

# BCSTH Bursary Fund Program: Evaluation Highlights

BC Society of Transition Houses | September 2024

I would like to thank you for granting me the bursary. It changed my life ... I hope that you will continue to help more women like me to build their lives again and be a stronger person. – Bursary Recipient

## BCSTH Bursary Fund

**The BCSTH Bursary Fund (BBF)** provides one-time grants to empower women who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV) to achieve financial independence through education and employment opportunities. Funds support women to break free from violence by helping them overcome adversity and pursue their dreams with choice, dignity and hope.

**Finances are a huge reason why a lot of women stay with their abusers because they can't afford to live on their own, but funds like [the BBF] really help empower them and allow them to live away from their abusers.**

- Anti-Violence Worker



## Why Flexible Funding is Vital

Financial independence is the largest barrier for women and their children leaving violent and abusive relationships. The worsening housing crisis in BC means that many women and their children fleeing violence have nowhere to go when leaving a Transition House. They are forced to choose between homelessness or returning to their abusive partners. Flexible funding is becoming an increasingly common strategy for economic empowerment among survivors that can enhance safety and economic and housing stability.

Flexible funding is a financial support to help survivors achieve independence after violence. Funds can be used in a variety of ways to meet the unique needs of survivors, are quick and easy to access, do not require survivors to provide evidence of abuse or their financial situation, and do not need to be repaid.

In BC, it is estimated that only 25% of women departing Transition Houses find housing. For most this is precarious housing, with just 4% leaving for safe, affordable permanent housing<sup>1</sup>. 75% remain temporarily sheltered or return to their abuser. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 89 survivors in BC became homeless upon leaving transition housing programs, and a further 293 returned to living with their abuser<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> BCSTH (2020) *Finding a home after violence: a road map of the barriers to safe, secure and affordable housing in British Columbia*.

<sup>2</sup> Fagan, E. (2023) *Hundreds of Women Have Nowhere to Go After Transitional Housing*. The Tyee.

# The Difference Flexible Funding Can Make

Drawing on a literature review and surveys and interviews with bursary recipients and anti-violence workers, a 2023 [evaluation of the BBF Program](#) identified the following impacts of flexible funding for survivors:

The literature evidenced the ability of flexible funding to stabilize housing, prevent homelessness, reduce abuse, and improve mental health, well-being and safety for survivors and their children. Flexibility of the funds was crucial to meet the unique needs of survivors and even small amounts made a big difference.



## Impacts for BBF Recipients

**100% of bursary recipients said the BBF helped to support their financial independence.**

Receiving the BBF was an empowering experience that led to **improved wellbeing, improved financial stability and independence, enhanced confidence and self worth, improved safety** and gave recipients **hope for the future.**

“It’s about **HOPE**. It’s about finding a purpose in life. Getting a step ahead. Because when you’re being abused it’s all you can see, it’s all that there is. It’s not even a thought to be outside that world because it’s not possible. It’s like this is my world. Of abuse. That’s my whole world. And then there was this little piece, and getting that little piece was just everything.” – Bursary Recipient

The bursary was described as a **door opener** and a **significant start** that **helped women to keep going.**

“I was halfway through my college education and I ended up in a shelter. That money came at a time where I was actually gonna give up. I ended up getting \$3,000. I thought, ‘you know what, you guys believe in me, so I can’t quit’. That was a good boost for morale.” – Bursary Recipient

Those who were mothers reported **improved relationships with their children.**

“And the nice thing was that the kids saw that. It’s like ‘Good for you Mom, I know you’ve really struggled through this. Good for you for doing this.’ The lies that they’ve been told about me, they’re just like ‘You know what? Maybe not.’” – Bursary Recipient

## Impacts for Anti-Violence Workers

Anti-violence workers said that supporting women to successfully apply for the bursary was a rewarding, satisfying and empowering experience that boosted their morale, provided them with a sense of relief, gave them hope for the women and helped to strengthen rapport.

**“In a world of so much darkness, it is that hope. For me, for my own mental health, the excitement of... this financial, practical, tangible thing that isn't just sitting in an office saying, 'okay well, now go to all these different pathways where some people say, 'no, not the right door'. You're actually really helping and that is such a feel-good.”**

– Anti-Violence Worker

100% of workers we spoke to said the BBF Program gave them hope for the women they supported, made them feel like they were making a real difference in the lives of these women, and enhanced their overall job satisfaction.



## Challenges & Barriers

Despite the positive impacts of receiving a bursary for women and their children, many continued to face challenges while pursuing their education and employment goals. These included meeting additional costs beyond what the bursary covered, dealing with ongoing impacts of abuse including physical impacts, PTSD symptoms, ongoing child support and custody battles or being unable to return to their previous employment for safety reasons. Those who were single moms had competing responsibilities that often prolonged the process of reaching their goals.

**“Okay, you got the money to study something, but now you need to spend money to pay someone to look after your children. So, for me that was a big challenge, to be honest.”**

– Bursary Recipient

## Recommendations

A key recommendation from the evaluation was to maximise and grow funding for the program so it can be promoted more widely and reach more women and their children fleeing violence in BC. Currently, the number of women organizations can nominate for a bursary is limited, purely due to restricted funds. This limit was set the year the program launched (2019) as 29 women had to be turned down because of lack of funds.

## Conclusion

Almost all of the women who participated in the evaluation explained that when they received the bursary they were in a position where they had lost everything, were at their lowest and were starting from scratch to rebuild their lives. Receiving the bursary was a signal that someone believed in them and motivated them to keep going and not give up.

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**“Cash transfers provide choice, control and purchasing power at a critical time in people’s lives. This is not merely a gesture of help, it is a signal that society believes in them.”**

- Foundations for Social Change, 2023

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The need for flexible funding to support survivors has been identified by multiple sources in Canada, including the Federal Government’s National Action Plan to End GBV, yet support remains limited and piecemeal. Increased investment in this approach is needed to be able to offer an effective, dignified and empowering pathway out of violence for more survivors and their children. Learn more about the BBF Program [here](#).



BC Society of  
Transition Houses

