



The Penticton & Area
Access Society

ANNUAL REPORT

2022/2023



Board President's Message

Thanks to the hard work of our staff and board, and with the expert guidance of Veronica Vinge, this was a very productive year.

In numerous all-day sessions, staff and board participated enthusiastically in clarifying why and how we do what we do, in a way that we can clearly describe to partners, funders, and community members. From there, many hours were spent determining what and how we want to improve, and to lay out clear steps we need to take to reach measurable goals. The process has been good. It not only helped us to define a direction for improvement and growth. It also helped us renew our sense of purpose, and to regain a feeling of connection as a team, which was difficult to maintain throughout COVID.

I've been incredibly impressed by the passion, caring, and knowledge of our staff throughout this process, and also through the smooth transition into our new office space.

I need to give a special note of appreciation to our Executive Director, Brandi Becket, who stepped up to the job of Executive Director. It's been great to see her learn and really grow into the position. Also a big thank you to Veronica Vinge, who has mentored her, and supported all of us over the year. She has been a huge part of our journey, and has had a huge role in getting to this place where, not only do we know that we excel at helping people effectively break down barriers preventing them from accessing health and social support systems, but we have a pathway to being recognized and supported appropriately by our community.

With much thanks for the hard work of our volunteers, staff, we're looking forward to another good year ahead, working to ensure that all people in our communities have equal and just access to all available support services.

Chair of the Board
Elmie Saaltink

Executive Director's Message

Welcome to The Access Centre's annual report for the fiscal year of 2022-2023! We're pleased to have our board, staff, members, volunteers, contractors, and supporters join us as we reflect on our achievements and look forward to an exciting future.

In 2022, we developed a strategic plan that was a true collaborative effort, with expert guidance from Veronica Vinge and the dedicated work of our board and staff.

We've taken a different approach to this report by seamlessly integrating our strategic plan into it. Since the start of the 2022-23 year, using our strategic plan to guide our work has led to improved decision-making, better resource management, and enhanced measurement of our impact. We're so proud to share how these improvements have positively impacted our organization and furthered our mission to help people navigate social systems.

In addition to these developments, we've experienced significant growth. Our cases increased by over 1000, and our revenue saw significant gains. We look forward to sharing the story of how we navigated these changes in the pages ahead.

So, please join us as we take you through our journey of accomplishments and future plans. We're excited to share our story with you!

Brandi Beckett
Executive Director

Centre Report

2022-2023 Fiscal year.

Increased Activity:

As you'll see on the statistics charts, we saw a significant increase in our stats across all programs. Our total number of cases for The Access Centre increased by over 1000, which is a 35% increase. Make sure to take a look at the year to year comparison to get a sense of how far we've come. Also note that we discontinued the Men's Counselling program in 2022. This increased number of cases is even more surprising when that is taken into consideration.

This is likely due in part to improved data entry processes but that big of a difference from one year to the next is too notable to be explained away so easily. By meeting our people at alternate locations, we've seen a decrease in the number of no shows and that has certainly had an impact. Our intake processes have improved as well and people are being paired with the right advocate according to the greatest need. Finally, we must note that with increased inflation and rising costs of living in the South Okanagan, more and more people are seeking out our assistance.

Based on an increase in hours for both of the Legal Programs as well as the Resource & Referral program, we suspect that next year's totals will be even higher.

We Moved:

When we found out that our rent was going to increase significantly, it was time to find a new home. After some research and cost comparison, we decided to stay in the same building, just moving across the hall into a smaller space. Our new office is smaller, more efficient, and safer. We all really enjoy being in a newly renovated space, and it pushed us to do some long overdue purging of things we no longer needed.

Centre Report

2022-2023 Fiscal year.

Outreach Advocacy:

Our Penticton-based Community Advocates, Keisha and Alex, expanded their outreach activities as they found it more effective to meet clients where they are. Regular visits are now made to Burdock House, Fairhaven, Compass House and Shelter, Foundry, and Okanagan College.

Additionally, increased funding allowed us to launch a pilot project for Outreach Legal Advocacy. This enabled our new Poverty Law Advocate, Mackenzie, to provide in-person legal advocacy in Summerland, Oliver, Keremeos, and Osoyoos.

Budget Growth:

This year saw significant growth in our budget and then we were approved for our largest ever grant award from BC Gaming. This funding will allow us to keep pace with inflation, increase advocacy hours in the Resource and Referral program, and provide more clinical supervision for our advocates. Our proposal was approved just before the end of the fiscal year. The Law Foundation also increased our annual grant amount, enabling us to pilot a Legal Outreach program.

Furthermore, we ran our first serious Giving Tuesday campaign which raised \$14,750.28 dollars between October 1st and December 31st, 2022. We found that most of the donations were made in December, well after Giving Tuesday but we believe that the marketing we did in November helped in keeping us in donors minds when they were deciding on end of year donations.

Thank you to everyone who donated to The Access Centre!

Centre Report

2022-2023 Fiscal year.

Program Changes:

We made significant changes to some struggling programs. After coming to the difficult decision that delivering counselling services doesn't fit within our mission, we requested a transfer of the Men's Counselling program and remaining funds to Pathways Addictions Resource Centre but unfortunately, BC Gaming Grants denied the request. We also recruited a new lead facilitator for RISE-our emotional regulation workshop, Sarah Brooks, who revamped the curriculum for that program.

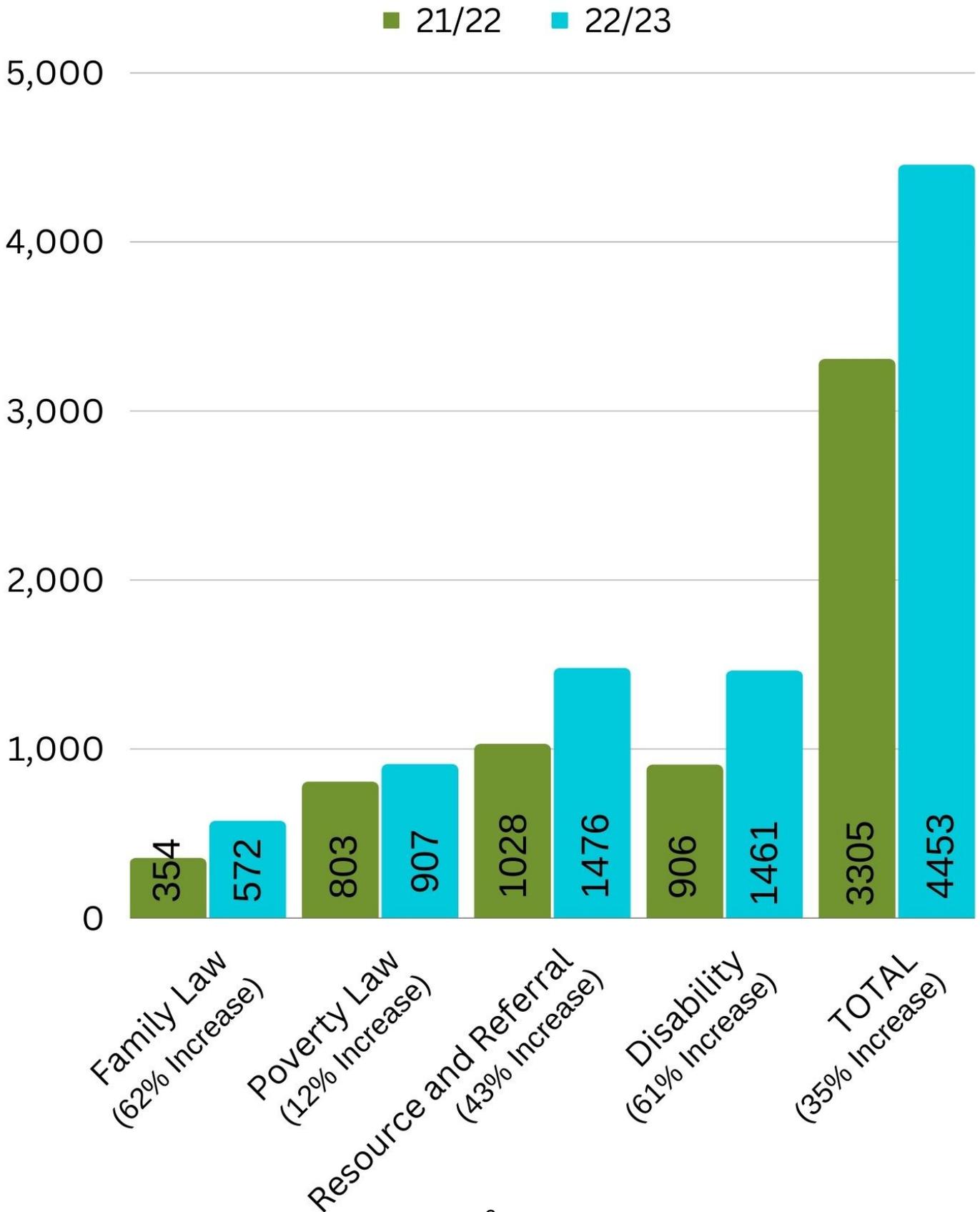
Networking:

We had the opportunity to present our programs and discuss gaps in service we see with NDP leader Jagmeet Singh and MP Richard Cannings during their visit to The Access Centre. Also, after his election as Mayor of Penticton, Julius Bloomfield (accompanied by Rod and Marj King) visited The Access Centre to discuss the housing crisis, our tax program, and other services we provide.

Storytelling:

We began collecting impact stories which have been shared in various platforms such as grant proposals, presentations to 100 Women and 100 Men Who Care, email newsletters, speaking with politicians, and more. At first we struggled with this new way of communicating our impact but once we started to see the response, how deeply moved people were in listening to these stories, it became much easier and more fun.

2021/2022 vs 2022/2023 Statistics Comparison



Program Highlights

A brief look at program activities in 2022-2023

*This is a summary, full program reports are available on request



Poverty Law Program

The primary goals of the Poverty Law Program are providing people with legal information, referrals and representation for Residential Tenancy issues, Government Benefit Reconsiderations, Debt, and other legal issues. Here is an excerpt from their annual report that showcases the work that this program does:

“We had a family who was served a 2 month eviction notice for landlord use of property. The landlord claimed that she needed the tenants to vacate because she wanted to move in to the tenant’s rental property. The family scrambled to find a new place, put their belongings in storage and incurred debt.

The current rental vacancy rate in Penticton is 1.4% and in Summerland where this couple lived the vacancy rate is 1.2%. This means that people who are evicted are pushed into temporary housing in motels or vacation rentals. This can lead to multiple moves, little hope of settling down in a stable environment and sometimes homelessness.

After a few months in temporary housing, the family saw their old place listed for rent at an elevated cost. They realized that their ex landlord had evicted them illegally to increase her monthly profit. They contacted our office for support and thanks to the online rental listing and landlord’s social media posts, the advocate was able to compile strong evidence for the tenancy hearing. They won and were awarded a monetary claim for 12 months of rent, the maximum penalty for this type of illegal eviction. This reward enabled the family to move forward and find permanent housing.

These 2 month notices have become common for landlords who want more money from their investments. They are difficult to fight because in order to prove bad faith the tenant often needs to vacate and wait 6 months before they can file for dispute. In that time they scramble to find housing and incur costs related to relocation. They sometimes are forced out of their communities, away from their doctors, extended family and friends. We have seen people evicted with serious health conditions who have upcoming surgeries and other medical appointments they miss because they have to move 8 to 10 hours away where life is more affordable but less accessible.

Having assistance and support when disputing illegal evictions, like the two month notice this family received, can have a big impact on tenant’s wellbeing. The process can be long and complicated but when tenants are successful, the financial reward can provide some relief. In this family’s case it led to more stable housing and debt repayment. These small wins also discourage landlords from illegal evictions and force landlords and tenants to become familiar with the BC Residential Tenancy Act.”

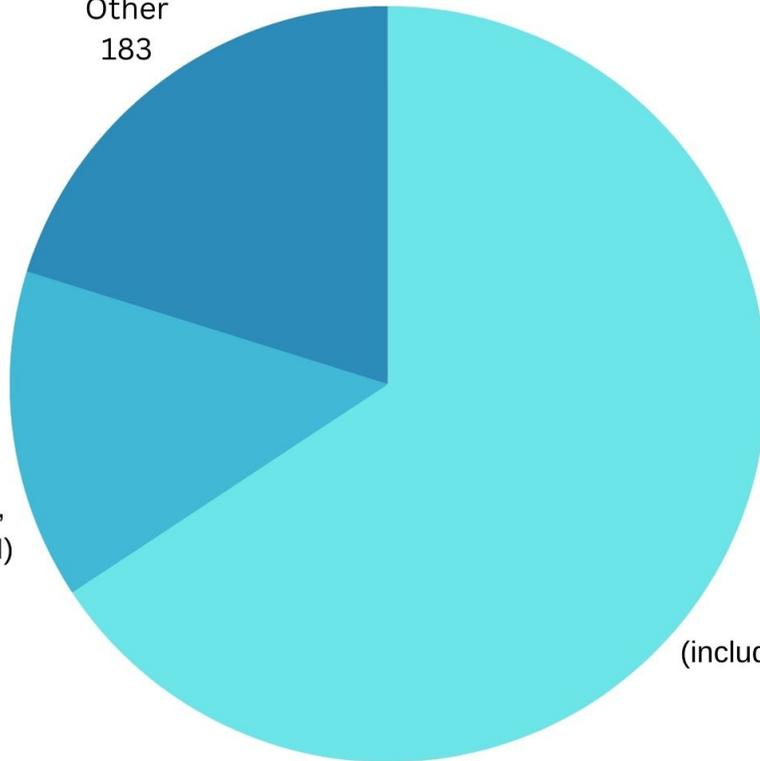
-Legal Advocate Keleah Strack

Poverty Law

Total: 907

Other (Criminal, Mental Health, Immigrant/Refugee, Wills/Estates, Human Rights, Consumer Debt, Employment)

Other
183



Income Security
128

(CPP, OAS, WCB,
Income Assistance, Disability, EI)

Housing
596
(includes Residential Tenancy)

Family Law Program

Maria is married to Floyd and they have two boys under 12 years old. Maria and Floyd had a good marriage until Floyd became aggressive and started to act erratically. It came to a point where Maria no longer felt safe so she decided to leave her home with the kids and went to live with a friend. Maria did try to reconcile but the attempt was unsuccessful as Floyd became even more dangerous.

The Family Law advocate, David, met with Maria and explained her options. First step was to apply for Protection Order for her and her kid's protection.

A provincial court judge granted the Protection Order. Once a Protection Order is granted, a copy of the Order is sent to the other party, the other party then has the option of applying to the courts to set it aside. A hearing is set and a judge determines if the Order stays in place. In this case Floyd didn't apply.

David prepared an Application about a Family Law Matter on Maria's behalf requesting that Maria have the majority of parenting time as well as all of the parental responsibilities, and she wanted a child support order in place. She also asked that Floyd's contact with the kids should be decided by her and the kids.

Again, Floyd did not respond to the Application so David prepared an Application for a Case Management Order Without Notice, a court date was scheduled, and the Application's requests were all granted by a judge.

Maria can now move on with her life, concentrating on raising her children in a healthy happy home. After one year of separation, she can apply for a divorce.

In this situation, there were many steps involved and each one requires a form to be completed, in some cases a very lengthy one. Without an advocate, Maria would have had to fill out the following forms and navigate the court system while raising two kids alone and without stable housing.

“Form 12-Preparing an Application About a Protection Order” -17 pages

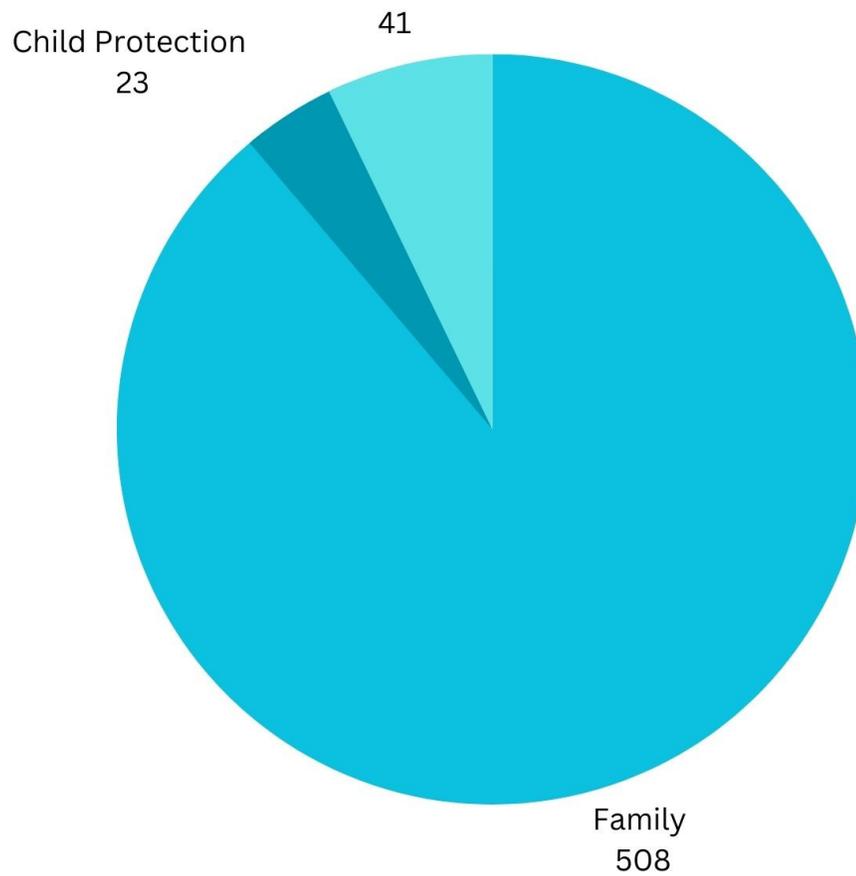
“Form 3-Preparing an Application About a Family Law Matter” -49 pages

“Form 11-Preparing an Application for Case Management Order Without Notice or Attendance” -3 page form with 18 pages of Schedules

Family Law

Total: 572

Other (Criminal, Mental Health, Immigrant/Refugee, Wills/Estates, Human Rights, Consumer Debt, Employment)



Community Advocacy Program Penticton

We have two teams of Community Advocates-our Penticton team, and our Oliver team. Both teams provide Resource and Referral as well as Disability Advocacy. These programs can be difficult to understand because they do so many things! Here are just a few examples:

Attending doctors appointments
Providing learning opportunities
and coping strategies
Communications with other
agencies specifically around
disability or supports

Requesting medical records &
documents
Letters of support
PWD Assessments
Obtaining additional information
for the application process

Identifying gaps in service
Supporting PWS in making
appointment or initial phone call
Referring to another agency
Providing contact information &
next steps to PWS for referral
Tax Intakes

Check-ins
Attending wellness / care plan
meetings
Attending the initial intake /
meeting with the PWS & the
new service provider to transfer
care

“The Penticton Community Advocacy Program has supported hundreds of individuals in navigating complex systems with strong positive outcomes. We have expanded our outreach programs to better serve vulnerable youth and adults in our community while also maintaining high in-office caseloads and a successful weekly drop-in”.

-Keisha MacLean and Alexandria Johnstone
-Community Advocates

Community Advocacy Program Oliver, Osoyoos, Keremeos, Summerland, etc

We have two teams of Community Advocates-our Penticton team, and our Oliver team. Both teams provide Resource and Referral as well as Disability Advocacy. Our “South Team” covers a large geographical area and are the first point of contact for people outside of Penticton needing advocacy and support.

In many cases, the People We Support have complex situations and require the help of a whole team of people; Access advocates from multiple programs, government service providers, doctors and other healthcare workers, and community support networks. This is a situation that demonstrates that very well:

Adrian was faced with mental and physical health issues & a housing crisis and he contacted our outreach office at The Access Centre for support. The most urgent issue was a landlord dispute & legal advocacy to not lose his RV pad rental.

Due to him having some mobility problems, Brittney and Donna made a site visit to meet Adrian at his RV to gather evidence and information to further understand the whole situation. They referred him to the Access Poverty Law Program for help to dispute the eviction notice. The dispute was successful and the final result was that he didn't lose his housing.

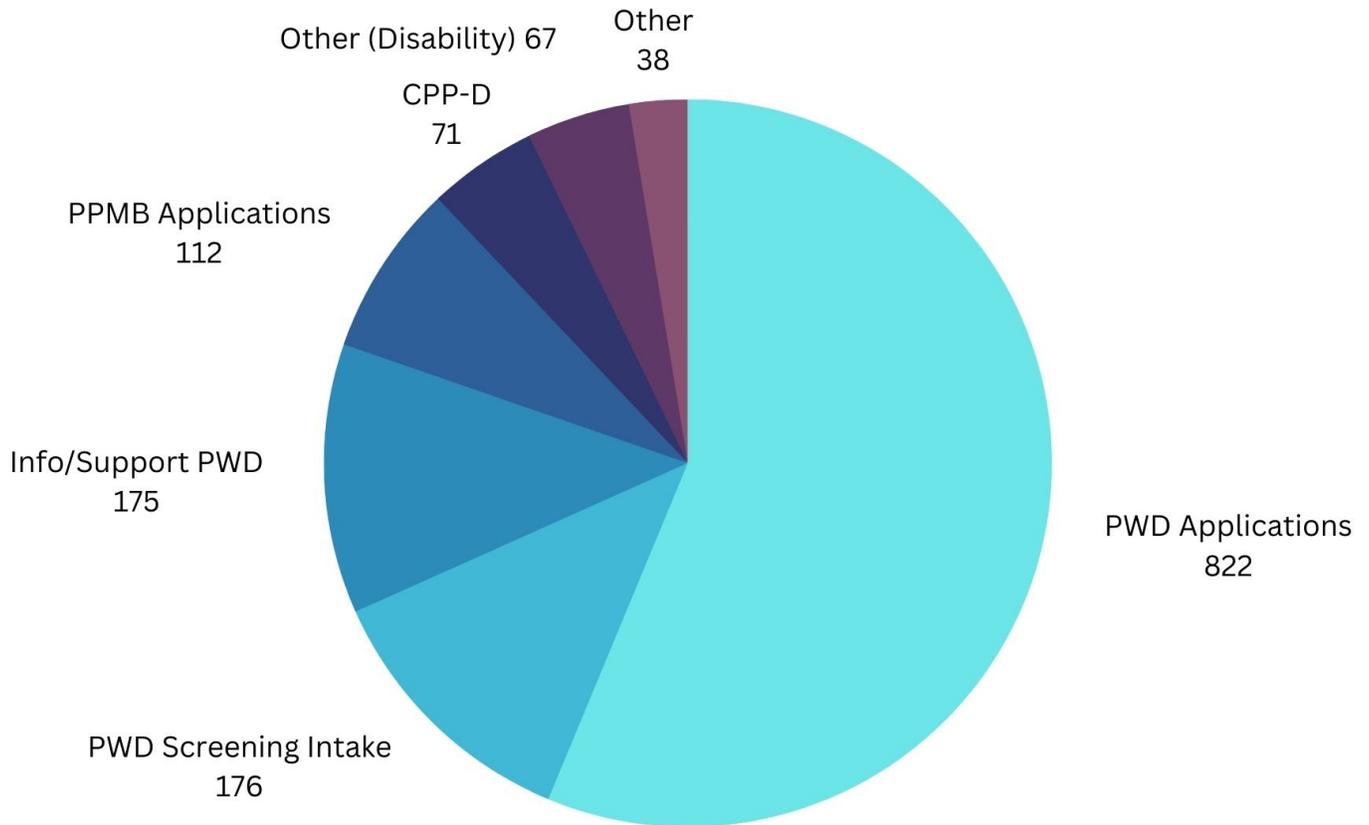
Brittney and Donna also provided emotional support and connected Adrian with appropriate healthcare and social supports. After struggling along without any support for so long, Adrian was very grateful and his mental and physical health were greatly improved.

“Our programs helped over 1000 people in the communities we serve. Without our help, the people we support wouldn't have access to government financial supports, taxes wouldn't be filed and they wouldn't have access to any tax credits or programs available. People would lose their homes, be unable to pay for food or prescriptions. We will continue to look for new and innovative ways to support our community members to find all necessary resources”.

-Donna Ashcroft and Brittney Taylor
-Lead Disability Advocate and Community Advocate

Community Advocacy:
Disability Program

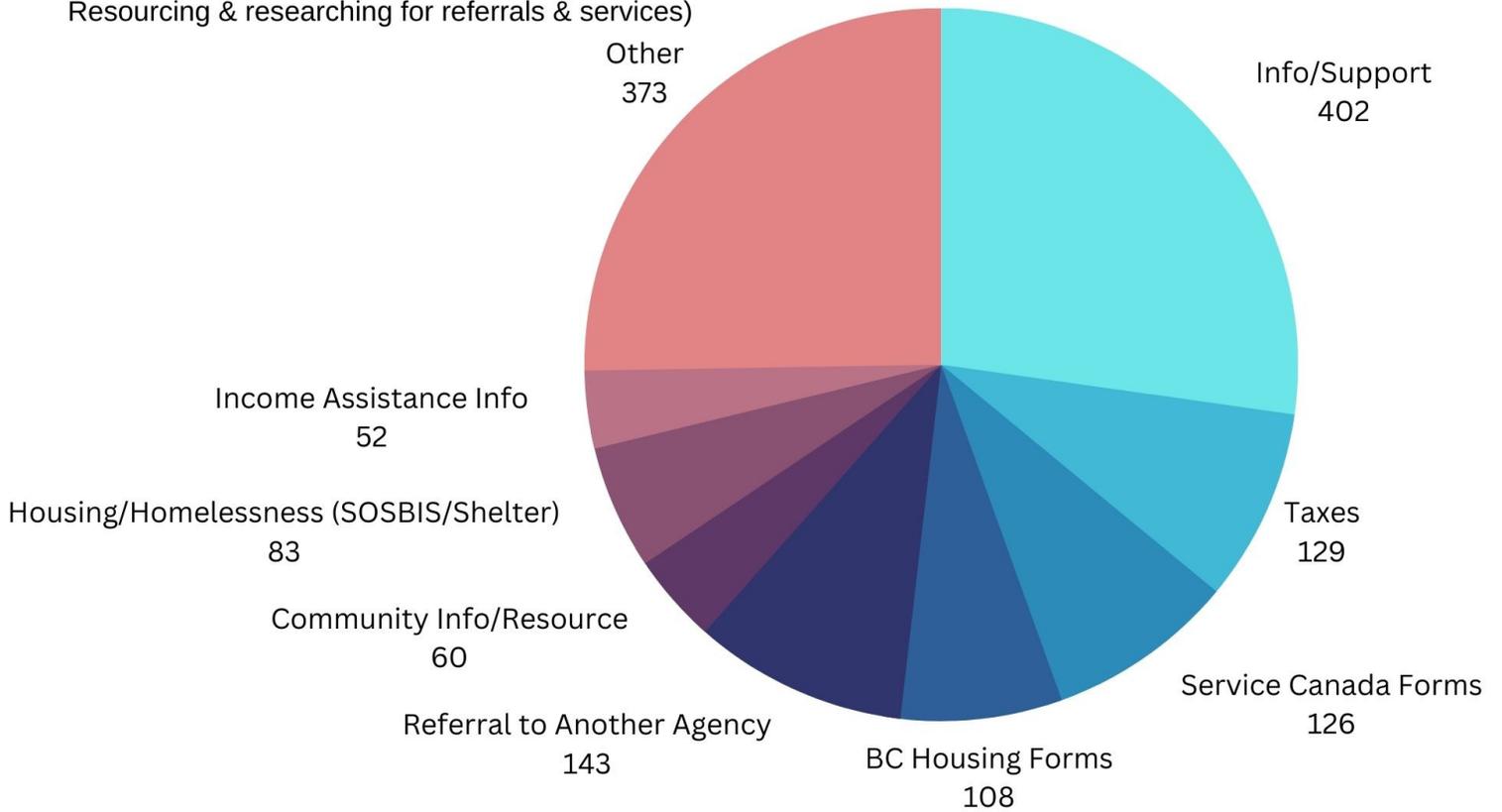
Total: 1,461



Community Advocacy: Resource & Referral

Total: 1,476

(Other applications & forms not listed,
Supporting PWS in accessing funding for required services,
Resourcing & researching for referrals & services)



Admin and Triage Reception

The progress and impact on the other programs and departments hinges on the Receptionist as they are the first point of contact and the one who directs the person to the appropriate program or service.

Mail

Sorting and storing mail for unhoused people

Social Media

Create and post content to social media channels
Analyze and strategize

Taxes

Answering questions
Providing details on what to bring

Red Book

Updating
Publishing
Design
Advertising
Promotion

Reception

Booking appointments
Answer calls
Prepare people for meetings
Pass on messages
Triage according to urgency

Community Referrals

Giving appropriate referrals to other services

Free Shelf

Sorting and tracking donations
Reaching out for things we need
Arranging for pick up and delivery

Food Programs

Answer questions
Keep a waitlist
Weekly reports for Farmer's Market
Coupons
Arrange for delivery of veggie bags

RISE

Keep a waitlist
Reminder calls
Booking intakes

Bus tickets

Hand out free bus tickets
Submit monthly reports

Newsletter

Design and create content for quarterly newsletter

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP)

The CVITP team offers income tax filing for low-income clients. We interview clients, and collect their tax paperwork, then enter their information on CRA provided software. The filing is done offsite. Our in-office shifts are 3 hours and processing times are equal to or greater than the office hours. Each year, with the exception of Covid years, 2020 and 2021, the number of clients and returns filed have increased. We live in hope that we will receive fewer and fewer multiple tax years to file. CRA accepts returns for the past 10 years but only the last four can be electronically filed and only those that are e-filed are included in our CRA count for grant funding. Our year to year stats comparison is on the following page.

Many clients who come to us are nervous, especially first timers and we try to put them at ease. It is gratifying to see some clients who are brain injured and have come in previous years with a worker, now feeling confident enough to come on their own. Many of our clients are seniors or social assistance recipients. Nearly all of them express their gratitude. Our work has a positive impact not only on clients but also on us as volunteers. As one volunteer said,

"I never knew how well off I really was until I worked here. I have a much greater empathy for people living so close to the poverty line."

The biggest challenge with CVITP has been finding and keeping volunteers. We lost three volunteers early in 2022/2023, either because of a move or due to unsuitability. Training is lengthy, in depth, and requires ongoing dedication. We need more volunteers and we need to get them trained this fall. The more tax experience they have, the easier it will be to get them ready for the busy March/April clinic.

"The work our team did this past year is something to be proud of but it isn't sustainable. I don't know what the future holds for the program. For a year now, I have been asking to be replaced as Coordinator and I am still here, trying to keep the program together. The time has come for a new Coordinator to take the reins. I would like to continue with CVITP but in a reduced role, concentrating my efforts into doing outreach work".

-Shirley Pretty
CVITP Volunteer Coordinator

2021/2022 vs 2022/2023 Tax Statistics Comparison



Food Programs

In June we were given 40 sets of Farmer's Market Coupons and due to the high demand, were given an additional 20 sets for seniors in particular. So all in all we were able to help 60 families/seniors have access to the fresh and locally sourced foods to help them live a healthy lifestyle. This amounts to \$432.00 per family/senior and \$25,920 total. This has a positive impact on those folks as well as our local community, including our hard working farmers.

Between our FMNCP coupons and the delivery of donated veggies from Puzzlegrass farm, we are always racing to keep up with demand for these food programs. Each year they grow, each year we stretch, and each year, it's not enough to meet the demand.

"One family said that if it weren't for the Farmers Market Coupons, they would not be able to give the variety of healthy foods to give to their children like strawberries, broccoli and more".

-Christine Baker
Triage Receptionist/Front Office Coordinator

Red Book

The Book of Resources helps to address gaps and challenges in the community by combining the resources all into one pocket-sized book that people can carry in their purses or backpacks and it's an easy reference guide if they need help themselves or come across someone on the street who needs assistance.

"It's so helpful to have them on hand for our staff as well as to hand out to the people we are trying to help".

This book is so very useful that we are currently creating another one- specifically for addictions services, with plans for future books for more specific topics.



RISE Program

The RISE program is an emotional regulation group program which was created when we saw how people's unregulated anger meant they were refused the help that they desperately needed. By attending the RISE program and learning to recognize those emotions and channel them differently, they are able to access these services and move forward with their lives. Here is some feedback on the program:

"How to cope with life in a more positive and healthy way. Regulate my emotions when negative situations arise."

"It helped me to get out of my head and into the present more often and to better regulate my emotions."

"The facilitators were very helpful in helping me deal with anger!"

The biggest challenge with RISE has been attendance, even when providing taxi vouchers and gas cards, and doing weekly reminder calls. We are looking at how to improve attendance by adjusting the format of the group by either offering online session or shifting the curriculum so that each session can stand alone and people can drop in to a monthly session when they are able to.



Acknowledgements

The CVITP program volunteers work tirelessly to provide such an important service. Without their efforts, many people would not be able to apply for so many numerous benefits. They bring millions of dollars into our community year upon year.

We have our lovely Farmer's Market Volunteers and John, our delivery volunteer making sure that people have access to healthy foods.

Our disability program benefits hugely from our intake volunteers. With the high demand in this program, our advocates already struggle to keep up and these volunteers get folks connected efficiently and compassionately.

We so appreciate the work of our long-time WCB volunteer- he would be impossible to replace.

Finally, our team of admin volunteers provide us with some welcome relief and support and give us a chance to make progress on things we never seem to have time to get to.

Thank you!

Next we want to thank our incredible staff team. They show up every day to do some of the hardest and most meaningful work we've ever witnessed. The impact they have on the lives of the people we support is hard to overstate.

It's not often in life that we are given the opportunity to work with people who quite literally inspire us every single day. The secret behind our growth and dynamism is just that. We inspire each other to demolish any barriers we see on the road to equity and justice.

Go Team!



Acknowledgements

Our volunteer Board of Directors deserves a special thank you for their unwavering dedication and passion for our mission. They have gone above and beyond in countless ways, serving as ambassadors for Access in the community and connecting us with people far and wide.

We also want to express our appreciation for Monika Leibel, our bookkeeper, who keeps our finances in shape and provides valuable insights into the numbers when decisions need to be made. And thank you to Peter Armstrong, who has been doing our year end financials for years. A good chunk of this report is his work.

Veronica Vinge has been an inspiration to us all. She guided us through the most thorough strategic planning process we've ever experienced and didn't stop there! From mentoring our Executive Director to helping create effective systems and guiding our growth, she has been a true gift.

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Thank you all for being here and showing your support for this organization and the work we do. Knowing that we are in this together gives us the strength to break through barriers for the people we support.

“The power of one, if fearless and focused, is formidable, but the power of many working together is better.”

-Gloria Macapagal Arroyo



Our Funders:

We are incredibly grateful to our funders for their support this year, including BC Gaming grants, The Law Foundation of BC, Health Sciences Association, LegalAid BC, Community Foundation of South Okanagan Similkameen (CFSOS), CRA's CVITP program, and Civil Forfeiture's Crime Prevention Program. It's also my pleasure to thank each of our individual donors. All of these contributions have made a significant impact on our work.

Other contributions come from BC Farmer's Market Nutrition Coupon Program, Puzzlegrass Farm, United Way Bus Pass Program, Value Village, and Safeway.



Canada Revenue Agency



United Way
Central & South
Okanagan Similkameen

