

2020

ANNUAL REPORT



Debra Parkes, President

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As Board President, I'm pleased to present Rise Women's Legal Centre's 2020 Annual Report.

When I think back to the start of 2020, I remember how we thought that moving offices would be our big news for the year! That was in the Before Times, before the COVID-19 pandemic swept through the year, driving changes throughout the legal sector along with the rest of the world.

On one hand, the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated gender-based violence. For many women, home is not a safe place to be. On the other hand, the pandemic has created opportunities for immediate advances to the status quo through the use of technology in spaces like the court system, which once seemed impermeable to change.

Since moving operations online, Rise has never been busier. Women continue to access services through our student clinic, and from our articling student and incubator lawyers. Our Virtual Legal Clinic has grown exponentially, and has provided support to other organisations that were making the transition from in-person to online services for the first time. Changes to the court system mean that in the future we may be able to help more women around the province with virtual appearances, and create the possibility of processes that provide greater to safety to women who are afraid to be in the same room as their abusers.

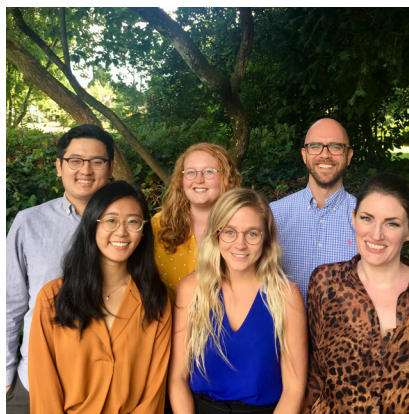
Further, this summer saw the first new law firm established through Rise's Incubator Project 'leave the nest', as Thakur MacNeill moved out of Rise's premises to set up an independent office nearby. Rise is looking forward to hosting our brand new incubator firm, Linden Law, over the next year, and seeing the number of family law firms in our community grow and thrive.

Finally, the global pandemic has thrown inequalities in our society into harsh relief, and has recommitted us to undertake the organizational work necessary to be more inclusive. As an organisation, Rise has been led predominantly by settlers, and our board and staff have ongoing work to do to decolonise our practices and procedures, and to build a culture that is both inclusive of diverse needs and viewpoints, and responsive to our community. We know that there will be many opportunities to learn as we start the next phase of our journey in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, and we look forward to the new relationships this will bring.

Thank you to all of the supporters who make Rise possible.



Spring 2020



Fall 2019



Summer 2020



Lost Lagoon, courtesy Chantal C. Michaud

TEAM

- Kim Hawkins**
Executive Director
- Vandana Sood**
Supervising Lawyer
- Sheila Schierbeck**
Communications & Development Manager
- Andrea Bryson**
Case Manager
- Vicky Law**
Lawyer, Virtual Legal Clinic
- Taruna Agrawal**
Lawyer, Family Advocates Support Line
- Haley Hrymak**
Lawyer, Research & Community Outreach
- Ayesha Ali**
Office Manager
- Lucie Krajca**
Lawyer, Incubator Program
- Juliana Pyde**
Articled Student
- Kala Bryson**
Senior Program Assistant
- Khristelle Hizon**
Intake & Client Care Assistant
- Nargis Rezaie**
Administrative Assistant

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Miryam Burns | Isabelle Groc |
| Carmen Contreras | Aurelia Kinslow |
| Marilyn Diaz | Jannah Kohlman |
| Marie Dussault | Linda Kong |
| Tanya Evans | Carolyn Major |
| Amy Fitzgerald | Candice Minnaar |
| Permindar Flora | Maria Socorro Nguyen |
| Andrea Glen | Francis Rosner |
| France-Emmanuelle Joly | Heather Wojcik |

VOLUNTEERS

- Rosa Arteaga
- Amanda Aziz
- Patricia Barkaskas
- Karin Blok
- Sonmin Bong
- John-Paul Boyd
- Susan Burak
- Sylvia Caberio
- Louisa Chantler
- Alison Clancey
- Steve Coventry
- Reneet Dhillon
- Kailla Dotten
- Megan R. Ellis QC
- Aftab Erfan
- Jacqueline Forster
- Lindsay Frame
- Jaskiran Ghakal
- The Hon. Kirsti Gill
- Patrick Grayer
- Nikos Harris
- Magal Huberman
- Dalya Israel
- Zahra Jimale
- Darlene Johnston
- Ranjeet Kanda
- Ahmed Khadija
- Victor Liang
- Rhona Lichtenwald
- Daniel MacNeill
- Parker Maris
- Dinyar Marzban QC
- Brianna McCann
- Hatden McGuire
- The Hon. Master Leslie Muir
- Julia Pinnock
- Kerry Porth
- Amber Prince
- Amanda Richards
- Monique Shebbeare
- Jamie Shorter
- Adrienne Smith
- Andrea Stevenson
- Zara Suleman
- Tanya Thakur
- Alix Tolliday
- Lisette Torres
- Laura Track
- James Upton
- Dr Allan Wade
- Diana Wang
- Bob Whitbread
- Lena White
- Sandra Wolfe
- Julie Wong
- Olivia Yin

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Debra Parkes**
President
- Kaila Mikkelson**
Vice President
- Patricia Kostuk**
Treasurer
- The Hon. Risa Levine**
Director
- The Hon. Donna Martinson**
Director
- Clea Parfitt**
Director
- Carly Teillet**
Director
- Elba Bendo**
Director
- Shahnaz Rahman**
Director
- Jeanne Robert**
Director
- Eva Ureta**
Director

FUND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

- The Hon. Risa Levine
- Meg Clarke
- Morag MacLeod QC
- J. Scott Stanley
- Scott Booth
- Jasmine Nielsen

with special assistance from
Jonathan O. Johnson
Jessica Lester
Zoe Si

Diver's Rock, Lund BC
courtesy Wendy Featherling

THE INCUBATOR PROJECT

This September, my law partner [Tanya Thakur](#) and I had the pleasure of watching our colleague [Lucie Krajca](#)'s call ceremony. Lucie is Rise's incoming incubator lawyer, which means we, as the outgoing (and first ever) incubator lawyers, are exiting the program. While we're sad to leave, we're excited to watch Lucie grow under the incredible guidance and mentorship that we enjoyed over the last year. Lucie's call has provided us an opportunity to reflect over all we've accomplished with the support of the Rise community.

Tanya and I started our firm, Thakur MacNeill LLP, last September. At the time, we had zero clients and zero experience running a practice. The support Rise provided us should not be understated. Rise provided office space, supplies, and funding for various operating expenses, giving us the time we needed to build our business. Without this assistance, we would not have been able to get off the ground.

Far more valuable, though, was the knowledge and support imparted to us from all the Rise staff. Starting a law firm is a daunting task, and one which our law school training had not prepared us for in the slightest. The Rise lawyers led us through the basics of running a law practice – from trust accounting, to obtaining a business license, to finding and retaining clients. With Rise's help, we were able to successfully launch our firm in a matter of weeks.

With the operational hurdles out of the way, Tanya and I set out to provide cost-effective legal services to those in need. Our clientele was (and still is) predominantly women fleeing violent and high-conflict partners, who cannot afford legal services at standard rates. Rise has been instrumental in seeking out and connecting us with clients who would most benefit from our services. Today, we have approximately 45 active files, thanks in large part to direct referrals from Rise, and connections we made through Rise's vast network of lawyers, social workers, and advocates.



Daniel MacNeill, Vicky Law, Lucie Krajca, Tanya Thakur



Tanya Thakur, Daniel MacNeill

We leaned heavily on Rise to help manage both difficult legal questions and the stress that is inherent to our line of work. Family law can be emotionally exhausting, particularly when there are violence concerns. Rise was with us every step of the way, providing structured check-ins to review our progress, and a communal atmosphere where we always felt comfortable seeking help; I know that on more than one occasion I called a Rise lawyer on the 'eve of trial' with last minute questions, and was beyond grateful for the assistance.

As freshly called lawyers, this sort of guidance is invaluable. There are certain intricacies of courtroom procedure that are just not written down anywhere, and can only be learned through experience. More importantly, we always knew there was someone in our corner to help if needed, which was a great reassurance as we conducted hearings for the first time on our own. Working with Rise provided us with the encouragement and confidence to work things out for ourselves, be courageous, and trust our instincts. While transitioning out of the incubator program is challenging, the knowledge and confidence we acquired at Rise is serving us well.

Thanks in large part to Rise's help, we are incredibly proud of the work we were able to accomplish to date. We have appeared in court on many occasions, including four protection order applications, contested provincial court hearings, numerous settlement and pre-trial conferences, a contested chambers application, and a two-day hearing last August. We have two three-day trials scheduled for the end of the year. We have negotiated, drafted, and executed complex separation agreements, and we have helped many of our clients navigate hostile opposing parties and difficult legal situations. Rise has provided us ongoing feedback throughout, not only supporting us, but grounding our practice by emphasizing the importance of providing violence-sensitive legal services to the underserved.

One year after starting, we have established Thakur MacNeill LLP as a fully-fledged law firm which we are proud to call our own. We are optimistic for our firm's future as we continue to develop our skills and serve our clients. We are endlessly indebted to Rise for giving us our start, and we expect we will give back to Rise in the years to come by providing assistance to its student clinicians, articulated students, and incubator lawyers. We express our deepest gratitude to the Rise community for allowing us to follow our dreams and do what we could not do without their help. And finally, we wish all the best to Lucie, and the future incubator lawyers. We are certain they will excel and become exceptional members of the legal community, as we strive to be.

– Daniel MacNeill

COVID-19 & RISE: STORIES FROM THE FRONT

ANDREA

I remember leaving work on Friday March 13th, with my to-do list sitting on my recently-settled desk. Things around the world were weird, but surely we would have time to transition to whatever came next.

I talked with Kim on Sunday night, the 15th, and realized that I wasn't sure when I would be in the office next. By Tuesday, it seemed ridiculous that I had thought I would come to the office that week at all. The rest of that whole week was spent setting up a home office., as the client calls almost stopped coming – normally at intake we have an average of 5 to 8 women each day asking for help with their legal matter; I don't even think we spoke to 5 women that whole week. Most women's legal matters took a back seat to more pressing issues like avoiding this new virus.

I didn't stop though, as there were so many other organizations who were just learning how to have complex conversations by phone, how to use Zoom safely, how to do very practical things like filling out forms remotely. I had to contact all the resources that we refer clients to, ensuring they were still offering services and what those services now looked like. Suddenly it seemed that instead of supporting clients I was supporting the workers.

And then I realized that the calm of the phones not ringing from clients is just like the water being drawn out from the bay before the tsunami. As the new normal set in, our intake was the busiest it had ever been. Normally we have a client or two each day who needs to reschedule, which frees up time, but suddenly we had no attrition and so many women were in distress, with urgent family matters, and some where their lives, or the lives of their children, were on the line. I often say that I am a bit of an air traffic controller for women navigating the available legal resources; I ensure they safely go from one place to another, understanding the conditions and ensuring that they have all they need to land safely at their next destination. By the end of April I felt more like a battlefield medic, just trying to get women the help they need to stay alive and get to safety.

But, as summer came, the most amazing part of intake as been watching the women manage, and seeing firsthand how resilient women are. Clients would apologize for being late or disorganized and I would crack a joke about the 'corona-coaster'-- everyone is late and everyone is disorganized. We would laugh together with a shared understanding that life is still happening, but Rise is here and we're going to get through this together. It is just like we have always done.



LUCIE

It's March 12, 2020. I am officially in the final third of my articles at Rise. I'm busy preparing for a JCC and on my list of things to accomplish before the end of my articles are a number of Chambers applications and a trial continuance. At the staff meeting that morning, a colleague tells us about the new concept of social distancing. The idea that we should put distance between each other to slow the spread of a virus that is sneaking its way through the world. Another coworker sits next to me, and I move over to make space, feeling the sudden need to clarify, "I'm just moving to make space" – conscious of ensuring she knows I'm not moving out of some fear of her. Little did we know how much our world would quickly change. In just a few short days, the whole nation went remote and was tuning into daily briefings and stocking up on toilet paper.

Remarkably, the Rise team adjusted seamlessly. Overnight we went from working in our new office to working from make-shift home spaces, setting up desks and bookshelves, and clearing our background of clutter so it was fit for Zoom meetings with colleagues and clients. We went from not having enough meeting space to worrying about safety and privacy of online meeting platforms. While keeping up with all the changes to court processes and finding solutions to help our clients, one couldn't help but feel the impact of the isolation and technological barriers. Instead of Chambers Applications and a trial, I felt the devastating effect of telling clients that their matter did not quite rise to meet the threshold of 'urgent' and thus would have to be put on hold for an uncertain duration. While continuing to help clients with negotiations, urgent matters, and meeting new challenges – such as family violence being ignited in this scary time – Zoom became my daily companion.

Forward to six months later, I have finished my articles and PLTC. On September 8, 2020, I was called to the Bar. Now, still in this pandemic, I embark on the journey of starting a practice and beginning the Incubator Program at Rise. As we all live under this uncertainty I know one thing: I can't think of a better team to be in this with, and am grateful to be working as a lawyer in this time.



AYESHA

At the beginning of March, when COVID-19 was becoming increasingly concerning, Kim and I began planning in case we needed to move Rise's staff and services off-site. Fortunately, Rise was very well-equipped for going remote and everything went well when we officially closed our in-person operations mid-March. I worked with our IT team to update our current remote network access, as the program we were previously using had a few glitches and was not ideal for full-time work at home. While there were a few technical issues the first

few weeks of quarantine, everyone is using the new system successfully now.

It was difficult at first because I was the main point of contact for staff and students for any issues that came forward and I often didn't have the answers to a lot of the questions because everything was quite new.

As we were only a few months into occupying our new office space when quarantine began, there were a lot of pending tasks that needed to be tabled because the space was no longer being used. Now that some of us are back to the office, things are slowly getting back to normal and office tasks are finally getting completed. Orientation will continue to be remote for the near future but we have started allowing client meetings, again as the office is all set up with plexi-glass barriers now. Things are looking more normal and I'm grateful for everyone at Rise for their constant support, as it's made working remote these past few months seamless!



Raji Mangat (centre) teaches a seminar on the lawn at UBC

VANDANA

On Thursday March 12, 2020, Kim and I were teaching the weekly seminar. The topic was "Cultural Humility" with a focus on anti-racism. We were seated together in our bright and airy boardroom in our new-ish office downtown on Richards Street. We had just moved from our former Broadway location. The office was a bustling place to work once everyone was set up!

During 'Rounds' (weekly round-table with instructors and students) we discussed this new virus, and were recommending hygienic protocols from public health officials like regular handwashing, and avoiding unnecessary exposure to others – 'socially distancing'. We encouraged the students to work from home and to conduct client interviews by phone. On Friday March 13, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization and UBC, and Rise, transitioned to fully online classes for the remainder of the semester (and since).

I worked over that weekend to prepare the entire student clinic for remote operations, as well as transitioning my husband and myself to working from home. I went into the office on March 16 and 17 to grab materials, and the office was nearly empty – it felt so different from the weeks before. It was cavernous and echoing. I went home and contemplated how I was going to keep our 6 students mentally well, motivated and moving forward on client files with all of us working from our individual homes.

I started a daily Zoom 'check-in' and told students they should check in every day for at least the first 10 minutes. We talked about feeling isolated, not wanting to go outside, and worrying about productivity. Most students stayed on the calls for the entire call, often up to an hour. I reassured the students that productivity was going to be low right now because everyone in the world (!) was grappling with fear and anxiety and this was going to take up a lot of our energy.

I heard from the students that the daily check-ins were extremely valuable because it gave them a touchstone every day where they knew they would talk to and see their classmates and supervising lawyers, and that it made them feel less isolated and less alone. What I observed is the students demonstrating leadership and initiative in adapting clinic procedures to virtual work, keeping on top of COVID-19 court notices and changes in court protocols, and communicating this to their clients. The students were resilient and helped their clients who were similarly struggling with isolation and family law issues, such as how to exchange children with the other parent, in the midst of a global pandemic.

This summer, our new cohort began the term entirely remotely. Most students came into the office about one day a week, per our reduced capacity COVID-19 office schedule. We ended the term with our final seminar held sitting in the grass on the UBC campus, on a beautiful sunny day. Two of the students brought their dogs along.

And here we are now in Fall 2020. Our Spring cohort did not get the chance to represent their clients in person, but our Fall students will have the opportunity to do so in November, for two Provincial Court hearings which were delayed in the Spring. We are continually adapting and improving clinic procedures and will continue to do so. Aren't I lucky to have such a wonderful job



Vicky's home office garden

VICKY

Rise recognized that the pandemic would create additional obstacles for women to meaningfully access legal services and resources. Many client-focused services were no longer providing in-person assistance, our office included. In order to meet the need, we quickly created policies to use videoconferencing safely with our existing Rise clients, and our office continued to provide services through telephone and email to ensure that our clients were apprised of the status of their legal matter.

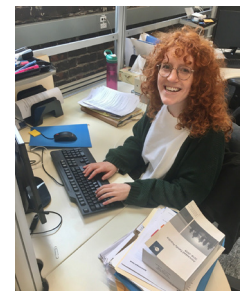
Rise was able to transition so quickly because our Virtual Legal Clinic (VLC) was already well-established and we're used to connecting lawyers and clients using videoconferencing platforms and other technology. Due to this experience, Rise was asked to consult with other non-profit legal organizations in BC and Ontario with transitioning their in-person services to virtual. We worked with multiple organizations and discussed the safety measures and Law Society rules in using technology to provide services remotely.

The VLC also reached out to community organizations across the province to increase our partnerships, and we now have 46 community partners connected by the Virtual Legal Clinic. We meet twice a month with our community partners to give them updates about our programs and those from the courts. We also provide a short community learning session where our case manager, Andrea, shares tips and tricks for frontline advocacy.

Rise participates in the BC Provincial Court Family Law Working Group, exploring ways to make the courts more accessible during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has proved to be very beneficial as we're able to provide quick updates to our community partners, and also bring concerns from our community partners to the working group.



First court appearance.



A rare office visit

TARUNA

As Rise's Family Advocates Support Line (FASL) lawyer I have hosted a great deal of online training prior to COVID, so the transition to completely online, whilst isolating, was not difficult.

We developed and delivered training for advocates and other support workers in BC on various areas of law including family and immigration, as well as specific training about changes in court rules and procedures during this unprecedented time. We also continued the monthly meetings and training for family law advocates and support workers, funded by the Law Foundation of BC, so that they may better assist their clients during this period.

I supervised a virtual appearance for our articling student, Lucie, and worked with Rise's incubator lawyers to help them overcome the challenges of practising at such a difficult time.

We did more outreach by contacting more than 50 non-profit organizations around BC to inform them about FASL and the services Rise offers. This allowed me to connect and have telephone conversations with various workers around the province.

As we reach the end of the year, I will provide training for BC Society of Transition Houses, deliver presentations at the training conference, and complete back-end work for the Law Foundation of BC, to assist with their upcoming trainings in October.



HALEY

As Rise transitioned to working from home, we all watched as the world became an even more dangerous place for women experiencing violence. At the start of the pandemic I was working full time on Rise's research on family violence in BC. Our research found that BC's family court system not only frequently fails to protect women, but in many cases exacerbates the dangers that survivors face. The family court system is not designed to recognize the pervasiveness of family violence, nor to meaningfully assess and respond to the risks of future violence. Writing our findings amidst the backdrop of the global pandemic spurred numerous meetings amongst Rise staff about the impact COVID-19 can have on women's safety, and the work Rise can do to assist.

In the spring of 2020, I started as Rise's Research & Community Outreach lawyer. I design current and future research projects with community organizations, and women with lived experiences of violence. COVID-19 has been a catalyst for increasing the use of technology in court processes, and we hope to study how the changes impact women, and identify any gaps that potentially exist in providing services using technology. What I have found especially rewarding in my new role is the direct legal services that I provide to clients, helping self-identifying women who cannot afford a lawyer and do not qualify for legal aid in matters where they would be otherwise unrepresented.

COVID-19 has put women experiencing violence at greater risk of harm across the globe and this has been felt deeply within the work we do here at Rise. Those already disproportionately impacted by violence, including Indigenous women, women with disabilities, LGBTQ2+ folks, immigrants and refugees, and racialized women are most at risk during this time. COVID-19 has led us to think of innovative ways to address the pre-existing pandemic of violence against women and has brought us closer together as a staff, to continue our work on making the legal system accessible, safe, and just.



NEW AT RISE



Juliana Pyde completed the Rise externship in Summer 2019. Born and raised in Prince Rupert, Juliana says “I saw first-hand how a lack of accessible family law services disproportionately impacts women and children. I decided on my first day of law school that I would do a clinical term in family law” as part of her legal education.

Juliana appeared in court regularly, including acting as co-counsel in a contentious child support hearing alongside one of her Rise cohort members. Although her clinical term ended over a year ago, Juliana notes “I received invaluable practical experience while at Rise. I continue to use and build on the legal skill-sets I acquired.”

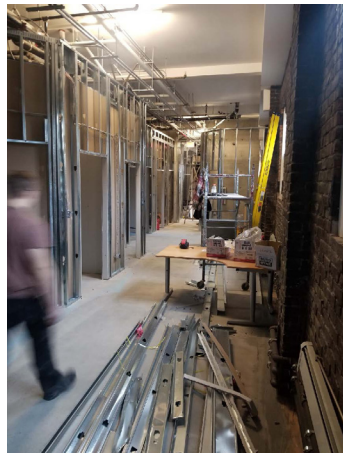
As of September 2020, Juliana is Rise’s newest articled student. “I feel extremely fortunate to be articling at a place where I feel constantly uplifted by my mentors and peers, and where I’m given the opportunity to take on files with complex issues. I am also happy to be working in an area where I can help women and children who may be experiencing increased hardship due to COVID-19.”

Once she finishes articling, Juliana hopes to remain onboard with Rise as an incubator lawyer so she can expand her practice in family and criminal law services for marginalized women. “Eventually, I would like to return to my hometown of Prince Rupert to help improve the lack of access to family law services in BC’s northern communities. I’m confident that my experience with Rise will help me achieve this goal.”

RISE’S NEW SPACE: A PHOTO ESSAY



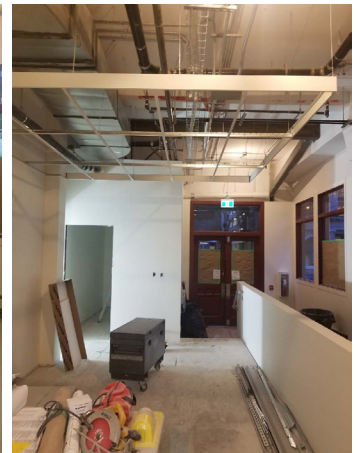
Just a big open space



Building offices



A would-be boardroom



Reception



The student bullpen



Offices



Reception, looking into boardroom



Courtenay-Comox; (photo: Sheila Schierbeck)

THE SUSTAINING CIRCLE

SUSTAINING PARTNERS

Jenkins Marzban Logan LLP

SUSTAINING ADVOCATES

Nancy Bradshaw & Robert Brown

Magal Huberman & Ury Segal

Morag MacLeod QC

Murray Jamieson LLP

The Hon. Catherine Ryan

SUSTAINING PATRONS

The Hon. Marion Allan

Roberta Beiser

May Chan

Nicholas Cotton

The Hon. Kirsti Gill

Agnes Huang

Judith Korbin

The Hon. Donna Martinson

FUNDERS & GRANTORS



**PETER A. ALLARD
SCHOOL OF LAW**



Status of Women Canada **Condition féminine Canada**

now Women and Gender Equality Canada



vancouver
foundation

**Face The World
FOUNDATION**



OUR DONORS

Special thanks to our Monthly Giving Circle, in blue

Johanne Blenkin

Scott Booth

Susan Boyd

Tanis Boxer

Alison Brewin

Lisa Bunting

Grant Burnyeat QC

Mateo Burtch

Amandine Clairo

Meg Clarke

The Hon. Ross Collver

Catherine Collver

Chantelle Coulson

Steve Coventry

Melissa Edwards

Equitas Law Group

Leon Getz

Andrea Glen

Kasari Govender

T. Claire Haaf

Katherine Halsall

The Hon. Wendy Harris

Ruth Herman

Patricia Kostuk

Amoljeet Lail

Joshua Lenon

Raji Mangat

Kaila Mikkelson

Josephine Nadel QC

Jasmine Nielsen

Clea Parfitt

The Hon. Jo-Ann Prowse

The Hon. Janet Prowse

Linda Robertson

Michelle Simpson

Bill Storey

Joel & Dana Solomon

Eva Ureta

Peeranut Visetsuth

Coralie Wood

MAJOR DONORS

The Hon. Risa Levine

J. Scott Stanley

DONORS IN KIND



Avison Young, *Tammy Stephen*

The Hon. Judge Michelle Daneliuk

Megan R. Ellis QC

Gerald J. Lecovin & Co.

Tevia Jeffries & Janos Sitar

Emily Lam

Morag MacLeod QC

Judge Maris MacMillan (*retired*)

Brock Martland QC

Marla Mennie & Trudy Hopman

Kathleen Packard

Ramil Rodriguez

SCC Construction, *Josh Bligh*

Johanna Stein

Bob Whitbread

Debra Windjack

...and many other generous donors who wish to remain anonymous.