

nellie's

Strength in
Growth

2025 - 2026
ANNUAL
REPORT



Letter from the Executive Director

In the last few years, there's been a lot of change at Nellie's — exciting change, but change nonetheless. From opening our new shelter in 2022, to creating a new strategic plan in 2023, and from redesigning our brand identity in 2024 to a change in leadership in 2025, Nellie's has been full of shifts. Thankfully, after a period filled with transitions, this past year has been one of stability.

To guide us toward this steady state, our Board of Directors recently completed a revision of that previously developed strategic plan. This updated plan more accurately reflects the work Nellie's is doing today and prepares us for future growth. As part of this update, we extended the plan's scope from the original three years to five to match the scale of change we're working toward, and we removed Empowerment as one of our pillars to narrow our focus on Sector Advocacy, Education, and Leadership; Organizational Culture; and Sustainability and Growth.

Removing Empowerment isn't because we're prioritizing this work any less — in fact, it's the opposite. Nellie's has proudly offered empowerment self-defense programs for both women and children since 2022, as part of our work to end gender-based violence. But rather than continuing to treat empowerment as a separate offering, we've recognized the importance of embedding it into our core, as a way to reinforce our holistic approach to working with women and their children as they rebuild their lives free from violence.

As gender-based violence rates continue to rise across Canada, these strategic shifts in focus are essential in keeping us at the forefront of supporting our clients. More and more women are turning to places like Nellie's to stay, but there still aren't enough shelter spaces available to meet the demand. We're thankful that in the past year, a new agreement with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services allowed us to add six beds to our shelter, bringing the total number to 44.

None of this work would be possible if not for our incredible staff at Nellie's — from the frontline workers and housing team, who support women experiencing the trauma of abuse and homelessness, to our Community Support and Outreach team, who run our community programs with a smile often under difficult conditions, and the amazing dedication and care of our Children's Program workers. Thank you to our funding partners and donors, whose generosity allows us to grow and respond to the evolving needs of the women and children we serve. A very special thank you to the administrative team at Nellie's who have had my back throughout this year of transition. And thank you, as always, to the women and children who continue to put their trust in us.



Ingrid Graham
Executive Director



Vision

Nellie's vision is to be a place where every woman* and her child(ren) who step through our doors finds a pathway to a violence-free life, and to advocate to ensure gender-based violence and oppression is a relic of the past.

*Nellie's affirms the inclusion of trans women and non-binary people in our vision of who we serve and support.

Mission

Nellie's breaks the cycle of gender-based oppression through our unwavering commitment to offering a safe refuge for women and their children fleeing violence, poverty, and homelessness. Beyond safe housing, we empower women with advocacy, strength and support-based programming, enabling them to create a new path for life, free from the barriers of violence and oppression.

Land Acknowledgement

Nellie's acknowledges our organization is situated in *Tkarón:to* (*Ta-kar-on-toe*), which is located on the traditional lands of the *Mississauga* (*Missi-sog-a*), the *Anishinaabe* (*Ah-nish-nah-bay*), the *Haudenosaunee* (*Ho-deh-no-show-nee*), the *Chippewa* (*Chi-puh-waa*), the *Huron* (*Hur-on*), and many other Indigenous Peoples.

Nellie's acknowledges all Treaty Peoples, including those who came here as settlers, as migrants either in this generation or in generations past, and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.

Colonialism is an ongoing process, and members of Indigenous communities and of African origin and descent all over Canada have been carrying the burden of this trauma for generations. Reconciliation cannot be achieved if we don't first prioritize understanding the truth. Moving forward requires determining what place we occupy in the history and future of this land. How do we participate in colonialism, and what can we do to ensure reconciliation? While many of us are settlers, it is important to recognize that not all those who live here chose to settle here. For that reason, we respect that some people may not be comfortable adhering to this term.

Tkarón:to (*Ta-kar-on-toe*) is a Mohawk word meaning **"the place in the water where the trees are standing."** We now stand where, for thousands of years, many languages were spoken, and alliances and decisions were made. Our fight for diversity and equity must include Indigenous Peoples. We must reimagine the narrative of Turtle Island together.

Growing Our Space to Deepen Our Impact

A few months ago, a woman showed up at Nellie's late in the evening seeking shelter for herself and her newborn. She had been abused and her baby was only a few days old.



Unfortunately, all of our beds were full. **“But how could we turn them away?”** shelter manager Maureen Caines-Comrie shares. **“So we set up a space for them in the corner of the living room, fed them, and kept them safe while we called other shelters. She ended up staying in our living room for a day and a half, until we could find a proper bed for her [at another shelter].”**

While turning our living room into an emergency space is a last resort, the overwhelming divide between the demand for shelter spaces and actual

availability is an issue we struggle with every day. Maureen's office is next to the reception area, and she frequently overhears callers being told we have no available beds.

“At least six times per day, if not more, I hear them have to say this,” explains Maureen. Rising rates of gender-based violence across Canada means the demand for our services continues to outpace our capacity.

In an effort to meet this growing need, earlier this year we added six new beds to the shelter, thanks to a funding partnership with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), bringing the total number to 44. By increasing our total number of beds, we're able to comfortably provide a safe space for more women and their children to stay — and because Nellie's is so much more than just a bed, we're empowering them through our supportive services, from counselling and housing support, to our children's programming and educational workshops.

But because of the lack of affordable housing in the city, the average length of stay for women and their children has been steadily increasing, making it even more crucial that we use that time to focus on how we can best support and prepare them.

“Safety and shelter is only the first step,” says executive director Ingrid Graham. **“With our expanded capacity, we can house more women and their children in urgent need, and what comes next is equipping them with the confidence, tools, and support to make decisions for themselves and navigate complex housing and legal systems. This strengthens their long-term stability and reduces the chances they'll return to unsafe situations.”**

Sustainability and Growth

We will evolve to meet current and anticipated operational needs. We will do so by updating infrastructure, policies, and procedures, bolstering evaluation capabilities, and strengthening financial and fundraising strategies.





Sector Advocacy, Education, & Leadership

We will advocate for systems change. We will do so by actively participating with intersecting planning advocacy tables, strengthening our leadership capabilities across the organization, and deepening our collaboration with other shelters and housing partners.



Beyond Shelter: Taking the Housing Crisis to City Hall

Here at Nellie's, we're continuing to see how Toronto's affordable housing crisis is affecting the women and their children who come to our shelter. With a lack of safe housing for our residents to move into, the average length of stay at Nellie's hovers around five months. **"Until we address systemic problems in sustainable housing, we can't fix this problem,"** explains executive director Ingrid Graham. **"If we can't safely move women out of the shelter, then we're no longer emergency housing — we've become transitional housing."**

Solving this crisis requires looking beyond our front doors. Over the past year, our Toronto Women in Action — Housing team (funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada) has pushed Nellie's to the forefront of the housing advocacy space. By hosting a landmark housing symposium, publishing an action-oriented [position paper](#), and presenting directly to the City of Toronto's Housing Advisory Council, we are growing our role as policy influencers.

Currently, women have just three months from entering the shelter system to completing their housing applications — a timeline that is deeply unrealistic for someone navigating trauma and possibly even missing vital documentation because they had to leave without it. Following conversations at our symposium, and with other organizations in the sector, we recommended to the Housing Advisory Council that the City extends this window to at least five months. This critical shift would give the breathing room needed to ensure women can be safely and permanently housed. While policy changes and system shifts are long-term projects, Nellie's is committed to keep pushing forward.

Helping women secure stable, affordable housing is just one of the ways Nellie's empowers women to break the cycles of crisis and take steps toward the next chapter in their lives. Safe housing stabilizes health outcomes, allows children to put down roots, and gives women the freedom to refocus on education and career goals.

"It's critical that we remain agents of change in our community," Ingrid explains. **"As an organization, we need to advocate to change the system for our clients."**



Countering Burnout with Compassion

Gender-based violence work can be challenging. Support workers are often exposed to traumatic experiences on the job, and frequently have to fill gaps in community services to help women and their children meet complex needs. For many, it impacts their mental health, leading to burnout and high staff turnover rates. Nellie's is no exception and how best to support and empower our staff is a question that we've been working to answer.

"At Nellie's, we know that the quality of support we provide to our community is directly tied to the support we provide our staff," says Marissa Eckert, Human Resources Manager. **"Our focus has been on building an internal culture that is intentional, safe, and as compassionate as the work that we do externally."**

To guide us, Marissa has implemented regular employee engagement surveys. Three iterations have rolled out so far: one in 2024 to provide a baseline, one in 2025 to see the progression, and one in spring 2026. **"Over the course of the three surveys, we've had increasingly more honest feedback, which is important for us when we're making decisions — especially around culture,"** Marissa explains. **"We can't build a strong culture based on assumptions. We have to ask, and more importantly we have to listen and receive that feedback, and implement it."** Most recently, Marissa has enacted ideas to increase staff safety and well-being, including days off for mental wellness and putting panic buttons on staff lanyards.

In addition to structural culture shifts, Marissa knows that in a workplace that can feel heavy, injecting some fun into the day-to-day is vital. From birthday shoutouts and new hire introduction emails, to door-decorating contests and team building activities, Marissa is creating opportunities for our staff to take a break from the intensity of their work, and strengthen their connections with one another.

"Everything ties back to making sure our staff feels empowered and safe," Marissa explains. **"We want our clients to move forward, to advocate for themselves, and to achieve long-term stability — but that journey has to start with an empowered staff. When our team feels secure, valued, and equipped, that strength translates directly into the life-changing support they provide to the women coming through our doors."**



Organizational Culture

We will support our diverse community of clients by fostering a healthy, engaged organization with a stable, skilled, and cohesive team. We will do so with a strategy to support employee recruitment, retention, recognition, and well-being, and invest in annual employee training and development.





2025 – 2026 Annual Program Statistics

Shelter

Nellie's has a mandate to help ALL women and their children, regardless of why they are homeless.

Women who stayed at Nellie's



44

Average length of stay



Children who stayed at Nellie's

36



Total number of women who received housing support

175

Community Housing Program

We help women access safe and affordable housing so they can leave violence, poverty, and homelessness behind for good.

283

Special Priority Program (SPP) applications completed



We helped 26 women successfully find a safe, new home.





Community Support and Outreach Programs

These core programs allow us to have an even greater impact in our community, providing vital supports that help to disrupt the cycles of violence and homelessness.



Food Bank (every Wednesday): 6,623 annual participants
(avg. 110 participants weekly); 5,997 total food bags distributed



Women on the Move (bi-weekly on Thursdays): 21 unique participants; 233 total attendees; 3 social outings; 24 support group sessions



Senior socialization program (every Tuesday): 42 unique participants; 866 total attendees; 41 workshops



Empowerment Pro-Active Violence Education: 273 total participants; 21 workshops

- Sessions include: **Women Ending Abuse & Violence (WEAV), Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD), Train the Trainer**



2025-2026 Board of Directors

Executive

Katherine Knowlton, Co-chair
Lindsey Walton, Co-chair
Maria Belfon, Secretary
Morgana Kellythorne, Treasurer

Members-At-Large

Tarini Chandak
Kara Golani-Tran
Freshta Karimi
Shagun Malhotra
Maja Saletto
Liveleen (Lynn) Singh
Lyndsay Tchevus-Veiga

Senior Management Team

Ingrid Graham, Executive Director
Jiin Yiong, Program Director
Marissa Eckert, Human Resources Manager

Administrative Staff

Halima Abdela, Financial Administrator
Yashika Arora, Executive Assistant and Board Support
Adonia Liu, Admin Assistant, HR and Finance
Taylor Nguyen, Operations (on Leave)

Shelter Supervisor

Maureen Caines-Comrie

Community Manager

Rachel Seaward, Housing (On Leave)

Thank You to Our Donors

We are eternally grateful for our incredible community of supporters: from our individual donors, who continue to support us every year, and to our monthly donors, whose partnership allows us to consistently provide our vital services for women and their children in need.

Thank you to **Evolve ETFs, the Bickle-Wilder Foundation, Donner Canadian Foundation, Greater Toronto Apartment Association, Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health, and CHUM Charitable Foundation** for your **generous financial contributions**. Thank you to **Metallica** and the **All Within My Hands Foundation** for choosing to lend your incredible financial support to Nellie's during your Toronto tour stop. Thanks to the **Royal LePage Shelter Foundation** for continuing to support us through your incredible Night Light Walk fundraising event. Thanks to **Nick Kennedy** and his team at **Civil Liberties** for once again supporting us with the proceeds from Miracle. And thank you to **La Fondation Emmanuelle Gattuso, the Alva Foundation, and the Catherine & Maxwell Meighen Foundation**, among others, for your invaluable support of our children's program.

Thank You to Our Board

We are forever thankful to our Board of Directors for guiding us as we grow to support the evolving demands of our community. Thank you for helping Nellie's be a leader in disrupting the cycles of gender-based violence.

In 2025-2026 we welcomed three new board members. Each brings a wealth of experience and expertise to Nellie's.

Freshta Karimi is a human rights and women's rights advocate, and an Afghan lawyer with extensive experience advancing access to justice, gender equality, and the rule of law. She has spent over a decade promoting women's legal rights in Afghanistan, fearlessly representing marginalized women, survivors of gender-based violence, and victims of forced marriage. Since resettling in Canada, Freshta has continued her advocacy and community leadership and currently works as a Settlement Counsellor, Project and Volunteer Coordinator at the Afghan Women's Organization in Toronto.

Maja Saletto is a seasoned philanthropic leader with extensive experience in the not-for-profit and public sectors. As Director of the Youth Opportunities Fund at the Ontario Trillium Foundation, she led the design and delivery of a \$17M annual granting program focused on advancing equity, justice, and community well-being, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth and families facing systemic barriers. She currently serves on the Board of the United Way for the City of Kawartha Lakes and volunteers as a Youth Restorative Justice mediator with the BGC and the John Howard Society.

Liveleen (Lynn) Singh is an innovative and accomplished health leader with over 30 years of experience in Ontario's healthcare system. She is currently the Chief Executive Officer of Lumacare, a community support services organization dedicated to empowering and supporting older adults in North York, Ontario. Equally passionate about social justice, Lynn is a committed advocate for women's rights and gender equity in healthcare leadership.

We are also saying goodbye to an incredible long-standing board member, **Lindsey Walton**. During the course of her six years on the board at Nellie's, Lindsey oversaw the modernization of our organization, including moving to our new building, overseeing the launch of our new visual identity, and spearheading the development of our new mission and values. She also led our board membership and development committee, which was responsible for recruiting new board members. **Thank you, Lindsey, for your time and service to Nellie's.**

Financial Report

Year End March 31, 2026

REVENUE

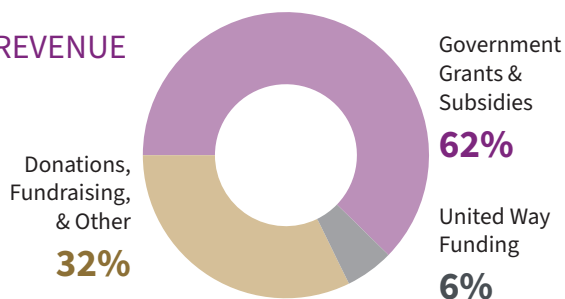
	2026	2025
Government grants	\$1,814,983	\$2,142,977
City of Toronto – per diem	551,389	487,396
City of Toronto – personal needs allowance	8,742	22,785
United Way Funding	208,608	208,608
Donations and Fundraising	1,185,860	1,155,401
Bequests	5,682	30,476
Rental, Interest, and Other	36,116	3,543
	\$3,811,380	\$4,051,186

EXPENSES (Schedule A of Audited Financial Report)

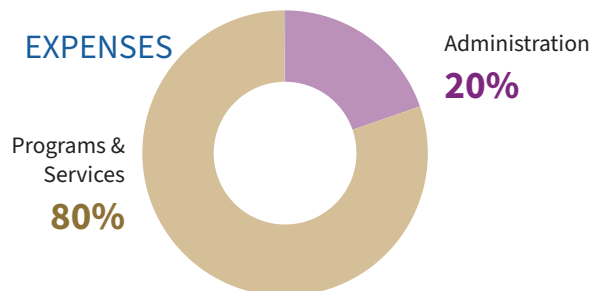
	2026	2025
Property	\$320,881	\$301,927
Administration	408,187	433,463
Staffing	2,630,134	2,587,030
Clients	339,739	394,941
One-time expenses including accommodation	3,768	
	\$3,702,709	\$3,717,361

	2026	2025
Excess of revenue over expenses from operations	\$108,671	\$333,825
Income from amortization of deferred capital contributions	\$379,355	\$379,355
Amortization of capital assets	(409,385)	(394,651)
Deficiency of revenue over expenses from capital assets	(30,030)	(15,296)
Excess of revenue over expenses for the year	\$78,641	\$318,529

REVENUE



EXPENSES



See full Audited Financial Statements, including notes at www.nellies.org.



Vision for Tomorrow

With a revised strategic plan in hand, the Nellie's team is confidently evolving to meet shifting operational needs, advocating for critical systemic change, and fostering a deeply engaged staff team.

Now a year into her role as executive director, Ingrid Graham is already looking toward even greater growth in the coming years. Alongside our Board of Directors, the groundwork is being laid for the 2028 strategic plan — a roadmap designed not just to sustain our current momentum, but to further establish us as leaders in the gender-based violence sector through our holistic support and advocacy work. To make this future a reality, Ingrid knows that we have to continue strengthening our foundation from the inside out and create a cohesive, empowered internal team.

“I’m adamant that in order to serve women better, we have to support our staff,” Ingrid emphasizes. By implementing robust staff engagement surveys and actively translating that real-time feedback into workplace improvements, we’re making Nellie’s a great place to work today, and into the future. When our staff feels listened to, supported, and safe, they can better help our clients to rebuild their lives and break the cycles of gender-based violence.

At Nellie’s, empowerment is no longer a standalone program — it’s the thread that runs through everything we do. Thank you for helping us give women and their children the knowledge, confidence, and support to make meaningful change for themselves.



SAFETY. STRENGTH. SUPPORT.

CRISIS

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