



ANNUAL REPORT 2018



BRIDGES
FOR WOMEN SOCIETY

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Message from our Board co-chairs



Alison Watson, Co-Chair



Kalen Schick, Co-Chair

We are pleased to share the Bridges for Women Society's 2017/18 annual report with you. The last year was certainly a positive and busy year for our organization. Bridges for Women again served women in our community, working to empower and support women to build and grow their capacity for healing and gaining independence. This year, we widened our circle of support with many new community partnerships on the island.

This year's International Women's Day event saw a change in our annual program. Our theme was "Inspiring Women" and, as always, it was a success. We hosted **Tracy Porteous**, Executive Director of Ending Violence BC, and **JR LaRose**, former member of the BC Lions and member of *Be More Than A Bystander* campaign. The event raised more than \$20K to support ongoing program development to break the cycle of violence against women living in Southern Vancouver Island. The board would like to thank the staff, executive director and volunteers for all of the hard work it takes to bring together this annual event. It has blossomed over the years to be a highly anticipated community event, thanks to creative, careful planning, and dedication.

We recognize that our donors, sponsors and community partners play vital roles in the work that Bridges does in our communities. We are grateful for the many friends and loyal supporters of Bridges for Women Society. Their support ensures the delivery of our important programs and promotes the work we do in the community. A big thank you to the Bridges for Women staff, whose passion and commitment to improving lives is the life blood of the organization, and has been since the start.

Many thanks to our volunteers, mentors and fundraisers for the time and talent that they generously give to Bridges. This kindness is what enables Bridges support clients on their journey towards financial independence and freedom from the impacts of trauma and abuse.

Finally, our Board of Directors has taken shape this year with some incredible new members joining our team. As we look forward and plan for the next five years in our upcoming strategic planning meetings, we are thankful to have this dynamic board of directors help guide Bridges on its journey.

Sincerely,

Alison Watson, Co-Chair

Kalen Schick, Co-Chair

Message from our Executive Director

It has been another year of providing high quality trauma informed services to women impacted by abuse, violence and trauma in our community. This past year, we weathered another challenging year in terms of the policies and limitations of the Employment Program of British Columbia, and are hoping that the new funding opportunity being released in the 2018-2019 fiscal year presents enhanced understanding of the specialized population that we serve here at Bridges.

This year, we had a number of firsts in terms of our programming for women; our first Federally Funded Indigenous Bridging enhancement funding from the Federal Ministry of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, and our first Métis-specific Bridging program pilot, funded by the National Indian Brotherhood Trust Fund. It was the fulfillment of a life's goal to work on the development of this program with Bridges colleagues, and to write and create program workshops, materials, and resources to support Métis women and fill a gap in services with respect to accessing trauma counselling.



We said goodbye this year to an amazing long term colleague, Ms. Jenny Holder, who has moved on to a position with Camosun College, and we welcomed Ms. Gwen Davies in to a new role as Director of Programs and Clinical Practice. We also welcomed several new staff, including our Agency's first Financial Controller, Ms. Chantal Barchard, who brings with her a wealth of experience and knowledge. As always we are weathering the winds of change with careful expansion, and innovation in terms of our staffing and program offerings.

I would like to thank our Board of Directors, staff, funders, donors and supporters for your continued belief in the important work that we do here at Bridges for Women Society. As we move into our Strategic Planning Year, I am excited about the vision that our Board, staff, and stakeholders will create for Bridges for the next 5 years of our Society's operations. I remember well the goals set, and the manifestation of those positive visions that have brought us to today's successes.

It is an honor to serve this outstanding organization, thank you for the opportunity.

With respect,

Victoria Pruden, BCom, DBA
Executive Director

Message from our Financial Controller

Bridges for Women relies on revenues largely generated from a fee for service model. This model results in fluctuating monthly cash flows and requires tight monitoring to ensure we have sufficient funds in place to service our clients.

Although we realized a deficit of \$23,928, the year ended March 31, 2018, with strong cash flow management and a significant increase in grant funding, allowing us to retain cash reserves for carryforward into our next fiscal year.

Despite an increase in the number of clients served, our fee for service revenues dropped 11% from prior year. We are mandated to serve clients even if we cannot recover the cost of our services. This is often the case when dealing with specialized populations who require extensive trauma counselling and supports that extend beyond what may be permissible for billing through our fee for service contracts. Our ability to serve these specialized populations was only possible through the generous donations of our supporters and significant new grants raised, in particular for our Indigenous Bridging program.

We were also pleased to make a significant investment in our organization's infrastructure this past year through a computer network redesign and upgrading project. This ensured our systems remain compliant with the requirements of our fee for service contracts. It also allowed us to move forward with important upgrades of the computer labs at the Downtown and Westshore offices so we can provide clients with a secure, safe and confidential space for women impacted by abuse in the Greater Victoria area.

Our priorities for the coming year include ensuring our compensation & benefits structure remains competitive within our sector and supports our hard-working team. We will also be investing resources to improve our measurement of our client continuum of services so we can proactively identify situations where we are mandated to serve clients but not receiving sufficient funding to do so.

With gratitude,

Chantal Barchard, CPA, CA
Financial Controller



Message from our Director of Program & Clinical Practice

Welcome! I would like to thank all of our staff, volunteers, board and community agencies that support Bridges in all the work that we do here.

This year has seen a lot of changes. Our long term Director Jenny Holder has moved on to a new position at Camosun College and I have stepped into her role. We appreciate all the time and hard work that she has put towards Bridges and know that she will be a wonderful ambassador for us out in the larger world.

Our long term counsellor and facilitator Meaghan Sibbett has left us to move across country to Fredericton, New Brunswick. Our long term front office administrator JL Boutier has also moved into a new position in a green start-up. Paula Calla has moved to Tumbler Ridge. This is a lot of change for our gutsy agency where staff tend to stay for many years. They will all be missed.

However, we have been blessed to hire two new front desk administrators to stream line calls, and organization, Cat Nnaegbunam and Teresa Bernardin. They are enthusiastic and talented and the hub of the wheel of Bridges.

We also have two new counsellor/facilitators here at Bridges, Mary Stock and Jackie LeBlanc. They are both talented in their fields and have fit into our team seamlessly. Dipti Chauhan has been with us since last August. She has strong administrative skills and has become an expert on the complicated and intricate policy and billing of EPBC. Cory Churchill has taken on finance and Chantal Barchard has taken the helm as financial controller.

We are entering our third and final year of staff training for Somatic Experiencing certification. This training is evidence-based to work very effectively with complex trauma. We have found that the training allows us to work at a deep level with the clients and also to have a common language with each other and the effects of trauma that we see.

My goal as Director is to work closely with the staff to ensure that we are working to our highest and best ability in a functional, heart based and trauma sensitive practice. I am looking at systems that will make it easier to see how much is being done on a daily level. This has become essential as our staff has grown and our numbers and types of programs offered has grown as well.

I am excited about this new year as marked by our AGM and the dynamism of our team.

Sincerely,

Gwen Davies, MA, RCC

Director of Programs and Clinical Practice



Message from our Fund Development & Communications Manager

The 2017-18 year has seen some incredible fundraising and promotional success. Together, we raised 9% of the operating budget, for a total of \$165,398 in donations and fundraising. Successful funding partnerships, an inspiring International Women's Day Luncheon event, supportive community media, responsive annual and monthly donors, and the generosity of third party fundraisers made all of it possible.

While I am overwhelmed by this generosity in reaching our funding goals, what is most remarkable is the connection each and every person holds to Bridges and its mission. Now, more than ever, it is important to create the world we want to live in, rather than idly standing by, and all of you are doing so through your spending, your time, and your hearts. So this funding report is focused on the development of the shared story of Bridges, a shared story made up of the sum of its parts: each and every one of you!

Each and every one of you will not allow women to fall through the cracks created by funding restrictions and contracts.

Each and every one of you will ensure there will always be a safe place for women impacted by violence in Greater Victoria.

Each and every one of you will break the silence of violence to encourage women to get the support and services they deserve. This is not fundraising, this is mission making, and that is what I am thanking all of you for.



Julie Cormier, Fund Development & Communications Manager

Partnership in I.T. Network Redesign and Updating



Island IT is the newest partner to the Bridges family and they are dedicated to increasing the safety, protection and confidentiality of the women we serve. As our new

tech service provider, Derek and Julie Sanderson took on much more than our IT needs and services. They have contributed major donations towards the redesign of the IT network, and upgrades to the Downtown and Westshore computer labs. Their partnership helped leverage funds from Gaming BC for the IT redesign, as well as the Rotary Club of Victoria, Town of View Royal and the Hamber Foundation in the upgrading of the computer labs. We are thankful for this new and blooming relationship.



Celebrating International Women's Day...Inclusively

Our annual fundraiser took on a new direction this year. We invited a male speaker to share in this day of celebration of the advancement of women. JR LaRose, former CFL player, and Tracy Porteous, from Ending Violence BC, really impressed the crowd with their authentic, passionate work in the fight to end violence against women. JR inspired us all in seeing the instrumental role that men play in the issue, in saying 'yes', it is a man's issue. Thanks to our guest speakers, emcee, attendees and valuable sponsors, we raised \$20,000 for healing and training programs. This celebration is so important to mark and we thank all the government officials who showed their support on March 8th. We can't wait to see you all next year!

Community News That Cares

We want to thank Ocean 98.5 and Black Press for their support in this year's outreach and promotions. Ocean 98.5 joined us as a sponsor for International Women's Day, but since then, the radio station has continued to promote Bridges and its mission to serve women impacted by violence in the area. The women behind this radio station know the value of outreach and how important it is to be part of breaking the silence of violence against women. Thank you Susan, Robin, and Ella and your team!



Black Press proved their dedication to the community of Victoria BC this year. They supported Bridges in publishing an extensive outreach newspaper wrap that reached many households across Greater Victoria. This news piece had a major impact in reaching women who were isolated, nearing poverty and living with the effects of violence and trauma. We truly value this partnership with Black Press and thank you for being a part of our community.



I thoroughly look forward to getting to know more about each and every one of you who contribute, generously, to the shared story of Bridges and its mission. Let's keep creating a consent-filled, violence-free future for all.

Sincerely,

Julie Cormier

Fund Development & Communications Manager

Bridges for Women Employment Program

“First Day of Class”

First day of class finds women walking into a cozy and well-loved kitchen and classroom space. She is met warmly by her facilitators and chooses her seat. She is anxious, hopeful, nervous, excited, and notices the sign on the wall; “build the future”. This is her anchor; a clear message about why she is here. She is invited to head to the kitchen to help herself to coffee and breakfast. Laughter greets her as she descends the hallway to the kitchen table where she is welcomed by staff, other Bridges clients, and her new classmates. This first day of class sets the stage for the whole program.

As the days go by she learns about group guidelines, sharing airspace, boundaries, communications, and building peer support within the classroom. She feels a cacophony of emotions, and begins to identify them and use them in ‘I statements’ as she learns and practices assertiveness over aggression. She learns to ban negative self-talk, and that shame and blame are not hers to carry. She develops an understanding that what happened to her wasn’t her fault; she’s not crazy, or lazy, or stupid, that was just part of her trauma.

She creates a magnificent visual depiction of her future, her hopes and dreams and goals, and presents it to the class amid anxiety, and tears, and laughter. This creation will adorn the wall for the rest of her time at Bridges, a talisman of what could be; a visual reminder of what she is working towards, a touchstone to gaze at when doubt creeps in.

Gradually, as the weeks go by, it becomes more comfortable thinking and talking about career. She learned that her experience with trauma has brought out innate qualities that are valuable and beautiful and exquisite; that she has more skills and strengths and accomplishments than she ever gave herself credit for. She learns to value her life experience and transform her scars into business language that light up her resume.

Graduation looms. She now dances through the hallways, comfortable and self-possessed, excited for the future, for school, career, and healthy relationships. Knowing there is still work to be done, but that she can achieve anything. She feels comforted by thoughts of friendships born, of healing nurtured, of hope restored, and the knowledge that she always has a home at Bridges.

2017-2018 Bridges Employment Program

The Bridges Employment Program (BEP) aids women who have been affected by abuse, violence and neglect by giving them the support and tools they need to build economic independence. In our supportive program women can heal from their trauma, develop their workplace skills, and make goals for the future.

We have morning and afternoon classes running three days per week and workshops including but not limited to; psycho-education, self-care, personal skills, healing from the impacts of trauma, building self-esteem and reclaiming identity; as well as a myriad of employment-based workshops such as resume building, writing cover letters, job preparation, and volunteering. In addition, students may attend English, Math and Computer skills upgrades through our partnership with Camosun College.

This past year has been super busy with full classes, new formats, challenging cases and many successes. The downtown location continues to run 6 classes a year, in a format that we've tweaked over the past few years; where we run two classes per day, with a gradual transition between recovery from trauma topics, and employment topics. This is now a pretty smooth operation! Our BEP team is led by senior facilitator Wendy, who is often joined by guest facilitators Charlene, Stephanie, and Kirsten lending their skills to co-facilitate in trauma content and counselling groups. New employee Mary is a welcome addition in both the counseling and facilitation departments; with Mary stepping in as afternoon facilitator. Patricia and Carrie round out our team as the anchor, facilitating weekly employment workshops, assessments, and fieldtrips.

New employment program class start up dates are January, May, and September, with graduation falling six to seven months after that. Graduation from programs at Bridges remains an amazing celebration of hope, identity, perseverance, and reclamation! There are few dry eyes, much pride, and awe at the accomplishments we witness. Graduation is something we do very well! Most students continue to work with staff on next steps, such as employment or education. It is wonderful to see the confidence, excitement, and motivation of students as they move into the next phases of their lives.

Successes and Highlights:

- High graduation, at about 80% completion (*many women not completing the program continue on at Bridges for other services and may reapply for BEP when ready*).
- Long-standing relationships with students, as we recognize trauma can take time to heal; slower is often the fastest route to healing.
- Students often move on to other programs, such as mentoring and self-employment, and very often continue with formal education through Camosun College, or other educational institutions.
- Strong peer supports and friendships develop during the course of the program.
- Students with very high anxiety and poor coping skills learn to ground, stay present, and develop faith in themselves, and the world around them.
- Students develop community connections and networking skills through fieldtrips to the Royal BC Museum and the Victoria Art Gallery, volunteering at Beacon Community Thrift Store, and by participating in cold calls and employer interviews in labour market research.
- Clients learn to place value in their life experience, and reframe newly acknowledged skills and strengths into business language which becomes part of her new resume.
- Clients work to overcome fears around job search, drop off resumes, attend interviews, or prepare for education.
- Counseling workshops support clients to heal from PTSD, anxiety, and grief; which promotes overall healing.

We continue to remain consistent in our criteria for services, which require clients to have some stability in their lives before starting programs. This includes having stable housing, in recovery from substance use (if that was an issue), and freedom from domestic violence.

Because of the impacts of trauma, these issues will sometimes re-emerge after the start of the program and this presents a challenge to students and staff. We work as a team to resolve issues in a way that considers our clients' needs first.

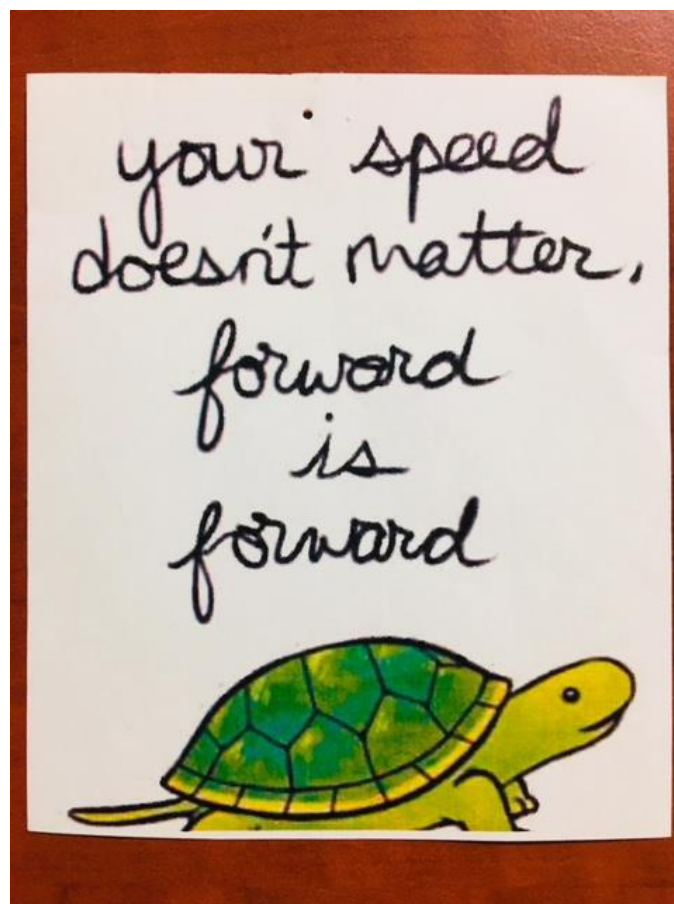
*~ Wendy Schultz, Bridges Employment Program Lead
Facilitator and Coordinator*

ESSENTIALS Program 2017-2018

Essentials is a one-day a week Trauma-Informed Employability Program at Bridges' Victoria office, and it has been gaining momentum as of late. This workshop series is meant to introduce clients to our curriculum, focusing most on community connection, how to create safety within a group setting, how to set boundaries, communicate assertively, and to understand the impacts of trauma. Essentials offers an anchor to Bridges and an introduction to our other services available to clients, such as Camosun College upgrading, Trauma Counselling, Career and Personality Style Assessments, and 1-1 Career Exploration. I find great joy in facilitating this workshop series, as I bear witness to transformation, courage and resiliency every class.

Kirsten Moline

Essentials Facilitator



CORE Program 2017-2018

CORE is the two-day a week Trauma Informed Employability Program at Bridges' Victoria office. We have a very full room of devoted clients, working diligently on occupying space and digesting our curriculum in a group setting. This 6-month long workshop series is not only meant to introduce clients to our trauma-informed curriculum, but also offers a focus on how to create safety within a group setting (and within themselves); how vital self-care is; how to set and hold boundaries; how to communicate assertively; how to explore and value who they are as a unique individual; and to understand and heal from the impacts of trauma. CORE offers a firm anchor to Bridges, and a connection to our other services available to clients, such as Trauma Counselling, Camosun College upgrading, Career and Personality Style Assessments, and 1-1 Career Exploration, and the Mentoring Program. I am inspired and honoured to facilitate this CORE workshop series, as incredible courage, resilience and determination shows up in each participant every session.

~Kirsten Moline, Facilitator



Mentoring Program 2017-2018

The Mentoring Program is currently midway through its' final year of a three-year contract. We continue to strive to match our BEP, CORE AND SEP graduates as mentees, to women in the community who wish to show up as supportive, effective mentors for them! In what is now my third year of working at Bridges for Women Society, I truly believe this specific program allows us to witness the continuation of the trauma healing process, manifesting via developing and holding of relationships. Mentees not only have the benefit of goal setting with the support of their mentor, but also the valuable opportunity to practice some core Bridges' curriculum. This includes "saying no with empathy"; setting and holding boundaries; practicing assertive communication; and so much more.

Together, Dianne and I continue to focus on interviewing, training, coordinating and supporting the mentees and the mentors that have so far been matched, and all the ones yet to be matched. We are proud to announce that for the period of June 2017 to May 2018, we have successfully completed eight matches, and have started another four.

Mentors and mentees have the option to participate in Advanced Training Workshops in a group setting together every 5-6 weeks. We have developed a meaningful series of workshops, such as P.A.T.H Goal Setting; Mentor Career Panel Night; Intentional (Danielle Laporte Inspired) Feeling Collage Night; Scavenger Hunt & Picnic in Beacon Hill Park & Graduation Ceremony.

We gratefully acknowledge funding support from the BC Ministry of Jobs Tourism and Skills Training, to be able to continue supporting Bridges for Women Society clients move towards their possibilities!



With gratitude,

Kirsten Moline & Dianne de Champlain, Program Coordinators

Bridges for Women Intakes

Submitted by Lisa Kurytnik, Intake Lead and Counsellor

Over the past year, 565 first contacts were conducted (initial screenings) and 300 intakes. A total of at least 273 people were accepted into our programs, including the Metis program we held this year. People may be ineligible for services based on various factors, including contract-based eligibility criteria and/or not being ready for Bridges programming.

Barriers preventing people from receiving an intake appointment at the downtown location:

Lack of follow through – 64
Major mental health issues – 10
Still involved in an abusive relationship – 8
Just out of an abusive relationship – 11
Active addiction – 16
General lack of stability, including housing – 14
Full time student – 5
Working full time – 13
On Medical EI – 1
Maternity EI - 1
Not interested in employment services - 3
More appropriate for other agencies such as ICA – 31
Outside catchment area – 7
Contact info outdated – 4

We have seen a noticeable rise in the number of returning clients, which often prevents us from being able to renew the service options available (such as the ten counselling sessions). Those seeking services sometimes have needs beyond the scope of our resources, such as serious mental health issues or housing crisis. When women do not meet eligibility criteria, we make every effort possible to redirect them to other appropriate resources, which can be exceedingly difficult at times because: agencies who offer Stopping the Violence counselling have extraordinarily long waitlists (around 9 – 12 months), there is an extreme housing shortage in Victoria, and there is a dearth of mental health supports in the community (for example, USTAT [Urgent Short Term Assessment and Treatment through VIHA] who will only accept individuals with suicidal ideation and there is about a 6 week waitlist).

Word-of-mouth continues to be the primary method of referral. Intake calls come in waves throughout the year and, considering the nature of trauma, the percentage of women following through with services is considerably high (an expected challenge). In terms of income source, the largest group of women is on PWD, followed by employment obligated women on income assistance. The age spread of clients is 19 – 72. Most of our clients have some college/university, followed by a grade 12 level education, a college diploma, and a Bachelor's degree. Bridges for Women continues to serve as many people as possible to accelerate the healing process, reach new levels of personal empowerment, and achieve a higher level of independence through supportive wrap-around programming by staff members who genuinely care.

2017-2018 Employment Services Team Report

We are excited to provide a synopsis of the variety of activities assisting clients to move towards employment. We work with clients in groups and one-on-one, providing a specialized and individualized approach. Clients have had a wide range of experiences and trauma so it is imperative that we meet them where they are, develop employment plans that are feasible and doable. The basis for the work that we do is setting the clients up for success.

A variety of employment-related services can be accessed at Bridges:

- ♦ Vocational assessments highlighting personality preferences, interests, values, personal qualities, skills, strengths, abilities, learning styles, conflict-handling modes
- ♦ Occupation and education research
- ♦ Labour market information
- ♦ Career planning
- ♦ Job search tools – resumes, cover letters, interview skills
- ♦ Referrals to short-term occupational training (e.g. First Aid, Foodsafe)
- ♦ Referrals to specialized assessments with psychologists and medical professionals (e.g. functional capacity, psychological-vocational, neuropsychological, learning disabilities)
- ♦ Assistance with upgrading applications for Camosun classes
- ♦ Assistance with training plans and applications to federally and provincially funded certified training programs
- ♦ Referrals to Wage Subsidy services
- ♦ Referrals to Self-Employment programs
- ♦ On-going case management
- ♦ Administration

The Facts – what we did in the previous year

Some numbers for the April 2017 to March 2018 fiscal year include:

- ♦ 724 Career Assessments were administered and debriefed
- ♦ 58 Skills Training packages - includes successfully completed upgrading courses only and entire post-secondary training programs completed or in progress
- ♦ 46 clients received Specialized Assessments
- ♦ 30 clients found employment and were employed a minimum of four weeks after their start date

Where we start

For clients who are unclear about their career direction or who can no longer do the work they did in the past, we provide a full-service career exploration process.

Bridges provides assessments:

- ♦ To help clients to understand themselves better;
- ♦ To help clients understand others better; and thereafter,
- ♦ To help determine work that is a good fit and provides sustainable income for the client.

Gaining skills for employment

Many of our clients have only had entry-level work experience and are single parents. Their skills are inadequate to find work that provides the income required to support them and their families. The training program offered through the Employment Program of BC provides funding while the client attends training. During 2017-18, Bridges had a record number of clients participating in training programs.

Clients attended the following programs:

- ♦ Mental Health and Addictions
- ♦ Health Care Assistant
- ♦ ESL Health Care Assistant
- ♦ Office Administration
- ♦ Welding
- ♦ Horticulture
- ♦ Community Support & Education Assistant
- ♦ Certified Dental Assistant
- ♦ BC Transit Driver
- ♦ Hairdressing

Specialized Assessments

Often clients who attend Bridges' programming are experiencing a variety of factors that affect their employability. What may be affecting a client includes:

- ♦ Short-term memory loss
- ♦ Cognitive issues (including head injuries)
- ♦ Complex trauma symptoms – emotional, physical
- ♦ Self-worth issues
- ♦ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Through the EPBC, we can provide specialized assessments to clients. In the past year, we have provided Functional Capacity Assessments, Psychological-Vocational Assessments, Neuropsychological Assessments, and Learning Disabilities Assessments.

These assessments are provided by trauma-informed professional practitioners who provide detailed reports and recommendations.

Finding employment

During this year, clients found work in a variety of occupations including:

- ♦ administrative assistant
- ♦ medical administrative assistant
- ♦ bookkeeper
- ♦ graphic artist
- ♦ communications
- ♦ research assistant
- ♦ customer service
- ♦ customer care contact
- ♦ pharmacy assistant
- ♦ health care assistant
- ♦ companion to the elderly
- ♦ certified dental assistant
- ♦ labourer
- ♦ bus driver
- ♦ food service worker

Clients found employment with both small and medium-sized businesses, organizations and government bodies. Some employers include: BC Public Service, Island Health, ICBC, Maximus, Beacon Community Services, Amica, BC Transit.

What clients had to say about their participation

Client 1:

"I can't thank Bridges enough for my new life. Bridges has taught me how to set good boundaries and know my worth. When I first came to Bridges I had low self-esteem, no boundaries and let people walk all over me. But now after going through this program and the amazing people there, I have such a full life and so many plans that I didn't think I could do or make. I know my worth and won't take anything less. ... Bridges gave me the confidence and special tools to help me deal with stress and give myself self-care. Thank you Bridges from the bottom of my heart." (currently in post-secondary training)

Client 2:

"I want the community to know that there is no other service in Victoria that offers the multiple services that Bridges does. The focus on healing from trauma is what makes Bridges so special. I was not able to focus on parenting, education, and employment without first coming to terms with the

trauma I experienced in my life. Bridges helped me to heal but also aided me with upgrading & funding for college. My daycare has also been covered throughout BEP, upgrading, college and for the first year of my employment. I would never have been able to obtain the life I have today, in only 2 years, without the support of the Bridges program."

Client 3:

"Entering Bridges for Women, my confidence was at an all-time low. I had left (another) bullying at work situation, and had just withdrawn from a program for starting my own business. In my early 50s, I found that getting hired was a lot different than it was in my 20s. I felt washed up and despite lots of education and plenty of skills, unemployable. Bridges helped me recognize the trauma I was carrying around, and gain the tools to move past it so I could move on with my life. In addition, I gained valuable skills on communication and setting boundaries, so I had the power to initiate change in myself, and honor the skills I have."

"It took me over a year to be ready and able to find work, but I don't regret the time I spent to put myself back together. As a result, I have created some strong new habits (time management and priority setting have been key) and am excelling in my new workplace. The chaotic "hot mess" I used to be has completely transformed, and I am showing the world my capabilities, patience and strength. I'm so thankful to Bridges for giving me the space and time to put it all together."

Client 4:

"Bridges for Women is so precious to my heart. The amount of love the facilitators and counsellors poured out helped me flourish to my full potential, and made me realize I am NOT alone.

The encouragement and support I received from Bridges helped me find my dream job and I finally am able to provide my daughter with the life WE BOTH deserve."

~ Cheryl McKay, Case Manager

Bridges for Women Online

This past year has continued to see continued growth and success in the Bridges for Women Online Program. As we continue to engage with women in our various catchment areas throughout Victoria, Sooke, Westshore, the Peninsula, Campbell River, Port McNeil, Sayward, Cortes Island, Quadra Island, Cumberland, Salmon Arm and Revelstoke, we continue to find creative ways to meet the diverse needs for safety, genuine connection, increasing knowledge and skill development of diverse women from a distance.



Stephanie Pedneault and Briana Mikkelson,
the Bridges Online Program team

We currently have 26 women actively engaged with our online program in various capacities. Each woman working through this program is assessed for her current level of safety, readiness, needs, and wants. We are then able to create a tailored plan of connect via email, regular phone check-ins, online program coursework, and/or group participation, as she make her own self-determined steps forward.

Northern Vancouver Island Partnerships

In our North Island catchments, we have continue to experience a thriving and strong partnership with both the Campbell River Women's Resource Centre and the North Island Employment Foundation (NIEFS). Through these relationships, the weekly group at the Women's Center has evolved into a consistent and strong touchstone for Bridges students in the Campbell River area. The diverse women who attend the group gather together every Friday to explore the Bridges' curriculum while receiving connection and support. We are fortunate to have a skilled and compassionate staff member from the Women's Resource Center facilitate the group.

This collaborative partnership has allowed us to deliver more client-centered services from a distance. We enjoyed a successful outreach trip in late spring 2017 to Campbell River where we had an opportunity to connect face to face with Bridges' clients and to share information with various community agencies in the area including at NIEFS, Mental Health and Addiction Services Campbell River, the Women's Centre, and the North Island Survivors' Healing Society.

~ Stephanie Pedneault and Briana Mikkelson, the Bridges Online Program Team



(L to R) Jenny Holder, Stephanie Pedneault, Linda Schulz, Briana Mikkelson, Jodi Boyd, Jenny Evans, Donna Desmet - *The Bridges Online team from Bridges Victoria office, staff from Campbell River Women's Resource Centre and our partners from North Island Employment Foundations Society take a break and enjoy an ice cream in support of the CR Women's Centre Social Enterprise Pier Concession stand*

Bridges for Women Sooke

Bridges for Women Society has now been operating in Sooke for two and a half years! We have had the honor of working with a number of delightful, resilient and inspiring women over the past couple of years. We also continue to be grateful to the Worklink staff, who have graciously welcomed us and the women we work with into their space. The programs and services currently offered in Sooke are as follows: Bridges Employment Program (BEP) group, personal and career assessments, 1:1 support, advocacy, case management, career exploration, job development, counselling and computer use.

Many clients in Sooke have also accessed counselling, Camosun College computer upgrading, job development and further career exploration in the Westshore office. However, the distance to Westshore and Victoria continues to be a barrier. For individuals relying on public transportation, the commute to our Westshore location tends to range from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes each way. With this in mind, we have recently increased our counselling support and began to offer some additional career exploration support in Sooke.



Briana Mikkelson &
New Counsellor Jackie LeBlanc



Bridges Employment Program Workshop Room in Sooke

There are currently fifteen women accessing services in Sooke. Over the past year we have connected with over **twenty-eight new women** in the Sooke area. Of those twenty-eight women, sixteen women have completed intakes, with twelve women signing on to access services. Fifty-four counselling sessions were completed with women from Sooke this year. We had eight women participate in our BEP group. While a number of other women accessed a total of thirty-two one to one workshops. Additionally, twenty-five personal and career exploration assessments were completed. We are also happy to report that this past year six women have successfully obtained employment and two women have started university!



Shoppers Drug Mart Staff



Bridges on Display at Shoppers

As we mark another year in Sooke, we continue to be amazed about how the community comes together to support each other. This past fall Bridges for Women Society in Sooke was fortunate enough to be selected as the registered charity for the Tree of Life campaign at Shoppers Drug Mart for the second year in a row! The staff at Shoppers Drug Mart (see image above) worked very hard telling customers about Bridges for Women and asking if people would be willing to donate. It was an excellent example of how a community can come together to support women. The results were overwhelming, \$5,347.00 was raised! We are very grateful for all of the staff and customers. We also share much appreciation for other community providers in Sooke, who do wonderful work with women in the community and tell them about our services.

~ Briana Mikkelson, Sooke Program Lead

2017-2018 Beecher Bay Sc'ianew Program

Bridges Beecher Bay/ Sc'ianew program marked our first time forming a relationship with this wonderful little community in East Sooke. Our Sc'ianew program was facilitated by Emilie Lindsay, Briana Mikkelson, and Meaghan Sibbett. From September 2017 – March 2018, we worked with a dedicated group of women to deliver Bridges curriculum in a safe and culturally appropriate way. We are grateful for the support of the community, particularly Denise Chewka and everyone in the band office admin team for helping us to arrange space to work and to connect with community members. Our thanks also to Chief Russ Chipps for allowing us the honour of working in this beautiful community.

Our group had a lovely private graduation ceremony attended by Briana Mikkelson, Victoria Pruden, Emilie Lindsay, and our five dynamic and inspiring graduates. We had a wonderful lunch at My Chosen Café to celebrate. This was an unforgettable experience and it is difficult to convey the honour we feel to have been able to walk with this group of women for the time we did.



From a client:

When it comes to thanking the people that supported me, I want to thank everyone of you, as a group you helped me become who I now am, I have made several positive changes in my life, thanks to you. I learned how to trust again, it's a small group but the trust is there, I hope that never changes. Even your personal struggles helped me to find ways to solve mine. And I felt blessed knowing that you were able to trust me when you brought up your struggles in our small circle. I hope we will continue to get together every two weeks or once a month, just to 'stay in touch.' I would like to raise my hands and thank each and everyone of you for everything you have done for me. HISKWE.

~ Emilie Lindsay, First Nations Programs Coordinator

Bridges for Women, Westshore

Westshore is a fast growing community, so it not surprising that we exceeded the intake goals set for this year. BEP workshops, assessments, one to one workshops and counseling form the foundation of our program. We are also pleased to have Carrie from the employment team come out biweekly to conduct workshops on workplace topics and meet with women individually to assist them in their career planning.

This year we held 2 graduations to celebrate those who completed the workshops in BEP. The latest graduation was integrated into the first week of the new classes so that new participants could witness that BEP is a powerful place for women to learn and heal together, and change their lives.

Three of our participants won tickets to the International Women's Day event and found the speakers very inspiring and helped them deepen their understanding of the challenges women who have experienced trauma face. They were very heartened to witness the support and caring of other women in the community.

Camosun classes continue to be a highlight of our offerings, with many students taking Computers 030 as their first college class. We appreciate Camosun's outreach and recognizing people need a safe and supportive place to begin college classes. As we are aware, trauma often interrupts education, and many assume they are not capable of higher level courses, so completion is a major accomplishment. Success builds confidence and opens career options for women that would not otherwise be available to them. Once they have one course under their belt, many find the courage to continue and complete English and Math. One highly motivated participant completed 5 courses this year!

Outreach is an important part of broadening our network. One of our biggest and most successful projects was outreach to Beecher Bay. Our Counselor, Meaghan, worked closely with Briana from Sooke and Emilie from downtown to reach out to the Beecher Bay community and were successful in providing workshops and counseling to this community. In addition, we made presentations to several groups: Harrison Place, Metis Society, Young Mom's, MCFD, Parole officers at the Westshore Courthouse, YMCA youth conferences in Colwood and downtown, and 2 workshops at the Soroptomist youth conference.



We are excited to enter our 5th year in the
Westshore community!

Bridges Self-Employment Program

Submitted by Carrie Everett, Program Coordinator

"The Self Employment program offered me a sense of connection, community, friendships for life and the knowledge and inspiration to start my own business."
2018 SEP Graduate

Women entrepreneurs are on the rise. And the appetite for business development and entrepreneurship is no exception at Bridges for Women Society. Many of our participants and graduates have the dream of owning their own businesses as a way to create economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. It's incredibly exciting when we get to provide specialized, trauma-informed entrepreneurship services into our suite of programming.

With funding generously donated by the Victoria Foundation and delivered in partnership with Community Micro Lending, Bridges was able to connect twelve women to our entrepreneurship training program from February 5, 2018 – May 30, 2018. This was the first time the program received funding by the Victoria Foundation, but it was the fourth offering since 2012.

Over the four months of programming, participants attended class two mornings per week with the Community Micro Lending facilitator where they were able to flush out their business vision, develop supportive relationships with their peers and work through specialized curriculum enabling each person to craft their personalized business plan. In addition to set classes, participants had access to bi-weekly business coaching sessions delivered by Community Micro Lending.

Some unique offerings outside of the business planning curriculum included attending the City of Victoria's Small Business Provider Information Session at City Hall, a Westshore Women's Business Networking Luncheon, and a Business Card Design Jam with the Vancouver Island Chapter of Certified Graphic Design Professionals, students from Pacific Design Academy and our program participants. Print sponsorship was generously donated by Digital Direct printing as they have for past cohorts. In addition, we welcomed many guest speakers to the group: seasoned entrepreneurs sharing their wisdom; accountants; small business representatives from government; digital marketing professionals and more.

"The program teaches you the skills and gives you the knowledge that you require to start up a new business venture. The guest speakers from our business community and the events that we attended, inspired us to have the confidence to go out and "just do it". The instructors and facilitators have been amazing. They are very supportive of our journey and inspire us to carry on and build our new lives with confidence. So very grateful to have participated in this program which includes mentorship for continued success."

~ 2018 SEP Graduate



May 30, 2018 SEP Graduation Ceremony at Bridges for Women Society's office

Our graduates businesses include the following sectors: local agriculture, acupuncture services, digital printables, miniature knitting, doula and parenting support services, reiki services for pets, First Nations arts, digital imagery, sonic journaling workshops, photography and women-centered visual arts.

This group of twelve women was filled with great wisdom, support, laughter, boldness and bravery. The Bridges team is so thankful for each woman and the gifts that were shared. We are visioning bright, bright futures!

"What I gained from SEP was this new modality to live as an observer and a participant; I realize I've been observing how things are for a long time and now I am stoked to act with strategic full heart and to bring value to the community." 2018 SEP Graduate

Inspiring Women

Bridges for Women Society was pleased to receive a grant from the New Horizons for Seniors Program to develop a support group for women 50+. Over the past year, 47 sessions were held, with over 50 women attending, and a core group of 12 who attended most sessions. Participants engaged in activities and educational sessions, initiated a celebration of birthdays, and attended community events together. They painted, constructed wild women and wise women masks, made tissue paper flowers, designed individual and group mandalas, and let their creative juices flow in many other projects.

Seven engaged in peer to peer mentoring and conducted formal presentations or workshops, including art, singing, belly dancing, nail decoration, and stamp collecting. One Elder who was a residential school survivor, mentored others by sharing traditional stories, educated other participants about aboriginal art at the art gallery and taught cedar weaving in the community.



**Dianne De Champlain,
Coordinator of Inspiring Women**

There was lots of laughter and wisdom shared as the group shared their views on various topics – everything from favorite shoes and music to more serious topics. Several BEP workshops were offered.

The group submitted a report to the BC Poverty Reduction Strategy. They identified issues and challenges facing senior women who want to work or volunteer: poverty, challenges in food bank services, health and dental issues, inadequate and expensive housing, loneliness, gaps in support services and identified a need for more opportunities and flexibility for seniors by employers.

Nationally, loneliness has been identified as a major challenge in older women's lives, and our participants verified this. After attending Inspiring Women, participants reported increased connection with others and increased awareness of community resources. Several women reported improved quality of life. One participant said the group deeply enriched her life and helped her heal—she felt loved and valued for the first time in her life. Three participants found full time work; 2 enrolled in Bridges Self-employment program; 3 enrolled in Bridges formal mentoring program.

As part of the program, an outreach campaign with information about trauma was designed and delivered through the local newsgroup to 103,000 homes with estimated readership of 197,700 in greater Victoria. This was printed into a brochure that is used in ongoing outreach, resulting in increased phone calls and referrals to Bridges.

We had an opportunity to explore new partnerships with the University of Victoria and participants have been invited to attend and present at VIDEA speaking series, a 2018 project funded by New Horizons for Seniors.

The women held a very special and memorable final celebration event in the penthouse of Oswego Hotel and honored the participants and those who had taken leadership in the group. It is our hope that Bridges will be successful in securing funding to allow this group to continue. Inspiring Women demonstrated that the power of women coming together is energizing and healing.



2017-2018 Trauma Informed Yoga Program

In February 2018, Bridges piloted a 5-week Trauma Informed Yoga class designed for people living with symptoms associated with Complex Trauma and PTSD. The pilot was a success and we are currently in the middle of our second series. Each series has had 8-10 Bridges students and graduates.

Two of Bridges Registered Clinical Counsellors (RCC), Kristin Bulger and Sarah Kinsley, are registered Yoga Teachers who have studied Trauma-Sensitive Yoga through the Trauma Center. This program was founded by David Emerson and Dr. Bessel van der Kolk in 2002.

These psychosocial group classes incorporate Yoga principles and practices. The facilitators aims to support emotion regulation, stabilization, and skill building for students affected by trauma in a safe space. Students are encouraged to focus on particular dynamics (i.e.: what muscles they are using, what it feels like to feel the feet, what is feels like to notice the breath). Facilitators use invitational and inquiry-based language to encourage choice, voice and control.

~ Sarah Kinsley and Kristen Bulger, Trauma Informed
Yoga Coordinators



Bridges for Women - Trauma Informed Portable Yoga Studio

We have created a portable Yoga studio with donations of mats and Yoga props from Ajna Yoga and Half Moon Yoga Supplies. Our aim is to continue offering this treatment modality that honours the role of the body in recovery from trauma while empowering women to safely inhabit and have control over their bodies in a supportive environment.

2017-2018 Métis Women's Program by Bridges for Women



This pilot program was funded by the National Indian Brotherhood Trust Fund (NIB Trust Fund) and was the first program of its kind.

Professional Trauma Counselling Sessions (Oct 2017-Mar 2018):

We delivered 111 professional trauma counselling sessions from October 2017 to March 2018 to 19 Métis women participating in the Métis Women's Bridging Program. These individual healing sessions led by trauma counsellors identified and addressed many issues, including:

- Extensive abuse history (Sex Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, Childhood and Adult experiences of Physical, Sexual, Emotional Abuse)
- Grief and Loss; several clients experienced losses through death of family members during the program
- Substance Misuse and Addictions Issues
- Sexual Assault and Sexual Exploitation treatment
- Ongoing Harassment/Abuses from ex-partners
- Navigating MCFD (Ministry of Children and Families)
- Planning for a healthy future including further education and career
- Working somatically to resolve historical experiences of chaos and emotional neglect from family of origin
- Navigating probation services
- Mental health (Anxiety, Depression, Personality Disorders)
- Trauma from adolescence and its impact on day-to-day functioning
- Creating safety and security; learning to deal with upsets that arise while navigating life
- Release and processing of trauma
- Addressing self-harm
- Extreme childhood abuse including neglect
- Abusive relationships in adulthood
- Loneliness and isolation
- Housing insecurity and risk of homelessness, poverty
- Food insecurity and malnutrition, poverty
- Disconnect from culture and community; 60's scoop adopted out, raised in foster care system, death of Métis parent - some of the related life experiences participants have.

- Depression, anxiety, hopelessness
- Lack of personal identity as Métis Women and also as individuals
- Unclear direction - limited ability to set goals and follow through -- a common impact of trauma
- Working deeply with childhood trauma

Weekly Trauma-Informed, Culturally-Specific Workshops (Aug 2017-Mar 2018):

Starting in August 2017, weekly workshops were delivered at the Downtown Bridges location on Wednesday evenings until March 28, 2018. These workshops provided a consistent, safe, culturally-sensitive, Métis-specific approach with meals, and supports for transportation. We prepared a meal, ate together as a group, and then broke off into the workshop space for the second portion of the evening. Of the 39 women registered for this program, approximately 21 attended these workshops on a regular basis and the rest participated in individual healing services only. Many of the workshop attendees also received professional trauma counselling.

We held twenty-four group workshops on Wednesday evenings and eight of these workshops included traditional Métis meals, such as making bannock, pakwiskan or libay/bangs, rubbaboo, dry meat, hamburger soup, tourtière, moose roast, and elk chili tacos. In addition, we were able to deliver five weekend workshops, focused on making traditional healing objects with elders and Métis leaders. Each workshop had an attendance of 8 to 21 participants, with some participants unable to attend each session. Family members and new participants were welcome to attend the sessions. The topics and activities of the workshops included:

- Métis Program Information Night, Traditional Food, and facilitated sharing circle #1
- Métis Program Information Night, Traditional Food, and facilitated sharing circle #2
- Creation of Group Guidelines and creating vision boards
- Inspiring Métis women stories
- Communication styles and assertive communication
- Eight Traditional Métis food dinners prior to our workshop sessions
- Opportunity to make and cook bannock, pakwiskan or libay/bangs at the evening workshops
- Exploring Métis Identity and our Métis Foremothers; A film viewing "Women in the Shadows" and sharing circle with Métis filmmaker Christine Welsh
- Introduction to creating healing cards with traditional Métis Art
- Métis Maskikiskwew traditions and traditional Plant Medicines with optional sharing of medicines to take home
- Smudge, Brushing with Eagle Fan, and Prayer ceremony
- Sisters in Spirit Vigil and Sharing on Métis Missing and Murdered Women
- Intro to Traditional drumming and singing
- Beading and Healing Cards
- Medicine Bags and Medicines
- Métis History and Rights
- Art Cards
- Conflict Styles

- Christmas Craft Making
- Métis Sash
- Drum Making ** 2 full days Weekend Session**
- How to Increase and Benefit from your Transferable Skills (Skills and Strengths Suitcase Group Presentations)
- Art Cards
- Métis Women's Songs
- Sashing our Warriors – Métis Experiences of Domestic Violence
- Purification Ceremony with Tom McCallum and Métis Elders
- Knowledge Keepers: Métis Traditions and Culture ** 2 full days Weekend Session**
- Beyond Survival Accomplishment Stories incl. Steps to Healing Low Self-Confidence
- Identifying Employability Skills and Strengths (Vision Board)
- Regalia Making ** 2 full days Weekend Session**
- Finishing Traditional Regalia ** 2 full days Weekend Session**
- Art Workshop **5 hours on Sunday**
- Strengthening and Resilience for Transitions to Closure
- Family and Community Feast – Graduation
- Sashing Ceremony
- Presentation of Eagle Feathers Ceremony



Cutting Hide; drum making



Participants and Elder, Ribbon Skirt Making Workshop



Ribbon Skirt Making

Métis Women's Bridging Program Curriculum & Healing Cards (Mar 2018):



Four of 25 Métis Women's Healing Cards (front and back)

The curriculum of the program was documented and archived onto the Bridges for Women Society website www.bridgesforwomen.ca under Programs, onto the Métis Women's Program webpage. The resources include the program curriculum and supporting documents.

These resources are available for download and have been shared within the local and provincial Métis community. More specifically, this program curriculum and resource were formally shared with members of the Métis Nation Ontario, Métis Women of British Columbia, and Métis Women of Saskatchewan, as well as the United Nations special representative on violence against women in Ottawa, and shared online through the national Facebook page of the Provincial Métis sites.

The Métis Healing Cards produced in the program workshops have also been a great avenue for sharing and promoting the program, with the distribution of 200 sets of cards. This program will continue to be promoted online, in person and through upcoming conferences of the Vancouver Island Metis Communities July 2018, National Women of the Métis Nation Conference in October 2018 and the Provincial Métis of Women Ontario conference in August 2018.

~ Victoria Pruden and Julie Cormier, Bridges for Women

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