



**ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2022-23**



**FRESH START**  
SUPPORT SERVICES

# LETTER OF GRATITUDE

## Dear Friends of Fresh Start Support Services,

We are thrilled to share with you our annual report. We hope it gives you a snapshot of all the work that has been happening at Fresh Start, and that you will enjoy reading about our endeavors, challenges, and growth over the past year.

Recently, Suzanne had the privilege of chatting with one of our supporters at a speaking engagement. He shared with her the challenges he faced as a young parent, ultimately leading to the difficult decision of placing his child for adoption due to the lack of support available. He shared his profound and continued sadness that he did not have access to a support service such as Fresh Start, which could have allowed him to raise and have a relationship with his child. His reflection highlights the critical need for services like ours to assist families in similar situations, and emphasizes the profound impact of your support. Therefore, we hope you will enjoy reading the personal story of one of our clients on page 5, as it shows what can happen when there is support for a mother in need.

Without an apartment building in place, our board, staff, and volunteers have dedicated countless hours towards the work and services that Fresh Start provides to our community clients. Our work has thrived at Haven, our program centre, located at 797 Talbot St. We continue to see the increasing need for parenting programming, system navigation, and early childhood support. It is our privilege to walk alongside the pregnant and parenting women in our community and help care for them in their greatest time of need. We are so proud of all the families and their children who come through our doors, willing to learn, to connect and to socialize. They work so hard to accomplish their goals and become the best parent they can be. Your generosity allows us to continue fostering positive change in their lives and you can read more on pages 6 and 7.

Although our work in St Thomas continues to flourish, we deeply miss the ability to provide housing for women and their children. We continue to trust in God's perfect timing and have seen the way that He is at work in our plan for a new 12 Unit building. We draw inspiration from Isaiah 43:19, embracing the promise of new beginnings and the emergence of opportunities in unexpected places. The development of our new 'House of Homes' at 118 Centre Street embodies this spirit of renewal, symbolizing our commitment to progress and innovation. In just over a year, more than 1.5 million dollars has been raised. The drawings are finalized and submitted, the site plan application is approved and we eagerly anticipate breaking ground. In addition to your regular giving, we ask that you please consider a capital donation specifically towards the new building.

We invite you to continue to explore more of our initiatives and achievements in the following pages. Your ongoing support ensures our financial stability, as evidenced by the comprehensive overview provided in our financial summary on page 9. Additionally, we encourage you to attend our Spring Fundraising Banquet, where we can personally express our gratitude for your dedication and support. More details about our upcoming events, including the Baby Bottle Drive, can be found on page 9.

Again, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to each of you for your continued support and prayers as we navigate the journey of change and growth. James 1:17 says "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of due to change." Your contributions are a testament to the boundless grace we receive, and we are ever so grateful as none of what you see within the pages of this report would be possible without your support.



SINCERELY,



**Jen Pennings**  
Board President



**Suzanne Flier**  
Executive Director



## OUR MISSION

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To provide a safe and supportive environment for families.

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

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

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

To put Christ's love into action.

## OUR VISION

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

## OUR GOVERNANCE

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Jen Pennings - President

Susan Somers - Vice President

Shellie Addley - Secretary

Stuart De Vries - Treasurer

Suzanne Flier - Executive Director (ex officio)

Anne Marie Krahn

Janet Neef

Megan VanDyk

Regis Trudel



# FAREWELL TO CARLA MATOS



I would like to take a moment to recognize the remarkable contribution of our outgoing board vice president, Carla Matos. For 14 years, Carla has served Fresh Start with dedication, passion, and commitment. Carla first joined the board in December of 2009 and her last meeting took place December 2023, closing a remarkable 14 years of service to Fresh Start. Although her time at Fresh Start is coming to an end, Carla continues to use her God-given passion for helping others through the many volunteer positions she holds in her own community.

Carla has supported Fresh Start through many challenges and changes. She has given countless hours of her time to ensure that Fresh Start remains true to its mission and vision. Through her leadership we have been able to provide vital support to countless women and families in need. Her impact will be felt for years to come, and we are forever thankful for her service.

Carla, on behalf of the board and employees at Fresh Start, I want to say thank you. Thank you for your leadership, your hard work, and your unwavering commitment. You have been an inspiration to us all, and you leave behind a legacy that we will cherish and strive to build upon in the years ahead.

**Jen Pennings, Board President**

## HOUSE OF HOMES UPDATE

It is amazing to see how far we have come in just over 1 year. Where in 2021/22 we were working towards renovation of the old building, in January of 2023 the board decided to pivot towards demolition and a new build. Now, in just over a year's time, we have been blessed with \$1.5 million in designated donations towards the new House of Homes.

According to our accounting policies, all contributions to the House of Homes are recognized as revenue in the year in which the related expenses are incurred. As we have not started building yet, you will not find any House of Homes donations on our statement of financial operation on page 9. Instead, they are reflected as deferred capital revenue on the statement of financial position (balance sheet). In the year these funds are expended for the new build, they will show up as revenue. If you would like to see these additional statements, our audited financial statements are available upon request. However, below you will find an income and expense statement specifically for the House of Homes.

As to the construction itself, we are very pleased to announce that we have reached 90% drawings and have already obtained site plan approval for the new building. Our general contractor is busy tendering to several subcontractors involved, and we are praying for much support from our builders' community through in-kind donations of their time, labor, or materials. Also, we are expecting to submit for building permit this month, hoping to have a shovel in the ground this spring.

If you or your organization have not donated to the House of Homes yet, please consider a one-time, transitional donation to help us amass the final \$322,592 towards the new building. Fresh Start depends relies on your help, to build a safe housing campus for our displaced mothers, and fulfill our mission transforming lives of crisis into lives of hope. Your support may be the difference between us putting a shovel in the ground or postponing the start of our desperately needed new building. We hope we can count on you!

### BUDGETED COST:

Demolition and remediation	\$ 60,000
Soft cost (designer, engineering, consultant)	\$ 352,000
Permit (0.0975%)	\$ 42,900
Construction (\$275 / sqft)	\$ 4,400,000
Hydro connection	\$ 20,000
Financing	\$ 100,000
Bonding, wrap up, liability	\$ 100,00
HST (3.94% for non-profit)	\$ 182,028
Contingency construction (6%)	\$ 264,000
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$ 5,520,928</b>

### FINANCING:

Developer's contribution = funds raised	\$ 1,498,336
CMHC loan (co-investment fund)	\$ 2,800,000
CMHC forgivable portion (co-investment fund)	\$ 900,000
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$ 5,198,336</b>



**Please prayerfully consider making a one-time donation towards our new building so that we can continue providing safe housing for moms and give them a chance at a fresh start! To donate, please scan the QR code or visit [www.fsms.ca/ahouseofhomes](http://www.fsms.ca/ahouseofhomes).**





## A STORY OF A FRESH START

I came to Canada as an immigrant after my marriage to my husband. We had a daughter together and while I was pregnant with my second child, he abandoned us. When he found out that I had given birth to a son, something that is considered superior in our culture, he returned. Shortly after, we had to relocate to St. Thomas for his job. We lived together here, but things started to get worse. We were being highly controlled and physically abused by him and his family. I no longer felt like my children were safe in that house so one day I decided to take my children and leave. All I had with me was my purse, a tiny bit of money and a diaper bag.

I had nowhere to go so I ended up at the women's shelter in St. Thomas. My husband immediately put a case against me for taking my children and filed for 50-50 custody. I knew I had to fight to protect them from him and his family, but I didn't know where to begin. I couldn't even afford a place to live let alone a lawyer. But given his discriminating behavior with my daughter, continuous emotional and psychological abuse, brainwashing and feeding both of my kids with negativity about me and the world, I knew I needed to fight for full custody. I wanted to save them from experiencing this trauma and abuse over and over again.

I heard about Fresh Start and since it was close to the shelter, I walked over there one day with my son in his stroller. When the staff learned about my situation, they immediately provided me with support. Within a month, I had a place to live. They helped me navigate applying for financial assistance and helped me to secure legal aid so that I could fight for custody of my children. I went from being well-off my entire life to counting pennies. I could barely afford to put food on the table for my children. Fresh Start provided me with basic needs like groceries, diapers, and a car seat for my son. When I felt lost or didn't know where to turn, I knew that Fresh Start would be there to help.

A year later, my case is still ongoing. I am doing everything I can to continue to fight to protect my children. The System Navigator at Fresh Start has continued to support me along the way. She is always just a phone call away and even when she doesn't know the answers to my questions - she constantly advocates for me and continues searching for resources to help me. I continue to attend programming at Fresh Start with my son and I am so thankful for the support they have given us. Fresh Start saved me when I had nowhere else to turn.

## VOLUNTEERS

It was a busy year for our amazing volunteers! Together, they volunteered for an amazing 392 hours for Fresh Start. We would like to thank the lovely women who have been faithfully child minding during programs or as respite (188 hours), our high school and family volunteers for getting baby bottles sorted and getting mailings ready, as well as help clean up after our banquet (22 hours).

We also like to mention the clean up parties of the Young Adults of the Thamesford Community Church and Springfield Baptist Church, as well as the Father Ernie Deslippe Knights of Columbus Council #1467 who took care of the gardens and weeds at 118 Centre Street (29 hours). Our board of directors volunteered 152 hours this year at meetings and fundraising activities.

Not volunteering, but still essential to run our programs were the family support workers of Southwestern Public Health who would accompany their clients to our programs, and perform child minding so that their clients would be free to participate. They assisted us for 114 hours.



If you are interested in volunteering with Fresh Start, please fill out the application on our website at [www.fsms.ca/volunteer](http://www.fsms.ca/volunteer) or scan the QR code. We can always use your help!



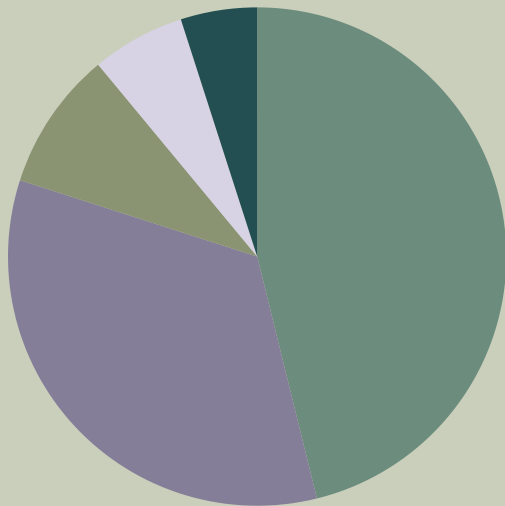
This past year, **we welcomed 15 newborns** into our Fresh Start programming. Nine sweet little girls and six amazing boys! We not only supported these moms through their pregnancy but continue to support them postpartum and through the early parenting stages.

# OUR PROGRAMS

Fresh Start Supports Services has moved from a program model that supported intrusive services and mandated programming to a progressive model of program delivery that supports client lead services from a trauma informed lens. The primary focus of programming within the agency is to support families with attachment-based skills as well as supporting with services and resources specifically in the areas of early infancy and child development. Fresh Start staff work to best meet the unique needs of each family individually. As our program continues to adapt and redevelop, our staff work collaboratively with community partners and services to allow clients to be as independent as possible reducing anti-oppressive practice. Fresh Start staff continue to practice from an evidence-based model of care. Several groups offered include: Circle of Security, Baby Love, Emotion Regulation, alongside with Self-Care care opportunities for parents. We have recently started spiritual care, which has been well-received and a wonderful spiritual addition to the Fresh Start programs.

Fresh Start recognizes the demands on parents and the challenges navigating the service needs of their families – this is an area that our Family Navigator supports, elevating barriers and providing resources for families. The program space at Haven continues to expand, while offering several programs and services along with casual drop-in times for families to connect with others.

**Traci English, Program Manager**



IN 2023 WE HAD A TOTAL OF 908 PARTICIPATIONS AT OUR FOLLOWING GROUPS AND PROGRAMS:

- DROP-IN PLAY
- CIRCLE OF SECURITY
- SELF-CARE GROUP
- SELF & CO-REGULATION
- BABY LOVE GROUP

## SPIRITUAL CARE AT FRESH START

This year we started a new group for clients who are seeking spiritual care. Our staff member Tammy Fehr who holds a bachelor's degree in ministry studies has enthusiastically taken on the role of facilitating this group. Together with three volunteers she provided a safe place for women to connect, where they could be vulnerable and learn about who Jesus is, while their little ones could play and enjoy some peer interaction in our large play area.

The first iteration of Growing Together was following the popular Alpha model and ran from spring to summer with a total of 12 gatherings. The group had six faithful participants.

Spiritual care has continued in the new fiscal year, with a Christmas study, to discover what Christmas is about and already saw 9 women participating. At the end of the Christmas study, the women were asked if and how they wanted to continue in the New Year. The women came back unanimously that they wanted to get into the Bible. Therefore, in 2024 the focus will be on studying a book of the Bible together.

Whether our clients want to study the Bible, pray together, find resources to teach their children about Jesus, or get plugged into a church, our hope and prayer for this group is to point people to Jesus by meeting the spiritual needs of our clients where they are.





# OUR PROGRAMS

## DROP-IN GROUPS

We continued our **drop-in play groups**, to support supervised play for the little ones, promoting peer interaction and skill building, as well as giving the opportunity for moms to deisolate and connect over a cup of coffee. These drop-in play groups ran mostly in the morning, 2-4 times per week, depending on the season.

Our **self-care group** was highly sought after, so much so that we introduced registration and waitlists. This weekly program offered moms the opportunity to connect and hang out in the backroom of our offices, while their dependents were cared for in the large program space in front. Participants acquired different coping strategies to deal with stress, and skills to re-regulate. Self-care became synonymous for a tight knit group of friends, who would return every week to catch up and work on coping strategies to deal with stressors.

## BABY LOVE

Baby Love is one of our programs around developing secure attachment between caregiver and baby, ages 2-15 months. Baby Love supports parents and caregivers in strengthening their attachment relationship with their infants and emphasizes the importance of feelings of security, reflective capacity and sensitive caregiving behaviours. These sessions include activities for babies & caregivers, Q&A, and the moms can practice exercises with your baby. Our hope is that parents learn to calm and read their babies, feel more confident in meeting the baby's needs, learn more about development and connect with other parents.

## CIRCLE OF SECURITY

The Circle of Security program aims to support secure attachment relationships between caregivers and their children, ages 15 months to 6 years, since we know that secure attachment is a protective factor in the development of young children. Secure attachment not only sets the foundation for social competence, but will also support the child's general learning. We have seen that all caregivers want what is best for their children, and in this program they work to increase their relationship capacity, which will hopefully result in a lasting change in the attachment relationship with their child.

## SELF & CO-REGULATION

In this four-week parenting program our moms explored the brain science behind self-regulation and regulation of their dependent (co-regulation). They learned about the different phases of life and its specific self-regulation, and could learn how self-regulation is linked to parenting. The impact of stress and trauma on self and co-regulation, as well as strategies to increase regulation were studied.

### # OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN WHO ATTENDED EACH PROGRAM

PROGRAM	# OF PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN
DROP-IN PLAY	37	58
SELF-CARE GROUP	35	49
BABY LOVE GROUP	19	24
CIRCLE OF SECURITY	10	17
SELF & CO-REGULATION	11	14



Did you know that our executive director Suzanne Flier accepted **15 speaking engagements** in the past year? These presentations were for churches, service clubs, schools, funders, and other groups. She really enjoys getting to know people or groups supporting Fresh Start, so if you would like her to come out and speak to your organization, please reach out to [info@fsms.ca](mailto:info@fsms.ca).



## LEGAL UPDATE

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As a non-for-profit corporation, Fresh Start must abide by the Ontario Non-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA) and Ontario Business Registration Act (OBR). The updated ONCA came into force on October 19, 2021, and gave us three years to review and amend our governing documents to be compliant with the new act.

Since our letters of patent dated from October 1987 with supplementary letters of patent from 2015 and 2016, we had to retain legal help to update our bylaws and adopt articles of amendment to be compliant with ONCA. With the prompt and accurate help of Cohen Highley LLP, our board could adopt our restated bylaws and move a resolution to file articles of amendment. The Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery accepted and certified the articles of amendment effective August 1, 2023, preparing Fresh Start Support Services for the future.

This year we also changed the legal name to the title and deed of our property on 118 Centre Street. As the property was purchased in 2005, the parcel registry had the registered owner as "Rehoboth Girls' Home of Refuge and Support". However, as of April 2016 our legal name was changed to Fresh Start Support Services, this discrepancy continued to lead to confusion when dealing with city, MPAC, or funding organizations. We therefore changed the registered name on title to Fresh Start Support Services. We realize that by doing so, we removed the last reference to the name "Rehoboth Girls' Home of Refuge and Support", but are grateful that although we operate under a new name, the original mission and vision are more robust and continue to guide us today.





## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

### Audited financial statements of operations, October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023:

#### Revenues \$600,539

Donations \$347,595  
 Baby Bottle Campaign \$24,233  
 Grants \$199,102  
 Amortization of deferred capital grants \$7,388  
 Rent, interest and other income \$22,221

#### Expenses \$451,301

Programs \$299,926  
 Amortization on equipment \$2,528  
 Management and administration \$111,464  
 Fundraising \$11,816  
 Professional services \$25,567

#### Surplus \$149,238

\$82,449 of surplus is written off as loss, due to disposal of capital assets (demolition of old building)

## 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  
09

### SPRING FUNDRAISING BANQUET

Our spring banquet will once again be held at the CASO Station in St. Thomas on Thursday, May 9th. The registration fee is \$100, which will include a delicious meal, venue, and live music. With each ticket purchased, you will receive a tax receipt for a \$50 donation to Fresh Start. All proceeds will go towards our new House of Homes. Doors open at 5:00pm, with dinner beginning at 6:00pm. In addition to music mixed with information, we will be hosting a dessert auction to make your night complete. To register, please visit [www.fsms.ca/banquet](http://www.fsms.ca/banquet) or scan QR code. If you are interested in being a sponsor of this event, please contact us at [info@fsms.ca](mailto:info@fsms.ca).



MAY  
12

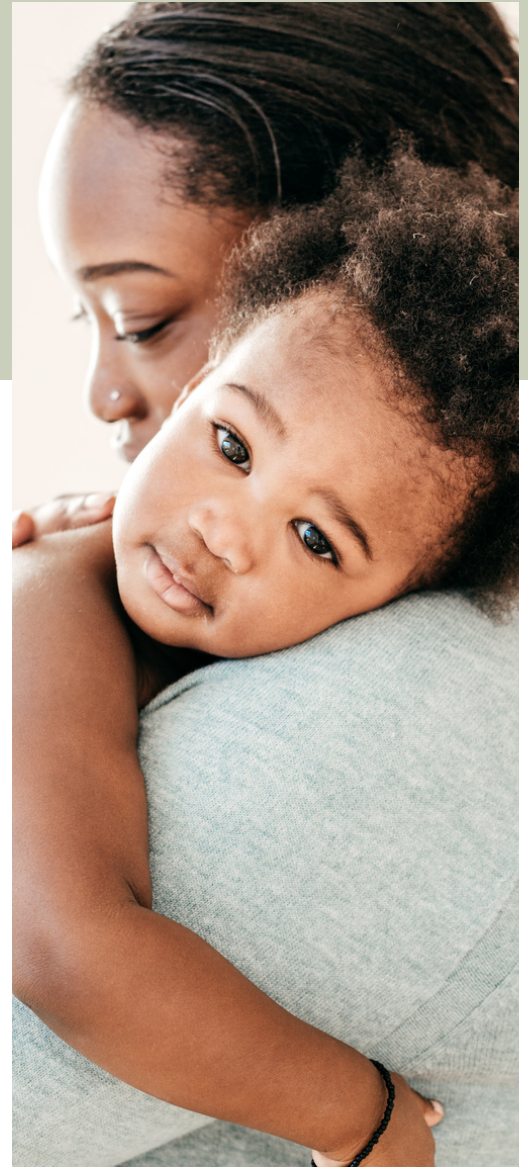
### BABY BOTTLE DRIVE

Our largest fundraiser is our Baby Bottle Drive, which takes place between Mother's Day and Father's Day (May 12th to June 16th). Many churches, schools and organizations participate by filling baby bottles with spare change, bills or cheques. If your organization or church is not participating yet and would like to, please reach out to us at [babybottles@fsms.ca](mailto:babybottles@fsms.ca) to sign up.



# OUR SERVICES

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## SYSTEM NAVIGATION

Since the start of the three-year Project Ujima funding (January 2022) we have rolled out system navigation at Fresh Start. System Navigation is a service that offers one point of access for our clients and their families, where they can discuss their immediate needs, as a strategy to reduce barriers and facilitate access to social and community supports. This service provides an opportunity for social and community supports to work collaboratively rather than siloing services within individual agencies.

System Navigation expands the support network for the client while increasing their potential for success. Examples of the past year include working on rental arrears in different provinces that had resulted in claw back of Canada Child Benefit as well as a threat of eviction and potential homelessness. Working with a family around Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and being able to refer them to specialists of the Community Services Coordination Network (CSCN) so that the family would receive the proper support they need. Supporting a client going through a challenging court case around domestic violence and custody. Accompanying and advocating for several families in their meeting with Family & Children Services (formerly CAS). Facilitating community table meetings with community partners to assist several families transitioning from shelter to permanent housing, so they receive basic needs and supports. Supporting a family on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) who requires ongoing support and programming, but does not meet the threshold for more intensive support programs.

As you can see with these examples, the complexity of needs is great but so is our drive to continue building the family navigation program as well as our connections within our community, to wrap around our clients completely and efficiently.



Did you know that at Fresh Start Support Services **we offer free Development Screening**, using the ASQ, or Ages and Stages Questionnaire? This is a screening tool that is specifically designed to monitor developmental progress in children between the ages of 1 month and 5.5 years. Our Early Literacy Specialist has performed 74 screenings, resulting in 8 referrals for speech and language delays. She also created 41 developmental support plans, and worked one-on-one with 53 at-risk families.

If you are interested in having your little one screened, please contact Danielle by email at [dbernardo@fsm.ca](mailto:dbernardo@fsm.ca) or call 519-630-5583.

# OUR SERVICES

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## PRAYER REQUESTS

- Please pray for the board of directors and its new members, that they will adapt, form deep connections, and continue to skillfully steer our ministry.
- Pray for our adult clients, that they are encouraged seeing their own personal growth, and that they see Christ's love through us.
- Pray for the little ones, that through playtime, the developmental assessments, and the one-on-one support, they continue to progress on a healthy cognitive and emotional developmental trajectory.
- Pray for our staff as two of our staff members are pregnant and we celebrate and prepare for the arrival of their firstborn. Pray for a healthy pregnancy and uncomplicated arrival of their babies. Also pray that we have no difficulty in finding replacement for them and that the team will continue to collaborate effectively.
- Pray for the House of Homes, that all the big and small steps towards full occupancy will be blessed with ease, timing and generosity. Pray for the permit process, the further grant applications, and the tenders towards subcontractors.

## MOVING FUND

Through a generous grant of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, approved by the Central Donation Committee in London in 2022, we could set up a Moving Fund for our clients. This fund was designated to aid our women transitioning from supportive housing to independent housing. As a supportive housing provider, providing pregnant moms, and moms with young children with safe housing and wrap around support for a year, we have encountered increasing difficulty in finding suitable permanent housing after they have graduated our program. Some of the factors are related to housing availability, other factors are related to increased rent expenses, both rent itself, as well as first and last month's rents.

With this new fund, clients could apply for reimbursement of moving-related costs, to a maximum of \$1000 per client. We could already assist four clients, three of them being the last families to move out of our campus to independent or further transitional housing, and one client who had previously graduated from our campus, but now had to relocate. Funds were used towards last month's rent, storage space, moving truck and start up supplies.

In the new year we expect more of our regular drop-in clients to apply for this fund, assisting them when moving to permanent housing.



Did you know that our **Family Giving Fund** offers practical items to help provide some financial relief to families in Elgin county? Families can

apply through our website once every 6 months. Fresh Start receives these donations from people living in our community who want to help make a difference in our family's lives. We are so grateful to you all for your contributions.

In the past year we were able to help 23 families with a \$50 grocery gift card, 15 families were provided with diapers and wipes, 4 families received baby bottles, and 5 families received baby formula. When we ran out of grocery gift cards (the most popular item) 4 families received a food package generously donated by our friends at Harvest Hands, a non-profit food rescue and re-distribution centre located here in St. Thomas.

In addition, all families attending the self-care group on Thursday nights could apply for a food package to take home. Again, this food was provided by Harvest Hands.



# FRESH START SUPPORT SERVICES

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Mail: PO Box 51, St. Thomas PO Main, ON N5P 3T5

519-637-7775 | www.fsms.ca

Charitable Registration  
# 10788 4074 RR000

#### MAKE A DONATION TO FRESH START

To donate, please send an e-transfer to [financials@fsms.ca](mailto:financials@fsms.ca) or scan the QR code to see other ways you can donate today!



#### SUBSCRIBE TO OUR EMAIL LIST

Scan the QR code or visit [www.fsms.ca/newsletters](http://www.fsms.ca/newsletters) to subscribe to our newsletters so you can stay up to date with Fresh Start.

