



2026 ISSUE

THREAD



The impact of gender equality

How the Victoria Foundation is helping create opportunities for equality.

CELEBRATING OUR
90TH ANNIVERSARY

TAKE A HIKE
YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH
NEW CEO IAN BIRD

A message from the CEO and CEO Emeritus

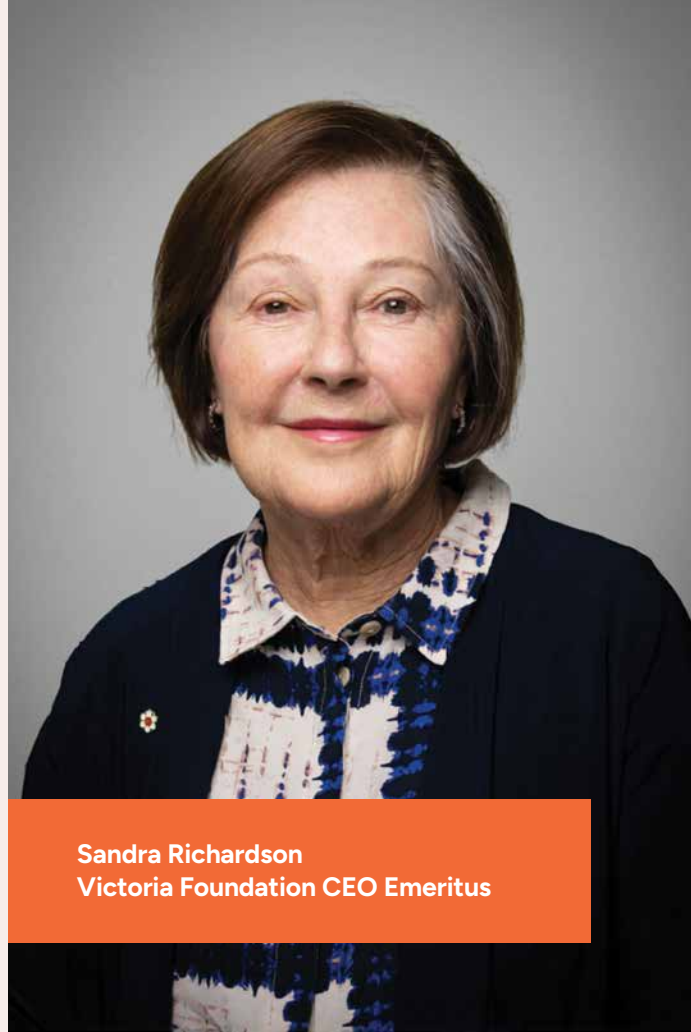
Welcome to *Thread*, a new publication that reflects a refreshed Victoria Foundation and the impactful community it serves. Earlier this year, we renewed our focus on what we do best: uplifting community by connecting ideas, solutions and people who care deeply about this island we call home.

The name *Thread* speaks to what binds us together. For 90 years, the Victoria Foundation has helped stitch our region together through generosity, collaboration and trust. That legacy is woven throughout these pages — from a timeline marking our milestone 90th anniversary, to stories that show how uplifting people and initiatives are making real, profound impacts today.

In this issue, you'll read about inspiring initiatives that help everyone in our region find a sense of belonging. These include a mental health organization whose work transforms lives for young students by connecting them to nature, and a film festival dedicated to Indigenous storytellers and filmmakers.

You'll learn about the Foundation's focus on three priority impact areas, including support for more arts and cultural spaces, the local food economy and a tenacious collaborative aimed at preventing youth homelessness. You'll also read about a remarkable donor couple whose foresight is uplifting the performing arts for generations to come, and a look at the road ahead for the Victoria Foundation's next phase of leadership.

Thank you for being part of this shared story. We hope you can join us as we continue threading our community together with purpose, innovation and hope.



Sandra Richardson
Victoria Foundation CEO Emeritus



Ian Bird
Victoria Foundation CEO





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About the Victoria Foundation

The Victoria Foundation is Canada's second oldest community foundation and the sixth largest of over 200 nationwide. For 90 years, the Foundation has been uplifting people, ideas and communities, by managing charitable gifts from donors whose generosity allows them to create permanent, income-earning funds. The proceeds from these funds are then distributed as grants for charitable or educational purposes. Since 1936, it has distributed over \$400 million to people, projects and charitable organizations, locally and across Canada.

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The capital region is home to a rich diversity of Indigenous peoples and cultures. Based on the 2021 Census, there were an estimated 19,460 individuals in the Victoria Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) who identified as First Nations, Métis and/or Inuk (Inuit). We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen-speaking people of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations on whose traditional lands our offices are located.



◀
Eagle carving by Carey Newman, gifted to the Victoria Foundation.

Woven through time: an anniversary retrospective

Moments that thread the Victoria Foundation's purpose over 90 years, as told by community leaders.

The greatest moment that defined the Victoria Foundation's purpose was its humble creation. In 1936, Captain Burges Gadsden, a war veteran, businessman and city councillor, opened the doors of a small soup kitchen and planted the seeds of what would become one of the most prominent community foundations in the country.

Ninety years later, the Victoria Foundation has grown alongside the community, adapting to new challenges and needs while staying true to its original purpose of unwavering support.

The voices that follow reflect some moments that

capture why the Foundation exists, and how its original spirit continues to uplift the community today.

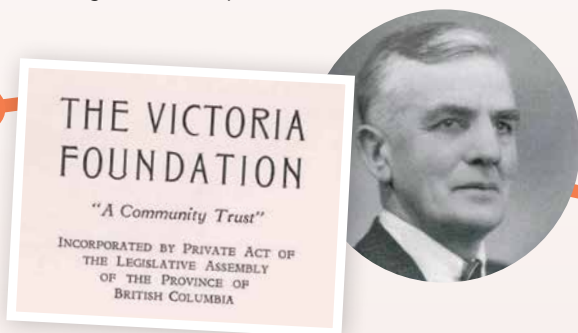
Paddy Stewart, Board Chair, 1986 to 1992

Paddy Stewart remembers starting with the Victoria Foundation in 1969: the year the first community grants were made.

Back then, the Foundation was still relatively unknown. "We weren't even on the map yet," says Stewart, who was part of the group responsible for governance, strategizing ways to advance the Foundation.

1936

The Victoria Foundation is established by an Act of the BC Legislature on April 1, 1936.



1957

The *Times* reveals a "forgotten charity fund" with under \$900 still exists. Mayor Percy Scurrah, newly aware he's a trustee, notes: "It contains an idea which could be very important". Indeed – a permanent source which would help uplift the community in perpetuity!

1974

The first designated fund, the Colonel Bull Fund, is established. The 2026 market value of the fund is now over \$1.3 million!

1937

The Foundation receives its first gift of \$20 from Fannie Gadsden, mother of founder, Burges Gadsden.

1969

Having become a federally registered charity in 1967, the Foundation announces three substantial grants totalling \$7,000 and begins active granting.



But by 1987, awareness started to shift when the Foundation's 1936 Act of the BC Legislature was modernized for the first time in over 50 years. Parameters were more clearly defined, the purpose was expanded and credibility was built.

"People started to realize there was agency and a whole history behind the Foundation. That was a big deal for us at the time," Stewart says.

This spark and the resulting growth is a reflection, he suggests, of what happens when a strong idea is given time and trust to flourish.

Sharlene Smith, Key Foundation Partner, 2001 to 2026

For Sharlene Smith, a major turning point for the Foundation's purpose was the flagship *Victoria's Vital Signs* — an annual community report card she helped spearhead from the ground up in 2006.

"*Vital Signs* put reliable, easy-to-use information into the hands of all kinds of organizations that they used to advocate for their cause, community needs and funding. All of which strengthened the sector," Smith explains.

"*Vital Signs* is the single greatest thing done to increase the Foundation's awareness and understanding in the community. It led to significant growth and increased granting over the past 20 years."

Sandra Richardson, CEO, 2001 to 2026

Long-time CEO Sandra Richardson says one of the most notable moments came from the direct impacts of the *Vital Signs* report, which revealed just how prominent food insecurity was becoming in the community.

"The hidden hunger in the region, especially in children, was very eye-opening for us, the Board and the community," Richardson reflects.

The spotlight in 2013 sparked a major response to map the entire food system in the capital region and to mobilize community partners to open a regionwide Food Distribution Centre in Esquimalt. Today, it serves around 65,000 people per month and continues to grow and evolve!

1993

The first \$1M gift is received to establish the Ernest & Hazel Kay Fund for Seniors. It aims to improve the quality of life for vulnerable seniors.

2003

The Vital Youth program is launched.

2006

Victoria's Vital Signs is launched.

Vital Signs
founding sponsor

OAKCREST PARK ESTATES LTD

1996

The Honorary Governors program is established under the distinguished leadership of Jane Rogers. This group of highly engaged, community-minded volunteers aims to raise the Foundation's profile by serving on committees and helping to grow Foundation assets.

2003 to 2006

A unique partnership with the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development is forged, creating 10 strategic investment funds resulting in over \$50M invested for children, youth and families.



Murray Farmer, OBC, and Lynda Farmer, OBC Honorary Governors (Murray was Board Chair from 2001 to 2003)

Prominent philanthropists Murray and Lynda Farmer reflect on the Foundation's diamond jubilee — a major celebration in 1996 — and the Honorary Governors program created that year to help raise the Foundation's profile.

"It was a major initiative with the intention to commemorate and provide a historical significance, adding credibility, longevity and outreach," Lynda explains.

This year, the Honorary Governors celebrate a milestone 30 years of being valued community champions of Victoria Foundation programs. Murray says the Foundation has really grown in size and spirit since then, including an impressive ability to foster leadership of all kinds.

Ian Izard, Board Chair, 2004 to 2006

For Ian Izard, the Foundation defined its purpose through trusting young people to lead.

After an inspiring meeting with the Winnipeg Foundation on their youth program, "we felt strongly that if we were going to do our own program for youth, they had to be intimately involved," Izard recalls.

Youth in Philanthropy (now Vital Youth) was launched in 2003, supported by the Honorary Governors, connecting student leaders to local, impactful causes to support.

"Students helped us see our community through the next generation's eyes, introducing us to organizations in new ways and building leadership capacity," he reflects.

Since then, more than 800 students have granted over \$544,000 to the community.

2007

The Foundation began its partnership with the Irving K. Barber British Columbia Scholarship Society (now known as the BC Scholarship Society) to help deliver scholarship programs that support post-secondary students.

2012

The Foundation launches the Smart and Caring Community Fund, to respond to major community needs identified by *Vital Signs*. The first initiative supported is the 'ABCs of Physical Literacy,' for children at the Cridge Centre. The program's launch is celebrated at the Pacific Institute for Sport Education, with then-Governor General David Johnston in attendance.

2017

T'esóts'en (Patrick Kelly) is appointed Victoria Foundation Board Chair, the first Indigenous Chair of any community foundation in Canada.

2011

The Victoria Circle is established to recognize donors who make legacy gifts.

2014

The Foundation supports a large-scale collaboration to create a regional food security hub in Greater Victoria.





Rob Gareau, Board Chair

Today's Board Chair Rob Gareau says the Foundation's purpose has been especially visible in moments of urgency. He points to the launch of the Rapid Relief Fund in the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when everyone was still trying to understand what the world was facing.

"What struck me was how quickly the Foundation moved without hesitation, acting decisively to raise and deploy funds when they were needed most," Gareau reflects. "Uncertainty was everywhere, and the Foundation provided clarity, leadership and stability."

But what also sticks with him is how the Foundation has helped in ways that are often quiet, but deeply meaningful — sometimes through grants, but also through convening the right people, or simply listening and guiding.

Looking back, moving forward

Across these voices and so many others, the Foundation's impact has always been about learning, relationships and stepping up. And most importantly, a duty to respond, again and again, to what the community needs most.

Ninety years on, that work steadfastly continues.



Victoria Foundation

**UPLIFTING COMMUNITY
FOR 90 YEARS**

2019

The Gadsden Initiative program is launched to help emerging donors explore philanthropy and establish their own funds.

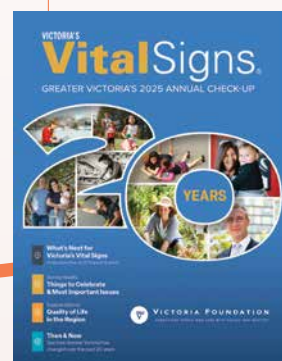


2022

The Foundation helps facilitate a \$3.1 million gift from Clint and Carole Forster to the Threshold Housing Society. It allowed the society to purchase a house supporting youth at risk of homelessness and pay off the mortgage on its home for the Supportive Recovery Program for youth.

2025

Victoria's Vital Signs celebrates 20 years!



2020

Partnering with the *Times Colonist* and Jawl Foundation, the Foundation raised over \$6 million in 52 days through its Rapid Relief Fund to support charities during the COVID-19 pandemic.



2022

The Foundation helps establish an all-Indigenous Granting Advisory and Fund to shape a new granting process that better responds to the needs and priorities of local Indigenous communities.

90th ANNIVERSARY SPONSORS

We are deeply grateful to our generous sponsors for helping bring the Victoria Foundation's 90th anniversary event to life.

Presenting Sponsor



Uplifting Partner



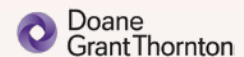
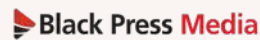
Impact Partners



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Community Builders



2025 financial highlights

The Victoria Foundation manages charitable gifts from donors whose generosity allows us to create permanent, income-earning funds. The proceeds from these funds are then distributed as grants for charitable or educational purposes. Over the years, we have invested more than \$400 million in people, projects and charitable organizations that strengthen communities in BC and throughout Canada.

\$664 million in assets

under administration including 51 new funds

\$38+ million in gifts

including bequest donations and gifts of securities

\$16.3 million endowment

\$1.0 million restricted term fund

\$20.3 million pass-through

\$0.27 million operating

\$31+ million in grants

2,154

Number of
grants issued
in 2025

164

Number
of Hosted
Organizations

736 grantee organizations

5%

Distribution
rate per CRA

7.44%

Actual
distribution
rate



Complete audited financial statements for the year ending Dec. 31, 2025 are available on our website at victoriafoundation.bc.ca

The 2025 financial statements were audited by KPMG, who provided an unqualified audit opinion. KPMG's independent Auditor's Report is available in the 2025 financial statements.

ARCHITECTS OF BELONGING

How civil society holds Greater Victoria together

What holds a community together when affordability, loneliness and inequality are on the rise? A 2025 study from the Victoria Foundation sought to find the answer.

Architects of Belonging: Civil Society Impact Study offers a thorough look at how local organizations support social wellbeing and economic strength in the region.

The study makes the case that belonging is essential to any flourishing community. Belonging is a value uplifted by charities, non-profits and community groups, otherwise known as civil society organizations.

Produced in collaboration with CIFAL Victoria and the University of Victoria, the study builds on a similar assessment released in 2018.

Since then, the sector has evolved through a period marked by a global pandemic, economic uncertainty and growing inequities.

Belonging as community infrastructure

From food security programs and environmental initiatives to arts organizations and newcomer services, this work touches on nearly every facet of daily life.

Many organizations are addressing the root causes of ongoing social issues, with 86 per cent reporting that they have implemented equity-focused programs designed to reduce systemic barriers.

Beyond social value, the study emphasizes the substantial economic contribution of the charitable sector.

In 2023, civil society organizations in the capital region generated \$5.4 billion in direct economic activity — nearly on par with the technology sector and the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector in British Columbia — and supported the equivalent of 60,600 jobs. This is a \$1.4 billion increase in less than a decade.

A collaborative sector ready to grow

Despite mounting pressures, 77 per cent of organizations report being engaged in partnerships, a level of cooperation that enables them to extend their reach.

Many organizations are also actively advancing reconciliation, with 62 per cent incorporating Indigenous-led programming.

However, the report identifies clear constraints facing the sector, and nearly all surveyed organizations indicate a pressing need for additional resources.

High operating costs and outdated funding models continue to limit the sector's ability to recruit and retain skilled staff and invest in long-term solutions.





Investing in belonging

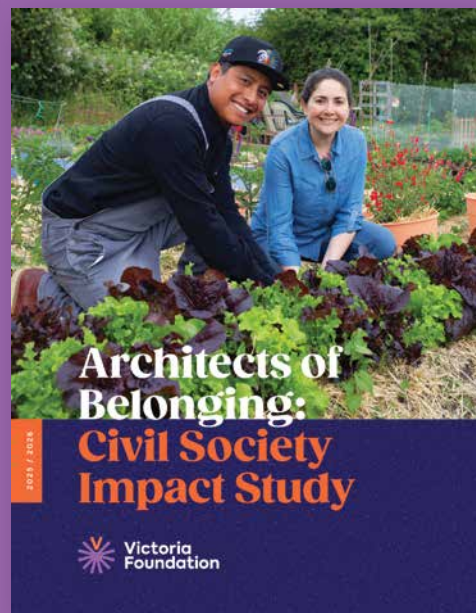
With that in mind, ongoing participation and support of civil society organizations play a critical role in building and sustaining healthy communities.

Strategic funding for core operations and collaborative infrastructure would allow organizations to scale what is already working.

As the study suggests, when people feel they belong, communities become more durable, innovative and well-equipped to face the societal issues of our time.

Embracing the idea that we are all architects of belonging will help shape a better future for our region.

To read the full study visit: victoriafoundation.bc.ca



Economic impact:

\$5.4 BILLION
TOTAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY
of registered charities in the capital region in 2023



With induced multiplier effects, this economic activity rises to nearly:
\$8.7 BILLION



77%
of the charitable
sector is engaged
with partnerships

A sector under pressure:

64% Of organizations report severe impacts from funding instability

46% Say community demand is outpacing their capacity

56% Cite administrative burden as a major challenge



How the Hosted Organization program quietly powers impact through endowments

An inside look at how the program provides stable funding to help charities sustain their work and deepen community impact.



“

It creates a model of giving where you contribute and it grows over time, benefiting everyone.

Mary-Lynn Hanson
Senior Manager of Philanthropic Partnerships

Thousands of locals interact with organizations like the YMCA-YWCA of Vancouver Island (the Y) every day, whether at fitness centres, in childcare programs or through housing and youth services.

What often goes unseen, however, is the financial backbone behind their work.

For many, that backbone is a long-term investment model supported by the Victoria Foundation that helps them sustain and grow their impact for generations.

Known as the Hosted Organization program, the Foundation permanently invests and manages endowment funds for their benefit. This helps diversify their revenue and investment strategies to reduce risk, optimize returns and support long-term growth.

Charitable organizations face many barriers to securing consistent, long-term funding. When they have access to stable revenue, they can focus on strengthening their services, advancing their missions and uplifting their communities.

“An endowment is about long-term sustainability. It ensures organizations can keep delivering on their mission 50 or 100 years from now,” says Mary-Lynn Hanson, Senior Manager of Philanthropic Partnerships at the Victoria Foundation.

There are 164 Hosted Organizations with 219 funds held with the Foundation. Pooled together, they are invested and stewarded with care to create reliable, long-term income for charities while also building financial resilience.

By pooling their funds into the Victoria Foundation’s investment portfolio, they contribute to this collective resource that supports granting, collaboration and community-wide initiatives.

One longstanding example of this model in action is the Y, where decades of endowment support helps sustain a wide range of community programs.



164

Victoria Foundation has 164 Hosted Organizations in its portfolio.

219

These 164 organizations hold 219 funds with Victoria Foundation.

\$66M

The combined value of Hosted Organization funds held with the Foundation is \$66 million, which is 12.6 per cent of the common trust pool.

A community anchor supported for the long-term

As the first Hosted Organization with the Victoria Foundation, the Y has seen the fund grow over the past 47 years, with annual grants supporting key initiatives.

For more than 150 years, the Y has been woven into the fabric of the region. While many know it as a place to work out, its reach extends far beyond fitness.

Across the capital region, it provides childcare, youth housing, community health programming and outdoor education.

Programs like Pandora Youth Apartments provide shelter, life-skills training and support for young people ages 15 to 19 who are living independently, while Y Young Moms offers housing for young mothers and their children.

At Camp Thunderbird, youth reconnect with nature through outdoor education, including access to Indigenous land-based learning and cultural programming.

“It’s some of the most impactful work we do,” says YMCA-YWCA CEO Derek Gent. “But it’s not always what people immediately think of when they think of the Y.”

“

Our mission is healthy people building strong communities. Everything we do should make people healthier, and everything we do should bring people together.”

Derek Gent, YMCA-YWCA CEO





The Y's story is one example of how Hosted Organizations are investing in their future.

Charitable organizations are choosing to place their endowments in a shared pool, supporting their own missions while contributing to a broader system of care and connection. In 2025, Hosted Organization funds granted **\$3.5 million** to support their organization's work and impact in the community.

Together, this reflects the idea that even in a resource-constrained sector, collective investment can strengthen their impact while quietly powering the services communities rely on every day.

Building stability through shared investment

Gent explained that in an environment where funding can shift year to year, having a stable, growing source of income provides certainty and some additional flexibility.

"Any time an organization receives an endowment, it can be complex to manage. Partnering with the Victoria Foundation is natural, that's what they're good at and this lets us focus on what we're good at."

For Gent, the partnership reflects something beyond financial management.

“

When you share stories of how we build community together, new opportunities bubble up.

Derek Gent, YMCA-YWCA CEO



Reclaiming the screen: Indigenous stories at FIRST

How an Indigenous film festival is bringing stories, voices and communities into focus

For two years running, audiences have gathered to experience stories that have long been absent or underrepresented from the screen.

During **FIRST: A Celebration of Indigenous Film**, cinema becomes a space for connection and cultural expression.

Presented by the Victoria Film Festival, **FIRST** is a growing platform for Indigenous storytelling and creative freedom.

The festival brings together a wide range of films, from contemporary dramas and documentaries to animation and romance, all created by Indigenous storytellers sharing perspectives grounded in lived experience, culture and community.

Reflecting on the 2025 festival, Sushil Saini, Manager of Strategic Initiatives at the Victoria Foundation, describes the experience of watching films like *Saints and Warriors* and *Sweet Summer Pow Wow* as deeply impactful.

"It's one thing to hear Indigenous stories, but to see them on screen with the music and the tone of voice, it was incredibly moving," she says.

Saints and Warriors, for example, is a documentary set in Haida Gwaii that explores the deep connection between basketball and community identity.

The film traces how, during a time when Indigenous cultural gatherings were restricted, sport became one of the few ways people could come together.

FIRST also reaches beyond film screenings through Q and A sessions, masterclasses and panel discussions.

By bringing together filmmakers, students and audiences, the festival creates space for important conversations about representation and the future of cinema.



Narrative sovereignty

Akira Iahtail, who is Cree, Métis and Mushkegowuk from Treaty Nine at Attawapiskat First Nation, has worked in film programming for the past five years. She describes her path into the industry as unexpected yet deeply meaningful.

When she began working in film programming in 2021, she had little exposure to Indigenous cinema and rarely saw herself represented on screen. That absence, she explains, has been a shared reality for many Indigenous people.

Today, Iahtail sees a shift, especially through her work with Victoria Film Festival and **FIRST**.

"When we're all watching these films together, we're going through the same wave of emotions," she says. "It feels like we're at a time of equality where we're all feeling the same thing."

Supporting the work

For the Victoria Foundation, supporting **FIRST** is part of a broader commitment to reconciliation rooted in humility and ongoing learning.

Through the Indigenous Priorities Fund, the Foundation was able to provide financial support for the festival.

As Victoria Film Festival Program Manager Mark Hoyne explains, "It is hard and expensive to run a festival. To bring in guests and do these things takes a lot, and the support makes that possible."

The Indigenous Priorities Fund is designed to ensure that funding decisions are guided by Indigenous voices and community priorities.

"The Foundation's investment really signals trust from the community in the vision and the importance of Indigenous-led storytelling," he says.

At the end of 2024, \$16,100 was granted to the Victoria Film Festival to support **FIRST** through the Indigenous Priorities Fund. In 2025, an additional \$6,440 was granted through top-up funding.



▲
Saints and Warriors director Patrick Shannon leads a storytelling class for emerging filmmakers. Photo courtesy of Luke Scanlon.

Looking ahead

As **FIRST** continues to grow, its impact is felt on and off the screen.

Creating space for Indigenous stories to be seen, for communities to come together and for audiences to engage with newfound perspectives is crucial in advancing reconciliation.

To learn more about

FIRST: A Celebration of Indigenous Film
visit: www.victoriafilmfestival.com/festival/f1rst-indigenous-films/

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Choreographing a legacy through art, education and community

How one couple transformed their love of the arts into a legacy of education and impact.

At its simplest, choreography is the intentional arrangement of movement. In practice, it's a creative process where a choreographer uses movement the way a composer uses notes or a painter uses colour: to create meaning. It is something that audiences can see, feel and remember.

Spend time with Janis Dunning, C.M. and Jacques Lemay, C.M. and you come away understanding why they have been awarded the Order of Canada and the dance they have been choreographing since their first meeting. It is a dance filled with storytelling, motion, philanthropy and a passion for their country, their community and their chosen cause in the performing arts.

A shared beginning on stage and in life

Dunning and Lemay met at the first rehearsal for a Manitoba Theatre Centre production of *The Boyfriend*. With Dunning from a small town in British Columbia and Lemay from Montreal, they brought their talent to the production, nurtured through years of training.

Just as important, they shared a love for the performing arts, supported by families who gave what they could to give them the best opportunity to follow

their passion. And they have been dancing ever since.

They also shared a love and passion for Canada. Together, they founded the Young Company Program for the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Prince Edward Island, a cornerstone of the Charlottetown Festival, where over 10 years Lemay performed and later served as Artistic Director.

He has contributed choreography, directing and producing to major national and international events, including the opening and closing ceremonies of Canada's Winter and Summer Games, the Commonwealth Games (Victoria, 1994), the Olympic Games and six royal visits.

Dunning created and was the principal performer of two highly successful national CTV television series for children, *Let's Go!* and *The Rockets*. Over an award-winning, 18-year television career, she coached, mentored and

supported the artistic development of hundreds of young artists. Her work in children's television has inspired and touched the lives of millions of Canadians.

Taking Canadian arts across the country

The couple took their love for Canada on the road in 1992, through the founding of the Canadian Heritage





“

Every one of us can make a Will and include a small percentage of our estate to help others. The Victoria Foundation makes leaving a legacy simple for the donor. And whatever we contribute will be meaningful to us, our families and to our community.

Janis Dunning



Arts Society (CHAS) to promote the arts through performance and education. The organization launched the highly acclaimed touring program Experience Canada.

This included the production *Spirit of a Nation*, created by Dunning and Lemay, which reached more than 800,000 people at festivals, in schools and in theatres across the country.

Investing in the next generation of artists

In 1998, CHAS and its founders established the Canadian College of Performing Arts. Located in South Oak Bay, this uniquely focused training program attracts students from across Canada and the world and boasts more than 850 alumni.

As creators, artists, performers, educators, mentors and nation builders, Dunning and Lemay believe that we leave a legacy in each of the actions we take and the connections we make. As Lemay says, “A legacy can be anything — mentoring, opening doors, helping neighbours or offering financial support.”

The investment in community and in people sits at the heart of their personal legacy for the performing arts. Through their estate planning, the couple have named the Victoria Foundation as a beneficiary of their Wills, with their gift designated to the Canadian College of Performing Arts Fund.

This fund supports training and guidance for the students at the College. Those students, in turn, will create their legacies, on and off the stage, as they pursue their own passion.

This support reflects their personal values and it's something anyone can do.

Through a lifetime of creating, teaching and giving back, Dunning and Lemay have choreographed a legacy that will continue to move others — proof that when passion is shared, its impact endures for generations.

Community impact, reimagined

The Victoria Foundation brings data, people and investment together to support bold, community-driven solutions.

From food insecurity to housing affordability, some community challenges are impossible to ignore. Across Greater Victoria, community leaders are responding to these urgent issues in creative, impactful ways.

The Victoria Foundation is leaning into this momentum with an impact studio that delves into how it can better support community-led solutions by bringing people, rigorous data and intentional capital together.

"We're focused on creating conditions where community action and collaboration can thrive," says Jessica Doll, Director of Innovation and Impact.

As challenges grow more complex, the Foundation is exploring its role as a coordinator by integrating these efforts to help achieve what wouldn't be possible otherwise.

To do this, the Foundation is focusing on three priority impact areas: sustaining cultural and arts spaces, strengthening local food systems and supporting a collaborative effort to prevent youth homelessness.

Doll says each area reflects "an issue where urgency is clear, leadership exists and the Foundation can play a meaningful role in helping community partners move forward with the right tools."

As Carol Hall, Senior Director of Innovation and Impact, puts it, "We're behind the scenes, working alongside community leaders to advance their vision and help solve some of today's most pressing issues."

Here is a closer look at these priority areas.





Community impact: toward functional zero

Youth homelessness, one of the strongest indicators for chronic adult homelessness, is rising in the capital region. Much of it is hidden.

Community data shows that many young people are couch surfing, staying in unsafe homes or frequenting shelters.

A 2025 Point-in-Time count identified 70 youth in the region experiencing homelessness on any given night, with Indigenous youth representing a third of the counts.

Julie-Ann Hunter, Executive Director of the Victoria Youth Empowerment Society, says the needs of young people have “increased significantly in volume and complexity, but the systems and housing options meant to support them have not kept pace.”

Hunter is a Co-Chair for the Collaborative to Prevent Youth Homelessness, a strategic network of nine* youth-serving organizations. They’ve come together to work toward intervening early, connecting youth with safe housing and providing harm reduction supports, culturally relevant care, mental health services and other supports.

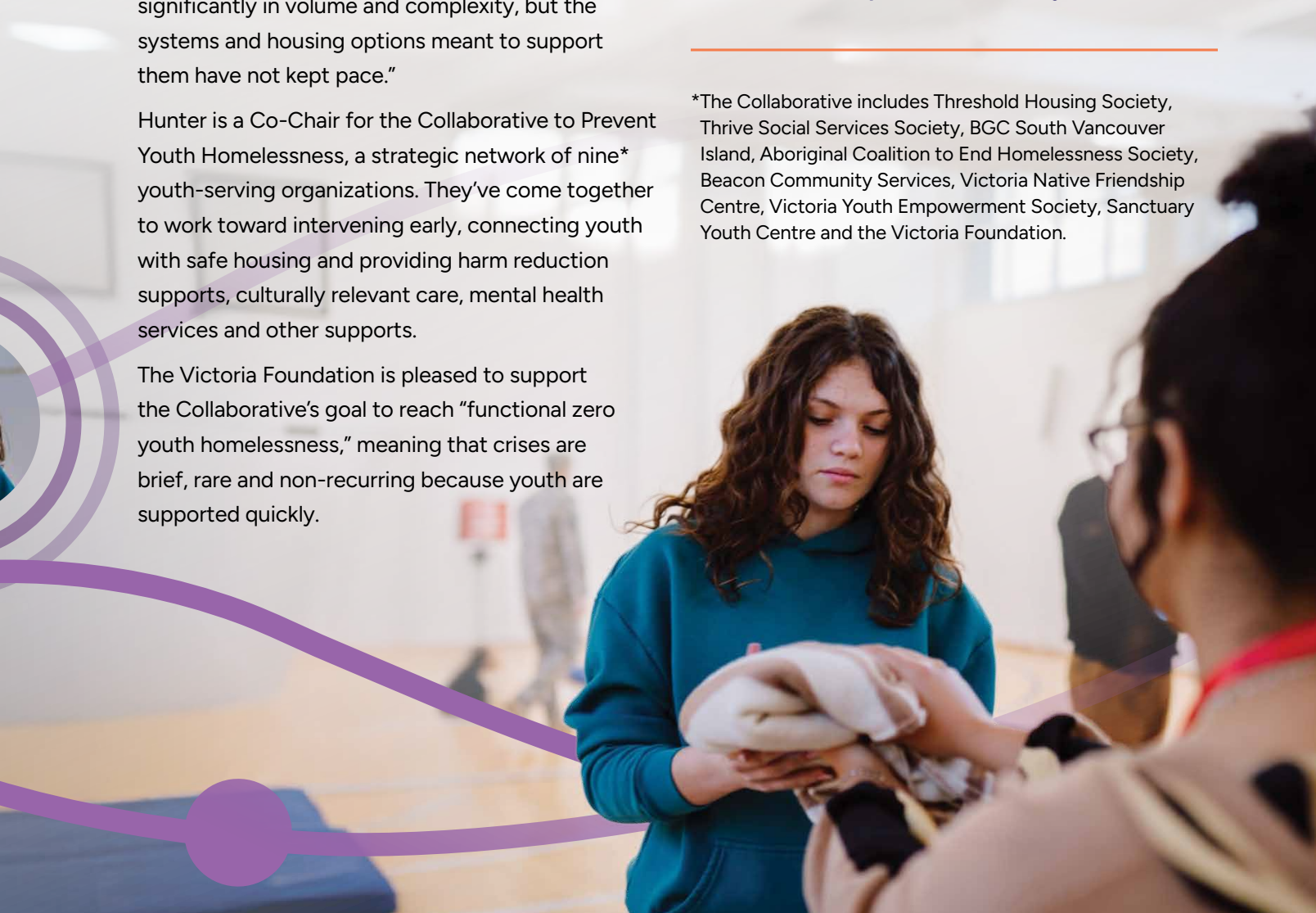
The Victoria Foundation is pleased to support the Collaborative’s goal to reach “functional zero youth homelessness,” meaning that crises are brief, rare and non-recurring because youth are supported quickly.

“We’re building a system where young people are met with clear pathways to housing, the right level of support and a sense that the community is walking alongside them,” explains Hunter.

“This alignment creates the conditions for real, sustained change, and that is where hope lives.”

**Julie-Ann Hunter, Executive Director of the
Victoria Youth Empowerment Society**

*The Collaborative includes Threshold Housing Society, Thrive Social Services Society, BGC South Vancouver Island, Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society, Beacon Community Services, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Victoria Youth Empowerment Society, Sanctuary Youth Centre and the Victoria Foundation.



Community impact: preserving the arts

“When we lose access to the arts, we risk losing our humanity,” says Jenn Neilson, PhD. “It means losing community connections, feelings of inclusion, political awareness and the opportunity to make and consider social commentary.”

Artists and arts organizations in the capital region face a critical tipping point, often struggling to access affordable, appropriate spaces to create and perform, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic spurred the loss of critical infrastructure.

Long-established organizations, including the Victoria Conservatory of Music and the Victoria Symphony, along with dozens of smaller arts groups, are looking to sustain or acquire their own downtown spaces.

The Victoria Foundation is working with charitable organizations, the government and businesses to interpret local data, clarify inventory and find opportunities to sustain music, performance and visual arts spaces regionwide.

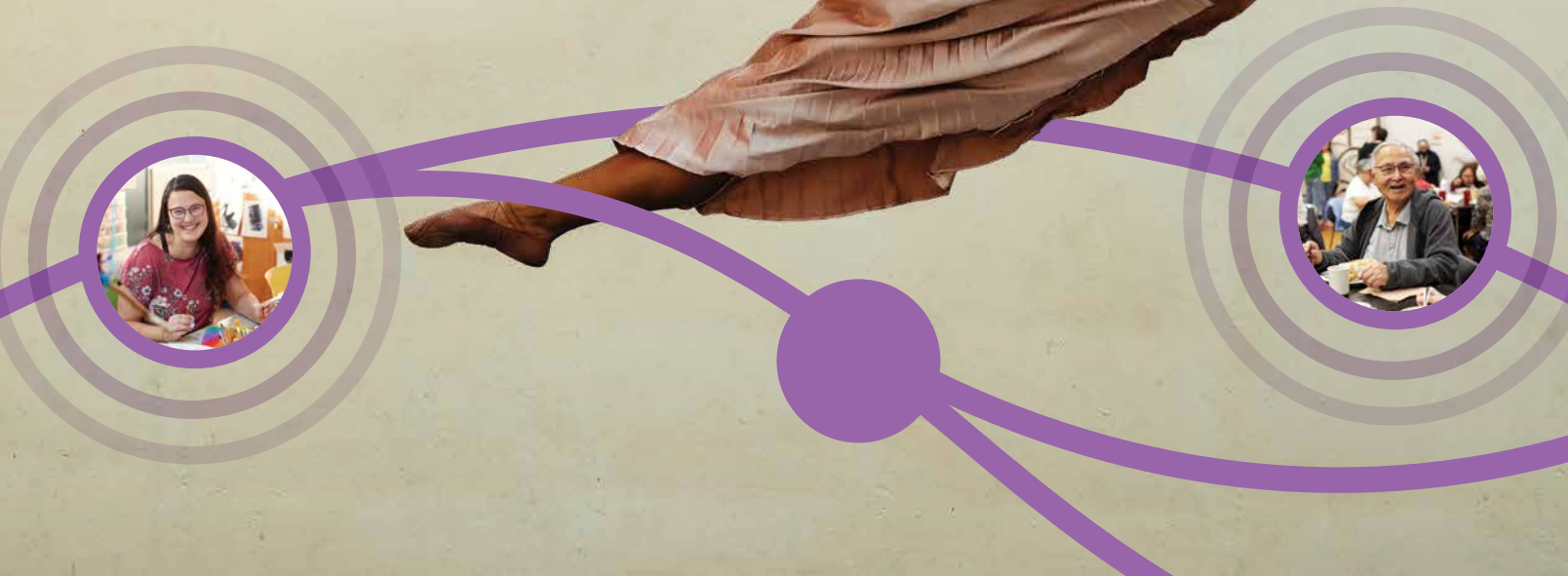
Community data reveals that few purpose-built artistic spaces exist and that rental and real estate prices continue to rise.

Jenn Neilson is a co-founder of The Arts and Community Infrastructure Foundation, a new

organization formed to prevent arts organizations from closing or being displaced, by housing them under non-profit landlords.

Neilson says she’s excited about how the community is coming together to own their own spaces – everyone from small organizations with occasional needs, to large galleries and theatres, to groups representing marginalized and diverse communities.

“There has never been more support for the idea that arts organizations need to own the means of production.”





Community impact: a sustainable food future

Kent Mullinix, PhD, says Vancouver Island could be the perfect place for a fully sustainable, local food system, where food is produced, sold and enjoyed in ways that protect the environment and economy.

"The populace is greatly supportive of 'local food,' there's a distinct island identity and the island has the natural and human resource capacity," explains Mullinix, Director of the Institute for Sustainable Food Systems at Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU).

This comes as food insecurity rises across the capital region and beyond, despite community food efforts working harder than ever.

In 2023, over 18 per cent of residents in the Island Health region worried about having enough food. The Consumer Price Index says overall food prices rose by more than 55 per cent between 2016 and 2025. Today, around 65,000 people rely monthly on the region's Food Security Distribution Centre.

To help shift toward sustainability, the Victoria Foundation is prioritizing the local food economy to support farmers, food makers and organizations in our region.

One major step is collecting data on Vancouver Island's nutritional and infrastructure needs. Mullinix and his KPU team, after completing similar studies for Southwest BC and the Okanagan, are assessing everything from self-reliance on food to vulnerabilities in the food system, to economic possibilities. The Victoria Foundation is supporting this research and will use its findings to work with the community toward future investment opportunities.

Mullinix says he hopes this compelling research supports local food advocates and persuades policy decision-makers to enable a self-sustaining food system.

Across these priority areas, a common thread emerges: lasting solutions are built in community, not in isolation. By integrating data, people and investment, the Victoria Foundation is working to unlock impact that no single organization could achieve alone.



A conversation with Ian Bird

The Victoria Foundation's new CEO on leadership, community and the work ahead

Ian Bird's work has always centred on collective effort and shared purpose. This is reflected in his time as CEO of Community Foundations Australia and Community Foundations of Canada, along with his involvement in the sport community.

As he begins his tenure as Victoria Foundation CEO, Ian returns to Vancouver Island with a wealth of experience and a strong connection to place. In this interview, he reflects on what has shaped his leadership and where he sees opportunity for Greater Victoria communities.



Q: You have deep roots in the capital region. What does it mean to be coming back to Victoria after working abroad?

It really feels like coming full circle. For ages, my family has had a place on Salt Spring Island, and Victoria was home for me earlier in life when I was playing field hockey at a high level and going to school.

I moved here when I was 25, worked in Oak Bay and lived near Government House. Being back on the island, closer to family, just feels right.

At the same time, this region has changed. There's enormous opportunity, but also real challenges that weren't as visible when I was younger. Taking up the baton from Sandra Richardson and helping shape how the community responds to these realities feels deeply meaningful.

Q: What personal or professional experiences have most shaped how you see leadership today?

Looking back, I think I've really only done one thing: teamwork. My years with the national field hockey team were always about what we could accomplish together.

That same mindset carried into athlete advocacy, the Olympic movement and later my work with Community Foundations of Canada and Community Foundations Australia. The question was always the same: how can people and organizations, working together, create impact beyond what any of us could achieve alone? That's the leadership I try to practice.

Q: Why was this the right moment to join the Victoria Foundation?

The Foundation is in a position of real strength. It's trusted, deeply embedded in the community and

stewarding significant resources responsibly, thanks to the care and leadership Sandra Richardson has built for many years.

We're also living through social and economic disruption. Some parts of the community are thriving while others are struggling. The question now is how to use our strength to respond to those realities and support a shared prosperity grounded in island values.

Coming back to the island, I want to spend time seeing things fresh, hearing different perspectives and understanding what the community is telling us about what needs to come next.

Q: What might surprise people about you?

Left to my own devices, my ideal day is a quiet one: a stack of books, a fire at the cabin, a walk in the woods. People often see me as outgoing through my work, but I recharge in quieter, more reflective ways.

Q: Looking ahead, where do you see opportunity for the Greater Victoria communities the Foundation serves?

Despite global uncertainty, I'm deeply hopeful. Vancouver Island is a place where coherence is very possible. Relationships are close, ideas move quickly and collaboration is happening. There are extraordinary thinkers and leaders here, exploring everything from reconciliation and Indigenous law to new ways of thinking about social and economic systems.

The Victoria Foundation is well-positioned to stretch, experiment and take on more complex challenges — convening, innovating and pushing at the edges of what's possible, while staying grounded in the stability Sandra and the community have built.

I'm confident we'll do precisely that.

Growing at the speed of trust

How Sandra Richardson turned trust and purpose into lasting community impact.

Sandra “Sandy” Richardson says she’s always enticed by need.

That instinct led the former hospice director of development to a humble community foundation 25 years ago. It shaped her tenure as CEO, and in turn, much of the community.

In 2001, the Victoria Foundation was in a small rented downtown office in the historic Yarrow building, back when some of the grant applications were handwritten.

“This organization was ready to burst open, to become something huge for the community,” recalled Richardson.

Under the Board’s direction, she got to work with her small staff. She hired an accountant and worked to strengthen the Foundation’s governance and financial systems — all while firmly focused on the community.

Community at the core

Richardson understood that to learn what really mattered, she had to meet communities where they gathered. She made connections at local events, at Annual General Meetings and listened deeply to pressing concerns.

“I learned that a community foundation grows at the speed of trust, not ambition,” she said.



Sara Neely, Senior Director of Philanthropic Services, says Richardson’s “enthusiasm for advancing the Foundation’s purpose is unparalleled.” The organization’s profile soon soared because she rarely said “no” to exploring an idea or emerging trend.

Key early moments were joining Community Foundations of Canada and connecting globally through the Transatlantic Community Foundation Network.

Richardson’s philosophy that “leadership should come first, not endowment size” shaped initiatives like *Victoria’s Vital Signs*. Data from this watershed initiative helped spur action that led to a regionwide Food Security Distribution Centre in Esquimalt and ongoing local food ecosystem growth, among other changes.



Neely says Richardson also helped develop Every Step Counts, a running program for those facing mental health and addiction challenges.

"And in 2011, when the Governor General of Canada asked community foundations to help create a smart and caring nation, Sandy was the first CEO to respond with the launch of a Smart and Caring ABC's of Physical Literacy program that now serves up to 15,000 children each year," she says.

From crisis to opportunity

But Richardson says some of her greatest learnings came during times of crisis. This meant fast-tracking community support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chuck Burkett, former Board Chair, says it also meant weathering the financial crash of 2008. When the Foundation's resilience was tested, Richardson "leaned into the challenge," turning crisis into opportunity.

"She brought together a highly skilled group of Board members, staff and volunteers to protect the Foundation's ability to support the community for the long term," he reflects.

Louise MacDonald, who worked closely with Richardson for 13 years, says "Sandy has always embodied the word 'community' with humility and openness. Sandy is a leader who doesn't try to command a room or a table, but provides strong, quiet leadership, always thoughtful and strategic."



A legacy of collaboration

Richardson's many accolades, including an Honorary Doctor of Laws, appointment to the Order of British Columbia and the King Charles III Coronation Medal, reflect her profound legacy.

Former Board Chair T'esóts'en (Patrick Kelly), of the Leq'á:mel First Nation, says this legacy includes unwavering support for Indigenous communities, locally and beyond, including a meeting he and Richardson attended "with local First Nation leaders to jointly develop approaches for sustainable, long-term relationships."

He cites a list of partnerships the Foundation has made with Indigenous communities across BC, and of investments into local reconciliation initiatives, including helping establish an Indigenous-led granting advisory. Kelly, himself, became the first Indigenous Board Chair of any community foundation in Canada.

"Sandy cares deeply about people, family, the community and about making the world a better place for all," Kelly says.

Working closely with the Board of Directors, Richardson has empowered staff and broadened the Foundation's role as a community leader. Her tenure also secured the Foundation's permanent downtown home to serve the region for generations.

Richardson heads into a well-deserved retirement after leading the Foundation to grant more than \$400 million over the years. She resolutely points to collaboration as the throughline of progress.

"There's nothing meaningful we can do on our own. Our community holds the answers. Our job is to bring people together, listen deeply and act."

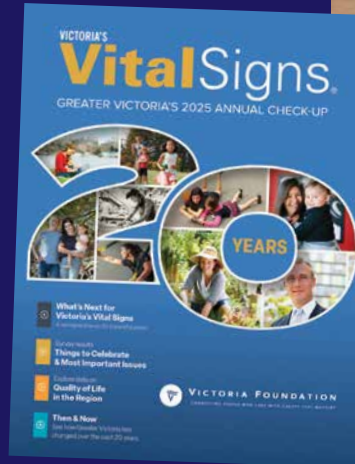
Sandra Richardson
Victoria Foundation CEO Emeritus

Her legacy is built on trust, purpose and an enduring belief that uplifting people means communities rise with them.



It's time to reimagine Vital Signs

Twenty years ago, *Victoria's Vital Signs* was launched with a clear vision — to measure community wellbeing in Greater Victoria. It started with community consultation, and that engagement has been a cornerstone of the program.



Community Foundations of Canada takes on a leadership role for the overall *Vital Signs* program from coast to coast to coast and provides the parameters and framework for each community to work within. Recognizing there are different needs in each community, every report or program will look different.

Victoria's program has been consistent over 20 editions — and with our 90th anniversary and two decades of producing the report, it is time to go back to the beginning.

This year, the Foundation will not be releasing a standard report. Instead, we will be announcing what will come next for *Victoria's Vital Signs* in the fall.

In order to gather the information necessary to move the program forward, the Foundation partnered with the Roy Group to explore it from an external and internal perspective. This included a public engagement session that walked over 140 people through a facilitated exercise called the Future Backwards.



We took stock of the current state and the history of the program and reimagined what an ideal report could look like in the future.

This information along with input from community leaders, staff and Board will result in a redeveloped program that will launch in 2027. The launch will include information about how you can engage in 2027 and a timeline for release.

The impact and passion for *Victoria's Vital Signs* is well documented, and now it is time to move it forward for the decades ahead!



IN THE COMMUNITY

Snapshots of the Victoria Foundation in action



▲ Isabella Anderton-Teasdale receives the Alex Nelson 'Ok'wilagame' Indigenous Female Athlete of the Year award from Tamara Napoleon, Victoria Foundation Past Board Chair, alongside Alex Nelson 'Ok'wilagame'.



▲ Victoria Foundation Board Chair Rob Gareau speaks at the Foundation's Hosted Organization event.



▲ The Victoria Foundation brings community together for an event at Soap For Hope.



▲ A Victoria Foundation team member learns about cultivation techniques with the Farmlands Trust Society.



Family fun at the McTavish Academy of Art, a Gadsden Initiative event.



Charitable sector leaders gather on BC Non-Profit Recognition Day to celebrate the people and organizations strengthening communities across BC.



Victoria Foundation team member on an outing with Able Sail Victoria.

Victoria Foundation team members visit Shelbourne Community Kitchen.



Making space: how gender equity is built, one question at a time

From one high school classroom to community-wide change, a story about systems, belonging and shared responsibility.

It was Tanya Chassé's final year of high school and mechanics was one of her favourite classes, a place where grease-stained hands and problem solving felt natural.

Her grades were strong, but none of that mattered when Chassé was called into the guidance counselor's office.

"We have a boy who needs your spot in mechanics," said the counsellor. The alternatives? Library or a spare.

The injustice stung. More than that, though, it was the quiet assumption that she would step aside. She didn't. By the end of the year, she earned one of the highest marks.

Years later, that moment still shapes her work. It revealed how gender inequality often shows up subtly. A door softly closed, and the expectation that no one will push back.

"No one is born thinking women, girls and gender-diverse people are less than. It's all learned, and that means it can be unlearned."

Tanya Chassé

Where belonging begins

At the Victoria Foundation, belonging for everyone sits at the heart of our mission, including addressing experiences like the one Chassé had.

Now Manager of Community Initiatives, she leads work focused on women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people facing barriers and discrimination.

One way the Victoria Foundation is advancing this work is through the Fund for Gender Equality, a partnership with Community Foundations of Canada and the Equality Fund.

This five-year national initiative supports women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse-led organizations from coast to coast to coast. The collaboration helps shift power and resources to communities leading the work.

The Equality Fund goes beyond stating a commitment to gender equality by embedding it in every impact investment decision, using clear criteria to assess how investments affect women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Supported by the Government of Canada, the initiative reflects a growing recognition that lasting change requires community-driven solutions and collective momentum.



Locally, the Victoria Foundation distributed \$50,000 during the 2019 pilot year, followed by \$300,000 to its first cohort in 2021 and \$595,000 to its second cohort from 2022 to 2025.

A total of \$945,000 has been granted supporting nearly 20 organizations through 47 grants.

Moving forward in a new way

That work comes to life through diverse community initiatives.

In 2025, funding supported programs like trauma-informed mental health services for immigrant and refugee women, perinatal care connections for families and programs creating safer access to support for victims of sexual assault.

Organizations like the Victoria Women's Transition House Society continue to provide critical, on-the-ground support for women and children fleeing violence.

"The rewards of the work that we do aren't immediate. We often get the impact much later down the line," said Bahar Dehnadi, Executive

Director of Victoria Women's Transition House.

"There are a lot of folks that reach out to us and say, 'hey, I attended your services five years ago, 10 years ago, and it changed my life'."

In the arts, Puente Theatre's Bridging the Gap residency supports Indigenous, Black and racialized women and gender-diverse playwrights with mentorship and professional development, helping address long-standing inequities in theatre.

The Foundation is also examining its own systems. While gender has always been considered, the cohort work sharpened this focus, embedding a more intentional gender lens into governance and recruitment practices and helping shift representation in leadership spaces.

Lasting change can grow from meaningful stories, shared effort and sustained investment, creating communities where everyone belongs.

"It doesn't have to be loud," says Chassé. "Sometimes it's just asking one question and letting that question change how we do things."

To learn more, visit victoriafoundation.bc.ca.



FINDING THEIR FOOTING

Inside Take a Hike's approach to youth mental wellness

Through land-based learning and trusted relationships, Take a Hike is supporting youth mental health while opening pathways to confidence, community and possibility in Greater Victoria and beyond.

Amid the caps, gowns and congratulations at a high school graduation, a youth paused in front of their counsellor with something they needed to say.

The words that followed carried an apology to their counsellor for the difficult moments, gratitude for the consistency and an acknowledgement of what had been missing for them before: supportive adults and a community that sought to understand them.

For Tristan Tjosvold, Take a Hike Foundation Program Manager and registered clinical counsellor, the moment felt full circle.

Take a Hike supports youth in Grades 10 to 12 who are experiencing mental health challenges through a blend of land-based outdoor learning, counselling and relationship-centred education. The organization began its work on Vancouver Island in 2019.

In the early days of the youths' experience, their struggles were evident. On hikes, they often fell behind, overwhelmed and discouraged. But by their second year, signs of change began to emerge.

On land-based learning adventures, they moved from resistance to participation, and eventually into leadership. The same youth who had once questioned their ability to complete a hike began guiding others.

Now, that former youth is preparing to return to the program where they will stand in front of a new group of youth, sharing what they have learned and the hope that lies ahead.

"Once youth enter the program, the relational work really gets to begin. There is a ton of intentional structure built into programming to help support connection," said Tjosvold.

Reaching youth where they are

At first, support might appear as lighthearted, trust-building conversations or gentle encouragement to tackle a challenging hike, helping youth build confidence and trust in their own bodies.

Later, when trust is more established, it becomes deeper work that unpacks social anxiety, grief, anger and the long-term effects of adverse childhood experiences.

Because counsellors work with a small group of youth, often over several years, relationships grow deliberately and steadily. The program is purposefully small with about 15 youth per cohort.

Take a Hike currently serves about 30 youth in Greater Victoria, with one cohort in Sooke and another in Saanich.

“

Land is a healer.
Time spent outside,
being embodied
and being together
is fundamentally
good for us.

Tristan Tjosvold
Take a Hike Foundation Program Manager



For Indigenous youth, the program opens space for cultural reconnection, where they can witness their culture as something honoured.

They have the opportunity to learn from Elders, harvest cedar, make drums, walk the land with intention and hear stories that affirm identity and belonging.

Growing community connections and opportunity

When Take a Hike first starts working within a school district, Tjosvold explained that it's often understood through the lens of its name and seen mainly as an outdoor education program, which shapes early referrals.

Over time, as relationships develop, communities come to recognize it as a land-based learning program focused on youth mental health and wellbeing.

That shift leads to more diverse referrals, stronger partnerships and greater integration that opens pathways into trades programs and post-secondary opportunities.

The Victoria Foundation was able to join Take a Hike youth for a day at the Malahat Skywalk, with the impact of this work clearly visible.

"I have a deep appreciation for the Malahat Skywalk for providing this opportunity. It's a regionally renowned experience that many of our youth would otherwise not be able to access. It's lovely seeing youth who are sometimes shut down come alive on days like this, when they get to experience something new and be outside," said Tjosvold.





Expanding impact through trust-based support

Rachael Lipetz, Director, Corporate & Institutional Giving with Take a Hike, explained that “there is significant need for youth on the island, including a disproportionate representation of Indigenous young people, who now make up a meaningful portion of youth enrolled in Take a Hike.”

Whether on the hiking trail or in their personal growth, youth come to realize they are capable of far more than they ever knew.

Guided by compassionate and trained adults, this form of care and connection is what Take a Hike seeks to nurture on a small scale, with impacts that ripple outward as youth carry these practices forward in their lives.

To learn more about Take a Hike Foundation, visit takeahikefoundation.org



In 2025, Take a Hike was supported with a \$30,000 grant through the

Victoria Foundation's Vital Grant

Stream, which provides eligible organizations with flexible, general operating and program funding.

This support was complemented by top-up funding from the **Indigenous Priorities Fund**, including \$6,500 in 2023 and \$4,000 in 2025.



The trust-based relationship that Victoria Foundation has with us is really special and it allows us to do truly significant things.

Rachael Lipetz
Take a Hike Foundation
Director, Corporate & Institutional Giving





In memoriam

The Victoria Foundation acknowledges the generous support of donors who have passed away over the last year. Our condolences go out to their family and friends. They will be missed.

Fundholders

Diane Schmuck (October 2025) and John established the John and Diane Schmuck Legacy Fund, a discretionary fund, to support programs and services for parents with children in need through the Foundation's Community Grants Program.

Glenda Kirk (February 2026) and Sandy established the A.D. (Sandy) & Glenda Kirk Fund, a donor-advised fund. Sandy will continue to carry out the couple's spirit of generosity to support causes near and dear to them, as well as awards at the University of Victoria for students in the Major or Honours program in the Department of Chemistry.

Janet Blanchet (February 2026) and her brothers established the Raymond and Marigold Patterson Fund in honour of their parents. The fund supports bursaries for students studying at Thompson Rivers University for certification in outdoor and adventure guiding.

Other donors who have generously supported us through their estate plan.

Susan Muir (May 2025)

Norma Pelikan (May 2025)

John Neal (June 2025)

Joan Anne Dickson Forsyth (August 2025)

Lorne James (November 2025)

Jeanne Irene Conroy (December 2025)

John-Paul Jackson (January 2026)

Elsie Fox (January 2026)

Marjorie Newman (March 2026)

Evelyn Butler (April 2026)

Funds created in memory of loved ones.

Lindsay Burgess Legacy Fund

Peter McCully Salmon Education and Research Fund

Michael and Isabel Phillips Fund





Uplifting Community.

Haya and Zoe-Blue, Compost Education Centre

The Victoria Foundation helps build a stronger, healthier and more vibrant community for all.

What makes a community thrive? What lifts us up, to nurture a greater good? This year, and thanks to the generosity of our donors, the Victoria Foundation will distribute an average of \$2 million dollars per month via grants to charitable organizations in our community. The breadth of causes we touch are vast and range from housing, food security, youth in crisis, climate, education and health and wellbeing. It's about improving quality of life — for people and community. Learn more about how we make good things happen.



VictoriaFoundation.bc.ca



Invest In More Than Wealth

For 90 years, the Victoria Foundation has helped bring this community together. We're proud to be the Presenting Sponsor of the Victoria Foundation's 90th anniversary and to support its continued impact in the community.



Discover a different
kind of wealth planning

