

# Kelowna Women's Shelter

Annual Impact Report  
April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025



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# Impact At A Glance

## 112 Children

provided with safe places to play at the Kelowna and West Kelowna Emergency Transition Houses.

## 945 Child & Youth

sessions delivered through the PEACE Program to children and youth affected by domestic abuse.

## 111 Families

welcomed into the Second Stage Housing Program, with adult and child programming to help rebuild lives.

## 70 Volunteers

contributed over **6500 hours** of their time, making our work possible in the Thrift Store, Program Service Delivery, Governance, and events such as our annual Art & Stories

## 4000+ Calls, texts and emails

answered through the 24/7 Support Line, connecting people impacted by Domestic Abuse to immediate help, resources, and referrals.

## 192 Women

found safety and stability at the Kelowna and West Kelowna Emergency Transition Houses.

## 72% Increase

in Outreach Program demand for court support, highlighting the growing need for advocacy and guidance in the justice system.

## 67% Increase

in group programming for children and youth, creating more opportunities for connection and support.

## \$160,000

generated in net profit by the Thrift Store, directly funding critical programs and services.

## 34% Increase

in people accessing the Community Voucher Program.

## Safety & Exit Planning

embedded across all programs, ensuring every person facing abuse has a pathway to support.



# A letter from the Chair, Board of Directors

## Dear KWS Community Members,

It is with great honour, on behalf of the Kelowna Women's Shelter (KWS) Board of Directors, that I present this year's annual impact report to you.

This past year, the Board of Directors focused on aligning the future of KWS with the growing need of our community in the Central Okanagan. Our most significant achievement this year has been our work on the Strategic Plan, to be implemented throughout 2025 – 2027. The Strategic Plan outlines four key areas of priority: Programs & Services, People, Sustainability and Community.

## PROGRAMS & SERVICES

We are focused on maintaining our strong core services for women and children, prioritizing quality and impact, remaining responsive to changes in our community and our field of work, and building inclusive and effective programming.

## PEOPLE

We are continuing to cultivate a resilient governance Board to guide our mission, strengthen leadership through succession planning, and foster a healthy, engaged workforce with opportunities for growth. We align our team around KWS's vision, mission, and values to ensure consistency and purpose.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Maintaining efficient financial management and accountability in decision-making remains a key focus for the organization. We are addressing long term sustainability by prioritizing the implementation of a strategic fundraising plan with the goal to diversify our revenue. In support of a culture of belonging, responsiveness and commitment to impact and to optimize our financial efficiency we are continuing our focus on the development of systems, processes, policies and structures.

## COMMUNITY

By focusing on collaboration and partnership we continue to raise awareness, drive systemic and policy change, and maintain a strong public presence. We engage those we serve to inform program development and partner across the region to amplify the good work of others and join together in collective impact.

We are excited to embark on this new chapter of KWS. Thank you for your unwavering support of the Kelowna Women's Shelter. We are truly honoured to contribute to this vital mission and deeply grateful to everyone who shares our vision of a community free from abuse. Your support makes a lasting difference.

Sincerely,

Catherine Widdoes  
Board Chair



# A letter from our Executive Director

Dear Participants, Team Members, Supporters, Community Members and Donors,

As we reflect on the past year at the Kelowna Women's Shelter, I am deeply moved by the strength of our team, volunteers and community and the shared commitment to creating safer communities free from abuse.

This year, we made meaningful progress in developing our new Strategic Plan to align our strategy with regional priorities and areas of need, the BC Provincial Action Plan Against Domestic Violence and the National Action Plan to End gender-based violence, which emphasize coordinated services, gender-inclusive and culturally responsive support, and prevention through education.

This year, **900 women and children accessed programs**, showing a **43% increase in people impacted by domestic abuse** receiving much-needed programming and services. This clearly demonstrates that the call to declare gender-based violence an epidemic, as stated in Dr. Stanton's Independent Systemic Review, is not only true provincially and federally but true in our own community as well.

Your support and collective voices have, and will continue to, help us advance our mission:

*"We support people impacted by abuse through programs, services, education, and partnerships."*

We remain committed to working alongside and partnering effectively with government, service providers, and the community to ensure that no one faces domestic abuse alone.

Thank you for standing with us. Thank you for moving Domestic Violence from a personal issue to a community issue. Your support is not only appreciated; it is essential.

With gratitude,

*Michelle Dickie*

Executive Director, Kelowna Women's Shelter



# Who We Are

Since 1980, the Kelowna Women's Shelter (KWS) has supported people impacted by abuse in the Central Okanagan. We provide a variety of programs and services in our community, including emergency transition houses, second stage housing program, community outreach, PEACE program, 24/7 Support Line, education & prevention, community voucher program, and thrift store. Our programs are grounded in safety, choice and inclusion. We serve women, children and gender-diverse individuals through trauma-informed and culturally aware services. All services are confidential and accessible to people of all identities, backgrounds and abilities. We believe that a community free from abuse is possible through education, support and strong partnerships.

## Our range of programs and services includes:

- Kelowna & West Kelowna Emergency Transition House
- West Kelowna Second Stage Program
- Community Outreach Program
- PEACE Program
- 24/7 Support Line
- Education & Prevention
- Community Voucher Program
- KWS Thrift Store

### Our Vision

A community free from abuse

### Our Mission

We support people impacted by abuse through programs, services, education, and partnerships.



The term "abuse" is used inclusively to refer to all forms of domestic abuse, including gender-based violence (GBV), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Domestic Violence (DV) and other intersecting forms of harm.

KWS serves all community members —including children and gender-diverse people—who have been impacted by, experienced or are at risk of abuse. Our services are accessible to all community members from Oyama to Peachland, inclusive of all genders, ages, abilities, cultures, and languages. We are committed to accessibility and equity, with programs designed to support people with varying physical, cognitive, and social needs. This ensures that everyone who seeks support from KWS feels valued, respected, and empowered.

# Why We Exist

Domestic abuse isn't just a statistic; it's a reality many in our community face daily. According to Statistics Canada, 44 % of Canadian women over 15 who have been in intimate relationships have experienced domestic abuse. That translates to nearly 50,000 women in the Central Okanagan alone. As our region grows, so does the strain on essential services like ours.

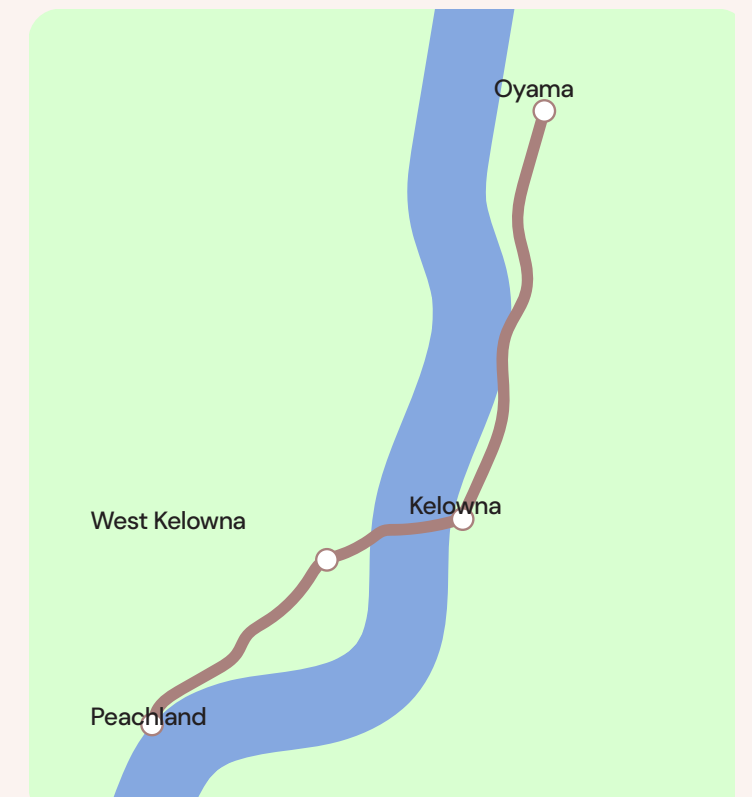
Just this spring, the Stanton report, a systemic review of B.C.'s legal system, declared that gender-based violence is an epidemic in our province. Survivors frequently face disbelief, trauma and complex systems designed against them, not to mention staggering under-reporting: 94 % of sexual assaults and 80 % of intimate partner violence cases never get reported.

KWS exists to meet that urgency with care, action, and unwavering support. Every day, we stand as a bridge between people impacted by abuse and their next step toward safety.

Dr. Stanton's report calls for intersectional analysis, survivor-centered policies, and accountability. That's what we do every day – advocate, support, and heal – because everyone deserves safety.

We exist to fill the gap, to humanize the numbers, and to build a safer Central Okanagan.

## Where We Operate



We acknowledge that the Kelowna Women's Shelter is located on the ancestral, traditional and unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

# Impact of Our Programs



# Kelowna & West Kelowna Emergency Transition House

Since 1980, the Kelowna Emergency Transition House has been a cornerstone of safety and support, offering short-term shelter and essential services to women and children fleeing abuse. With eight bedrooms and a trauma-informed environment, residents receive personalized support including safety planning, legal and health referrals, and life skills development. In 2025, the West Kelowna Emergency Transition House marked its first anniversary, expanding KWS's reach with ten additional units.

**"People like you who show they care are very special and very rare. We are stronger together."**

- a note left in a Woman's room after she moved into a new home.

In our Fiscal 2025 year, we were able to provide safe, temporary housing for women and children in our community. Successes during the fiscal 2025 year include:

- 88% of women who stayed at our Transition Houses successfully moved forward without returning to an abusive environment.
- We strive to be culturally inclusive by creating a welcoming environment that provides the opportunity to celebrate cultural celebrations and religious practices.
- We increased our childminding capacity, creating a safe space for children, where parents know their children were receiving care and developmentally appropriate play opportunities.
- We expanded our partnership with Helen's Acres community garden, to provide weekly fresh produce to both transition houses.



**"Every day, I witness the strength and resilience of the women who walk through our doors. My role is to support them through their journey, offer a safe space, and remind them that they are not alone. Together, we rebuild, one step at a time."**

- Staff Participant

# West Kelowna Second Stage Housing Program

Welcoming families in November 2024, the Second Stage Housing Program offers 32 units of secure, long-term housing and wraparound support for women, and those who identify as women, along with their children after leaving abusive situations. With stays ranging from six to twelve months, participants engage in family-centered programming, life skills development, and personalized adult case management. The program also includes dedicated services for children and youth, promoting safety, resilience, and healthy development.

The Second Stage Program provides a stable foundation for healing and independence, and is a transformative step towards creating a positive, empowered future.

## Program Highlights for the 2025 year include:

- As of March 31, 2025, **111 women** had accessed the West Kelowna Second Stage Program.
- **99% of Women** who participated in the Second Stage Housing Program successfully moved forward without returning to an abusive environment.
- **28 women** have found secure, affordable, and adequate housing despite obstacles such as, economic and financial abuse and lack of safe and affordable housing

We take great pride in the community we have built and continue to grow. Through the many programs that we offer ranging from educational based trauma informed workshops to fun creative arts and crafts; participants are given much opportunity to learn more about themselves and their peers. We often see beautiful friendships form between the participants here through consistent programming. The staff here find great joy in being able to walk alongside women through their healing journey.

– Staff Participant



“I was very fortunate to get an apartment at the West Kelowna Women’s Shelter in their Stage 2 Housing [program]. The apartment is beautiful and has been a safe space for me to work on my healing and prepare for the next phase of my life. I am very grateful for this opportunity to heal.”

– Program Participant

# Outreach Program

The Outreach Program provides free, confidential support to participants who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse but may not need or choose to access emergency housing. The program also extends support to those still in abusive environments, those awaiting entry into a transition house, or those who have found alternative accommodations.

## Support Services Include:

- Personalized case management
- Resources and community referrals, including legal, employment, financial, immigration, and health and wellness needs.
- Education on domestic abuse
- Safety and exit planning
- Court support and more

## Outreach Impact in Fiscal 2025 include:

- **27% increase** in need for Community Resources
- **72% increase** in need for Court Support
- **58% increase** in need for Emotional Support
- Each woman worked with Outreach to create a personalized safety plan, empowering with knowledge, strength, and strategies to protect herself. These plans prioritize safety within the relationship, guide exit strategies, and support ongoing protection after leaving an abusive partner.

Throughout 2025, we have seen a 72% increase in need for court support. In response, our Outreach worker has become commissioned to take affidavits in the province of BC. This alleviates a multitude of barriers for people accessing Outreach services by mitigating high costs of legal proceedings and allowing program participants to share their story with our Outreach worker once and not continue to relive the details of their experience at every step of their experience in court.

# 24/7 Support Line

The 24/7 Support Line offers support for our community for people navigating a current crisis related to domestic abuse, people impacted by domestic abuse and is source of information for community members as well. The program ensures people are guided toward the right supports at the right time, including safe sheltering, programs and services, community referrals, and planning to ensure safety.

This support line is available 24 hours a day by phone, in person, email, and text—providing flexible, timely, and trauma-informed assistance to individuals, families, and community members seeking safety, support, and information.

# PEACE Program

The PEACE (Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling, and Empowerment) Program is a province-wide program for children and youth experiencing violence. It is a free, confidential program for children and youth aged 3 to 18 who have experienced abuse. Based on psycho-educational methods, PEACE programs provide individual and group programming to help children and youth:

- Understand what violence is, that they are not alone, and that the violence is not their fault
- Identify support networks and develop a safety plan
- Identify their feelings and express them in healthy ways
- Recognize their strengths and increase their self-confidence
- Develop problem solving and coping skills

## Impact From PEACE

- Created 43 safety plans to support children in their safety, for example, during visitation and school transitions
- The PEACE Program hosted two week-long Violence is Preventable day camps, helping 12 children build self-confidence and develop a stronger understanding of healthy relationships.
- Psychoeducational support was provided to 8 women through peer support and facilitation in our 4-part women's Support group session in collaboration with the Outreach program



# Education & Prevention

The Education and Prevention Program is dedicated to raising awareness about domestic abuse by highlighting its signs, causes, and effects through community engagement and research. By fostering community involvement and research, we can take steps to challenge harmful societal norms, and provide vital resources, the program aims to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence and create safer, more supportive environments.

## Fiscal 2025 year, KWS achieved the following:

- Domestic Violence education to 38 businesses and organizations across the Central Okanagan
- Member of the Interagency Case Assessment Team (ICAT) with key stakeholders across the Central Okanagan
- Participated in the City of Kelowna Community Safety Plan sub-committee for Action 7.2 to "Enhance collaborative community partnerships to wrap around affected youth and adults" to "Improve emergency supports for those fleeing situations of Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence"
- Case Study site and Co-Presenter: BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) developed a women-centered design toolkit and KWS was one of the organizations chosen as a case study site to develop the [From Knowledge to Action: Lessons Learned in the Practical Application of Women-Centred Housing Design](#). KWS co-presented learning at the BCSTH and Building Up 2! Provincial forums

"I had great conversations with the staff and women at both locations. I have to say, both groups of women spoke very highly of your team which is pretty amazing and says a lot about KWS so congratulations."

- Research Coordinator.

- Towards Inclusivity Report 2S/LGBTQ+ community for KWS to increase inclusion practices provided by Tori Stranges, PhD Candidate, UBCO
- Research partnership with researcher Tori Stranges, PhD Candidate, UBCO that will generate essential knowledge to address the needs of people marginalized by gender identity and sexual orientation within the GBV sector. Specifically focusing on awareness, health, and social support services for 2S/LGBTQ+ community members who have experienced brain injuries (BI) due to intimate partner violence (IPV)
- Participating in the community project under the KGHF, Strengthening Connections Initiative (SCI), in collaboration with Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC) and community partners to explore the impact of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) from the perspective of a child's experience.
- On March 6, 2025, our team hosted the third Annual Stories & Art Event, this year's theme - No longer hidden. The event showcased visual artwork and personal narratives of people impacted by domestic abuse. In addition to community members, local elected officials were in attendance to share their support for KWS. In addition to the stories and art that were on display, a program of singing, dance, and sharing took place to educate the audience about KWS' mission to support people impacted by abuse through programs, services, education, and partnerships.

## Building Our Team

We were excited to bring Response-Based Practice Training to our entire organization this year and build a program monthly community of practice!

"[Response-Based Practice]..is a social justice-oriented approach that focuses on how individuals respond to and resist violence and adversity, recognizing their inherent resilience and dignity. It emphasizes understanding social interactions and contexts, and aims to empower individuals and challenge harmful narratives."



Performer, Aidan Sharkey, from Stories & Art on March 6, 2025, at the Laurel Packinghouse.



Mayor Gordon Milsom, Mayor of West Kelowna, and Mayor Blaire Ireland, Mayor of Lake Country, with KWS Staff at Stories & Art on March 6, 2025, at the Laurel Packinghouse.

# KWS Thrift Store & Community Space

KWS has been preparing for an exciting milestone: a major move to a larger location that will include a community space. Relocating to a new space has been a strategic priority for KWS to ensure long-term sustainability, as redevelopment plans affect the current site. The new location will bring internal working and meeting spaces, community engagement and training spaces, and the Thrift Store under one roof serving to strengthen our impact and accessibility. KWS is very excited to welcome you to the new KWS Thrift Store & Community Space open now at 102-1021 Ellis St., Kelowna!

The ongoing support and generous donations from our community reflect a shared understanding of the importance of KWS programs and a commitment to creating a welcoming, inclusive space to shop and give back.

## Fiscal 2025 Highlights:

- The KWS Thrift Store was the recipient of the Silver Award in the category of best Thrift or Second-Hand Store in the Best of Kelowna awards.
- The store also received the Purple Ribbon Award for the third consecutive year! The Purple Ribbon Award acknowledges hope givers, honours advocates, programs and community members dedicated to supporting survivors of domestic abuse and working to end violence.
- The KWS Thrift Store was also awarded Gold in second-hand clothing & consignment, bronze in shoes, silver in thrift stores and top pick in women's clothing and accessories in Kelowna Votes.

All Thrift Store proceeds are reinvested into critical KWS programs and services, enabling us to continue delivering essential initiatives that create a significant and lasting impact within the community.

**"We see so many lovely people in our store... some really heroic in the way they cope with challenging lives with great attitudes. Its inspiring!"**

- Volunteer, KWS Thrift Store



## Community Voucher Program

KWS partnered with 37 people serving organizations throughout the Central Okanagan to provide 237 vouchers totaling \$4,705.97.

**"Thank you again for your continued support. Your generosity truly makes a meaningful difference in the lives of the people we serve."**

- Quote from Community Partner

## Partnership Success: LEADS Program Pilot with KWS

WorkBC provides the LEADS program for our community, this program's mission is to assist people to take the lead in their own lives and have the freedom to work on their personal healing while gaining skills for job search and leads to potential employment for survivors of violence and/or abuse.

100% of participants celebrated completion of the program and the successful pilot has now developed into an ongoing LEADS program offered to KWS participants.

Employment programs like LEADS are vital for people impacted by domestic abuse. Through this partnership we increased accessibility to this program offering a pathway to independence, safety, and healing. In Canada, economic dependence is one of the leading barriers preventing women from leaving abusive relationships. Tailored employment support helps survivors rebuild confidence, overcome trauma-related barriers, and regain control over their lives.

**"This was an amazing experience, an insightful journey, and a safe space where barriers could be overcome. When asked if LEADS should be offered again with KWS, clients overwhelmingly recommended that it should be. One participant shared: I would recommend this program to everyone. I learned more than I thought I ever could in these 10 weeks."**



# Financial Report

# Thank You to our Donors

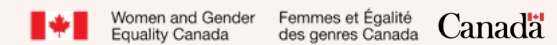
This fiscal year has been one that marks both opportunity and growth for the finance department at KWS. With an increased scale of operations and new & refined processes/controls being implemented throughout the year, the finance team has been busy absorbing this growth and realizing the benefits/efficiencies of newly implemented processes.

Some key accomplishments from the team have been highlighted below:

- Completed the successful roll-out of "Arcori", a property management software partnered with BCNPHA. The implementation of Arcori has provided both increased efficiencies and effectiveness for the Society's various processes. Furthermore, the organization also revamped processes that involved participants to increase usability and transparency.
- To optimize efficiency and effectiveness, the Finance team has been continuing to improve existing financial controls and processes.
- Worked to improve shared learning and understanding within KWS leadership to deepen understanding of financial controls and funding requirements and work in coordination with the finance team.

**"The finance team would like to recognize how lucky we are to work with such a fantastic team internally at KWS, and with such great partners externally. For our audit, BDO has been a pleasure to work with, and the contributions from both the Finance Committee and Board of Directors have been invaluable to the success of the department this year."**

- Sam Overton, Director of Finance



# Board of Directors

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Director



**If you, or someone you know, is experiencing or impacted by domestic abuse and would like support or want to know more about our programs please reach out anytime. We are here for you.**

24 hour helpline: 250-763-1040

24 hour textline: 236-970-0704

Support Email: [support@kelownawomensshelter.ca](mailto:support@kelownawomensshelter.ca)

**If you are in immediate danger, please call 911.**

**Visit Our Programs & Services:**

