



2020 ANNUAL REPORT



GILLIAN'S PLACE
support for women and children who have experienced abuse

EXECUTIVE TEAM

Tanja Loeb

Executive Director

Kristi Lawrence

Director of Shelter Services & Operations

Nicole Regehr

Director of Development & Violence Prevention Programs

Rhonda Sliwa

Director of Finance

Marion Wright

Manager of Legal Services

Amy Stott

Manager of Counselling Services

Graeme Dargavel

Manager of Community Development

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EXECUTIVE LETTER

Unprecedented times. That is how many are describing the widespread effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. While we could never have anticipated the depth and devastation caused by COVID, we continued to take steps towards our organizational goals throughout 2019, to our fiscal year's end of March 31, 2020 – only two weeks after the impacts were having a ripple effect within our own community.

A pillar in our Strategic Plan is “strengthening our core” to deliver an exceptional quality of service, nimble and adaptive to the needs of the organization and the community. We achieve this through continued investment in our team and service provision, which are the underlying strength of our organization and a vital part of many women’s pursuit of a life free from abuse. Prioritizing training in the ever evolving areas of addiction, mental health, trauma-informed care, and cultural competence allows our team to be better equipped for the diverse needs of our clients, and better equipped to handle the effects that a global health crisis has on both an emergency shelter, and women and children confined with their abusers, unable to find safety. Our further investment in expanding our services to respond to the lack of safe and affordable housing for women and children fleeing abuse reflects the adaptability we have set as a standard and come to value highly. These activities have become not only the foundation for some of our greatest achievements, but also from which we have drawn some of our most needed strength.

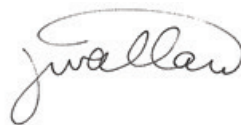
We know that there are many challenging hurdles still to overcome, not only in our community, but worldwide. Here and across the globe, we are seeing that, compared to men, women are disproportionately affected by COVID. Sadly, in our work, we witness these unfair, unjust, and unfathomable ramifications daily. The pandemic resulted in a 55% decrease in women accessing our emergency shelter. This certainly does not speak to the lack of need, but rather the level of abusive control that women are living under wherein they are unable to safely leave and access much-needed protection.

While emergency shelter services saw a decline during this time, our community services noted dramatic increases that highlight the distressing amount of abuse and violence happening within our community. With calls to our crisis line increasing by 50%, and our community service staff responding to up to 62% more requests, we certainly have been navigating a rapidly changing world.

There is no doubt that our work to achieve our objectives in strengthening our core helped ready us for what, at the time, was unknown. We look back on this past year as a year of transitions, during which we were focussed on improving and enhancing. It is only now, looking back, that we can fully appreciate that these transitions toward expanding our services to women and children in our community, had also set the stage for our resilience and readiness to deal with our greatest challenge.

With this in mind, we end our year abundantly grateful to our community, who has stepped up to help us meet every transition, those that were planned and those that were not. Both the federal and provincial governments provided funding for our essential services. Beyond these funds, our network of individual donors, corporate sponsors, and foundation partners not only helped us sustain these services throughout the year, but when the pandemic hit, ensured that we could remain available and that our team and clients stayed safe. In the coming months and years, we know that we will continue to require this support to respond to the demand on our services. But for now, more than ever before, we wish to convey our deepest appreciation.

Thank you. Stay safe and stay healthy.



Jennifer Wallace
Board President



Tanja Loeb
Executive Director



EMERGENCY SHELTER

201
WOMEN



127
CHILDREN

328
LIVED IN OUR SHELTER

COMMUNITY SERVICES

3939
CRISIS
CALLS



620
WOMEN
obtained legal
advice and support

474
WOMEN
attended counselling
appointments

6038
TOTAL SERVED
through our
community services

313
WOMEN
received transitional
housing support

88
CHILDREN
living in the
community were
seen by our Child &
Youth Counsellors for
exposure to abuse

604
WOMEN
received help
from our Domestic
Violence Consultants
at FACS Niagara

We are
responding
to increasing
demand. In the
past two years...

31%
INCREASE
in the number of
crisis calls answered
by our expert
counsellors

35%
INCREASE
in the number of women
living in the community
who attended
counselling sessions

600%
INCREASE
in the number of women
who were referred
out due to capacity
limitations

REFLECTIONS ON TRANSITIONS

These days, it is difficult to remember the start of our 2019-2020 fiscal year – the “old normal”. Today, in the “new normal”, we find ourselves reflecting on and appreciating the important and meaningful facets of our work.

As we reflect and consider the many transitions that have taken place at Gillian’s Place this past year, we have come to realize that change and challenge are woven into the fabric of our identity. Over the past 43 years, we have grown and evolved from an 8-bed, volunteer-run emergency shelter to a multi-site provider of free and confidential services that support women and children fleeing abuse, including a 34-bed shelter. At the heart of each and every transition is the goal to better protect, support, and advocate for women and their children who themselves are in the midst of a life-transforming journey. Our team of professional and dedicated staff and volunteers work tirelessly toward our largest vision for transition of all – a socially just community where all women and children are free from violence and abuse.

It is in this spirit that we are pleased to share with you our 2020 Annual Report, replete with our reflections on *transitions*. Whether it was challenge or opportunity that spurred them, they uncovered the resilience of our community and its people, and have made Gillian’s Place stronger and more focussed to weather one of our most unexpected trials yet, the COVID-19 pandemic.

NOW, MORE THAN EVER,
WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THESE
TRANSITIONS THAT HAVE LED US
TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY.



Merriam-Webster:
Transition
[Noun]

*A movement, development,
or evolution from one form,
stage, or style
to another*



Gabe DeSantis, Homes by DeSantis and Tanja Loeb, Gillian's Place

"We are so grateful to Gabe and his incredible team at Homes by DeSantis, and very excited about this coming to fruition in the future. With limited transportation options in West Niagara, it is difficult for women and children in Grimsby to get to St. Catharines or even Beamsville. It is an added challenge when those who need help often have to search it out in secrecy..."

Tanja Loeb,
Executive Director

TRANSITIONS

Reflections on our work in West Niagara...

We have now celebrated a complete year after having joined with West Niagara Second Stage Housing & Counselling Inc. This past year we enjoyed deepening our community connections and getting to know our genuine and like-minded neighbours. Trinity United Church, Ophardt Hygiene Technologies, Grimsby Superstore, GBF Community Services, Niagara Community Foundation's Grimsby Fund, Community Care West Niagara, Providence Church, and Bench Brewing are just a few amongst many, who have answered our calls. Whether it has been to lend support, assist clients, or allow us to educate and bring awareness about gender-based violence, the West Niagara community has been there for us every step of the way.

Beyond deepening our community connections, we have been committed to enhancing our model of service delivery to ensure we are providing safety and support across the continuum of care. Knowing that women experiencing abuse in rural areas often experience greater isolation and risk, we began hosting community outreach sessions, as well as increasing our public education efforts. Our facility in West Niagara has also seen a transition of its interior, allowing for a more comfortable, warm, and trauma-informed counselling experience.

This year, in partnership with our longstanding supporter, Homes by DeSantis, we were excited to announce a future expansion. Homes by DeSantis has generously donated the entire main floor of their future development of Grimsby's James Willison Grout Nelles House to Gillian's Place. We look forward to this location, which once completed, will help meet the growing demand in West Niagara and will complement our locations in Beamsville and St. Catharines.

TRANSITIONS

Reflections on second stage housing in St. Catharines...

Since taking on West Niagara Second Stage Housing & Counselling, we have come to see first-hand the impact transitional housing has had on women and their children while they rebuild their lives. It was the critical housing crisis in Niagara and the lack of second stage housing in St. Catharines and across Canada that led Gillian's Place to seize another opportunity to transition.

Thanks to generous multi-year grants from the Branscombe Family Foundation, the David S. Howes Fund at the Niagara Community Foundation, the Niagara Prosperity Initiative, and other friends and supporters, we have been able to develop and implement our new and innovative Second Stage Family Program. This program consists of nine new units in St. Catharines and will provide full wrap-around support to women and their children transitioning from our emergency shelter to a life of safety, stability, and self-sufficiency. Now, that is a transition worth being proud of!



Home sweet home for our first family!

TRANSITIONS

Reflections on our community...

Once again, our loyal, as well as new, friends and supporters have joined us to help raise much needed funds and awareness. Whether you supported Gillian's Place by strutting around in pink heels, gathering friends to win designer handbags, purchasing a purple scarf or tie, making a financial gift, donating new and much-needed items, sponsoring or hosting an event in the community, joining our Dream Builder Society, or including Gillian's Place in your estate plans, you have not only directly impacted the lives of those surviving domestic violence, but also reminded our staff and volunteers of our community's embrace. For that, we are truly thankful.

Reflections on corporate support...

This year also saw a long-awaited transition within our programming. While we receive no funding for education or prevention programs at Gillian's Place, more than ever, we see this as a fundamental component of our vision of a socially just community where all women and children are free from violence and abuse. Educating people in the community to understand and identify the signs of abuse, as well as how to safely intervene and/or seek help, is paramount to ending the cycle of violence. PenFinancial Credit Union shares this vision and this past year, generously sponsored a series of educational videos. *Safe Space TV* is a bold and uncompromising look at realities of gender-based violence.



*Ken Janzen, CEO, PenFinancial Credit Union,
Walter Sendzik, Mayor, City of St. Catharines,
and Nicole Regehr, Gillian's Place*

Another example of PenFinancial's impact with Gillian's Place can be seen through their involvement with our *Wrapped in Courage* Campaign. As presenting sponsor, PenFinancial has played an integral role in helping to spread awareness about violence against women during Women Abuse Prevention Month. They also helped raise funds by selling our *Wrapped in Courage* scarves and ties at their locations throughout Niagara. They really mean it when they say "Improving Lives. Strengthening Communities."



To access *Safe Space TV*: gilliansplace.com/safe-space-tv

Reflections on longstanding support...

Alexandria Professional is one of our close and loyal friends. For many years, Lina Kennedy and her amazing team have always been willing to generously support Gillian's Place in any way they can. From monthly financial support, event sponsorship and attendance, to thoughtful gifts-in-kind, they fully embrace our work and vision. When we made the necessary decision, in the spring, to cancel our Gala presented by Alexandria Professional, they generously allowed us to divert their committed funds to a campaign to encourage others to give. As the official Match Sponsor of #GivingTuesdayNow, they helped us raise over \$15,000 in one day and spread the message that for some women and children, home is not a safe place.



Sell out event at our Designer Handbag Bingo

Reflections on a new event...

In June 2019, in partnership with Château des Charmes, our first Designer Handbag Bingo sold out within days. It was incredible to see the support for Gillian's Place through a fun night out in wine country with beautiful handbags! Over 200 supporters came out and helped raise over \$22,000. We cannot wait until we can host this popular event again!



Reflections on community hosted events...

The Grimsby Street Party...

The second annual Grimsby Summer Street Party hosted by Homes by DeSantis raised over \$40,000 for Gillian's Place. Thank you to the West Niagara community for supporting this incredible event. We are truly grateful to have been chosen as a beneficiary.

The Vagina Monologues...

Gillian's Place has had a long history with The Vagina Monologues, having produced sold-out shows in 2003-2005, 2016, and our final production in 2017, directed by Genevieve Jones and stage-managed by Amanda McDonnell. Though we had made the decision that 2017 would be our final production of this incredible show, it was met with great enthusiasm and popularity. But, Genevieve, with her expertise and passion for the production, knew that Niagara wasn't quite ready to say farewell. Last February, Genevieve and Amanda decided to produce and present it in a new way. The new, intimate environment amplified the spirit and nature of the show and both shows sold out, raising over \$3,000 for Gillian's Place!



Nicole Regehr, Genevieve Jones, and Amanda McDonnell

Reflections on legacy giving...

Our Wrapped in Courage Campaign wrapped up with a true legacy. Long-time friend of Gillian's Place, Bonnie Handley, informed us about her decision to include Gillian's Place in her estate plans.

"I became interested in Gillian's Place after a friend and co-workers' mom was murdered by her ex-husband in 2016. I began joining her at Gillian's Place events such as Walk for Women, Pancake Breakfast, Walk a Mile in HER Shoes with Judy's Gentlemen, and the Breakfast to End Violence Against Women. I listened to my friend tell her story of her mom and their life with a monster. It was there I found my understanding for what Gillian's Place was all about.

After many events and listening to so many women speak of tragedy in their lives, as many are unable to, I began to understand how much physical and mental abuse there was in the world we live in. I decided I needed to do more to help. I have since put Gillian's Place as my beneficiary of my life insurance policy, realizing my money could be used helping women and their children escape their abusers."

To learn more about including Gillian's Place in your estate plans, visit: gilliansplace.com/make-a-planned-gift or call Graeme at 905.684.4000 ext. 254



Our volunteers...



OVER
40

VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTED

OVER
510

HOURS OF SERVICE



IN THE AREAS OF...



CHILD & YOUTH
PROGRAMS



GARDENS



ADMINISTRATION



FOOD
SERVICE



TRANSITIONAL
HOUSING



EVENTS

To learn more about volunteering at Gillian's Place, visit:
gilliansplace.com/volunteer or call Bev at 905.684.4000 ext. 233

TRANSITIONS

Reflections on COVID-19...

When Ontario, Canada, and the rest of the world, “shut down” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our team at Gillian’s Place was faced once again with an unexpected transition and challenge. As everyone knows, COVID-19 has led to profound upset and upheaval, as well as devastating loss across the globe. Individuals, families, organizations, and entire communities have had to rapidly adapt and protect themselves in response to the novel coronavirus.

As we soon learned, however, COVID-19 exposed a pandemic within a pandemic. Albeit, one that did not surface just this past year. Violence against women has been a public health concern that for far too long has unjustly and unfairly gone ignored. But, as the pandemic began to quickly spotlight women and children experiencing abuse, Gillian’s Place, along with shelters across Ontario, were thankful that the provincial government deemed our sector an essential service. For that, we are thankful.

Why are we thankful? Now, more than ever before, women and their children will need our support. We know that the social, economic, and health pressures from COVID-19 have greatly exacerbated domestic violence. We have learned that, for women and children living with abuse, the shut down bred further isolation, and reaching out for help became very difficult. But now, as public health measures are beginning to lift, we have started to see examples of the increased scale, scope, and severity of violence and abuse. Sadly, this includes domestic homicide.

Gillian’s Place is committed to being there for women and children who are breaking the cycle of violence and abuse. Our team is here, our shelter is safe and open, our expert counsellors are available 24/7 by phone or text through our crisis support line, and all our free and confidential services are fully operational.

The reflections in this report are only a few of the ways Gillian’s Place has transitioned to be able to competently and rapidly to meet the challenges caused by COVID-19. Before the pandemic took over, we had begun to invest in our own infrastructure and capacity. Upgrades with our IT environments and platforms, client data software, and portable workstations made it easier for our staff to work remotely. Staff working remotely allowed us to promote and enact safe, physical distancing for staff and clients working and living in our shelter. We also expanded our training and development for our highly skilled counsellors, all of whom completed enhanced danger assessment and harm reduction training, training for technology safety, and training to strengthen their counselling skills with the esteemed Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute. The introduction of our employee wellness program this past year has played an instrumental role in unifying our team and raising everyone up during the dark and hard days.



TRANSITIONS

Reflections on our clients...

The transitions at Gillian's Place do not compare to the tremendous transitions we see everyday and we would be remiss if we did not share stories of impact. Brave women and their children leaving everything behind, rebuilding their lives void of violence and abuse, are truly at the heart of every transition at Gillian's Place.

Aisha's Story...

This past January, escaping her abusive husband, Aisha came to our doors with her eight-year-old son.

For years, Aisha and her kids experienced both mental and physical abuse from her husband. Soon after they married, her husband's aggression and alcoholism radically increased. Relentless, hurtful, and controlling verbal assaults were accompanied by traumatic, violent, and physical attacks. With Aisha's daughter away at school, Aisha and her son were experiencing rampant abuse.

Aisha's son, who lives with a disability, started to experience severe anxiety and episodes of night terrors. Aisha was always trying to make sure everything went "perfect", so as not to allow anything to trigger her husband's rage.

One day, a family member reached out and implored her to leave – knowing the terror she was living with. With Aisha scared if her husband discovered her leaving, it was her family who contacted Family and Children Services, who then referred Aisha and her son to Gillian's Place.

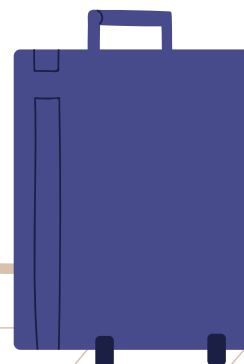
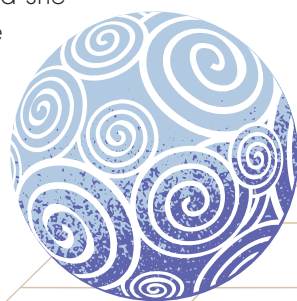
Leaving in the middle of the day, while her husband was at work, Aisha and her son arrived at Gillian's Place. As soon as they came through our doors, Aisha knew she had made the right decision. She could finally breathe. While she still felt scared, our secure walls and supportive counsellors helped her and her son feel safe.

Almost instantly, Aisha's son started sleeping better. He started playing with the other kids and "fell in love" with our Child and Youth Counsellor. Aisha confirmed she had made the right decision when one day she walked in on a Child and Youth Program and her son, despite his disability, was dancing and laughing. In this moment, Aisha felt pure joy and couldn't hold back tears and laughter.

Aisha and her son were accepted amongst our first clients in our new Second Stage Family Program. Her son was "most excited" to have a new apartment and a room to fill with toys.

Aisha said she had "shelter shock" and was excited, anxious, and nervous. She was moving from a shelter where she was safe with day-to-day essentials taken care of, to a new apartment and having to deal with the unknown "virus-ridden" world outside, as well as fear of retribution from her ex-husband.

With help and support from our Second Stage Family Counsellor, Aisha and her son have successfully moved on from our shelter and have decorated their new apartment. Both feel safe and supported by Gillian's Place everyday. For the first time in many years, Aisha was looking forward to taking her son out of town to visit her daughter and her parents. She was going to visit the market and make them a special meal. The smile on Aisha's face was more than enough thanks for us!





Kelly's Story...

Kelly had experienced abuse for many years. However, being pregnant seemed to bring on an entirely new and unknown level of control and manipulation. Her partner made it clear to her that he had no interest in raising a baby, that he would not allow an abortion, and that he wanted the baby to be put up for adoption. He continuously and violently threatened her every time she mentioned wanting to keep the baby. When Kelly was in labour, she told the nurses about her controlling husband and her desire to keep the baby. They contacted Gillian's Place and five days after delivering her baby girl, Gracie, they arrived at our doorstep.

Kelly couldn't articulate how she felt – much of it was a blur. Giving birth was already a life-altering experience, but Kelly was also in the midst of crisis, fleeing abuse, and alone. When she arrived at Gillian's Place, a nursery was already set up for her newborn. She started to feel less scared. Soon after, a feeling of comfort and relief set in. Kelly had used our counselling services before, but this time was so different. She had a greater responsibility

now and that was to protect and provide for Gracie. She described everyone at Gillian's Place as supportive, amazing, and loving. They went above and beyond and made her feel safe and secure.

Kelly and her now five-month-old Gracie were also amongst the first clients accepted into the Second Stage Family Program. For Kelly, this was a time that was met with both excitement and anxiety. She was looking forward to moving into a brand new apartment and beginning a more independent life for Gracie and her. At the same time, she feared that her former partner would find her and Gracie, and she was also nervous about coping with COVID-19, while caring for her five-month-old. The wrap-around support she received meant everything to Kelly. She still feels connected to Gillian's Place, while forging ahead with independence and stability. She realizes there have been ups and downs, but for the first time in a long time she sees the path to a safe and positive future for both herself and her daughter.



Desiree's Story...

Desiree had experienced months of verbal abuse that led to a violent attack from her girlfriend. For her, this was the final straw, especially since this assault happened in front of her six-year-old son, Kyle. Knowing she could not stay, but not knowing where to go, she turned to her neighbour for help. Her neighbour, who had heard many altercations, suggested Gillian's Place. A month before Christmas, Desiree and Kyle came to Gillian's Place, both terrified of the unknown, but relieved to have a fresh start. Kyle soon became friends with other children staying in the shelter while participating in the Child and Youth Programs. Meanwhile, Desiree began to talk to our counsellors – on her terms and as she was ready. For Desiree, Gillian's Place was everything she did not expect. She envisioned what you would think of from a "shelter" – one big room with rows of beds. She did not think she

would have her own bedroom and bathroom. She never would have expected that she and her son would experience the joys of the holidays like they did. Traditional holiday dinner, a visit from our local firefighters, and so many thoughtful gifts made this holiday season one to remember.

Her biggest surprise of all, like both Aisha and Kelly, was that she and her son would be accepted into the Second Stage Family Program. Just two months after moving in, Desiree and Kyle are thriving. Again, with the support of Gillian's Place and our Second Stage Family Counsellor, Desiree is looking to gain meaningful employment and her son is loving exploring downtown and looking forward to starting school again in September.

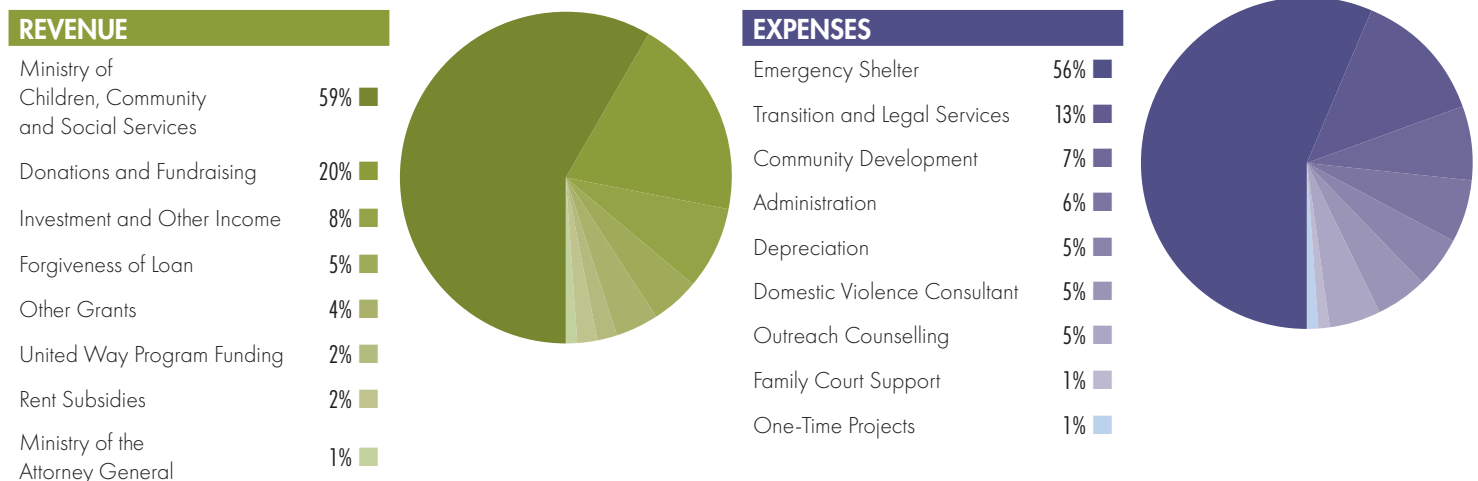


GILLIAN'S PLACE STATEMENT OF REVENUE AND EXPENSES

For the year ending March 31, 2020

	2020	2019	2018
REVENUE			
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services	\$ 1,664,294	\$ 1,692,153	\$ 1,565,495
Donations and Fundraising	566,492	571,834	430,995
Ministry of the Attorney General	32,500	32,500	32,500
United Way Program Funding	48,552	48,552	–
Rent Subsidies	60,335	57,050	–
Other Grants	104,952	15,618	89,416
Investment and Other Income	219,791	111,400	144,396
Forgiveness of Loan	138,162	138,162	138,162
	2,835,078	2,667,269	2,400,964

EXPENSES			
Emergency Shelter	1,525,320	1,397,438	1,274,043
Outreach Counselling	150,466	159,873	73,971
Transition and Legal Services	363,106	311,527	171,612
Domestic Violence Consultant	145,662	128,588	144,682
Family Court Support	32,500	32,500	32,930
One-Time Projects	33,241	111,298	239,624
Community Development	193,777	154,510	103,089
Administration	171,661	204,335	223,137
Depreciation	124,850	132,977	137,231
	2,740,583	2,633,046	2,400,319
Surplus (Deficit)	\$94,495	\$34,223	\$645
as per p.5 of Audited Statements			



A copy of the Audited Financial Statements are available upon request

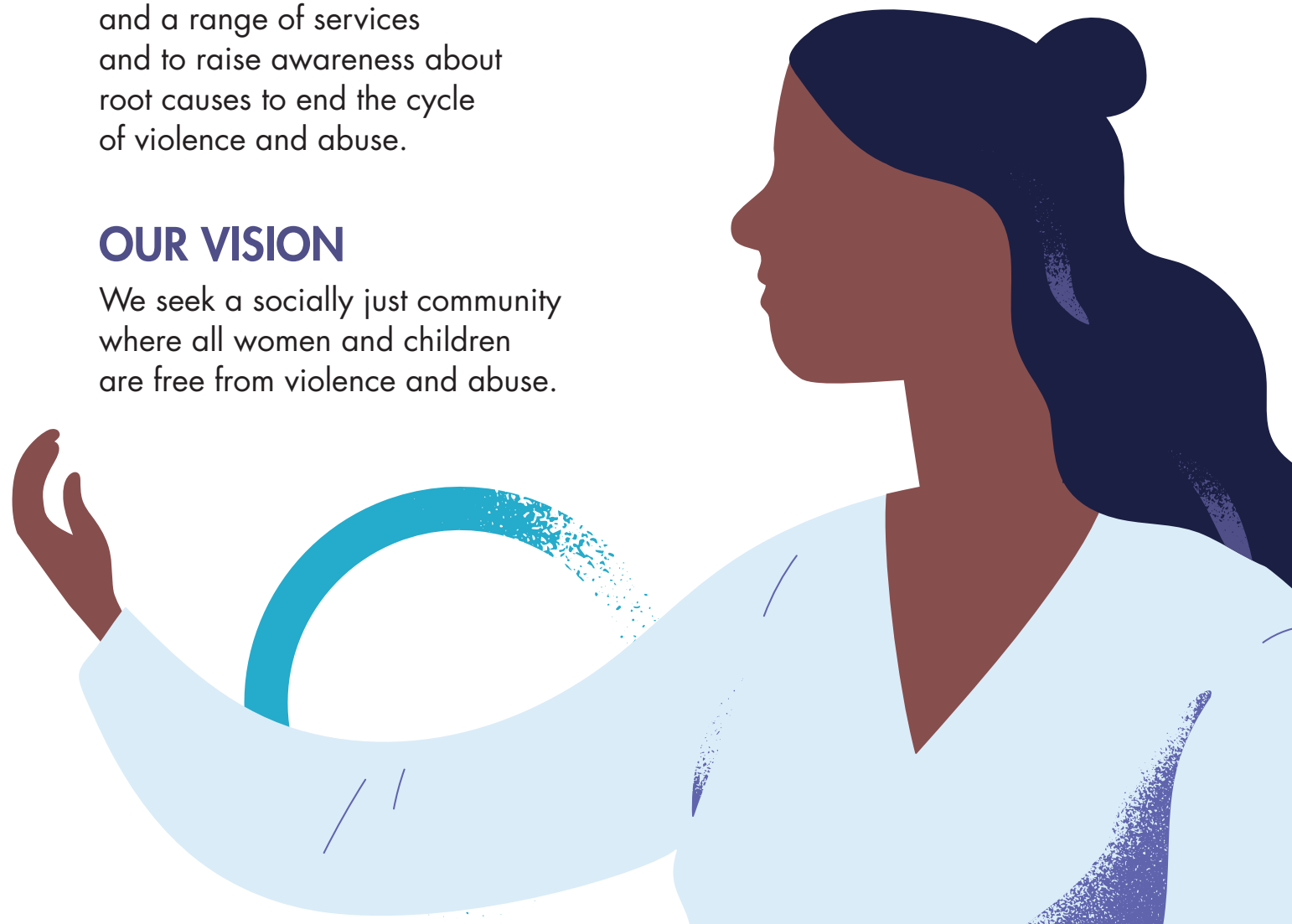


OUR MISSION

To empower women and their children fleeing abuse by providing safety, support, and a range of services and to raise awareness about root causes to end the cycle of violence and abuse.

OUR VISION

We seek a socially just community where all women and children are free from violence and abuse.



GILLIAN'S PLACE
support for women and children who have experienced abuse

24-HR Support Line: 905.684.8331

Business Line: 905.684.4000

Mailing Address:

PO Box 1387

St. Catharines, Ontario, L2R 7J8

gilliansplace.com