



BUILDING

# Connections

Annual Report 2022/23



# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are on stolen land of the Anishnabek, Huad-neh-show-nay, Mississaugas peoples bound by the Dish with One Spoon treaty. This treaty was originally between the Anishnabek, Huad-neh-show-nay, and Mississaugas, and bound communities to share the territory and protect the land. The land is also treaty 16 territory, a treaty signed in 1815.

We and all non-Indigenous were invited into the treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect. We recognize the deep, systemic and ongoing violence faced by Indigenous peoples across Simcoe County and our country and are committed to the indigenization of spaces.

## Table of Contents

<b>Message from our Executive Director</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Message from our Board Chair</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>What Makes Us Unique</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Our Values</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Our Services</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Shauna's Story</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Our Impact at a Glance</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Fundraising &amp; Communications</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Board Highlights</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Board of Directors</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Financials</b>	<b>26</b>



## A Message

from Executive Director, Alison FitzGerald

As we look back on the past year, I am so proud of what we have accomplished. In this report you will read and see firsthand the work we do with our Board members, our staff, and most importantly, with our community. The women and children we serve in our catchment area, five towns wide, are finding help and community assistance and making critical progress to a life without violence. This is all made possible by the donors and volunteers who support us.

Please read our updates and also watch the accompanying videos. Learn about one of our amazing volunteers named Annette. She has generously offered to provide legal support to our residents. Her story is one of courage and success, and we are so grateful she will share her talent and passion. We also made strides with our Strategic Planning Committee as we met to move forward in our commitment to find land, a building and explore options to expand our shelter capacity. Lastly our Fundraising team has been successful in attracting new friends across our service area, through third-party events and our signature Red Shoe Walk.

My Friend's House has been serving

Southern Georgian Bay communities for 32 years and the key to our longevity and success is the value we place on relationships and building connection.

Even though My Friend's House is funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, it is the support of the communities we serve that allows us to open our doors to women and children every day.

As an organization, we know that we cannot achieve excellence alone. Our incredible staff team, who give their all each day, build positive connections with social service, health, and justice providers as well as businesses in the area. They do this as they know collaboration ensures the necessary resources are available to produce the best possible outcomes for the women and children we serve.

The small but mighty Fundraising team connects our incredible donor base to the impact their gifts have on My Friend's House and the women and children who need our support. Through telling our story and demonstrating the deep respect we have for their generosity and compassion, our Fundraising team strives to honour the trust donors have



<https://youtu.be/7xVQrc6wEkw>

SCAN TO WATCH



shown My Friend's House with their financial support.

Our volunteer Board of Directors generously shares their expertise to ensure My Friend's House remains on solid footing to maintain the services we offer and to explore expansion as we respond to the increasing and changing demand for services. It is our volunteer Board that connects us to the broader community as they too help tell our story and inspire others to develop a relationship with My Friend's House.

I am sincerely proud of our entire team. I know whomever you connect with – a staff member, volunteer, manager or board member – you will see their passion for My Friend's House and the work they do.

– Alison FitzGerald, Executive Director





## A Message

from Board Chair, Mary Ruby

As we continue to build strong connections in our community, the Board of My Friend's House and senior staff have now turned their focus to reviewing and refining our model of care to better meet our organization's current and future needs.

In 2022, My Friend's House undertook a Community Needs Assessment to identify where we needed to concentrate our attention and resources in order to meet the increasing demand for services and the changing nature of the needs of abused women and children seeking refuge in the South Georgian Bay area.

From this process came the recognition that the current shelter and programs could no longer adequately meet these needs. Related in part to the movement of people out of urban centres during the pandemic, our area is experiencing a severe shortage in affordable housing. In short, even if the shelter is able to meet the short-term need for crisis services, there is a lack of resources, including available housing, to accommodate residents once they are ready to move on from the shelter.

The Needs Assessment highlighted the urgent need for purpose-built

shelter space and additional programs as well as services to support increased addiction and mental health considerations. Over the last year, the Board has focused on clarifying the vision for the new, expanded facility as well as an analysis of what resources are necessary to build and operate it.

I am grateful for the enthusiasm and thoughtful involvement of all Board members in the visioning process and, in particular, for the leadership of the Strategic Planning Committee, which has taken us through the exercise of imagining what the future may be.

As Chair, I am humbled to work with a group of such passionate and multi-skilled Board members who attend every meeting ready to apply their energy, expertise, and insight towards the accomplishment of the short- and long-term goals of our organization. The Board, as a whole, has benefited greatly from the strength and collaborative approach of all of its members. Thank you.

This year, the Board was fortunate to have had the chance to meet and collaborate with various members of the operations team at My Friend's House. This provided us with a unique opportunity to hear firsthand of the

Annette, Volunteer Lawyer  
Samantha, Shelter Manager

[https://youtu.be/yroKxV6S\\_aY](https://youtu.be/yroKxV6S_aY)

SCAN TO WATCH



day-to-day challenges our staff face as well as their recommendations for future facility and program improvements.

We are extremely fortunate to have such dedicated and highly skilled staff driving the work of the shelter forward. A special congratulations to our Development team who have had an extremely successful year raising much-needed funds to keep our doors open – the campaigns were inspired and attracted visibility and new supporters – well done!

Every day, I am grateful that My Friend's House has Alison FitzGerald as its leader. She has the ear of the community, the loyalty of her staff, the respect of her Board, and the vast knowledge of all aspects of the shelter's mission and operations

through her more than 25 years at the helm. I am very excited to have the opportunity to continue to work with Alison next year.

Lastly, I wish to express my deep gratitude to all our donors, families, friends, fundraisers, and supportive community leaders who have given generously of their resources to ensure that our organization can continue to provide vital crisis services to women in our region. Without you, My Friend's House would not exist.

Thank you!

– Mary Ruby, *Board Chair*



## What Makes Us Unique

Keeping survivors at the centre of all we do, My Friend's House is the only provider of specialist support to the greatest number of survivors across the Southern Georgian Bay community. We tailor our support to ensure every woman is safe and is given options to enable her to overcome trauma and regain control of her life, free from abuse, violence and fear. We listen to women and we give them the space to describe their experiences. We empower them to rediscover their own needs, gradually overcoming the trauma they have suffered.

### Our Staff

Our team of over 25 passionate experts work tirelessly to provide essential support to traumatized women and children. My Friend's House recognizes that its staff are its most precious asset; it is this team that allows us to achieve our Mission, "to provide shelter, crisis support and advocate for equity for women and children in the South Georgian Bay area fleeing from gender-based violence and abuse."

### Our Values

Our values run through the core of everything we do. We integrate our values internally and externally and continually seek to build and develop them. At the same time, My Friend's House expects the highest standard of behaviour and conduct from its employees and volunteers. As such, our values are underpinned by a behaviour framework to demonstrate this commitment.



Sarah, Child and Youth Worker  
Shauna, Outreach Client

<https://youtu.be/GOeJfXKgiwI>

SCAN TO WATCH



## Our Values

### Fearlessness

We are courageous and do not give fear the power to silence or stop us.

### Respect

We acknowledge the dignity, significance and humanity of each other.

### Integrity

We conduct ourselves ethically and with a high level of accountability and transparency.

### Excellence

We commit to a high standard of

service, with women and children's safety at the forefront.

### Non-judgment

We value, support and respect the individual choices made by informed and empowered women.

### Diversity

We see and celebrate the value in ourselves and others.

### Service

We have empathy and compassion for those we serve, coupled with the desire to meet their needs.



## Our Services

### Changing Our Approach

Over the last several years, My Friend's House has not only seen an increased demand for services, but we have also recognized that the mental health of the women and children we serve has been significantly impacted due to the trauma experienced because of gender-based violence.

Since 1991, My Friend's House has provided five core programs that offer safe refuge, crisis support, therapeutic counselling, transitional housing and legal support as well as support for children and youth. With an increase in the number of clients struggling with mental health, we have worked to ensure all our programs are provided with a trauma-informed lens. Trauma-informed care is about creating a physically and emotionally safe environment where trust is established, choice is supported, relationships are collaborative, strength-based and empowerment-focused. Our approach promotes resilience, lays the groundwork for healing and prevents re-traumatization.

In addition to shifting how services are provided, through a federal grant, we have been able to augment our team by creating a Wellness

Coordinator position. This role has become vital to our services and the successful transition of women reclaiming and rebuilding their lives.

The Wellness Coordinator walks alongside women during their time of crisis to help navigate systems and support their physical, mental, and emotional health. This role provides wrap-around care that enables women and their children to stabilize more quickly which decreases time at My Friend's House and creates space for the next family needing services. It is our goal to build on the successes we are seeing by creating a Wellness Program as part of our core services.

### Building Community Connections

Connecting with the communities we serve has also been a focus for the year and we are very pleased to be working with Southern Georgian Bay Community Health Centre in Wasaga Beach. It has been important to expand our reach, since we receive 25% of our calls from Wasaga Beach, but the logistics of transportation has historically been a barrier. With weekly office hours, our team can now provide one to one support and group counselling to women and youth in need.



<https://youtu.be/yjM-mfBqOsY>

SCAN TO WATCH



## Shauna's Story

When Shauna met someone in 2018, she didn't know he would cause her life to spiral out of control. She explains, "I ended up using drugs with this man, and I dropped out of college. I ended up not managing my money very well. Ended up losing custody of my daughter and became homeless."

Eventually, he became aggressive, and he began abusing her verbally and physically.

It was Shauna's mother who convinced her to call My Friend's House for help. Shauna says, "I got a spot [at the shelter] to get away from him." The staff helped Shauna get into treatment and supported her as she worked to get her life back on track.

Today, Shauna has custody of her daughter again. She is in a loving relationship and they recently welcomed a baby into the family. With a healthy lifestyle and a positive outlook, Shauna is excited for the future. She is going back to school for a degree in social work and is hopeful that this new career path will enable her to help others.

Shauna is grateful for the support she received from My Friend's House and says, "They helped me find my own strength to be able to take care of myself and my children. It gives me courage every day to think about how I had them there for me when I needed them most."



# Our Impact at a Glance



**Our 24-hr Support Line handled 3,926 calls**

- 2,586 Crisis Calls
- 1,340 Information and Support Calls



**41 women and 35 children accessed our shelter services**

+ 14,938 nutritious meals served.



**532 women accessed community outreach programming**

including Therapeutic Counselling, Transitional Housing and Legal Advocacy Programs. 52 Children and Youth accessed individual and group counselling.



**Of the women who accessed My Friend's House services last year:**

- 58% reported physical and/or sexual violence.
- 13% were injured when they arrived.
- 25% feared for their life.
- 100% suffered emotional and psychological abuse.
- 60% experienced financial abuse.
- 40% experienced technology abuse



**I didn't know what I was living through until my friend told me how my relationship wasn't normal. It was her that called My Friend's House and had one of the counsellors go to her house to meet with me.**

**The staff at the shelter provided me with support 24 hours a day. If I was having a rough night, like at 3 a.m., I could go sit and talk with someone. I always had the support and guidance. I don't know what would have happened if it weren't for My Friend's House.**



*– former My Friend's House resident*



## Fundraising & Communications

My Friend's House Fundraising and Communications Department finished up our fiscal 2022/23 year achieving our targets thanks to the support of our dedicated donors and friends.

With an enhanced digital strategy, we were able to move ahead with our new website, linking visitors to critical information on what we do, services we provide and opportunities to provide assistance for the work we do. We launched the website in May 2022 and the scope and efficiency of the digital version has enabled us to connect donors to events and fundraising campaigns more readily. As well, we can better feature our updated Wishlist of items needed at our shelter, and showcase new and vital programs that help us to keep both our residents provided for and our community informed.

In addition, we were so proud to start up new Fundraising and Awareness Initiatives with supporters and provide media awareness that spread the message that My Friend's House is here to help. We would like to share a few incredible initiatives that helped strengthen our fundraising efforts, broaden our base and join in the buzz-worthy community gatherings that build connection.

In the spring, we were so excited to work with an Ontario-wide Initiative

– Boots on the Bruce. Dreamed up by and executed every day in her boots rain or shine, hill or dale, Linda Murphy walked the entire Bruce Trail in support of shelter work. Boots on the Bruce was advertised in-house and assisted by the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation. Linda told her story both digitally through updates and video through her own incredible network



Courtesy of [www.thehealthyhiker.ca](http://www.thehealthyhiker.ca)



Chris, Fashion Week Chair/Business Owner  
Ciara, Donor Relations and Stewardship Manager

<https://youtu.be/Xj-o5SeEHjc>

SCAN TO WATCH



and supported by our donor and board outreach, Linda spoke on Fresh Air CBC. Many outlets picked up her story of resilience as she hiked in all weather for 990km. She had friends and shelter workers join her. The last leg done in June, Linda continued to help us, attended events and raised a flag for COURAGE. She then gave us \$50,000 to help My Friend's House support the courage of so many women seeking refuge from violence.

Broadening our base of support, we created a stronger event stream for our Red Shoe Walk. Signage, radio coverage and media articles let everyone know we were spending all September showing off our red shoes, walking the walk and talking the talk to end abuse and violence. Traditionally, the event was Collingwood-centric.

Last year, one of our key events that raised over \$38,000 to achieve our \$106,000 goal happened in Thornbury. A gourmet buffet, welcoming guests from all over South Georgian Bay at a beautiful home, a robust silent auction, and a "Catwalk-themed" pool strut, our hosts Mary and Bev made sure we all had a blast. The next night they arrived to surprise us at our wrap event with a big cheque and a promise to be bigger and better next year!

In the fall, we joined events across the catchment area, gave speeches, deputations and found support in towns we work in that reflected the numbers we serve. 25% of our clients come from Wasaga Beach and we were able to make stronger connections with local groups, clubs and the town to let them know.



## Fundraising & Communications *continued*

In December, we were so thrilled to be live and in person at the Thornbury Community Centre representing the work we do and the relationship we have with Royal LePage North who holds the popular and well attended by folks around Ontario – Holiday Homes Tour. Coinciding with our Courage month, our flag flew across our area including Meaford and Clearview – towns we will be expanding our presence in to build local programming.



Buzz-worthy events rounded out our involvement to create awareness and we will grow as they grow. In the summer two first-ever events were held – and we joined in. There was Festival North showcasing Caribana-style music, food, crafts and culture including a public day for gathering; and Pride Collingwood with markets,

floats, a parade and flag-raising that celebrated the diversity of South Georgian Bay.

Collingwood Fashion Week involved a group of My Friend's House staff and volunteers to help host a week of spirited events, beautiful fashion and local talent modelling. The Gala ended the week with an impassioned speech by Chris Brakel, Fashion Week Chair, in support of My Friend's House. His words stirred up the crowd that night and his commitment to a Red Shoe workout at F45 his local business. The club's members brought their workouts to a new level and threshold of understanding. The shoes pinch and are hard to wear when sweating it out, but this is what it takes to show your Courage in helping others.



Photo credit: Kimberly Vincent

Cherchez La Femme's annual lingerie holiday show this year included men sweeping up the floor, and of course, we were given beautiful Pajamas for the women attending our Christmas Shelter Party.

In 2023, Hockey for Hope – Women's International Hockey Tournament – sold out fast and supported us with 50/50 proceeds and ticket sales and an opportunity to embrace female empowerment with competitive young women. The Foundry's women entrepreneurs celebrated International Women's Day and invited My Friend's House to join. The cold, windy night featured amazing talks, and a room full of women with bright ideas, warm hearts and generous support for the work of our shelter.

All the invitations we receive, events we attend and are honoured to be part of, gives us a chance to talk and connect. We tell everyone first and foremost, we are here to help women and children find lives free of violence and abuse.

We know fundraising is not just asking for money, it involves communication about what we do and who we serve, joining in to promote our work and to support others, and expressing our gratefulness as we embrace the South Georgian Bay community. Meeting our financial goal means we can fund shelter costs and all the support we need to make a difference. It also means we connect with more and more women who need My Friend's House services. Building connection is integral to who we are.



## Board Highlights

### Governance

This year, the Board continued its focus on good governance, especially around our Board Member recruitment process. Building upon the work completed last year, we were able to identify the necessary skills needed to support the organization's movement towards the achievement of the Strategic Plan. Our annual call for nominations took place in March through social media, word of mouth and other means to the South Georgian Bay community which



identified desired areas of expertise to add to and/or augment existing board experience. We received multiple expressions of interest and the Board is looking forward to welcoming new members at the Annual General Meeting. We've also commenced a review of our governance manual with

a goal of providing recommendations and updates in the coming year.

The Board Committees have been operating full tilt this year and each has made significant contributions and provided support to the organization's operating mandates as well as progress towards long-term goals.

With a continued focus on strong governance principals and practices, the Board is well-placed to continue its oversight of the organization towards the accomplishment of its short- and long-term goals.

### Risk Management

The Risk Committee met regularly over the last year reviewing identified and emerging risks. Highlights for the past year include the creation of a succession plan for the Executive Director and the investment in an IT Service Provider to mitigate risk related to cyber security and technology use.

As an organization, everyone has a role to play in risk management and, this year, the Risk Management Committee established an annual review cycle where a risk identification process will be conducted with each Board Committee as well as senior management. This information is then brought forward to the full board for review on an annual basis.

### Strategic Planning

The Strategic Planning Committee has continued to implement the strategic goals identified in the Strategic Plan that covers 2021-2026, including: Listen; Expand; Build; Advocate; Integrate; Invest.

The priority under the Listen goal, was to conduct a Community Needs Assessment to research the priorities and needs of this rapidly changing community. This was completed in 2022 and identified five areas for future action where the community need was greatest, including:

- Providing Safe and Accessible Housing
- Addressing Complex and Co-occurring issues (such as mental health and addiction issues)
- Envision, Plan and Build a new Shelter and Programming Space
- Expand Child and Youth Services
- Expanding Community Reach and Engagement into Georgian Bay's diverse communities

The Board identified the recommendation to envision, plan and build a new shelter and programming space as the highest priority. To this end, the Board hired a housing development consultant, SHS Consulting, to guide the completion of

a housing feasibility study. The Board then held three visioning sessions to define the needs for the new space, to identify the design and supports needed, and to confirm the viability of the project. SHS Consulting worked with the Strategic Planning Committee to prepare a financial plan to bring the new space to life.

The next stage is to complete a site search and hire an architect, as we bring the new space closer to reality.

The Board also hosted a retreat, in January 2023, to review the Strategic Planning priorities and confirm whether the priorities needed to be revised. The Board recommitted to short-, medium-, and long-term priorities including the building of a new shelter and programming space, as mentioned above. Other priorities from the Plan that had been implemented or were in the process of being implemented, include:

- obtaining additional funds for child and youth programs;
- complete a governance and operational policy review with a diversity, equity and inclusion lens to support inclusive practices throughout the organization;
- complete a donor study; and,
- create a capital campaign to support the realization of the new shelter and programming space.



## Board Highlights *continued*

### Communications Committee

The Communications Committee developed a strategic communications plan that identified strategies to promote our services and advance fundraising. The committee developed key messages for internal and external audiences and created content to promote fundraising and strategic planning efforts. A media list was updated and used to publicize fundraising efforts with a focus on the South Georgian Bay area. Linda Murphy's hike from Niagara to Tobermory was publicized on CBC, local radio, TV and online, and extended our profile across Ontario.



The committee identified opportunities for Board engagement by providing key messages,

contributed to social media activity, organized a Board team for the Red Shoe Campaign and engaged several community organizations to raise funds. Efforts were made to support government outreach to local politicians to ensure they are aware of our services and future needs. The Board members supported public relations efforts on International Women's Day and the international themes were shared with and adopted by the Board's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee efforts for internal and external audiences.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee made some significant progress this year, influenced by the survey we conducted last year. Most notably was the development, adoption, and communication of our DEI Policy and Strategy. A large part of our DEI strategy is developing and taking training, both of which the members of the DEI Committee were able to accomplish this year. Our next steps will be reviewing policies and procedures with a DEI lens, amending and updating where appropriate, and making a training module on Exploring Intersectionality in Theory and Practice available to Board members and staff.

## Our Board of Directors

### Mary Ruby

Board Chair

### Paulette Soper

Vice Chair

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Chair

### Sonya Donovan

Treasurer  
Chair of Finance

### Carol Ellis

Secretary

### Michelle Kemper

Strategic Planning Committee Chair

### Nancy Prenevost

Risk Management Committee Chair

### Prabha Mattappally

Governance Committee Chair

### Mary Ferguson

Communications Committee Chair

### Bob Martin

Committee Member





**No one deserves to be abused in any way, shape or form. As scary as it is, leave. Go to My Friend's House. There is so much love and support.**

**They take you through every step, guide you along the way. You're not alone in the process at all. There's counseling support. There's court support. Any appointments that need to be gone to, you have someone to go with you.**

**It's okay to love yourself enough to get out.**



*– former My Friend's House resident*



## Financials

For a complete analysis and explanation of the numbers on the balance sheet and statement of operations, it is very important to read the financial statements and the accompanying notes to the financial statements. The audited financial statements can be found on My Friend's House website and are made available upon request.

A summary of the financial results is as follows:

	2023	2022
<b>Statement of Operations:</b>		
Total Revenue	\$1,897,056	\$1,677,614
Total Expenses	\$1,691,785	\$1,318,363
Operating Surplus (Deficit)	\$205,271	\$359,251
<b>Balance Sheet:</b>		
Cash	\$797,599	\$470,564
Net Assets	\$2,970,781	\$2,709,919

### Highlights

While the health of the balance sheet is positive, all funds are fully committed towards the financial stability of My Friend's House. There remains a necessary focus for fundraising in both the short- and long-term, to support the ongoing work (and associated financial commitments) of My Friend's House.

As a Finance Committee, we acknowledge and understand the myriad of responsibilities we face. We serve as stewards of the organization's resources. And when the organization has a mandate that is as important as that which faces My Friend's House, to help address the problem of domestic violence in our community, we know full well that these resources that we are safeguarding are precious.

## Our Mission

My Friend's House provides shelter, crisis support and advocates for equity for women and children in the South Georgian Bay area experiencing gender-based violence and abuse.





Mailing Address:  
Box 374,  
Collingwood ON.  
L9Y 3Z7

Crisis Line:  
705-444-2511

Office Telephone:  
705-444-2586

Development Office Telephone:  
705-999-2504

[www.myfriendshouse.ca](http://www.myfriendshouse.ca)

