



Victim
Services
Toronto

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

Centering People

Long after police file reports, crime victims can struggle with physical, emotional, social, legal, and financial impacts for months or years.

Victim Services Toronto is evolving the system to center crime victims to ensure they get the help they need.

In 2023-2024, we deepened our people-centered approach by showing up, listening, and preventing violence to transform victims into survivors.

STRATEGIES:

- 1 CRISIS INTERVENTION
- 2 CASE SUPPORT
- 3 EDUCATION + TRAINING
- 4 ADVOCACY



Immediate Crisis Intervention and Support for Victims of Crime and Sudden Tragedy.

Victim Services Toronto (VST) provides 24/7 on-scene support to crime victims, including crisis intervention, emotional support, and immediate safety planning.

In the aftermath of COVID's distancing requirements, VST renewed its commitment to showing up in person for victims and their families—at the scene of a crime, at their hospital bedside and in their homes. We're there, regardless of whether a victim reports an incident to the police.

Currently, based on input from survivors, we're working to remove barriers that unfairly disqualify victims of crime from accessing the immediate supports they need in the aftermath of a crime or tragedy.



Programs

VICTIM CRISIS RESPONSE

The only service in Toronto that deploys counsellors wherever and whenever needed to provide trauma-informed, client-centred support in the immediate aftermath of a crime.

VICTIM QUICK RESPONSE

Immediate financial assistance and practical interventions to support individuals at high risk of experiencing violence or those who experience multiple barriers to accessing services.



A Way Home.

Hours after a stranger shot her in a motel, the hospital discharged Alicia in a wheelchair. Police seized her phone and her personal belongings—they were now part of the crime scene.

After months of forced sexual exploitation across hundreds of kilometres, Alicia left the hospital alone without any idea what city she was even in.

When a Human Trafficking Officer wheeled Alicia into Victim Services Toronto's offices at 3 am, she was alone, terrified, in pain and utterly exhausted.

Alicia was terrified her trafficker would find and kill her. She longed to get home to her mother in Montreal.

Victim Services Toronto's Human Trafficking Case Workers listened to Alicia to find ways to help lift her enormous burden.

Alicia's greatest immediate need was rest and peace. VST secured a hotel room for Alicia and provided her with transportation. The following day, police accompanied Alicia as she boarded a flight to Montreal, with her mother awaiting her arrival.

In the immediate aftermath of human trafficking, police investigate the crime scene, compile evidence and interview suspects. VST's trauma-informed Crisis Intervention Teams operate alongside police to ensure the survivors are listened to and receive the emotional and practical support they need when they're at their most vulnerable.

We know that exiting human trafficking and sexual exploitation is only the first step in a long and painful journey. We also know it's a step that no person should have to navigate alone.





Ongoing Support + Case Management

Long after police clear the crime scene, survivors need ongoing, community-based, specialized support.

Healing from crime is a difficult journey that can take months or even years. We walk alongside survivors for the long term.

Programs

EXIT ROUTE

VST Neighbourhood Advocates work inside police units and divisions with the highest incidents of crimes related to exploitation and violence.

Neighbourhood Advocates give survivors and their families emotional and practical support to address their trauma and connect to local agencies that meet their ongoing practical and emotional needs.

In 2022, VST launched Exit Route as a pilot project in Toronto Police Force's (TPS) Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence units. The pilot successfully built trust, reduced crime, and strengthened connections between police and the community.

In 2023/24, VST expanded the program, embedding Neighbourhood Advocates in TPS' Internet Child Exploitation and Emergency Task Force units.

Today, Exit Route Neighbourhood Advocates are in four specialized units and four TPS Divisions, working right alongside police to address the human impacts of crime and exploitation in the communities where crimes occur.

CASE MANAGEMENT

Case Management and specialized Human Trafficking Case Management Services provide crime victims with ongoing emotional, physical, legal, social and financial support. Case Managers stay connected to clients through every step of their journey so they never have to navigate the system alone.

[Watch "I am a Survivor"](#)

"For clients to have a consistent connection on a human-to-human level has so much more power than just connecting them to services because they know there's someone that always has their back.

Having one person with them throughout their journey allows for consistency... when their whole life has been inconsistent."



HUMAN TRAFFICKING
SPECIALIST

A Clearer Path.

*“I’m leaving school.
I’m on my way to the bridge.
I’m going to kill myself.”*

Amir was just 11 when he called a national support line, desperate to stop sexually explicit images of him from being circulated among friends and family.

The Toronto Police’s Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit was investigating the man Amir had met online, but there wasn’t enough evidence to stop him. The humiliating images kept appearing. Each new image deepened Amir’s shame and humiliation.

Amir’s many visits to the hospital made it clear to VST’s Case Worker (embedded in the ICE Unit) that his feelings of shame often exceeded his ability to cope.

When Amir left his elementary school and began walking toward the bridge, VST’s Case Worker found a map and identified a place to meet and talk.

The Case Worker was able to stop Amir from ending his life that day. Then the other shoe dropped.

What Amir hadn’t yet shared with his Worker, the police, or his mother was that his father was sexually assaulting him.

The man ICE was investigating had images of the assault and shared these images with Amir’s mother. That’s how she discovered her husband was sexually assaulting their adolescent son.

*When these images appeared, it
felt as if their lives were falling
apart right before
their eyes.*



VST's Case Worker was there as Amir and his family walked those tentative steps through devastating upheaval and shame. They helped Amir's mother:

- Connect to culturally relevant, trauma-informed counselling services and an Arabic interpreter so she could communicate in her mother tongue and understand what her son was experiencing.
- Connect to housing services so she and her son could exit the site of so much trauma
- Identify accessible legal services to secure a legal separation.

Amir's story illustrates how reporting child exploitation to the police is the start of a long, painful, usually non-linear journey involving many people.

VST Case Workers helps make the path forward visible, navigable and possible for victims, their families and all those impacted by trauma and crime.





Education + Training to Prevent Crime and Mitigate its Impacts

Mitigating abuse and exploitation and promoting healthy relationships requires sustained and deliberate education and training.

VST's innovative education and training programs directed at youth from grades 5 to 12 help mitigate crime, reduce violence and foster a culture of safety.

Programs

YOUTH SYMPOSIUM

22k+ TOTAL YOUTH PARTICIPANTS IN 2023.

2/3rds OF STUDENTS FEEL MORE EMPOWERED TO TALK ABOUT THESE ISSUES WITH OTHERS.

VST's annual Youth Symposium brings 22,000 youth together for an online experience designed to address that young people process information differently at different developmental stages.

Delivered in partnership with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Police Service (TPS), the Youth Symposium sessions on what healthy relationships look like and the early signs of abuse and exploitation have a profound impact on reshaping youth's understanding of consent and boundaries.

In 2023/24 VST deepened our relationships with the TDSB. With strong teacher support for the curriculum, we expanded youth attendance at the Youth Symposium by more than 400%.

T.E.A.R™ PROGRAM

10k+ WORKSHOP ATTENDEES ANNUALLY.

The T.E.A.R™ Youth Leadership program educates youth leaders about gender-based violence and trains them to share information with their peer networks.

T.E.A.R.™ workshops are delivered by trained youth leaders and adult facilitators in middle and secondary schools.

The workshops, presented to 10,000 youth annually, delve into the pillars of healthy relationships and the early warning signs of abuse. They also provide a place for youth to find support and help when navigating relationship challenges.

ASK ANGELA

238 STAFF AT LOBLAWS AND AFFILIATE STORES WHO HAVE COMPLETED ASK ANGELA TRAINING.

1k+ STAFF TRAINED TO RESPOND TO THE QUESTION: "IS ANGELA HERE?"

Based on a UK campaign situated in pubs, when a woman asks, "Is Angela Here?" trained staff recognize the coded question and intervene to guide the woman to safety.

VST worked with survivors to understand where they were most likely to seek a safety intervention. Survivors told us most likely to be alone while shopping for necessities like food and household goods.

In response to this input, VST launched a Canadian version of Ask Angela in partnership with Loblaws and Shoppers Drug Mart.

Thousands of staff at 238 Toronto Loblaws, Shoppers, and affiliate stores are trained to respond to shoppers who ask, "Is Angela Here?" Posters about the Ask Angela Campaign are in every Loblaws and Shoppers store, and a QR code equips people in danger with a potential way out.



A Safety Net.

In the privacy of her room, 10-year-old Eva excitedly texted with a new friend.

Over many weeks, Eva shared her stories, angst, dreams and insecurities.

On the other end of the phone, a 42-year-old man listened attentively, slowly gaining Eva's trust.

In 2024, Elijah participated in Victim Service Toronto's Youth Symposium, which we'd just extended to kids in grades 5-7. Elijah realized he couldn't keep Eva's secret and told his teacher, who informed the school principal.

The teacher and principal had participated in Symposium for educators and knew what to do. The principal called Eva's mom and Toronto Police's Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) Unit.

The Youth Symposium taught students like Elijah about cultivating healthy relationships, the early warning signs of abusive relationships and where to find help.

The signs of abuse and exploitation can be difficult for young people to recognize and act on, and child exploitation can surface at any time.

The Youth Symposium educates youth, parents, educators, and students to create a safety net and to identify exploitation whenever the signs appear.





Advocacy to Improve the Systems that Impact Survivors

VST acts and speaks out to change the systemic practices preventing crime survivors from moving forward.

As the leading voice for survivors of crime or sudden tragedy, we provide a platform for survivors to share their experiences and perspectives, which we leverage to influence governments and industry leaders.

Programs

RECLAIM

\$20,000 AVERAGE DEBT PER
HUMAN TRAFFICKING SURVIVOR.

\$1,000,000+ OF FRAUDULENT
DEBT ELIMINATED ON BEHALF OF WOMEN
ESCAPING HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

Acquired by VST in 2022, Reclaim supports Canadian survivors of human trafficking by removing coercive debt from their names and records.

We've rebuilt Reclaim from the ground up to streamline processes for working with creditors and clients.

Our partnerships with the Canadian Bankers Association, Equifax, creditors, and political leaders mean coercive debt is less of a burden for those exiting human trafficking.

Our client-centred process ensures victims of human trafficking aren't re-victimized by continually retelling their stories to strangers.

[Watch "Reclaim: Helping human trafficking survivors reclaim their good name"](#)

GOVERNMENT ADVOCACY

4 BILLS, ACTS AND DECISIONS
VST ADVOCATED AROUND.

VST listens to survivors and uses our influence with governments to change policies that impact their lives.

In 2023/24, we generated widespread political and public support for Bill 41, Ontario's Protection from Coerced Debts Incurred in Relation to Human Trafficking Act.

The Bill, which passed unanimously, now compels financial institutions and collection agencies to forgive coerced debts accrued by victims of human trafficking and erase these debts from survivors' credit reports.

Also in 2023/24, VST made recommendations to the Standing Committee on Social Policy for proposed Bill 188, The Supporting Children's Futures Act.

If passed, the Act will help safeguard vulnerable young people in Foster Care from exploitation.



A Way Forward.

Human traffickers coerce their victims to use their credit cards. They use their victims' money to buy cell phones, hotel rooms, and transportation that make trafficking possible and help cover the trafficker's tracks.

When trafficked individuals manage to exit and get to safety, they have an average of \$20,000 of coerced debt tied to their name.

This debt is a red mark on their credit reports and makes it impossible for them to obtain student loans or secure housing needed to move forward with their lives.

In 2022, Victim Services Toronto acquired Reclaim, a national organization that works with survivors to eliminate fraudulent and coercive debt. In 2023/24, The Banking and Credit industry, including the Canadian Bankers Association, Equifax, and Transunion, supported our effort to educate creditors about the impacts of coercive debt.

We also worked to eliminate the systemic barriers between survivors and their good name.

In 2023, Victim Services Toronto (VST) worked with political and industry leaders to build support for Bill 41, The Protection from Coerced Debts Incurred in Relation to Human Trafficking Act. Bill 41 was co-sponsored by MPPs from every political party.

A human trafficking survivor and Reclaim advisor deputed at the province's Standing Committee on Social Policy, providing a first-hand account of how coercive debt occurs and its devastating impact on survivors.

Bill 41 was unanimously passed in 2023, a significant milestone that compels financial institutions and collection agencies to forgive coerced debts and erase them from survivors' credit reports. This is a reassuring step towards a more hopeful future for survivors.

The impact of Bill 41 is spreading across the country. Similar legislation has been proposed in Saskatchewan, and VST has consulted with the Attorney General of British Columbia and the Crown's office in Quebec to legally enshrine the protection of human trafficking survivors victimized by fraudulent or coercive debt.





Year in numbers

18,032

TOTAL VICTIMS SERVED.

3,557

TOTAL YOUTH & CHILDREN
VICTIMS SERVED.

22,548

STUDENTS PARTICIPATING
IN YOUTH SYMPOSIUM..

8

SPECIALIZED UNITS AND POLICE DIVISIONS VST
NEIGHBOURHOOD ADVOCATES ARE EMBEDDED IN.

\$1,000,000

AMOUNT OF FRAUDULENT DEBT ELIMINATED ON
BEHALF OF WOMEN SINCE VST LAUNCHED RECLAIM.

4

BILLS, ACTS AND DECISIONS
VST ADVOCATED AROUND.

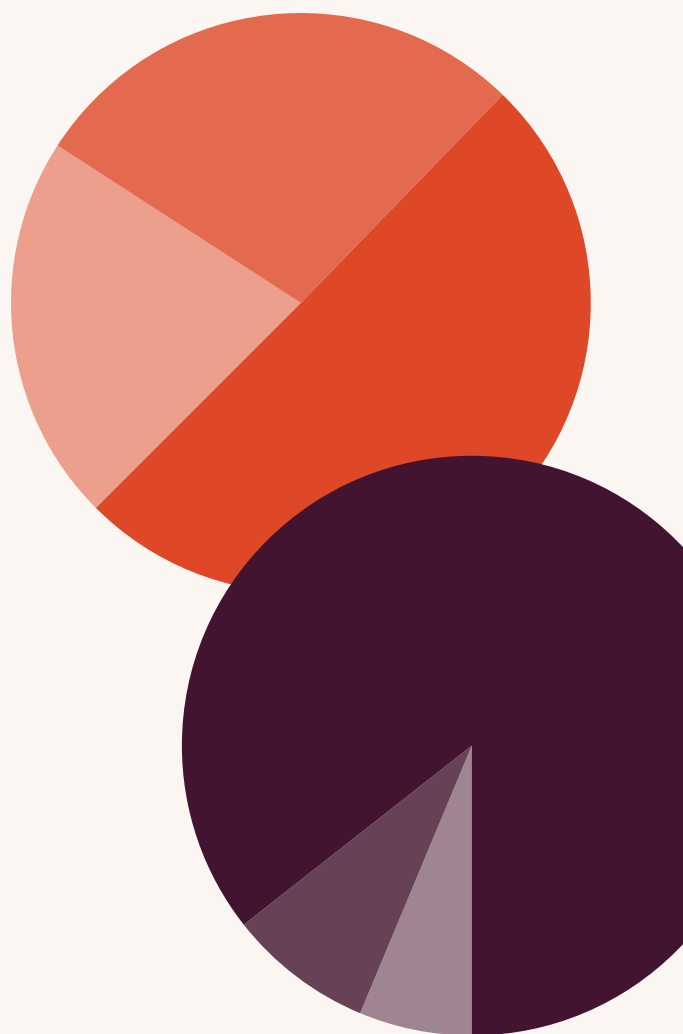


Financial Snapshot

REVENUE

2023-24

MINISTRY GRANT	\$2,598,828
FUNDRAISING	\$1,499,825
GRANT - OTHER	\$1,220,250
GRANT - CITY OF TORONTO	\$315,163
DONATIONS	\$135,460
INTEREST	\$34,582
	\$5,804,108



EXPENSES

2023-24

ADMINISTRATION	\$33,860
ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION	\$95,566
AMORTIZATION	\$23,203
BAD DEBTS	\$49,000
BANK CHARGES AND FEES	\$59,522
INSURANCE	\$26,682
COVID-19	\$--
FUNDRAISING	\$470,049
OFFICE AND GENERAL	\$83,376
PROFESSIONAL FEES	\$256,549
PROGRAM	\$747,458
SALARIES AND BENEFITS	\$3,884,354
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	\$10,350
TRAINING	\$49,904
VOLUNTEER	\$10,166
	\$5,800,039



2023-2024 Sponsors

LOBLAWS	CAPITAL ASSET	TOM'S PLACE	OXFORD PROPERTIES
ONX CANADA	LENDING/MORTGAGE CO	HOTEL X	PEEL POLICE SERVICES
SPROTT INC.	CANADA	RBC	BOARD
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LIUNA OPDC	EXHIBITION PLACE	BUSINESS MEDIA)	ST. HELEN'S MEAT
DIAMOND & DIAMOND	SYNOPTIC MEDICAL	GRAND TOURING	TD BANK GROUP
ALLIED UNIVERSAL	ASSESSMENTS	AUTOMOBILES	LIUNA LOCAL 506
WESTDALE PROPERTIES	AXON	BEANFIELD	WILLIAMS TOWING
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HARLO ENTERTAINMENT	BMO FINANCIAL GROUP	GOODMANS LLP	PSYCHOLOGY AND
NICHE TECHNOLOGY	HBNG (HOLBORN	MLSE	WELLNESS
	GROUP)	ENTOURAGE	MIZRAHI DEVELOPMENTS

2023-2024 Funders

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION	CITY OF TORONTO	MINISTRY OF PUBLIC	TELUS FRIENDLY FUTURE
THE KRAWCZYK FAMILY	DEPARTMENT OF	SAFETY CANADA	FOUNDATION
FOUNDATION	JUSTICE CANADA	ROTARY CLUB OF	TIPPET FOUNDATION
THE BISHOP STRACHAN	LOBLAW COMPANIES	TORONTO	TORONTO DISTRICT
SCHOOL	LIMITED	SCOTIABANK	SCHOOL BOARD
THE CATHERINE AND	MINISTRY OF EDUCATION	TANAQUIP FOUNDATION	TORONTO POLICE
MAXWELL MEIGHEN	MINISTRY OF CHILDREN,	TORONTO-DOMINION	SERVICE
FOUNDATION	COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL	BANK	WOMEN AND GENDER
THE CHARLES H. IVEY	SERVICES	TORONTO FOUNDATION	EQUALITY CANADA
FOUNDATION			YORKVILLE RUN



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