



West Kootenay Women's Association (WKWA)

Annual Report 2021/2022

The West Kootenay Women's Association gratefully acknowledges that the Nelson & District Women's Centre rests on, and operates within, the traditional and unceded territories of the Sinixt (Lakes), the Syilx (Okanagan), and the Ktunaxa Nations. We recognize the presence of other First Nations, Inuit and Metis people, and their contributions to our communities.

WKWA Vision

Women's equality in a world free of oppression.

WKWA Mission

Creating healthy community through providing support for women and advancing gender equality.

WKWA Purposes (from our Constitution):

- To promote equitable treatment of women, in the belief that every woman has the right to control over her social, economic and physical circumstances.
- To work together with women of every race, class, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, age, size, spiritual or political belief.
- To supply and render service of a charitable and educational nature to women.
- To establish resources for women.
- To co-operate with other organizations which have objectives similar to the objectives of the Association.
- To operate as a non-profit organization to administer and employ its property, assets and rights, for the purpose of promoting, or aiding in the promotion of, the welfare of all women.
- To receive, acquire and hold gifts, donations, legacies and devices.

Nelson & District Women's Centre Staff (as of Oct. 6, 2022)

Terri-Lynn Wilkinson, Executive Director
Melanie Berndt, Drop-in Coordinator
Megan McMichael, Volunteer Coordinator
Michelle Oakley, Garden Coordinator

WKWA Board of Directors (as of Oct. 6, 2022)

Zabree MacInnes, Director & Co-Chair (to AGM 2023)
Donna Macdonald, Director & Co- Chair (to AGM 2022)
Kerry Marsland, Director & Treasurer (to AGM 2022)
Nora Janssen, Director & Secretary (to AGM 2023)
Claire Amiel, Director (to AGM 2023)
Suzannee Chappell, Director (to AGM 2023)
Jean-Aubin Gardiner, Director (to AGM 2023)
Malia Joy, Director (to AGM 2022)

Please Note: This annual report covers activities of the Nelson & District Women's Centre from April 1st, 2021 to March 31st, 2022, corresponding to our past fiscal year. However, we will also report on important events and happenings from April 1 to the date of this AGM.

Overview of the Year

The fiscal year 2021-2022 continued to be heavily influenced by COVID, as we slowly but surely started to experience the re-opening of the Centre that we've all longed for. As always, there were challenges and opportunities!

In July 2021, we were thrilled to bring on board our new Executive Director, Terri-Lynn Wilkinson. She faced a steep learning curve and several challenges, but met them with grace and determination. Her commitment to the Women's Centre runs deep, and keeps her afloat on the difficult, too-much-to-do days. Terri-Lynn is a gracious and enthusiastic ambassador in the community and has been successful in building relationships and in securing many grants to support our work.

Terri-Lynn has also built a wonderful staff team. Megan McMichael brings energy and extensive experience to her role as Volunteer Coordinator and Melanie Berndt brings compassion and a commitment to the feminine to her role of Drop-in Coordinator. Together they have worked hard to improve the experiences of all visitors to our Centre and to grow a great team of volunteers to fill various jobs.

We were also pleased to welcome practicum student Morgan McLean who completed her 4th year practicum hours with us and graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work degree in June. Morgan was a familiar and welcoming presence in our Drop-in program from January through April. She played an key role in the success of our silent auction fundraising event, helped initiate our tributes to strong female leaders on our social media platforms, and was an excellent mentor to the girls registered within our HER program. We wish her the best in her new role working within the field of social work in Trail, BC.

In 2021 we received funding for two positions from the Canada Summer Jobs program. We were delighted to work with Sophie Edney as our community engagement coordinator and Malia Joy as our garden coordinator. Many thanks to both of them. In 2022 we also received funding for two positions and we joined the many employers struggling to fill those positions. In the end, we weren't successful but found some other funds to hire the delightful Michelle Oakley to coordinate our garden (and so much more).

Our Board of Directors has been quite stable since the last AGM, representing a range of ages and life and work experience. As well as the directors elected at the 2021 AGM, Nora Janssen was appointed in February and Malia Joy in March 2022. However, we sadly lost our respected director Yvette Janzen, who passed away in April 2022. Yvette led a rich life as a feminist

activist, outdoors lover, artist, cook and gardener. Our organization was lucky to have her share her commitment and passion with us. We miss her very much.

Board Committees

Throughout the year the work of the Coordinating Collective was helped immeasurably by community members who participated in committees, such as Finance, Governance, Facilities, Fundraising and Community Relations. These volunteers donated their time and expertise and we appreciate their commitment and involvement; without them we would not have accomplished as much as we did.

Programs

The Drop-In Resource and Referral Program is a core project of WKWA. The Women's Centre provides a safe space for women to receive a number of critical services including: free access to food, clothing, and personal hygiene supplies; peer counselling and referral to other community resources, such as the transition house or the Advocacy Centre; educational and skill-building opportunities; and access to a feminist library and computers. This program is funded through our major funder, the BC Gaming Commission, so there are no costs to access or participate in the Women's Centre's services or programming.

As we've been doing for almost 50 years, we strive to create a healthy community through increasing women's and families' social determinants of health. We know that having members of our community live in poverty, isolation, or oppression means that not only does their health as individuals suffer, but our whole community is weakened.

We want to express gratitude for the 1,731 pounds of food and the 1,840 pounds of gently-used clothing that were donated to the Centre this past fiscal year. The 280 women and children who visited our Centre benefited greatly from this generosity.

Like most organizations, we were strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting public health orders. Despite the challenges, we continued to provide services to the women of our community with pre-scheduled one-on-one appointments. The Women's Centre was physically closed at the start of this past fiscal year, but we re-committed to serving women in crisis via telephone and email communication, and successfully utilized the Zoom platform for multiple diverse programming opportunities.

By August 2021, we successfully transitioned to a Communicable Disease Prevention Plan and met women's needs via appointment on a one-on-one basis. In January 2022 we implemented a COVID-19 Safety Plan and re-opened to allow for small groups to gather during drop-in hours. Today we are completely open, our Drop-in programming is thriving and we are so happy to continue to provide a safe space to the women of our community.

Programming highlights from this past year include Trauma Yoga via Zoom to women on a one-to-one basis; weekly sessions were facilitated for one hour with a certified yoga instructor. We offered free virtual art therapy sessions offered in collaboration with the Vancouver Art Therapy Institute; this program was offered to adolescents and adults. In August 2021 Aloria volunteered her time to facilitate a free online knitting workshop for beginners. Yoga instructor Jena Renwick hosted a free gentle, slow flow yoga practice in our garden space in August, and as the weather changed with the seasons this practice was moved to the Intuit Yoga Studio.

In January 2022, Café Connections, a multicultural program funded by a BC Multicultural grant and facilitated by Melanie Berndt, offered women new to our community the opportunity to meet weekly at our Centre and explore social connections while they visited local coffee shops.

The HER Project (funded by Community Foundations of Canada) marked the successful end to our fiscal year. This girls' empowerment program provided learning and social engagement to the youngest members of our community and was co-facilitated by Melanie Berndt and Megan McMichael. Both these programs had been delayed due to COVID.

In May 2022 we were pleased to offer our GEM program, with funding from Columbia Basin Trust—Social Grants, which was also co-facilitated by Melanie and Megan. The GEM program ended with a beautiful coming-of-age ceremony for a circle of 12 young girls and their mothers.

Volunteers are an essential part of our success, and we are proud of our respected training program for volunteers called Rooted in Community, last offered in March-April of 2022. This free volunteer training programming empowers and educates women to do crisis support and volunteer at our Centre, as well as preparing them to work within the greater community. We maintain a list of dedicated volunteers who assist with picking up food donations, organizing the free store, working in the garden, preparing food, shoveling snow and many other essential chores at the Women's Centre. Another RIC training is in the planning stages.

In addition, we want to tell you that the Board has developed an application process for community members who would like to offer a program at the Women's Centre. Recent programs have included an herbal healing workshop hosted by Althea Herbals, ongoing peer support counselling offered by Kendra Wilks, and a Sinixt rattle making workshop hosted by Board Member Suzzannee Chappelle. If you have a program idea, please contact Megan McMichael, our Volunteer Coordinator, at volunteer@nelsonwomenscentre.com

Our House

In January 2021, the Board proactively commissioned a thorough home inspection by a local professional inspector. This inspection revealed an urgent need to replace the stairs and railings leading to our front entrance, to make them safe and welcoming for all women accessing our services. We were approved for funding from the Building and Capital Support Grant of the Columbia Basin Trust in January 2022 and hired Moose Construction to carry out this work.

The improvement to our physical property has resulted in the key outcome of creating a safe and welcoming space for everyone. Staff has noticed an increase in both seniors accessing our services as well as single mothers accessing our Centre with their young children. We believe the increase in these two demographics is a direct result to our organization's commitment to safety.

The work to improve our house continues; plans are being made and funding secured for priority items to ensure the sustainability of our home for the future.

Events

On September 30 our Centre honoured the first **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**. This day honours the children who never returned home and all survivors of residential schools. As an organization we are deeply committed to learning and growth through our own reconciliation process.

AGM 2020-2021 – November 18, 2021

We successfully held an online AGM via the Zoom Platform with 31 attendees participating in learning about our organization and voting to pass three special resolutions.

Winter Solstice Event

This first special event hosted by our new staff team on December 20 was a success with 20 individuals gathering to celebrate the return of light. We gathered outdoors and it was very cold! Special thanks to members of Heartstrings – an all-woman ukulele group who played holiday songs for everyone's enjoyment.

International Women's Day – March 8, 2022

In celebration of International Women's Day, the Women's Centre held an open house event inviting women from our community to gather for the first time post-COVID. This year's theme was 'Breaking the Bias'. Many women were emotional as an all-female ukulele group called Heartstrings led us through some empowering songs and connection. All attendees to this very special event enjoyed the decorations, refreshments, and conversation.

In conjunction with International Women's Day our Centre held an online silent auction event from March 7-12. Through the generous support of our community we received 231 auctions items from 71 local businesses and individuals to raise over \$5200.00 via the 32-Auctions platform. This event would not have been possible without the generosity of the Kootenay Lake Tourism Board in both financial support and a significant time commitment by key staff members.

The Kootenay Bakery Café Cooperative held their own fundraising event in celebration of International Women's Day and raised \$410.00 for our Centre.

Just to bring you up to date, in May we gathered in front of City Hall to bring awareness to the issue of a guaranteed liveable income for all. Beginning in June we were a proud partner in the BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon program, and we hosted a drum ceremony in our garden space to celebrate National Indigenous People's Day. The youth volunteer group SERVE organized a successful food drive on behalf of our Centre in July. We also held a Harvest Celebration Event on Sept. 22 to mark the Equinox. Together we are stronger!

Formidable Female Features

We are proud to be a part of such a vibrant community that has so many strong female leaders! The Nelson & District Women's Centre has decided to pay tribute to the strong female leadership that enriches our community, both within the not-for-profit as well as business sector as success within every industry deserves acknowledgement and celebration. Please check out our social media accounts to learn more about our inspiring, local female leaders:

Funding and Projects

The Centre was successful in obtaining the following grants:

A **B.C Gaming Grant** of \$30,000 for the Drop-in Resource and Referral Program.

The **Kootenay Co-op Grocery Store** provided \$250.00 which was allocated to our community garden project. The **Canada Summer Jobs** program partially funded the employment of our Garden Coordinator. Additionally, through successful collaborative partnership with the **Nelson Community Food Centre** we received funding to purchase supplies and equipment to assist in revitalizing our backyard garden space.

The **City of Nelson** generously awarded WKWA a two-year property tax exemption for our house and property. We are eligible to re-apply in Fall 2023.

The position of Community Engagement Coordinator was also partially funded through the **Canada Summer Jobs** program.

In December 2021 the **Columbia Basin Trust** approved \$5000.00 in funding for a session of our Girls Empowerment programming (GEM) which was offered in May 2022.

The **Flaman Fitness Foundation** awarded our organization \$3,500 in December. These unrestricted funds contributed greatly to the overall success of our organization.

The **Columbia Basin Trust** granted us \$2,760 via the Non-Profit Advisors Program. These funds were allocated to our extended community engagement project from the previous fiscal year. They were used to hire a consultant to continue consultations and assist in refining our vision and mandate. The **Osprey Community Foundation Grant** allocated \$720.00 to support our community consultation process.

Nelson Lions Club contributed \$500.00 to our Drop-in, Resource and Referral Program.

But there's more!! We're pleased to tell you about other significant grants we received beyond the fiscal year end:

The **United Way Food Infrastructure Grant** program provided \$5,000 for our 2022 garden project. A **Community Initiatives** grant awarded \$6844 toward the revitalization of our garden space and **Kootenay Co-operative Grocery Store** chipped in another \$500. All in the name of food security and a beautiful yard!

We were proud to receive \$34,785.00 in mostly unrestricted funds to support our operations from the **Canadian Women's Foundation Shockproofing Communities** Grant program.

Columbia Basin Trust – Community Tech Grants approved \$5,057.13 for the purchase of computer technology devices including a new printer, laptops and tablets to be utilized by service users.

The **Columbia Power Community Sponsorship Program** awarded us \$1000.00 to be used to help purchase food items for our food hamper program

Deep gratitude to:

- The Kootenay Bakery Café Cooperative, Kootenay Co-op Grocery Store, and Silverking Soya Foods for ongoing weekly donations of food for our food hamper program
- The Harrop-Proctor Community Co-op for a lovely new desk for our Executive Director
- West Kootenay Telus Ambassador Program for the donation of \$250
- Shawn Morris Creative for an art fundraiser event totalling \$180.00
- Trista Vanhesen – Authentic Photography donated \$500.00
- Red Clover Dental for their generous donation of dental supplies including toothpaste, floss, and toothbrushes
- Louis's Steakhouse and Lounge for their generous donation of a fruit tray for a special Coordinating Collective meeting
- Valhalla Pure Outfitters for their community-minded 'Coats for the Koots' program which resulted in women receiving free winter coats
- The staff of Kootenay Insurance Services who donated \$344.00 in December
- Kootenay Chai Brewing Co for their generous contributions of refreshments for special events
- Oso Negro Café for their continuous support of refreshments for special events
- Glade Esso for the donation of propane tanks for use during special events

- And the many individuals, organizations, and local businesses for their cash and in-kind donations. In particular, we are thankful to be remembered by two legacy donors who provided generous gifts to the Women's Centre

To the many supporters, volunteers and staff who continue to stand by the Women's Centre – thank you dearly for remaining steadfast in your conviction that the Women's Centre is an important resource that continues to fill many needs in our community.

Unfinished and In-Process Business

Although this report technically only covers the period to the end of March, 2022, we have additional information we think you'd like to have, particularly related to work-in-progress.

At the 2018 and 2019 AGMs, several proposals submitted by members were approved. Many have been completed as was reported at the 2019/2020 AGM on March 18, 2021. The following are still in progress.

From 2018

- A bylaw and policy review of WKWA documents. This remains a priority and will occur after completion of the community engagement process (see below).
- Development and implementation of a communication policy. This remains a high priority for the new Board and Community Relations Committee.

From 2019

- Bylaw changes regarding election of the Coordinating Collective and regarding member discipline. The Board intends to include these in the comprehensive review of WKWA bylaws.
- Conduct of a well-planned and facilitated engagement process to discuss WKWA's mandate, including who we serve, what programs and activities are priorities, potential partnerships with other community groups, etc.

The engagement process has been much on our minds and on our desks this past year. In the summer of 2021, we hired a student (under Canada Summer Jobs) to conduct a community survey. We heard back from about 200 West Kootenay women. The survey results showed strong support for many of the services and programs currently offered, with the Drop-In, Girls Empowerment workshops, referrals, and food and clothing provision topping the list. More education and training was supported, as was greater feminist activism.

In terms of who the Women's Centre should serve, the results were quite mixed. Some respondents supported a much greater focus on non-binary, in-transition and two-spirit persons, as well as trans men. Others urged the maintenance of the focus on women, with other programs/services provided when possible.

The survey was not intended as a vote or referendum, but as baseline information to guide the Board’s decision process. Gaps in certain demographics were identified for further consultation.

The Board continued to work with the CBT Non-Profit Advisors program. In January 2021, with the assistance of a consultant, we completed a “road map” that lays out detailed steps and priorities for an Organizational Review. This will include three areas: Governance (including our mission and mandate); Administration; and Programs/Services.

The first priority was to continue work on the community engagement process, and the refinement of our mandate (vision, mission, purposes).

In January 2022, the CBT Non-Profit Advisors program generously provided us with additional funding to engage our consultant to complete this process. Gaps in the 2021 Community Survey were identified and the following steps taken to fill them:

- Targeted surveys – distributed to young girls, seniors, BIPOC women, and current users of the Women’s Centre.
- Focus groups with leaders of non-profit women-serving organizations and with youth aged 15-18 (at LVR).

In July, the consultant presented her final report to the Board of Directors, and through August and September, the Board wrestled with different wording to respond to what we’d heard from the community. On September 13, a new Vision, Mission and Purposes (Constitution) were approved by consensus (with one director standing aside), and are being presented at the 2022 AGM for members’ consideration.

There is still a lot of work ahead, to ensure a respectful process for changes at the Centre, to build partnerships with other groups, to revise WKWA’s bylaws and policies, and to complete the Organizational Review. This work, based on members’ approval and direction, will ensure a strong and vibrant future for the Women’s Centre.

Additional thanks,





Working with communities in BC's Interior, Lower Mainland, Central & Northern Vancouver Island

