

Land Acknowledgement

YWCA St. Thomas Elgin rests on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, Attiwonderonk, and Mississauga peoples, which are covered by the Upper Canada Treaties, specifically Treaty 2 (McKee Treaty, 1790) and Treaty 3 (Between the Lakes Purchase and Collins Purchase, 1792). This area is also covered by the Dish with One Spoon wampum, under which multiple nations came together in peace to care for the land and the resources of the Great Lakes. Today, Elgin County is also bordered by the communities of Munsee-Delaware First Nation, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, and Oneida Nation of the Thames. We are grateful to work on this land as we strive to build a more equitable and just community.



Our Mission, Vision & Guiding Principles

Our Mission

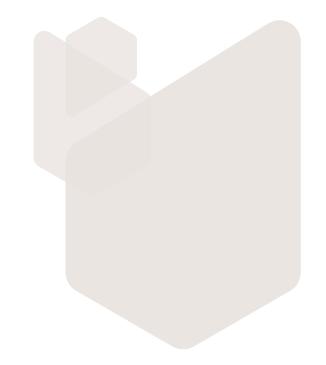
Providing leadership, advocacy, opportunities, and a voice. Empowering women, gender-diverse people, and their families, every day!

Our Vision

We envision a thriving community where everyone experiences equity, opportunity, and self-determination.

Guiding Principles

- Community-Mindedness
- > Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
- Resiliency and Responsiveness
- Respect and Dignity





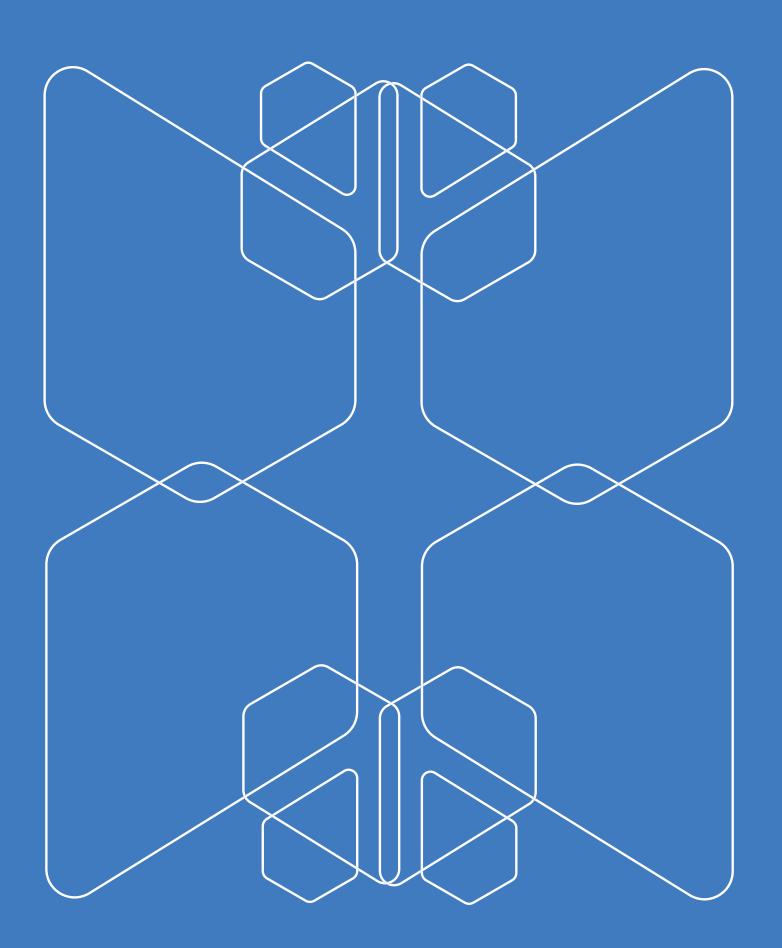


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Executive Director & Board Chair Message

Our 2024-2025 annual report invites us to pause and reflect on the progress we've achieved, the obstacles we've overcome, and the lives we've impacted. By celebrating our successes, we honor the dedication of our team, volunteers, and supporters, while also aiming to inspire ongoing commitment and enthusiasm for the future. We continue to build an organization that is responsive to the needs of our community, that empowers women and girls and offers high quality programs and services. With 100 staff, over 50 volunteers, and over 35 service delivery locations we are proud to serve thousands of children, youth and adults in our community of St. Thomas-Elgin.

Our highly engaged Board of Directors launched our 2024-2028 Strategic Plan highlighting our Guiding Principles: Community-Mindedness, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, Resiliency & Responsiveness, Respect & Dignity. This collaborative process between staff and board articulates our current Vision – We envision a thriving community where everyone experiences equity, opportunity, and self determination and our updated Mission – Providing leadership, advocacy, opportunities and a voice. Empowering women, gender-diverse people and their families, every day! This plan guides our work across diverse YWCA programs and services and inspires us to lead and unite our community through quality programs and services, advocacy and impact, and collaboration and innovation.

In 2024 we were honoured to see the community come together under the leadership of Doug Tarry Homes to build 8 tiny houses in 3 days during a blitz build. This effort showcased skilled talents throughout the home building and construction sector. Our property development has progressed over the year with the addition of 3 duplexes for a total of 13 units to date completed or in progress. With the support of our capital campaign committee, we have hosted several tours of our first fully furnished one bedroom bungalow showcasing the welcoming environment of a tiny home. Last year we secured provincial and federal funding agreements in addition to our City of St. Thomas contribution and the incredible contributions from residents, businesses, service clubs, churches and foundations - THANK YOU!

Our Youth Independence Program empowered young people with developing self-esteem, learning new life skills and preparing for employment. We hear from participants and their parents throughout the year about the remarkable life changes they see – teens returning

to high school, applying to college, getting their first job. This program offers a turning point for a young person and is credited to the hard work of each participant and the personalized support our facilitator offers.

With unwavering commitment, the YWCA supported newcomers with settlement services, conversation circles, language instruction classes and events for newcomer youth. Through our settlement team we support newcomers to feel welcomed, obtain Canadian citizenship and equip them to thrive in their new environment. Our Settlement Worker in Schools worked with 58 families within 10 schools with a range of support services, including connecting families to resources, helping them understand school culture, and facilitating communication between families and school staff.

Our aquatics program continues to grow with swimming lessons and lifesaving training during the school year at 2 indoor pool locations and in partnership with the Town of Aylmer at the outdoor pool during the summer. Over the past year, we provided recreational swimming opportunities attended by 3,361 swimmers and water safety programs to over 1,100 children, youth and adults.

Amidst a gathering of over 125 women, we proudly honored Marla Champion and Carrie O'Brien with the King Charles III medals at our annual Women's Day event. This recognition celebrates their exceptional leadership, unwavering dedication to empowering women, advocacy for local services, and their impactful contributions to enriching our community.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our generous donors and committed funders whose support has been instrumental in our success this year. Thank you for believing in our vision and for being an essential part of our journey. Together, we are making a difference.

We are grateful to our dedicated staff and volunteers for their tireless efforts and unwavering commitment. Your passion, hard work, and selflessness have touched countless lives and made a lasting impact on our community. Each of you brings unique skills and perspectives that enrich our organization, and your collective contributions have driven us forward. Thank you for your incredible dedication and for being the heart and soul of our mission. Together, we are making a difference every day!

Lindsay Rice,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Helen Button, BOARD CHAIR

Executive Director



Lindsay Rice



Chair

Helen Button

Past Chair



Ashley Dunn



Natalie Huston





Alicia Connolly

Treasurer



Maria Fiallos

Board Directors



Surbhi Chaturvedi



Rachel Honsinger



Mackenzie Jackson



Tori Taylor

School Age Childcare

Supporting Children Where They Learn and Grow

This year, our School Age Childcare Department proudly served 350+ children in 15 programs across 10 public schools in our region:

- Davenport Public School
- > Elgin Court Public School
- > Éva Circé-Côté French Immersion Public School
- > McGregor Public School
- Mitchell Hepburn Public School
- New Sarum Public School
- > Southwold Public School
- > Springfield Public School
- > Straffordville Public School
- Summers Corners Public School

We offer
15 programs
across 10
different area
schools

At each of these sites, as well as within our two Summer Camp locations, our licensed programs have created safe, inclusive, and engaging environments where children feel seen, supported, and celebrated.

Guided by "How Does Learning Happen?"

Our programs are rooted in Ontario's provincial early years pedagogy, *How Does Learning Happen?* bringing the **Four Foundations** to life:

Expression – Encouraging every child to share their ideas, feelings, and creativity

Engagement – Providing hands-on, inquiry-based experiences to spark curiosity

Belonging – Creating strong relationships between children, families, and Educators

Well-Being – Prioritizing safety, emotional health, and joyful play

Creating Inclusive, Supportive Spaces for All Children

We recognize that children with diverse needs may face additional barriers in accessing quality childcare. At the YWCA, we pride ourselves on working closely with families and community partners to ensure our programs are inclusive, engaging, and supportive. We are committed to creating environments where all children can thrive, feel respected, and be fully included in all aspects of learning and play. This year, in partnership with All Kids Belong, we have adopted new intake practices to support children with unique needs in accessing childcare.

Members of our department have been lucky to be part of a provincial initiative that focuses on mental health in the early years. While receiving training from renowned child psychiatrist Dr. Jean Clinton, our Educators are working to reimagine the way we see

and support mental health from infancy into school age. As this project blooms, these participants will continue the conversation through a provincial Community of Practice and locally ground us in the work we do.

We connect with 350+ children and their families

Celebrating Growth, Connection & Care

"We have been so fortunate to be part of such a supportive and enriching environment over the years. The educators have played such an important role in their growth, and I truly can't thank you enough for all the care and attention you've shown them. The positive impact you and the YWCA team have had on both of them will stay with them for years to come."

Continuing to Grow a Skilled Workforce Through Mentorship

Our School Age Childcare Team has been involved in the research, development, and implementation of initiatives to support "Mentorship in the Early Years Workforce". Under the leadership of the City of St. Thomas, front line mentors are now receiving specialized capacity-building training. The goal is growing the childcare workforce in a sustainable way that builds capacity and authentic connections. We are very proud to be involved in these regional opportunities.

Our Impact in Action

We nurture **self-esteem** by recognizing each child's unique strengths and voice.

We build **community** through collaborative play, shared celebrations, and strong partnerships.

We champion **inclusion and diversity** in every classroom, every day.

Our **Educators lead with care**—they are the heart of our success, creating welcoming spaces where every child can thrive.

"Your program has been amazing for us this year; the program staff we have are all wonderful! I always know our child is in good hands!"





Looking Ahead

We are proud of the meaningful connections and growth we've supported this year—and even more excited for what's next. Thank you to our families, schools, and dedicated team for believing in the power of childcare rooted in love, learning, and equity. Together, we are raising a generation that is confident, compassionate, and ready to shine.



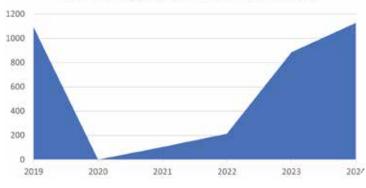
Aquatics & Children's Programs

Children's and aquatics programs provide opportunities to join in physical activities, build skills, make connections and grow community. In delivering youth first aid, life skills and leadership programs alongside swimming lessons, lifesaving training, advanced aquatics and recreational swimming, we collaboratively promote healthy, thriving people and communities.

Through our partnerships and shared resources, dedicated, local staff and volunteers, and with funding support, we deliver quality, responsive programming to have this impact in our communities - together. We cherish the longstanding relationships, new connections, and generous supporters that help to ensure these opportunities are available locally.

Meeting every challenge as an opportunity, with patience, creativity and care, staff and volunteers adapt to change, to different abilities, unique strengths and the individual ways that children, youth and adults learn and grow. We are inspired by each others' hope and

Swimming Lesson, Lifesaving Training & Advanced Aquatic Leadership Registrations



commitment to realizing shared goals and new possibilities.

Every class, every lesson, every swim, and every moment in the classroom, pool or community adds to the experiences of learning, teamwork, perseverance, and small



victories that become life-changing milestones and lasting memories. We are so grateful and proud to be a part of each journey.

Our Impact in Action

- ▶ 157 children participated in Red Cross youth first aid programs including Babysitting and Stay Safe-Home Alone as well as Kids Creative Cuisine throughout the school year at the YWCA and delivered in partnership with local libraries across Elgin County in Belmont, Dutton, Springfield and Straffordville.
- ▶ 1128 children, youth and adults joined in Lifesaving Society's Swim for Life® swimming lessons, Lifesaving training and Advanced Aquatic Leadership programs at the indoor pools of the Ontario Police College and Terrace Lodge and at the outdoor pool in Aylmer.











- 3361 swimmers attended supervised recreational swimming during the summer at the outdoor pool in Aylmer during daytime, evening and weekend swims, with 1875 of these swimmers joining in for free during generously sponsored swims.
- ▶ 16 sponsored recreational swims were delivered every Friday and Saturday afternoon throughout the summer. Thank you Sponsors!
- 25+ individual child grants were provided through Canadian Tire Jump Start, local service clubs and community donors for children and youth to join in swimming lessons.
- 14 youth aged 13+ joined in Becoming a Leader and Emerging Leader Programs to gain skills, experience and qualifications to contribute to and be involved in aquatic program delivery in the Aylmer area, with support from the Aylmer Area Community Foundation.
- In partnership with the Town of Aylmer, 22 older adults participated in Lifesaving Society Safeguard certification for guardians who accompany young children to pools or waterfronts to gain water safety, accident prevention and aquatic safety supervision awareness and skills.
- Partnered with Elgin County Drowning Prevention Coalition to promote water safety and highlight

National Drowning Prevention Week through local proclamations, sponsored supervised swimming and community awareness events.

Over 475 volunteer hours contributed.

3361
swimmers
attended
supervised
recreational
swimming.



Supportive Housing

Guided by the belief that ending homelessness requires collaborative efforts to ensure individuals are housed quickly, safely, and appropriately, our programming is designed to promote housing and life stability. We continue to be committed to offering housing stability and homelessness prevention supports and services to vulnerable youth, adults and women with children throughout St. Thomas and Elgin County.

For over 97 years, we have been a trusted provider of housing supports, offering safe and supportive environments for women, men, and youth. Currently, we operate eight transitional supportive housing programs. Each resident is paired with a dedicated Housing-Based Case Manager (HBCM), who delivers strength-based, housing-focused case management tailored to the individual's unique needs and goals.

21 individuals transitioned from our supportive housing into their own independent living accommodations.

Successfully
housed 65
individuals over
the course of
the year.



In addition to housing supports, residents have access to a range of wrap-around services, including emergency food and toiletries, in-house programs, life-skills workshops, system navigation assistance, counselling, and family reunification supports.

Over the past year, we successfully housed 65 individuals. Our primary referral source is the community's By-Name Data List. Notably, 21 individuals transitioned from supportive housing programs into independent living accommodations, reflecting the effectiveness of our continuum of care and our commitment to empowering individuals toward sustainable housing independence.

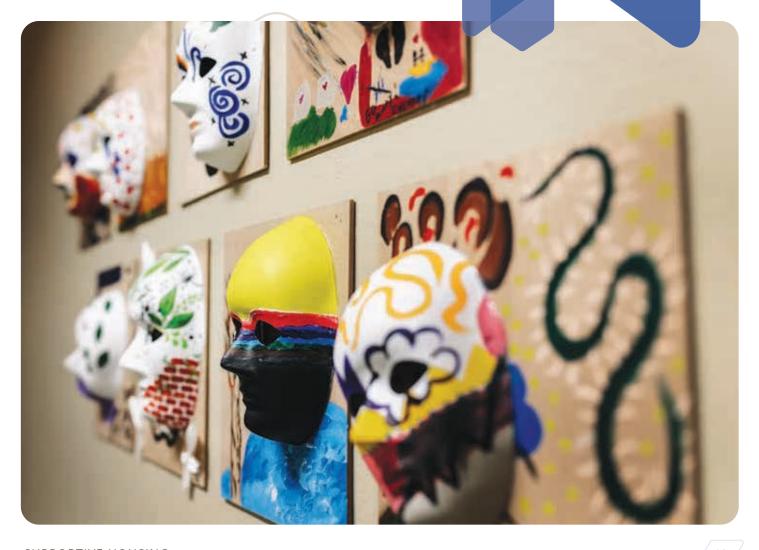
Rising living costs and a 1.4% vacancy rate have extended residents' housing stays to an average of 226 days.



12 > SUPPORTIVE HOUSING



Our long term outcome is for everyone in St. Thomas-Elgin to have safe, affordable, and adequate housing.



Housing Stability

Next Steps Support Services

For the past five years, our *Next Steps Support Services* has played a critical role in enhancing housing stability for youth, women, men, and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. This program is designed to deliver timely and individualized secondary supports that help prevent homelessness, assist in transitions to stable housing, and provide essential system navigation and basic needs support.

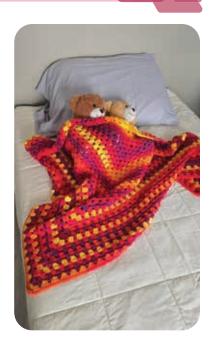
The primary objectives of *Next Steps Support Services* are to provide targeted secondary supports that strengthen housing stability, assist individuals and families in transitioning from homelessness or precarious housing into more stable living situations, prevent homelessness through early intervention, and offer personalized services that address basic needs while connecting clients to broader community supports.

Our Impact in Action

We supported a total of **203 unique individual and families** through *Next Steps Support Services*. Many recipients accessed more than one type of support, depending on their unique circumstances. Services provided included:

- Rental Assistance: 42 individuals
- ldentification Replacement: 6 individuals
- Storage Support: 3 individuals
- Transportation (Bus, Taxi): 41 individuals
- Moving Expenses: 21 individuals
- Start-up Furniture and Household Essentials:51 individuals
- Pet Fostering: 4 individuals
- Emergency Food & Hygiene Supplies: 96 individuals
- Phones and Phone Cards: 27 individuals
- Clinical Health & Treatment Services: 5 individuals
- Education & Employment Supports: 6 individuals

In addition to these direct supports. many clients also received comprehensive system navigation and wrap-around services to ensure effective homelessness prevention and diversion. This holistic approach ensures that individuals are not only housed but also supported in



sustaining housing over the long term.

42 evictions were prevented through the support our *Next Steps Support Services*.



14 \rightarrow Housing Stability

Keep A Roof Over Their Heads

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you to our generous donors for your sponsorship of the 2024 Keep A Roof Over Their Heads Campaign. Together we raised an amazing \$72,081 for supportive housing and poverty intervention programs. Our donors' support is more than just a donation—it is a lifeline, a foundation, and a beacon of hope for those in our community who need it most.

The housing crisis in St. Thomas has left far too many individuals and families struggling to find a safe, stable place to call home. But because of our donors, lives are changing. Their generosity has helped provide deeply affordable and supportive housing, giving women and youth not only a roof over their heads but the opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity and security.

To express our gratitude, we invited our residents to create paintings for our top sponsors, paintings that reflected what housing means to them. This was an emotional and deeply personal process, as many shared how having a place to call home has allowed them to heal, grow, and thrive. Their artwork is filled with stories—of hope, of resilience, and of the power of community. One woman shared that the YWCA quite literally saved her life. Each brushstroke was intentional, each color choice meaningful, as they worked hard to convey their appreciation in the most personal and powerful way. It was a deeply special moment, filled with emotion, creativity, and the undeniable reminder of how transformative our community's generosity and kindness truly is.







Together we raised \$72,081 for our Housing, and Poverty Intervention Programs.

Green Lane Community

Trust Fund

Duggie & Ted Gill

Gold Sponsors

Breaking the Cycle of Gender Based Violence

National Emergency Survivor Support Fund (NESS Fund)

The National Emergency Survivor Support Fund (NESS Fund) is a critical resource that provides immediate financial assistance to survivors of gender-based violence (age 16+ who identify as women, trans, two-spirit or gender-diverse), including but not limited to domestic and intimate partner violence.

Through this fund we empower survivors by helping them leave unsafe or abusive living situations, exit emergency shelters or precarious housing, or maintain stability and safety following an experience of violence. Recipients are also connected to system navigation assistance and community-based referrals.

We provided support through the NESS Fund to 41 women in our community. Each survivor received tailored assistance to address immediate needs while also accessing longer-term supports that promote safety, independence, and healing.



Anti-Human Trafficking Committee

Human trafficking remains a serious and pervasive issue in Canada, affecting individuals of all ages, genders, and backgrounds. It involves the exploitation of people through force, coercion, deception, or abuse of power, often for the purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labour. Vulnerable populations, particularly women, girls, Indigenous peoples, migrants, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals, are disproportionately impacted.

In February 2025, we launched the Anti-Human Trafficking Committee of St. Thomas-Elgin—a critical step toward addressing this issue at the local level. This initiative followed a community-wide symposium hosted by Family and Children's Services and St. Thomas Social Services, which highlighted the urgent need for coordinated action. This committee serves as a focal point for coordinating and driving an action plan aimed at preventing human trafficking, protecting victims and raising awareness about the issue. By providing strategic oversight, fostering collaboration, and ensuring accountability, the committee will enhance the collective response to human trafficking within our local landscape.

New Beginnings

In partnership with United Way Elgin Middlesex, the New Beginnings Loan Fund provides critical financial assistance to women transitioning



out of situations involving intimate partner violence. This interest-free loan is designed to help recipients overcome financial barriers as they rebuild their lives and move toward safety, stability, and independence.

The loan can be used to cover a wide range of essential expenses, including but not limited to rent, moving costs, counselling, education, interpretation and translation services, and utilities. The program is rooted in a trauma-informed, client-centered approach. Repayment plans are developed collaboratively with each woman, based on what she identifies as affordable and manageable for her individual circumstances.

We provided interest-free loans to 2 women through the New Beginnings Fund, enabling them to access the resources and services necessary to begin a new chapter in their lives with dignity and support.

The Anti-Human Trafficking Committee is dedicated to fostering a safer, more informed, and collaborative community response to human trafficking in St. Thomas and Elgin County. Our key priorities include:

- Advising on the development and improvement of anti-human trafficking policies and programs.
- Supporting community partners with practical recommendations and shared resources.
- Promoting regional safety and improving quality of life for all residents.
- Encouraging inclusive, informed decision-making through diverse perspectives.
- Organizing awareness events in partnership with local organizations.
- Assisting with data collection to support evidencebased actions.

Together, we are committed to building a coordinated and equitable response to human trafficking.

Women's Day



On March 1, we celebrated women in our community through our spring Women's Day event. Over 125 participants took part in three workshops as 22 local business owners shared their expertise. The day, sponsored by Elgin Business Resource Centre, showcased Guest Speaker Sherry Ball who shared her journey as an Olympic figure skater, her connection to mental health and what we can all do to be champions of change in our community.

This Women's Day we had the honour of presenting a special award to two amazing women. The King

Charles III Coronation Medal is a way to recognize outstanding individuals of all ages and from all walks of life who have made a difference in their community, province and territories. Across Canada 30,000 Coronation Medals were awarded and YWCA Canada granted us the privilege of honouring extraordinary women in Elgin County.

We recognized the dedication, innovation and advocacy of Marla Champion (past YWCA Executive Director) and Carrie O'Brien (past YWCA Board Chair) as recipients of this distinguished award.

We are so grateful for Marla and Carrie's talents, generosity and service to community.





Over 125
participants
gathered for a
day filled with
inspiration,
creativity and
wellness.



WOMEN'S DAY — \(\lambda 17



What a thrill it is to see housing constructed! To see beautiful homes built with careful consideration of the wellness and comfort of each family and individual who will call them home. Knowing that each home will be affordable, safe and include wrap-around services for each resident. Understanding that supportive housing is more than a house – it is a sense of belonging, it is community, it is the opportunity to plan and dream. We could not be more excited about this housing expansion of 40 tiny homes for 66 new residents in downtown St. Thomas!

Last summer the Doug Tarry Homes team built the first one-bedroom bungalow which our staff furnished and showcased to donors and community partners throughout the year. Our visitors commented on the welcoming space, the comfortable home and the bright future to come.







Of course, the greatest milestone last year was a 3-day blitz build coordinated by Doug Tarry Homes with seven other builders including Collier Homes, DHP Homes, Gilbert Contracting & Renovations, MP Custom Homes, Wastell Homes, WINMAR Property Restoration Specialists, and Woodfield Design & Build. Thank you to each of the home builders,

tradespeople, suppliers and helpers for their skill and dedication – together we are brightening lives and building community!

In addition to generous community donations, our capital fundraising was boosted by securing both federal funding from CMHC and provincial funding from the Canada-Ontario Community Housing

8 homes constructed with over 50 different trades and 100 workers

Initiative last year. Thank you to our community supporters and donors, for helping spread the word, for being a part of the affordable housing solution and for being there when we need you most.

As construction steadily progresses, we remain focused on the horizon—envisioning a future where safe,





18 PROJECT TINY HOPE

supportive, and affordable housing is a reality for those who need it. With each foundation laid and every wall raised, we move closer to building not just homes, but places of dignity, stability, and opportunity for individuals and families in our community. In total, 8 homes were constructed, involving over 50 different trades and more than 100 workers who came together to make this vision a reality.





Together
we are
brightening lives
and building
community!







Settlement Services

Our Settlement Services program continued our history of supporting and impacting newcomers and the community in St. Thomas-Elgin.

Settlement Services staff assists adults, youth, and families to face the challenges of adapting to the new culture while maintaining their own culture and language. Newcomers accessed our service to support their learning around Canadian systems, employment, and education and to build connections and engage in their neighbourhoods. Services offered include needs assessments, information and orientation, and referrals to community and government resources.

"I heard from friends that the YWCA had an excellent English Language Instructor and decided to travel all the way from Aylmer to attend her classes because it is worth it. I have really benefited from her classes." (Evelyn, LINC Student)

Our full- and part-time English language training classes provided newcomers with vital social connections, helping them build everyday skills for daily tasks, progress on their citizenship journey, and become active members of the growing workforce.

For newcomer youth ages 10-17, our group activities offered opportunities to build friendships, life skills, and to share their experiences of settlement and immigration.

Our Settlement Worker in Schools staff has been very successful in connecting with new schools across St Thomas and Elgin County to provide onsite support to youth and families.

Ten wonderful new friendships and experiences were shared by participants of the Canada Connects' program. We match newcomers with community volunteers to connect to their neighbourhoods and community as they move forward on their settlement journey. They can learn of each others' cultures and create healthy, engaged neighbourhoods, and we will continue to recruit for this matching program to support inclusion and respect for all members of the community.

We are very grateful to our funders, volunteers, community partners that welcome clients and youth, and especially grateful to our staff who serve the community with pride and passion every day.









We are proud to have welcomed 327 clients from a staggering 50 different countries, speaking 32 different languages through our doors this year. With the support of the staff and the community, newcomers had the opportunity to meet friends, learn English in our LINC classes, and engage and contribute to the community.

A Settlement Client's Story

A refugee client who could not find employment due to poor English language skills and was facing medical expenses that had her on the verge of homelessness. Members of our settlement team connected her to many networks and exhausted many options. Thankfully, they were successful in helping her find employment in St. Thomas in an environment that allowed her to communicate in her language and paid her a living wage. She is continuing to practice English as she earns enough to thrive in our community.

SETTLEMENT SERVICES — 21

St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership

The St. Thomas-Elgin Local Immigration Partnership (STELIP) is a collaborative community initiative, made up of a council with 26 representatives from local organizations and newcomers to Canada. Together, we work to build welcoming, caring, and inclusive communities. We support the integration of immigrants in our community and promote the value of diversity through a variety of activities across five different priority areas: workforce development and employer supports, community readiness, equitable supports, education, and civic and social inclusion.

Highlights of 2024-2025 included our 5th annual Global Flavours: International Taste Experience of St. Thomas & Elgin, which encouraged the community to check out local immigrant-owned and/or cultural restaurants; successful Welcoming Week celebrations, including Spanish bilingual story times at the St. Thomas Public Library and two municipal flag-raisings and welcoming community proclamations; well-attended newcomer social events in partnership with settlement services with a collective attendance of 300 newcomers; and the 13th annual Walk With Me service provider networking event, which offered intercultural communication training and networking opportunities, ultimately increasing referrals between organizations that serve newcomer clients.

This year marked the end of our 5-year strategic plan. In 2019, we set the aspirational goal that by 2025, 80% of newcomers to St. Thomas-Elgin would progress from settlement to integration within five years of arriving in St. Thomas and Elgin County. While it is hard to exactly measure this outcome, our 2023 Immigrant Survey showed some encouraging results: 75% of respondents shared they had a positive settlement experience and expressed a strong sense of belonging, while 77% considered permanently staying in our community.

As we look towards the future, amidst uncertainty and with St. Thomas poised for unprecedented growth, we will continue to affirm that immigrants are a critical part of our community. They account for around 90% of Canada's population growth and 80% of all labour force growth, bringing new and valuable perspectives, and most importantly, they are our neighbours, friends, family, and colleagues.



300 newcomers
attended newcomer
social events in
partnership with
Settlement
Services



Skills Training & Upgrading

The Skills Training & Upgrading (STU) program continues to be a vital resource for adults striving to build their skills, confidence, and independence. This year, we have seen tremendous growth, innovation, and deepened community collaboration as we respond to evolving needs in our region.

A major highlight of the year was the expansion of our **Tech Connect programming**, which brought digital literacy and foundational technology skills to rural communities through strong partnerships with local libraries and seniors centres.

This outreach ensured that more individuals—especially those in isolated areas—could access the tools they need to navigate an increasingly digital world.

We've also observed a notable rise in interest among adult learners seeking to complete their high school education. This encouraging trend reflects the growing recognition of education as a key stepping stone to employment and long-

term personal growth. Our programs are designed to support learners at every stage of this journey, helping them set goals and achieve them at their own pace.

Additionally, much of our internal focus this year has been on preparing for the upcoming PowerCo expansion, a development that is expected to reshape local employment opportunities. We have engaged in meaningful planning and discussion with community stakeholders to ensure our programming will be responsive and aligned with the anticipated demand for skilled workers.

This year,
we witnessed
tremendous
growth, meaningful
innovation, and
strengthened
collaboration
across our
community.

As always, our staff continue to serve as mentors and advocates—creating safe, inclusive learning environments where adults feel empowered to embrace change, overcome challenges, and take charge of their futures. We remain committed to growing our programming in ways that reflect community needs and helping individuals build strong, sustainable pathways forward.



Uplift Program

This year marked a powerful chapter in the Uplift Program, delivered in partnership with YWCA Hamilton and funded by the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. Since its launch in 2021, Uplift has supported 131 women across Southern Ontario in building skills in Advanced Manufacturing and Advanced Technologies, helping them pivot into secure, future-ready careers.

Designed to meet the needs of a highly skilled yet underrepresented group—many of whom already held post-secondary credentials—Uplift offered participants the opportunity to reskill or upskill to enter new industries, return to the workforce, or earn Canadian-recognized qualifications. Through full sponsorship of tuition, textbooks, laptops, and necessary software, the program effectively removed financial barriers. Courses were delivered in a flexible, part-time, online, and asynchronous format to accommodate work, family, and life responsibilities.

We were especially proud to partner with McMaster University and the McMaster Manufacturing Research Institute (MMRI) to offer financial support for women attending intensive training in Advanced Manufacturing 4.0 and Project Management. This collaboration opened new pathways for women to gain hands-on, industry-relevant experience, backed by one of Canada's leading research institutions.

Community and connection remained central to the Uplift experience. Participants engaged in private peer support groups, where many developed lasting relationships—especially meaningful for newcomer women navigating professional and cultural transitions.

We also continued our partnerships with Fanshawe College, Mohawk College, and Continuous Improvement Consulting 360, ensuring the curriculum remained current, practical, and industry-informed.

We celebrate the lasting impact of this program: women who challenged limitations, embraced learning, and redefined their futures. The legacy of Uplift is

not just in skills gained—but in confidence built and opportunities unlocked for women across our region.

Since 2021,
131 women
across Southern Ontario
were supported in
building skills in advanced
manufacturing and
technologies through
the Uplift Program.





Youth in Transition

The Youth in Transition Program, funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, supports young people aged 16 to 24 as they move from the child welfare system into independent adulthood. Recognizing the challenges faced by youth exiting care, we provide individualized, holistic support to help them navigate this critical life transition with stability and confidence.

Through one-on-one and group-based interventions, the Youth in Transition Worker offers guidance in key areas such as housing, education, employment, life skills, and relationship building. Youth also receive support with money management, accessing health and mental health services, navigating legal systems, and connecting with community resources. The approach is strengths-based, trauma-informed, and tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of each participant.

Over the 2024–2025 fiscal year, we supported 34 youth through this program. The outcomes were both

meaningful and transformative. Many youths re-engaged in their education, secured stable housing, and achieved financial independence.



Others found employment, strengthened essential life skills like cooking and budgeting, and began to rebuild relationships with family. Participants reported increased self-esteem, greater confidence in navigating adult responsibilities, and improved overall wellness. Several also experienced reduced substance use and a renewed sense of direction and purpose in their lives. The Youth in Transition Program continues to be a vital part of our mission to empower young people as they build safe, stable, and fulfilling futures.

Youth Independence Program

The Youth Independence Program is designed to support young people aged 16 to 29 in building the foundational life and employment skills necessary to successfully enter the workforce and gain independence. The program supported 25 youth through a combination of individualized coaching

and group-based learning, helping them develop the confidence and competencies required to thrive in various employment sectors, including food service, hospitality, retail, and manufacturing.

Each participant engaged in a 10-week session that focused on holistic skillbuilding and personal development. Through interactive workshops, youth

explored topics such as effective communication, job readiness, daily structure, mental wellness, and independent living. These sessions were thoughtfully

designed to foster meaningful engagement while equipping participants with practical tools to support long-term employment and self-sufficiency.

Throughout the program, youth were encouraged to set personal and professional goals, develop resilience, and work toward greater independence and

economic stability. The Program Coordinator witnessed remarkable transformations in every participant—including boosted self-esteem, renewed motivation, and a stronger sense of readiness to rejoin the workforce. Many participants reported significant improvements in their mental health and overall well-being, crediting the program as a turning point in their personal growth and journey toward stability.

The *Youth Independence Program* proved to be a transformative experience for many youth, offering not only job-related training but also a renewed sense of purpose and the confidence to pursue brighter futures.

Get Gorgeous for Grad

Get Gorgeous for Grad is a heartfelt community initiative that celebrates the accomplishments of graduating youth by ensuring every student has the opportunity to participate in their graduation or prom with confidence and pride. Each spring, we collect and distribute new and gently used formal wear—including dresses, suits, ties, shoes, and accessories—to youth who may face financial barriers to accessing these items.

This program does more than celebrate an academic milestone—it uplifts youth at a pivotal moment in their lives, nurturing self-esteem, and a deep sense of belonging. In 2024–2025, Get Gorgeous for Grad brought joy, pride, and confidence to **55 young people and their families**, giving them the chance to mark their achievements with dignity, style, and the support of a caring community.

Thanks to the unwavering generosity of our donors and the heartfelt commitment of our staff and volunteers, this program continues to be a powerful reminder that every young person deserves to feel seen, valued, and celebrated. 55 young people and their families were supported this year.







ClothingWorks Coat Drive

In partnership with *ClothingWorks*, a division of *Goodwill Industries Ontario Great Lakes*, we proudly supported our community through the gift of warmth this past winter. From August to October, seven Goodwill retail locations collected donations of coats, hats, gloves, scarves, warm socks, hoodies, and snowsuits in preparation for what became our largest Coat Drive to date.

Thanks to the dedication of 17 incredible volunteers and staff from both ClothingWorks and our organization, we welcomed over **400 visitors** and distributed more than **1,486 winter items**—free of charge—to individuals and families in need.

The event was designed to offer a dignified and inclusive shopping experience for all participants. Guests included women, men, children, international students from Fanshawe College experiencing their

first Canadian winter, YWCA residents, and learners and clients from various community programs.

Together, we helped ensure that members of our community stayed warm, safe, and supported during the coldest months of the year.





Rachel's Story

"I'd like to start by asking you all a very simple question: have you ever felt uncertain about something? I'm sure you have.

Perhaps the most obvious source of uncertainty is the future, right? I want you to hold onto that feeling for a moment... Now imagine being told, right now, that you're no longer allowed to go back home. Really think about how it would feel not knowing where you're going to sleep tonight, or if you're even going to eat today. It's definitely not the best feeling.

Now, imagine the feeling you'd get if someone told you that you have a place to sleep. There's plenty of food available, and there are so many caring individuals who want to help you. That feeling? That's sweet, sweet relief. And that's exactly how I felt during my first encounter with the YWCA.

Let's start at the beginning. I was homeless way too young. At the same time, I was dealing with multiple mental health concerns that were undiagnosed at the time. The only form of medication or therapy I knew was smoking marijuana. Sometimes I could stay at a friend's house, but other times, I'd sleep on a hill in a park in Aylmer. A lot of the time, I slept in the loft of the barn where I used to work. I was still trying to attend school, and thankfully, my guidance counsellors and teachers were a big help.

One of my guidance counsellors connected me with a very kind lady, who eventually introduced me to the YWCA. At the time, the YW didn't have any rooms available, so they got me a room in a hotel for a few days until I was able to move into the Women's Residence at the YWCA. But I didn't just get a warm bed — I got my own room.

I want to quickly highlight how important it is to have privacy after experiencing trauma. Having your own space can give you a sense of safety and stability. I was given access to food, a phone, clean towels, bedding, personal hygiene products, and — most importantly — a support system.

Later, I was introduced to Harmony House, and I can't

even begin to describe how excited I was to move in! It was such a big change. The environment was completely different — it felt safe and comfy. After moving in, I continued going to school and started to settle in.

But as time passed, the impact of once being homeless really



started to set in. I was no longer in survival mode — I had entered depression mode. I stopped going to school and was eventually asked to leave because of my lack of attendance. I thought maybe getting a job would help, so with my worker's support, I completed a resume and was hired by a cleaning company. The YW even helped me get funding for my work uniforms and shoes — which I truly appreciated.

Unfortunately, once I started working, my mental health declined even more, to the point where I had to quit. My worker was incredibly supportive. I received taxi vouchers to get to my doctor's appointments, funding for therapy, and help finding a therapist.

Eventually, I was chosen to be the Resident Advisor at Harmony House. I've always been drawn to leadership roles, and this opportunity gave me a huge boost in self-confidence. It really makes a difference when people believe in you.

I also attended the Youth Independence Program through the YWCA, which allowed me to earn the last high school credits I needed to graduate — best feeling ever! I also received certifications in CPR and safe food handling, which helped me with future job opportunities.

Now, days feel calmer. I'm looking forward to growing as a person and enjoying the activities made possible by the YWCA."

Poverty Interventions

Getting Ahead

Living in poverty means facing daily challenges in meeting basic needs like food, housing, healthcare, and stability - often with limited access to resources or opportunities for long-term improvement. Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World is a multi-week program designed to empower individuals experiencing poverty by helping them build the resources necessary for a more stable and prosperous future - for themselves, their families, and their communities. The program's core objective is to explore the impact of poverty and to foster actionable strategies for positive change.

Structured as an engaging and reflective experience, we offered two intensive sessions during the year, supporting 11 participants as they examined their

lives, explored new insights, set personal goals, and developed practical plans for a more successful future. Participants collaborated to generate ideas for strengthening their communities and build a supportive network to assist them along their journey.

Each Getting Ahead participant
set personal goals and with
the support of the group-based
intervention, 91% experienced housing
stability, 7 graduated the program with
a focus on employment, 2 enrolled in college, and
3 participants started skills training and upgrading
classes.

supplementary
food support

m
ou

Food Security

Access to nutritious food and essential resources is fundamental to supporting a healthy and stable lifestyle. As the cost of living—particularly food—continues to rise year over year, the urgency of addressing food insecurity becomes increasingly

critical. In response, all of our programs are designed to ensure that participants and residents have consistent access to food and nutrition supports.

This year, we continued to provide a range of food security initiatives, including grocery store gift cards, group meal preparation, budget-conscious shopping education, and access to on-site emergency food supplies. These efforts are aimed at reducing daily stressors related to food access and promoting long-term well-being.

To strengthen our food support systems, we were proud to deepen our partnership with **Harvest Hands**, a local not-for-profit food salvage and distribution centre. Through this collaboration, we were able to offer a wider variety of food options—including non-perishable items, fresh fruits and vegetables,

and whole grains—to individuals across all our programs. Approximately 120 participants received monthly supplementary food support, reinforcing our commitment to making food security a consistent reality for women, men, and youth in our community.

In addition, we continued our valued partnership with COBS Bread, whose donations of fresh baked goods were a welcome addition to our monthly distributions. These collaborations reflect our holistic approach to food security—combining immediate relief with long-term community support.

Additionally, 180 family emergency food boxes were distributed this year.

28 POVERTY INTERVENTIONS

120 individuals

were provided

monthly



Over 250 guests joined us for our 3rd Annual Summer Night Social at the beautiful property of Wildflowers Farm. From chicken tossing and tug of war to the amazing energy of The Sheridan Band, it was a night to remember indeed! Guests challenged one another's generosity in an epic double-down live auction hosted by Mike Vecchio as dinner for six prepared by and donated by Mayor Joe Preston was the highlight of the auction. A delicious meal was prepared by Salt and Pepper Meals with the night ending fireside with a singalong by Adam Blair and Dan Stewart. Our hearts were full of the generosity of our guests, our 17 sponsors and the more than 75 companies including Westjet and

St. Thomas Canadian Tire who donated to our raffle and silent auction. Together we raised over \$33,000 in support of our annual fundraiser, which sustains all of our essential programs serving women, youth, and families across the region. Special thanks to our Legacy Sponsor: Masco Canada, our Tribute Sponsor: Cole-Munro, as well as our Patron Sponsors: Belmont Swans, Casey's Kitchens, Cheryl and Steve Holmes, Elgin Dental Centre, Homewood Pope Wealth Advisory Group at CIBC Wood Gundy, Dutch Brothers & East Elgin Concrete Forming, Highlands Apartments, Elgin Realty through Angela DeVries, Muma Manufacturing, Royal Containers Ltd, Royal LePage Triland Realty through Ainslee Tracey, Steelway Building Systems and Scotiabank.

Together we raised over \$33,000!



MASCO Building home together.









SUMMER NIGHT SOCIAL _____ 29

Volunteer Recruitment

Over the last three years we have strategically developed several key volunteer roles to enhance our spaces, programs and services for our community. Today we are proud to share we have over 40 active volunteers. Each role has been customized to strengthen our relationships with our clients, volunteers, social service partners and build lasting engagement opportunities through Aquatics Assistants, Building Assistants, Canada Connects Mentors, Childcare Assistants, English Language Tutors, Receptionists, Bingo Assistants, and our Helping Hands Volunteers.

We share our sincere thanks to the many individuals who serve on our board of directors

and committees, tutors, those who work in our housing programs, youth initiatives, and so much more. We simply could not do the work we do without the support of our dedicated volunteers. As a not-for-profit organization, our volunteer's compassion and commitment are the heartbeat of our mission—and the reason so many in our community feel seen, supported, and empowered.

Today we are proud to share we have over 40 dedicated volunteers.







Donors & Sponsors

*Donors marked with * are monthly pledge donors.

\$50,000+

Doug Tarry Ltd.

Geerlinks Home Hardware

\$10,000 - \$49,000

Anne-Marie Nicli

Co-operators – Debbie Hamilton & Associates Ltd.

Donna Kerrigan

Duggie & Ted Gill

Lynn Disbrowe in memory of George & Peter Disbrowe

Masco Canada Ltd.

Sine Herold & the Estate of William Herold

St. Thomas Anglican Church and in memory of George and Cela Sloan

\$5,000 - \$9,999

BPLM Ltd.

Glynis & David Ramsay

Grace & Gerald Schipper

Helen & Gerald Phillips

Julia Kolb & Kirk Maltby

Libro Credit Union – London

Lions Club of Port Stanley

Liz & David Currie

Royal Canadian Legion Br. 41

\$2,500 - \$4,999

Aylmer Express Ltd.

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Kelley Armstrong (K.L.A. Fricke Inc.)

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Kim Ryckman*

DONORS & SPONSORS — 31

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Sheri Williamson

St. John's Presbyterian Church

Susan & Brian Chase in memory of Greg Grondin

Susan & Dan Boehm*

Suzanne Lefebvre

Winnifred Medcalf in memory of Greg Grondin

Funders & Foundations

Arlene & Terry Campbell Charitable Foundation

Aylmer Area Community Foundation C & J Wright Family Fund within the London Community Foundation Canadian Tire Jump Start Charities

City of St. Thomas

Don & Hazel Williams Charitable Foundation

Don & Helen Black Fund within Elgin St. Thomas Community Foundation

Estate of Donna Vera Bushell within Elgin St. Thomas Community Foundation

Family & Children's Services of St. Thomas and Elgin

Green Lane Community Trust

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Junior Jumbo Poverty Initiative Fund within Elgin St. Thomas Community Foundation

London & St. Thomas Association of REALTORS® (LSTAR)

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

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The Lawson Foundation

Town of Aylmer

United Way Elgin Middlesex

White Family Fund within Elgin St. Thomas Community Foundation

YWCA Canada

YWCA Hamilton

The YWCA St.Thomas-Elgin would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who donated to us from April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025.

While every single donation makes a positive and lasting difference, we would like to recognize those who gave donations totaling \$100 or more. We regret any errors or omissions. Thank you all for building a brighter community.

Thank you to all our sponsors and donors for building a brighter community.













2024-25 Financial Statement

As of March 31, 2025

Revenue and Expenditures –

RECEIPTS

Grants	\$3,232,238
Program Fees	\$1,063,976
Donations and Event Proceeds	\$234,177
Residence Rent	\$228,217
Unrealized Gain on Investments	\$204,099
Investment Income from Non-Restricted Funds	\$128,893
▶ Deferred Capital Contributions	\$73,632
Investment Income from Restricted Funds	\$12,097
TOTAL	\$5,177,329

EXPENSES

Excess of revenues over expenditures for the year	\$617,014
TOTAL	\$4,560,315
Amortization	\$124,200
Service Charges and Bad Debt Expenses	\$21,198
Office and Administration	\$108,135
Fundraising	\$23,539
Staff and Volunteer Expenditures	\$28,578
Promotion and Publicity	\$23,134
Repairs and Maintenance	\$13,342
Materials and Supplies	\$479,499
Professional Fees and Contracted Services	\$366,986
Salaries and Benefits	\$3,371,704

These funds have been internally restricted to the 2025-2026 operational budget and program reserves as approved by the Board of Directors.

Ways to Give

Since 1902 we have committed to achieving sustainable supportive housing, skills training, advocacy, equity and social justice, as we embrace difference and diversity among people through the variety of programs and services we provide. With the need for supportive housing at a crisis point, growing demand for skills training and education upgrades, rising newcomer settlement, and an increasing desire for advanced youth opportunities through employment, financial literacy, and wellness activities—your gifts are truly invaluable to us. We are deeply grateful for your generosity and promise to honour it by using every donation in the most impactful and effective way possible.

Choose how you'd like to support your community today!

Become a Monthly Donor – With your monthly gift, you help to create long-term sustainable solutions to meet the needs of families across Elgin County.

Leave a Legacy – When you leave a charitable gift in your will, you pledge to help us empower women and their families, create opportunities for youth at risk, advocate for diversity, and engage students through leadership, and provide before and after school childcare.

Host a Third-Party Event – Bring your network together in a creative, action-oriented way to raise funds for one of our programs that is near and dear to your heart be it a golf tournament, charity BBQ, or even a concert.

Make a Gift in Honour – Make a donation in memory or in honour of someone special, or to celebrate an important occasion.

Give the Gift of Time – Volunteering with YWCA St.Thomas-Elgin gives you the chance to make an impact in your community, connect with others, share your life experiences and skills.









