

Report: Accountability Report
From: Stella's Circle
Date: April 2021
Submitted by: Lisa Browne, CEO, Stella's Circle

Unprecedented! This word was one we heard over and over in 2020-21. Despite all of the challenges that Snowmagedan and COVID-19 presented, Stella's Circle **continued to offer its services everyday of the year**. This is an amazing result, and we did it thanks to the support of many people, foundations, community groups and corporations. We are very grateful for the United Church of Canada response to COVID-19.

Throughout this period, Stella's Circle stayed true to its value of *innovation* to ensure that programs and services continued to provide positive impact to our participants. Every single day during the pandemic we continued to offer our services. This report is a testament to the *wisdom* of our staff, the *courage* of both our staff and participants and the *respect* of our community.

The mission of Stella's Circle is to transform lives by offering **Real Homes, Real Help and Real Work**. This translates to providing housing, counselling and employment services. Stella's Circle helps people who face many barriers to fully participating in their community. These barriers include mental illness, addictions, criminal justice involvement, poverty, homelessness, trauma and long periods of unemployment. Our 125 staff and 50 volunteers help 1000 people annually. Our values are Respect, Wisdom, Connectedness, Innovation and Courage.

Innovation Through Technology

"Being a single mom and unable to take my child to the Just Us Women's Program, the Therapy-Assisted Online platform has given me the ability to connect through the virtual platform. So I really benefited - I found the online programming and virtual support very beneficial"
~Just Us Women's Participant

"I feel connected and like someone cares. I would never have been able to afford this on my own".
~ Emmanuel House Participant

Thanks to the *wisdom* of Stella's Circle staff, we immediately recognized the digital divide faced by vulnerable population groups could affect the overall wellness of participants due to the strict public health measures that had to be put in place. The organization quickly pivoted to provide the technology needed to ensure participants had access to the resources required for accessing programs and services from home. Thanks to donors and funders, phones, tablets and laptops were donated for participant use and data cards and minutes were provided for connectivity. Individual counselling and groups like Adult Basic Education, Transition to Work, Addictions and Peer support were delivered online, including at the Women's Correctional Centre in Clarendville. The Just Us Women's Program alone delivered 121 remote counselling sessions and 20 addictions groups. True to our value of *connectedness*, virtual groups were also hosted for social connection and friendship to our participants to promote inclusion. Staff and volunteers led these activities in real-time to offer music, art and horticultural therapy. Even our beloved Stella's Circle Inclusion Choir was able to connect online.

Innovation Addressing Food Insecurity

"We have been able to provide many meals to people in need during Covid-19 response. Meals are delivered weekly and we have had very positive feedback. Women have told us that the

prepared food is delicious and really helpful at this time. Many people we work with have high levels of anxiety and are very cautious about leaving their homes. These meals have enabled them to feel safe in their homes. Furthermore, a number of people have commented that the "comfort" food has enabled them to feel loved and connected during times of isolation and loneliness."

~ Staff Member

During the pandemic, food insecurity was heightened due to the restricted public health measures that saw transportation restrictions and a higher anxiety of going out to public spaces such as the grocery store. To date, the Hungry Café has produced 6,700 nutritious meals for participants living in the community who are experiencing food insecurity. By providing our own prepared meals, we relieved the overwhelming demand on food banks and other food distribution channels so that they could serve others in need.

Staff also delivered hygiene supplies, wellness kits, and grocery hampers by contactless drop offs to participants of our Just Us Women's Centre and Employment Services. Naomi Centre and Emmanuel House provided meals to former participants and organized for pickup at their door. These activities promoted our values of *respect* and *connectedness* as it provided dignity for our participants and it reinforced impactful relationships with our staff and organization.

Innovation Through the Welcome Window

"I'm overwhelmed with happiness. Sitting on a couch with my dog while watching TV is something I couldn't do for years, I'm so happy."

~ Housing Services Participant

True to all our values of *respect, wisdom, connectedness, innovation and courage*, the staff of Housing Services recognized that even though the pandemic was on our doorstep, we needed to continue to help our community's most vulnerable find stable, safe and affordable housing. While the province was in lock down due to the pandemic, many people had refuge in their homes, but a portion of the population did not have this luxury.

Housing services continued at the Brian Martin Housing Resource Centre through a walk up "welcome window" that provided the physical distancing required by public health measures, keeping both participants and staff safe.

In February 2021, for example, during the return of the tightest pandemic restrictions, Housing Services staff completed 12 new intake assessments from individuals in shelters requiring housing; worked with 325 clients, and housed 12 individuals in secure, long term housing.

Connectedness with The United Church of Canada

The United Church of Canada's relationship with Stella's Circle is highlighted at the Board level with the Reverend Miriam Bowlby as a Director and the Rev. Faith March-MacCuish, Executive Minister, is a member ex-officio.

The ongoing support and generosity of The United Church of Canada is invaluable and vital to the organization. Several of the downtown churches provide space for our programs and events to allow for social distancing during the pandemic. During the Christmas season, numerous United Church Men's and Women's groups, Sunday Schools and others provided gifts, financial donations and supplies. Each year, the Mission and Service Fund provides funding to Emmanuel House and Naomi Centre. In addition Stella's Circle continued to be featured in Gifts With Vision in support of Expressive Therapies, in particular the Stella's Circle Inclusion Choir. Thank you. Please visit our web site at www.stellascircle.ca and on social media channels.