



## Bridges for Women Society Annual Report 2015 – 2016



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## Message from the Bridges for Women Society Board of Directors

It gives us great pleasure to share Bridges for Women Society's 2015-2016 annual report with you – good news is always a pleasure to share. The report highlights several positive outcomes. Following significant and successful expansion. We began building strength and resiliency to ensure that Bridges is well positioned to continue delivering quality services that empower and support women impacted by violence or abuse. The 2013-2018 Strategic Plan continues to guide initiatives that support financial sustainability, exceptional program delivery, communications and human resources. In the coming year, we will begin to develop the next Strategic Plan that will guide and frame our work here at Bridges for Women Society.

This year's International Women's Day event was a resounding success and served as an illustration of how far Bridges for Women Society has come. With a fresh new concept, venue and layout we were able to create a meaningful and inclusive event for our supporters and stakeholders. The overwhelming response creates optimism and highlights opportunities for future Bridges events.

We are filled with gratitude for the many friends and loyal supporters of Bridges for Women Society and recognize that our donors, sponsors and community partners play vital roles in the work that Bridges does in our communities. They help to support delivery of our important programs, and promote the important work we do in the community. The Bridges for Women staff, whose passion and commitment to improving lives is the life blood of the organization and has been for nearly twenty years.

Finally, thanks to our many 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.

This year our Board of Directors has changed dramatically. We thank our outgoing Chair, Mary Bumstead, Beth Kope, Catherine Mustafa, Linda Neville, Daina Rozitis, and Johanna Scholten for their 12 years of combined service to Bridges – they will be missed, we are delighted to welcome Thandi Pilkey, Sabina Saransingh, Kalen Schick, Dibya Shrestha, and Alison Watson and the opportunity to learn from their fresh perspectives.

Sincerely,

Lindsay Walton and Thandi Pilkey, Co-Chairs

## Message from Bridges' Executive Director, Victoria Pruden

The 2015-2016 year represented a year of continued growth for Bridges for Women Society. We physically moved our location in July 2015, in order to accommodate the volume of clients needing services. Our move to 1809 Douglas Street was an incredible revitalization to the agency staff and clients alike. Adequate office space, new classrooms, multiple private women's washrooms, and two kitchens support the women who journey to Bridges to improve their employability and heal from trauma.

This year has been another where community partnerships featured prominently for us. We partnered with Tseycum First Nation to deliver a very successful on-reserve program for the women in their community, as well as expanded services to Sooke in partnership with Worklink. Our relationship building for the benefit of women in their home communities continues to be a priority, and our satellite programs and their success lets us know this approach is worthwhile!

We welcomed news that the Employment Program of BC contract would be extended for another 3 years, with re-negotiation or extension expected in 2018. We also obtained funding for our Mentoring program through ESS funding from the Ministry of Jobs; welcome news for us as this program has become such a valued part of our programming. We spent the year without a fundraiser on our team, and Sandra and I took on the roles of grant writing, social media and fund development as a team in addition to our usual workload. We saved the agency some expense, and were proud of our accomplishments; however, we are pleased to welcome our new Fund Development and Communications manager, Julie Cormier, to our team for the upcoming year.

We have grown as an agency and walk a conservative walk to balance the needs of the clients and staff with a very conservative approach to spending, including overhead expenses. As our Accountant reflected to us this year in her remarks accompanying the Financial Statements, ***"You had a great year - way to go. So many changes - it feels like you have come into your own and are a force to be reckoned with."*** Transitioning to a non-profit "fee for service" model with our largest contracts is a continual learning, monitoring and balancing act. There are no guarantees with this funding, and we must be very mindful of our fiscal management.

In the year ahead, as we welcome a new and dynamic slate of board members, we look forward to increased stability and stabilizing organizational harmony reflective of our feminist roots. At the centre of these efforts are the amazing women who we serve, who courageously take on the work of healing and creating change in their lives.

Victoria Pruden, Executive Director

## Message from Bridges' Director of Programs, Jenny Holder

The past year has continued to be a dynamic time for program development and continued growth at Bridges for Women Society. We focused the expansion of our services to reach more rural women in need of specialized employment services and trauma counselling. We opened up new services group and individual services for women in Sooke and the surrounding area in a co-location with Worklink at their Work BC office. We are able to reach more women living in rural areas, as Sooke is easier for clients to travel to than our Westshore location. It provides a safe connection point for resources, referrals, and employment readiness skills, career assessments and specialized employment training.

Bridges program expanded this year to include a face to face group, in partnership with Tseycum First Nation. This partnership was a new initiative this year. We were successful in opening up our first weekly trauma counselling spots in partnership with Beacon Community Services offering space for the sessions. We have been blessed to have strong participation and community involvement in this project.

All of our counselling staff are now registered with the Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) and can offer eligible/ funded clients counselling through CVAP. This has allowed us to assist clients with their CVAP applications and enabled them to continue counselling where needed for specific approved issues. We have seen a great benefit for the clients as they are in need of long term counselling services to address the complex trauma responses they experience.

The provincial government opened up a specialized funding source within our existing EPBC contract called the Single Parents Employment Initiative. This services offers funding for training and childcare for single parents receiving income assistance and allows them to continue to collect income assistance while they are going back to school. This has brought a number of interested clients through our doors this year looking for assistance with career research and extensive funding applications/ training packages.

We developed a partnership with the Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute to allow our agency to host Somatic Experiencing trauma counselling training for our staff. This is a great success as access to this training without the partnership was beyond our financial means. This partnership sets the groundwork needed for us to become fully trained and certified in Somatic Experiencing counselling.

This year we conducted two Trauma-Informed Practice trainings for front line staff working in community settings with victims of violence including Transition Houses and First Nations service providers. We now have an introductory level Trauma-Informed Practice training workshop designed and ready for delivery to other agencies, community groups and employers.

Jenny Holder, Director of Programs



## Organizational Overview 2015 – 2016 Fiscal Year

We continued the 2015-2016 fiscal year to work in an environment of 100% fee for service contracting in the Employment Program of British Columbia (EPBC). We continue to analyze on an ongoing basis our operations and the EPBC fee schedule model. We remain dependent on high client volumes and a wide range of programs and services to generate revenue for sustaining the society. We continue to explore alternate sources of revenue, including fund development, to support the longevity and financial sustainability of the agency.



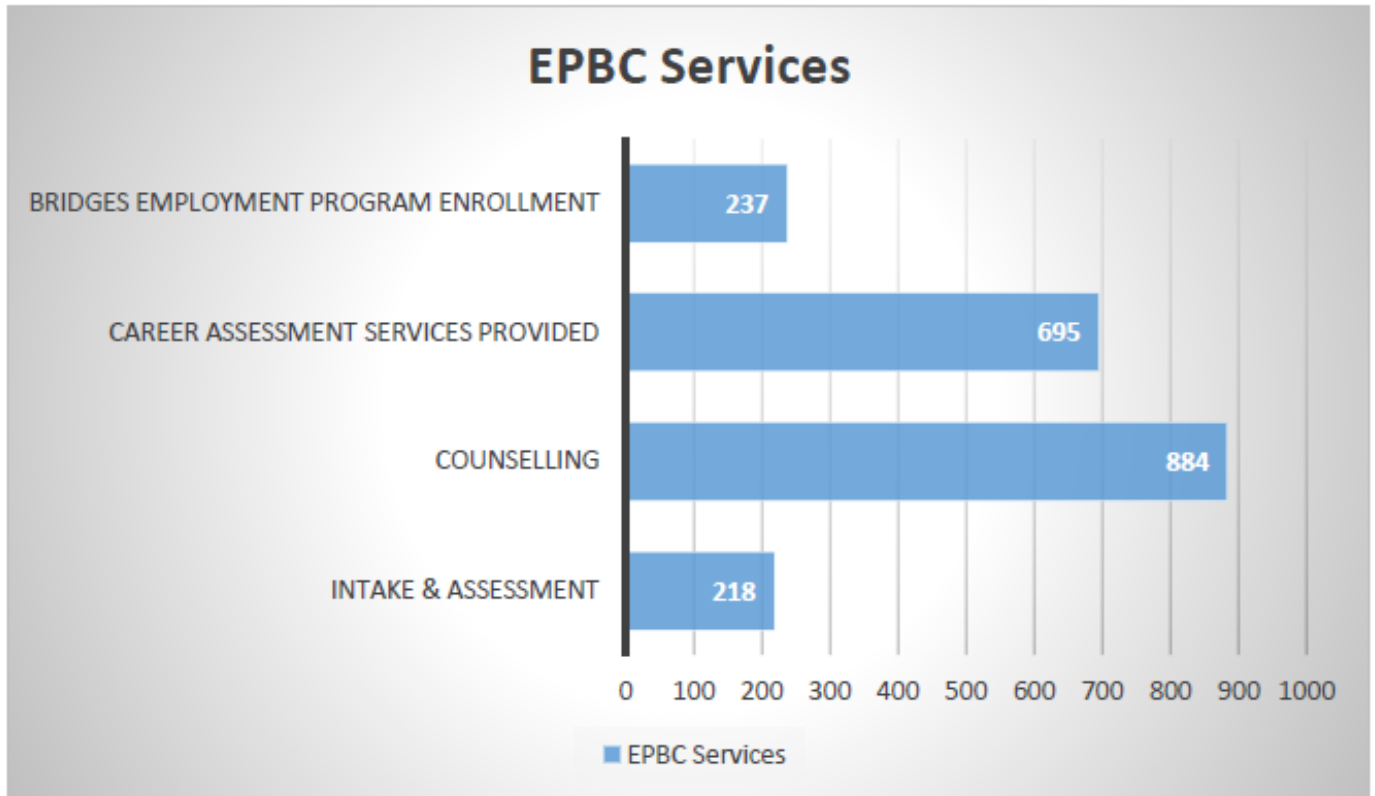
**We moved to our new location at 1809 Douglas Street** – this process represented the culmination of many hours of negotiation, research and work on behalf of our board and staff. We wish to thank our Lawyer, Mr. Joe Gereluk for his gracious assistance through this process at no charge to the society. In July 2015, we took possession of the space and it has been very positive for staff, participants, volunteers and board.

Thank you Black press for the positive press on our move and for the acknowledgment in your Women in Business section.

**Bridges continues to grow its trauma counselling practice:** As identified in our strategic plan, our trauma counselling services are growing. We are able to provide EPBC clients who need counselling 11 sessions, and also have a number of our staff registered with the Crime Victim Assistance program.

**Provide a fulsome Career Counselling and Career Services experience at Bridges:** This year we provided 695 Career Assessment services to our clients, including the Myers-Briggs, Strong assessment, and more. We are engaged in high quality career counselling and assessments, Job Development Services, and assisting clients with Training Plans and funding requests. It is very gratifying to see Bridges return to a model of service that can support women through their journeys into employment and post-secondary education.

## Employment Program of BC Stats at a Glance:



### We also:

- Had First Contact with an additional **120 women** who did not complete intake into our programs
- Had **770 Sign in self-service or drop in service** visits from Women not in regular programs
- Had **9,076 phone calls** to our Front Desk!

## Community Event Highlights 2015 – 2016

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*We were pleased to be involved in several community based events in the past year, highlights include:*

### **International Women's Day 2016:**

We partnered this year with lead sponsor, Raymond James, and Aidan Henry / Brink Events, to produce the International Women's Day 2016 luncheon. Our keynote speaker this year was the inspiring Silken Laumann, and a special introduction was provided by her Honor, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, Judith Guichon. We were thrilled at the success of our 2016 International Women's Day event, this year we sold 230 tickets. Thank you to our lead corporate sponsors, Raymond James, Lindalee Brougham, and TD Wealth for your support in promoting and making this event a success. We were joined by Robyn Farrell, of KOOL 107.3 FM, as our MC again this year. We raised \$29,000 at this luncheon, which represents a major portion of our fundraising goal for the year. Thank you to our event Co-Chairs Donna Ruppell and Joyce Hodd, our volunteers, attendees, and supporters!



Keynote Speaker, Silken Laumann

**RAYMOND  
JAMES®**



Co-Chairs Donna Ruppell and Joyce Hodd



Naomi Dankwerth & Her Honor,  
Lieutenant Governor, Judith  
Guichon, OBC



Bridges Volunteers & Diva Fundraiser Bags



**Women in Leadership Conference:** Milica Ivaz of Investors Group created a dynamic Women in Leadership conference this year, with proceeds benefitting Bridges for Women Society. The well attended conference raised over \$6,000 for Bridges for Women, and we are so grateful for your ongoing support Milica and Investors Group!



**Mayfair Mall Style Program and Fleurs de Ville:**

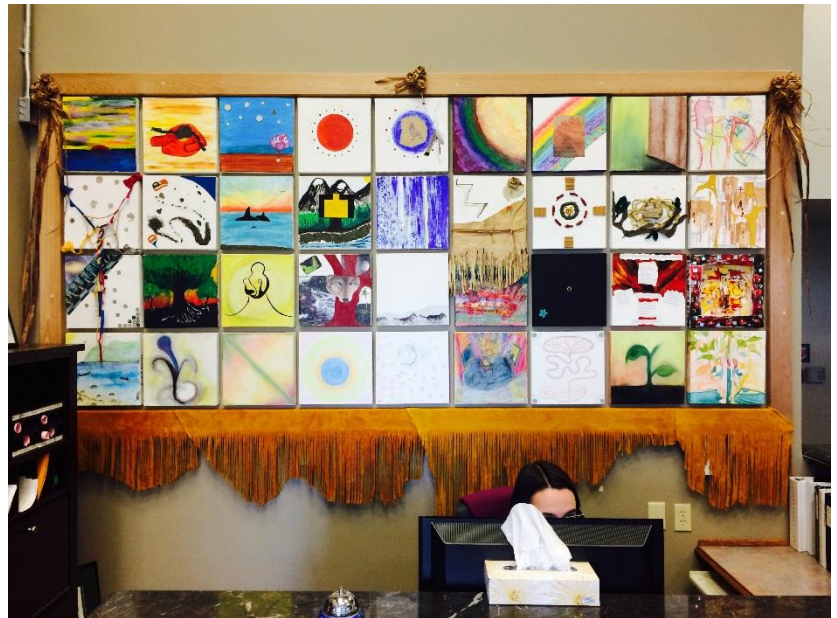
Mayfair Shopping Centre, our corporate partner, engaged Bridges in their “Fleurs de Ville” event, with a local florist creating a beautiful life size mannequin inspired by Bridges covered in fresh flowers. Mayfair continues to provide an ongoing source of donated revenue with the style program – for a \$20 donation to Bridges for Women, a woman can have a session with the Mayfair stylist, Caitlin Eng.



**Journey of the Lifegiver Project and Art Installation**

Bridges was approached by Camosun College to be the steward of the “Journey of the Lifegiver” Indigenous Women’s Art Project. This work was the result of several weeks of Art Gatherings symbolizing the women’s journey from Innocence, through trauma and resilience, to wellness and strength. An opening ceremony and feast was held at Bridges the Evening of March 30<sup>th</sup> 2016.

The photograph shows the display in Bridges Front Entryway.



# Program Reports

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## Bridges for Women Intakes

Over the past year there were **218 intake assessments** completed, in which women became clients of Bridges. In addition, there were upwards of **120 initial contacts** made with women who did not proceed to assessments and programs due to reasons, such as:

- Still being involved in an abusive relationship
- Mental Health and Psychiatric Challenges
- Substance use issues, need treatment prior to attending Bridges
- Legal issues, including difficulties with former partners
- Language barriers for women with English as a Second Language
- Working too many hours in sustainable employment
- Currently being enrolled in full time education or training

Referral sources include: word of mouth, other employment agencies, such as, GT Hiring, The Cridge Centre for the Family, USTAT, Harrison Place, Burnside Gorge, Victoria Sexual Assault Centre, The Ministry for Children and Family Development, private counsellors, the Internet, and various transition houses. We, in turn, refer the women we connect with, to the relevant resources in the community. Bridges for Women continues to grow and expand its capacity to meet the needs of the community.



# Employment Services Report

## by Cheryl McKay, Patricia Rawson, Kirsten Moline

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*Employment services encompass career exploration, career planning and job development.*

*Services are offered, both individually and in groups, on a client-centred, continuous intake model. Employment services work alongside other programming.*

### **A variety of employment-related services include:**

- Vocational assessments highlighting personality preferences, interests, values, personal qualities, skills, abilities, learning styles, conflict-handling modes and strengths
- Career exploration, occupation and education research
- Labour market information
- Job search techniques – resumes, cover letters, interview skills, developing leads, networking, elevator speeches
- Referrals to short-term occupational training (e.g. First Aid, Foodsafe)
- Referrals to specialized assessments with psychologists and doctors (e.g. cognitive, learning disabilities, functional capacity testing)
- Assistance with training plans and applications to funded training programs (e.g. upgrading & post-secondary skills training)
- Referrals to other service providers (e.g. wage subsidy, self-employment)
- Unpaid work experience
- Customized employment

### **Some statistics for this fiscal year (April 1/15 – March 31/16) in all Bridges catchments:**

- # of career assessments - 695
- # clients in job development: 4 started; 2 completed
- # clients in unpaid work experience: 4
- # clients in customized employment: 2
- # unpaid work experience clients - 4
- # clients completed STOC's - 10
- # clients in-progress or completed post-secondary funded training - 3
- # clients completed English, math, computer upgrading in partnership with Camosun College – 36 completed. (plus more in-progress)
- # clients employed
  - to 4 week follow-up - 30
  - to 12 week follow-up - 25
  - to 24 week follow-up - 23

## Success Stories

One of our clients Maureen (not her real name) went through Bridges' career exploration process and identified occupations that would be a good fit for her. The client has a keen interest in taxidermy so an informational interview and site visit was arranged with a man who has been in the business for many years and is seen as an expert in the field. Maureen asked questions to help direct her on how to start in the business. Through the exchange, the man was inspired by Maureen's self-directed knowledge and interest in the field and offered to help her develop the skills. While Maureen is looking for work in another field, she plans on following up and moving in this direction for her long-term goal. Maureen feels inspired and focussed on her future.

Merna (not her real name), 55 years old, has had a history of entry-level work and has spent a good deal of her time raising children and helping raise her grandchildren. She is looking for work but cannot do the physical demanding work that she did when she was younger. During her career exploration process, she identified 3 areas that she might pursue, and through research, by talking to people in the community, eliminated 2 because of the physical nature of the work. As she works well with others, she is considering the social service field. She is now doing upgrading and feeling confident about her ability to reach her goals.

Ivy (not her real name) is a single parent who is a recent resident in Victoria. Due to changes in the labour market she needed a new career direction. After doing career assessments, research and informational interviews she decided on a ten month program at Camosun College. She completed and excelled in this program making the Dean's list. She is now actively job searching.

## New Service

Starting in February 2016 Bridges officially started offering Customized Employment Services to two clients! Customized Employment is a very in-depth time invested one to one service that starts with the Discovery stage, which unearths the skills, strengths, & abilities that clients possess. This Discovery Information then informs what types of jobs would be a fit for clients, so to set them up for success in the workplace. Customized Employment is often called "Job Carving" so to find the specific job for clients (not advertised) that match their skills & abilities with the needs of the Employer. Intensive on the job support is part of Customized Employment, with the overall goal of independence in the workplace for the client.

## Bridges Career Mentoring Program

### by Kirsten Moline and Dianne de Champlain

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The previous Bridges Career Mentoring Program contract ended in the fall of 2015. However we were soon awarded another 3 year contract that started in December 2015! Each year of this new contract, we have the goal of matching 20 of our Mentees to women in the community who wish to show up as supportive, effective Mentors for them! I can tell you as a new staff member at Bridges for Women Society that I truly believe being the Coordinator of this program offers witness to a variety of gifts. Some of these gifts range from the sometimes weekly calls I receive from women in the community who want to become a Mentor (from having attended the inspiring Bridges For Women Society International Women's Day event for example) to the many Bridges Employment Program graduates who want to take the next step in creating possibilities for themselves, by requesting a Mentor, as they are aware that they have value and are deserving of this specific support.

Also new to the Bridges Career Mentoring Program, is a partnership between myself and Dianne de Champlain, who Coordinates Programming at the West Shore Bridges for Women Society location. Together we have and are 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 so far we have matched 8 Mentees to 8 Mentors and all of these matches are going well so far. Of these 8 Mentors, 3 of them have mentored before and were very happy to participate again! It is obvious to us so far that both the Mentees and Mentors are equally contributing to the positive connecting opportunity that the Mentoring relationship can offer.

Mentors and Mentees have the option of to participate in Advanced Training Workshops in a group setting together. Planning is under way for the following topics for these workshops: guest facilitator and staff member Sarah Kinsley to deliver her forte, a workshop on "Mindfulness", then Dianne and I to deliver P. A. T. H. Goal Setting & Visioning, and Card Making for Grounding and so many other potential topics

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 Counselling Services

### by Gwen Davies

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Our move to our new headquarters at 1809 Douglas Street has been very good for our ability to work with our clients in counselling. We were facing challenges last year of simply not having enough space where all the demand for counselling could be met. We now each have our own offices and this allows us to book to full capacity.

We have found that safety planning, housing problems, complex childhood trauma and serious mental health issues have been increasingly presented in our clientele in the last year. We have also noticed more self-harm, brain injury, issues with drugs and alcohol and more immigrant and older clients accessing our services.

We have billed for over 893 sessions for counselling over the last year, and have hired two more counsellors to join our team. Kristin Bulger comes to us from Calgary where she was well versed in the effects of trauma from working in Addictions and Recovery and the Sexual Assault Centre. Our other counsellor, Sarah Kinsely, has returned to us from Toronto. Sarah worked for us in 2008 and has been very involved in the Mindfulness program at the University of Toronto and integrates a variety of modalities in her practice. We have seen a lot of referrals from our community partners. We are thankful for their referrals and trust in us as a trauma focused women serving agency.

We have had the amazing good fortune to start training in the Somatic Experience Modality as created by Peter Levine. This is a body based psychotherapy model which helps the client center and calm their autonomic nervous system. We are really excited to see how Bridges continues to be cutting edge and evidence based in how it approaches trauma.



## Bridges Online Program Report 2015-2016

### by Stephanie Pedenault and Alegha Van Hanuse

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We are so pleased to see tremendous growth and success in the Bridges for Women Online Program in our various catchment areas including Victoria, Tseycum First Nation, Campbell River, Sointula, Port Hardy, Port McNeil, Alert Bay, Salmon Arm and Revelstoke. We currently have 31 women enrolled in our online program with 8 women who have recently expressing interest in the program and who are currently moving through the intake process.

We continue to have a strong partnership with both the Campbell River Women's Resource Centre and the North Island Employment Foundation (NIEFS). Through this support, the weekly group at the Women's center has evolved into a consistent and strong touchstone for the women in the Campbell River area who are in the online program. The diverse women who attend the group gather together every Friday to explore the online curriculum while receiving connection and support. We are fortunate to have a staff member from the Women's Resource Center facilitate the group who is skilled in delivering trauma informed programs. This collaborative partnership has allowed us to deliver more client centered services from a distance.



**Campbell River Women's Centre Partners**

We also continue to explore ways to collaborate effectively with our community partners in knowledge sharing. In the past year, we have travelled to Campbell River to train NIEFS staff regarding how to support and refer women to our program who have experience trauma and violence. In addition, during this trip, we were able to connect with our partners at the Campbell River Women's Resource Centre and co-facilitate one of the Friday morning Bridges groups. Meeting face-to-face with staff and students who we have formed strong connections with from afar was an exciting and powerful experience for the Bridges team.

Over this last year, we have also strengthened our collaboration with WorkBC partners in Revelstoke and Salmon Arm, continuing to make efforts to support our community partners in making appropriate referrals and collaborating on case management of current clients. We have

served 3 clients over the past year in the Revelstoke and Salmon Arm areas and continue to explore ways to increase referrals and our ability to connect with appropriate potential clients. We are also currently creating refreshed marketing materials, an informational webinar on how to support and appropriately refer to the Bridges program along with a trip to the interior so that we can directly connect with support agencies and create potential partnerships.

We continue to enjoy a strong relationship with BC Technology for Learning Society and have received 60 free laptops from the program this year so that we can continue to offer computers to those women in need. Not only do these computers allow women the ability to engage in the online classroom safely, students are also able to complete school work, create resumes, and communicate with potential employers with greater ease. We also ordered 4 desktop computers to add to our computer lab at the Bridges downtown Victoria office.

This past year we also enlisted the support of a computer tech to help us update our online classroom platform. This work has resulted in a more user friendly, aesthetically pleasing, and safer site for clients to navigate.

We continue to feel honoured to be part of the Bridges Online Program as it continues to grow as a dynamic and engaging community where diverse women have received and shared vulnerabilities, insight, learning, and growth both personally and in connection to their employment and financial goals. We are excited for the bright future of the Bridges Online Program and are proud of the role it plays in serving the needs of women in various communities around BC.

## Bridges Employment Program Report 2015-2016 by Patricia Rawson and Wendy Schultz

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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.

Classes are three days per week and include psycho-educational workshops focusing on self-care, personal skills, healing from the impacts of abuse, career planning, job preparation, and volunteering. We also offer English, Math and Computer skills upgrading through our partnership with Camosun College.

This past year has been very busy with full classes, new formats, challenging cases and many successes. The downtown location now runs 6 classes a year; that's double what we were doing in past years! New class start up dates are January, May, and September, with graduation falling six to seven months after that. Graduation is an amazing celebration, of hope, identity,

perseverance, and reclamation! There are few dry eyes, much pride, and awe at the accomplishments we witness.

The employment program is forever striving to achieve a balance in curriculum between psycho-educational content, skills, and employment/career- focussed workshops. With an expansion on career exploration and a solid employment series, this balance is now a little closer to fruition. Charlene, Stephanie, and Kirsten lend their skills to co-facilitate with Wendy in trauma content and counselling groups in the first phase of the program. This first phase also includes Patricia providing career exploration and includes 8 career assessments. During the next phase, Sarah and Patricia facilitate weekly employment workshops and facilitate the process to move clients to graduation.

## **Bridges Employment Program 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*)
- 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
- Students develop community connections and networking skills through fieldtrips to The Royal BC Museum, volunteering at Beacon Community Thrift Store, and by participating in cold calls and employer interviews in labour market research
- Client learns to place value in her 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.

In order to best serve our clients, we have a list of criteria that must be met in order for a woman to engage in full-time programming at Bridges. These include: stable housing; free of domestic violence, free of substance misuse; counseling supports. 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 the group and clients' needs first.

Feedback from clients illuminates how Bridges has changed their lives, giving them the confidence and focus to propel them forward.

## Program Highlight: Bridges CORE Program

CORE is a group that meets twice per week for a half day. It is an open group, meaning that women can join at any point in the rotation. Similar to the full time Bridges Employment Program (BEP), we cover personal development related themes such as assertiveness, boundaries, cognitive distortions, and understanding the dynamics and impacts of abuse, as well as, employment related themes, such as networking, cold calls, resumes, and cover letters. In addition, the following assessment tools are offered in the group setting: Myers Briggs Type Indicator, Learning Styles, and Career Cruising. The group generally runs over a period of 4 – 4 ½ months.

In CORE, women work on their own healing and gain important skills for the employment field. For many, it is the beginning of breaking the cycle of silence and isolation. Women learn they are not alone and that there are others who share similar journeys. Together we explore and learn skills vital to well-being. The CORE clients gain confidence and start to spread their wings. The group dynamic offers a supportive circle within, which women can find their way. Alongside Core, women also have access to 1:1 counselling, career planning, and Camosun upgrading.

## Bridges for Women Essentials Program by Emilie Rhone

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The Bridges Essentials program has been offered on Wednesday afternoons throughout the year. The group is run by Emilie Rhone. This group is designed for women who have other responsibilities in their lives to attend to that present barriers to their attendance in the full time program. Each Essentials student has access to all the services that Bridges provides along with the benefit of a shared group experience.

Essentials workshops mirror Bridges core curriculum in many ways with flexibility threaded throughout so that we can meet the needs of the students as they come up. Our main focus is on the stages of recovery and stages of change. We notice that the majority of participants are focused on making changes in their lives and this process can be scary and confusing at times. The biggest benefit of a group format is that the shared experience illustrates to women that they are not alone. Just as trauma occurs in isolation, healing is nurtured with safe and healthy connection.

Workshops cover topics such as:

- **Self-Compassion**                      **Safe Boundaries**
- **Envisioning the Future**            **Community and Personal Resource Mapping**
- **Understanding Anger**              **Effective Communication**
- **Uncovering Survivor Skills and Strengths**
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We see our role as providing space for women to form connections with themselves and others in a safe and gently facilitated forum. All of our stories are unique, but the process of healing and change is similar for everyone. Essentials provides ongoing intake so the numbers of students and class demographics are always changing. Each participant is enrolled in Essentials for six months.

*In keeping with Bridges' vision, mission, and values, Essentials enables us to reach more women with diverse needs in our communities than ever before. We value the dignity and worth of all women and we are thrilled to have the opportunity to live this value through our Essentials program.*

## Bridges for Women West Shore by Dianne de Champlain

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Bridges for Women WestShore started this fiscal year off with a celebration of its first year in business! Local service providers and businesses were invited to an open house to thank them for their generous support and donations that had helped make our first year such a success.

We have witnessed so many success stories already with women rebuilding their lives and starting work. As an example, one of our grads who had overcome addiction had not worked in many years was extremely overwhelmed and nervous throughout the process of writing a resume and cover letter and interviewing. With support, she was able to conduct 2 informational interviews, submit her resume and at the end of April announced that she had been interviewed. The next week, her face was glowing with excitement when she

stopped in to tell us she had received a job offer. We are happy to report that a year later she contacted us, moved into her own place and is very happy and continues to enjoy work. She is thriving and very proud of her accomplishments and expressed deep gratitude to Bridges for the training and support!

Briana, a practicum student worked with us last spring and we were very pleased when she was hired as a casual worker with Bridges. She has since gone on to work hard in establishing our new location at Sooke. Sooke participants still come to Westshore for counseling and Camosun, but it is exciting to extend our reach and offer other services to women in their local community.

As new programs we have to work hard to maintain growth. We have experimented with a number of strategies to reach prospective clients. We were invited back to the Soroptomist Youth Conference and offered a well-received workshop on healthy relationships. This resulted in increased awareness of our programs. To meet our participants' needs we implemented continuous intake into our classes after a short series of orientation sessions. These Foundation classes give all women coming into WestShore an overview of the agency and policies, an overview of our programs, and tools in grounding.

We are currently open 3 days per week. The programs offered in the West Shore include: the Bridges Employment Program which covers approximately 60 workshops on personal and work skill development, Individual Counselling, Camosun Computer Upgrading, Career Assessments, as well as Job Development and Mentoring. Crime Victim Assistance Counselling was added this year, which allows for longer term counseling.

We are thrilled that Camosun continues to offer computer classes at our location. We watched as 13 women completed the course, despite challenges, and were awarded certificates. This is such a powerful component of our programming – women realize they are capable of learning and completing a college level course, and this gives them the confidence to continue learning. We have had several students move on to do upgrading at Interurban campus or explore educational training is available to them.

We added 33 new clients (45 new ESS) and celebrated 10 BEP graduates this year. In addition, we had several women leave the program early when they found work. We have offered the full slate of 8 career and personal assessments to women, resulting in completion of 161 in our catchment. These provoked great discussion on career paths and self-awareness. We continue to integrate art activities as way to enhance our programming - for example coloring as a way of grounding, pastel smudging to manage and express anger, collage on self-care, and a larger project painting mandellas to demonstrate self-care. These creative projects add vibrancy to our classroom walls!

We look forward to continuing to build our community connections and expand the number of women receiving services in the next fiscal year.

# Bridges for Women Sooke Report 2015-2016

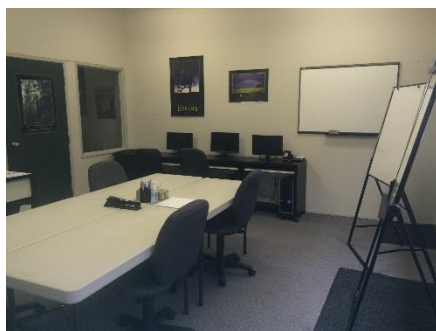
## by Briana Mikkelson

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Despite the downpour of rain, November 12, 2015 was an exciting day for Bridges for Women Society. On this day, we picked up the keys for our Sooke workspace located in Worklink. Over the years the distance and lack of reliable transportation have been barriers for women wanting to access Bridges for Women Society. We are thrilled to have expanded our programs and services out to Sooke. We are also incredibly grateful to the Worklink staff, who having been welcoming, kind and supportive to us and the women we work with. It has been a lovely atmosphere to work and grow in.



The programs and services currently offered in Sooke are as follows: Core group, personal and career assessments, 1:1 support, advocacy, case management, career exploration and computer use. Many clients in Sooke also access counselling, Camosun computer upgrading, job development and further career exploration in the Westshore office.



Over the past six months we have connected with over twenty-three women out in Sooke. Of those twenty-three, thirteen have completed intakes, with eleven of those women signing on to access our services. Five of the eleven women have already found employment! The response to our expansion out to Sooke has been wonderful. Many agencies in the community have welcomed us with open arms and many women have expressed gratitude because our services have become more accessible. As we start to approach the second half of our first year, we are looking forward to working with more women, getting to know more community providers, decorating our space and continual growth.

## Bridges at Tseycum First Nation

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Our Tseycum First Nation Program came together for our first group in October 2015. The group is co-facilitated by Emilie Rhone and Alegha Van Hanuse with individual trauma counselling support provided by Sarah Kinsley. We are grateful to Beacon Community Services in Sidney, and Saanich Adult Education Centre in Tsartlip for providing us with the use of an office for private counselling. June 14, 2016 was the graduation celebration for this cohort.



In total, 11 women have come through Bridges for Women from this small and vibrant community. It is because of the strong support of Chief Tanya Jones and her team of incredible women that Bridges has been so successful in Tseycum. Our Tseycum Bridges group met on Tuesday evenings with dinner, songs, stories, laughter, affirmations, and powerful and courageous healing work.



Often we had the company of honorary baby Bridges members who remind us always of the reason this work is so important. Our vision includes continued work in First Nations communities as long as we are welcome. Our W'SANEC programs represent the essence of partnership, where both

parties take some risks to enter on a new journey together and each hold goodwill and trust for the good intentions of the other—and most importantly, for the women we all serve. When we work together, incredible things take shape. We are truly honoured to have been entrusted with this responsibility and we look forward to many more precious shared moments into the future.



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