



watari
COUNSELLING & SUPPORT SERVICES

**2022/2023
ANNUAL REPORT**

WATARI COUNSELLING & SUPPORT SERVICES SOCIETY

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DTES FOOD HUB & WELLNESS CENTRE

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*Watari operates on the the stolen, occupied lands of
thex^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and
səlilwatał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.*

*Watari is committed to honouring and respecting Indigenous
presence and sovereignty in this place and across Turtle Island.*

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A WORD FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

As the Board Chair of Watari Counselling Services and Support Society, I am thrilled to present our annual report and share our collective achievements over the past year. I'm also excited to announce the renewal of our strategic plan, which will guide us as we continue to grow and evolve over the next three years.

The Board is immensely proud and appreciative of our staff, contractors, peers, volunteers, and everyone else who brings their passion and dedication to serving the community each day. The Board is incredibly grateful for the fierce leadership, energy and kindness of our Executive Director, Ingrid.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our wonderful funders and community partners. It is because of your investments and partnership that the work of Watari is made possible, so we thank you for your continued support. Additionally, we express our sincere appreciation to Watari's individual donors for their generous contributions.

As we reflect on our journey, we look forward to the exciting opportunities on the horizon and remain committed to making a positive impact in the lives of those who rely on our services.

Warm regards,

LARA CROLL

BOARD CHAIR



A WORD FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am eternally grateful to all my co-workers, contractors, community organizers, volunteers, board members, community partners, funders, supporters, and everyone who has been able to support us in this meaningful work. The commitment, passion and dedication that they bring, has made a huge difference in people's lives.

This Annual Report for 2022-2023 describes some of the amazing work that happens at Watari. I am excited for the many more things that will continue happening at this great organization. While the numbers and description give you a glimpse of this past year at Watari, they do not show the many hours, tears, laughs and solidarity that happens every day inside and outside our facilities.

Deep gratitude again to each one who makes this work a possibility, and to the community we support for trusting us by walking through our doors or reaching out in different ways. Thank you.

With respect and gratitude,

INGRID MENDEZ
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



YOUTH SERVICES

Over the past year, youth programs have broadened their efforts to support at-risk youth. The YEAH program, run by youth workers Dustin and Lavern, offers rent subsidies to around 40 youth every month, along with exceptional individual and group support. With the youth outreach team, Krystal and Shania support some of the most disadvantaged youth in the Downtown Eastside; the recent addition of Che has resulted in establishing new connections with other agencies and community supports. Our Individualized Community Outreach Program (ICOP) continues to partner with Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (VACFSS) to offer one-on-one support for Indigenous youth, as well as caregiver and respite support both in Vancouver and on Vancouver Island.



SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH EDUCATION

Watari's highly educational STAR program continued to engage grade 6 and 7 students in the Vancouver school system with insightful presentations on topics such as addiction, substances, peer pressure, and social media, as it has for almost two decades now. We are excited to announce our plans to expand the STAR program into other school districts soon! Additionally, our Passages program is now offering immersive four-day cultural Rite of Passage experiences in the BC interior for Indigenous girls. We have the guidance and support of Knowledge Keepers and Elders to ensure these experiences are meaningful and impactful.



YOUTH HIGHLIGHTS

1128

STUDENTS SERVED THROUGH OUR STAR PROGRAM, AND 137 PRESENTATIONS SHARED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

43

NEW CONNECTIONS THROUGH OUR YOUTH OUTREACH SERVICES

161

YOUTH SUPPORTED THROUGH OUR YEAH (YOUTH EXCELLING AND ATTAINING HOUSING) PROGRAM

31

INDIGENOUS YOUTH SERVED THROUGH ICOP (OUR INDIVIDUALIZED COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM)

COUNSELLING SERVICES

The Counselling Team has had another busy and productive year! With the addition of the new Watari Food & Wellness Hub at 320 Alexander Street, we have two of our counsellors stationed on-site to provide support to peers and community members. We've also expanded our team to include two half-time migrant counsellors, joining our group of highly skilled and exceptional therapists.

Alongside our ongoing one-on-one support, we continued to organize valuable community events this year, including art therapy, talking circles, smudging, drum-making, community gardens, and community kitchens. We remain dedicated to providing low-barrier access to free counselling services for individuals and family members of all ages, from children to seniors.

Spotlight on Expressive Arts Therapy for Children

Our wonderful counsellor Ahmad offers Expressive Arts Therapy to help children navigate challenging emotions and experiences. This innovative approach helps children communicate their experiences and needs, regardless of their language skills. Through art making, children explore their inner selves and find healing. By providing a safe, playful, and non-judgmental space for children to unleash their imaginations, we help them find their voice and unique expression. Remember, it's not about the final result, but the process that leads to understanding, release, and growth!





COUNSELLING HIGHLIGHTS

1051

NEW CLIENTS SERVED THROUGH OUR SUBSTANCE USE COUNSELLING PROGRAMS, INCLUDING 4827 ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS AND 376 GROUP SESSIONS

146

NEW VIETNAMESE-SPEAKING CLIENTS SERVED BY OUR VIETNAMESE COUNSELLOR VERONICA

962

ONE-ON-ONE AND 209 GROUP COUNSELLING SESSIONS FOR THE LATIN-AMERICAN COUNSELLING PROGRAM

FOOD PROGRAMS

Watari recognizes food security as a crucial aspect of community well-being. We have been actively addressing urgent food needs in the DTES by delivering essential hot meals and groceries to food-insecure DTES residents and high-risk migrant families. These food initiatives go beyond mere charity by actively involving community members in volunteer and paid support roles to create community-driven food and cultural programs. This approach enables us to inclusively and comprehensively address short-term food needs while fostering skills, economies, and supportive networks. Our long-term goal is to work with partners and the community to establish a more fair, sustainable, and Indigenous-led local food system for the future. Notable achievements this year within our food programs include:

- Assuming leadership of two DTES Food Sovereignty Collaborative programs, the DTES SRO Outreach Program and the DTES Indigenous Seniors & Elders Grocery program
- Acquiring 320 Alexander space from the City of Vancouver in November 2022 to establish a multi-purpose DTES Food Hub & Wellness Centre
- Engaging community through our peer program to help us renovate and develop this space
- Transitioning LatinX Kitchen program from church space to the larger 320 Alexander location, allowing us to collaborate with partners to provide approximately 1,900 hot meals weekly to isolated, food-insecure SRO tenants
- Migrant 2 Migrant grocery program received core funding grant from Food Banks BC, recognizing the difficulties that conventional food banks have in supporting precariously documented people.

We express our sincere appreciation to the dedicated staff, volunteers, and donors who have contributed to the success of our food programs. Looking ahead, we are enthusiastic about increasing collaboration with DTES Food Hub partners, increasing capacity for sustainable recovery, and expanding food production and meal services to meet community needs.

FOOD PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTS

1,300

HOT MEALS SHARED ON AVERAGE EVERY WEEK WITH ISOLATED SRO TENANTS BY WATARI AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

35

INDIGENOUS HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING HEALTHY, CULTURALLY-INFORMED GROCERY HAMPERS EACH WEEK THROUGH OUR INDIGENOUS ELDERS & SENIORS GROCERY PROGRAM

54,335

TOTAL MEALS SHARED WITH SRO TENANTS FOR THE WHOLE YEAR

1,803

HOURS OF PEER EMPLOYMENT FOR THE SKILLS TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM THROUGH OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH EMBERS & HAVE CAFE

GARDENING PROGRAMS

The Latin American Garden Support Group is a program that brings together members of the local Latin American community to plant, grow, and harvest fresh produce, while building connections, support, and community resilience. Group members learn about planting techniques, as well as the medicinal properties of various plants. During the summer, many children join in on the fun, eager to learn and lend a helping hand.

This year, our group regularly came together across three different gardens: Woodland, Strathcona, and the DTES Urban Farm. Throughout the year, we hosted a variety of events, including Earth Day, Harvest Day, Mother's Day, and the 80th birthday celebration of one of our volunteers. We also added a new program featuring meditation and stretching exercises prior to planting.

**“For me, the garden is life, working with the land and waiting for it to give you what you sowed and then receive a good harvest. Gardening removes my stress and helps heal my body and “mind.” -
*volunteer testimonial***

**The garden is my safe place!”
- *Child volunteer testimony***



GARDENING PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

46

VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED
OVER THE COURSE OF THE
YEAR

350

MEANINGFUL, HANDS-ON
VOLUNTEER HOURS

982

LBS OF FRESH,
NUTRITIOUS, AND
CULTURALLY-RELEVANT
PRODUCE GROWN THAT
DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTED
TO OUR HOT MEAL AND
GROCERY PROGRAMS
THROUGH THE LATINX
KITCHEN

IM/MIGRANT PROGRAMS

MIGRANT 2 MIGRANT

Watari's Migrant to Migrant program supports migrants in Vancouver's DTES and beyond who face special challenges and barriers to accessing support services. This program, in partnership with BCFederation of Labour's Health & Safety Centre, has recently expanded its present to include Kelowna and the Fraser Valley area. Our committed outreach team has been visiting workers, with a primary focus on emergency preparedness and delivering food donations to support agricultural migrant workers. Additionally, we have continued our successful online English classes, which have been well received by the agricultural migrant workers who attend our sessions.



SANCTUARY OUTREACH

This program helps pregnant people, women, children, families, and people with precarious/undocumented immigration status to access and apply for essential services relating to health, education, food, and recreational services. As community connectors, we have eagerly helped these communities navigate scarce services and organized successful wellness and connection workshops for undocumented women experiencing gender-based violence.

With the generous support of the Canadian Women's Foundation, and in collaboration with an advisory committee of women who have life experience as undocumented migrants, we were also able to create an invaluable resource manual this year. This manual lists the organizations that will safely provide women with precarious immigration status with essential services.

IM/MIGRANT PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

3179

MIGRANTS ASSISTED OVER THE YEAR.

4905

TOTAL OUTREACH HOURS

40276

EMERGENCY SUBSIDIES GIVEN.

2538

NUTRITIOUS, CULTURALLY RELEVANT FOOD HAMPERS SHARED

273

BIKES GIVEN TO MIGRANTS TO REDUCE TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Thanks to our incredible Board for your care and guidance!

Lara Croll: Chair

Sara Hills: Treasurer

Casey Vickers: Member at Large

Gurpreet Chopra: Member at Large

Saffina Jinnah: Member at Large

Sunny Sandhu: Secretary

Ingrid Mendez, Executive Director | **Heather Scarff**, Director of Community Teams/Finance Administrator | **Dustin Budden**, YEAH Program Case Manager | **Andrew Drury**, Downtown Community Courts (DCC) System Negotiator | **Lavern Kelly**, YEAH Parenting Program Case Manager | **Kevin Crofton**, Youth Programs Director | **Grace King**, Community Housing Support Worker 320 Alexander Street | **Berta Alicia Perez**, Latin American Substance Misuse Counsellor | **Eloina Alberto Mendez**, Health Care Systems Negotiator/ Food Hampers Programs Coordinator | **Krystal Jules**, Senior Youth Outreach Worker | **Christopher Castro**, Migrant to Migrant Program Outreach Worker | **John Spence**, Substance Misuse Counsellor Indigenous Community | **Veronica Thuy Doan**, Substance Misuse Counsellor/Vietnamese and Asian Community | **Karina Villada Zepeda**, Fundraising Developer/ Sanctuary Outreach Community Connector | **Amendeep Brar**, Substance Misuse Counsellor | **Jeff Thompson**, Clinical Supervisor | **Shania Sandoval-Cross**, Youth Outreach Worker | **Angelo Moroni**, Community Counsellor for Community Peers in the H.A.V.E. Culinary Training Society Peer Program | **Mercedes Fortney**, Indigenous System Negotiator | **Elise Purdey**, DTES Community Kitchen (D.E.C.K) Coordinator | **Ahmad Nakhaei**, Child and Youth Counsellor | **Refugio Reyes Ortiz**, Migrant to Migrant Outreach Worker | **Nayeli Gonzalez Velazquez**, Latin American Kitchen Coordinator | **Adriana Alfaro Rosales**, Migrant to Migrant Outreach Worker | **Luz Termari**, Substance Misuse Counsellor | **Jill Ratcliffe**, Food Programs Manager | **Marlin Ramazzini**, Bookkeeper | **Leila Meshgini**, Grant, Proposal and Fundraising Developer | **Mackenzie Baxfield**, Administrator/Community Support 320 Alexander | **Jonathan Chou**, Youth Outreach Worker | **Gustavo Felipe Flores Rivas**, Reception 320 Alexander Street | **Navill Munoz Frias**, Receptionist/Administrative Assistant

STAFF

Thanks to our passionate staff for all your hard work and dedication!

VOLUNTEERS

Thanks to our amazing volunteers for generously sharing your time and skills with us!

Linda Hale | Claire Pitcher | Vera Rosenbluth Hanvelt | Juliana Dalley | Jonathan Hanvelt | Afuwa | Rita McCracken | Sarah St John | Lora Genaille | Katia Tynan | Stefanie Machado | Yinong Zhao | Reta McKay | Lara Croll | Sara Hills | George Booth | Bronwyn Armstrong | Emily Yakashiro | Ajay Brach | Jean Swanson | The Vietnamese Professionals Association of British Columbia | Jessica Piers | Pilar Riano | Brie Hoffman | Blackbird Fabrics | Sharon Tid | Adriana Contreras | Ramona Chu | Jennifer Hales | Elizabeth Hodgson | Amea Wilbur | George Heyman | Sarah Brophy | Evyn Gandhi | Sarah Ringdahl | Juliet Lu | A Naomi Paik | Gillian Chetty | Marta Rogic | Karen Croll | Carole John Kriebel | Mo Pareles | Yen Espiritu | Amila Li | Canada Helps | Simeon Man | Carrie Jenkins | F&K Productions Ltd | Evan Mauro | Brad Michinau | Gabriella Evans Anderson | Radhika Bhagat | Jamie Evrard Ltd | Hope Hart | Alejandra López Bravo | Jeremy Chow Mee Lam | Paul Rietkerk | Jeff Ilich | Nicola Sharp | Isabelle Eaton | Brett Eaton | Kelly Schmidt | Joanna Lam | Allison Sullings | Ana Hilton | Alexandra Samuel | Nicole Way | Michelle Stack | Paula Reeder | Meredith Moritz | Shabrina Hyder | Charitable Impact Foundation Canada (CHIMP) | Mogan Daniels Slager LLP | Canada Helps | Tiny Foundation | Vancity Community Foundation | Thach, Dung Thi | Alison Brewin | Pico Productions | Heather Scarff | Daniel Silveyra Perez | Si Meng Liu | Affiliation of Multicultural Societies & Service Agencies of BC | LA Bottles Returns | Shasta Martinuk & Brian Hoover | VCF DAF | Sandra Taylor | Amy Marie Schwenneker | BC Housing Mgt Commission | Canadian Online Giving Foundation

DONORS

Thanks to all our generous donors for believing in us and uplifting the work we do!

FUNDERS & COMMUNITY SPONSORS

Thanks to our generous funders and sponsors supporting the work we do and supporting our communities!

BC Housing | Community Action Initiative CAI | Canadian Women's Foundation | City of Vancouver | Embers | HAVE Culinary Training Society | Greater Vancouver Food Bank | Ministry of Children and Family Development | Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General | Mosaic-Government of Canada | Reaching Home | SRO Collaborative | TD Park Peoples Grant | The Law Foundation of British Columbia | United Way | VACFSS | VanCity Community Foundation | Vancouver Coastal Health | Vancouver Foundation | South Vancouver Neighbourhood House | WES Marian Assefa Fund



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Thanks to our community partners for collaborating to build stronger, more resilient communities!

Aboriginal Front Door | Archway Community Social Services | Atira | Atira Housing Society | Atira Women's Center | Aunt Leah's Place | Bernie Williams + Team | BabyGoRound | Benefits by Design | Better Life Foundation | BC Federation of Labour | Battered Women's Support Services | Blade Runners Blade | Britannia Community Center | Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC), part of Pacific Community Resources Society | Carnegie Center | Carnegie Community Outreach | City University of Seattle, Vancouver Campus | Chickadee Book keeping | Cottonwood Community Gardens | Community Impact Real Estate (CIRES) | Coastal Reign Printing | Covenant House | Crabtree Corner | Directions Youth Services | Douglas Park Community Centre | Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House | Drug User Liberation Front | DTES Response | Dudes Club | Food bank | FRAFCA | Frog Hollow Community Centre | Foundry | Food Mesh | Gathering Place | Gordon Neighbourhood House | GVFB | Heart Tattoo Society | Homelessness Services Association of BC | Jewish Family Services | Kilala Lelum Health Centre | Khalsa Aid | Kids Up Front | Kiwassa Neighbourhood House | Lottus Life | Ministry of Children & Family Development | Mosaic | Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House | National Abortion Federation Canada | Native Education College | Odyssey 2 | New Chelsea Housing Society | New Beginnings Maternity Clinic | New Westminster School District | Nexus and Odyssey | Network of Inner City Community Services Society (NICCSS) | Oppenheimer Park | Overdose Prevention Society | PACE Society | PHS- Bud Osborne Shelter | Powell Street Festival | Quest Food Exchange | Rain City Housing | Ray-Cam Co-Operative | Sage Transition House | Sanctuary Health Vancouver | Schmunk, Gatt | Sheway | Smoke Signals | South Vancouver Neighbourhood House | Spirit of the Children Society | SRO Collaborative | St James Anglican Church | Strathcona Community Centre | The Budzy | The Chill Program | TRRUST Collective Impact | The Lab of Meditation | Tupper Alternative School | UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning | UBC Community Health Initiative by University students (CHIUS) | UBC Learning Exchange | UBC medical students | Union Gospel Mission | United Church Social Services | United Way | UNYA | VACFSS | Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre | Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) | Vancouver Community College Nursing Program | Vancouver Food Policy Council | Vancouver Aboriginal Health Society | Vancouver School Board | WePress Community Arts Space Society | Western Aboriginal Harm Reduction Society | WISH | Woodland Community Gardens | Work BC | Youth Unlimited

THANK YOU, FROM ALL OF US AT WATARI!

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