



SWAN

Annual Report

2023-2024

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With gratitude for the wisdom of Indigenous Peoples, we acknowledge that SWAN Vancouver is situated on the stolen ancestral lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

We're also honoured to work in the territories of the QayQayt First Nation, Kwantlen, ǵícǵý (Katzie), Semiahmoo, Tsawwassen First Nations, kʷikʷəłəm (Kwkwetlem) and Stó:lō Nation



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Introduction

Almost 25 years ago, volunteers stepped into a massage parlour as part of a healthcare pilot project. But it wasn't long before im/migrant women engaged in sex work began asking questions about the law, immigration, employment and safety, and volunteers realized these workers face a wide range of barriers.

Those initial questions and conversations led to the creation of SWAN Vancouver, a person-centred, low-barrier, anti-racist and rights-based organization whose programming is based on women's needs, interests and calls for systemic change. For years, the women we support have shaped our programs and have become increasingly more involved in sharing their perspectives and experiences to inform our advocacy.

In this report, you'll read about how we've expanded our services and advocacy, while still maintaining a grassroots-at-heart, community-minded organization that will continue to evolve based on the women we support.





Board Chair's MESSAGE

Reflecting on the past year, it's encouraging to take stock of how much change we've weathered and how much more anti-racist, feminist work we're ready to do. We've faced new and ongoing challenges, but we've also achieved a heartening degree of stability while continuing to grow and adapt.

This year we welcomed talented new staff and board members. We hired our first-ever Human Resources Manager and Office Manager. We're so pleased that Aya and Meris are now part of our team. They've become indispensable to our organizational capacity and sense of community. Kristina and Melody joined our board in September 2023. They enrich our strategic thinking and big picture planning with their vision, wisdom and warmth.

We are so proud that SWAN Vancouver was certified in British Columbia as a Living Wage Employer in September 2023. This designation allows us to live our values and demonstrate our sincere commitment to fairness and social justice.

We also persevered with our ongoing advocacy work. In May 2023, our Executive Director, Angela Wu, addressed the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) to intervene in their study of anti-trafficking initiatives, and in November 2023, Angela, our Communications Manager, Crystal Laderas, and our Board Member, Bronwyn McBride, spoke to the Richmond City Council on several occasions to advocate against their introduction of harmful bylaw and licensing enforcement practices in massage businesses.

As always, we are immensely grateful for our dedicated team of staff and volunteers, our donors and partners. Thank you for your unwavering support.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mindy Abramowitz". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Mindy Abramowitz
Board Chair, Co-Treasurer

Executive Director's **MESSAGE**

As I look back on the past year – my first as Executive Director - I am filled with deep gratitude for SWAN's steadfast community of supporters. It is because of you that we can remain values-driven and continue this important work, year after year.

I am humbled by what we have accomplished together these past 12 months. Despite going through a significant transition, this has been a year of growth: we filled important positions

that have strengthened our capacity to support our staff and volunteers more effectively, so that they can thrive in their work and personally; we elevated our external communications, public education and community engagement; we developed important partnerships locally, as well as in Victoria and Calgary to collaborate on providing low barrier and safe support for women who live and work there; and, perhaps most exciting, we expanded our frontline services to reach a new population of Japanese-speaking im/migrant women engaged in sex work.

One of SWAN's most significant accomplishments this year was our advocacy to Richmond City Council. There were moments when we felt discouraged and helpless, and that there was no way to affect change within this municipality and its harmful bylaws, policies and practices. But through the collective effort and commitment of our staff, volunteers, supporters, and most importantly, the women we serve, the City of Richmond is now evaluating its bylaws and examining best practices for sex worker safety. We will continue to campaign for change in Richmond, so that the women we support there can work without fear.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to our mission to uphold the rights and self-determination of the people we serve and challenge the systemic inequalities that contribute to their marginalization. This upcoming year, we will continue expanding our programs and services, including offering virtual English classes to women unable to access our Vancouver office, and launch new projects focused on legal education and equitable healthcare access. As the needs of our community evolve and new challenges come our way, we will work hard to tackle ongoing and emerging barriers to the rights, health and safety of im/migrant women engaged in sex work.

Thank you for your continued belief in our work and for your generous support – we truly could not do this without you.



Angela Wu
Executive Director



The Year IN REVIEW

APRIL

- First BC BDAR sharing circle
- English Class spring session



MAY

- Hosted open house for Victims Week
- Angela speaks to House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women



JUNE

- Red Umbrella March
- Second BC BDAR focus group



JULY

- Media Project focus group
- English Class summer session
- Hired Human Resources and Office Managers



AUGUST

- Meeting with UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of Slavery



SEPTEMBER

- English Class fall session
- Migrant Rights Rally
- Brock University students practicum with SWAN
- Annual General Meeting
- Law Foundation Shared Learning Day
- SWAN is Living Wage Certified



OCTOBER

- Living in Community conference
- Launched accessibility info page on website



NOVEMBER

- Outreach trip to Victoria
- Launch of Media Project



JANUARY

- Richmond advocacy - SWAN continues to send emails to councillors requesting meetings
- Submission to UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls
- English Class winter session



MARCH

- Richmond approves body rub bylaw review
- Joined Migrant Rights Network, attended Status for All rally



DECEMBER

- Strategic Planning meeting
- Advocacy begins after Richmond raids
- Programs expansion to Japanese-speaking women



FEBRUARY

- Media and public campaigns for Richmond
- SWAN leadership speaks at Richmond City Council
- Media Project Journalist Advisory Committee focus group
- Booth at UBC pharmacy conference
- Trip to collaborate with Shift Calgary
- Women's Memorial March
- Lunar New Year



Frontline SERVICES

The Outreach Team saw a steady increase in the number of women it supported after adding new routes, trips to Victoria and Calgary and connecting with women living and traveling to work in the Interior of B.C. SWAN also marked the start of Japanese service in February 2024, following the addition of a Japanese speaker to our staff.

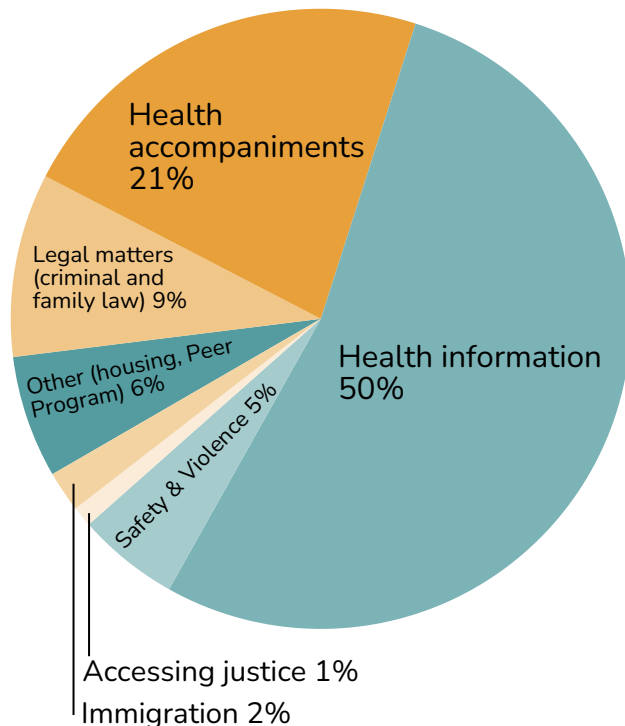
830 WOMEN SERVED

437 ACCESSED SWAN FOR THE 1ST TIME

825,984 CONDOMS DISTRIBUTED

“It’s really nice to know that there’s an organization like SWAN. You all are very kind.”
- Cindy

NETREACH CALLS



Requests for human trafficking support: 0
Abuser Alerts sent: 3

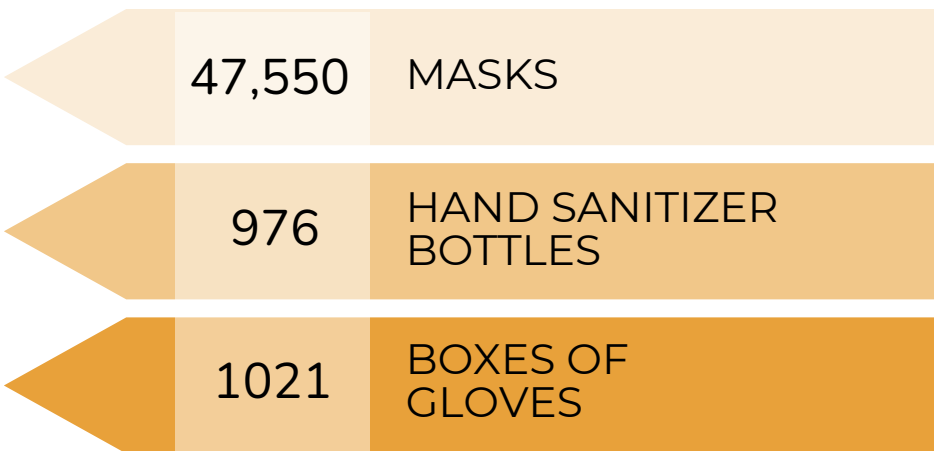


Program HIGHLIGHTS



“Thank you for all your help. SWAN is the best! It means a lot to know that there are people that care about us.” - Lulu

PPE DISTRIBUTED



Outreach

- introduced private Condom Packing Party bookings for social groups, workplaces, organizations and classrooms and other groups
- launched Japanese service
- collaborated with HOPE Okanagan, SHIFT Calgary, Peers Victoria and ANSWERS Society to provide supplies for women in different communities
- experienced Condom Packing Party volunteers became facilitators and freed up staff to work in core areas such as frontline work

Netreach

- advocacy work with clinics (front desk/admin staff, healthcare practitioners, etc.) remains a priority
- launched support services in Japanese

Peer PROGRAM



“I’m leaving Canada, but you guys will always be in my heart.” - Anh



“Thank you very much, I’m grateful for all of you. If you had this class forever, I’d go to this class forever. - Sara”

ENGLISH CLASS

Women are improving their English skills and staying connected with SWAN by attending weekly English classes. This is now our most consistent Peer Program activity, with four semesters running throughout the year. Along with running classes with the support of staff translators, the teacher also helped a woman study for an English proficiency test required for a job in the public sector.

SWAN offers separate classes for beginners and intermediate students and hosts a Peer Lunch in between so all of the students can socialize with each other, the staff and teacher, while practicing their English.

HIGHLIGHTS

- hosted four semesters of English classes
- organized activities including peer lunches, yoga class, floral arranging, pumpkin carving and Christmas tree decorating

Project HIGHLIGHTS



RESPONSIBLE REPORTING MEDIA PROJECT

SWAN launched its Media Project and microsite, [ResponsibleReporting.ca](https://www.responsiblereporting.ca), an online hub that contained 28 resources aimed at educating journalists on the nuances and ethics of sex work reporting. To create the resources, staff worked with a former journalist, consulted with the women we serve and collaborated with various experts.

For the public project launch, SWAN held a news conference but pivoted to create a [video](#) when reporters did not attend. The video detailed the project and its resources, as well as exploring the issue of apathetic media and their disinterest in criticism.

A portion of the project, focusing on creating [ethical imagery](#) of sex workers for journalists to use in their stories, also pivoted to a [blog post](#) following reflection by SWAN staff. SWAN staff had collaborated with the women we serve to inform these ethical images, but ultimately realized that there are inherent difficulties involved in producing images representing sex work/workers without using stereotypes that would indicate to the public

what the image is meant to show. We realized that broader societal and policy changes will need to occur first, before sex work imagery in the news can become more accurate and ethical.

As part of collaborating with the women SWAN supports, and being accountable to them, some of the project resources and all the materials for the ethical imagery piece were translated into Chinese for the women to review and give feedback on.

The project resources were also displayed at a Living In Community conference in Vancouver. The resources were further disseminated to journalists looking to speak to SWAN on various issues, as a means of interview preparation. Last, the Responsible Reporting resources were shared with an undergraduate criminology class at Brock University in Ontario. Following a presentation of the project, the criminology students incorporated the resources into graded assignments on critical representations of sex workers in the media.

SWAN also held a focus group comprising of working and consulting journalists to give feedback on the resources and the overall project. The results of the focus group were overwhelmingly positive and included suggestions and advice for improvements to accessibility and next steps for the work. An external evaluator used all project materials, focus group results, student assignments, and the women’s feedback to produce a final evaluation of the project, its resources, its impact, and the potential for future scaling to reach different audiences and/or expand the reach with journalists.



In February 2024, staff travelled to Calgary to host a similar workshop with SafeLink Calgary and its sex work support program Shift. SWAN also provided outreach services to 10 massage parlours where women accepted safer sex supplies, PPE and holiday gifts. Many of the women told us they knew about SWAN because they previously worked in Metro Vancouver and two women accessed our Netreach Coordinator to book health appointments shortly after our visit. We remain focused on continuing services in Victoria and Calgary and working with sex work support organizations and other agencies. These trips are part of a four-year project funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada.



A scene from “Im/migrant Sex Workers Don’t Need a ‘Hero’ Journalist.” [Video production by flippinpictures/Rosanne Lambert]

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER CITIES:

SWAN staff are training organizations that may encounter im/migrant sex workers, so women receive the support they need if they’re living and working outside of our regular outreach route. Following a March 2023 trip to Victoria where staff ran a workshop for a settlement agency, we provided a follow-up training for their staff through a virtual workshop focused on supporting im/migrant women in sex work. SWAN returned to the Victoria area in November for an outreach trip that included sharing information about using Peers Victoria’s services.

RACIAL JUSTICE REPORT

Women provided insight into Canada’s sex work laws and regulations during in-depth interviews that will inform our advocacy work and educate the public about the barriers im/migrant sex workers face. Twenty-four women participated in the Racial Justice Project, a Law Foundation of BC-funded initiative that provides a clear picture of how women deal with criminalization in their work and lives. Women participated in interviews and one focus group from March to July 2023. The preliminary report, “You’re always on edge: Sex work, Immigration, and Canadian Law” was shared with the funder, and other organizations who received funding, during a knowledge-sharing day in September 2023. The report was also translated to Chinese and shared with participants.

Advocacy

RICHMOND RAIDS



“You are putting these women at greater risk if you shut down these establishments. The reality is that if women are not able to work there, they will continue working but in far more dangerous situations.”


-Executive Director Angela Wu speaks at the February 13, 2024, Community Safety Committee meeting at Richmond City Hall.

Workers say
#StopTheRaids
Richmond.

For months, women in sex work have experienced what some describe as traumatizing bylaw inspections after a Richmond City Council committee ordered a crackdown on massage parlours.

Many women are immigrants and newcomers who have left their safe workplace and may risk working in apartments where there's a greater chance they could be assaulted on the job.

The following statements are from women engaged in sex work. Aliases are used to protect workers' safety and privacy. Some quotes have been translated from Mandarin.



SWAN swanvancouver.ca/richmond-letter/

SWAN led coordinated efforts to stop the City of Richmond's bylaw raids on massage parlours and push officials to review discriminatory bylaws and practices. We launched an organization-wide response that included more frontline support in Richmond, reports from the women we support, engaging with city staff and politicians and using media interviews and public campaigns to put pressure on City Hall.

In December 2023, Executive Director Angela Wu began reaching out to city councillors and staff, inviting them to learn more about im/migrant women in sex work and the harms of raids. Councillors were unresponsive and soon after, we released a joint statement which included researcher Sylvia Machat and allies from PACE Society, Living in Community, West Coast Leaf and the AESHA Project.

In February, Angela appeared at City Hall to spea**k in opposition** to the raids and answer city councillors' questions. Board Secretary Bronwyn McBride, an independent researcher who completed her PhD at the Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity, appeared at the same meeting to present some of her research about the harms of workplace inspections on indoor sex work venues. Jessi Taylor, a sessional lecturer at UBC, also drew from her research to outline the risks workers face during these kinds of law enforcement operations.

“We know deep down a lot of people are discriminating us, look down on us for our work, we know that. But with you folks from SWAN, we don't feel like that, we feel like we are seeing our family.” - Cara

On the ground, Outreach staff scheduled extra visits and support for women working in Richmond while collecting vital information and reports from workers to amplify in our public advocacy. These details were crucial in informing how we spoke to media and developed advocacy, including campaigns that encouraged supporters to email and call Richmond’s politicians and staff to speak against the raids.

SWAN leadership continued to speak at council meetings in March, engage with councillors and participate in media interviews. Supporters, researchers and community organization persistently contacted City Hall. Unfortunately, City Council decided to ignore evidence and voted to continue enforcement and increase fines. However, SWAN did receive the support of two city councillors. In March, Coun. Laura Gillanders’ introduced a referral to review body rub bylaws by consulting with SWAN and others and looking at best practices around Metro Vancouver. A report to City Hall could be presented before the end of 2024.

CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER SEX WORKER SAFETY FRAMEWORK WORKING GROUP COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SWAN participated in the City of New Westminster’s Sex Worker Safety Framework Working Group, which met regularly between February-June 2023 to provide a vision and a plan to protect the health and safety of community members engaged in sex work in New Westminster. Members of the working group contributed their experience, knowledge, and perspectives that informed the development of the city’s [Guidelines to Promote Sex Worker Safety](#), with the purpose of making “the city safer for sex workers by promoting their health and rights, and ensuring that City of New Westminster employees treat sex workers with dignity, fairness and respect, including acknowledging that sex work is an occupation.” The Guidelines were approved by the city council in November 2023.

BC BDAR PROJECT

SWAN is working with other community-based organizations to develop B.C.’s first province-wide bad date reporting system. As a member of the [BCBDAR](#) working group, we hosted two focus groups to ask women about what they’d like to see in a provincial reporting system, what would make them interested in sharing reports and what they need to feel safe reporting. BCBDAR is currently developing an online platform and expects it to launch in 2025.

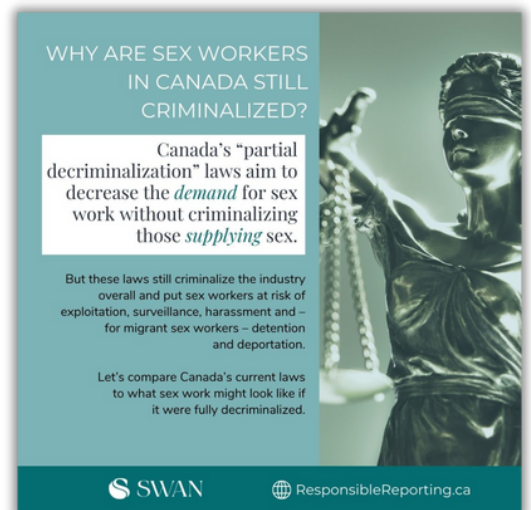
Communications & MEDIA COVERAGE



SWAN is establishing itself as a thought leader and expert commentator regarding im/migrant women in sex work, while educating the public on key issues. The last year's communications focused on three key areas:

1. Increasing awareness about how criminalization impacts worker safety and their ability to access mainstream services.
2. Providing expert commentary on newsworthy or trending topics related to sex work or migrant rights.
3. Further growing our community of supporters including volunteers, donors, advocates and stakeholders.

Following revisions in SWAN's Communications Strategy, we rolled out the plan to create accessible messaging to reach a wider audience. Informed by years of frontline service, research and policy work, and the resources on ResponsibleReporting.ca, we created simple, easy-to-read campaigns on social media that use graphic design, storytelling and multimedia. Instagram campaigns, blogs and Twitter threads introduced key issues to the public, including sex work laws and regulations, the harms of many mainstream anti-trafficking initiatives and the dangers of Richmond's bylaw officers raiding massage parlours.





IN THE NEWS

[B.C.'s free birth control program puts some women at danger: SWAN Vancouver](#)

[Why Canada needs to end ban on migrant sex work](#)

[Sex worker advocates push back against attempt to rid Richmond of massage parlours](#)

[Ces travailleuses du sexe qui risquent l'expulsion](#)

[Inspections drive Richmond sex work into 'dangerous locations': Advocacy group](#)

[As Richmond eyes harsher penalties for massage parlours, critic fears it will drive workers underground](#)

[Safety committee votes to continue allowing raids on Richmond massage parlours](#)

[Richmond body rub studio crackdown applauded by councillor Kash Heed](#)

While we did speak with reporters for stories about accessing healthcare and the immigration ban on sex work, most media coverage of SWAN revolved around the City of Richmond's raids on women's workplaces. The first story was published in December 2023 following a joint statement SWAN issued with our partner organizations and allies. By February 2024, and leading up to our public appearance at Richmond City Hall, we received a flood of interview requests which led to coverage in CBC Vancouver, CTV Vancouver, CityNews Vancouver, the Vancouver Sun, Daily Hive Vancouver and the Richmond News. The media attention put public pressure on Richmond City Council and resulted in councillors approving a review of the city's body rub bylaws. It also helped build SWAN's media contact list and establish working relationships with reporters.

The communications department also supported various operational needs, by advertising for Condom Packing Parties, Outreach Team openings and board and job openings. New registration and application forms were launched to streamline registration and application processes. SWAN also experienced a boost in donations after the department led the annual fall/winter fundraising campaign and appealed to the public for extra support during the Richmond raids.

SWAN Vancouver's TEAM

SWAN's greatest asset is our staff. They have the language skills and frontline experience to build relationships with women, ensure their privacy and provide person-centred support. Staff also specialize in policy, projects and advocacy that have a global influence. With the addition of two new roles, Office Manager and Human Resources Manager, new staff have been able to handle finances and administration, develop workplace policies and procedures and implement health and safety measures.

Thank you to our Board of Directors for their guidance this year.

Mindy Abramowitz, Chair & Co-Treasurer

Bronwyn McBride, Secretary

Kelly Yang, Co-Treasurer

Steph Sia, Director

Jane Li, Vice-Chair

Melody Wise, Director

Kristina Corpin-Moser, Director

We encourage people who share our values to apply to [join our board](#). Experience on boards or expertise in law, human resources or migrant rights are all assets.



The Year **AHEAD**

- UBC pharmacy student practicums: Students will be calling clinics and pharmacies to learn about their intake process and report back to Netreach about healthcare access.
- Launch of Peer Program virtual classes: Some women say they would join our English classes but live too far away from our office to attend in-person. Additionally, current students are more likely to be longer-term residents who have status and virtual lessons may be more accessible to temporary residents.
- Fundraising and development: Work with a consultant to develop a fundraising strategy, coach staff and support the roll out of initiatives.
- Lunch & Learns: Hosting a series of workshops about anti-racist practices, barriers to services and other topics, in sessions made for the public, frontline workers and journalists.
- Expanding Peer Program: Running new social activities and educational workshops based on women's interests and needs.
- Accessibility training: Train staff in hosting accessible events and using appropriate communication tools and practices for supporters with different access needs.
- Victim's Week: Host a workshop with an immigration lawyer to discuss and answer questions about different pathways to Canadian citizenship.
- Systemic change project: Identify barriers to healthcare services and develop training for providers treating patients who are im/migrant women engaged in sex work.
- Media Project: Continue to develop and roll out resources to journalists and the public.
- Media engagement: Address media misrepresentations through corrections, discussions with management and workshops made for journalists.
- Japanese services: Continue expansion of Outreach and Netreach services to Japanese-speaking community.
- Legal Education project: Develop educational resources to help women better understand and navigate Canada's laws and immigration regulations.
- WAGE project: Engaging and training settlement agencies using an anti-racist, intersectional feminist approach to improve support services for im/migrant sex workers.
- Strategic Planning for 2025 onwards.
- Exploring ways to bring STBBI testing to the women through our outreach program.
- Upgrading our kitchenette to enhance our in-office programming.

The Milne FAMILY

Year after year, the Milne family has reaffirmed it's commitment to advancing the rights, health and safety of im/migrant women in sex work, through generous contributions to our Outreach Team. This core program is at the root of SWAN's service, and the Milne's recognize the impact our organization makes with ongoing visits with women at their workplaces. Thank you to the Milne family for donating to SWAN's Outreach Team for another year.

“SWAN does what few organizations do and that's meet people where they're at in a non-judgemental manner. The team is interested in improving the lives of the women they serve without telling them what to do or who to be.”
- The Milne Family

Funders

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT.

THE MILNE
FAMILY



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada



Gifts in kind



SWAN received a generous donation of products from LUSH. The cosmetics company is a long-time supporter of our work and has funded our Peer Program and advocacy projects in the past. This past year, LUSH delivered hundreds of items to our office which our Outreach Team and Peer Program delivered throughout the holiday season (from November 2023 to Lunar New Year in February 2024). LUSH also committed to supporting women and SWAN's work with yearly donations for the holiday season!

Donate for rights **NOT RESCUE**

Due to multi-layered criminalization and stigma, im/migrant sex workers face daunting barriers to accessing healthcare, legal support and justice. In contrast to the many “rescue” initiatives that push women to exit the industry, SWAN Vancouver respects a woman’s right to self-determination and focuses on their rights, health and safety. We provide frontline programs when mainstream services have failed to offer safe and inclusive support to im/migrant sex workers.

When you give to SWAN, your generous contribution will help fund:

- Frontline work including delivering safer sex supplies, booking and accompanying women to healthcare appointments and connecting them with our staff and programs.
- Peer Program activities including four semesters of English Class, one of the many learning and social activities developed following requests from the women.
- Advocacy and policy work such as working with municipal, provincial and federal governments to push for equitable laws, bylaws and practices impacting the women we support.

DONATE HERE to contribute to rights, not rescue.

“As a massage therapist of over 40 years, I am well aware of the ‘othering’ of women involved in sex work. When that othering facilitates the daily violence that sex workers are vulnerable to through repressive laws and biased media, it becomes even more important for me to support the invaluable work of SWAN Vancouver.” - Matthew

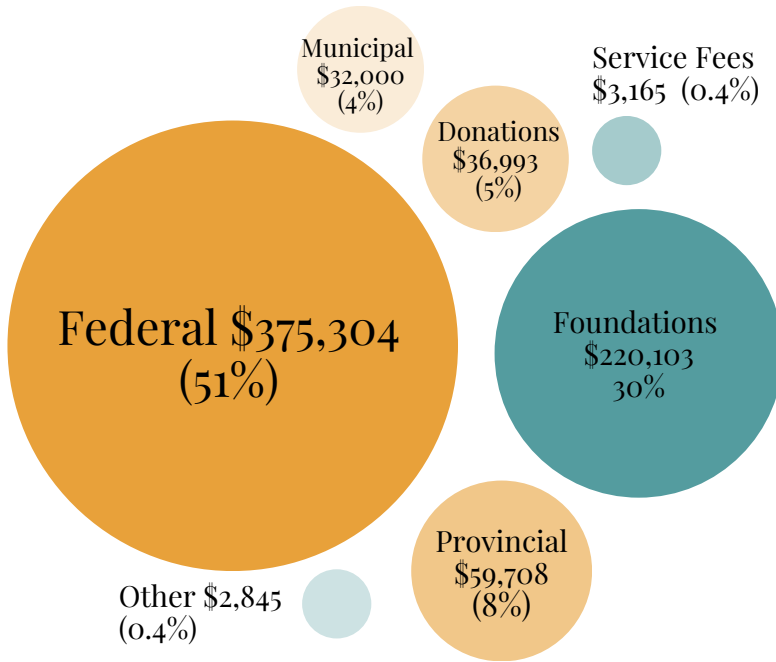
“I’m very passionate about the rights of sex workers – I believe that it is work that should be treated with respect and dignity. Sex workers are often marginalized people and unfortunately, sex work tends to add to that marginalization. I love that SWAN Vancouver keeps the women at the forefront and provides services specific to their needs. I think it’s a really great organization and I’m proud to support it!” - Ally M.

“Because of my own ignorance and lack of research and curiosity, I didn't know about SWAN and their vital work until the devastating 2021 shootings in Atlanta. I didn't want to contribute to the unsustainable, reactionary ways of giving after a mass tragedy that often befalls organizations tirelessly working with marginalized communities. For me, I want to support an organization that will continue to humanize and create support systems for im/migrant women and femmes in sex work, long beyond headlines and fleeting public interest.” - Mary W.

Financials

April 2023-March 2024

REVENUE: 730,118



SWAN Vancouver saw a return to pre-pandemic levels of funding across all sources. Fortunately, we began and ended the year with healthy reserves, and we remain confident in our ability to fund operations.

Our 2023-2024 revenues declined by 16% while our expenses remained consistent with the previous year's. We ended the year with a shortfall of revenues over expenses of \$88,362. We anticipated this financial result, and we were able to absorb it without encountering any cash constraints.

Our grant and private contributions rose significantly between 2020 and 2023, but the pandemic crisis created delays that prevented us from meeting all of our human resources needs until last fiscal year. At last, we were able to hire new team members to fill positions instrumental to SWAN's stability and sustainability. We allocated the surpluses we had accumulated over the preceding three years to these positions.

Although we have directed substantial resources to funding new staff positions, we ended the 2024 fiscal year and began the current one with a starting balance of \$53,300.

EXPENSES: 818,480

