

We Acknowledge That Our Work Occurs On The Ancestral Homelands Of The Nsyilxcan Speaking Peoples Of The Sylix Nation; And We Are Committed To Cultivating Respectful And Reciprocal Relationships With All Indigenous Peoples.

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## **PENTICTON AND AREA ACCESS CENTRE**

# **2024 - 25 ANNUAL REPORT**



[accesscentre.org](https://accesscentre.org) / (250)- 493-6822 / #209, 304 Martin St, Penticton, BC

*Thanks to Leslie Lambert for the use of her beautiful original artwork in this report*

[leslielambertart.com](https://leslielambertart.com)





## Who we support

We support individuals and families who have difficulty meeting their basic needs; who require help to successfully access programs that connect them with income security, shelter, clothing, healthcare and food.

We advocate for families, tenants, and those struggling with human and disability rights, as well as employment issues.



Penticton  
& Area  
Access  
Centre

## Where we work

We assist people in communities from Osoyoos to north of Summerland, east to Rock Creek and west to Princeton, also known as the South Okanagan/Similkameen and Boundary country.

We are grateful to our partners who provide us office space:

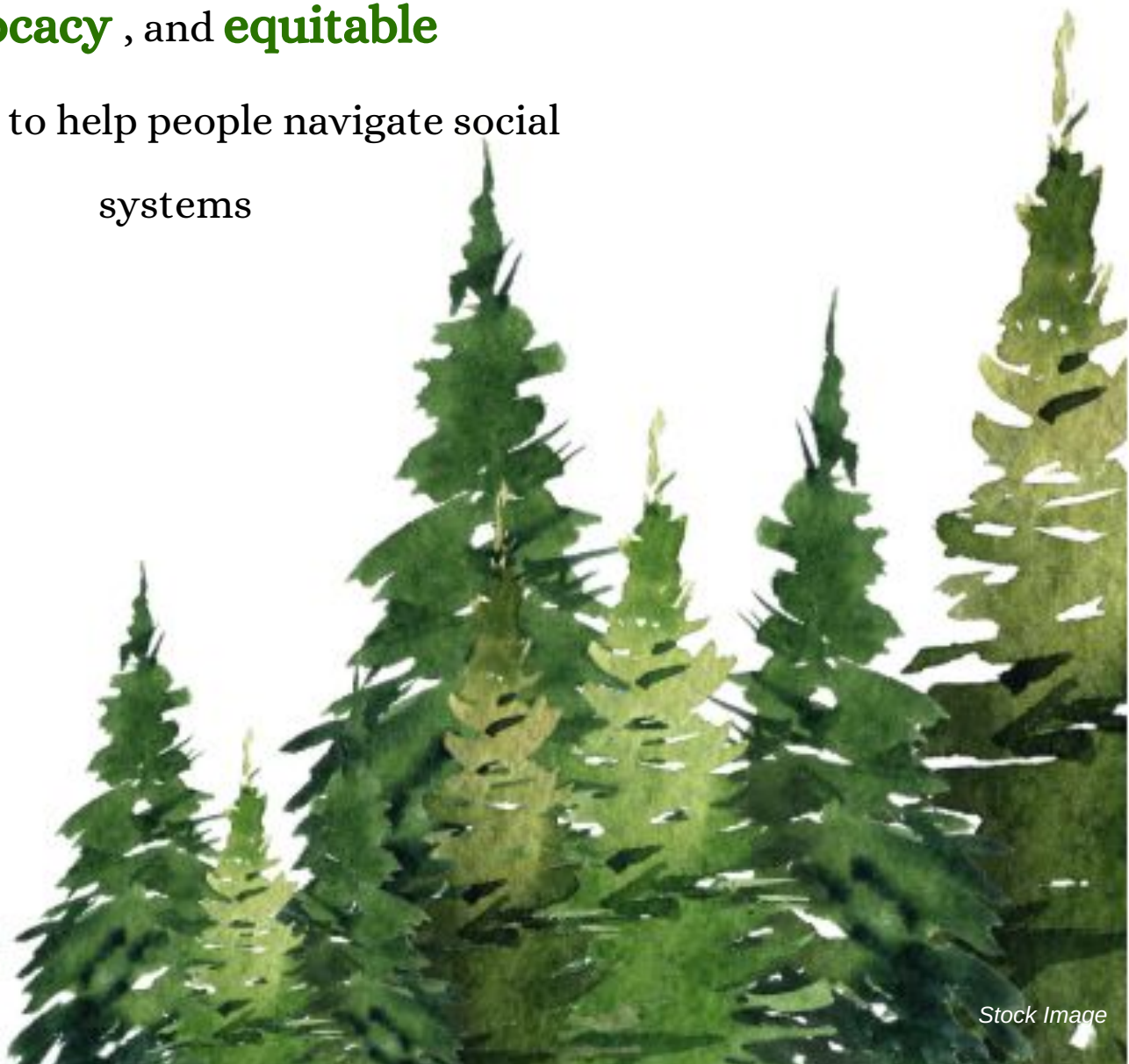
- Summerland Food Bank
- Desert Sun Counselling, Osoyoos
- Park Drive Church, Oliver
- LSCSS, Keremeos

## OUR VISION

All people in our communities have  
**equal** and **just** access to all available  
support services

## OUR MISSION

We use **action** , **awareness** ,  
**advocacy** , and **equitable**  
**practice** to help people navigate social  
systems



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# Message from the Executive Director & Chair

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**Dear members and partners,**

This year has been one of transition, growth, and renewed energy at The Access Centre. We begin by introducing Lucy, our new Executive Director, and by expressing heartfelt gratitude to Brandi, who served as Executive Director until January. Her thoughtful handover set the stage for a smooth transition, and she continues to be an invaluable resource in her new role as Fund Developer. We are excited to see her talents focused on exploring new funding streams that will strengthen our capacity to serve the community.

Among the highlights of the year was another record-breaking tax season. Once again, our tax volunteers were able to complete more returns than ever before, ensuring that vital benefits reached the people who rely on them. In addition, our Legal Advocates attended their annual training conference in Vancouver, bringing back rich learning and new strategies to support our clients.

Our commitment to partnership remained strong. We continued our participation with 100 More Homes, contributed to updated living wage calculations, received generous sponsorship from Wildstone, and launched our first Annual Service Awards to recognize community partners who consistently go above and beyond for those we support. These relationships remind us that the work of poverty reduction and advocacy is never done alone.





Internally, we took an important step forward by implementing a four-day work week. This decision reflects our deep respect for our staff's mental health and wellbeing. Supporting people through complex challenges is a marathon, not a sprint, and we are committed to ensuring our team has the balance they need to continue making a difference for the long term.

We also found a new office space in Oliver. We extend our thanks to Park Drive Church for many years of partnership, and to Oliver Alliance Church for welcoming us into a space that aligns well with the needs of our staff and the people we support. Opportunities like this allow us to be more accessible and responsive across the region.

The year also brought new opportunities for connection. Through 100 Men Who Care, we were able to share our story, meet members of the community, and learn about other organizations doing important work.

Of course, challenges remain. Like many non-profits, we continue to face volunteer shortages, ever-growing demand for services, and the impact of staff turnover, which creates temporary gaps in capacity. Yet even in the face of these obstacles, the dedication of our staff, board, volunteers, and partners keeps us moving forward with determination and hope.

Looking ahead, our focus will be on strengthening program capacity, creating more meaningful volunteer opportunities, and increasing awareness of our services—both for the people who need them and for those in a position to support us. We are confident that with the continued dedication of our community, we can meet these goals.

To close, we want to express our deepest gratitude to everyone who has walked alongside us this year: our staff, board members, volunteers, donors, and community partners. Each of you plays a part in building a more just and inclusive community. Together, we are showing what is possible when people refuse to accept poverty and exclusion as inevitable.

With appreciation and optimism,

**Lucy Whittaker**  
Executive Director



**Elmie Saaltink**  
Board Chair

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# Perspectives from People We Support

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“ The centre has been nothing but helpful and kind to me over the years”

“You helped when there was no one”

"Thank you so very much for the fantastic job you did helping me get ready for my JCC. Your humour, incredible organizing skills, your ability to notarize the documents - amazing! I am so truly very thankful"

“You were caring and compassionate and made a stressful situation much easier”

“I can't imagine how I looked panicking in front of you. Your calmness helped me immensely.”



# Empowering Change

## Our Impact in Numbers

# 5,927

Service interactions

**1,940**

Families accessed gov't & local services

**341**

Families received legal guidance

**14,820 Km**

Driven to support outlying communities

# \$19million

Brought into community through refunds, GST, benefits & supplements

**191**

PWD & PPMB applications submitted

**1,736**

Income tax returns filed

# \$69,000

In-kind donations supporting community

**\$39k**

Farmers Market coupons

**50**

Veggie bags from Puzzlegrass Farms

**254**

Bus tickets

# 2,228

Volunteer hours

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# Stories from People We Support

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When Jullian first came to our Community Advocacy Drop-in, he wasn't sure what he needed—he just knew he couldn't manage alone. With no doctor, no supports, and active substance use, he was connected with a Community Advocate, who immediately began building a care team and helping him access the systems he had been shut out of. For the first time, Jullian had a primary care clinic, a diagnosis for his disabilities, and treatment options that made sense for him.

By fall 2023, Jullian was approved for lifelong disability supports, raising his income from \$950 to \$1,350 a month. With this stability and encouragement, he entered treatment, found part-time work, and is now engaging in his community while continuing on his recovery path. Jullian's story shows what can happen when someone is truly seen and supported.

Tammy has been turning to the Access Centre for support since 2021. Last year, she needed help applying for Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters (SAFER), and this year she returned for assistance with her re-application. At the same time, she faced a landlord dispute and the threat of eviction. Our legal advocate stepped in, guiding Tammy through the process and ensuring all the right documents were in place.

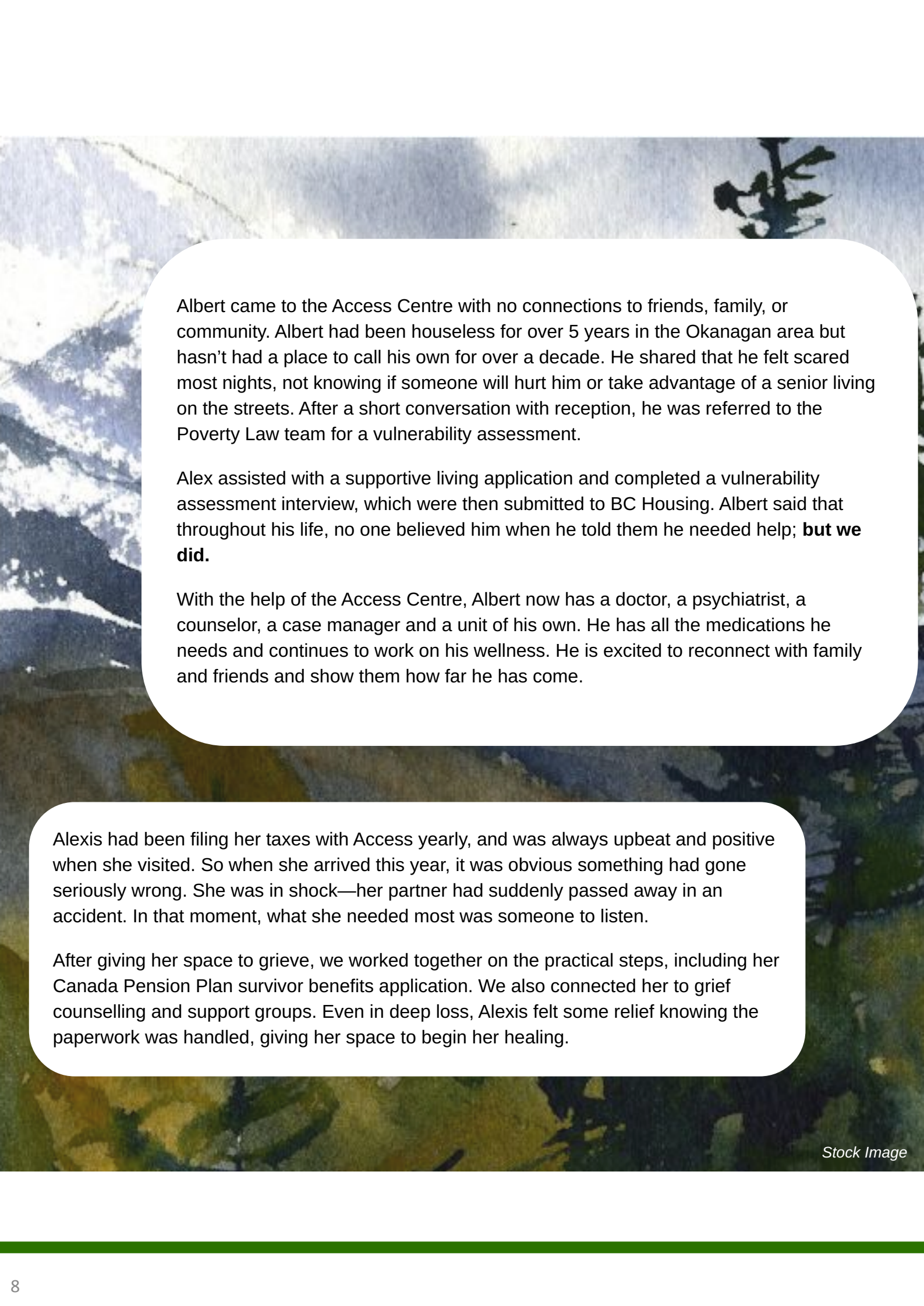
With the support of the entire Access team, Tammy not only avoided eviction but also found new housing in March. What could have been an overwhelming and destabilizing crisis instead became an opportunity for stability and peace of mind.

Kirstie came to us in April 2024, burnt out after years of working as a full-time nurse. Her mental health was deteriorating, she'd recently moved in with her parents and was struggling to keep up with bills. At our first meetings, we simply talked, giving her space to be heard while we mapped out the steps together. Over time, we applied for income assistance and completed the assessments needed for disability benefits.

When Kirstie's application for Persons with Persistent Multiple Barriers was approved, she texted us in relief. Later, when we submitted her PWD application, she hugged her advocate in gratitude. With new medications, counselling, and financial support in place, Kirstie's health and outlook have improved dramatically.

*L Redhead*





Albert came to the Access Centre with no connections to friends, family, or community. Albert had been houseless for over 5 years in the Okanagan area but hasn't had a place to call his own for over a decade. He shared that he felt scared most nights, not knowing if someone will hurt him or take advantage of a senior living on the streets. After a short conversation with reception, he was referred to the Poverty Law team for a vulnerability assessment.

Alex assisted with a supportive living application and completed a vulnerability assessment interview, which were then submitted to BC Housing. Albert said that throughout his life, no one believed him when he told them he needed help; **but we did.**

With the help of the Access Centre, Albert now has a doctor, a psychiatrist, a counselor, a case manager and a unit of his own. He has all the medications he needs and continues to work on his wellness. He is excited to reconnect with family and friends and show them how far he has come.

Alexis had been filing her taxes with Access yearly, and was always upbeat and positive when she visited. So when she arrived this year, it was obvious something had gone seriously wrong. She was in shock—her partner had suddenly passed away in an accident. In that moment, what she needed most was someone to listen.

After giving her space to grieve, we worked together on the practical steps, including her Canada Pension Plan survivor benefits application. We also connected her to grief counselling and support groups. Even in deep loss, Alexis felt some relief knowing the paperwork was handled, giving her space to begin her healing.

Stock Image

# Key events

**Apr 2024**

Attended a council meeting with 100 More Homes to collaborate on housing solutions

**May 2024**

A music bingo & games night at Highway 97 helped us raise \$1,625

**May 2024**

After first joining us as a Law Summer Student, then seeing great successes in the Community Advocacy team, Alex re-joined the the Poverty Law team

**Oct 2024**

Brandi gave a public presentation at the Community Foundation's screening of the movie UnCharitable

**Sep 2024**

Legal Advocates attended annual training conference in Vancouver, hosted by the Law Foundation

**Nov 2024**

Celebrated community partners at our first Annual Service Awards

**Dec 2024**

Welcomed staff, volunteers and community partners at our Holiday Open House

**Jan 2025**

Lucy joined as our new Executive Director

**Jan 2025**

Introduced a four-day work week to support staff wellbeing

**Mar 2025**

Secured a three-year Community Foundation grant to support ongoing programs





# Financial review

Contact us for full financial reports

Revenue		
Community Gaming Grant	\$	231,700
Law Foundation	\$	227,088
Grants - Other	\$	147,013
Donations	\$	21,769
Fee for service	\$	13,150
Other revenues	\$	14,266
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>654,986</b>



Expenses		
Payroll	\$	518,816
Rent	\$	42,700
Office	\$	34,350
Fees, Dues & Memberships	\$	25,014
Programs	\$	15,714
Advertising and promotion	\$	14,182
Insurance	\$	4,078
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>654,854</b>

Excess of Revenue Over Expenditure: **\$132**

## BOARD

**Elmie Saaltink**, *Chairperson*

**Karen St Martin**, *Treasurer & Secretary*

**Marjory King**, *Director*

**Gizella Samu**, *Director*

**Amy Gour**, *Director*

**Priya Sachdev**, *Director*

**Jeff Burgoyne**, *Director*

**Kathy Malone**, *Director*

**Jen King**, *Director*

## VOLUNTEERS

Shirley Pretty

Viv Mohoruk

Christine Elder

Kathy Locke

Caroline Palmer

Faye Wheeler

Clair Chesley

Mody Burgart

Ankit Sachdeva

Sue MacDermott

David Wong

Ron Price

Aerin McIvor

Tina Gamache

John Hardisty

Edna Johnson

Daphne Manaog

## STAFF

**Lucy Whittaker**, *Executive Director*

**David Desautels**, *Legal Advocate*

**Rob Breathet**, *Legal Advocate*

**Alexandria Johnstone**, *Legal Advocate*

**Ishita Malik**, *Legal Advocate*

**Paula Pereira**, *Community Advocate*

**Wayne Millar**, *Community Advocate*

**Brittney Taylor**, *South Advocate*

**Brandi Beckett**, *Fund Development*

**Christine Baker**, *Triage Receptionist,  
Office Coordinator & Volunteer  
Coordinator*



Thank you to our  
volunteers!  
It wouldn't be  
possible without  
them



# Thank you to our funders



**United Way**  
British Columbia



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# What's next for 2025 - 26?

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With the cost of living increasing and ongoing uncertainty in housing, the importance of people being able to access available supports continues to increase. Our focus is on increasing our capacity through improving our systems & processes; increasing awareness of Access Centre - both for those that need our services and for those who can support the work we do; and enhancing our volunteer opportunities.

## **Help us make a difference today!**

- We urgently need volunteers:
  - tax program coordinator
  - income tax preparers
  - web design & implementation
- We have a 5 year sponsorship commitment with Wildstone Construction and need four more sponsors to join us!
- Bid in our upcoming wine auction - details coming November 10th!

