of a pandemic. The creation of Revy Helps began, led by Community Response Network coordinators Lisa Cyr and then Reeve Christensen. Many of the Revy Helps clients were seniors.

Christmas and other holidays can be stressful on our women and their families. Often this time is full of bad memories. The home that they have left has not been warm and loving during holidays, rather it has been a time of survival. I would like to mention a few acts of kindness and generosity. The first was from a man who has now passed, who came through for those women every year. For years, Bill Gill and the BC Hydro Power Pioneers, collected food, gift certificates and gifts for everyone on our list. We will all miss Bill's knock on the door bearing gifts and a smile. The second is a woman who spent countless hours collecting items for Christmas baskets. The baskets are full to the brim with donations from local businesses, even though they too were struggling. Thank you, Conin Erbench, for the time and dedication.

The kindness and generosity of others trickles down like a stream of water, affecting many. This year those small acts of kindness have been that stream for the Revelstoke Women's Shelter Society starting with our board of directors, staff, and volunteers and followed by our community. All of you construct the house we have built as a home, representing safety and security.

Thank you to all,

Sincerely,

Lynn Loepky



Our board members

As a non-profit society, the Revelstoke Women's Shelter Society is governed by the B.C. Societies Act through a volunteer board of directors.

Why did you choose to be involved with the Revelstoke Women's Shelter Society?



Meg Irving - President

I began working with women and children fleeing abuse 20 years ago in Victoria and East Vancouver, BC, then on to Ottawa, Ontario. Upon moving to Revelstoke eight years ago, my first stop was RWSS. I deeply believe in the work of supporting and elevating women and where this intersects with community building. I'm proud to stand with the staff, volunteers and my fellow board members.



Dustin Fransoo - Vice-president

After spending five years in Jasper, Alberta, working at Ski Marmot Basin, I moved to Revelstoke in 2010 to work as RMR's lift operation supervisor. I've called Revelstoke home since then, recently getting married, having a daughter and purchasing a house in town. I've always thought volunteer work is a great way to contribute back to a community and I believe the women's shelter is a society worth helping!



Hailey Lacroix

Because I was looking to help the shelter in anyway I could. I wanted to know more about what goes into creating the amazing programs and services that our shelter offers and I felt like it could help me spread the word to others. It has been an amazing way to connect with members of the community and to gain insight into what makes the Women's Shelter Society such a staple of Revelstoke.



Lisa Lamothe

Jocelyn Doll - Secretary

Because empowering women is important to me and a vital part of having a healthy community.



Who we are

For over 30 years, Forsythe House, established by the Revelstoke Women's Shelter Society, has served as a place of refuge and support for women and their children at risk of all forms of abuse.

About the shelter

We provide a safe and comfortable place to stay and essentials such as food, clothing and toiletries. We also provide confidential counselling, support, advocacy and preventive education programs. We have a 24-hour helpline and our shelter is staffed 24 hours a day.

The house is alarmed and inside you will find a stocked kitchen, common rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms and laundry facilities. The backyard has a privacy fence and is equipped with a playground and a quiet space.

We ensure everyone's safety with an 11 p.m. curfew, zero tolerance for drug and alcohol use, mandatory bag checks and lock-up of medications and sharp objects such as razors. Bedrooms have their own locks to ensure privacy and safety.

What we offer

- Individual counselling and support
- Child counselling or support
- Parenting information and support
- Transportation, advocacy and accompaniment
- Referrals
- Ongoing support and mentorship
- Outreach services
- Support and social groups



Gratitude

Helen Inglis



Showing gratitude is one of the simplest yet most powerful things that people do for each other. It can make a real difference.

It is easy to feel grateful when everything in life is good but, as you know, the last few years have been extremely challenging.

Still, we are so grateful for all the generosity and support throughout the years for the Women's Shelter. We are grateful not just for the donations but also for all the women who have come and gone through our lives at the shelter. These women have shown us generosity with the smallest acts of kindness, like those who make dinner for staff and help around the house when times are hectic. These acts are worth more than words can say.

Generosity comes in different variations. Sometimes staff take clients for scenic drives or for walks or just sit and have a cup of coffee with them. We try to touch each life and hope to make sunshine where clouds once were.

We have received so many thank yous over the years. Some come in words; others come through actions. One former client shows her appreciation by caring for our garden. The beauty that she creates nourishes our souls.

We would like to read a couple of them just to show the kind of appreciation that comes our way.



For the 2021-22 year, we released our second *Uplift* magazine, which was well received. This was a collaborative effort with board member Hailey Lacroix. We also submitted a few articles to local media.

Emily Kemp



The year in numbers

Laura Stovel



The fiscal year ending in March 2022 saw a jump in the number of women and children staying at the shelter, back up to and exceeding 2019-2020 levels. This past year we hosted 38 women and 16 children – far more children than in the last two years.

While our numbers were higher, women and children stayed for a shorter time – a week or less on average – compared to the years before. Consequently, our actual number of bed nights for women was down – 359 bed nights this past year compared to 546 the year before and 929 the year before that. Our bed nights for children, however, were up – 209 this past year compared with 184 and 142 the years before.

The vast majority of women stayed with us because of abuse. Two-thirds of the women were between 30 and 49 years old. The youngest adult client was 20 and the oldest was 66. The children ranged in age from two to 17. Ten of the women – just over a quarter – identified as Indigenous.

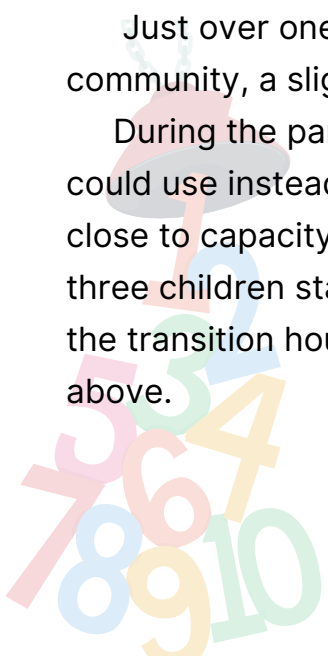


shutterstock.com - 263591402

The two oldest children who stayed with us were teenage boys and they were a delight to have in the house. They were helpful, polite and enjoyed borrowing the bicycles to explore the town. One quickly made friends in the community; the other was more introverted but had several deep philosophical conversations with staff.

Just over one-third of the women who left the shelter remained in the community, a slightly higher proportion than in previous years.

During the pandemic, we had access to one or two hotel rooms that women could use instead of staying at the shelter. This was especially helpful if we were close to capacity or if the women had symptoms of Covid-19. Five women and three children stayed at the hotel, three women and three children then moved to the transition house. Those numbers are included in the numbers mentioned above.



Healthy relationships and consent workshops

Michelle Maillet

The Revelstoke Women's Shelter Society collaborated with Community Connections Revelstoke to create and facilitate a Healthy Relationships and Consent workshop at Revelstoke Secondary School this spring. We delivered the workshop in two parts to all grade eight, nine and ten students in their physical education classes.

Part one focused on healthy relationships. It began by outlining how personal values guide our relationships. Participants explored their own values and identified how these inform their personal behaviour and needs in relationships. We discussed how we express our values through our behaviour and words and how the expression of our values varies across relationships and from person to person. We explored a framework to identify whether or not relationships are moving in an unhealthy or healthy direction.

Part two, which dealt with consent, explored the F.R.I.E.S acronym that stands for freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic and specific. Students engaged in activities to work through the intricacies of consent. We also discussed the legal age of consent in Canada, grooming, perpetrator responsibility, victim blaming, and statistics on sexual violence in Canada. We finished part two with an inclusive video from Planned Parenthood demonstrating how to ensure you have consent. Students could ask questions anonymously and were given local and provincial resources for support.

We would like to thank the school staff and students for their willingness to engage and learn with us. We really enjoyed having the opportunity to teach and learn at the high school!



Moving Forward and outreach programs

Adrien Tillen



We have had an eventful year at the Revelstoke Women's Shelter Moving Forward and outreach program. After lockdowns and restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have begun to open up again and meet in person.

During the pandemic we offered yoga classes on Zoom. Beginning this February, we rented the dance room at the Community Centre to offer in-person, trauma-informed yoga again with teachers Beth Purser and Danielle Channell. We continue to offer the Zoom option for those who prefer that and have had consistent weekly attendance both in person and on Zoom.

One client said, "The Moving Forward's yoga initiative allows me to breathe after a busy day of work, to slow down, ground myself, get fit, de-stress, bond with women; all without having to worry about cost. Such an immense benefit to the community, it's almost beyond words."

When artist Emily Beaudoin began volunteering her time to teach art classes to women on Zoom beginning in November 2020 our attendance rose dramatically. This year, between 20 and 30 women attended each lesson. The coordinator delivered art supply start-up kits (watercolour paint pallets, paper, brushes, pencils, erasers, and ink pens) to all participants. Feedback has been very positive.

As one client said, "The watercolour painting program has provided me with an invaluable opportunity to try something new, in a safe and supportive environment, without any pressure or judgement. The class helped me feel connected both to creative parts of myself, which is calming and soothing, and also to the community as we join together in real time for these classes. I am very grateful for the Moving Forward programming in Revelstoke as there are limited options in small communities to participate in these kinds of programs."

This spring, an art therapy practicum student offered art therapy sessions in person at the Women's Shelter for house clients and on Zoom to the community. She will resume offering classes in fall of 2022 on a more regular basis.





Lyndi Shaw hosted ETF (Emotional Free Technique) sessions, where participants learned to tap on different points of the body on specific meridians for emotional release and healing. And an acupuncturist who is passionate about supporting vulnerable women has reached out to offer her services for free to women and staff.

We hosted several Christmas crafts for women and children in December, including paper stars, yarn trees, sequin ball ornaments, snowy mason jars, acrylic pour glass balls. We had several first-time attendants, and several children.

A talented volunteer taught us to make wreaths, door hangings and centerpieces for Christmas. For Valentine's Day she showed us how to decoupage jars in honour of love, not just romantic love, but also love for good friends, a pet or others in our lives. The most recent event was making beautiful wall hangings from colourful and multitextured yarn and beads.

We held several workshops at Big Eddy Glass Works, including a sandblasting workshop to make an 'upcycled' cup enjoyed by women and children, and a workshop for female youth to blow glass beads, all made possible by fundraising and grants.

The Moving Forward Outreach Program provides direct support to women, including seniors and those who are physically unable to do their own shopping. We shop, help with other errands, do light housekeeping, and deliver food hampers from the Community Connections Food Recovery Program.

One client said, "The Moving Forward Program is a lifesaver for me. I have no idea how I would manage without Adria, who does my shopping for my very specific diet, picks up my mail, runs errands for me, is always cheery and very helpful and does so much more for me. I am very, very grateful."

We want to thank our community partners, donors, instructors and all shelter staff who make this program possible.

Moving Mountains program

The goal of the Moving Mountains program is to provide support to socially isolated and vulnerable men in Revelstoke through our peer support group and one-to-one outreach meetings. Support group activities included attending hockey games, camp fire nights, hiking and biking. When Covid-19 hit we bought group members a subscription to HockeyTech so they could watch the Grizzlies play from home. We supported men individually in various areas of their lives, including divorce, child custody, court, transportation, supervised visitation and counselling referrals. We regularly reached out to homeless men, buying them coffee, offering them socks and connecting them to other community resources.



During the pandemic our Moving Mountains and Moving Forward coordinators maintained connection by delivering and coordinating essential goods and services to community members. This was actually the birth of our Revy Helps program. Through the generosity of Sleep Country, we were also able to provide hospital beds to two men with serious illnesses. In the background we have been advocating for an emergency shelter for men in response to the number of calls we get from men looking for a homeless shelter.

One marker of success is that relationships form within the men's group and continue beyond it. One group participant organized a coffee meet up at Tim Hortons where men brought lawn chairs and had coffee together outside of Tim Hortons. One participant volunteers at the shelter by cutting the lawn and shoveling snow.

Although our Moving Mountains program successfully met the needs of some men in our community, we will need to adapt the program due to a staffing deficit. We have struggled to find a male coordinator to run this program and we believe a male presence is important. In the meantime, we encourage participants to continue hosting the fire nights and remind them that our counsellor is available if they need more support. We continue to search for a male coordinator and look forward to this program running at full capacity again in the future.



Counselling services

Caylan Barber



Counselling has been quite successful since the program was initiated. Caylan came on board in June of 2021, at 24 hours a week, seeing roughly ten to 12 clients a week during that time. At this point, there was a large wait list, with many referrals from Interior Health.

In September of 2021, Caylan's hours were expanded to 32 hours a week, averaging 15 to 17 clients per week, and we were able to admit most clients on the wait list. The wait list has steadily increased since then. We noticed that clients needed closer to 15 to 20 sessions, rather than the original ten sessions, as many clients have a history of complex trauma.

This year, we made significant renovations to the counselling office space, creating a much more welcoming environment for clients. This included new flooring, covering up exposed plumbing, adding a sage-green carpet and plants.

We also provide a budgeted time of two to three hours per week dedicated to clients who may come into the shelter and need immediate counselling while staying there. In such cases, clients often need a safe space to process the recent events that have happened to them.

In October, the counsellor took additional training in a technique called 'Brainspotting,' which involves eye movement and processing at more of a somatic level. This type of therapy is often used in clients that have nervous system responses that still bring them challenges day today.

Overall, the program is running smoothly. Since there is a high client load, at times admin can fall behind and further time for administration and additional training could be needed. The program has now been shifted to include ten to 20 sessions, depending on client needs.

Community Response Network (CRN)

Reeve Christensen and Laura Stovel

Over the past two years, the Community Response Network coordinators co-founded and ran Revy Helps, a program that helped isolated seniors and vulnerable residents during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Revy Helps and outreach coordinators and volunteers shopped and ran errands for people in need and picked up and delivered food hampers from the Revelstoke Food Bank. First Lisa Cyr, then Reeve Christensen worked closely with Sandra Gregory, founder of Revy Unstuck, our friends at Community Connections, and wonderful community volunteers to make sure that seniors and isolated individuals received the help they need.

In April, Community Connections received substantial funding from the United Way to run a similar program for seniors called Better at Home. The program, coordinated by Deborah Hogan, does all that Revy Helps did and more. As a result, to avoid unnecessary duplication, Revy Helps wound down in the middle of May of this year.

CRN recently completed and printed the updated 2022 Seniors' Resource Guide for Revelstoke seniors. It will soon be up on the City's Community Social Development page. We also worked with the library to fund the purchase of ipads for seniors and training on how to use them. We hosted five CRN meetings for Revelstoke service providers and participated in the monthly Revelstoke Social Sector meetings. The Revelstoke Quilter's Guild kindly donated a quilt for raffle with half the proceeds going to our programs and half going to the library (see photo below).

Another initiative that will soon reach the community is the intergenerational guide that Katrina Van Wijk is finalizing for us. We look forward to presenting that to elementary schools in the upcoming school year.

This summer, we are exploring the possibility of developing a response to potential heatwaves or serious smoke events that might endanger seniors and other vulnerable and isolated residents.

Looking forward to the fall, the CRN coordinator will be renewing the gatekeeper program – training frontline workers such as bank tellers, hairdressers and retailers to identify and respond to possible cases of elder abuse. We also plan to deliver workshops on telephone and internet fraud for seniors.



Thank you to our funders



Thank you to our CNOY sponsors

Our fundraising efforts were successful as we participated for the second year in the national fundraiser called the Coldest Night of the Year. We raised just over \$14,000 for our programs. This year our sponsors included Stoke FM, *The Revelstoke Review*, Silverwinds, Southside Food Market and Tim Hortons.



Stoke FM





From the board president

Meg Irving

Since our last AGM the world has continued to reel from the affects of the Covid-19 pandemic. While for some individuals this has been a time of re-opening and a return to togetherness, it has remained a time of isolation for many. The women and children we serve have continued to flee toxic living situations in a housing market uncompassionate to single parents. They have gone without to ensure their children's basic needs are met, despite the cost of food continuing to soar. They seek safety from threats and abuse despite the number of attempts this often requires to get away.

The women we serve are very resilient.

In the past year, the dedicated staff of the Revelstoke Woman's Shelter has seen the number of unique visits and bed nights rise steadily, with local, regional and interprovincial woman and children being served. Additionally, more Indigenous and Métis women and children have stayed at the shelter and staff members have developed culturally appropriate and inclusive care practices as needed. The team has expanded programs at an incredibly responsive rate encompassing outreach work, therapeutic art sessions, individual counselling and housing support including rental subsidies.

It would seem that now even more than ever, kindness and generosity must be included in the pillars of how we live as individuals and respond to those around us. On any day throughout the last year, one might witness the kindness of our staff members and the generosity of Revelstoke's continued support for our programs. I believe both kindness and generosity are evident in the many ways that skills, plans and dreams are shared by clients to staff members even during times of crisis.

I would like to thank each staff member of the Revelstoke Woman's Shelter for their dedication to the work this past year, as well as to Lynn and Megan, for keeping the operation running smoothly. I'd like to extend gratitude as well, to the members of the board, who volunteer their time to the organization.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the women and children who have been supported by the shelter and who continue to inform our practices.

"One day she finally grasped that unexpected things were always going to happen in life. And with that she realized the only control she had was how she choose to handle them. So she made the decision to survive using courage, humor and grace. She was the queen of her own life and the choice was hers."

Kathy Kinney (American actress)



(From left) Ella Carmichael, Sandra Gregory, and Céline Rytz are co-organizers of the Revy Unstuck group, which has been organizing volunteers to help neighbours who can't shovel snow and build friendships along the way.

From the *Revelstoke Mountaineer*, January 1, 2022
Photo: Zoya Lynch