



BEFORE

AFTER

Wear 2 Start



# EMPOWERING

self-identified women  
to dress their best  
to reach their goals

## ANNUAL REPORT

### 2023



BEFORE

AFTER



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## Wear 2 Start Society

### President's Report for the Annual General Meeting, December 12, 2023

#### Introduction

As 2023 draws to a close, I am taking this opportunity to reflect on the exceptional women whom I've had the honour and pleasure of working with over the past 12 months. We are a small but mighty band, and I am so pleased to see that the work that we do is having a significant positive impact in the lives of the self-identified women we serve.

#### Thank you to the volunteers!

I would like to start with some heartfelt thanks. First of all, thank you so much to **all** of the volunteers who contribute so much to the success of our mission. While we have added quite a few new volunteers in the past year, we also have many volunteers who have been committed to this work for many years. One in fact has been volunteering since Wear2Start (W2S) began operations in 2001! Many, many thanks for all you do. Rest assured that we could not have achieved so much success without you.

I would in particular like to thank our departing Board members. We are very sorry to see you go:

- Heather Catte (Treasurer)
- Tara Keeping (Secretary)
- Alessandra Ringstad (Past President)

Finally, I would like to extend many thanks to our Program Manager Zoey Wells. Not only does Zoey do a huge amount of work to keep the trains running on time, she has been exceptionally adept at making sure the wheels didn't fall off said trains. Zoey does so much that it is impossible to list everything, but she has made a huge difference in the operations of W2S. Saying 'we couldn't do it without you' understates her contributions. THANK YOU ZOEY!!

#### Community Engagement

Wear2 Start has been considerably more active in participating in community activities to raise the profile of the organization than in the past. Zoey's Program Manager Report lists all of the many activities in which we participated in the past year. I can say with confidence that these efforts are paying off, in a variety of ways. The general awareness in the community has increased significantly, and when I speak to people about W2S I am often asked 'how can I help'. While many volunteers have participated in various activities, and Zoey's efforts to highlight potential events and organize us to attend have been instrumental in ensuring W2S benefits as much as possible for our efforts. In addition to attracting more volunteers and more clothing donations, increased community awareness also pays off with increased financial donations. We experience a bump in donations each time we participate in a community event!

I was so pleased that we were invited to have a feature in the Victoria Foundation's Vital Signs Annual report this year. Tara and I had a lot of fun at the photo shoot, and again, this helped raise awareness in the community.

## Friend-raising and Fund-raising

I would also like to thank our funding agencies. We have had considerable success in obtaining grants this year, both large and small. Zoey has provided a full list of the grants we received this year, and we appreciate all of the funds we receive. These grants make it possible for us to continue to grow and serve a larger clientele base. Some grants are for particular purposes/programs and others simply support general operations. All are needed and helpful, and allow us to serve our clientele more effectively.

For the first time (or the first time in many years) Wear2Start held a clothing sale as a fundraiser and to help distribute clothing that we could not use in the boutique. In addition to that clothing, a number of consignment shops also donated unsold clothing to us, and the event was held in the back yard of the House of Savoy (Many thanks again to Emily Hamel!). Even though it was the long weekend in August, we raised well over \$4,000 in sales and donations. As a result, we have decided that a semi-annual clothing sale making use of excess clothing will be a very effective fund-raising tool.

## Looking Forward

### Board Renewal

The departures of three Board members do create some space on the Board. Please refer anyone you know who might be a good fit to Zoey and myself. Our greatest immediate need is a Treasurer, ideally a CPA and at minimum someone who has some accounting and bookkeeping background. We also have an ongoing need to have several individuals wanting to be actively involved in maintaining and increasing our social media presence.

In addition, two existing Board members have reached the end of their 2-year terms and must be renewed. We are Susan Mills and Leelah Dawson.

**Motion:** To approve the renewal of Susan Mills and Leelah Dawson as Board Members for the Wear 2 Start Society for a second 2-year term.

### Community Activities

As noted earlier, we participated in a large number of community activities this past year. This stretched our resources considerably, and while some of these events were hugely successful for us, others were less so. Our experiences last year will help us pick and choose the events/activities in which we participate going forward.

We have continued to expand our clientele, and as will be detailed in the Program Manager's report, over half of our clients are now either self-referrals or returning clients. This highlights the fact that the need in the community is not only met through other social service agencies, and we are pleased to see that many clients find us directly.

### Friend-raising and fundraising

We intend to continue to maintain/increase our community engagement which has attracted both donations and grants, in addition to clients and volunteers. However, as will be detailed in the Treasurer's Report, we are in better financial condition than we have been in many years. While we will continue to seek both general and special purpose grants to ensure our funding well into the future, it does mean we will be able to expand our specialty support programs (Shoes that Fit, Blue Bags, Cuts for Confidence, and the Bra program) this year.

Our clothing sale last August was not only financially successful, but also engaged the community and built awareness. As a result, we have decided to have a regular, semi-annual clothing sale as our main fundraisers each year. Our next **Clothing Sale** will be held **February 3, 2024 at the Fernwood Community Centre**. Please **Save the Date** and **Tell your Friends!**

### Conclusion

I would like to close by again thanking all of our volunteers including the Board. This has been a rewarding experience for me, and I look forward to continuing to work with all of you to build on our successes.

I would also like to wish everyone a very **Happy Holiday season!** I hope you have as many enjoyable celebrations as you desire with your family and friends.

# Program Manager Report, Zoey Wells

2022/2023 has been a year full of transitions and first's for Wear2Start. This year welcomed a new Program Manager, the departure of the Volunteer Coordinator, and a board full of new and extremely talented women! We participated in a number of Community events, strengthening our partnerships and visibility within our community and working towards building upon these partnerships in the coming years to add more growth and sustainability as we move forward and continue to engage in new opportunities.

Wear2Start welcomed 196 clients through its doors this year. This is a 28% increase in clients accessing services. A number of these clients were newcomers to Canada, past clients revisiting our services, and clients accessing services through a wide range of referral agencies. Due to the increased cost of living, which specifically impacts self-identified women in our society, we have seen an increase in past clients returning and a significant increase in clients using our self-referral option. We are extremely grateful for our referral partners that continue to use our services and look forward to strengthening our existing relationships and also creating more as we move into the next year.

We are extremely grateful to the support we receive from our community. This includes but is not limited to our individual donors, in-kind donations of services and products from businesses in our community, grantors and funders that provide support through grants and donations, and all of our referral partners and supports on social media and other forms of promotion. We are so grateful for the continued support and participation in all of our programs. This growing support enables Wear2Start to continue and grow our programs and supports for any self-identified women needing assistance.

This past year Wear2Start reinvisioned and revamped a few of our programs and procedures to speak to the growing and changing needs of our clients and referral partners, listening to their feedback and pivoting appropriately. These changes have seen an increased number of clients through our boutique this year as well as a huge increase in our community engagement and support translating into increased fundraising, community support and volunteer recruitment and engagement.

## Wear2Start's Programs and Stats 2022-23

### Wardrobe Program

Wear2Start's Programs and Stats 2022-2023 Wardrobe Program is a personalized, 1-hour appointment at the Wear2Start boutique, over 195 women-identified clients were provided with a business casual wardrobe and accessories to assist with their next steps.

Returning Clients            32

Self Referrals                81

Referral Agencies           83

### Cuts4Confidence Program

A professional haircut can make a world of difference to someone's self-esteem and confidence. Thanks to our longtime partner salons, 46 clients were provided salon appointments and received complimentary haircuts last year. Many thanks to: The Ginger Group Hair Salon, Lavish Salon, Love One Hair Studio, Shampoo Hair Bar, and Tisa Giuffre Hair for your kindness to our Wear2Start clients.

The Cuts4Confidence Program has experienced some changes this year and we are excited to report that this program has been reimagined and has pivoted to ensure that we are supporting our clients but also our partner salons in the current changing economic climate.

## **Peninsula Co-op Bra Vouchers Program**

Thanks to the generous financial support of Peninsula Co-op, we were very pleased to continue our partnership with Victoria Classic Lingerie to provide a complimentary bra fitting and new bra to our hard-to-fit clients. 28 vouchers were issued this past year.

## **“Shoes that Fit” Program**

Our partnership with the kind folks at SAS Comfort Shoes continued thanks to the generous support of an anonymous individual donor. This program allows us to purchase footwear for our clients who require specially structured shoes for health reasons or hard-to-fit shoe sizes.

Funded by a grant from the **Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem Knights Hospitaller**, the Shoes that Fit Program was developed and provides shoes for those clients who don't fit within the above-mentioned parameters but who require specific shoes or sizes that are unavailable in our donated inventory.

## **Financial Donors and Grantors of Note**

- Country Grocer – Save a Tape Program and coin box fundraiser
- Estate of Sandra Louise Beaton
- United Way/Women United
- Coastal Community Credit Union
- City of Langford
- Reimagine Work
- Sovereign Order of St John of Jerusalem Knights Hospitaller
- Victoria Foundation's Community Grants Program
- Victoria Foundation – Carole and Clint Forester Foundation
- Zonta Club of Victoria

## **Community Donors and Supporters**

Wear2Start is fortunate to have the support of many community partners through generous donations and advocacy. These include: The Victoria Downtown Business Association, Westshore Town Center, Benevity Community Impact Fund, CL Web Developers, Destination Greater Victoria, Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce, BC Housing, Provincial Employees Community Services Fund, SAS Comfort Shoes, Soap for Hope, and Wild Abandon Jewelry. We extend special shout-outs to Volunteer Victoria whose never-ending support and guidance is valued beyond measure, the many members of our

community who have donated their stylish, up-to-date clothing, accessories and shoes, and the many donors who have quietly given significant financial donations.

## **Community Events and Engagement**

Wear2Start participated in a number of new community events and engagement opportunities this year. A few of note are:

- The Victoria Women's Show
- Cook Street Village - International Women's Day Celebration
- International Women's Day discussion with the Premiere
- CHEK TV - The Upside
- CHEK TV - Vital People
- Destination Victoria - Travel Summit
- Victoria Downtown Business Association - Block Party
- WorkBC - Reconnect Event
- Wear2Start 1st Biannual Clothing Sale
- Westshore Town Center - What to Wear, Where!

## **Our Referral Partners**

Wear2Start welcomes self-referrals and new referrals from any organization, program or individual in the Greater Victoria area that provides services to women-identified and nonbinary clients. We are grateful for the amazing work that our partners do in providing support, empowerment, and advocacy. Special thanks to:

- 1Up Single Parent Resource Centre
- Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness
- Action Committee of People with Disabilities
- Beacon Community Services
- Bridges for Women
- Burnside Gorge Community Centre
- CBI Health
- Connections Place
- CoolAid/Rock Bay Landing
- Cridge Transition House
- Cook Street Village Activity Centre
- Cridge Dovetail Program
- Ethos Career Management/QMunity Works
- Greater Victoria Housing Society
- GT Hiring
- Help Ukraine Vancouver Island Society
- Inter-Cultural Association
- Island Community Mental Health Association
- Island Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre
- Island Sexual Health

- John Howard Society
- March of Dimes
- Maximus Canada
- Mustard Seed
- Our Place Tiny Homes
- Our WorkPlace
- PEERS
- Pegasus Recovery
- PHS Community Services
- Quadra Village Community Centre
- Rainbow Kitchen
- Restorative Justice Victoria
- Salvation Army
- Sandy Merriman House
- St. Vincent de Paul/Rosalie's Village
- Ukrainian Cultural Society
- Victoria Brain Injury Society
- Victoria Native Friendship Centre
- Victoria Pregnancy Centre
- Victoria Women's Transition House
- Victoria Youth Empowerment Society
- Women in Need
- WorkBC

## **Volunteer Program Report, Zoey Wells**

This year was a busy year! Appointments for clients and donations ramped up as we navigated the end of the pandemic and protocols ended. The volunteers all did a fabulous job of working with clients and clothing donors to ensure positive experiences.

### **Volunteer Program Stats & Updates**

- Total number of current volunteer positions not including Board members – 31
- Boutique Consultants – 18
- Inventory Specialists – 6
- Consignment Liaisons – 3
- Client Intake Specialists – 2
- Administrative Volunteers - 7
- Event Volunteers - 15
- Social media Volunteers - 1
- Cuts4Confidence Volunteer – 1
- Bra Program Volunteer - 2
- Alterations and Seamstress Volunteer - 1

This year the Volunteer Program has seen a number of changes and has been pivoting to our ever changing environment. A number of trends have been identified moving forward and the Volunteer Program has been expanded, and will continue to do so, in order for us to serve our clients and community to the best of our ability.

We have expanded the number of Boutique Volunteers to ensure full coverage for vacations, illnesses and to ensure that trained volunteers are ready to manage shifts in the boutique as we add new times for client appointments.

We have added some new positions to our volunteer program, including Administrative Volunteers. These volunteers manage data entry for our new client/donor CRM to bring Wear2Start into the current fundraising landscape of donor and client information management. Admin volunteers also assist the Program Manager with research projects for planning for future community engagement opportunities, new grant opportunities and overall program planning. Social media has also been added to the Volunteer opportunities this year and will be moving forward with more of a specific plan in place for our social media presence.

Our amazing Consignment volunteers work behind the scenes identifying items that can be consigned and facilitating the process. The expansion to this program has allowed us to create a new revenue stream to assist us in funding our programs. Thanks so much Susan Mills, Cindy Jensen and Julie Wallace.

Inventory Specialists Inventory Specialists work in the storage room accepting clothing donations by appointment and sorting through items to assess suitability and condition. This Inventory Specialist team works every Friday and has six appointments available that can be pre-booked on-line through a system called Setmore. Thank you to Laurie Chesworth, the Lead Intake Specialist, who manages all inquiries, appointments, and cancellations.

## **Translation Skills**

In the Boutique we seen an increase in clients from Ukraine, and Boutique Consultant Marina Crawford deserves a special shoutout for helping with language translation.

## **Country Grocer – Save a Tape Program**

Thank you to volunteer Daphne Andrews for overseeing this fundraising initiative. Country Grocer gives a \$50 gift card to W2S for every \$5,000 worth of receipts that are collected from community members.

## **Gender Diversity Workshop**

As Wear2Start evaluates our clients needs and recognizes areas for continued growth and learning we are dedicated to providing opportunities to our volunteers and board members to further their knowledge and understanding of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

This year we were so grateful to have the opportunity to facilitate a Gender Diversity Workshop that was facilitated by Connie Quayle. Connie is a past client and expert in the area of Gender Diversity.

**Thank you to all volunteers!**

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of the volunteers that have chosen Wear2Start as part of their journey. We are so very fortunate to have such an extraordinary group of dedicated individuals assisting us in providing such necessary services in our community.

We couldn't provide any of our services without you and I am so proud to be able to work with such inspiring individuals on a daily basis, Thank you!

## **Introducing our new Volunteer Program Coordinator - Sarah Duncan**

Hello, my name is Sarah and this is my brief bio!

I am a west coast girl through and through. My childhood was spent on the west coast of a different island, Ireland. My parents came to Canada when I was 12 and settled in Ontario.... but the west coast and ocean kept calling me so I moved to Victoria after high school. When I am not working, you can usually find me camping in my little camper. I have a 16 year old dog who is my hero, him and I have camped across Canada twice! You may also see me saving a drowning worm or bringing abandoned plants home.

I worked for many years in the banking industry; graduating from UBC Saunderson School of business in 2006 where I continued in the field and became a Mortgage Broker. However, there was an empty feeling in my soul and I knew after 2 years that brokering wasn't for me. I needed to give back through work. I left the industry and set up a dog rescue in Victoria called Tiny's Town dog rescue. I set up the non-profit from the ground up starting with our Board. I ran all of the day-to-day procedures, most importantly, finding and working with volunteers. We fundraised, rescued, home checked, vetted, and most importantly loved abandoned, neglected dogs before rehoming them. The next ten years led me to Managing a Veterinary Clinic, while continuing to volunteer my time for rescue animals. I know my soul is only complete when my job involves helping and supporting others.

As for many people, everything changed with covid and I ended up changing careers. In 2020 I wrote a book and published it with Amazon, while continuing to work in the non-profit sector. After spending a couple of years working with the homeless community, I feel excited about the opportunity to work with people getting back on their feet, starting new, experiencing hope.

## **Quotes**

“The experience was so enjoyable. The three ladies in Wear2Start yesterday were friendly, warm, helpful and professional, they helped me a lot. They are like beautiful angels.”

“My daughter and I came for our appointment this morning. I was truly overwhelmed by your generosity, care, and excitement at finding us outfits. We came home with far more than I ever could have expected. What made my day more than anything was after we left my daughter said that she loved the experience and said she felt like a princess. I haven't seen her so happy in a long time due to the bullying she has

faced at school. I could have cried several times when I could see her great joy. She can't wait to show off her new outfits at school and to return to her thrift store work to help give this same joy to others. Thank you again for giving a time of great joy with the Wear 2 Start team. You gave us a memorable and life changing day"

"I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for the incredible support and assistance you provided me. Your organization truly made a significant impact on my life, and I am filled with immense appreciation for your kindness and dedication.

From the moment I stepped into your doors, I was met with warmth and compassion by your exceptional team members Cindy and Julie. Their genuine care and attentiveness made me feel valued and deserving of the help I received. Their patience and understanding throughout the entire process were truly remarkable. I cannot thank both of them enough for their tireless efforts in helping me find the perfect outfit. They went above and beyond, taking the time to understand my needs and preferences, and ensuring that I felt comfortable and confident. Their expertise and a keen eye for fashion transformed my outlook and gave me the boost of self-assurance I desperately needed.

Not only did Wear2Start provide me with beautiful outfits, shoes, accessories, a handbag and sunglasses but the support and encouragement extended beyond the physical items. The genuine care they showed me as an individual left a lasting impact on my heart. Your organization's mission to empower individuals and provide them with the tools for success is truly inspiring. You have created a safe and welcoming space where individuals like myself can regain their confidence and take positive steps toward a brighter future.

Once again, thank you from the bottom of my heart for the remarkable work you do and the unwavering support you offer. Wear2Start and your incredible staff have forever changed my life, and I will be forever grateful."