



WOMEN'S CENTRE

2013-14 Annual Report



*Providing basic needs and positive change
for women and children of the
Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.*

Board of Directors Report to the 2014 Annual General Meeting

During the 2013-2014 year, the Centre has continued to provide a safe place for women and children, together with practical support, basic necessities and nutritious meals on a daily basis. The Centre supports women as they strive to make positive changes in their lives, and refers them to resources in the community where appropriate.

In last year's Board report, it was noted that a key area of focus for the Board of Directors had been to develop the management structure and staffing of the organization. The 2013-2014 year was the first full year during which the Centre operated under its new structure. The Centre now operates under the leadership of an Executive Director, who has overall responsibility and accountability, supported by an Associate Director who handles many of the day-to-day responsibilities and who can fulfill the role of the Executive Director in her absence. A full-time Fund Development Coordinator focuses solely on fundraising and contract management, while specific programs (Drop-in, Kitchen, Emergency Night Shelter, and Specialized Services) operate under the direction of Program Managers. This new structure has proven very successful in achieving a spread of responsibilities such that workloads are manageable and sustainable and that further areas of work and planning can be undertaken.

There continues to be a focus on listening to the concerns of women, and providing a variety of options for them to express any issues: Women's Voice meetings, volunteer meetings, and a suggestion box. A Governance Committee was appointed to review the Board of Directors structure and terms of reference, and suggest changes to ensure that its mandate is being fulfilled while ensuring women of the centre provide important input into the decision-making process. This new committee will provide its recommendations to the incoming Board of Directors.

A key and ongoing area of concern has been to secure a new location for the shelter, with the intent of moving to a 24-hour model. This will enhance our ability to meet the basic needs of women in the Downtown Eastside community.

Other items of note over the past year:

- A new Collective Agreement was negotiated with BCGEU;
- Our auditor has resigned, but for this year's audit has appointed another duly qualified individual to work under her supervision. DEWC management have been impressed with the new auditor's work and will present her to the membership with the recommendation of appointing her for the 2014-15 audit; and
- The Elder's Council has been very active in a number of activities, including fundraising to support their participation at the Elder's Conference.

The Board of Directors would like to extend sincere thanks to all of the volunteers whose contributions are critical to our ongoing success, and to all of the staff, who work hard on a daily basis to ensure that we are fulfilling our commitment to women and children in the community.

Report from Management

The Management and Administrative Team of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, which experienced a number of changes in the previous year to a revised management structure, has seen the increase in capacity to take on priorities, including developing staff orientation processes, building staff training and development opportunities, as well as focusing on increasing programming opportunities for women.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank the Centre Volunteers who undertake an enormous amount of work to ensure the smooth operations of DEWC. Without the dedication and commitment of the volunteer women, we would not be able to provide the services and programs that we do. We recognize that many of the volunteers live in extremely challenging circumstances including poverty and homelessness, yet consistently show up to contribute to making a safe space for women and to ensuring that DEWC remains reflective of our mission and purpose.

We send a special thank you to the Board of Directors. This year, there has been consistent membership on the board which really supports the work of the DEWC. We really appreciate the dedication and hard work of each and every board member.

We would like to thank DEWC staff who continue to provide vital and essential services within a very challenging environment. Although incredibly busy, chaotic, and stretched for resources, DEWC staff continues to work with commitment and generosity. Particularly through times of crisis, we see staff step up to ensure the services to women.

We continue to work along with many other community partners to support and participate in the February 14th Annual Memorial March. We stand with many others to raise awareness about the extreme and ongoing violence perpetrated against women in this community, and to challenge the apathy of those in positions to exert influence or change. We have participated in the Women Safety Mapping process, which is now releasing its report. This important work will be utilized as a tool to support the advocacy efforts to increase women's safety and access to all services.



Drop In Program

The Drop-In space is the central hub of the Centre. Providing a place of refuge and basic-need services 7 days a week, the numbers of women visiting the Centre continue to increase, where up to 350 women per day access DEWC.

Here women can access services to meet their basic needs including a hot meal, showers, toilets, toiletries, clothing and basic hygiene products, as well as telephones and computers. We provide social and recreational opportunities through workshops, groups, and cultural activities and events. The Drop-In is able to support women in accessing specialized services.

The dedicated Peer Support staff work daily to facilitate members receiving services in a caring and supportive way. It is the Peer Support staff who are the face of the Centre. A smiling hello when a woman comes through the door sets the tone for the rest of that person's day. The Peer Support team work to ensure that the DEWC mission statement and philosophy are integrated into their daily practices.

With increasing funding cuts to services, and systemic barriers and break downs we have a growing number of women seeking assistance from the Drop-In Centre. The Drop-In has seen an increase in women who have experienced violence and trauma by their partners, as well as from interactions on the streets. There has also been an increase in those with co-occurring concerns that make it difficult for them to receive appropriate services.

Kitchen Program



This past year has been busy as usual for the kitchen and of course we continue to operate through the ups and downs responding to the needs of women in the community as a priority. The kitchen program provided over 90,000 meals this year.

Of course, food is essential to support a person's physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. The DEWC food program is developed with this principle as a basis: ensuring that healthy, nutritious food is served and women's preferences and dietary restrictions are considered. We provide vegetarian options, options for gluten-free and other dietary restrictions, ensuring that our members get at least one good meal a day.

The kitchen program is vital to DEWC and our members. We provide over 350 nutritious meals each day, including a daily lunch, breakfast twice a week, and meals for evening groups. In addition, the kitchen program prepares the meals for the emergency night shelter which serves over 120 evening meals, night soup, and breakfast for over 60 women. On top of that, the Kitchen hosts special event meals including National Aboriginal Day, Christmas, Spring, and Fall Dinners and a Summer BBQ serving over 400 each time.

If it was not for the volunteers we just wouldn't be able to do it. Their help in all areas and their spirit is what keeps us afloat. There is a total of 12 volunteer hours each day in the kitchen. The volunteers are indispensable.

Donations to support our kitchen program come from all over and sometimes from our members themselves. We work in collaboration with other organizations such as WISH and Atira, sharing with each other when we have more than we need.

Emergency Night Shelter

The Emergency Night Shelter was initiated in November 2006, when a group of DTES women occupied the DEWC during a period of extreme rain and storms. Women were calling, as they had been for 20 years, for a 24-hour safe drop-in space. In response, the province agreed to fund a temporary shelter which opened for 9 hours each night. Again in 2011, as a result of the sexual assaults perpetrated against women at First United Church shelter, women from the community organized to demand a safe 24-hour space for women. The province committed to prioritize a 24-hour safe drop-in space, and in the process of pursuing this, agreed to additional funding to extend the opening hours from 9 hours per night to 15 hours per night and 24 hours over

the weekends. The Shelter, located at 412 East Cordova, operates on a drop-in basis to ensure minimal barriers to access. We open Monday to Friday 5:45pm to 8:45am and 24 hours on weekends and holidays.

The women accessing the shelter experience high levels of violence, homelessness, addictions, and poverty to name a few of the challenges they face on a daily basis. Many women come from other parts of the province and some from out of province, with increased numbers of younger women accessing the service. A pressing issue is the increased number of women with significant health issues including aging related conditions and/or mental health diagnosis yet who lack adequate supports and services, making them particularly vulnerable on the street.

The DEWC emergency shelter provides a safe place for women of the DTES but is still challenged by having to wake women and have them return to the street at 9am each weekday morning. All DTES women are welcome to access the shelter; there are no other criteria for entry other than being a woman. The shelter offers a safe place to sleep, shower, do laundry, and have a hot nutritious meal, which includes breakfast and dinner 7 days per week. Between 150 and 200 women access the shelter space each night for food, shower, phone access, or respite from the street. Approximately 60 women per night sleep at the shelter.

The Elders



The Elders Council is an integral part of the Women's Centre. They provide guidance, direction, wisdom and share with us traditional values, customs and protocol and high value is placed on emotional, physical, spiritual and mental growth. Traditional teachings and protocol makes the elders approachable and engenders a sense of family.

It has been a busy year: attending the 38th annual Elders Gathering in Penticton; hosting a fashion show; and creating a calendar that

will be for sale later in the year. The group spent much of the year making arts and crafts, working to produce items for the fundraising efforts. The fundraising was done at a variety of venues such as craft fairs, pow wows, special events, and dinners. They have exhibited their work at two curated art shows, participated in the Memorial March, and participated in various groups at the Centre.

The Skills Development Program

The Skills Development Project facilitates self empowerment and training for women who reside in the Downtown Eastside. In addition to working regular volunteer shifts, women participate in workshops on the topics of life skills development and health and safety, along with certification programs, such as First Aid and Food Safety. Some women participate in counselling programs offered by the Centre, such as the Battered Women Support Services, the W.O.W. group, the Healing Circle, Community Kitchens, and other support groups offered in the community.



The volunteer program continues to be a very important part of the Women's Centre. This year, volunteers contributed 12,127.5 hours to many of the Centre's services and programs. For example, there are opportunities to help as floor workers, clothing room attendants, receptionists, kitchen staff, translators, volunteer store managers, workshop facilitators, shelter support

workers, and participate in hiring committees and at fundraising events. Volunteers also assist at special events, including the Spring Dinner, Harvest Dinner, Summer BBQ, and Christmas events. The number of women in the program is stable, with 36 women actively participating. This year 10 women participated in the Vancouver Community Collage Life Skills Training Program, a six-week intensive program, and two women joined The Have

Culinary Training Society, a cooking skills training program with a work placement program. Two of these participants found employment.



Volunteers continue to voice their concerns about the centre at our monthly meetings. Nineteen women participated in our annual summer camping trip to Loon Lake. Women look forward to this retreat and they are already planning for next year.

Cultural Activity Programming

The cultural activity program facilitates culture activities, educational programs, artistic workshops and outings. Cultural activities are inclusive to diverse backgrounds as to respect women's differences, sexual orientation, age, and participation. Educational programs include social gatherings, a safe space for women to learn and share, impacting on personal healing, health, crafts, wellness and supportive solution-based advice. Artistic and



craft workshops are held in the wellness room where women learn new art skills like painting, poetry, and dance or share their talents and interests. The art materials are donated and have value as they support women of the centre to learn, create and express their importance as women. Outings are planned with advise through social gatherings with women and elders, who ultimately decide the events and locations.

Some of the outings this year have included berry picking, elders gatherings, sage picking, theatre events, and local community events.

The elders are a part of the facilitated activities, events, social gatherings and outings. The Aboriginal elders group share their cultural protocols, healing methods and medicines with women who face negative and positive circumstances and it supports healing journeys, artistic skills, artworks, ceremonies, and community events. Most recently, an All Nations Elders group was formed and has been well attended by Aboriginal, Chinese and mixed-race elders, who work together to bridge and support positive relationships, experiences, health interests, advice and friendships.

Programming includes special events such as the National Aboriginal Day, Christmas Dinner, Annual Summer BBQ, and seasonal group activities. . This year women created artworks for the “Streams of Colour” exhibit at the Silk Purse Gallery, the Carnegie Centre and the DEWC wellness room. The Aboriginal Elders group, including Chinese seniors, hosted the “Feast Your Eyes” fashion show at DEWC to fundraise for the Elders Gathering in Penticton, BC. Also Elders have been creating beautiful hand-made jewelry to sell at various markets to fundraise for special events.

Facilitated groups include the Women’s Voice, Anti-Racism and All Nation’s Elders. Recently, we have revamped DEWC’s workshops, by including women of the centre to teach beading, dream catcher making, and earring design. The women are support by participating in workshops that includes lesson plans, input, solutions to issues that may occur, feedback on experiences, teaching support, and a completion certificate.

Housing Outreach Program

Another year has passed ever so quickly. The quest for affordable and stable housing remains more challenging than ever. Mayor Gregor Robertson’s promise to end “street homelessness” by 2015 appears to be in jeopardy with data released after the homeless count showing Vancouver now has the largest homeless population in the city’s history. The Housing Outreach program can certainly attest to that.

The program operates seven days a week beginning at the emergency shelter program to connect with women using the shelter. On an average we

see five women daily. While some are women who repeatedly access services, there are more new faces.

The program supports women to fill out countless housing applications, advocating, appointment accompaniments and referring women to external agencies. In addition we organize monthly housing workshops. The workshops are centered on tenants and landlord rights and practical help in how to keep long term and stable housing when someone does find adequate housing. And, as our quest to house women continues, the waiting lists seem to be getting longer and longer.

In the mean time, as women patiently wait for that much anticipated call, they utilized emergency shelters, single room hotels; couch surfing and staying with family and friends. There is a vicious cycle of women moving from one single room hotel to another. The single rooms are problematic as they are unsafe for women and many of the shelters have a 30-day maximum stay.

Women seem to come from all walks of life, old and young alike. There is a wide range of ages, from 19 to 72. We have provided support to women accessing, shelters, safe houses, transitional houses, counseling, support groups, drug and alcohol support, daytox programs, traditional healing and reconnecting to family. In addition we have helped women set short term and long-term needs, examples are setting up in home support, accessing home starter kits, custody and access, applying for bus pass program and identification such as birth certificates, and passports.

HIV Outreach Program

The primary goal of the HIV/AIDS Outreach is to provide client-specific services to women who are HIV positive or at high risk. The women either currently reside or continue to have ties to the Downtown Eastside, and our goal is connect them with community resources and supportive medical services.

Through prevention and education, our focus is to assist marginalized women of the DTES to access supports and services they otherwise wouldn't have access to. These services include, specialized medical referrals, food

security, accompaniment to medical appointments, and counseling services. Through the establishment of connections and networks with other community resources, we are allowing ourselves to continuously remain updated and informed on current HIV trends and developments, especially those specific to the DTES community.



By means of a partnership with the DAMS team, we are able to provide outreach services to women on the streets. By providing a light snack and harm reduction, we are able to connect with the women to further provide support services and referrals. We consider this aspect to be very important since many of the 80+ women we encounter face multiple barriers in accessing services, or often come across discrimination in the process. By outreaching the women on the streets, we are preventing further isolation faced by many women.

By serving as a presence in the community, we are knocking down barriers that are clear and ever present, as well as continuously challenging the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. By collaborating with other community-minded organizations, we are enhancing our knowledge of services and supports for HIV positive women. Health and wellness has always been our top priority, and creating an environment with which to promote such ideals is vital to the physical and emotional health of women in the community.

Chinese Seniors Outreach Program

This program serves approximately 200 Chinese seniors annually and is designed to reach out to isolated seniors living in the Downtown Eastside and Strathcona area, many of which are disconnected from their families. The types of issues they face daily include poverty, racism, housing, ageism, isolation, mental health issues, discrimination, domestic abuse, and conflicts arising from language barriers and miscommunication. The program offers accompaniments, translations, advocacy, hospital visits, home visits, referrals, outings, groups, and a community kitchen program. DEWC's daily

lunch serves up to 50-70 Chinese seniors on a daily basis, seven days a week. The weekly community kitchen program serves between 18-20 seniors each of four different groups of seniors, so this program services roughly 80 seniors per month.

The centre-specific programming has been developed to meet the needs of women accessing this centre. Groups such as Anti-Racism, All Nations Elders and Women's Voice have been created or revamped to address and create an understanding about cultural awareness and hopefully break down some barriers of racism that many Chinese seniors face on a daily basis. Women's Voice and All Nations Elders group provides a space for women of all nationalities to vocalize their concerns about the centre, food, and other issues that affect their everyday life.

In collaboration with various associations, community kitchen program, seniors volunteering with Potluck Café for special events, Art and Dance workshops, community garden projects and farmers' market coupon program have all been offered to Chinese seniors and many have benefited from these various programs. Staff attends monthly community response network meetings with other service providers to discuss vulnerable Chinese seniors accessing services in the DTES community and the racism they endure. Action planning is involved at the meetings to minimize racism in food line-ups and other drop-in spaces. These collaborations are intended to create awareness of the needs of these seniors who have survived through starvation and homelessness from war-afflicted parts of China, and more current issues of family loss and health decline while coping with inability to access regular governmental services on their own, all of which require either French or English language abilities that they do not possess.



A significant systemic issue is a lack of Cantonese or Mandarin-speaking services within the community, and consequently there is a large population of Chinese Senior women who are not receiving basic services that are easily accessible to other citizens. To alleviate some of these

difficulties, we assist them with housing, advocacy, application forms, hospital accompaniments, as well as police incidents, often working closely with their families to ensure their basic needs are closer to being met. Because the seniors themselves often have Alzheimer's, or other forms of dementia, and the inability to speak the English language, this population is especially vulnerable.

Warriors Organizing Women (W.O.W.) Project

"Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. But the best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will say we have done it ourselves." ...604 B.C. Lao Tzu ...From CPEPR www.cpepr.net

The project mandate is to run education groups with a mandate that includes:

1. Ensuring meaningful participation and decision-making for women on issues that affect their lives and their community, including DEWC program delivery, policy development, and public awareness;
2. Drawing on popular education philosophy to facilitate a peer support group, with social justice issues and topics as identified and acted upon by women in the group;
3. Facilitating learning opportunities for women to build on their organizing skills through workshops, guest speakers and especially through hands-on community organizing initiatives in which women advocate for reform on behalf of women living in the downtown eastside.

The conversion from "Power of Women to Women" to "Warriors Organizing Women" occurred at a full-day workshop designed to address some challenges facing the group. As with any change, there are difficulties associated with the transition process. But as some wise women have said, 'this too shall pass,' and indeed it has passed and we are well on our way to organizing for positive changes and making our voices heard.

Health was a theme that continually came up for women facing such issues as lack of access to dental services, arthritis and other body aches, diabetes, the need for hearing and mobility devices, and a variety of other unmet needs. We used the Medicine Wheel as a tool to examine our mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being. Health concerns are an on-going issue, hence our group activities will continue to include this.

The primary focus of W.O.W. has been on violence against women, a topic that touches all of our lives. The federal government's new Prostitution Bill, and the hearings on revisions to this Bill, appeared to heighten women's passion. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by the Aboriginal leadership – the First Nations Summit, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the Metis Nation of BC with Premier Christie Clark raised some concerns about Aboriginal women's leadership for W.O.W members. A recurring theme at group meetings is the anxiety over police brutality, so we expect to become more involved in the "Sister Watch" proceedings. We routinely hear of extreme brutality such as the Marlene Bird case, a reality that brings W.O.W. members to the point of wanting to rise up and organize.

Women who participate in W.O.W. face numerous challenges such as violence, racism, poverty, mental illness, disabilities, and homelessness. Yet they arrive each Sunday and Wednesday evening, resilient spirit intact. Women bring these experiences to the table and that's where our learning begins and that's where grassroots leadership grows. It is in recognizing and respecting one another that we can break the culture of silence. When women are able to analyze our experiences from a historical and global context, it is the most emancipating and exhilarating experience ever! We have witnessed, time and again, the dissipation of self blame when women reach this point of critical consciousness. It is evident that women in our group are at this point. We refuse to be politically marginalized in discussions of the missing and murdered women. We are ready to take control and to stop the violence against us, whether it is male violence, police brutality, economic insecurity or the social ills that plague us. And we'll continue to take our place in the community and act on issues that affect us.

Victim Services Worker

The Victim Services program works with women who have been victims of serious crimes, including sexual assault, and violence in relationships. We provide emotional support, crisis intervention, and information about the criminal justice system; as well as assistance with police reports; referrals to appropriate agencies; accompaniments to hospitals, police, crown interviews and court; assistance with criminal injuries compensation and victim impact statements; and liaising with the criminal justice system personnel.

Many women in this community continue to deal with extreme violence not only within their community, but at the hands of the police, their dealers, their companion, or someone they know or owe money to. The many stories of survival continue to bring strength not only to our presence in the community, but also to the voice of injustice.



We are all aware of the women's lack of access to services and resources and the ongoing restrictions that they encounter. We work towards ending that restriction.

As well as providing individual support, the Victim Services program continues to participate in many initiatives to bring attention to the violence and injustice experience by women, particularly Aboriginal

women, within the DTES of Vancouver. This includes organizing and participating in the annual Feb 14th Women's Memorial March; December 6 Day of Action; Sister Watch Committee; LAPP Committee; Women's Safety project; and speaking at various community gatherings and spaces. In addition, the program hosts a weekly Healing Circle.

Since the public inquiry ended there appears to be such a deep silence. Women are silent and it is this silence that instills a sense of fear: are they choosing to be quieter; have they felt their voices or their lives are not worthwhile; are they feeling a sense of justice or a sense of hopelessness?

Mental Health Advocacy Program

The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre provides ongoing support to women involving: The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), Vancouver Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (VACFSS), The Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI), and the Residential Tenancy Office (RTA). We also work on issues and applications concerning Canada Pension Plan benefits (CPP), Old Age Security benefits (OAS), and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). They provide assistance and support to women in their efforts to access housing, treatment, and medical services. In addition, the advocacy program averages 200 tax returns per year, including back taxes for sometimes up to 12 years.

During this past year the advocates have experienced an increase in women requesting assistance, especially in the area of welfare law, as there have been many changes to the delivery of service within the MSDSI. Very seldom can women access services face to face. This barrier is frustrating and creates hardship for our members, many of whom are already struggling with poverty, violence, addictions, and/or mental health issues.

The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre has worked with the welfare ministry to ensure that we have a liaison person attend the centre three times per month. We developed and continue to update the Downtown Eastside Resources list. This is used all across the Lower Mainland by many organizations.

The DEWC advocacy program continues to work with other advocacy organizations to establish positive systemic changes for our members.

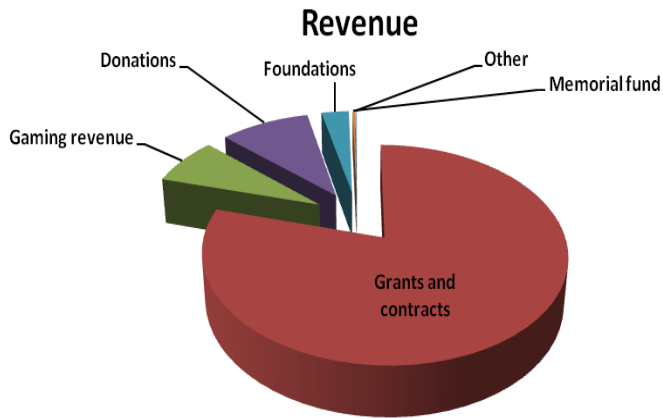
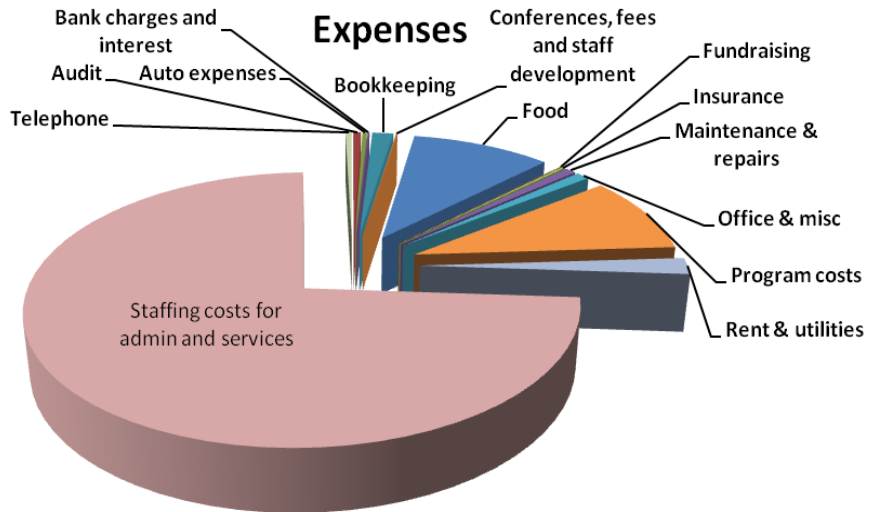


Funder Acknowledgement

It has been a busy time in Fund Development, with the new coordinator having just completed her first year with the centre. We have seen a trend toward funders making greater demands on the centre, from creating complex application processes where none previously existed to requiring changes be made to the way we deliver some programming. With the assistance of a UBC practicum student, we completed a study on funding options that we may be able to tap into, and tentative steps were made toward adding a fund development committee to the resources accessible for this important work. The greatest limitation we have to accessing funding resources is time, and an independent committee that takes on new and innovative projects has the potential to compliment the work of the fund developer. We are also in the preliminary stages of revamping our online presence, with hopes of drawing greater support from individual donors and corporations. We look forward to a successful year ahead to ensure the stability of centre programming and increase our ability to assist women in need. We gratefully acknowledge the support of all of our funders for the 2013-14 fiscal year, including:

- Canadian Heritage
- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
- Service Canada
- BC Housing
- BC Ministry of Finance - Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch
- BC Ministry of Justice
- Vancouver Coastal Health
- City of Vancouver
- Anglican Church of Canada
- B.C. Masonic Foundation
- Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation
- Central City Foundation
- CHIMP Foundation
- Community Arts Council of Vancouver
- The Connor, Clark & Lunn Foundation
- The ClearView Group
- Freedonia
- Health Sciences Association
- Leon Judah Blackmore Foundation
- The M.A.C AIDS Fund
- Newman's Own Foundation
- United Way Lower Mainland
- Vancity Community Foundation
- The Winnipeg Foundation
- The Zacks Family Charitable Foundation

Financial Summary



Our Mission

Our mission is to provide for basic needs and to work toward positive change for women and children in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver.



Our Purpose

The constitution of the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre was written in 1978 upon incorporation and is still relevant today:

- To provide a comfortable, safe drop-in centre.*
- To provide recreation and self-help programs.*
- To act as a source of information by assisting women with referrals concerning their needs.*
- To provide a social space and facilitate the opportunity for women of diverse backgrounds to interact and build community.*

To educate the public and all levels of government about issues concerning women in the area.