

A large, hollow orange chevron shape pointing downwards, framing the title text.

VICTIM SERVICES TORONTO



2022 - 2023
ANNUAL REPORT

We provide trauma-informed support and advocacy in the moment for any person in Toronto who has experienced crime or sudden tragedy. We work to prevent violence through community engagement. A thriving community where people are safe, supported and empowered.

VICTIM SERVICES TORONTO PROGRAMS



Exit Route

Exit Route moves our services to a Neighbourhood. The program embeds Neighbourhood Advocates in the human trafficking unit and the domestic violence unit in TPS Divisions: 14, 31, 23, 43.

Survivors have immediate access to emotional support and systems navigation to meet the practical and emotional needs to rebuild their lives.

Exit Route also responds to urgent requests for assistance.



Victim Crisis Response Program

This program assists individuals and their families in the immediate aftermath of crime or sudden unexpected tragedy. Operating 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, it is the only service in Toronto providing immediate on-scene crisis, trauma, safety and support services to victims of crime and sudden tragedies.



Project Recover

Project Recover supports survivors of human trafficking – in Toronto and across all of Canada – by working with Canadian creditors to remove fraudulent and coercive debt from the victim's name. The program advocates for survivors, while also ensuring they're not revictimized in the process.



Case Management Services

Case Management Services offer short-term, intensive assistance for victims of a crime or sudden tragedy who experience multiple barriers to accessing services, are at high risk of violence, or who qualify for immediate financial support. The services are tailored to the needs of each individual and may include: emotional support, systems advocacy, financial assistance (limited eligibility), safety planning, personal safety devices (limited eligibility), and accompaniment, to name a few.



T.E.A.R.™

T.E.A.R.™ is a powerful 'healthy relationships' workshop, grounded within a gender-based analysis, and established for youth by youth between the ages of 12 to 18 years. T.E.A.R.™ workshops are delivered by trained youth leaders and adult facilitators in middle and secondary schools along with community agencies across Toronto and reach over 10,000 youth annually.



The Trauma Dog Program

A specially trained Labrador Retriever, Dandy, provides the unconditional comfort of touch and warmth as well as a healthy distraction from the agony of grief and trauma.

Victim Services Toronto counsellors may offer Dandy to clients when in-person appointments are scheduled.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

While Toronto is far from a dangerous city, public safety, food insecurity and affordability are key issues that have risen to the forefront in the past year. In turn, the threat of victimization is real for many innocent people, and particularly so for our most vulnerable.

The pressure many citizens face in light of these issues only leaves them feeling more exasperated – exasperation we increasingly hear from the thousands of victims of crime and sudden tragedy who Victim Services Toronto supports each year. Our clients cope with emotional, physical, legal, social and financial impacts on their lives that can last for months and years.

We understand that anyone, at any time, may need our support, which is why our teams are available throughout the day and

night to accept referrals and calls. And not just from police or other agency referrals – from anyone who needs us. Our teams share a profound responsibility: to respond immediately to someone who is in any emotional state, any position of danger, and in a situation of any magnitude.

Another difficult, impactful issue in our communities is the rise of labour and sex trafficking. In 2022 we supported upwards of 80 labour trafficking survivors – a major increase from the handful we typically encounter in a given year. This is a complex area that is becoming more acute as young people and foreign workers fall prey to traffickers online, coupled with antiquated laws and insufficient services to manage the influx.

In a related move, we acquired Project Recover this past year, an important program

that eradicates fraudulent debt linked to sex trafficking exploitation. In coming years we will build it out from a victim-first lens and aim to broaden its scope beyond Ontario.

We also piloted an exciting new victim support model called Exit Route whereby VST staff specialized by neighbourhood and by theme are embedded in local police divisions and units to connect with people in their communities. The early impact of this program is detailed in this report.

Crime prevention remains an important target for us as well, and one of our main yearly efforts lays in guarding young people against abuse and victimization. In the winter, we hosted a youth symposium to explore healthy relationships with students and teachers in the Toronto District School Board – engaging 5,000 participants.



To our staff and volunteers at VST: thank you again for your tireless work, and for your patience as our organization evolves through change. We are fortunate to earn our team's trust as structures are being updated to bolster our ability to help more people in this city. Our people are the ones who transform victims into survivors – they aren't operators or city officials; they are our clients' confidants, beacons of hope, and trusted advisors.

Finally, thank you to our funders, sponsors and donors for their vital support, ensuring that we can evolve to help more marginalized people, incorporate new technology, and invest heavily in equity, diversity and inclusion.

Warm wishes,



Paul Khawaja
Board Chair



Carly Kalish
Executive Director

Year In Numbers



17,102
total victims helped



3,216
total child & youth victims helped



1,020
of TEAR talk youth-led tweets and posts



34,622
of students reached (via posts)



77
of volunteers



1,974
of students reached through TEAR In a Digital World workshops



190
Individuals served through the Trauma Dog Program

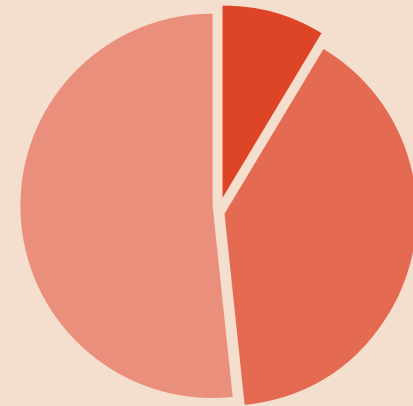
AUDIT SNAPSHOT

REVENUES	2022/2023
Ministry grant	\$2,598,798
Fundraising	\$1,557,084
City of Toronto grant	\$295,096
Grant funding - other	\$427,867
Donations	\$161,195
Interest	\$12,600
Government wage subsidies	\$0
	\$5,052,640

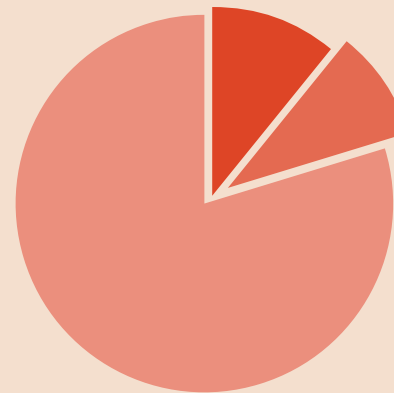
EXPENSES	2022/2023
Administration	\$24,219
Advertising and promotion	\$91,178
Amortization	\$30,197
Bank charges and fees	\$33,356
Board	\$0
Board insurance	\$21,060
COVID-19	\$5,511
Fund raising	\$377,088
Office and General	\$102,557
Professional Fees	\$307,392
Program	\$211,877
Salaries and Benefits	\$3,647,032
Telecommunications	\$21,790
Training	\$39,513
Volunteer	\$4,237
WAGE Project	\$136,366
	\$5,053,373

2022/2023 FINANCIAL REVIEW

Revenue 2022/2023



Expenses 2022/2023



Revenue 2022/2023

- Grants & Interest - 9%
- Fundraising & Donations - 40%
- Government Funding - 51%

Expenses 2022/2023

- Management & Administration - 11%
- Fundraising Expenses - 10%
- Charitable Programs - 79%



“

WORKING AT VICTIM SERVICES TORONTO IS LIKE WORKING ALONGSIDE A TIGHTLY KNIT FAMILY DURING LIFE'S MOST DIFFICULT MOMENTS. WE COME TOGETHER, WE ADVOCATE TOGETHER AND WE STRIVE TO PROVIDE THE BEST POSSIBLE CARE DURING THE WORST POSSIBLE MOMENTS.

”

—GRACE, INTAKE CRISIS COUNSELLOR

CASE WORKER STORY: LABOUR TRAFFICKING

Labour Trafficking: a growing problem

The promise: Good work. A better life.

Opportunities not found at home.

The reality: Living in a basement with dozens of other workers with no beds, forbidden to cook, living off rations. Forced to pay for each square of toilet paper. Medication withheld. Paycheques and passports confiscated. Threats of violence to family back home.

These are the stories we heard first-hand from workers last summer after a major human trafficking ring in Toronto came to light. What initially began as a search warrant of two houses bloomed into a third, with more than 40 victims in need of support.

Though we didn't know the full scope of the situation at the time, police gave us advanced notice of the raids – so we developed a plan. We booked hotel rooms, bought food, arranged for immigration lawyers, found temporary visas, and collaborated with partner agencies to secure long-term housing support. We understood the victims spoke Spanish, so we mobilized all staff and volunteers fluent in the language, and produced pamphlets in Spanish explaining who we were and that they could trust us.

The survivors were terrified and traumatized. They'd formed trauma bonds with their traffickers and were fearful and suspicious of outsiders, as well as of being deported. They'd already had so many promises broken and had yet to experience any kindness in this country.

Thus, our support required layers of sensitivity. For instance, while we found a hotel for one survivor near the airport, We had to reassure them that the location didn't mean they were being deported. Every conversation required a consistent, trauma-informed approach so these victims could feel safe.

We are proud to have found food and lodging for each survivor. Their trust in us enabled them to open up and bravely tell us that there was another location – that third house – with more trafficked victims inside, who were then rescued.

Sadly, trafficking is on the rise, and becoming more sophisticated and complex. What was once isolated to farms and factories is now being infiltrated by organized crime with detailed playbooks on how to profit off of human lives. We desperately need more funding, more services, and stricter laws in place to reduce the trafficking threat in Canada.



INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Amanda

Oftentimes abuse isn't easily recognized: it can begin casually, in ways that can be brushed off or excused.

When I met my now ex, I was a single mom of a young boy, and fiercely independent. We had an instant connection; he made me feel special. In our first year together, I fell pregnant.

His behaviour, however, began to change. He would put me down with insults that grew from subtle to overt. He would bring a gift home for me but in the same breath criticize me in front of the children if the house wasn't spotless. He undermined my decisions, drank more, was home less, gone on weekends with no notice. Despite the disrespect and disparagement I made excuses for him – and, worse, quietly agreeing with his contempt and thinking less of myself.

As years passed, his behaviour towards me became worse, and I became complacent. Though I was miserable and stuck, I said yes when he proposed to me after seven years.

During COVID, I homeschooled the children and opened my own business but was made to feel like a useless leech living in his family's house. My needs were non-existent and inconveniencing his was not an option. I was shut out financially to the point where he didn't help pay for dental work I had long needed, which he had promised.

I finally built up the courage to leave, but returned after two months as living in his family's home was better for my kids. Then his verbal and financial

abuse escalated. His rants would last hours, unbearable scenes in which I would beg him to stop before screaming and crying. He would restrain me, push me, and in one instance headbutted me. Last spring he held me down on the bed saying that he would love to kill me – before leaving with my kids for 10 hours with no contact.

When I called the police, charges were laid and a no-contact order put in place. It is hard to transition out of an abusive home, especially when you are broke. My children and I were sleeping on the floor and I was begging for help. Fortunately, police had put me in touch with Victim Services Toronto.

Through them, and especially my social worker, I finally felt validated as a victim after having completely lost myself. They gave me a chance to tell my story at a special event, which empowered me to feel stronger and more capable. Seeing the audience's heartfelt reaction is something I'll never forget.

Last December I finally found my own place for me, my two sons and my two dogs. This prompted my abuser to lash out and hurt me in the only way he could: financially. I was extremely vulnerable but wanted to give my kids the Christmas they deserved, to keep the magic alive after everything that happened. In only a few days, my angels at Victim Services Toronto swooped in to find an agency that provided me groceries, gift cards and household items – helping me save Christmas. I even got a tree.

My social worker feels more like a friend – she listens and counsels and, to this day, reaches out to tell me about community support that's available for food and groceries. Her efforts to make sure me and my boys are okay is unbelievable. Because of her, I am not alone.

While my vindictive abuser is still a major source of stress, I'm taking time to be in the moment with my kids, going for picnics and bike rides, trying to live our best lives.



“

I LOVE THE SPIRIT WE ALL HAVE. WE'RE SUCH A FUN BUNCH AND I ALWAYS FEEL WELCOME AND SAFE WHEN WE MEET. IT MAKES ME LOOK FORWARD TO COMING HERE EVERY THURSDAY FOR OUR MEETINGS AND FOR ANY IN-PERSON EVENTS WE MAY HAVE!!! WE'RE LIKE A BIG OL' FAMILY!!!”

—TEAR YOUTH PARTICIPANT



OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) are foundational principles for Victim Services Toronto. We are committed to fostering a culture of inclusion, addressing systemic barriers, and promoting social justice. By engaging EDI consultants, conducting an organizational assessment, and implementing various initiatives, VST has made significant strides in advancing EDI within the organization. These achievements not only benefit VST's employees but also contribute to the organization's ability to provide inclusive and culturally responsive support and services to diverse communities.

The following achievements highlight the commitment and efforts made by VST:

- Consultants acquired
- HR review
- EDI sessions for all staff, volunteers, students and board members
- Added diversity to clinical supervisors
- Created an EDI board committee
- Created an EDI staff committee
- Benefits plan improvements
- Created a full-time equivalent (FTE) position dedicated to community outreach and EDI

In 2022, Victim Services Toronto began the work of tackling the historical context of their work and actively embracing change, and equipping leadership to be fluent in current and relevant societal issues, impact and responsibilities in the years to come.



FEATURED PROGRAM PROJECT RECOVER

In addition to the physical and emotional impacts that survivors of human trafficking endure, many also carry another harmful burden: the financial fraud and identity theft that traffickers leave in their wake.

These criminals coerce victims to borrow funds in their own name – taking out personal credit cards – to facilitate the crime: purchasing cell phones, hotel rooms, transportation. In Ontario, the average debt faced by victims of human trafficking is \$23,500.

Project Recover is VST’s newest initiative that provides trauma-centred support to survivors while advocating on their behalf with banks, telecom companies, car rental agencies, property managers and creditors to dislodge victims from their fraudulent debt. VST acquired Project Recover in November 2022 and it remains the only initiative of its kind in Canada.

To date, Project Recover has removed over \$2 million in debt. Our goal is to take it nationwide while ensuring it is guided by a trauma-informed lens.

NO PERSON SHOULD EVER HAVE TO PAY FOR THE FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS THROUGH WHICH THEY WERE BOUGHT AND SOLD.

“

PROJECT RECOVER LITERALLY SAVED MY LIFE. I COULDN'T SEE A WAY OUT OF ALL THAT DEBT AND THOUGHT IT WOULD TAKE DECADES TO PAY BACK, IF EVER. I KNOW I HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD OF ME AND I'M SO GRATEFUL TO MY ADVOCATE WHO HELPED ME.”

—Megan, human trafficking survivor

Project Recover helped her eliminate a staggering \$65,000 in debt accumulated in her name.

Avg age of Project Recover client

21

Avg length of time trafficked

4 Years

Avg number of survivors per trafficker

3

Avg debt per survivor

\$23,500



FEATURED PROGRAM EXIT ROUTE

Victims have urgent, time-sensitive needs that can often cascade in several directions. Due to high call volumes at the VST central office and at the main Toronto Police Service intake line, ensuring access to timely support was becoming an increasing concern.

To address this, we secured new funding to pilot a new vision: a decentralized model where specialized staff could directly connect with victims at the local level.

“Exit Route” debuted in 2022 in four Toronto communities, embedding new Neighbourhood Victim Advocates, Human Trafficking Specialists and Housing Specialists into local police divisions to provide in-person, on-scene support and advocacy.

Despite being a pilot, Exit Route had an immediate impact. An independent audit of the program revealed a host of benefits, including:

- **Reduced crime:** In these divisions, cases of intimate partner violence dropped in 2022 while cases in other divisions rose or stayed level.
- **More prosecutions expected:** Police believe Exit Route will spur more prosecutions as victims stay connected to investigations and feel more

empowered and safer to press charges.

- **Greater trust:** It gave VST the ability to develop closer relationships to victims.
- **Improved support:** Victims received more accessible, continuous support that is set up for the long-term.
- **Closer community connections:** VST staff linked seamlessly with community agencies and programs, helping fast-track victims to services in their area.

- **Stronger VST-police collaborations:** Improved communication between our staff and police enabled a more proactive, faster and tighter web of support for victims.

This unique program has continued through 2023, and is poised to help change the nature of how we attend to victim needs in Toronto.





“

ONE THING I FIND MEANINGFUL ABOUT WORKING WITH VST, IS THE CHANCE TO LISTEN AND TO VALIDATE SOMEONE AS A HUMAN BEING. THIS IS SOMETHING I WOULD WANT IF I WAS IMPACTED BY A CRIME.”

—ANTHONY, CRISIS TEAM VOLUNTEER

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Allied Universal	Bell Canada	Panasonic (plus massage chair donation)
LiUNA Local 183	Beanfield Centre	Humber Institute
LiUNA OPDC	BMO Financial Group	Gesher Canada
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Kenny & Maddy Bodenstein	Hotel X	Entourage Health Corp
NicheRMS	EY Canada	Camcorp Construction Inc.
Gravitas Secure Solutions	MLSE	Algieri-Boileau Legal
Dignity Memorial	Mirvish Productions	
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2022-2023 FUNDERS:

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
City of Toronto
Frederick Douglas Foundation
Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE)
Ministry of Education
Public Safety Canada
Telus Friendly Future Foundation
Toronto Police Services Board
Scotiabank



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