



STEPPING STONES
Crisis Society

ANNUAL REPORT 2024–2025





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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



There are moments in this work that stay with you.

A mother arriving at our doors with her children in the middle of the night, unsure of what comes next but certain that leaving was the only option. A teenager who's been told for years that what's happening to her isn't abuse until someone finally believes her. A woman quietly sitting at our kitchen table, finally beginning to exhale after carrying fear in her body for far too long.

These are not rare stories. They are daily reminders of the courage it takes to survive and of the responsibility we carry to be ready when someone reaches out for help. These moments remind us why we exist and why we must keep going.

This past year, Stepping Stones Crisis Society remained on the frontlines of a growing national crisis. Family and intimate partner violence in Canada continues to be deeply troubling. In 2023, police reported over 139,000 victims of family violence, including more than 123,000 cases of intimate partner violence involving individuals aged 12 and up.

Nearly 80% of victims are women and

girls, with young women aged 12 to 24 facing rates nearly seven times higher than their male peers¹.

Let those numbers settle for a moment. Because behind every statistic is someone who didn't know if she would make it through the night. Someone who has normalized control, fear, isolation. Someone who deserves more.

At Stepping Stones, we see this every day. Last year, we provided nearly 4,300 safe bed nights to almost 400 women and children but had to turn away 332 others due to lack of space. That's 332 lives we couldn't shelter, not for lack of care, but because we were full.

That's unacceptable, and that's what we're changing. Our new facility and the "Building Better Futures" campaign is our answer to this crisis. It's not about building bigger for the sake of it but scaling for impact. It's about creating a trauma-informed, culturally inclusive, fully accessible space built for healing.

A place where no one is turned away.
A place that unites together our shelter, second-stage housing, outreach, legal supports, community

kitchen, and wraparound services under one roof because that's what survivors deserve, and what our community deserves.

Our new facility is not just a building. **It's a promise. It's a promise that says we see you, you matter, you're safe here, we will walk with you.** And that promise extends not just to our clients, but to each other, our staff, our partners, our supporters, and our community.

Because as important as the structure is, this work will always be about people. The relationships. The safety. The possibility. And above all, the dignity that every survivor deserves.

To our staff, thank you. Your strength, integrity, and compassion especially in the hardest moments are the heart of this organization.

To our board, thank you for your steady guidance and bold leadership.

To our partners, funders, and donors, thank you for believing in more than a project. You are changing lives.

We are not just responding to crisis, we are shaping the future of care. We are no longer settling for good enough, but doing what is necessary, right, and just, together.

This is a defining chapter for Stepping Stones Crisis Society. And I'm proud to say: we are writing it with clarity, courage, and purpose.

This is a movement. This is a new era for Stepping Stones. And I'm honoured to lead it.

We are not slowing down. We are not stepping back.

We are building better futures, on purpose, with purpose.

With deep respect and gratitude,

Melissa Francis
Chief Executive Officer



¹ Statistics Canada. (2024, October 24). "Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2023." The Daily. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/241024/dq241024b-eng.htm>

YEAR IN REVIEW

BY THE NUMBERS: WHY WE'RE BUILDING BETTER FUTURES

111 Lives Sheltered in a Single Month

Without a single new bed built, Stepping Stones provided emergency shelter to 111 individuals in August alone our highest-demand month to date.

This staggering number, given our current capacity, is clear proof of the urgent and growing need. It's exactly why the new facility is essential.

Half a Million Dollars in Tracked Service Delivery

Even at our current facilities' capacity, we delivered over \$549,000 in services, a reflection of our resilience, creativity, and the true scale of our operations.

Demand Remained High Each Month Shelter Use

We supported an average of over 30 women and children each month, underscoring the urgent need to expand our facility to meet real-time demand.

Helpline Use Signals Strong Early Intervention

Although helpline call data isn't highlighted every month through reporting, the overall trends show steady use of prevention and support services beyond just the emergency shelter.

Survivors are reaching out earlier, before crisis escalates; this is a strong indicator of growing awareness and effective prevention.

Even before we expanded our facility, we are operating at full capacity; demonstrating our urgent need. Despite this, our programs did not slow. Ella's Closet surged in community impact and revenue generation. Our social enterprises hit record highs in participation. Our numbers show that the new building is not only necessary, but overdue. These numbers validate every brick, beam, and dollar committed to Build Better Futures.

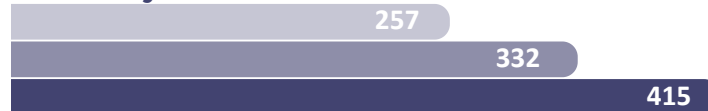
"We didn't wait for the new building to act. We served, stretched, innovated and still, the numbers tell us: more is needed." —Melissa

While overall program activity remained strong, our bed night and second-stage housing numbers slightly declined. This reflects not a drop in need, but longer stay time due to housing crisis. As a result, transition timelines have increased. This does allow us to offer deeper, more consistent support and provide additional programming tailored to each family's journey toward stability and independence.

Shelter Clients



Turnaways*



Helpline Calls



Bed Nights



Second Stage Clients



2023

2024

2025

*Total Turnaways

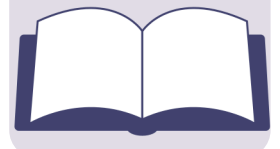
Average Stay
13.2 Days



Pet Nights
118



Students Served
206





CLIENT STORY

We always rented, we had to move often. The house was destroyed, and every wall was a reminder. I recall each house by the carpet in it, the color, the smell, the texture. He always buried my face in the carpet with my arm bent behind my back with enough force to break it. I sat against the wall and with the fist force of a boxer he punched holes in the wall, all that was left of the wall was the silhouette of where I sat. Like a machine he could rip kitchen cupboards off the wall and rip them like they were pieces of paper. What could my children hear? What could the neighbors hear?

Behind closed doors was the worst. He could tackle me like a wrestler, my body bending, twisting, choking me and with all my strength I try to survive. Yelling to my little ones from under the door during his brutality to go, to run, to hide, to get somewhere safe. My only strength coming from the thought that my children cannot find my lifeless body. He came home drunk again. Who was I kidding, whether he drank or not he was violent. It was easier to blame the alcohol. In an instant my face was buried in the carpet again, but I learned how to use my words to say what he wanted to hear to survive. I convinced him to let me go. This time

I would call the police. I went for the phone and I dialed, the lady on the other end said, "hello can I help you". I couldn't utter a word, not even my name, he ripped the phone out of the wall and destroyed it.

This was going to be my end, this time he would kill me. I tried to run outside but I only nearly made it to the back door, I was so close. I buried my 8-month pregnant belly into the corner and I let the rest of my body suffer. Between the punches I found the exit and I ran into the yard. I knelt in the grass and screamed for help, nobody wants to know, and nobody wants to get involved, the lights around me went out and nobody helped me. My little ones still inside upstairs asleep, I need to go back in and get my children and with horror I remember the guns in the basement. I had to save my little ones still inside the house. I ran back in, he was on his way to the basement. I knew what he would do, and I needed to stop him. He turned around saw me and kicked me in the chest, the front door flew open and four police officers handcuffed him. In a heart beat he was taken away. We were alive. With the police officer's camera flashing, recording all the bruises, my head in a haze, I thought how was the officer not taking pictures of lines on the floor, how was I still

alive. I found God in that moment and this was my miracle.

I took him back. It must have been the 10th time I took him back and over 50 times he was violent. Driving erratically at high speeds, putting his fist through the windshield, swinging golf clubs at me, choking me, I thought he would change, he didn't. I doubted myself, how would I raise three children on my own? I decided I needed to start learning more about domestic violence, I read books, I went to a counsellor, I began the steps I needed to take to flee, I saved money, and it took 12 years. 12 years that were the hardest of my life, but I got stronger. Then the day came, the point of no return, finally freedom was within reach. I was in the hospital, with bruised ribs, bruised kidneys and bruised liver. This time it was different, I was a working professional and the Doctor knew me, the nurse knew me, the doctor who was going to admit my husband into the psych ward knew me, I couldn't hide it this time.

Light began to overtake the darkness. My strength overtook my weakness. Above my desk in my place of employment hung a sign "uphold the value of life." It was all I could see while I was lying in the hospital, it was all I could think. I need to uphold the

value of my and my children's life. In that moment I vowed that he would never again enter my home. Never again would I allow us to be exposed to his violence.

Over those 12 years not once did I go to a women's shelter, my own shame kept me from entering their welcoming front doors. I have a new understanding now, and as a survivor I see that Shelters take away the darkness and give people a chance to experience walking in light and truth with the full support they need.

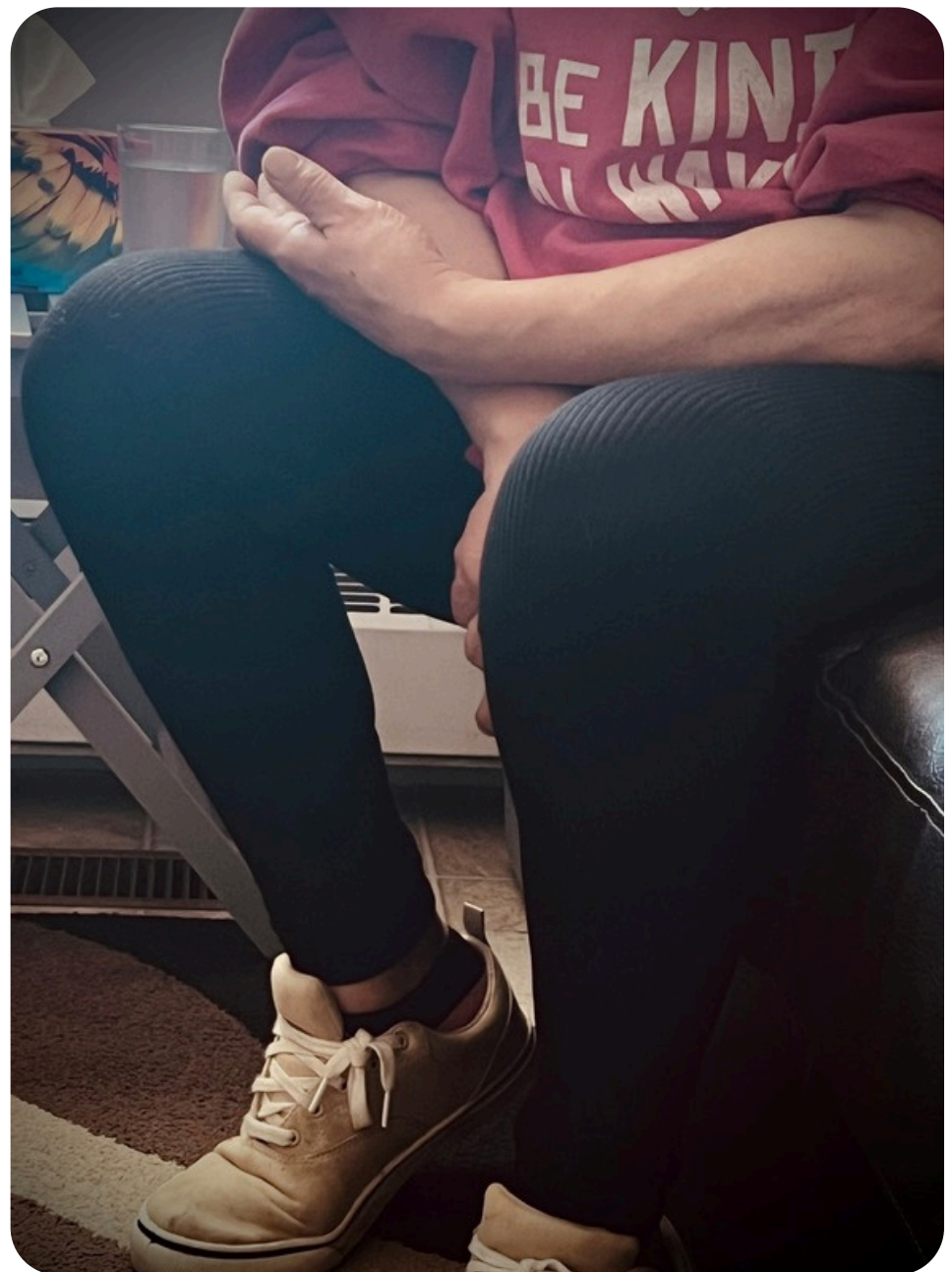
After that day, he never entered our home again my vow I kept. I remain forever grateful for the officers and front-line workers at Stepping Stones who put their lives on the line everyday for people and families in struggling with domestic violence. My life is different now, its been 8 years and today the picture is far different from those days of past. With plenty of counselling and immersing ourselves into the love and care that family and friends had for us, life became new. My children have forged lives for themselves and are successful and happy people. Each of us works hard and enjoy all the gifts that life has to offer. We are a closely bonded family who enjoy time and laughter spent together. Today I can say my children and I are strong, brave, kind, compassionate, and incredibly resilient people. All of us with a passion for investing in and being the light in peoples lives. Without a doubt, the greatest gift I have ever given them was showing them that my life and their lives were to be upheld with the utmost value. The past doesn't define us, it made it us who we are today; survivors, with a message of love and kindness to others.

We must be the light in peoples lives, especially those who have endured or experienced such violence. May we remember all the children that live through domestic violence, the police officers that attend those high

risk calls, the doctors, the nurses, those who fought to survive but didn't, those that walk among us that are survivors and all of you who hear stories like mine. Domestic and Family Violence knows no boundaries, it does not discriminate. In some form either directly or indirectly most people have been affected by family violence some time in their life or in the life of someone they know.

There is hope! You become free the day you realize you no longer have a secret. You have a story. You are not a victim and your children do not have to be victims. Get busy getting help,

get busy making sure you and your children are healing. You are and always have been a survivor. Let's not give domestic and family violence the darkness anymore, let's give it light! We can all be a part of that light by being supportive and encouraging to all those affected by domestic violence. Learn about the resources in your community so that you can point those in need in a safe supportive direction. Be brave enough to listen to their stories for in simply listening you are giving those in need a chance to experience light, freedom, hope, healing, and above all peace.
**Names have been changed.*





OUR SERVICES

EMERGENCY SHELTER & 24/7 HELPLINE

Safety; for Clients & Staff

To strengthen safety across our emergency shelter, we introduced trauma-informed bag checks as part of our intake process. The results have been overwhelmingly positive. These checks are conducted solely to enhance the safety of both clients and staff. Our team implements this process with transparency and respect, clearly explaining that it is judgment-free and focused entirely on creating a secure environment.

Through this approach, we have improved the safety of shared spaces by temporarily storing items such as weapons, substances, or drug paraphernalia for the duration of a client's stay. These items are returned upon discharge. More importantly, the process has opened the door to honest, stigma-free conversations, helping build trust and rapport from the very first interaction.

Introduction of Slow Transitions

Some clients require additional time and support as they move from shelter into community, particularly young mothers or those recovering from trauma. Our team has introduced a slow transition model that is flexible and client-centered, acknowledging that safety and readiness look different for everyone. For some, this

may mean spending their days in the shelter while reintegrating into daily routines outside their new home and returning to the shelter for a final night of support and debriefing. For others, it involves having direct access to our Outreach team for phone check-ins or in-person encouragement. In many cases, simply having a plan in place and knowing they are not alone is enough to give clients the reassurance they need to thrive independently. These trauma-informed transition supports foster long-term stability, resilience, and success.

Community Connections

The Client Care department continues to build and strengthen partnerships that provide responsive, holistic support to individuals in crisis. A recent example is our new collaboration with the Cold Lake Food Bank. Recognizing our shared commitment to meeting urgent needs, the food bank has granted our team after-hours access. This allows us to provide emergency food support to clients from both Outreach and Joie's Phoenix House when the food bank is closed, ensuring no one goes without during a critical moment.

Help Parents Get Their Children Assessed

Some families accessing our services have children with developmental delays or neurodiverse needs. Through a collaborative effort

between our frontline staff, Outreach team, and management, we have effectively advocated for these families. By connecting parents with assessments, resources, and specialized supports, we help ensure their children receive the care they need to thrive. Just as importantly, this process empowers mothers with a deeper understanding of their child's unique needs, along with the tools and confidence to support their child's development moving forward.

OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Community Engagement

Our team has been actively engaged in a wide range of community initiatives throughout the Lakeland region to promote awareness, support, and collaboration across various sectors.

Event Participation and Community Representation

This year, our Outreach team demonstrated a strong commitment to collaboration, education, and advocacy across the Lakeland region. As proud members of the Lakeland Festival of Words planning committee, we supported literacy and community connection, participating in the event at the Cold Lake North Senior Centre.

Throughout the year, our team hosted information tables at a variety of local events, including parent-teacher interviews, job fairs, health fairs, and

cultural gatherings such as the 1-11 Treaty Gathering and National Addictions Awareness Week.

Our dedication to youth education was highlighted through the delivery of “Healthy Relationships” presentations at Bonnyville Centralized High School and Bonnyville Outreach School, promoting safety, respect, and emotional wellness among teens.

We also participated in awareness campaigns such as the Bonnyville Indian-Metis Rehabilitation Centre’s Wellbriety Walk, FCSS’s Bully Free Walk and Preparedness BBQ, and Lakeland Centre for FASD’s Mocktail Challenge, where our team proudly placed second.

In partnership with the Cold Lake Food Bank, we provided emergency food hampers to those in need, and consistently attended interagency meetings in both Bonnyville and Cold Lake to foster collaboration and improve service coordination.

Our presence at culturally significant events, such as the Bonnyville Native Friendship Centre’s MMIWG awareness gathering, reflects our commitment to truth, reconciliation, and community healing.

To continue offering high-quality, trauma-informed care, our staff engaged in professional development opportunities, including the ACSW Innovation Conference, training in embodiment practices, and youth mental health workshops.

Finally, our team played a key role in organizing and supporting Family Violence Prevention Month activities, helping to educate the public and strengthen community awareness around the issue of family violence. One of the most powerful moments of the month was our Candlelight Vigil, which was an empowering and emotional event where staff shared heartfelt reflections on why they are so passionate about their work with Stepping Stones. Several staff bravely spoke about their lived experiences

with domestic violence, whether personally or through the impact it had on a close family member. We were also deeply honoured to have had two courageous clients speak. One from our second-stage housing program and one from the Better Way program who shared their stories of transformation. They spoke of their journeys from abuse and addiction to safety, sobriety, and the promise of a brighter future for themselves and their children. Their voices were a profound reminder of the strength, resilience, and healing that can happen when community comes together in support.

Outreach Supports

This year, our Outreach team remained a vital support for individuals and families facing crisis, transition, and healing. Clients shared heartfelt messages of gratitude, highlighting how seen, supported, and valued they felt while accessing our services. These reflections speak to the compassion and dedication of our staff and the safe, empowering environment they work to create every day.

Our team has supported clients through critical moments, including fleeing unsafe environments, securing Emergency Protection Orders (EPOs), and connecting them with urgently needed services. Outreach staff offer vital court support, providing transportation, emotional reassurance, and clear support through often confusing legal processes. This trauma-informed, client-centered approach ensures clients are not alone during some of their most vulnerable moments. Staff also support clients on probation, offering non-judgmental accountability, encouragement, and a space to explore topics such as healthy relationships, emotional regulation, parenting, and breaking cycles of violence and trauma.

Beyond crisis intervention, Outreach empowers clients through individualized, strengths-based support. Many clients have achieved stable housing, reunited with family,

WORDS FROM OUR CLIENTS

“This is the best place I’ve ever stayed!”

- 8-year-old client

“The only thing that loved me unconditionally is my dogs.”

- Shelter client who came with her dogs

“A Better Way Programming has given me something to look forward to in keeping an open mind on better ways to improve myself”

- Outreach client

“The Outreach facilitators for A Better Way Programming were very outgoing, provided great examples that were connected to shared personal experiences, and were very understanding and helpful”

- Outreach client

“I will be forever grateful for the hope JPH brought to my life and for believing me whenever no one else did.”

- JPH client

“Staff always made me feel welcomed to share my worries and they are always there to answer my endless questions and to tell me that I am not crazy.”

- JPH client

“Now we have a place to call home.”

- JPH client



found employment, or reached personal milestones with the continued encouragement of our team. Initiatives such as vision boards, self-care workshops, and group discussions on self-esteem, mindfulness, and personal growth have helped clients explore their identities, set meaningful goals, and celebrate progress. Staff have also created events within our second-stage housing program, Joie's Phoenix House, that foster belonging and joy. Programs like the Easter self-care egg hunt, holiday celebrations, and community outings. These moments of connection provide more than just comfort; they help clients rebuild trust and experience positive relationships in a supportive environment.

Outreach staff regularly collaborate to ensure clients receive holistic and culturally responsive care. Our capacity to serve has been strengthened through key partnerships with shelters, Indigenous organizations, mental health services, the Humane Society, and food banks.

Throughout it all, the heart of our work remains the same: walking alongside clients with empathy, consistency, and hope as they move toward healing and long-term success.

Community Programming

This year our Outreach Team has facilitated two separate community Outreach groups, one for men and

one for women. Under the Better Way Program, they offer a trauma-informed, evidence-based initiative aimed at preventing the reoccurrence of family violence. The program is designed for individuals who exhibit abusive behaviors, struggle with emotional regulation, or seek healthier relationship dynamics.

The program focuses on education, skill-building, and long-term behavior change. Through structured workshops, peer support, and scenario-based learning, participants gain tools for conflict resolution, emotional self-regulation, and communication. The program integrates cultural practices to support Indigenous, rural, and underserved communities, while promoting intervention and shifting harmful social norms. By fostering accountability and empathy, the program helps individuals build healthier, nonviolent relationships.

Empowering Women is another cornerstone of our Outreach work. This strengths-based program supports women in rebuilding self-esteem, recognizing their worth, and gaining the tools needed to navigate life independently. Empowering Women offers education on mental, physical, and sexual health, legal rights, financial literacy, parenting, and more. Through interactive workshops, peer connection, and practical life skills,

participants are equipped to set boundaries, make informed decisions, and confidently move toward a safer, more empowered future.

JOIE'S PHOENIX HOUSE Expanded Support Services

Our dedicated staff worked closely with each resident to ensure support was tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. By building strong, trusting relationships with clients and their families, we were able to help them access the services most relevant to their unique journeys.

Through an individualized case management approach, clients are supported in recognizing that healing and progress are deeply personal and look different for everyone. For some, this means help building a résumé and applying for jobs. For others, it involves advocating for assessments, accessing medication, or establishing long-term supports to live independently, without relying on a partner. Sometimes, support is as foundational as helping a woman find the strength to get out of bed, rebuild a daily routine, and create a sense of stability for herself and her children.

Our team also provides essential guidance as clients navigate the justice system. Whether it's taking the first step to file forms at the courthouse or standing with a client as they testify in court, we are there ensuring no one

has to face those moments alone.

We are incredibly fortunate to work alongside an in-house lawyer who is available to support clients with legal questions, assist with form wording, and provide trusted legal advice. This unique partnership helps reduce barriers to justice and ensures clients feel informed and empowered throughout the legal process. In all situations, our team walks alongside each resident with compassion, consistency, and care, empowering them to reclaim control of their lives and build a safer future.

Life Skills and Wellness Programming

This year, we enriched our life skills and wellness programming at Joie's Phoenix House (JPH), offering both group and individualized programs designed to empower women with practical tools for independence and long-term success. Workshops on life skills, budgeting, job readiness, self-care, and parenting strategies provided essential knowledge to navigate daily life with greater confidence and stability.

JPH programming focuses on two core formats: individualized support and group-based learning. Individual programming is personalized, where staff help residents identify local educational opportunities aligning with their unique goals. Customized mini-programs are created to ensure clients gain valuable skills and knowledge required to meet their case plan objectives.

Group programming is a cornerstone of the JPH experience. It allows for the delivery of key educational content but also fosters peer support and helps develop healthy and supportive friendships. We offer a range of group sessions, including Anger Management for Moms, Discovering Beauty from Broken Pieces, Empowering Women, and skill-building workshops that draw from Cognitive Based Therapy, mindfulness practices, and other

therapeutic models to promote long-term well-being.

One of the most popular weekly activities is our Community Kitchen program, where JPH residents learn cooking skills, meal planning, and budgeting on a income. Together, they prepare and serve a nutritious meal for all of our clients and staff. This experience builds confidence, fosters community, and is enjoyed by both residents and team members.

We are also fortunate to partner with community agencies that enhance our programming by offering sessions on financial literacy, vision boarding and goal setting, and navigating the legal system through ongoing bi-weekly discussions. These partner- ships deepen the support available to our residents and contribute meaning- fully to their healing and growth.

Child and Family Support

At JPH, we prioritize the emotional and mental well-being of families. Through structured activities and trauma-informed support, we help families explore new ways to connect and care for one another in a safe, nurturing environment. Our Family Support Specialists provide individual, family, and child-focused support, walking alongside families as they navigate the complex journey of fleeing abuse.

Whether celebrating milestones, managing triggers, or facing uncertainty and loneliness, we ensure families feel seen, heard, and supported. Staff offer a listening ear, a safe place to cry, and practical guidance to help families set goals and plan for future growth. From the most difficult moments to hopeful transitions, our Family Support Specialists remain a steady, compassionate presence, cheering families on as they heal and prepare for their next chapter.

COMMUNITY KITCHEN

Our Community Kitchen program is a vital resource that addresses food insecurity by providing meals,

fostering social connections, and teaching essential skills.

This year we had 34 participants over our 10 cooking classes. Participants learned how to grocery shop and plan for specific meals, then made and shared the meal. They also provided 307 meals for the Healthy Babies Program.

This program promotes collaboration by learning to cook together and strengthens our community as participants share a meal.

HEALTHY BABIES

The Healthy Babies Program provides support for at-risk women throughout their pregnancies and for up to a year after delivery. Support includes one-on-one guidance and education, as well as providing neonatal vitamins, and fresh milk, vegetable, and fruit coupons.

This year Healthy Babies served over 900 clients and gave out 2815 fruit and vegetable coupons and 4505 milk coupons.

We are proud to continue our partnership with InterPipeline and now Pathways Alliance as we expand and enhance services for Healthy Babies across the Lakeland Region. Their ongoing support helps us reach more families and deliver meaningful, community-rooted care.

HEALTHY BABIES WISH LIST

- Formula
- Diapers
- Breast pads
- Baby care items (Nail clippers, files, scissors, aspirators)
- Diaper cream
- Baby toiletries
- Baby mitts
- Wash cloths
- Nipple cream
- Nipple shields
- Post natal feminine supplies
- Soothers



SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

In a year marked by local challenges and a significant transitions within the organization, both Orbiting Trends and Ella's Closet proudly reported strong revenue performance. This milestone reflects not only the resilience of our mission-driven operations but also the unwavering dedication of our team.

Our achievements this year wouldn't have been possible without the continued support of our community. From loyal customers to local partners and volunteers, your belief in our purpose kept us moving forward. As we navigated change, our commitment to social impact remains firm and, thanks to you we're stepping into the future stronger than ever.

Our Social Enterprises continue to thrive, generating increased engagement and impact. Every dollar earned goes directly back into Stepping Stones operations; 100% of net proceeds support our programs and services. These stores don't just fund our work, they make it possible.

ORBITING TRENDS

Orbiting Trends isn't just a store! It's one of the most vibrant places in town, providing our community an affordable place to shop in times where money is tight! Thanks to our amazing community, people are constantly donating everything from

gently used furniture, kitchenware, and home decor to stylish adult and kids' clothing. If you can use it, it's probably donated it and we're so grateful!

But what really sets us apart? We love to have fun! Whether it's dressing up for 80s Day, hopping into Easter gear, spooking it up at Halloween, or going all out for Christmas, we celebrate every season with creativity and heart. Our team brings energy, and our customers always leave with smiles.

We'd also like to thank our volunteers who clocked in just under 900 hours this year. Whether it's sorting, cleaning, shoveling, or helping us paint over graffiti, our volunteers help us every step of the way.

ELLA'S CLOSET

Ella's Closet has just wrapped up its most successful year to date! We've seen record-breaking growth, where we continue to attract new customers who are amazed to discover that Ella's Closet is a secondhand store. Our \$5 Anniversary Sale was an incredible success, surpassing the excitement and sales of previous years. The Fall and Back to School events brought in even more first-time shoppers, while our Spring Launch set a new benchmark in seasonal sales! We're so proud of what

we've accomplished and can't wait to continue growing our impact and our community in the year ahead.

Through our consignment program, 17 local charities, schools, churches and community organizations received support this fiscal year. A total of \$1,475.00 was given back to the community; a 28.5% increase from the previous year.

Thanks to our generous donors, we were able to give back to: Hearts for Healthcare, Bonnyville Health Foundation, Palliative Care Society, FASD, Haying in the 30's, Lakeland Humane Society, Cold Lake Food Bank, North Star Elementary, Cold Lake Elementary, Assumption Jr/Sr High School, Pirouette School of Dance, Cold Lake Minor Hockey Association, 4 Wing MFRC, Harbour Lights Alliance Church, Harvest Life Church, Cold Lake Public Library and Age Friendly Cold Lake.

FULL THROTTLE BBQ

On July 19th, 2024, our amazing team went above and beyond grilling, serving, and sharing the mission of Stepping Stones. With live music setting the tone and a steady crowd of supporters throughout the day, the BBQ quickly became a highlight of the event. It was a day to raise awareness, celebrate community, and have some fun! We raised a total of \$678.50.

FASHION FORWARD WOMEN'S CLOTHING DRIVE

Our 5th annual women's clothing drive was a huge success, thanks to the incredible generosity of businesses and community organizations from our community. We were overwhelmed in the best way possible by the bags and bags of clothing that came through our doors. A very special thank you to Scotia Bank (Cold Lake Branch), Cold Lake Elementary School, NorthStar Elementary School, the City of Cold Lake, and Stingray Radio for their outstanding support and contributions. Your commitment shines brightly.

ACTIVISM

At our stores, we're committed to upholding and promoting the values of Stepping Stones Crisis Society for our community. Over the past year, our staff proudly participated in several initiatives that reflect this commitment, including:

- The Holiday Helper's Tree
- Cozy Kids program, providing winter gear for children in need in our community
- Pink Shirt Day (Anti-bullying initiative)
- International Women's Day
- Red Dress Day or National Day of Awareness and Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people
- Truth and Reconciliation Day, September 30th

LOOKING FORWARD

As we move into the new year, we're excited to expand our social media presence for both stores to connect with a broader audience, while continuing to advocate and share our mission. Orbiting Trends provided hundreds of items to the families using our services at no cost to them.

We actively support the development of Stepping Stones' new building, with a special focus on contributing to the success of the Grand Opening and the Soiree. We will maintain our promotions and fundraisers while

also introducing fresh, creative initiatives to keep things exciting for our customers.

We also look forward to investing in the growth of our team through ongoing staff education and training.

MORE THAN A STORE

Our social enterprise stores are more than just retail spaces. They are a vital part of how we support women and children rebuilding their lives after experiencing domestic violence.

While the public sees our stores as places to shop affordably and support a good cause, what many don't realize is that these same stores quietly and consistently give back. Every month, clothing, household items, furniture, and other essentials

are provided at no cost to our clients, ensuring they have what they need to start fresh. This behind-the-scenes support is a core part of our mission. Your donations and purchases help fund this work and allow us to meet urgent client needs without hesitation. The impact reaches far beyond what's visible at the checkout counter, it touches lives in transition, in healing, and in hope.

Looking for a way to get involved?

From organizing donations to helping customers, each volunteer creates a meaningful impact within our stores and beyond.

Contact Anita @ 780.826.9875



Our Vision

Prevention of family violence through public awareness, outreach, and supports.

We provide safe and secure shelter and supports to women and children in crisis.

Assist individuals and families by providing resources and advocacy.

Educate the public and create partnerships to prevent family violence and build stronger communities.

Our Mission



EVENTS

In August 2024, Stepping Stones welcomed a dedicated Events and Community Engagement Coordinator. Their first initiative was our October 23 Open House, where the public toured our facility, met staff, and learned about our services and the upcoming new build. The event helped raise awareness and build stronger community connections.

In November, we launched Family Violence Prevention Month with official proclamations from the City of Cold Lake, MD of Bonnyville, and Town of Bonnyville, highlighting a shared commitment to ending family violence. On November 19, we held our annual Candlelight Vigil, a small powerful gathering, with survivors bravely sharing their stories.

Our Winter Wishes cash raffle, generously supported by Cougar Fuels and Benjamin Dyck Accounting, sold out completely and raised \$17,000 for programs and services. After a five-year hiatus, we were proud to bring Walk a Mile in Her Shoes back to the Cold Lake community, a meaningful and visible stand against gender-based violence.

This marked our first large-scale in-person event since 2019 and was a powerful moment of reconnection and advocacy.

November 9th's event was held at the Energy Center with 19 walkers wearing red high heels in a men's march against violence and brought in 8 volunteers for a total of 28 volunteer hours. The event raised \$10,390.

Festival of Peace this year was another online auction format as it has been since 2017. This year we experimented with a new platform which had pros and cons but ultimately, we raised \$8869.09 from donations and online bids.





FUND DEVELOPMENT

This fiscal year marked a turning point in our journey toward long-term sustainability, deeper donor engagement, and transformational impact. From the capital campaign to community-driven initiatives, this year's fund development efforts demonstrated the strength, trust, and commitment behind the Stepping Stones name.

Stepping Stones made measurable progress in advancing initiatives to support our mission and long-term sustainability. With a strong focus on relationship-building and community engagement, we expanded our donor network and introduced new sponsorship opportunities.

With the introduction of a new Funding and Volunteer Engagement Specialist we enter the new year full of momentum, purpose and a renewed focus on strategic fundraising. Fund development will remain a critical pillar of our growth for the coming year.

VOLUNTEERISM AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Behind every dollar raised are the countless hours generously given by our volunteers. In 2024–25, over 60 volunteers contributed 1,711 hours of service, reflecting the deep commitment our community holds for the women, children, and families we support.

From sorting and organizing donations at Orbiting Trends and Ella's Closet, to selling raffle tickets, working bingos, and assisting with special events like Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, our volunteers consistently showed up with compassion, energy, and purpose.

Their dedication reminds us that an important part of community support is time given, hands extended, and hearts shared. We are profoundly grateful to the volunteers who walk alongside us in creating pathways to safety and healing.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we look ahead, Stepping Stones Crisis Society remains focused on strengthening our core services, expanding prevention and education efforts, and deepening our impact across the Lakeland region. We will continue to deliver, trauma-informed support to women, children, and families facing violence and instability.

We are actively securing multi-year commitments to support:

- Staffing the new facility;
- Expanding programming in second-stage housing; and
- Launching trauma-informed childcare and community kitchen programs.

COMMUNITY GIVING AND DONOR GROWTH

- Total Annual Giving for 2024-2025: **\$1,526,444.21** a **31.12%** increase from the previous fiscal year.
- Ella's Closet generated over **\$56,000** in May, setting a new single-month record.

- Orbiting Trends contributed over **\$444,000** in gross sales revenue.
- Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, Family Violence Prevention Month and the Candlelight Vigil saw **record attendance** and donor conversations.

DONATE TODAY

We invite you to become a monthly donor and make a lasting impact in the lives of women and children fleeing family violence.



BUILDING BETTER FUTURES CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

In 2021, we launched the Building Better Futures Capital Campaign with a bold vision: to create a purpose-built, trauma-informed facility that meets the growing needs of women, children, and families impacted by domestic violence in Cold Lake and the surrounding region. Today, we are proud to report that vision is nearly a reality.

WHY IT MATTERS

The rates of intimate partner and family violence continue to rise, particularly among young women and girls. Our old facility was at capacity, and we were turning away hundreds each year due to lack of space. The new facility is more than a building, it's a statement that safety, dignity, and healing are non-negotiable. This campaign has allowed us to reimagine what support can look like for survivors in northeastern Alberta.

FROM VISION TO REALITY

We began with architectural sketches and a dream to build a facility that could finally meet demand, offer wraparound services, and reflect the dignity of the people we serve. Today, we stand on the cusp of opening one of the most advanced women's shelters in Alberta. From land acquisition to policy development, from fundraising hurdles to construction delays, the path has not been easy, but it has been worth it.

Together, we are building more than a shelter. We are building hope, resilience, and futures.

GRAND OPENING: SEPTEMBER 6, 2025

We are thrilled to invite the community to celebrate at our Grand Opening and Building Better Futures Soirée. This moment marks not just

the completion of a construction project, but the beginning of a new chapter in our services. Every square foot of this space represents the collective effort of donors, builders, staff, and advocates who believed in a better future!



157,763 hours spent on the project



50,000 square feet of services



88 different local vendors contributed



63 emergency shelter beds created



12 second stage housing units built



7 dedicated program spaces



\$7.5M total campaign goal



89% raised by end of this fiscal year



BUILDING BETTER FUTURES SPONSORS

VISIONARY SPONSORS • \$1,000,000+

Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation

Government of Alberta

LEADERSHIP SPONSOR • \$750,000 – \$999,999

City of Cold Lake

GUARDIAN SPONSOR • \$250,000 – \$499,999

Cenovus

PILLAR SPONSORS • \$ 100,000 – \$249,999

Anonymous Donor
Strathcona Resources

Federation of Canadian Municipalities
Women's Shelter of Canada

M.D. of Bonnyville

FOUNDATION SPONSORS • \$50,000 – \$99,999

Anonymous Donor (2)

Community Housing Transformations

REALTORS® Community Foundation

SUPPORTING SPONSORS • \$25,000 – \$49,999

Grand Centre Lions Club

FRIEND OF STEPPING STONES • \$10,000 – \$24,999

Cold Lake Lions Club
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NEIGHBOURHOOD SPONSORS • \$1 – \$9,999

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

In 2021, Stepping Stones reached a critical turning point. Our existing shelter and second-stage facilities could no longer meet the increasing demand for services. As more women and children sought safety from domestic violence, our limited capacity meant we were unable to admit everyone in need and the numbers we turned away continued to increase. With domestic violence rates rising locally and nationally, it became evident that significant action was required to continue serving our community effectively.

This urgency gave rise to a bold and transformative project: the construction of a new facility designed to expand our shelter capacity, enhance our community programming, and strengthen our ability to provide a full continuum of care. This initiative has involved years of careful planning, grant applications, and steadfast commitment; all while continuing to deliver essential daily services.

To help bring this vision to life, we launched the Building Better Futures Capital Campaign, an ambitious fundraising effort to support the new facility. While the journey has

presented challenges, we are proud to share that the new building is set for completion in August 2025, with a grand opening planned for September 2025.

This marks a significant milestone for Stepping Stones Crisis Society. As we look toward this new chapter, we take this opportunity to reflect on the past year and the efforts that have brought us to this pivotal moment.

Our progress would not be possible without the strong leadership of our experienced Chief Executive Officer and the dedication of our exceptional team. Their unwavering commitment ensures we deliver vital shelter, safety, and support to those who turn to us in times of crisis. Staff continue to go above and beyond, whether providing trauma-informed care, managing programs, operating our social enterprises, or performing essential administrative functions. They offer safety, support, and hope to individuals as they begin new chapters in their lives.

Equally vital to our success is the remarkable support from our community.

We are deeply grateful to local businesses, individuals, and volunteers whose generosity has been instrumental. Through the Building Better Futures campaign, we have received not only financial support but also advocacy, event participation, and broader engagement. This outpouring of support from both within and beyond our community has reinforced the importance of our mission.

To everyone who has contributed: thank you. Your kindness and commitment have made this new facility possible. Your support inspires us every day.

It is my honour to serve this organization. I continue to be inspired by the resilience of those we support, the dedication of our staff, and the generosity of our community. As we navigate this exciting period of transition, we remain grounded in our mission and vision. We are committed to being a strong community partner and to providing safety, support, and hope to those impacted by domestic violence.

With gratitude,
Emily Allsop
Board President

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LOOKING AHEAD

As we prepare to move into our new, purpose-built facility, Stepping Stones Crisis Society is focused on expanding both the depth and reach of our services. In the year ahead, we look forward to offering more inclusive and responsive programming not only for the women and families we serve directly, but for the broader Lakeland community as well.

Our goal is to position Stepping Stones as a hub for healing, empowerment, and education. From new initiatives in legal navigation and food security to expanded supports for children, youth

and families, our programming will reflect the diverse and evolving needs of those we serve. We are particularly excited to open our doors more widely to the community through outreach, workshops, and engagement opportunities that foster connection, resilience, and growth.

As one of several dedicated nonprofits in the Lakeland Region, we recognize the importance of collaboration. We are committed to working alongside our partners to ensure that our collective efforts meet the needs of our region in the most impactful

and sustainable ways possible. With the support of our funders, stakeholders, and community members, we are not only building a new space, we are building new possibilities. The future of Stepping Stones is bright, and together, we will continue to strengthen the safety net for those who need it most.

Every stone we lay is a step closer to a safer future for those who need us most. Together, we can build a better tomorrow, one that is free from violence and full of possibilities.



OPERATIONAL SUPPORTERS

Every gift to Stepping Stones Crisis Society is a powerful act of kindness and hope. We are deeply grateful to our donors and partners whose generosity makes healing and safety possible for women, children, and families in crisis. Together, you help us create brighter futures. Thank you!

CIRCLE OF CARE • \$100,000+

Government of Alberta

Government of Alberta - Community Support Fund-Indigenous Grant

Inter Pipeline

GUARDIAN OF HOPE • \$50,000 – \$99,999

Anonymous (1)

Government of Alberta - Small Community Opportunity Program Grant

Town of Bonnyville - Community Development Grant

CHAMPION FOR CHANGE • \$20,000 – \$49,999

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PATHWAY PARTNER • \$5,000 – \$19,999

Canadian Natural Resources Limited

Lac La Biche Regional Health Foundation

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OPERATIONAL SUPPORTERS

FIRST STEP - \$1 TO \$999

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We are deeply grateful for each and every one of our donors and partners. We do our best to recognize everyone who supports our work. If you notice an omission, please reach out to us at anita.gerwing@steppingstonesociety.ca. Thank you for standing with us.





Digital Report

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