

Our Journey

2020/2021 Annual Report

Acknowledgements

**We thank our 2020 - 2021
Board of Directors for their
leadership and dedication
to advancing the work
of Sistering:**

This report covers the
fiscal year April 1st, 2020
to March 31st, 2021

Designed by Aperkoo,
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Women and Gender
Equality Canada

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des genres Canada



Our Journey



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Letter From The

Interim Executive Director



As I reflect on the unprecedented past year, I am humbled by the resilience of our incredible staff, peers, participants, volunteers, donors, Board, and neighbours. I am proud of our wonderful community, which rallied together to ensure Sistering's response to this crisis was timely and reflective of our participants' needs throughout all the uncertainty. More women and trans people than ever turned to us for support as they sought housing information, accessing services, medical assistance, food security and COVID-19 concerns – and we responded with the necessary information, resources and expertise that helped our community through the evolving changes. Our programs pivoted; the Drop In became a respite, we observed a significant increase in take-away meals, and consultations and workshops shifted to virtual platforms. Our supporters showed their resilience working alongside us, and essential fundraising resumed virtually. Our entire community made it possible for our impactful journey to continue, reinforcing our dedication to our participants' wellbeing.

This year, we are celebrating an incredible 40th-anniversary milestone. From our early beginnings as a small group of women with an ambition for social change, Sistering has grown into a 24/7 multi-service agency with two locations in Toronto and partners across the country. While much has changed since 1981, the power of community, mutual aid and

solidarity remain the most significant force for change. This year, especially, we learned to connect, work together and support each other in unique ways. In doing so, we became stronger as a community. On our 40th anniversary, we recommit ourselves to working towards Sistering's vision: a world where all women and trans people, in all our diversity, are safe, respected, valued and treated with dignity; where all women and trans people have equitable opportunities to thrive and participate in inclusive communities.

We could not have persevered through the past year without the full support of our tireless Board of Directors, our generous donors and partners, our dedicated peers and volunteers and our talented and committed staff. Their willingness to devote time, effort and resources to help Sistering accomplish its vision made the successes possible. I want to extend my sincerest thanks to everyone who stood by us and supported our critical work, especially through these challenging times. Together, we will recommence our journey to advance our mission through the upcoming years.

My heartfelt thanks for your continued support.

Silvia Samsa
Executive Director, Interim

Letter From The

Board Co- Chairs



We mark an important milestone this year — our 40th anniversary! Our Journey started when a group of women conceptualized a haven for women to heal and empower themselves. Since then, Sistering has grown into a multi-service agency welcoming cis and trans women, and gender diverse individuals. With our feminist, anti-oppressive, and pragmatic approach, we fight inequality.

On this very special occasion, we also envision our future space. We've long outgrown our current location, and with the hard work of the management team, we are closer than ever to moving into our new home. More space will allow us to better serve our participants, and our hard-working staff will also have the much-needed space to work comfortably.

Sistering's vision has always been grounded in the vision of our participants' self-advocacy and self-identified needs based on lived experience. Participants have described the need for bright, comfortable spaces for them to feel safe and respected; with separate areas for different programs and needs, so the low barrier model can be supported without stigma.

Staff continue to deliver support and services, and consistent attention to public health guidelines has kept them and participants healthy. In the second year of this pandemic, we've developed a new rhythm, but remain vigilant to

the devastating intersectional impact of homelessness, reduction of essential services and isolation, especially pervasive in marginalized communities.

With vaccine distribution steadily ramping up nationally, and a clinic here at Sistering – thanks to staff, we look forward excitedly to next year and the probability of partially reopening the drop in safely.

Thankfully, our financial position remains strong; we thank the LHIN, City of Toronto, United Way, and all other funders. Special thanks to our unwavering donors that have stood with us for many years, and new donors over the past months. Every dollar supported much needed programs, gift cards, communication devices, care packages, and more. We are extremely fortunate to have them.

As an organization, we are reflecting on what we have learned, and choosing what we will carry forward to make us stronger. On this, our 40th year serving our community, we re-dedicate ourselves to working on behalf of our participants, fighting with them in the now, and working together for a more just future.

Michaela Ferguson &
Heather Smyth

About Sistering

Sistering is a multi-service agency for at-risk, socially isolated women and trans people in Toronto who are homeless or precariously housed. We have been serving this community for 40 years, validating the experiences of women and trans people regardless of outcomes.



OUR VISION is a world where all women and trans people are safe, respected, valued, and treated with dignity; a world where all women and trans people have equitable opportunities to thrive and participate in inclusive communities.

OUR MISSION is to create a safe, welcoming and non-judgemental space for women and trans people, guided by the principles of feminism, anti-racism and anti-oppression.

WE OFFER practical and emotional support to women and trans people, enabling participants to take greater control of their lives.

WE COLLABORATE with others in the community to change the social conditions that endanger the welfare of women and trans people.

In 1981, a concerned group of women came together to develop a strategy to meet the needs of the growing number of homeless and transient women in Toronto. Representatives from across the community joined, including women's agencies, community residents, and women living in hostels. Women were being discharged from mental health facilities, and many had nowhere to go. They were alienated from their families, and community supports were seriously inadequate.

Sistering was initially created for these women. However, it soon became apparent that other marginalized communities could benefit from this support. As the social conditions continued to evolve, Sistering expanded its services to meet those needs. Today, Sistering supports women and trans people from across Toronto who experience social isolation; homelessness or precarious housing; trauma and violence; discrimination; substance use; and/or need mental health support.

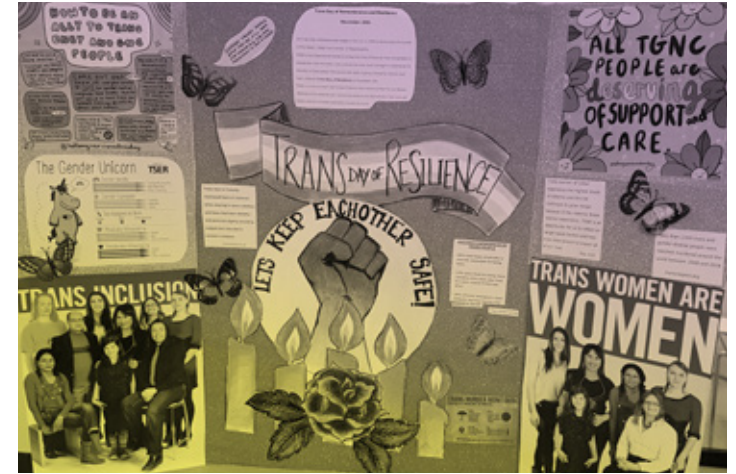
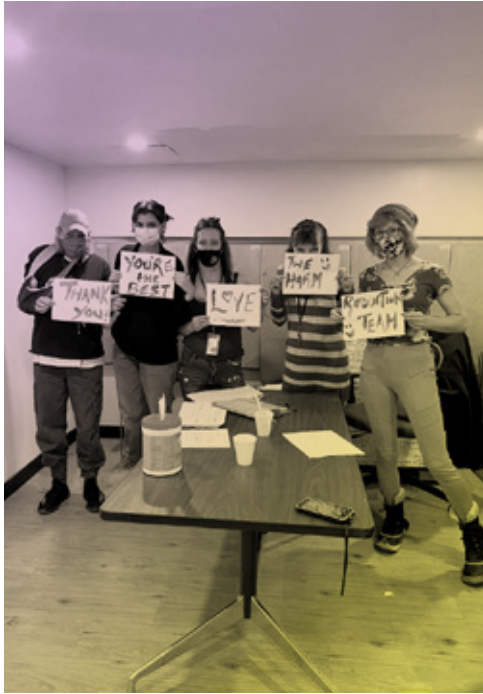
Our vision has remained consistent throughout the years, imagining a world where all women and trans people are safe, respected, valued and treated with dignity. We work to ensure all women and trans people have equitable opportunities to thrive and participate in inclusive communities.

On our 40th anniversary, we celebrate the founders of Sistering, who came together to challenge the inequities in our society; we celebrate our frontline heroes, who work 24/7 in support of our community; and we celebrate our participants, who demonstrate formidable resilience against an unjust system.

40 YEARS SISTERING

OUR JOURNEY SINCE 1981





Our 2020/2021 Impact

24-Hour Drop In



Sistering's 24-Hour Drop In provides low-barrier practical and emotional support to women, trans and gender-diverse peoples. This year, our primary focus has been adapting to the pandemic to best serve our participants through these challenging times, helping to preserve safety while meeting immediate needs.

At the onset of the pandemic, we quickly mobilized to evolve into a bedded respite at our Cowan Street location. We returned to our Bloor Street site in June 2020, operating as a temporary respite with a capacity of 16 participants, as determined by the City of Toronto. We serve the rest of the Sistering community by providing takeout meals, referrals to shelter beds and hotels, as well as wraparound services, including case support, harm reduction, and medical care. We have been proactive in following Toronto Public Health guidelines, with additional measures to keep participants safe, such as modified food service, temperature checks, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for all staff and participants. We have been fortunate to provide participants with a stable and safe place to stay throughout the pandemic, while also offering rich, recreational programming that increases social connection.

6,394

Participant visits

70

Events hosted

40

Participants attended events

7,705

Personal hygiene & clothing items distributed

303

Referrals made



Food Access

Our Kitchen is often said to be the heart of Sistering, bringing participants, peers, volunteers and staff together to create and share meals. This year, with a reduced number of participants able to gather, our kitchen team distributed more than 150 takeaway meals a day and delivered special food boxes during Black History Month and the holiday season. The Sistering Kitchen also got creative and collaborative with its programming. We partnered with Muslim Welfare Canada, who provided dinner every Saturday for nine months; hosted the Jerk King Brothers food truck, who created delicious meals for our participants; and participated in the Toronto Drop-In Network's food voucher program, which provided our participants with meals from local BIPOC-owned businesses. In place of our large annual holiday dinner, the Kitchen celebrated with a full week of special meals.

67,876

Meals served

525

Food boxes delivered

Key partnerships:

Muslim Welfare Canada
Jerk King Brothers
Toronto Drop-In Network

Special events and meals:

Black History Month
Lunar New Year
Thanksgiving Meal
Holiday Meals

“When I came I was so desperate for support which I found right away. I was amazed for all the services and opportunities that Sistering offers to women in need, reaching out to their families too, like mine. Working in the kitchen is something I want to highlight, without the support we wouldn't have received our permanent residence. I couldn't be happier.”

- Kitchen Peer

Harm Reduction

Sistering's Harm Reduction program focuses on reducing social, economic and health-related issues, helping women and trans people involved in substance use and/or sex work to build resiliency and improve overall health and wellbeing. It is a social justice and public health response to drug use and sex work; rather than criminalizing individuals, it focuses on reducing the associated harms.

Although most of Harm Reduction's programming shifted to virtual delivery this year, we continued to provide support with housing, health care, mental health, food security, and emotional support. The Harm Reduction team also engaged in a variety of advocacy work, including co-designing a virtual forum entitled "Women & Drug Strategy: Know your Rights"; developing an informational poster on violence against women; creating a calendar that addresses the stigmatization of people who use drugs; participating in a video campaign to raise awareness of gender-based violence; and developing resources on how businesses can support during the Overdose Crisis.

"Being a worker in Harm Reduction means to me that I am able to fight for equality and justice for myself, and my community, for those who cannot."

- Harm Reduction Peer



13,722

Harm Reduction kits
assembled and distributed

Needle: **3,637**

Dragon: **1,078**

Crack: **4,088**

Meth: **3,722**

Naloxone: **1,197**

99,472

Harm Reduction resources
distributed

Safer sex: **63,612**

Other supplies: **35,860**

13

New partnerships with
local organizations

268

Events (virtual or socially distanced)

HIV/Hep. C testing events: **2**

Peer trainings: **22**

Internal workshops: **8**

Kit making sessions: **80**

Street and community
outreach sessions: **76**

Drop in events: **32**

KAPOW sessions: **48**

Community Support Work

Landlord visits: **102**

Phone follow-up

Support: **1,170**

ODSP/OW: **40**

“Sistering profoundly changed my life for the better. Because of them I am housed, healthy and independent and happy and have my daughter back in my life. The Harm Reduction at Sistering is a fantastic program that gives people hope.”

- Harm Reduction Peer

Parkdale Outreach



We also offer a daily Drop In program from our Cowan Street location in Parkdale. Due to the pandemic, this program shifted to distanced services, which included phone support, meal and food box distribution, personal care hamper deliveries, and referrals to community services. Outreach participants received free smartphones with data and Canada-wide calling, allowing them to stay in contact with their loved ones and participate in virtual programming. We also provided advocacy on food and income security as well as support with COVID testing, vaccinations, and other health care needs.

60

Regular participants

640

Referrals made

2,940

Meals distributed

“I look forward to your calls everyday.”

- Outreach Participant

On The Path To Employment

On The Path supports Sistering participants who have experienced trauma and violence prepare for the workforce. This year's programming included virtual one-on-one employment counselling and income support, a weekly Zoom employment group, entrepreneurial training, violence against women counselling and events, as well as the annual Income Tax Clinic. Due to the pandemic, On The Path also provided much needed support to ensure the wellbeing of participants in the community, such as socialization through Zoom, referrals, food delivery, as well as mental health and self-care support.

156

Participants served

10

Participants gained employment

9

Participants become self-employed

23

Participants pursued further training

70

Participants received violence against women counselling

61

Participants received pre-employment services

110

Participants attended violence against women events

52

Events and workshops were held

Spun Studio

Spun Studio offers both recreational and social enterprise programming to marginalized women and trans people. Involvement with the Studio grants participants the chance to earn supplemental income in a creative, collaborative and healing environment.

This year, Spun Studio placed additional emphasis on building community, increasing self-esteem, and supporting mental health. Utilizing virtual platforms, Spun programming included the facilitation of two weekly classes, the delivery of craft supplies and food boxes, as well as daily phone calls. At the onset of the pandemic, Spun also facilitated a peer-led journaling program, supporting peers to develop their teaching skills while also bringing participants together virtually for a journaling practice. In March 2021, Spun Studio launched its first online shop, increasing sales during COVID-lockdowns and generating increased awareness of Spun products.

“Spun Studio has taught me the magic of arts and crafts and the importance of supporting each other. It’s filled with wonderful people who have changed my life for the better.”

- Denise, Spun Participant



73

Spun Studio participants

4

Peers led and facilitated virtual workshops

7

Participants attended the weekly Entrepreneur Mentorship group remotely

248

Total attendance of Spun Zoom group

\$2,552

Total amount in Spun product sales

Exhibitions and Partnerships

Spun participants' work was on display as part of the "Community Voices" exhibition at the Textile Museum of Canada from October to December 2020.

Spun participants began creating embroidery pieces as part of the Flags of Hope advocacy project, honouring Sistering participants who have died due to the Overdose Crisis. The flags will be displayed at City Hall for International Overdose Awareness Day 2021.

Spun partnered with ILiveEco, who contracted the Studio to create 900 face scrubbies for their eco-friendly subscription boxes.



"Spun Studio is where I am inspired by a group of women, and I learned how to be creative in weaving, crocheting, knitting, quilting, sewing, embroidery and special projects such as flags of hope and also unique displays for the Textile museum by two passionate and enthusiastic teachers Barb and Sue."

- Jennifer, Spun Participant



Research & Advocacy

At Sistering, we recognize the importance of advocating for social, structural, and systemic change, in addition to supporting participants with their immediate needs. By undertaking a variety of research projects this year, we sought to challenge and uncover the social conditions that are endangering the welfare of women and trans people across Toronto, foregrounding the voices and experiences of our participants.

Our efforts are focused on research areas and initiatives that our participants identify as being of critical importance, such as poverty reduction, gender equity, homelessness, and affordable housing. Through our research this year, we developed a 'Community of Practice' alongside six drop in sites across Canada; co-facilitated a symposium to present research findings; held focus groups with Harm Reduction Peers; and employed a team of peer researchers, who are in the process of creating their own digital stories to be shared widely.

“Creating vital awareness and implementing integral advocacy from lived expertise and recovery, are to me such a healing aspect of these dynamic and connections-based positions within the Making Visible Advisory Committee as well as my role as Peer Researcher. Both of which I am honored to be a part of, on my journey from survival to ultimately, thrival.”

– Anastasia, Peer Researcher

4

Research projects

56

Research interviews conducted across projects

16

Peers hired as researchers

330

Participants received honorariums as part of projects

“We all got to utilize our strengths where we could, you know, make our voices heard, either just by being there and merging, or by helping organize... We all participate equally as we could, was where our strengths lie... I found my voice, I didn't realize I had a voice”

– Peer Researcher



This Is Not Home

Through focus groups, key informant interviews and a participant survey, we highlighted the housing experiences of participants and the role of six drop ins across Canada.

Creating Home Together

Based on the learnings from *This Is Not Home*, the six drop in sites are working to develop appropriate and adaptable service models and housing solutions to leverage new development opportunities presented by the National Housing Strategy.

Making Visible

Funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada, *Making Visible* seeks to amplify Sistering's skills, tools, networks, and capacity to highlight experiences of homelessness and housing precarity of participants. The project aims to develop the case for the need for a definition of women's homelessness.

Narratives of Advocacy

A SSHRC funded research project, initiated by the Social Action Committee and organized by Dr. Heather Smyth, co-chair of the Sistering Board, *Narratives of Advocacy* documents past advocacy at Sistering to bring best practices forward. Using a narrative theory approach, the project highlights the stories Sistering participants and staff tell of social injustice and how we can make a better Toronto, Canada and world.

Participant

Dan turned to Sistering for support after moving to Toronto from Hamilton last year. They developed job skills and gained income through Sistering's On The Path employment program while also helping out within the respite. "I'm from Hamilton and new to Toronto. Sistering helped me find the right low-income housing. I couldn't do that alone. I'd be lost. I wanted low-income housing, and I am signing a lease today and have a job interview tomorrow. I love it!"

- Dan

"Sistering...The open door to my grieving heart; the helping hands to my broken soul; the listening ear to my lost self; the friendly staff and volunteers that made me feel safe; the place that saw my brokenness yet believed in me, encouraged me, and strengthened me to be able to stand again and start gaining confidence, to know that I could start over and could rise above my troubles. Participating at the Spun Studio with Sue and Barbara, whose dedication to all of us in their group allows space for us to feel safe, understood, and valued. We learn new skills, we form new friendships, reduce isolation, and through art, crafts, and needlework, we begin healing. Doctor Judy, Doctor Lucy, and other medical staff, Teya in counselling, and the many other services that Sistering provides to women in need, without discrimination of any kind, FREE of charge, and with a wholesome approach, are the reason that many of us today are still here, and continue to live a safer, healthier and happier life. The place that cares for us and takes us as we are, to help us pick up the broken pieces, retrace a new path, and rewrite our own story. Thank you, Sistering, for what you do every day for all of us women."

- C.C.

Journeys

"It is a joy to watch everyone inspire each other and grow, doing something that comes from themselves. As a result of this program, participants have been able to gain confidence in harnessing their skills and making their own products, while earning extra money in the process."

- Entrepreneur Mentorship Group Participant

"One of the many things I love about Sistering is that they are always offering new opportunities to learn, create, and participate in so many different ways while supporting us through it all. I find being in the Sistering community helps build confidence and purpose, while improving my overall emotional well being and mental health."

- Denise

"I have tried to kill myself - I took enough pills that could kill a horse. It is a miracle to be alive. I went from the hospital to a shelter, a lady told me about Sistering. I walked into Sistering and it saved my life. As I walked towards the kitchen, the food smelled delicious. I helped cut up some boxes, I looked in the kitchen at this beautiful lady with a big smile working so hard. She came over and said 'hello, I'm Maureen', I told her my name. It was just her and the dishwasher. I asked if I could help with the dishes and truck. Maureen and I got along right away... The next day I met Carol. Can you imagine meeting 2 angels? I started coming to Sistering 7 days a week, got clothes, and I no longer wanted to die. Maureen and I work hard and we laugh a lot. I want to thank all the staff and managers. I will be 60 this month. I have had an apartment for a few years now. I just want to thank everyone who has helped me at Sistering."

- Debbie

"I am a very strong woman who holds Sistering dear to my heart. I am a survivor who never gives up and faces every day with hope and strength."

- Harm Reduction participant

Our Community Support

Volunteer

Without our dedicated team of volunteers, Sistering would not be able to offer the programs and activities our participants have come to count on. Unfortunately, Sistering's in-person volunteer program has been suspended for COVID-19 health and safety precautions. However, this did not deter our dedicated volunteers, who remain deeply committed and continue to support remotely. Sistering volunteers organized food donations, created handmade masks for staff and participants, led online programs, such as yoga and an entrepreneur mentorship group, and participated in Sistering's Garden Initiative.



“I’ve been volunteering with Sistering since the end of 2019. I instantly felt welcomed by the staff and community members. Although I’m giving

back to the community through volunteering, I really think by volunteering at Sistering, the community is giving so much more back to me. It’s been such an amazing and enjoyable experience that I wish more people could share in.”

– Amanda

Sistering Community Gardening Initiative

Last summer, more than 50 volunteers were busy raising seedlings and growing vegetables that the Sistering Kitchen turned into delicious and healthy meals for participants. Sistering is so appreciative of the Christie Pits Community Garden, where we have a large plot tended to by one of our volunteers, Sally.

Entrepreneur Mentorship Group

The women and trans people who participate in Sistering's Entrepreneur Mentorship Group, led by our volunteer Char, enter a safe, supportive space that seeks to support participants' creative practice, build confidence, and increase financial independence.

Community Engagement

Sistering is so grateful to be part of the Bloorcourt community, who work alongside us to help achieve our vision. We are always seeking new ways to be a better neighbour, partner with and promote our local businesses, and create opportunities for open dialogue. Although many of our initiatives were disrupted by the pandemic, we continued to seek creative ways to connect and build our community.



Numerous Community Partnerships

Sistering participated in several community committees, contributed to the development of a Community Liaison Guide in collaboration with the Toronto Shelter Network, and co-developed a series of community policing infographics. In partnership with Homes First, we provided our participants with private transportation to a catered meal at The Bentway. We also partnered with our BIA to deliver community de-escalation workshops to local businesses around Bloorcourt.

3 Spatial Improvement Projects

We were able to redirect grant money intended for a movie night at Christie Pits park towards improving our spaces through artwork. We contracted artists within our community to paint murals inside our dining room and in our new participant respite area on the third floor. We also partnered with Hektor Projects to create a street-facing mural at our 962 Bloor location. Local artist Isabella Vella painted a beautiful piece with the inspiring words of Rosemary Brown, "Until all of us have made it, none of us have made it."

56 Harm Reduction Pick Ups

The Harm Reduction Pick Up program helped to provide our Harm Reduction Peers with valuable mentorship experience and income. Our participants were coupled with Peer Workers to go into the neighbourhood and safely pick up improperly disposed of harm reduction materials. Participants appreciated the experience of getting out in the community and discussing Sistering in their own words with community members who often inquired about the program.



Fundraising

Our compassionate donors, funders, volunteers and partners remain the backbone of Sistering, making each of our essential programs possible. Throughout the pandemic, community support and resiliency have been more critical than ever before. This year, we saw thousands of dedicated community supporters get involved by making monetary donations, hosting in-kind donation drives, facilitating third-party events, sharing our mission with others in the community, and participating in fundraising events, such as Coldest Night of the Year. We also had an overwhelming response from first-time donors, particularly in the late spring and holiday season. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, our community has sustained the spirit of giving that is important to so many – for that, we are grateful.

10,265

Number of monetary donations

2,522

New donors, including **159** new committed monthly donors and **114** new corporate, small business and community groups

\$56,554

Value of in-kind donations for which receipts were given

31

Virtual third party events generating **\$43,406**

Coldest Night of the Year

\$65,150

Was raised at our virtual Coldest Night of the Year event

137 Walkers

22 Teams

795 Donors

Giving Tuesday

\$26,681

Raised online for Giving Tuesday, a global day of generosity that took place on December 1st, 2020

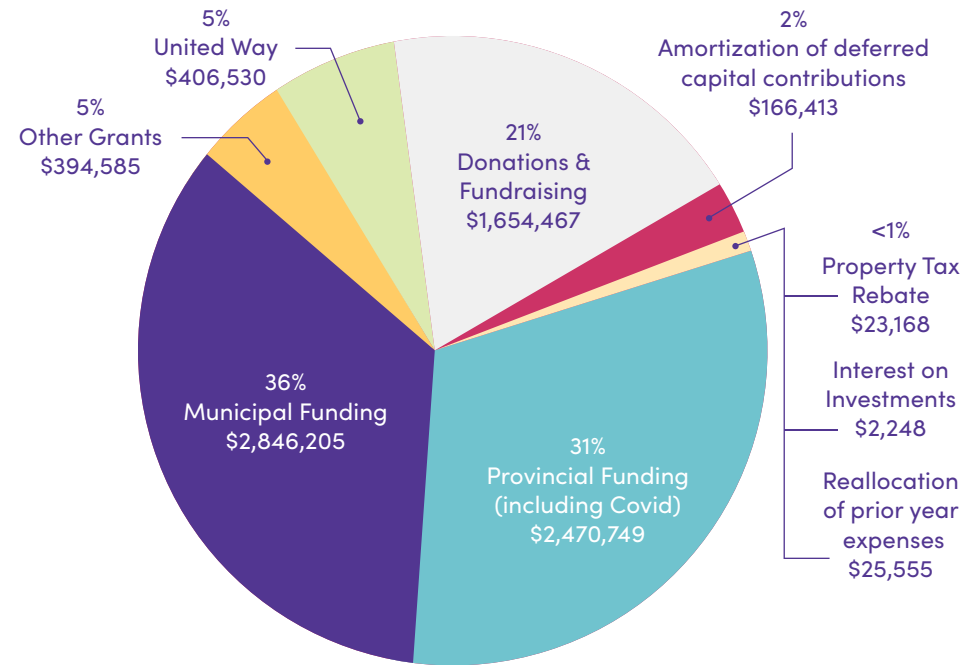
Statement of Operations

Revenues	2021	2020
Grant revenue		
City of Toronto	\$2,846,205	\$2,541,543
Local Health Integration Network	\$1,364,322	\$1,352,275
United Way of Greater Toronto	\$448,248	\$356,530
Foundations	\$423,629	\$180,822
Other grants	\$292,793	\$156,248
West Neighbourhood House	\$98,892	\$123,223
Ontario Women's Directorate	\$94,348	\$90,000
Ontario Seniors Secretariat	\$53,114	\$38,317
Donations and fundraising	\$1,189,120	\$852,082
COVID-19 funding	\$958,965	-
Amortization of deferred capital contributions	\$166,413	\$151,914
Miscellaneous	\$51,618	\$59,634
Interest	\$2,248	\$9,759
	\$7,989,915	\$5,912,347

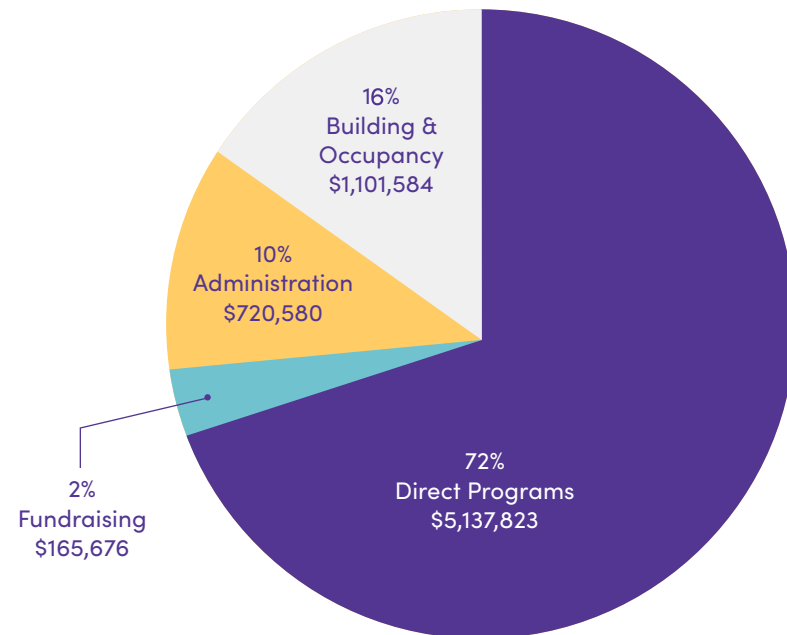
Expenses	2021	2020
Wages and benefits	\$4,546,829	\$3,858,388
Programs	\$720,319	\$774,650
Building occupancy costs	\$529,783	\$332,694
Office and general	\$431,416	\$188,421
Amortization	\$338,565	\$318,182
Purchased services	\$197,820	\$188,269
Security	\$110,260	-
Repairs and maintenance	\$85,961	\$282,623
Professional fees	\$67,184	\$19,932
Fundraising	\$48,697	\$103,781
Promotion and publicity	\$31,659	\$5,666
Insurance	\$17,170	\$19,181
	\$7,125,663	\$6,091,787
Excess (deficiency) of revenues over expenses	\$864,252	\$(179,440)

Approved financial statements for year ending March 31st, 2021.

Where Our Funds Come From



How We Use Our Funds*



*Includes wages and benefits.

40 YEARS
SISTERING
OUR JOURNEY SINCE 1981

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