



TOGETHER WE CAN SUPPORT A COMMUNITY FREE FROM ABUSE

April 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026

KWS

WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO, WHY WE DO IT

About KWS

KWS has been providing programs and services for people impacted by gender-based violence* since 1980. Our programs include emergency transition and second-stage housing, the PEACE program, community-based victim services, sexual assault services, education and prevention initiatives, a 24/7 support line, and a community thrift store. We are committed to fostering safety, choice, and inclusion, and believe in building a community free from abuse and sexualized violence through education, support, and strong partnerships.

Our **2025–2027 Strategic Plan** grounds this critical work in four commitments:

People — Strengthen governance and leadership, investing in the growth and well-being of our team, and fostering organization-wide alignment with our vision and mission.

Programs and Services — Strengthening opportunities for individuals, children and youth to experience safety, dignity and connection through inclusive programming and responding to evolving community needs.

Community — Strengthening collective impact by engaging those we serve, fostering community partnerships, and advancing education and awareness.

Sustainability — Strengthening organizational sustainability through a commitment to impact, responsiveness, effective systems and processes, and strong financial stewardship.

Our Vision

A community free from abuse.

Our Mission

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

Why our work matters

Gender-based violence (GBV) results from deliberate choices to use violence, coercion, and control, while those affected respond with strength, resistance, and efforts to maintain safety and dignity, which we recognize and honour in all aspects of our work.

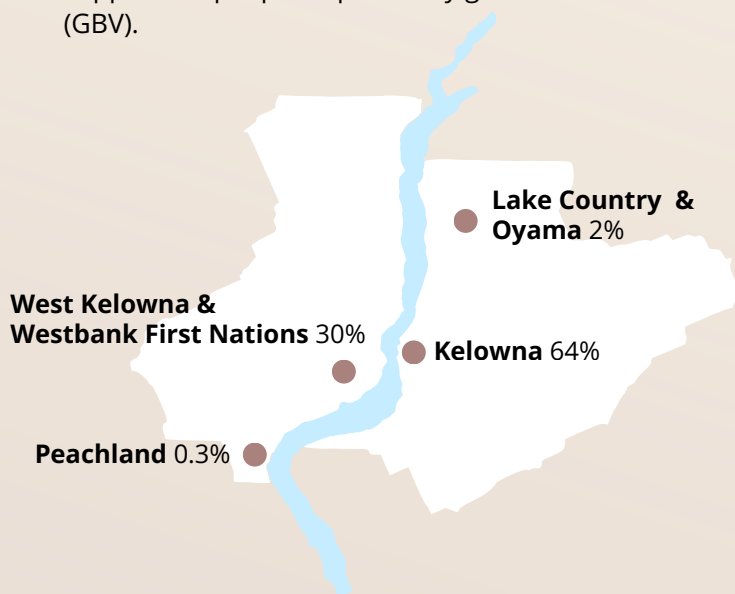
Roughly 45 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men in Canada have experienced abusive or violent behaviour from an intimate partner since the age of 15, alongside this, a higher proportion of Indigenous people (20 per cent of women and 17 per cent of men), those who self-identified as having a disability (20 per cent of women and 16 per cent of men), and those who are 2S/LGBTQIA+ (26 per cent of women and 22 per cent of men) experienced IPV in the past 12 months.¹

1. Statistics Canada, *Gender differences in experiences of violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2025*, Juristat (2026).

*Gender-based violence includes intimate-partner violence, domestic violence and domestic abuse

WHO WE SERVE, AND WHERE

KWS serves the Central Okanagan from Oyama to Peachland and is committed to working with partners regionally and provincially to provide coordinated supports to people impacted by gender-based violence (GBV).



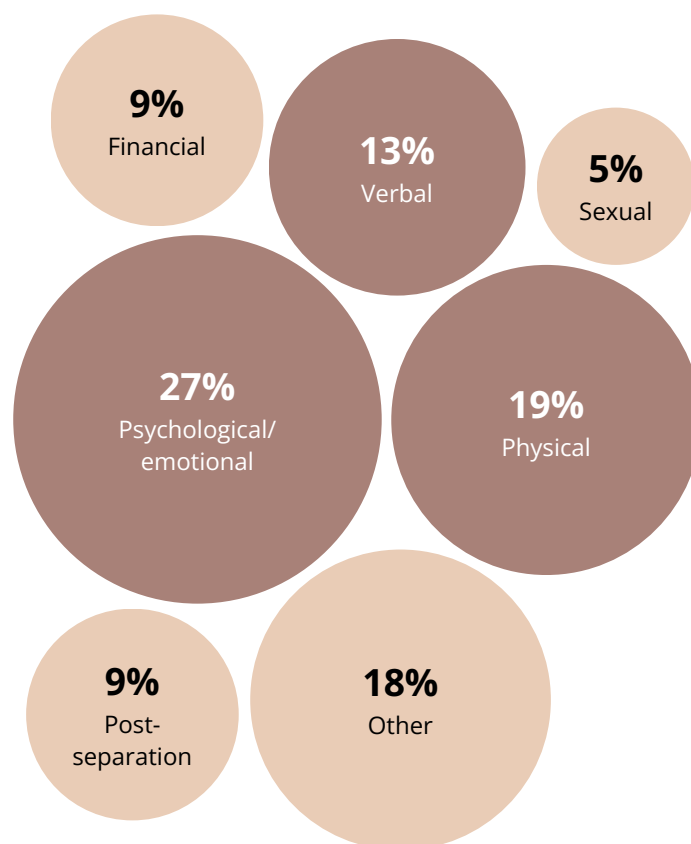
KWS operates on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the syilx/Okanagan Peoples. We are grateful to live and work on these lands. We also recognize that Indigenous women, girls and 2S/LGBTQQIA+ people² continue to experience violence at rates far higher than non-Indigenous people — and we are committed to listening, learning and working with Indigenous partners to provide trauma-informed and culturally safe care.

Geographic breakdown

Kelowna	64%
West Kelowna & Westbank First Nations	30%
	<i>*an 8% increase from the previous year</i>
Lake Country & Oyama	2%
Peachland	0.3%
Out of province	0.2%
Outside region	4.5%

What abuse looks like in our community

The following information reflects what people in our community have had the courage to share with us about the violence, abuse and control they have experienced.



2. Women and Gender Equality Canada, *Ending gender-based violence against Indigenous peoples*.



PEOPLE

A letter from our Executive Director

As I reflect on the past year, I am incredibly honoured to be part of an organization that helps create safety, connection, and hope for adults, children, and youth impacted by abuse in our community.

Our team recognizes that gender-based violence results from a deliberate choice to use violence, coercion, and control against another person. Those impacted are not responsible for the abuse committed against them and deserve to be believed, supported, and treated with dignity and respect. Every day, we witness extraordinary acts of strength, resistance, and resilience as people protect themselves and their loved ones, preserve their dignity, and work toward safety, healing, and hope. We deeply value the trust they place in us and remain committed to ensuring that every person who reaches out is met with compassion, respect, and support.

Guided by our strategic plan, we have strengthened programs and services, deepened community partnerships, invested in governance and organizational sustainability, expanded education efforts, and responded to emerging community needs. The impact highlighted throughout this report reflects the dedication of our organization and the collective efforts of everyone who shares our commitment to creating a safer community.

Through the dedication of our team, volunteers, community partners, donors, and funders, we have created pathways to safety, healing, and hope. Thank you to our team members for bringing compassion, expertise, and commitment to this work every day. Thank you to our volunteers for generously sharing their time and talents. Thank you to our partners for their collaboration and shared vision, and to our donors and funders for their trust and investment. Together, you help ensure individuals and families can access support when they need it most.

Meaningful change happens when communities come together around a shared purpose. Our responsibility is clear: to believe and support those affected by abuse, to challenge attitudes and behaviours that enable violence, and to hold those who choose violence accountable for their actions. I invite you to continue standing with us as allies, partners, and voices for change.

Together, we can create a community free from abuse where those impacted by abuse are met with belief and support, where those who choose violence are held accountable, and where every person can live with safety, dignity, respect, and belonging.

Michelle Dickie
Executive Director, KWS



I got my life back, my sanity, I owe you the world...We are on the other side of what was a horrid horrid situation. Thank you so much for giving us our lives.

— Emergency Transition House resident



IMPACT AT A GLANCE

601

people accessed programs & services

254

children, youth and caregivers found support in our PEACE program

141

of people accessing programs & services found support in more than one of our programs

84

people found support in our PEACE program

4,204

connections made through the 24/7 Support Line helping individuals impacted by abuse and their supporters access support, resources, and a stronger sense of community

238

people found safety through Emergency Transition Houses



Across our programs, we saw more individuals reaching out for support, often navigating circumstances that were increasingly complex and difficult to resolve. The impacts of domestic abuse rarely exist in isolation. Financial hardship, housing instability, limited transportation, legal and family court system involvement, and other barriers can intersect to make finding safety and stability even more challenging.

Rising costs of living, limited access to affordable and safe housing, and increasing demands on community services created additional barriers for those seeking support. For many, accessing a program or service is only the first step: being able to sustain that connection while navigating multiple systems can be equally challenging. Our KWS hope for 2026 is to lessen or, even better, eliminate that challenge.

Lisa Watson
Director of Programs & Impact

PROGRAMS & SERVICES



24/7 Support Line

The 24/7 Support Line provides centralized support, referrals, and information for the community. These supports are accessible 24 hours a day by phone, text and email – providing flexible, timely, and trauma-informed assistance to both individuals and families seeking safety and support. This program supports individuals of all genders and is grounded in inclusive, client centered practice.



If I had not found the courage to contact [KWS], I probably would not have found a lawyer smoothly, and I might not even know that protection orders existed.

— KWS Program Participant



Emergency Transition Houses

KWS Emergency Transition Houses are safe, comfortable and confidential. We provide food and other essentials, individualized support and safety planning, and help with transportation and childminding wherever possible.



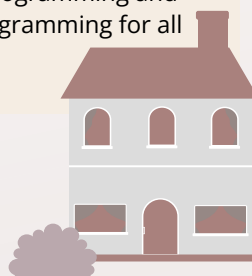
I slept last night for 12 hrs...I never sleep that long. I usually only sleep three. I didn't realize how much stress I was under until I came here. I usually struggle with pain and I was busy all day yesterday, but today I have no pain. My hands are still shaking thinking about this past week. I am so grateful for this place.

— Emergency Transition House Resident

Second Stage Program with Housing

The Second Stage program provides safe, affordable housing and wraparound supports that build on the resilience and strengths of individuals with lived experience, fostering choice, autonomy, community connection, and access to resources as they work toward the goals they have identified for themselves.

With a grant received from a private donor we were able to set up a child and youth space for children and youth to take part in Second Stage programming and other children and youth specific programming for all residents.





Community Outreach

Our outreach team provides support, exit and safety planning, resources and referrals to those who are experiencing or have experienced abuse. This support is provided to people who have made the choice to leave the abusive environment, but also to those who have yet made that choice. This program supports individuals of all genders and is grounded in inclusive, client-centered practice.



Thank you for sitting beside me in court and supporting me through the whole process. I finally feel like I stood up for myself, thank you for helping me fight for my children.

— **Community Outreach Program Participant**



PEACE Program

The PEACE program provides confidential, short term psychoeducational support for children and youth, ages 3-18, who have experienced abuse. The program includes individual and/or group sessions focused on education about abuse, safe environments, expressing emotions in healthy ways and more. This program supports individuals of all genders and is grounded in inclusive, client-centered practice.

Of the **254 people supported** — **149 children and youth** accessed programming, and we were able to support **105 parents and caregivers** alongside them as part of the PEACE program.

Coordinated Supports = Increased Care

71%

of total referrals came from external sources, meaning 504 people in our community found support through self-referrals and partner agencies working in collaboration with KWS to enhance impact and increase access to critical services.

78.8%

The KWS team saw a 78.8% increase in self-referrals meaning people recognized what was happening in their environment and knew where to find help.

COMMUNITY



Abuse is not a personal issue, it's a community issue that impacts everyone - our colleagues, friends and family. Bringing education and awareness into our community creates conversations about violence and safety to ensure that every door can be the right door when somebody needs help.

— Michelle Dickie, Executive Director

How you joined the conversation to create a community free from abuse:

Stories & Art

For the fourth year, people experiencing abuse bravely entrusted us with their stories.

Through painting, spoken word, song and dance, our community came together to honour the courage and dignity of those that shared and joined the conversation surrounding gender-based violence in the Okanagan.

REAL Talk

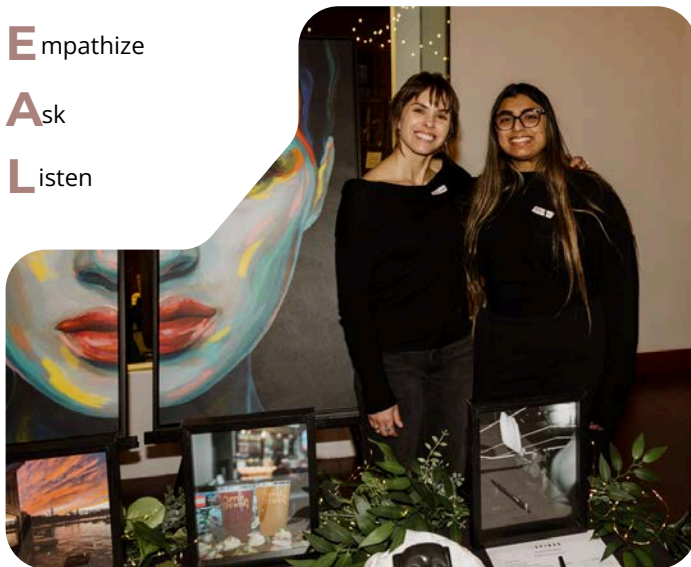
In partnership with Sageesse in Calgary, KWS supported **145 community members, corporate partners and partner agencies** with a framework on how to enter into a conversation about abuse and be a support to someone experiencing abuse. Together, we learnt to:

Recognize*

Empathize

Ask

Listen



*To learn more, please visit sageesse.org

Domestic Violence Awareness Month: Be a Voice For Change

November each year marks a collective call to stand up against domestic violence.

Through **14 opportunities**, including panel education events, campus pop-ups, digital media campaigns, community workout classes and more, our community stood up as 'Voices for Change' and used their sphere of influence to learn, listen and carry the conversation forward.



The more awareness there is, and the more public displays of solidarity and support we show, the more we can help destigmatize these experiences and educate people on how to reach out for help.

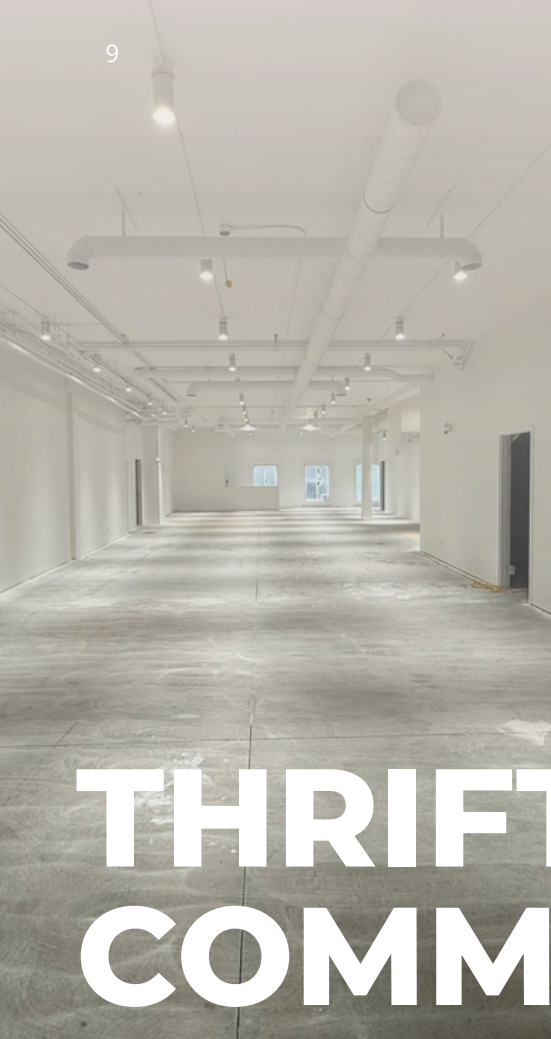
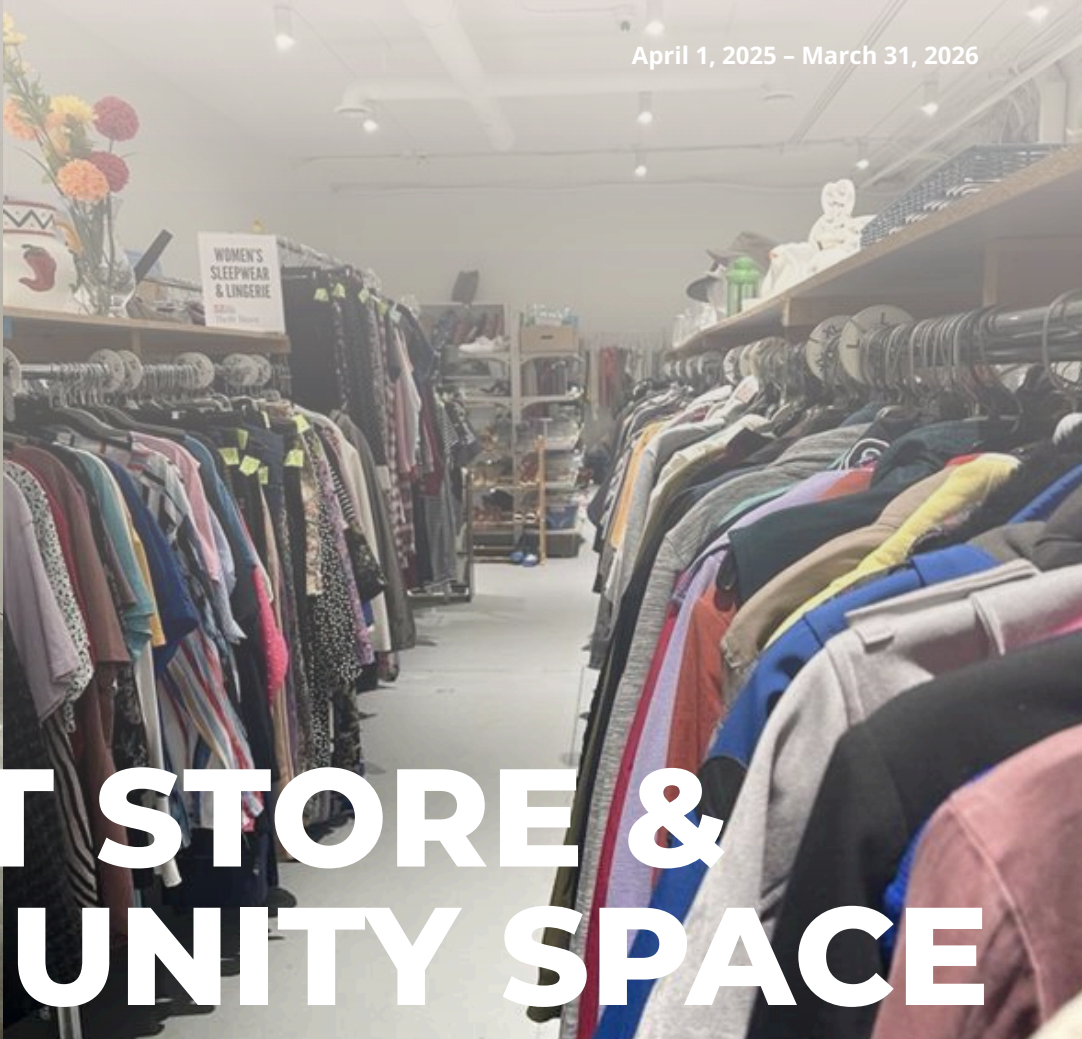
— Camille, KWS volunteer

103 volunteers

across our programs, Thrift Store, Board and education and prevention initiatives

4,500+ hours

donated to critical programs, services, governance and community initiatives

THRIFT STORE & COMMUNITY SPACE

Where every donation and every purchase supports a community free from abuse

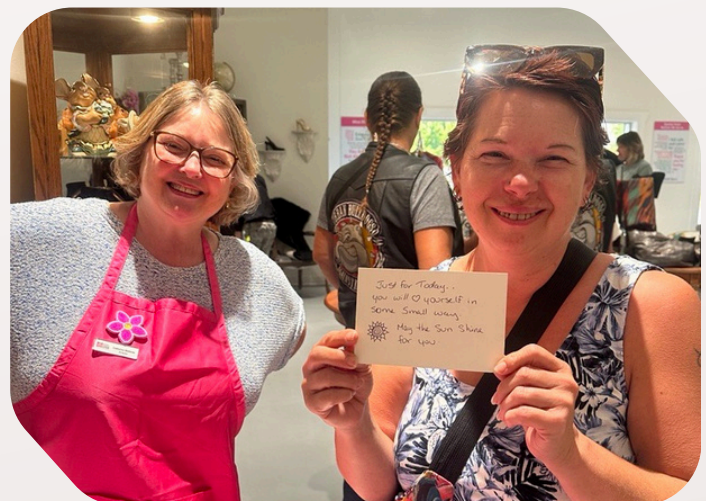
In September 2025, KWS welcomed the community into the new KWS Thrift Store & Community Space.

A new space, boasting almost double the square footage of the previous space, features large windows and natural light throughout, and a dedicated sorting, packing and washing space with a large garage door to accept donations. The shelves are packed with new donations of men and women's clothing, accessories, household items and more, including a boutique space for higher end items.

The space was intentionally designed to be more than just a store, but also a welcoming community space. This designated community space opens up a meeting and training space for KWS staff and Board to use, and be able to invite and host community conversations. This space also fills a much needed gap within KWS service delivery: a larger space for group programming that is safe, confidential and accessible.

Community Voucher Program

The KWS Community Voucher Program provided **360 vouchers** this year, lowering barriers to access the KWS Thrift Store & Community Space for program participants and community partners. Through a discreet and flexible approach, individuals and families selected clothing, household items, and other essentials based on their own priorities and preferences. The program supports dignity and community connection by recognizing each person's right to make decisions that reflect their own needs, priorities, and circumstances.



SUSTAINABILITY

A note from our Board Chair

Boards spend a lot of time reviewing and discussing numbers and briefing reports. This year I would like to take a moment to focus on the people behind the reports and numbers.

It's been another remarkable year for KWS. We opened a new community space, expanded programs & services and focused on building efficient internal structures — all of this has occurred while never once failing to answer a call. I have sat with this staff, board and team through the diligent work and planning that has made this possible, and I can tell you it was achieved by a team that is thoughtful, disciplined and genuinely excellent at what they do.

The significant growth and achievements this year are a testament to the commitment of the whole KWS team. On behalf of the Board, thank you to Michelle and to every member of the KWS team. Thank you to the 103 volunteers who gave more than 4,500 hours this year and are integral to the success of KWS. To the donors, funders and businesses across the Central Okanagan who are passionate in supporting us, thank you for standing with us and making us stronger.

Our 2025-2027 Strategic Plan focuses on the unfortunate reality that there is a growing need for our services. We have charted a carefully planned course for growth that will build upon the core of who we are. The united efforts of the dedicated staff, volunteers and community makes it all possible.

Again, on behalf of the Board of Directors I extend to each of you our deepest appreciation.

Catherine Widdoes
Board Chair

Board of Directors

Catherine Widdoes, Chair

Edi Cote, Vice Chair

Candace Surette, Treasurer

Brenda Ridgeley-Ketchell, Secretary

Coleen McEwan

Jeffrey J. Peterson

Kimberly Humphreys

Susan Van Unen



Back row left to right: Jeffrey J. Peterson, Edi Cote, Susan Van Unen
Front row left to right: Brenda Ridgeley-Ketchell, Catherine Widdoes

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada



It was a busy year for the Finance team, and there are many accomplishments to look back on throughout the fiscal year that we are proud to have achieved through our team's efforts. One being finalizing a new securities donation platform, providing another avenue for financial sustainability - making growth responsible.

— Sam Overton, Director of Finance



LOOKING FORWARD

Building on this year's progress while pursuing new opportunities to support a community free from abuse.

24Hr Community Support Program

The Community Support Navigators provide compassionate, non-judgmental support to community members impacted directly or indirectly by domestic violence and abuse. This includes support for individuals, families, community partners, and first responders seeking information, guidance, and resources related to domestic violence and abuse.

Through in-person, phone, and virtual services, the team offers crisis intervention, emotional support, safety planning, risk assessment, referrals, and education. By connecting people with resources and walking alongside them on their journey, the program helps build safety, resilience, and pathways toward lives free from violence and abuse.

Community-based Victims Services.

KWS has been working with the community to envision a streamlined, coordinated, responsive, and accessible service delivery system in our community for adults, children, and youth impacted by domestic abuse and sexualized violence.

We are excited to share that, in consultation with Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (MPSSG), starting April 1st, 2026, KWS began providing the Community Based Victim Services (CBVS-Domestic Violence Unit and Family/Sexual Violence), and Sexual Assault Services programs.

Research and implementation

KWS is excited to continue our partnership with Tori Stranges, PhD, supported by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), to continue researching and implementing inclusive and trauma informed care for all members of our community.



Our research partnership began with a recognition that people in 2S/LGBTQIA+ communities who experience intimate partner violence are often navigating systems that were not designed with their experiences in mind. Through our partnership with Kelowna Women's Shelter and WAGE, our research has grown from identifying gaps to working alongside our local community to develop practical and meaningful responses to them.

— **Tori N. Stranges, PhD, MPK, B.Kin**
(she/they)

3. Recent Statistics Canada reporting found that gender-diverse individuals experience significantly higher rates of violent victimization than the general population and are consistently identified as one of the groups at highest risk for violence. Statistics Canada, *Gender differences in experiences of violence and unwanted sexual behaviour in Canada, 2025*, Juristat (2026).



If you, or someone you know, is experiencing or impacted by 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

If you are in immediate danger, please call 911.



**Learn more about our
programs and services**

Legal name: Central Okanagan Emergency Shelter Society

Charitable reference number: 118843473RR0001