

2023-24

# ANNUAL REPORT

FRESH START SUPPORT SERVICES



*PROVIDING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE  
ENVIRONMENT FOR FAMILIES*



# A LETTER FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

## Dear Friends of Fresh Start Support Services,

As we reflect on this past year, we are filled with gratitude for God's faithfulness in guiding us through a season of transition and growth. This year, our Executive Director, Suzanne, stepped away from her role to return to her career in medicine. Suzanne's leadership was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the next chapter of Fresh Start. Even as she steps into a new role, we are blessed that she remains deeply involved as the project manager for our House of Homes initiative.

House of Homes is no longer just a dream - it is becoming a reality. After more than a year of planning, fundraising, speaking engagements, and what seemed like endless permit applications, we are witnessing the physical foundation being laid for this 12-unit apartment building. This space will provide a safe and supportive home for women facing crisis pregnancies, offering them the stability they need to build a bright future. We thank God for His provision and for the many hands that have contributed to making this project possible.

We are also excited to welcome our new Executive Director, Jaime Cann. Jaime has brought fresh enthusiasm, innovative ideas, and a deep commitment to serving families in need. Under her leadership, we hope to expand our programming to include fathers, recognizing their vital role in a healthy family dynamic. While fathers will not reside in the House of Homes, they will have access to valuable resources and support through our programs.

Our programming at Haven continues to thrive, providing a welcoming space for pregnant and parenting women. This year, we have expanded our services to include one-on-one counseling for mothers who desire to heal from past trauma. By addressing generational wounds, these mothers are empowered to break cycles of hardship and become the best parents they can be. We have seen firsthand how God is working through these women, bringing restoration and renewal into their lives.

Through every challenge and triumph, we have been reminded that God's timing is perfect. There have been moments when we have had to wait longer than expected, but we trust that He is providing exactly what we need, when we need it. Proverbs 3:5-6 encourages us to "trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight." We hold on to this promise as we continue our work, knowing that He is leading us every step of the way.

As we look ahead, we invite you to continue partnering with us. Your support through prayers, financial contributions, and volunteer efforts makes a lasting difference in the lives of the women and families we serve. Thank you for walking alongside us in this mission. We look forward to sharing more about the impact of your generosity in the pages ahead.

With gratitude and faith,

**Jen Pennings**  
Board President

# A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Dear Faithful Supporters,

As the newly appointed Executive Director of Fresh Start Support Services, I am both honored and excited to lead this incredible organization into its next chapter. This past year has been one of significant growth and transformation, and I am thrilled to share with you the milestones we've achieved together.

I want to begin by acknowledging the exceptional leadership of Suzanne, our former Executive Director. Suzanne's unwavering commitment and vision have shaped the success of Fresh Start, and I am deeply grateful for the framework she has built.

One of the most exciting developments this year is the official launch of the House of Homes project. We have "laid the foundation" for this new initiative, which will provide accessible housing for women-led families experiencing acute homelessness. This project is designed to offer immediate support and stability for those in urgent need. We trust that God's hand is guiding this project and that it will be a refuge of hope and restoration.

In addition to our House of Homes project, we've seen a wonderful increase in participation in our Haven programs. These programs, including our drop-in sessions, Early Literacy initiatives, ASQ testing, Growing Together Bible Study, and Circle of Security, have been thriving. The demand for these services has grown significantly, which speaks to the real need in our community for supportive, empowering programs. We're pleased to see more and more individuals and families engaging with us and benefiting from the tools and support these programs offer. We are encouraged to also see an increase in dad's attending and engaging with their children and the programs.

As we move forward, Fresh Start will continue to focus on our core mission: supporting those pregnant and parenting while providing safe, supportive spaces for families in need. The House of Homes will be an essential part of this, providing a refuge where women-led families can find safety, support, and the resources they need to thrive. Our Haven will be open to all who are pregnant and parenting whether a mom, dad, grandparent, aunt or uncle. We strive to show grace and the love of Christ.

I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to our dedicated staff, donors, volunteers, and community partners. Your continued support makes all this possible, and I look forward to working together to create brighter futures for those we serve. May God bless all of you abundantly as we continue to live out His calling to serve others.

Sincerely,

**Jaime Cann**  
Executive Director

# Our Mission

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

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

## OUR GOVERNANCE



**Jen Pennings**  
Board President



**Susan Somers**  
Vice-President



**Stuart De Vries**  
Treasurer



**Shellie Addley**  
Secretary



**Jaime Cann**  
Executive Director  
(ex officio)



**Anne Marie Krahn**  
Director



**Janet Neef**  
Director



**Megan VanDyk**  
Director



**Regis Trudel**  
Director



# HOUSE OF HOMES UPDATE

After breaking ground at the end of September 2024, we celebrated the foundation being completed on November 29 and 30, 2024. We welcomed a wonderful mix of politicians (MP Vecchio, office of MPP Flack, Mayor and Council members of Southwold, Council members of St. Thomas), other community partners (Eastwood Housing Corporation, Elgin St Thomas Community Foundation, Mennonite Community Services, YWCA), home builders (STEHBA, MP Custom Homes), media (MyFM, Aylmer Express), current and prior Fresh Start volunteers, staff and director, friends and family and supporters. With you, mimicking Ezra 3:10-13, we could celebrate the completion of the foundation that will support our mission to provide our clients with a safe and supportive environment. Thank you all for coming out and celebrating with us.



Pictures courtesy of @NatalieRosePhotography.

Since then, construction has progressed according to plan. At the time of writing, the basement walls, framing and support beams have been completed, as well as the elevator walls up to the second floor. The front and back stairwells are in progress, and we almost finished main floor framing to second floor. If you have not done so, please come by 118 Centre Street, to admire the progress we have made. Our site supervisor Jim will be happy to provide you with detailed information on the building.



Suzanne Flier, our previous Executive Director, has returned to working in healthcare but has also stayed on at Fresh Start as our Project Manager to see the House of Homes to completion. If you would like her to come out and speak about our new safe housing campus, please contact her at [sflier@fsmc.ca](mailto:sflier@fsmc.ca).

# OLD AND NEW FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIPS



Since Fresh Start decided to build a new dwelling for our moms and babies we have been blown away by your generosity. From 2022 onwards we have had many different private donors, foundations, businesses, churches, estates, grants, municipalities and service clubs join us and provide or pledge their support, good for a total of \$2,162,991.96!

Where the proposed financing of the 2023-24 annual report still quoted a loan of \$2,800,000, we are happy to announce that with further fundraising our proposed mortgage application could be lowered to \$2,060,000 (see below). Also, where in previous newsletters we asked you to pray for the

submission of the large federal grant application with CMHC (Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation), we can now announce that we have been conditionally approved. We are working with legal counsel towards a funding + loan agreement for a grant of \$900,000 and a loan of \$2,060,000. This is a major milestone, as it means that our budget is now balanced, and we can confidently continue with construction. God has been so good to us, and we thank Him for all He has done. You are still very welcome to join and contribute towards our building, as we have not signed the loan agreement yet, and would be happy to amend and bring the loan further down. To donate, please visit [www.fsms.ca/ahouseofhomes](http://www.fsms.ca/ahouseofhomes).

Another new partnership has been forged with our local St. Thomas & Elgin Home Builders' Association. At their meeting on February 4, 2025, they announced a \$100,000 STEHBA Member challenge dedicated towards furnishing our building. With the challenge wrapping up in September we cannot wait to see how far they will get.

## HOUSE OF HOMES FINANCIALS

### REVENUES (until Jan 31, 2025)

All-time donations	\$ 1,265,211.96
Pledged donations	\$ 126,000.00
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	\$ 900,000.00
Affordable Housing Fund CMHC loan	\$ 2,060,000.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 5,122,991.96</b>

### BUGETTED COSTS

Hard Costs	\$ 4,356,809.00
Soft Costs	\$ 766,182.96
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 5,122,991.96</b>

### EXPENSES (until Jan 31, 2025)

Hard Costs	\$ 426,941.95
Soft Costs	\$ 272,144.39
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 699,086.34</b>

\* The capital revenues and expenses are not reflected on our statement of operations on page 9, 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 and the expenses to date under tangible capital assets. In the audited statement of financial position of the past fiscal year, you will find donations towards HOH therefore under deferred capital contributions.



# OUR PROGRAMS



**Drop-In Programs** - Our drop-in groups are a place for parents to bring their little ones to socialize, do an activity that aids in early learning and enjoy a snack with friends. Children will work on a variety of skills, such as fine motor, communication, and problem solving, through crafts, sensory, and learning activities. This group is often where parents are first introduced to Fresh Start Support Services, and from there will find our other services and groups we offer. Throughout 2024, we saw a substantial increase in numbers for this group, with many new faces coming through our doors, including dads and grandparents.

**Circle of Security Program** - The Circle of Security Parenting program guides caregivers to reflect on their parenting by reflecting on how they were parented. This helps caregivers learn why they do what they do, so they can foster better attachment with their children. Like the other groups, this group has seen an increase in participation. We offered this program from October to December last year and just started another one in January with plans to offer another group in the fall.

**Baby Love Parenting Program** - Baby Love is a group program that 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 are for babies ages 2-15 months and their caregivers. The hope is that parents learn to calm and read their babies, feel more confident in meeting needs, learn more about development and connect with other parents.



## DADS AT FRESH START

Dads in St. Thomas, Ontario, are increasingly getting involved in the Fresh Start Support Services programming, recognizing the importance of active parenting and personal growth. Many fathers and stepfathers are taking the initiative to participate in the Drop-In Programming, where they can connect with others who are parenting, share their parenting experiences, and gain valuable insights. This involvement not only helps strengthen their parenting skills but also fosters a sense of community and support among all who are parenting. By stepping into these programs, dads are playing an essential role in their children's lives, becoming more engaged, and building stronger, healthier family relationships.

*"When I come here, I don't feel judged and for an hour I feel like a part of society"*

- Fresh Start Dad

# A STORY OF A FRESH START

When I was 17 years old, I came to live at Fresh Start back when it was still called Rehoboth Home, located in Springfield, Ontario. I was pregnant and needed some support. When my daughter Adrienne was born the staff there helped me so much in my new life and journey into motherhood. Adrienne was born with a severe physical ailment that almost took her life. We spent time in the ICU at Sick Kids and as she recovered, we stayed at LHSC well past her first birthday. The support I received from the home and the chaplain during this time transformed both our lives.



Photo of Adrienne during her stay at LHSC

While Adrienne was recovering, they helped us transition into housing in Woodstock. She came home healthy but behind in development so we worked with CPRI in London as well as home visits too. Today, Adrienne is healthy and 25 years old. God performed many great miracles in her life span. Since my time at Rehoboth Home, I've had three more children, 2 girls and a boy. My husband and I run our own cleaning business. In Fall 2024, I decided to reach out to Fresh Start because we want to give back and help other very young moms who find themselves in a similar situation that I found myself in back when I lived at Rehoboth Home.



## SPIRITUAL CARE AT FRESH START

A little update on spiritual care at Fresh Start Support Services. We have seen an increase in participation from current and new clients seeking to grow in their faith journey. Our first growing together group we ran had 4 participants and we are now seeing upwards of 14 clients in attendance when the group is running. Some people want to go to church but don't know where to start. Some have asked for prayer, and our

spiritual leader has had the privilege of praying with them. Many of the participants in this group want to know more of the Bible. So, over 2024, we ran three Bible studies where we simply opened the Bible and asked questions of the passage and/or chapter. Over the summer we ran two separate events just for the kids called "Growing Together for Kids." This was a time for kids to hear a bible story, enjoy worship songs with actions, do a craft, play some games and have a snack. During our last study of 2024, we hosted some open discussions on hard topics. All the studies may have had a different focus, but all had the same goal, which is to explore faith, share life, build relationships and find hope in Jesus!

DID YOU KNOW?

**Harvest Hands has been an incredible supporter of Fresh Start Support Services.** In 2022, our partnership began when we started receiving weekly grocery packages from Harvest Hands for clients attending our programming. Since July 2024, Harvest Hands has donated **24 car seats, 6 cribs, 4 strollers and many other family essentials** to pass along to our clients and families in the community who struggle to afford these items.

We are so incredibly grateful to the team and volunteers at Harvest Hands who provide so much to the at-risk families in our community. To learn more about Harvest Hands, please visit their website at [www.harvesthands.ca](http://www.harvesthands.ca).





# OUR SERVICES

**Counselling Support for Clients (CSC)** - We continue to offer our clients with financial assistance for counselling services with a registered counsellor or psychotherapist. This has been beneficial to clients who are looking to seek professional help with overcoming past trauma, working through difficulties in their life or who may be looking for a safe space to share their struggles. In 2024, we received 13 applications with 9 clients attending sessions.

**System Navigation** - Our System Navigator supports clients with identifying needs, goal setting and connecting families with other organizations and resources in the community (for example: ODSP, Ontario Works, Legal Aid, Housing, etc.). In 2024, our System Navigator saw 97 families with 912 points of contact. System Navigation expands the support network for the client while increasing their potential for success.

**ASQ Screening** - We offer free developmental screening, using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). 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. Since August, our Early Literacy Specialist has performed 15 screenings, resulting in 6 referrals for speech and language delays. Our Early Literacy Specialist worked one-on-one with 26 at-risk families.

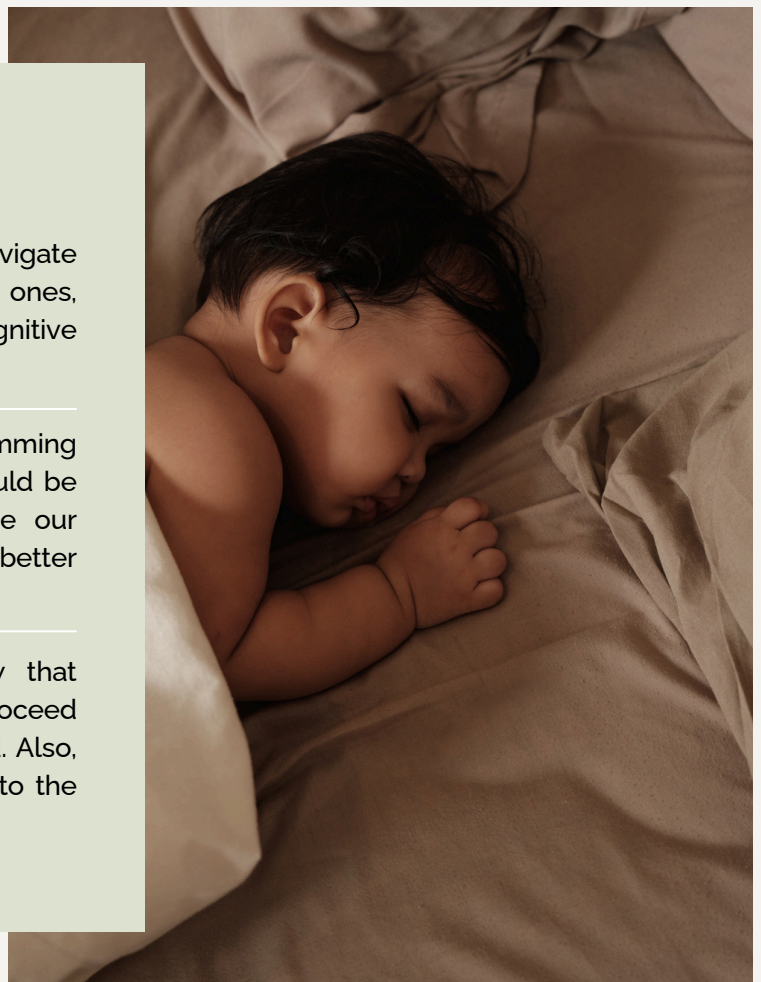
**Family Giving Fund** - The Family Giving Fund is an invaluable service we offer for caregivers to apply for diapers and wipes, formula, or a grocery gift card. Caregivers can apply once every six months for this free service, and because of your generous donations, we have been able to help a total of 84 families in 2024. Without the Family Giving Fund, many families would go without the basic needs.

## PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for our parents and caregivers as they navigate parenting in a difficult world. Pray for their little ones, that they continue to progress on a healthy cognitive and emotional developmental trajectory.

Pray for our staff as they continue to run programming at Fresh Start Haven. Pray that Christ's love would be shown through them as they lead and guide our parents and caregivers towards providing a better future for their little ones.

Pray for our House of Homes Project now that construction has begun. May the process proceed smoothly and may all those involved be blessed. Also, pray for the families whom we will welcome into the home in Fall 2025.





# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Audited financial statements of operations,  
October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024:

REVENUE: \$519,989

EXPENSES: \$410,160

Donations: \$303,483

Baby Bottle Drive: \$27,219

Grants: \$177,641

Rent, Interest, and other Income: \$11,646  
(No rental properties in last year)

Programs: \$261,020.24

Amortization on Equipment: \$2,037

Management and Admin: \$114,907.76

Fundraising: \$10,987

Professional Services: \$21,208

SURPLUS: \$109,829

**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



### SPRING FUNDRAISING GALA

Join us for a night of community and giving, while enjoying dinner and a dessert auction. Our Spring Gala will be held on Thursday, May 1st at the CASO Station in St. Thomas. Tickets go on sale March 1st at [www.fsms.ca/spring-gala](http://www.fsms.ca/spring-gala) (or scan QR code). Make sure to get your early bird tickets before pricing goes up April 1st. We can't wait to see you there!

MAY  
1



### BABY BOTTLE DRIVE

Our Baby Bottle Drive is our largest fundraiser and takes place between Mother's Day and Father's Day (May 11th to June 15th). 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.

MAY  
11



### HOUSE OF HOMES GRAND OPENING

Stay tuned for the Grand Opening of our House of Homes this Fall 2025. We are making lots of progress on the build of our new House of Homes (see pg. 4-5). Make sure to follow us on Facebook for updates from the build site and for more information about the Grand Opening. To learn more about our house of Homes, scan the QR code or visit [www.fsms.ca/ahouseofhomes](http://www.fsms.ca/ahouseofhomes).

FALL  
2025





## QUESTIONS? CONTACT US.

[www.fsms.ca](http://www.fsms.ca)  
[info@fsms.ca](mailto:info@fsms.ca)  
519-637-7775

*Office: 797 Talbot Street, St. Thomas*

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



### 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

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



Charitable Registration #  
10788 4074 RR00