

2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT



50 
YEARS
DOMESTIC ABUSE
SERVICES OXFORD

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Message from the DASO Board of Directors

As we continue to advance the goals outlined in our Strategic Plan, we are actively building new and renewed partnerships with community organizations in Oxford County. These collaborations are not only enhancing our profile but also empowering the women and children who rely on the services of Domestic Abuse Services Oxford. A significant achievement this year, thanks to the collective efforts of DASO and Ingamo staff, was the declaration of Gender-Based Violence as an epidemic in the City of Woodstock and throughout Oxford County.

Board Initiatives

Last year, the board completed an update to governance policies and procedures for the agency, enhancing the ability to achieve our vision, mission and strategic objectives. Later in the year, a small task team was established to update the Board Orientation Binder. We aim to clarify the language and include new documents and training opportunities for incoming board members. This will ensure all members have a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

Celebrating 50 Years

2024 marks DASO's 50th anniversary, and it's an exciting time for all involved. In March, Soupstock, a former fundraising initiative was revived. This was a huge success, with many attendees expressing hope that it will become an annual tradition. Special thanks to Megan Porter, former Fundraising and Communications Coordinator for organizing the re-boot of Soupstock. Megan turned over the baton to Sophie Foster who will be arranging the details of a summer Open House plus organizing other events to mark this special anniversary.

Gratitude and Farewells

I extend heartfelt thanks to all Board members for their support and hard work over the past year. In June, we bid farewell to Sue Hodgins, who has completed her term on the Board. Sue has been an invaluable member and an outstanding Board Chair. Her expertise and knowledge will be greatly missed. Thank you, Sue.

On behalf of the Board, I also want to extend a huge thank you to the Staff, Managers and Executive Director for your continued commitment to ending gender-based violence in Oxford County.

With warm regards,
Pat Coad
Chair, Board of Directors



MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In 2024, we honor 50 years of dedicated service to women and children in Oxford County. Our journey began in 1974, when Lee Lakeman took the courageous step of bringing abused women into her home on Hatch Street, unknowingly laying the foundation for the shelter system in Oxford County. Lee, working unpaid as a Coordinator alongside a collective of women at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), became a pivotal figure in this movement. In February 1975, the center was officially named Women's Emergency Centre (Woodstock) Inc. (WEC). Despite the lack of government funding, Lee Lakeman, Julie Buell, and Janet Feeney tirelessly sought donations and grants to keep the center operational. Their courage and commitment established a legacy of support for survivors of intimate partner violence.

In June 1976, with funding from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), WEC acquired a 10-bed home, continuing to support families facing abuse. That year, 200 women and children found refuge at Lawrason Street. Financial challenges were a constant struggle; an article in the Globe and Mail highlighted that WEC often had to choose between food and heating bills. Undeterred, the WEC team remained committed to challenging attitudes that perpetuate gender-based violence, playing a crucial role in providing direct support and advocacy for women in Oxford County.

By June 1985, WEC moved to 117 Wilson Street, thanks to another CMHC grant and support from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS). This new facility featured a playroom for children, a lounge, offices, five bedrooms, and four bathrooms, offering three times the space of the previous location. Executive Director Louise Todd emphasized the importance of visibility and accessibility, asserting, "Women have been hiding long enough." With enhanced security features, she believed it was crucial for the center to be easily located by those in need.

In October 1991, our current location at 975 James Street was purchased with funds from the Ministry of Housing, ensuring enhanced accessibility for women and children. The new space provided increased security, privacy, and room to serve our community better.

However, government funding challenges persisted, with budgets slashed by 21.6%. Under the leadership of Executive Director Brenda Boswell, the agency navigated these difficulties through community grants, generous donations and enhanced community relationships.

In 2011, Executive Director Rhonda Hendel rebranded the center as Domestic Abuse Services Oxford (DASO). Under this new name, DASO expanded its scope to address gender-based violence more comprehensively. The "Believe in Me" program was introduced to help women and their children/youth cope with the effects of witnessing or experiencing domestic violence. Additionally, a sexual assault counseling program for women aged 16 and older was established, along with transitional support and court support programs.

In 2023, the County of Oxford and the City of Woodstock jointly declared intimate partner violence as an epidemic. This declaration aligns with the first recommendation from the Renfrew County Inquest findings, which were conducted after three women were tragically killed by their former intimate partner. By making this declaration, Oxford County became the 25th out of 94* municipalities to take this step. Domestic Abuse Services Oxford (DASO) is actively collaborating with community partners to implement further recommendations from the inquest, aiming to enhance the community's response to intimate partner violence.

As we celebrate our 50th year, we reflect on the remarkable journey that has brought us here and the countless lives touched by our services. We remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting and empowering survivors of gender-based violence, continuing the legacy of courage and resilience that began half a century ago.

Sincerely,
Diane Harris
Executive Director

Our Vision

A world with gender equity for all.

Our Mission

To provide effective, efficient, and accountable services for women and their children impacted by abuse in Oxford County.

Our Strategic Priorities for 2023–26

Maximizing Impact Together: Leverage community partnerships and collaboration to build capacity, increase access and eliminate barriers.

Fostering a Culture of Success: Strengthen culture, capacity and EDIB through staff engagement, training, and accountability.

Empowering Women: Enhance and expand services to support to meet the complex, changing and emerging needs of all women and the community.

Stronger Together: Increase awareness, advocacy, and education of violence against women by meaningfully engaging with the community.

Annual Trends

51

Women called DASO their home

40

Children called DASO their home

1654

phone interactions

That translates to 4-5 calls every day

Increasing complexity of caseloads in part due to additional support in criminal and immigration law

Significant increase in community-based program referrals

The need for more diverse and inclusive services continues to be highlighted by changes to cultural demographics

Of 187 Women accessing Outreach Supports...

177

Women accessed outreach programming through the Intake Coordinator

106

Women referred to the Transitional Resource Program

33

Women accessed Child Witness Programming

77

Prioritized legal supports with Transitional Resource/Family Court Support Worker

81

Women referred to Community Support Worker for individual and group supports

27 Days

Average wait time to access legal advocacy support

Programs and Services

Kitchen Program

The Kitchen Program has seen significant evolution since its inception four years ago. This year, the program has leveraged both minor adjustments and major upgrades through grants like Women's Shelters Canada and United Way-Oxford to create a positive impact on the 51 women and 40 children who sought shelter services. While consistently delivering delicious and nutritious meals, school lunches and snacks, the past year has seen a broader focus on nourishing the body, mind, and soul, and fostering a sense of community through food. DASO welcomed a new Kitchen Supervisor and a registered Red Seal Apprentice to transition from a single-staffed to a team-managed kitchen. This opened doors to greater possibilities like emphasis on healthier food choices, showcasing affordable ingredients, teaching basic cooking techniques and engagement with Service Users to promote food literacy. As well as providing snacks and meals for group programs like Supportive Sweets, PEACE Program, and Community Support Groups.

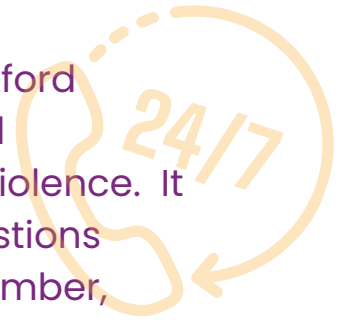
Community Support Program

Over the last fiscal year, the Community Support Program delivered 1-on-1 brief support and psychoeducational groups to 81 women, focusing on coping skills, boundaries, and trauma education. By liaising with organizations such as Victim Witness, CAS, and CMHATV, the program ensured comprehensive system navigation and advocacy. Regular attendance at the Situation Table and operations out of Tillsonburg Livingston Centre every Monday enhanced accessibility and responsiveness. Targeted inclusive support for outreach women, public education and training upon request, and furthered connections with community partners have expanded the Community Support Worker's impact, making a difference in the lives of many women in the community. The CSW has also supported the agency around other initiatives such as the 50th anniversary campaign, creating promotional materials, and supporting in a temporary on-call capacity.

Programs and Services

24/7 Crisis Line

The 24/7 crisis/help line is available to individuals in Oxford County who are in crisis or who need help, support and information about any issue involving gender-based violence. It is also open to anyone in the community who has questions about abuse or is concerned about a friend, family member, neighbour or co-worker.



Residential Program (Shelter Services)

The Residential program is safe, secure accommodation for women identifying as women (with or without children) who are impacted by gender-based violence. Our 17-bed shelter is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Service users receive individual support, safety planning, information, and referrals as well as assistance customized to needs.

Transitional Resource Program

The transitional resource program helps women affected by abuse to overcome barriers as they start new, violence-free lives by providing advocacy, goals planning, safety planning, court support and assistance with housing. In the past fiscal year, the Transitional Resource Worker has been carrying an increasingly complex caseload due to lack of legal representation and lack of lawyers accepting Legal Aid Ontario cases in Oxford County and beyond. Like many other outreach services, the Transitional Program is seeing an influx of referrals, specifically for legal supports.

Family Court Support Program

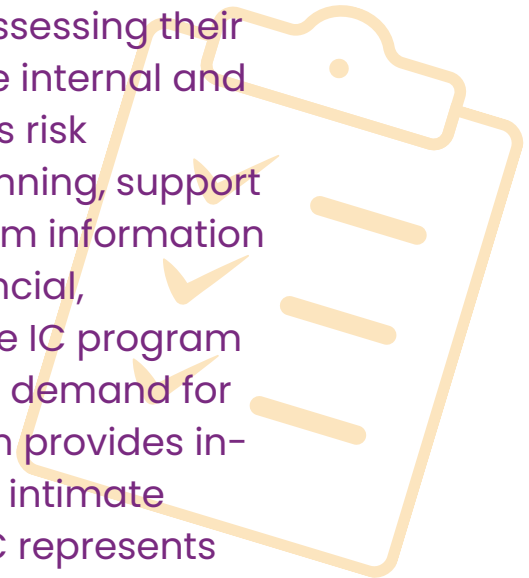
Court support services are offered collaboratively by DASO, Ingamo Homes, Family Violence Counselling Program and Victim Services of Oxford County. Court Support staff at DASO work with existing services for victims of domestic violence to ensure clients have access to the supports they need at every stage of the family court process. This service will facilitate the client's understanding and navigation of the family court system.



Programs and Services

Intake Coordinator

Over the past fiscal year, the Intake Coordinator (IC) program supported 178 service users by assessing their goals and connecting them to appropriate internal and external supports. The IC program provides risk assessment and management, safety planning, support with housing applications, brief legal system information and navigation, as well as referrals to financial, employment and counselling supports. The IC program ensures timely support amid an increased demand for outreach services at DASO. The IC program provides in-services to community partners regarding intimate partner violence and DASO services. The IC represents DASO for Oxford County's By-Name List and is the primary contact for all Special Priority requests for Rent-Geared-to-Income housing. The IC acts as DASO's second representative for Oxford County's Situation Table.



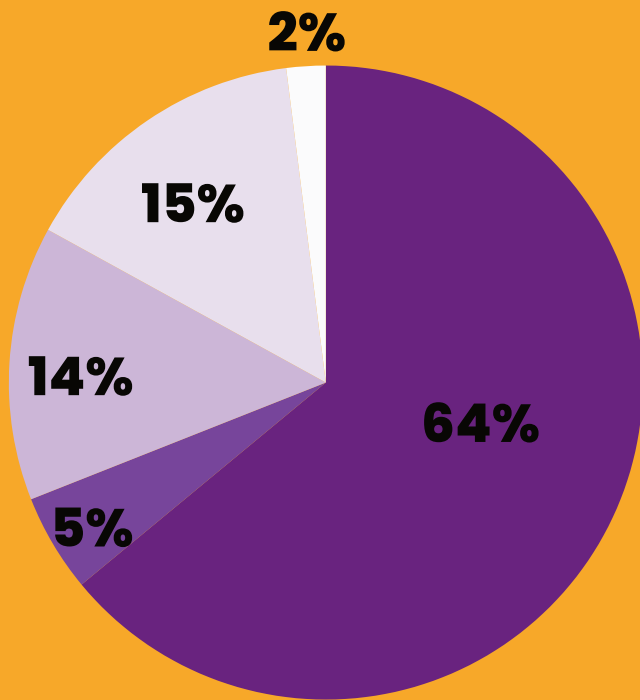
Family Support Program

The Family Support Program provides support for mothers and their children to aid in the transition from domestic violence to safety. The Family Support Worker also provides children's activities, respite, and advocacy with community partners. Together with Ingamo Homes, DASO implemented the PEACE (Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment) Program providing education and supportive counselling for children and youth that have been exposed to and/or witnessed domestic violence/abuse. The Family Support Worker and facilitators successfully ran two sessions in the fall and winter of 2023. The team continues to look at creative ways to offer the content.



Annual Finance Report

Revenue



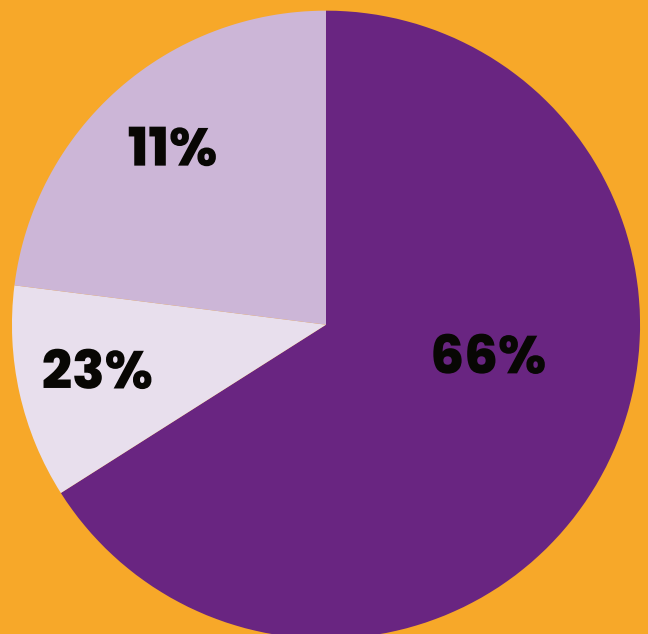
64%	Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services \$1,133,563
15%	Grants \$256,157
14%	Fundraising \$247,540
5%	County of Oxford \$84,199
2%	Other Funds \$36,289

Total Revenue: \$1,757,748



Expenses

66%	Residential Program \$1,136,464
23%	Community Based Programs \$405,372
11%	Housing \$184,754



Total Expenses: \$1,726,590

Our 2023/24 Audited Financial Statements are available on our website at www.daso.ca or by contacting our office at 519-539-7488 x238; anne@daso.ca

HIGHLIGHTS

from an eventful year



Board of Directors

Pat Coad
Chair

Sheri Vindasius
Vice Chair

Courtney Strickler
Treasurer

Kristen Doyle
Secretary

**Alannah
Robinson-Stott**
Director

****Carly Keenan**
Director

Amy Canlas
Director

Leah Robinson
Director

Deb Almost
Director

Sue Hodgins
Non Voting Member

Management Team

Diane Harris
Executive Director

Jennifer Weicker
Residential Program Manager

Samantha White
Communications Manager

Anne Wismer
Contracted Financial Manager

Jaime-lyn Thorne
Kitchen Manager

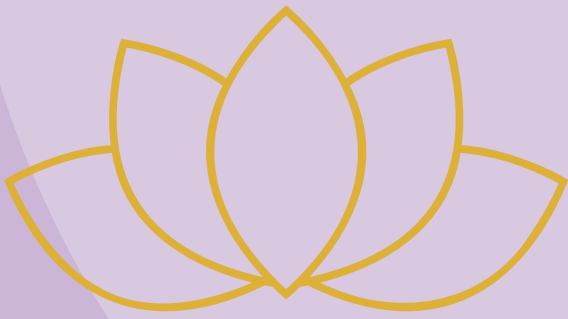
Hannah Bergman
Contracted Kitchen Supervisor

Staff Team

Alyssa R.
Sophia R.
Robyn D.
Sarah R.
Sarah K.
Melissa S.
Natasha M.
Jenilee M.
Rachel H.
Jess B.

Abbey G.
Cait B.
Cinnamon B.
Jodie F.
Amanda D.
Maddie G.
Lorraine M.
***Sophie F.**
*** **Megan P.**
****Christine K.**

* Contracted
** Resigned



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Wrapped In Courage
Be the Light Mail Campaign
Finkle Street Tap & Grill
Home Depot Orange Door Campaign
Fashion for a Cause
Soup Stock
Vuteq...

And many more third party events!

"I will be eternally grateful for being able to call DASO my home during one of the hardest but most beautiful and transformative times of my life." -26 y/o new mom

Thank you to all of our private donors named and unnamed for supporting DASO and enabling us to continue offering our programs and services to all of Oxford County. We could not do it without you!

Ways to Donate:

