

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection
Revitalizing
Resilience
Remembering
Reconnection
Reopening
Reorienting

Re: 2022 2023

Recovering
Reaffirming
Responding
Relationships
Relocation
Rediscover
Renew

Annual Report

Regional
HIV/AIDS
Connection



Reaffirming our mission

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC) is community-inspired and dedicated to positively impacting the lives of individuals and diverse communities living with, at risk for, and affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C.



Regional mandate

Serving Perth, Huron, Lambton, Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford Counties.



Respecting Indigenous peoples and land

With great respect, we acknowledge the regions we serve as the traditional territory of the Algonquin, Anishinaabe, Attawandaron, Haudenosaunee, and Leni-Lunaape Peoples. The three First Nations communities closest in proximity to the agency are: Chippewa of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee-Delaware Nation. We are grateful to collaborate with Indigenous communities as we foster healing together.

Re: A Simple Way to Say a Lot

***Fact:** The following statement
contains **43** instances of "re."

A message from our Executive Director

It's not easy reducing a year into words—especially the right ones. It was a remarkable year for Regional HIV/AIDS Connection (RHAC). In putting together our year-in-review, it proved difficult to redefine this period in RHAC's history as a theme or title for this year's Annual Report. It turns out, only two letters could do the trick: *Re*.

Oftentimes, we start a word with "*Re*" when we mean to start over: We retrace our steps, reconsider our plans, and we re-start. But it doesn't mean we have to go backwards. After all, reflecting on our history and responding to new realities is how we forge new futures. *Re* can be revolutionary.

We invite you to rediscover our year of "*Re*" in this year's Annual Report, reviewing April 1, 2022—March 31, 2023. This report recaps a year replete with "*Re*'s" in which RHAC continued recovering from the impacts of COVID-19, relocated our services to multiple new locations, and recognized the retirement of a long-time leader at RHAC: former Executive Director, Brian Lester. During unpredictable times, RHAC remained resilient, responsive, and resourceful thanks to our Board, staff, volunteers, community supporters, and the many individuals who access our regional services.

We are grateful to all of you, and for the many respected relationships that made our far-reaching impacts all the more possible this year, and for years to come.



Martin McIntosh
Executive Director

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

Remarkable Progress: Our Year in Review



A message from our Board Chair

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we present our Annual General Report for 2022/23, we celebrate the remarkable progress achieved by RHAC. It was a momentous year for us as we continued to work tirelessly in our mission to provide comprehensive care and support to individuals and communities affected by HIV/AIDS and hepatitis c virus (HCV).

This was a year of transformation and growth, marked by significant milestones and transitions. After an exceptional tenure of 16 years, our highly regarded Executive Director, Brian Lester, made the decision to retire. Brian has been an unwavering beacon of leadership and dedication, guiding our organization with passion and compassion. We extend our deepest gratitude to Brian for his invaluable contributions and wish him all the best in his well-deserved retirement. In this period of transition, we were excited to announce the appointment of Martin McIntosh as the new Executive Director. Martin is no stranger to our organization, having been with us for a decade. He has exhibited exemplary dedication and a deep understanding of our mission. Martin brings a wealth of experience and a unique perspective to his new role. We have every confidence that Martin will build upon Brian's legacy and lead RHAC to new heights.

Amid these changes, we expanded our reach and impact through various initiatives. One of the most significant milestones was the official opening of our Consumption and Treatment Service (CTS), Carepoint. This site has become a symbol of progress in our fight against HIV and the opioid crisis. The service provides dignified support for people who use substances, and a safe and non-judgmental environment for individuals to access vital supports. Through Carepoint, and our regional harm reduction outreach programs, we continue to reduce drug-related deaths and negative health outcomes across diverse populations.

We also completed the full return and relocation of our HIV/HCV Support Services, Administration, and Community Relations and Education departments—alongside OAHAS (Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy)—to 602 Queens Avenue as part of an evolving collaborative service model in proud partnership with London Cares Homeless Response Services and St. Joe's Café. With our doors opened, we returned to in-person client services and peer/volunteer engagement in response to many community recovery challenges posed by the pandemic. This resumption of face-to-face interactions has strengthened our bonds with community and allowed us to deliver more personalized care and support.

Education and prevention continued to be at the core of our efforts, empowering individuals to make informed decisions and take charge of their health. A renewed focus on peer empowerment programs has fostered a greater sense of community by providing a platform for individuals to support and learn from each other, further enhancing the impact of our services.

Furthermore, our ongoing excellence in the John Gordon Home residential care program remained a cornerstone of our organization's impact. Our dedicated staff and volunteers continue to provide compassionate care, ensuring that residents receive the support they need to thrive.

As we bid farewell to one remarkable leader and welcome another, we are filled with gratitude for the legacy left by Brian and the promise of a bright future with Martin. Together, we will continue to work passionately towards our mission of providing comprehensive support and care to individuals and communities affected by HIV/AIDS.

In closing, we express our sincere appreciation for the invaluable contributions of our dedicated staff, volunteers, partners, and donors who make our vision possible and whose steadfast belief in our cause enables us to create positive change in the lives of those we serve.

With heartfelt gratitude and warm regards,



Chris Moss

Board Chair

Regional HIV/AIDS Connection



PHOTO: The new, permanent home of Carepoint at 446 York Street.

Rehoming our services

RHAC moved our headquarters and harm reduction programs to new neighbourhoods. Throughout the transition, dedicated staff kept our services running, even delivering Carepoint's supervised consumption services from a temporary trailer.

Reopening Carepoint, permanently

Five years after opening Ontario's first legal temporary overdose prevention site, RHAC and the program's founding partners reopened Carepoint as a permanent Consumption and Treatment Service from a state-of-the-art facility at 446 York Street in February 2023.

Relocating RHAC offices to Queens Avenue

RHAC's administrative offices moved into a shared service space with London Cares Homeless Response Services and St. Joe's Café at 602 Queens Avenue with the vision of offering wraparound supports and a place to belong for marginalized community members.

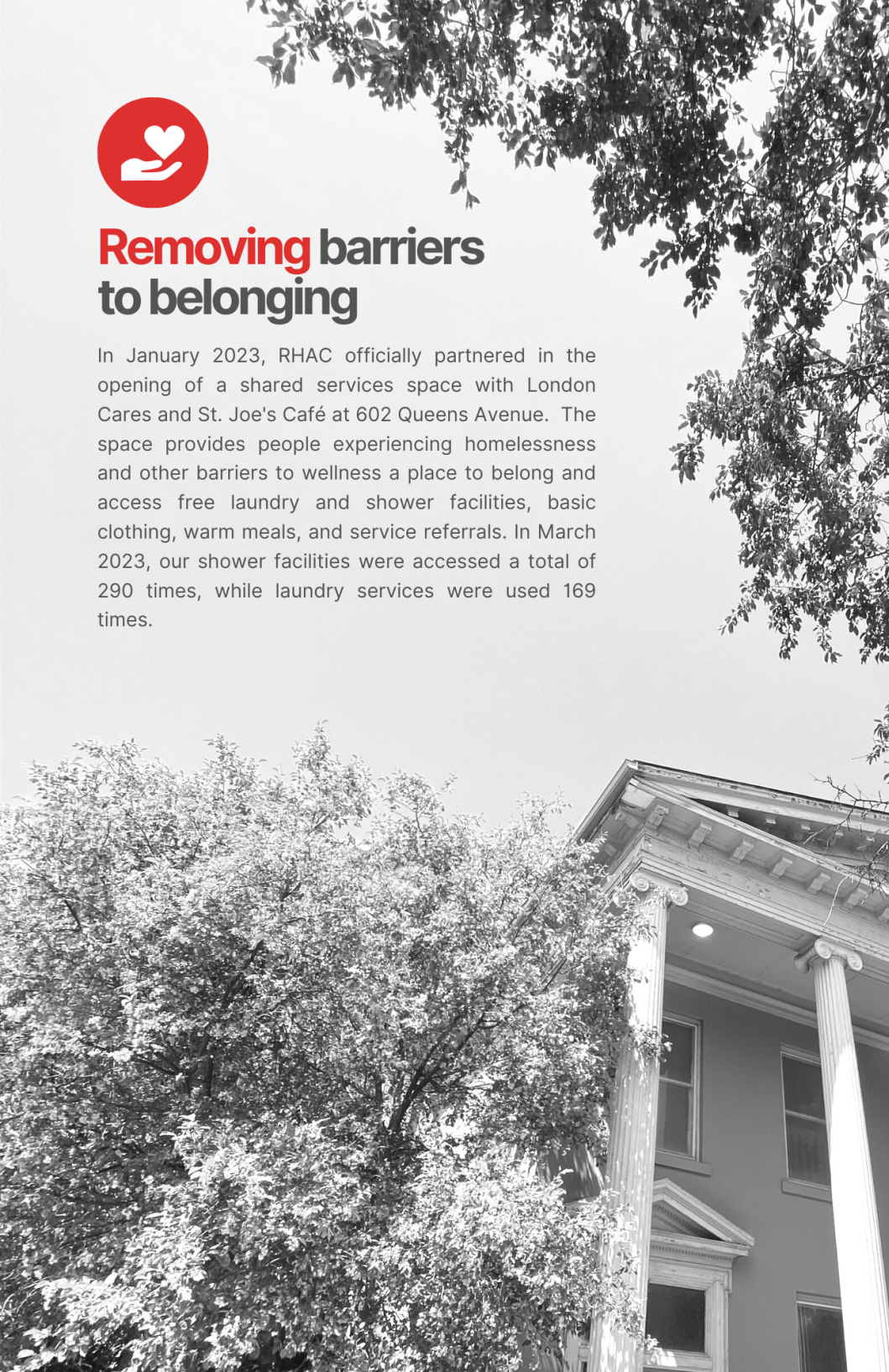
Renovating the Home with a Heart

John Gordon Home (JGH) underwent significant renovations following a fire that resulted in zero injuries. Repainted and refloored, JGH continued providing a place to call home for residents living with HIV and hepatitis C.



Removing barriers to belonging

In January 2023, RHAC officially partnered in the opening of a shared services space with London Cares and St. Joe's Café at 602 Queens Avenue. The space provides people experiencing homelessness and other barriers to wellness a place to belong and access free laundry and shower facilities, basic clothing, warm meals, and service referrals. In March 2023, our shower facilities were accessed a total of 290 times, while laundry services were used 169 times.





Rekindling community

As mass COVID-19 restrictions lifted, RHAC found ways to safely reconnect with our community at London's Black History Month Opening Ceremony and Take Back the Night's rally against gender-based violence. Meanwhile, Western University's Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry also presented its 65th Annual Tachycardia show in support of RHAC! Our annual A Taste for Life fundraiser returned to reunite community at local restaurants, raising \$34,304 in support of RHAC's client programs and services! We were also thrilled to welcome our volunteers back on-site. In total, volunteers contributed 5,573 hours to our mission!



Reaffirming Truth and Reconciliation

RHAC continued collaborating with Indigenous communities to provide culturally-safe supports. At the grand opening of Carepoint's permanent facility, RHAC collaborated with Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) and Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy (OAHAS) to offer ceremonial smudging and other cultural medicines and supports to Indigenous participants. Meanwhile, the John Gordon Home program was able to connect a resident to Indigenous-led mental health services at Parkwood Institute. In addition to recognizing Orange Shirt Day and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, RHAC's three locations engaged in a Day of Education in collaboration with Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, including: an Opening Circle, Indigenous foods, medicine workshops, a fire ceremony, prayers, teachings, and songs. Throughout the year, RHAC collaborated with Chippewas of the Thames First Nation on prevention and education initiatives, and to deliver Indigenous-led healing and harm reduction services at Carepoint.



Reducing barriers to testing, treatment, and prevention

RHAC continued working with community partners to coordinate the delivery of Hepatitis C virus (HCV) and HIV testing, treatment, and prevention options. Our HCV team adopted a new treatment model, resulting in a significant increase in prescribed treatments. In honour of World Hepatitis Day, we hosted several HCV testing events in July. RHAC also continued to offer its PrEP Clinic with SpecialtyRx Pharmacy, and developed programs to increase awareness and access to HIV self-testing kits provided through the Public Health Agency of Canada and TD Bank Group's Better Health grant. Self-testing can provide a safe, confidential, and low-barrier option for people to test for HIV themselves and get connected to the care they deserve.



208
hepatitis C
tests provided



288
HIV self-testing
kits distributed



57
hepatitis C
treatment starts



3197
HIV Support
sessions held



231
HIV Support
Services clients



20792
sexual health
resources
provided



Resident care at JGH

John Gordon Home (JGH), known as the *Home with a Heart*, provided transitional, respite, and end-of-life care to a total of 17 residents. The program also provided approximately 12,225 meals throughout the year. For the first time in JGH's history, the program supported an eligible resident through medical assistance in dying (MAID).



Reducing harm, renewing hope

Harm reduction is an essential part of what we do. We work with community members to reduce risks of infection and substance-related harms, including drug poisoning. Carepoint served a total of 22,495 visits, while our Counterpoint needle and syringe program saw 25,725 visits and an additional 20,359 visits to our 26 satellite locations. Meanwhile, the collaborative Health Outreach Mobile Engagement (H.O.M.E) Program provided primary care and harm reduction supports by bus. Peers with lived and living experience continued to play a central role in keeping our communities safer by putting together 20,100 harm reduction kits for people who use substances and assisting in the recovery of 5,468 discarded syringes from our local community. RHAC's Harm Reduction team also coordinated the relocation of services with as few interruptions to program hours as possible. Upon opening in February, the new site hosted 15 tours to neighbours, media, local service providers, and representatives from all levels of government.



144
drug poisonings
reversed



2893
naloxone kits
distributed



1.7M+
sterile syringes
provided



2568
addiction &
treatment
referrals



3445
medical &
healthcare
referrals



4195
food security
& housing
referrals



4501
mental health
support
referrals



PHOTO: A memorial tag hanging on the fence outside Carepoint.

Recognizing International Overdose Awareness Day 2022

On August 31, Carepoint welcomed community to honour and remember those we have lost to the toxic drug supply crisis. Community members tied over 100 messages to the fence surrounding Carepoint's York Street location in memory of loved ones lost to fatal drug poisoning. Harm Reduction teams distributed an estimated 47 naloxone kits during the event to help prevent overdose and drug poisoning.



PHOTO: Learning more about the fight to end unjust HIV criminalization laws with HALCO.

Resisting oppression and injustice

Resisting stigma, structural violence, and oppression are vital to supporting the health and wellbeing of communities we serve. In partnership with PFLAG London, we brought over 50 community members together at an open mic night for International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia featuring 8 peer performers. In 2023, staff and client sessions were hosted with HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic of Ontario's (HALCO) Executive Director, Ryan Peck, to learn more about HIV criminalization in Canada. Throughout the year, RHAC delivered virtual events and community sessions, including a Queer Anti-Stigma Film Night for African, Caribbean and Black 2SLGBTQIA+ community members. RHAC also worked towards actioning our ongoing commitment to addressing inequities through the delivery of a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) assessment with plans to implement identified recommendations.



PHOTO: Announcing the community mosaic project at Susan Day's studio.

Reinforcing our commitment to people who use substances

In collaboration with local artist Susan Day, Western University's McIntosh Gallery and RHAC were joined by London Mayor Josh Morgan to announce a mosaic wall mural co-created by community members impacted by the opioid crisis over the course of several community tile-making workshops. The planned unveiling of the mural was announced for August 31, 2023: International Overdose Awareness Day.



Reaching the regions we serve

Every year, we go the distance to provide supports and services across Perth, Huron, Lambton, Elgin, Middlesex, and Oxford Counties through mobile outreach, satellite locations, and community pop-ups. RHAC remained committed to supporting the health and wellness of seasonal agricultural workers with the generous support of Second Harvest's Emergency Food Security Fund. RHAC supported over 100 migrant workers by providing much-needed food security assistance. Over the summer, we also provided period care products to 25 individuals engaged in seasonal work. In partnership with CMHA Thames Valley Addiction and Mental Health Services, RHAC supported the launch of a peer syringe recovery team in Oxford County.



Responding to community needs

Throughout the changing course of the COVID-19 pandemic, RHAC continued responding to the needs of communities placed at systemic risk for HIV, HCV, and substance-related harms. In 2022, RHAC also supported local responses to MPOX virus, working with Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance (GMSH), Middlesex-London Health Unit, and Southwestern Public Health to increase access to more than 20 MPOX vaccine clinics.

Relevant cultural supports and activities

We continued forging meaningful partnerships to deliver culturally-relevant programs for diverse communities, including women's health and wellness sessions featuring Caribbean Soca dancing; a community gathering for Black women at a local beauty shop; and a barbecue that engaged 60 African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) community members with information about HIV self-testing. RHAC also launched the federally-funded Peer Pathways program to support ACB and 2SGBTQ+ community members through peer-led training and programming. We also worked with WHAI to complete a large-scale community consultation to identify the needs and priorities relevant to women living with, and at risk for, HIV.

Ready, set, SWISH

Through the Public Health Agency of Canada, RHAC launched the Sex Worker Initiative for Safety and Health (SWISH) in partnership with Street Level Women at Risk (hosted by CMHA Thames Valley) and SafeSpace London. The 5-year program has made significant inroads, reaching 155 individuals engaged in sex work.

Revitalizing smiles

Individuals living with HIV or experiencing homelessness can encounter barriers to accessing dental care, such as stigma and discrimination. A community service learning program provided supervised fourth-year students from Western University's Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry the opportunity to serve the unmet oral health needs of RHAC's clients. The program covered basic dental services for 23 participants to address infections and relieve pain.



PHOTO: The crowd at the Red Scarf benefit concert snapping an audience selfie.

Rewinding with Red Scarf

Performances from ABBAMANIA and Night Fever took audiences back in time, rewinding to the sounds of the '70s for a night louder than stigma at the annual Red Scarf benefit concert in support of RHAC's programs and services. The Red Scarf anti-stigma campaign received a total of 611 handcrafted Red Scarves and raised \$41,209 in support of RHAC's client services and programs! On December 1, RHAC's annual World AIDS Day vigil took place at First-St. Andrews United Church, featuring performances from Pride Men's Chorus London, to remember and celebrate the lives of those lost to AIDS-related illness.

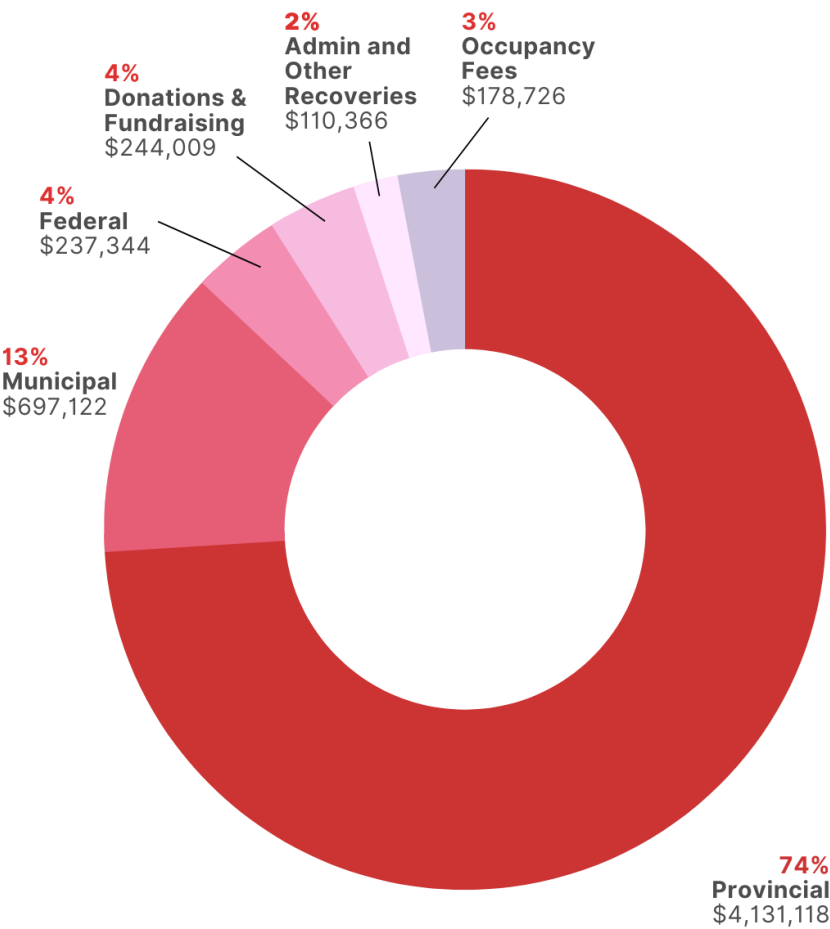


Reflecting on the retirement of Brian Lester

Brian Lester retired as RHAC's Executive Director on March 31, 2023. Community came together for a send-off that celebrated Brian's 16 years of dedicated service and leadership, and his legacy of courage and compassion. In February 2023, RHAC's Board announced the appointment of Martin McIntosh as Executive Director.

Financials

Fiscal 2022-23

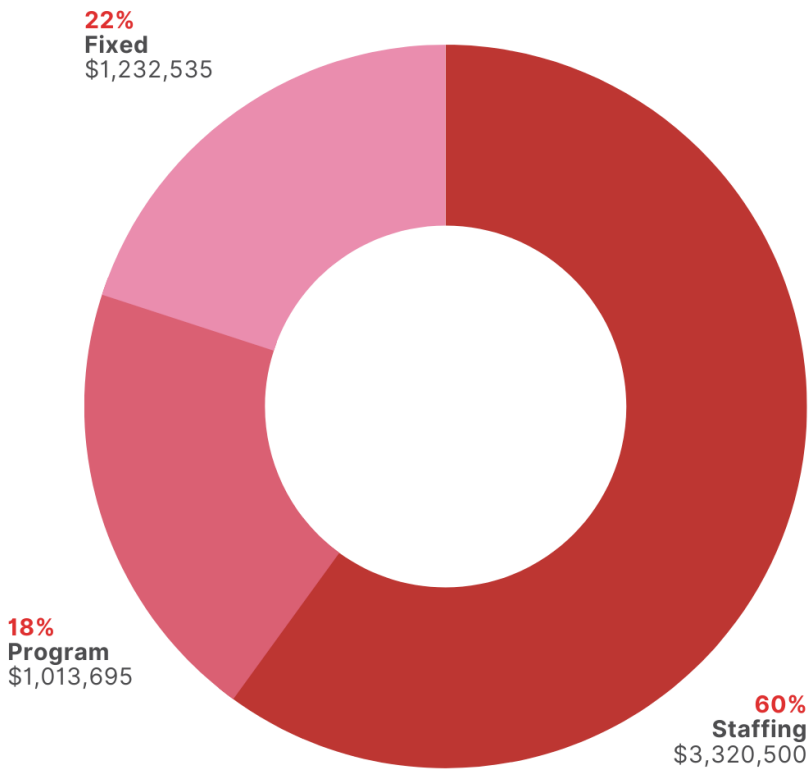


REVENUE
\$5,598,685

TOTALS DO NOT INCLUDE
IN-KIND DONATED
MATERIALS.

Financials

Fiscal 2022-23



TOTALS DO NOT INCLUDE
IN-KIND DONATED
MATERIALS.

EXPENSES
\$5,566,730

Thank you **to our funders**

Public Health Agency of Canada
AIDS Bureau, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Housing, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Ontario Health West
Employment and Social Development Canada
Middlesex-London Health Unit
City of London
London Health Sciences Centre
Southwestern Public Health

Thank you **to our grantors**

Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada
Lawson Foundation
Ontario Trillium Foundation
Second Harvest
TD Bank Group
United Way Elgin Middlesex
ViiV Healthcare ULC

Thank you **to our 2022-23 Board**

Chris Moss, Board Chair

Nancy Griffiths, Vice Chair

Hamza Serdah, Treasurer

Kelsey Adams, Secretary

Alexa Duggin

Matt Brown

Dylan Dubois

Lindsay Lake

Megan DePutter

On behalf of our staff and Board, RHAC would like to express our deepest gratitude to each and every one of our community partners, sponsors, and supporters. Thank you to the people we serve, our dedicated volunteers, and the sponsors, donors, grantors, and funders who help to make our free client programs and services possible.

PHOTO: ABBAMANIA performing at RHAC's 2022 Red Scarf benefit concert.



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