



2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT



*PROVIDING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE
ENVIRONMENT FOR FAMILIES*

A LETTER OF GRATITUDE



JEN PENNINGS

Outgoing Board President

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As I reflect on the past year at Fresh Start Support Services, I am **filled with gratitude** for the many ways God has continued to guide and provide for this ministry. Your prayers, encouragement, and generosity have allowed us to **walk alongside women and families in some of their most vulnerable and life-changing moments.**

Our programming at Haven continues to thrive. Each week, **more than 30 families** come through our doors seeking support, resources, and community. It is a privilege to offer a safe and welcoming place where women feel seen, cared for, and reminded that they are not alone. The steady growth we are experiencing is a clear reminder of the need in our community and a reminder of **God's faithfulness** in helping us meet it.

We are also excited to share that the **House of Homes is nearing completion.** With construction in its final stages, we are prayerfully anticipating **opening our doors this spring.** This home will be a **place of stability, hope, and new beginnings** for women facing crisis pregnancies. We look forward to hosting an open house in the coming months and hope many of you will join us to celebrate all that God has done. In the meantime, we invite you to follow our social media pages for updates and ways to stay connected to this incredible journey.

Another tremendous blessing this year has been the leadership of our **new Executive Director.** Jaime has truly settled into her role and has already expanded our reach within the community. Through new connections, partnerships, and increased visibility, she is helping ensure that more people know who we are and how we can help. We are so thankful for her heart, dedication, and vision for the future of Fresh Start.

Thank you for standing with us. Because of your support, **lives are being changed, hope is being restored, and families are being strengthened.** We look forward to all that God has in store in the year ahead.

With sincere gratitude,

Jen Pennings

Outgoing Board President
Fresh Start Support Services

A YEAR OF FAITHFUL GROWTH AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

As I reflect on this past year at Fresh Start Support Services, I am filled with deep gratitude and excitement. **This has been a season of growth, connection, and preparation.** A year where we have clearly seen God's faithfulness at work through our community, our partners, and those we serve.

One of the most meaningful shifts this year has been **Fresh Start stepping further into the community.** We have been present, visible, and engaged in ways that have strengthened relationships and opened new doors. Being named the **Official Non-Profit of the St. Thomas & Elgin Home Show** was a tremendous honour and a reflection of both God's provision and the trust our community places in this work. Being chosen as **one of only three charities supported through the LSTAR Gala** further affirmed the shared values that bring partners together in generosity and service.



We also celebrated an incredible milestone when Fresh Start was awarded the **\$10,000 grant from the 100 People Who Care within Elgin-St. Thomas Community Foundation.** We are deeply thankful for this generosity and for the ways God continues to provide at just the right time. More recently, being named a **finalist for the IMPACT Awards**, with the ceremony taking place this April, has been a humbling reminder that faithful, purpose-driven work makes a meaningful impact.

This year has also been marked by an **outpouring of generosity from our local churches, community groups, and faithful partners like Harvest Hands.** Through financial gifts, in-kind donations, volunteer hours, prayer, and ongoing encouragement, **these partners have strengthened our ability to serve families with dignity and compassion.** Their support is not only practical, but also deeply meaningful. It reflects the heart of our community and the shared belief that we are stronger when we care for one another.

Throughout the year, we have **formed new community connections that continue to strengthen our mission and expand our reach.** These partnerships are built on compassion, dignity, and hope, values rooted in our belief that every person is created by God with inherent worth and deserves to be supported with care and respect.

Perhaps the most exciting development is what lies just ahead. This spring, **we look forward to the opening of the House of Homes**, a long-anticipated step forward that **represents hope, stability, and new beginnings.** This project has been carried forward with prayer, patience, and trust in God's timing, and we are grateful to see it coming to life.

There has been so much good in the past year, moments that have built us up, stretched us, and strengthened our faith as an organization. As **we move into this new season**, we do so **with gratitude, confidence, and trust in God's continued guidance.**

Thank you to our supporters, partners, volunteers, churches, community groups, and generous donors who have walked alongside us. Your faithfulness, generosity, and shared belief in this mission make this work possible. We look forward to continuing this journey together, trusting God as we grow and serve our community.

Sincerely,

Jaime Cann, Executive Director

OUR VISION

To foster healing and growth in a Christ-centered environment, where each family is encouraged and equipped to pursue a Fresh Start.

OUR MISSION

1

To provide a safe and supportive environment for families.

2

To provide programming that will aid parents and their children in developing the skills required to end the cycle of hurt and poverty.

3

To sever cycles of trauma and to foster attachment in the infant-parent relationship, building healthier family units integrated into their own communities.

4

To support women during their pregnancy and following birth, through encouragement, system navigation, and practical support.

5

To put Christ's love into action.



OUR GOVERNANCE



Jen Pennings
Outgoing
Board President



Susan Somers
Incoming
Board President



Janet Neef
Vice-President



Stuart De Vries
Treasurer



Shellie Addley
Secretary



Jaime Cann
Executive Director



Megan VanDyk
Director



Regis Trudel
Director

WE ARE LOOKING FOR BOARD MEMBERS

We are seeking experienced individuals to join our Board of Directors. Ideal candidates will bring skills and **experience in policy development, human resources, children and social services, legal matters or financial management**. Board members serve a **three-year term**. If you are interested in learning more about board membership, please contact Jaime at jcann@fsms.ca.

SPIRITUAL CARE AT FRESH START

Growing Together remained an ongoing and well-attended program throughout the year, with each study welcoming 8–10 participants. In 2025, we facilitated four Bible study groups for caregivers, engaging a total of 17 unique participants who expressed a **strong desire to learn more about the Bible and deepen their faith**.

In addition, we hosted two week-long **Vacation Bible School (VBS)** camps in July and August, serving a total of 37 children across both sessions. These programs would not have been possible without the **dedication and commitment of our volunteers**, whose support was essential to their success.

A HOUSE OF HOMES UPDATE

God willing, and with deep gratitude to our community, this will be the **last update on the construction of our House of Homes**. As **we anticipate being move-in ready by May**, we look forward to sharing updates about the families we will be serving rather than progress reports on bricks and mortar.

At the end of such a dynamic project, **we stand in awe of what God has done for us**. In our 2022 annual report, we first announced the decision to tear down our old building and launched a fundraising campaign for a new one. In 2023, the asbestos abatement and demolition of the old building was completed. Then in 2024, after obtaining all necessary permits, we broke ground on the new building. Many of you joined us to celebrate as the foundation was laid - a meaningful milestone in this journey.



Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:5 NIV).

One such perfect gift has been the financing of this project. In 2023, we estimated a total cost of \$5.5 million. Remarkably, **the actual budget proved to be lower than we anticipated** — which, in today's economy, is a miracle in itself. As you peruse the financial statements on the next page, **we hope you will be as overwhelmed with gratitude as we are by the generosity of our community**. Private donors, trusts, estates, municipal, provincial, and federal grants, as well as interest, contributed to the current amount of \$2,558,094.82 raised. With an additional \$771,780 in pledged donations and an approved loan of \$2,060,000, **total revenues now exceed the projected budgeted cost**. If you feel led to help reduce that loan even further, **we warmly invite you to consider making a final gift toward House of Homes** by visiting www.fsms.ca/ahouseofhomes.

Another perfect gift has been the contractors and builders working on our site. Our architects and affordable housing consultants repeatedly tell us that **this project stands out for its ease, collaboration between trades, speed, and ownership of the parties involved**. Once again, this is a testament to the Mighty God we seek to serve.

Lastly, we have received the precious gift of **strengthened collaboration with our city's Social Services department**. They have renewed their commitment to providing rent support for our clients and have expressed appreciation for the ongoing work at Haven — our downtown drop-in and program space.



The photos above offer just a **small glimpse into the beautiful apartments that are now in the final stages of construction**—and we could not be more excited! Watching every detail come together has been such a rewarding journey, and it fills us with joy to see these spaces transforming into places families will soon call home.

Every room has been thoughtfully designed with comfort, warmth, and community in mind. It's truly inspiring to see the vision becoming a reality, and we are **counting down the days until we can officially open our doors and welcome families into the House of Homes.**

If you'd like to see the House of Homes for yourself, please consider this your personal invitation to **join us for our Open House this spring.** Come walk through the apartments, experience the space firsthand, and celebrate this exciting new chapter with us. We would be absolutely delighted to share this special milestone with you and hope to see you there!

HOUSE OF HOMES FINANCIALS

REVENUES (until Jan 31, 2026)

All-time donations (rcvd)	\$ 1,658,094.82
City of St. Thomas contribution*	\$ 100,000.00
Community Improvement Plan*	\$ 205,000.00
Pledged Gift in kind*	\$ 466,780.00
Affordable Housing Fund CMHC grant (rcvd)	\$ 900,000.00
Affordable Housing Fund CMHC loan**	\$ 2,060,000.00
TOTAL	\$ 5,389,874.82

* Will be received upon completion of project

** Not drawn yet

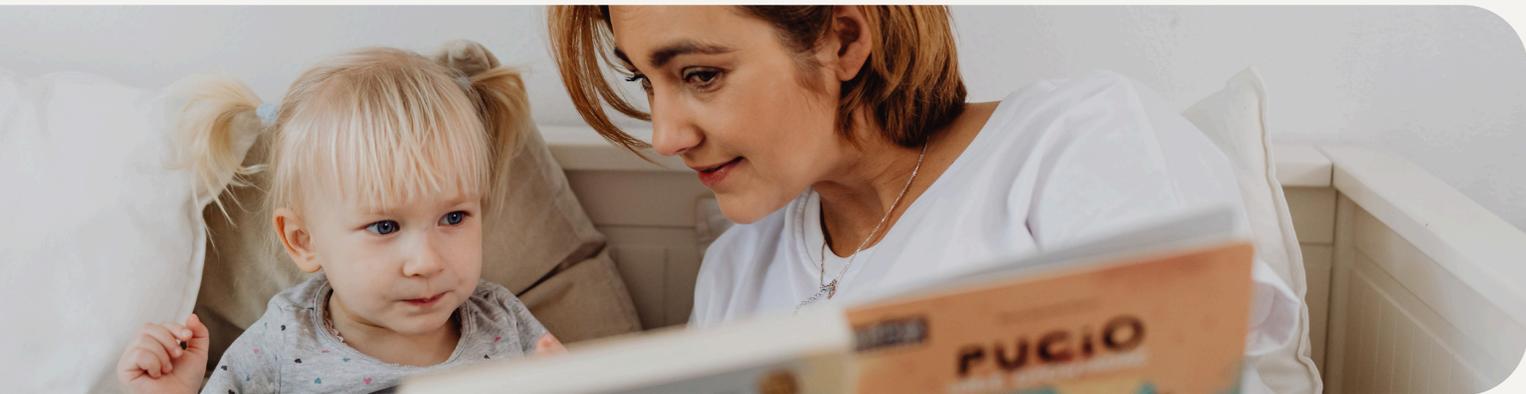
BUGETTED COSTS

Hard Costs	\$ 4,356,809.00
Soft Costs	\$ 858,521.00
TOTAL	\$ 5,215,330.00

EXPENSES (until Jan 31, 2025)

Hard Costs	\$ 1,621,839.17
Soft Costs	\$ 518,419.79
TOTAL	\$ 2,140,258.96

The capital revenues and expenses are not reflected on our statement of operations on page 11, as Fresh Start follows the deferral method of accounting for contributions. This means that donations restricted towards the House of Homes are only recognized as revenue in the year in which the expenses for the building are incurred. They will then be found under tangible capital assets (Building). In the audited statement of financial position, you will find some donations towards HOH still under deferred capital contributions.



A STORY OF A FRESH START

“After leaving a difficult relationship, I found myself at the women’s shelter in St. Thomas, where I first learned about Fresh Start. I began bringing my child to their play groups, which became **a meaningful way for my child to play and for me to connect with other parents** who understood what I was going through.

I soon became involved in Fresh Start programs like Growing Together and the Circle of Security Parenting Program. What I expected to be a typical parenting class turned into something much deeper. **I learned how to better understand my child’s emotions, respond to their needs, and help them feel safe and secure.**

When I moved into Second Stage Housing and struggled to afford groceries, Fresh Start’s Family Giving Fund helped me with a grocery gift card, allowing me to **provide food for my family during a difficult time.** Later, when I moved into my own place, Carolyn, the System Navigator, helped me with essential household items so I could truly start over.

Even now, I continue attending programs at Fresh Start. It’s a warm, welcoming place — a **“heartly place,”** as I like to call it. When everything had been taken away from me, **Fresh Start helped lift me back up.** I’m deeply grateful for the care and support I continue to receive.”

— Fresh Start Client

PRAYER REQUESTS

- Please keep the **children at Fresh Start** in your prayers—that they **may thrive in a nurturing and safe environment**, and that their **caregivers are granted the wisdom, resources, and support to guide their emotional and cognitive growth** during these crucial early years.

- Please pray for our **House of Homes project**—that the **final weeks of construction** unfold safely and smoothly, and **that we may joyfully open our doors this spring** to welcome and support families in need.

- Please **pray for our staff** as they continue to run programs—**may Christ’s love shine through their work, guiding and supporting parents and caregivers** as they nurture a brighter future for their children.

Our very first prayer letter went out December 2025. If you would like to pray for Fresh Start a little more specifically, please email tfehr@fsm.ca and request a copy of our letter.



OUR SERVICES

SYSTEM NAVIGATION

Our Family System Navigator **helps caregivers identify their needs, set goals, and connect with community organizations and resources**—including ODSP, Ontario Works, Legal Aid, and housing supports—to promote stability and positive support. In 2025, the System Navigator assisted **97 families through 903 points of contact** over the year.

FAMILY GIVING

The Family Giving Fund is an essential support offered to caregivers, **providing access to diapers and wipes and formula**. Caregivers may apply for this free service once every six months. Thanks to generous donor support, the Family Giving Fund **assisted a total of 98 families in 2025**. Without this program, many families would struggle to meet their most basic needs.

COUNSELLING SUPPORT FOR CLIENTS

We continue to provide financial assistance for counselling services with a registered counsellor or psychotherapist. This support has been valuable for clients **seeking professional help** to address past trauma, navigate life challenges, or have a safe space to share their experiences. In 2025, **we received 26 applications** from individuals seeking counselling services.

ASQ SCREENING

We continue to offer Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) screenings, **a developmental tool that helps caregivers monitor whether their children are meeting key milestones across all areas of development**. If the ASQ or a caregiver identifies a concern, we provide appropriate referrals to specialized services, such as Tyke Talk.

OUR PROGRAMS

DROP-IN PROGRAM

Our Drop-In Program **continued to welcome new families throughout the year**, serving 15–30 adults and children at each group. Caregivers are able to bring their children aged 0-6 to participate in crafts, snacks, and play with toys and peers. The program **supports children’s social, communication, creativity, and fine and gross motor skill development**, while encouraging sharing, making new friends, and trying new things in a safe, supportive environment with their caregivers. Caregivers are able to engage in play with their children while also connecting with other caregivers.

CIRCLE OF SECURITY

Circle of Security Parenting is a reflective parenting program that helps caregivers explore how their own upbringing influences their current parenting. Through this process, caregivers learn to better **recognize and respond to their children’s needs**. The program runs once a week for eight weeks at the beginning and end of the year, and many caregivers report being able to **apply what they learn after just the first week**. In 2025, a total of **nine caregivers**—including parents and grandparents—participated in the Circle of Security Parenting program.

BABY LOVE

Baby Love Parenting Program is a group program designed to **support parents and caregivers in building strong, secure attachment relationships with their infants**. It focuses on developing reflective parenting skills, sensitive caregiving practices, and a sense of security for both parent and child. The program is open to caregivers with babies aged 2–15 months and **aims to help parents better understand and respond to their baby’s cues, grow in confidence when meeting their child’s needs**, learn about early development, and connect with other parents.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Audited financial statements of operations,
October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025:

REVENUE: \$415,670

EXPENSES: \$393,196

Donations: \$266,325

Programs: \$234,516.57

Baby Bottle Drive: \$37,606

Management and Admin: \$109,780.13

Grants: \$65,317

Fundraising: \$7,896.30

Rent, Interest, and other Income: \$10,205

Professional Services: \$41,003

(No rental properties in last year)

Fundraising and Events: \$36,217

SURPLUS: \$22,474

USE OF DONATIONS AND DESIGNATED DONATIONS: Spending of funds is confined to Fresh Start approved programs and projects. Each contribution designated toward an approved program or project will be used as restricted with the understanding that when the need for such a program or project has been met or cannot be completed for any reason as determined by the Board, the remaining restricted contributions will be used where most needed.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY
6

SPRING FUNDRAISING GALA

Our Spring Gala will be held on May 6th at the CASO Station in St. Thomas. To purchase tickets, please visit www.fsms.ca/spring-gala (or scan QR). Early bird sale ends March 31st.



MAY
10

BABY BOTTLE DRIVE

Our Baby Bottle Drive takes place between Mother's Day and Father's Day! If you would like to participate, please reach out to us at babybottles@fsms.ca to sign up.



We can't wait to open the doors of the House of Homes and share this space with our community. Join us for our Open House this spring — stay tuned for details!



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