
The Victoria Youth
Empowerment Society



2026 ANNUAL REPORT



***Building Futures.
Creating Belonging.
Empowering Youth.***



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The Victoria Youth Empowerment Society acknowledges and respects the Lək'wəŋən (Songhees and Xwsepsem/Esquimalt) and the WSÁNEĆ Peoples on whose territory the organization operates. We respect their diverse traditions and connection to the land and waters.

Through our work, we acknowledge that colonialism and systemic racism have impacted generations of Indigenous people and continue to harm the youth and families that we serve at VYES. We are committed to creating safe spaces and working in partnership with Indigenous-led organizations.



The Victoria
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ABOUT US

The Victoria Youth Empowerment Society (VYES) is a local charitable non-profit supporting young people aged 12–24 and their families across Greater Victoria. Since 1992, VYES has grown and evolved alongside the community, responding to changing needs while remaining grounded in relationships, care and a commitment to young people.

Today, we provide a continuum of support, from food and basic needs to counselling, shelter, wellness, employment preparation and crisis services, recognizing that each young person's needs and goals are connected.

Our work begins with relationships. By listening, building trust and meeting youth where they are, we help young people navigate challenges, strengthen connections and take steps toward the future they want. Whether someone needs immediate safety or support before a concern becomes a crisis, VYES offers a welcoming place to turn.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2025–2026

Merissa Raymond
President

Gerry Thompson
Director at Large

Sarah Garr
Director at Large

Deena Dam
Vice-President

Erin Shaw
Director at Large

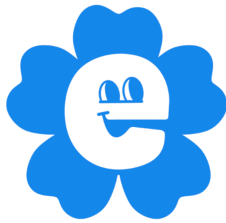
Anjuli Gustafson
Director at Large

Taryn Castles
Treasurer

Madeline Geneau
Director at Large

Alex Nelson
Secretary

Aidan Winkle
Director at Large



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ABOUT US

Vision

Every young person has the skills and support to shape their future and move confidently into adulthood.

Mission

VYES provides responsive, individualized support to youth and their families, walking alongside them to build safety, stability, and connection while strengthening well-being and independence.

Core values

Integrity

We act with honesty, transparency, and accountability. We do what we say we will do and hold ourselves to a high standard in service of youth, families, and community.

Collaboration

We believe meaningful change happens together. We work alongside youth, families, partners, and community to build coordinated, responsive, and connected supports.

Equity & Inclusion

We are committed to creating inclusive spaces where all youth feel seen, valued, and supported. We actively work to reduce barriers and address systemic inequities, so every young person has access to the support they need.

Resourcefulness

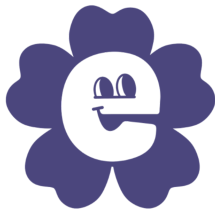
We are adaptable, creative, and solutions-focused. We respond to evolving needs and opportunities with flexibility and innovation.

Respect

We honour the dignity, voice, and lived experience of every young person. We build relationships grounded in trust, empathy, and mutual understanding.

Safety

We prioritize physical, emotional, and cultural safety in all that we do. We create environments where youth feel secure, supported, and able to grow and move forward.



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A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

The world is not getting any easier to live in, and the youth we serve are facing ever-increasing challenges. VYES has spent the past year working hard to help with those challenges, with promising results.

Our youth food pantry continues to assist youth and their families in the face of continuing food insecurity, offering groceries, toiletries, pet supplies, clothing, bedding and school supplies to youth in need. With the rising costs of food, we have been pleased to see that youths' ready access to the food pantry has helped to mitigate some of our food budget in other areas, creating some efficiency for our bottom line.



We continue to pay careful attention to our use of resources, and our future looks as stable as it did last year. The Board and Executive Director have made some necessary changes to the contracts that help keep our systems running, with some immediate savings and improvements. We are also continuing to focus on our fundraising potential and many avenues which lead into that, including updating our website—it now includes profiles of our board of directors, better donation features, and an overall refreshed design. We also received some community assistance to run a Souper Bowls launch party, which obtained some donations and sold some tickets; we are looking forward to this year's Souper Bowls and the exposure and fundraising it will bring.

Operationally, we have had to say goodbye to Kisae Petersen, our able Operations Director, as she moved on to an exciting new opportunity, and welcomed Andrew HOLETON as he stepped into the position with enthusiasm and expertise. The board looks forward to working with Andrew and what fresh perspectives he can bring to YES.

2027 will bring us another CARF review, which we are prepared to excel at, along with new fundraising opportunities, continued program development, and readiness to meet whatever unknown challenges are ahead. YES is showing resiliency that will help us stay around to offer support to youth for years to come.

Respectfully,
Merissa Raymond, Board President



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A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When I reflect on this past year, I think about the moments that rarely make it into an annual report: a young person returning because they felt welcome the first time; someone asking for help before a situation becomes a crisis; a family beginning to find its way back to one another.

These moments remind me that progress often begins with a relationship—with knowing there is someone who will listen, a place where you belong and support you can count on.

In 2025–2026, the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society supported more than 1,000 youth and family members across Greater Victoria. Some young people came to us needing food, shelter or immediate safety. Others were looking for help with housing, mental health, family relationships, recovery, education or employment. Our role was to listen, respond and walk alongside them toward their goals.

Across VYES, we see how closely these needs are connected. A meal can open the door to a conversation. A trusted relationship can make it easier to ask for help. Stable housing can create space to focus on school, work or well-being. Our continuum of support allows us to respond to the whole young person, recognizing that their lives do not fit neatly into separate programs.

This year, that support included providing emergency shelter to 145 youth, helping 70 young people build stability and independence through Supported Independent Living, and expanding Wellness programming from one weekly activity to three. These achievements reflect the range of our work: responding when safety is urgent, supporting everyday stability and creating opportunities for connection and growth.

The year also reinforced the importance of prevention. While crisis services remain essential, our hope is to reach more young people before their circumstances become urgent. Practical assistance, family support and the consistent presence of caring adults can help strengthen the foundations that make safety and stability possible.

I am proud of the compassion, skill and resourcefulness our staff bring to this work. They navigate complex situations, celebrate steps forward and continue showing up when progress takes time. The feedback shared by youth and families throughout this report speaks to the trust and connection they help build.

That commitment is strengthened by our Board of Directors, volunteers, donors, funders and community partners. Your support helps us respond to immediate needs while creating opportunities for young people to build confidence, develop skills and imagine their future.

As we look ahead, we will build on these foundations through our Gender-Based Violence Response Program and expanded Wellness opportunities on Pender Island. We will continue listening to youth and families, strengthening partnerships and making support accessible. Thank you for standing alongside young people. Together, we help create a community where they can find safety, experience belonging and move toward the future they want.



Julie-Ann Hunter, RSW, MBA
Executive Director
Victoria Youth Empowerment Society

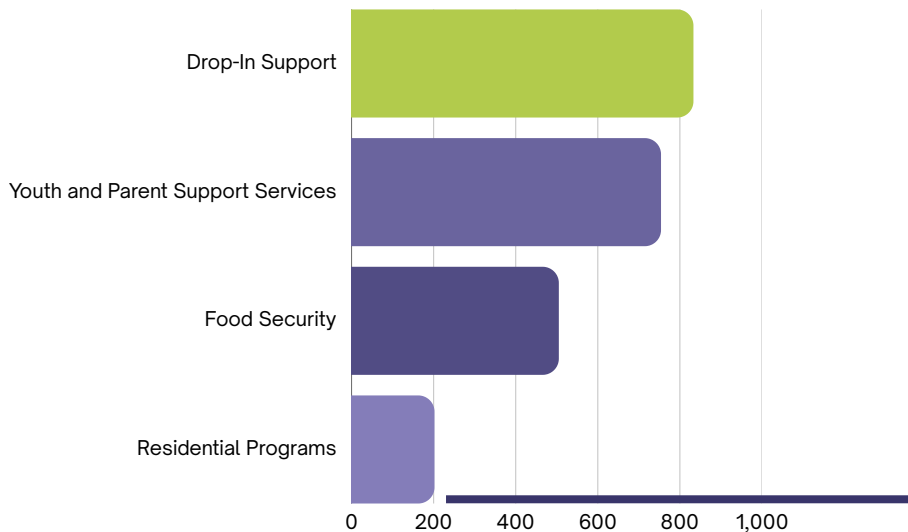


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2026 Impact at a Glance

A Year of Safety, Stability and Connection

Who We Served



Youth and Families Served

1,000+

youth and family members supported across Greater Victoria through housing, food security, outreach, wellness, family support, justice, recovery, and crisis services. This estimate accounts for participation across multiple programs to avoid double-counting individuals.

Why Youth Sought Support

- Mental Health
- Housing Instability
- Food Insecurity and Basic Needs
- Family Conflict and Relationships
- Education and Employment Barriers
- Substance Use and Recovery



Community Impact

3,790

Visits to Alliance Club

884

Visits to Youth Food Pantry

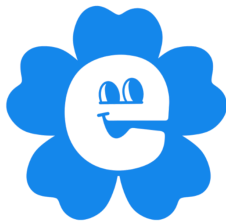
2,800+

Referrals Made to Community Resources

3,000+

Meals Served

Who We Served: Drop-In Services Include Alliance Club and Wellness, Youth and parent Support Services include SIL, Life skills, Outreach and YFSS, Residential Programs Include SYD and KEYS and Food Security Includes Youth Food Pantry



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Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter (KEYS)

The Kiwanis Emergency Youth Shelter provides safe, temporary accommodation and crisis support for youth experiencing homelessness, family breakdown, or other situations that place them at risk. Youth are connected to immediate supports while staff work alongside them to identify pathways toward long-term stability.

Throughout the year, KEYS provided safety and stability to 145 youth, offering 546 safe bed nights and ongoing support during times of crisis.



Youth Services Outreach Team (YSOT)

The Youth Services Outreach Team supports youth experiencing mental health concerns, housing instability, family conflict, and barriers to community connection. Outreach workers meet youth where they are, helping them navigate systems and work toward their personal goals.

Throughout the year, 280 youth received support and were connected to services through more than 1,400 referrals to community resources.

FINDING SAFETY



Specialized Youth Detox (SYD)

The Specialized Youth Detox Program provides youth with a safe and supportive environment to begin their recovery journey. Through stabilization, withdrawal management, and individualized planning, youth and families receive support to build healthier futures and connect with ongoing services.

During 2025–2026, 57 youth accessed detox services, with 77% reporting improvements in their mental health following participation.



The Youth Justice Program

The Youth Justice Program supports youth involved with the justice system who are facing challenges related to safety, housing, mental health, and community connection. Through intensive outreach and individualized support, youth are connected to services, resources, and opportunities that promote positive outcomes and reduce future justice involvement.

During the year, 13 youth received support through the program and achieved 27 safety-related goals.



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Youth Food Pantry

The Youth Food Pantry provides youth with access to nutritious food, hygiene products, clothing, and essential household items in a welcoming and dignified environment. The program helps reduce barriers created by food insecurity while creating opportunities for connection, skill-building, and support.

During 2025–2026, 505 youth accessed the Food Pantry, resulting in 884 visits for food and essential supports.



Youth and Family Support Services

Youth & Family Support Services provides counselling, family support, mediation, and individualized services for youth and caregivers. The program helps strengthen communication, improve relationships, and support families through challenging transitions.

During the year, YFSS supported 197 youth, parents, caregivers, and family members across 91 service files.

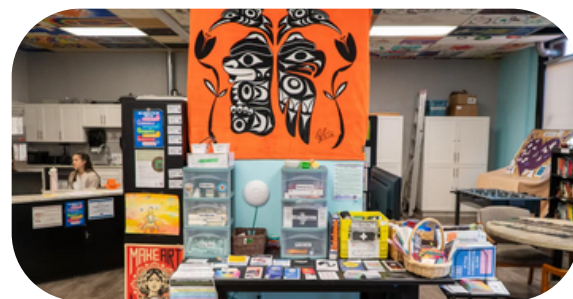
BUILDING STABILITY



Griffin Housing Support Fund

The Griffin Housing Support Fund provides flexible financial assistance to youth facing urgent housing-related barriers, including rent arrears, damage deposits, moving costs, and essential household expenses. By responding quickly to emerging needs, the fund helps prevent housing crises and supports young people in maintaining safe and stable housing.

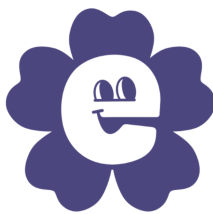
Since 2022, the fund has helped more than 100 youth overcome emergency situations that threatened their housing stability.



Alliance Club

Alliance Club provides a safe, welcoming drop-in space where youth can access support, build relationships, develop life skills, and connect with community resources. Through low-barrier services and meaningful relationships, youth are supported to improve their well-being, strengthen stability, and explore opportunities for personal growth.

During the year, 755 youth accessed Alliance Club, resulting in 3,790 visits to the program.



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GROWING CONNECTION



Youth Wellness

The Wellness Program creates opportunities for youth to build confidence, develop social connections, and improve overall well-being through recreational, educational, and life-skills activities. Programming promotes inclusion, belonging, and positive community engagement.



Queer Connections & Summer Opportunities

Through the Queer Connections group and The Summer Opportunities Program, youth have opportunities to connect with peers, explore new interests, build skills, and develop a stronger sense of belonging. These programs foster community, promote well-being, and provide welcoming spaces where young people can learn, grow, and thrive.



Recovery & Harm Reduction Groups

The Harm Reduction Group and Recovery Group provide youth opportunities to explore harm reduction and/or recovery skills with fun activities run by staff. Youth are able to connect with others experiencing similar situations around changes in substance use, and feel more connected.



Community Garden

The Community Garden located at KEYS allows youth and staff to care for plants and flowers and grow food. The garden helps youth build practical skills and strengthen their connections to the land and one another.

During the year, 119 youth participated in Wellness activities across Connections programs, while the program expanded from one activity per week to three regularly scheduled activities.



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BUILDING SKILLS AND INDEPENDENCE



Life Skills Program

The Life Skills Program supports youth in developing practical skills that foster independence, resilience, and long-term stability. Through one-to-one support and skill-building opportunities, youth work toward educational, employment, housing, and personal goals.

Over the year, 77 youth participated in Life Skills programming and were connected to additional supports through 959 referrals.



Supported Independent Living Program

The Supported Independent Living Program assists youth in developing the skills and confidence needed to live independently and successfully transition into adulthood. Through individualized support, youth build capacity in housing stability, education, employment, financial literacy, and daily living skills.

During 2025–2026, 70 youth participated in the program, achieving 64 independence-related goals on their path toward self-sufficiency.



Youth Janitor Program

The Youth Janitor Program provides hands-on employment experience and mentorship for youth connected to VYES services. Through practical workplace training, participants develop job readiness skills, gain valuable work experience, build confidence, and strengthen their employment references while contributing to the upkeep of VYES facilities.

During the year, 8 youth participated in the program, gaining meaningful work experience and skills to support their future employment goals.



REFLECTIONS FROM YOUTH AND FAMILIES

"I wouldn't be where I
am without your
support"
— Youth participant,
Youth Outreach

"I have grown so much
as a person because of
this program."
— Youth participant,
Youth & Family
Support Services

"I felt like the staff believed in me
before I fully believed in myself."
— Youth participant, Supported
Independent Living

"You're the best, you
never judge me and I
know I can call you no
matter what."
— Youth participant,
Youth Justice
Program

"It's been super
challenging trying to
get everything done. I
am so grateful for
your support, it has
made all the difference
this past year."
— Parent of a youth
participant, Life Skills



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BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF HOPE

What started with Helen Hughes' vision of providing youth with a safe place to connect has grown into a thriving Community of Hope. Through [Souper Bowls of Hope](#), [Remote Bowls of Hope](#) and [Stockings of Hope](#), community members come together each year to support youth experiencing some of life's greatest challenges.

SOUPER BOWLS OF HOPE

Souper Bowls of Hope is VYES's signature community fundraiser, bringing together local artists, chefs, businesses, and community members in support of youth across Greater Victoria. Named for the handcrafted pottery bowls and homemade soups that guests enjoy, the event raises vital funds while creating awareness of the challenges youth face and the impact community support can have on their lives.



REMOTE BOWLS OF HOPE

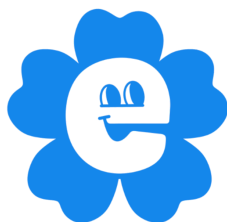
Remote Bowls of Hope extends the spirit of Souper Bowls of Hope to Pender Island, creating an opportunity for community members to support youth while fostering connection and creativity. A unique feature of the event is the involvement of local residents who paint and create their own bowls, celebrating community spirit while helping fund wellness programming and opportunities for youth on Pender Island.



STOCKINGS OF HOPE

Stockings of Hope was officially launched in 2025 to help ensure the youth served by VYES experience the joy, care, and belonging that the holiday season can bring. Inspired by the generosity of the Pender Island community, which first championed the initiative, the program brings together donors, volunteers, and community members to provide gifts, essential items, and holiday support to youth who may otherwise go without during the festive season.



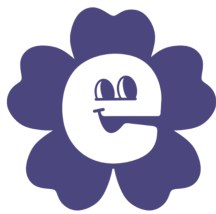


FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Financial Overview	2026	2025
REVENUE		
Government Grants	\$2,627,318	\$2,650,457
Grants	\$130,541	\$56,900
Donations	\$142,780	\$79,431
Fundraising	\$44,647	\$41,213
Rental Income	\$119,252	\$122,605
Other Revenue	\$40,363	\$56,862
Unrealized Gains on Investments	\$6,789	\$11,060
Total Revenue	\$3,111,690	\$3,018,528
EXPENSES		
Salaries & Benefits	\$2,516,850	\$2,443,902
Program Supplies, Food & Transportation	\$219,856	\$189,431
Facilities & Equipment	\$283,683	\$254,409
Administration Expenses	\$52,663	\$57,884
Professional Fees	\$28,911	\$29,839
Staff Development	\$23,534	\$20,866
Fundraising	\$16,367	\$11,700
Advertising	\$9,262	\$5,732
Total Expenses	\$3,151,126	\$3,013,763
Excess / (Deficiency) of Revenue over Expenses	(\$39,436)	\$4,765

In 2025–2026, VYES received \$3,111,690 in revenue and invested \$3,151,126 in services and operations. The Board approved a planned deficit of \$79,500 to support strategic investments in building improvements, technology, bookkeeping capacity, and the Housing Support Fund. The year ended with an actual deficit of \$39,436, approximately 50% lower than anticipated, reflecting careful stewardship while continuing to make important investments in organizational capacity and youth services.

VYES' financial statements were independently audited by MNP LLP. This summary should be read alongside the complete audited financial statements and accompanying notes.



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LOOKING FORWARD 2026–2027



Strengthening Safety and Support

Our new Gender-Based Violence Response Program will provide youth-centred support for young people aged 13–24 of all genders who are at risk of or experiencing intimate partner violence, sexual assault or sexual exploitation. By helping youth and their supports explore options, strengthen safety and connect with care, VYES will offer a trusted place to turn during difficult and often isolating experiences.



Bringing Wellness Closer to Home

Expanding our Youth Wellness Program to Pender Island will bring more opportunities for connection, creativity and mental well-being to young people in a smaller island community. Through community partnerships and welcoming group activities, we aim to reduce isolation and help youth build skills, supportive relationships and a sense of belonging, closer to home.

As we look ahead, VYES remains committed to ensuring youth and families have access to safe housing, responsive support, and meaningful opportunities for connection and growth. We know that housing affordability, mental health challenges, and social isolation continue to impact young people in our community. Through strong partnerships, dedicated staff and volunteers, and the support of our donors and funders, we will continue working to ensure every young person has the opportunity to thrive.



A YEAR OF SHARED SUCCESS

VYES' work is strengthened by a community that cares about young people. Funders, donors, businesses and community partners help youth and families access practical support, caring relationships and opportunities for the future.

In 2025–2026, VYES was grateful for the continued support of the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Island Health, alongside the funders, businesses, service clubs and community organizations whose contributions help make its work possible.

To the volunteers who share their time, skills and creativity, the staff who provide compassionate support every day, and the Board of Directors who guide the organization:

THANK YOU

VYES extends sincere thanks to the following organizations, alongside the many individuals whose generosity makes this work possible:

Grants, Foundations and Sponsors

Aqueduct Foundation
Pemberton Holmes
Quail Rock Foundation
Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem
Knights Hospitaller
Starbucks Foundation
Times Colonist Christmas Fund
United Way
Victoria Foundation
City of Victoria
Coast Capital
Flintstones Pro
Tamarack Institute
100 Women Who Care
Chawkers Foundation
Felicia Oliver Fund
Echo Foundation
Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice
Committee

Contributors and Partners

Mount Douglas Secondary School Environmental Leadership
Mustard Seed
Paws on Cook
Kiwanis Club
Maximum Express
Edited. Curated Consignment
VIDEA
Bill's Bag Lunches Society
Browns Florists
Soap for Hope





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HELP BUILD BRIGHTER FUTURES



01

PARTNER

Put Your Support into Action

Bring your workplace, service club, or community group alongside VYES. Sponsor an event, organize a donation drive, contribute items from our current wish list, or explore a partnership that connects your strengths with the needs of young people.



02

DONATE

Make a Meaningful Gift

Your generosity helps youth access practical support when they need it most, from meals and groceries to counselling, housing support, and opportunities to build skills. Make a one-time donation or become a monthly donor to help sustain responsive, individualized care for youth and families.



03

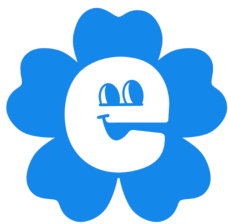
CONNECT

Join our Community of Hope

Become part of the growing community that stands alongside youth through events and initiatives such as Souper Bowls of Hope, Remote Bowls of Hope, and Stockings of Hope. These events bring together individuals, businesses, volunteers, and community partners who share a commitment to creating brighter futures for youth.



Together, we can help young people build safety, stability, and connection.
Visit www.vyes.ca/get-involved to learn more and get involved.



The Victoria Youth
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CONTACT US



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"We salute the youth and families that we serve, your resolve and courage to improve your life situations through challenging situations motivate our daily efforts."

-Pat Griffin

THANK YOU