

**Like everyone, everywhere,** COVID-19 impacted Domestic Abuse Services Oxford. While the pandemic only became apparent in the last month of this fiscal year report, it is now difficult to think back to pre-pandemic operations!

In March 2020, the Province of Ontario declared organizations such as DASO to be “essential services,” making it imperative we remain operational. DASO immediately implemented our pandemic plan which allowed us to successfully transition our services.

In the first few weeks of the pandemic there were many unknowns. But most of all, there was fear: fear for our Service Users, fear for ourselves, fear for our families and friends. In response, our staff team stepped up at a time when much of the world was stepping back and staying behind closed doors. We did not close, not for one minute. We continued to provide our vital programs including shelter and 24/7 crisis services.

We want to acknowledge this significant accomplishment. We are grateful for the great work of our DASO staff team during these difficult times. You continue to be dedicated, compassionate and show genuine care for those who use our services. Our skilled management team also went above and beyond, working proactively and thinking creatively. We were not always perfect, but we all did our best!

While some operational changes were necessary and mandated, we adapted and continued with purpose and direction toward our mission. We are thankful to our local Public Health for guidance in safely providing services.

We want to acknowledge our government funders, especially the provincial Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. DASO faced some extraordinary expenses due to the pandemic and we commend our funders (which include Oxford County and the federal government) for also stepping up and helping those who were most vulnerable in our communities. You have our deepest admiration and gratitude.

Looking back to pre-pandemic times, this past year was another busy one. The 3rd annual Men in Heels

fundraiser was a resounding success, raising close to \$28,000 for programs to help women victimized by physical and sexual violence. Meanwhile, we coped with ever increasing demand for *all* of our programs and services. That is a constant – the need for the specialized work we do does not go away. We have been here for 46 years and we will continue to be here for as long as we are needed.

The annual report you are now reading details statistical numbers, our financial situation, our mission and values, challenges faced and lessons learned. What’s harder to quantify is the courage and strength of the women and families who take the first step to a new life free from abuse and homelessness. Regaining control of your life is difficult and life altering. The journey is hard, but the outcome can be so rewarding. There are successes, challenges and new lessons to be learned every day by all of us at DASO.

An important initiative we want to highlight is a research report DASO commissioned from the Social Planning Council Oxford. *Rural Barriers to Accessing Domestic Abuse Services in Oxford County* recognizes the unique challenges women in rural areas experience when trying to access services. We’re pleased with the many community strengths that were identified and now we’re ready for the next phase: overcoming those barriers to service for rural women. The full document is available on our website ([www.daso.ca](http://www.daso.ca)).

DASO is actively working with several provincial and national groups to better understand the impacts of COVID-19 on gender-based violence services and survivors. While the Violence Against Women sector faces considerable challenges, we remain optimistic. We are positive and continue to grow and move forward!

Our final note is to our Board of Directors, dedicated and enthusiastic community volunteers who bring an excellent mix of skills and gifts to the Board. The exceptional governance by the Board ensures that DASO is fiscally sound with a good balance between stability and innovation. Plus, you are just a great group of people!

**Rhonda Hendel**  
*Executive Director*

**Pam Hagen**  
*Chair, Board of Directors*

# Challenges and Lessons Learned

DASO's Board of Directors and the management team strongly support the principles of accountability. It is one of our core values and we have comprehensive policies and procedures to direct our accountability, whether this be to our funders, to our donors or to our stakeholders.

An important component of accountability is ongoing quality improvement and continuous learning. DASO manages this process through our *Organizational Learning and Quality Improvement Committee*.

The purpose of this Committee is to identify agency challenges, develop solutions and evaluate the results, i.e. lessons learned:

- Track trends (internal and external); monitor agency and Service User data
- Build and maintain best practice standards and quality improvement initiatives
- Create and monitor service/program evaluations

The 2019/2020 annual goals of the Committee were all either completed or significantly moved forward:

1. **Policies and Procedures:** Ensure P & P are accurate, up to date and follow best practices  
**Outcome:** *The Committee realizes that this goal is ongoing as we must be constantly evolving and amending our P & P to meet this goal – the current COVID-19 pandemic is an excellent example. While DASO had a pandemic plan, we did not anticipate the length and depth of this pandemic. As a result, new policies state that we must have a six-month supply of all necessary operational supplies.*
2. **Human Trafficking:** Gather local and provincial data/research to identify next steps  
**Outcome:** *DASO hired the Social Planning Council Oxford to complete a background report on human trafficking in Oxford County and to make recommendations on a community response. A report was researched, written, published, and distributed. The report resulted in concrete next steps and a community event hosted by CrimeStoppers.*
3. **Trauma-informed interventions**  
**Outcome:** *P & P are reviewed with a trauma-informed “lens;” staff training around this issue was offered twice during staff meetings; staff engaged with on-line learning and seminars around trauma; a staff member took EMDR training as this was identified as one of the*

*most productive ways to help Service Users deal with trauma. This goal is on-going.*

## Observed Trends and Organizational Learning

- **Rural barriers to accessing domestic abuse services in Oxford County:** DASO commissioned a report from the Social Planning Council Oxford which identified Oxford's strengths and the barriers to providing services to rural women. DASO will move the recommendations forward in the coming years.
- **Human trafficking:** A noticeable increase in system level attention to issues of human trafficking; DASO obtained provincial government funding to conduct research, and hired the Social Planning Council Oxford to do this work to gain a better understanding of human trafficking within a local context. A report was produced with the resulting data.
- **Oxford County housing crisis:** Data showed a negative impact on where Service Users are discharging to; length of residential stay; increased number of bed requests from out-of-county service providers.

## Challenges

- With no increase to our annualized base funding for more than 14 years, our resources are stretched to the limit.
- There is a housing crisis in Oxford County with an inadequate supply of affordable safe housing resulting in extended shelter stays and the shelter often at capacity.
- There is a substance use crisis in Oxford County.
- Service Users are presenting with increasingly complex needs.
- Recruiting and retaining enough Relief Residential Support Workers is a continuing challenge.

## Lessons Learned

- To identify community needs, we must go further than gathering Service User feedback and data from various community tables and committees. We need to actively gather data/research from the larger Oxford communities to better inform our practices and services.
- DASO appreciates the need for ongoing evaluation of policies, procedures, and interventions to maintain up to date, best-practice service delivery.

## 2019 / 2020 Service Statistics

**481** women, children and adolescents impacted by domestic abuse or sexual assault or homelessness received customized help, support and counselling

**356** crisis calls

**1,274** inquiries by phone, text or email for information and support

**144** women, children and adolescents called our shelter “home”

**115** women, children and adolescents accessed *Believe in Me*, DASO’s specialized program for moms and their dependents, aged 1 to 18, who were exposed to domestic abuse

**91** women accessed transitional housing and resource supports including **53** women who required help navigating court and legal systems

## Domestic Abuse Services Oxford Financial Report

For the fiscal year April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020

### Revenue

Ontario Ministry of Children,  
Community and  
Social Services \$1,017,440

Ontario Ministry of Health (LHIN) \$24,669

County of Oxford \$59,426

Donations / Grants /  
Foundations  
\$176,200

**Total** \$1,277,735

### Expenditures

Residential Shelter \$801,392  
domestic abuse and  
homeless programs

Community Outreach \$288,716

Community-based: counselling  
programs for women, children and  
adolescents; sexual assault  
counselling; transitional resources  
including court support

**Total** \$1,090,108

*For a copy of our audited financial statement, please call 519-539-7488 ext. 238*

*We are grateful for the financial support from our government funders who continue to support our good work. We also could not offer our range of programs and services without the generous help of supporters, donors, businesses, unions, service clubs and foundations. **From all of us at DASO, our heartfelt gratitude for choosing Domestic Abuse Services Oxford.***

*Our building at 975 James is 30 years old. As with any aging facility, DASO will incur significantly increased capital expenditures in the coming years (for example, the building has five furnaces, all 30 years old, and these need to be replaced). DASO’s Board of Directors and management team are excellent fiscal stewards. We manage our budget within our anticipated operating revenue and use resources efficiently and effectively. Through this competent management, we were able to direct revenue into our Reserve Fund for these future pressing capital expenditures. For a copy of our audited financial statement, please call 519-539-7488, ext. 238.*

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- DASO is an expert in the provision of services to women, children and adolescents impacted by domestic abuse and/or homelessness. We need to concentrate on our core service mandate. The strategic planning process emphasized this and reminded us of our primary responsibilities, mission, vision and values.
- There are limited 24/7 service providers in Oxford County – and those who do provide these services are often called upon to fill service gaps “after hours.” We are a small agency and we continue to learn that we cannot fill many of the Oxford County service gaps. While we are in

the “helping” business, we cannot help everyone. This is especially relevant to our residential shelter program which offers short-term (generally less than 12 weeks) emergency accommodation, which gives women the opportunity to plan their next steps.

- Due to the continuing affordable housing shortage, we must continue to be flexible, creative, and work collaboratively with our community partners.
- Harm reduction is a working philosophy that requires us to be mindful of trends and flexible in our service and programming approach.

## Mission

We are leaders in providing effective, efficient, and accountable services for women, children and youth impacted by domestic abuse and/or homelessness in Oxford County.

## Vision

Our vision is a world with gender equality for all.

## Guiding Principles

- We are feminists advocating for women's rights and gender equality.
- We facilitate collaboration.
- We are effective and accountable.
- We are responsive to Service User and community needs
- Our services and programs are progressive and innovative.
- We are community leaders on the issues of domestic abuse, sexual violence and homelessness.
- We foster a culture of continuous learning and quality improvement.

## CARE Values

### Communication

- Demonstrate honesty and transparency in all interactions
- Constructively resolve conflict and concerns
- Disengage/challenge/walk away from gossip
- Actively listen first and ensure others are heard
- Be sensitive and knowledgeable about differing communication styles and skills
- Offer a culture of openness and acceptance

### Accountability

- Pursue excellence and quality in service delivery
- Exhibit self-awareness and self-reflection
- Keep commitments
- Deliver results
- Take ownership of decisions, actions and their outcomes
- Exercise responsibility for self-care, learning, personal and professional growth
- Demonstrate integrity to stakeholders

### Respect

- Adopt a non-judgmental, feminist approach
- Be genuine
- Right wrongs
- Demonstrate understanding and compassion
- Celebrate diversity
- Be respectful of each other's boundaries
- Respect confidentiality

### Empowerment

- Provide individuals with information and resources to make knowledgeable choices
- Believe in the individual and unique strengths of people
- Encourage and support people with their goals
- Invite and implement input from others
- Foster learning, feedback, coaching and mentoring

## Board of Directors

April 1, 2019 - March 31, 2020

Pam Hagen, Chair  
Susan Hodgins, Vice Chair  
Nino DeLuca, Treasurer  
Francine Paquette, Secretary  
Phyllis Eastlake  
Karen Greenham  
Sabrina Guilbault  
Danielle Paluska  
Marci Shelton  
Jaime-lyn Thorne  
Rhonda Hendel *Executive Director, ex officio*

## Management Team

Rhonda Hendel, Executive Director  
Jen Weicker, Residential Services Manager  
Karen Moritz, Business Manager (p/t)  
Heather Werby, Operations Manager (p/t)

Our staff team this fiscal year included:

Kim K.	Jodie F.	Carole P.	Laura M.,
Jenny M.	Sarah F.	Samantha W.	
Alicia A.	Caitlin B.	Brittany B.	Amanda D.
Avrey J.	Sam B.	Christine K.	Rebecca C.
Angila P.	Tracey S.	Shelbie P.	

**Thank you to our staff and volunteers for your time, talents, kindness and assistance!**



975 James Street, Woodstock, Ontario N4S 0A5

24-Hour Crisis/Information/Support Line:

**519-539-4811 or 1-800-265-1938**

**Text 519-788-9993**

All other calls: **519-539-7488**

Website: **www.daso.ca**

Email: **info@daso.ca**

Facebook: **Domestic Abuse Services Oxford**

Charitable registration no. 10821 9767 RR0001