

Rise 
WOMEN'S LEGAL CENTRE



2022-2023 Annual Report

Rise's office is located on the unceded homelands of the x^w məθk^w əy̓ə (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlílwataʔt/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations

Photo from the Virtual Legal Clinic's regional meetings, courtesy of Stephanie Melnyk

Our People

Staff

Kim Hawkins
Executive Director

El Cameron
*Supervising Lawyer,
Student Legal Clinic*

Vandana Sood
*Supervising Lawyer,
Community Legal Clinic*

Courtney Poland
*Virtual Legal Advocate,
Community Legal Clinic*

Carmine Dung
*Program Assistant,
Community Legal Clinic*

Simona Panevska
*Legal Navigator,
Community Legal Clinic*

Lily Hsueh
*Community Outreach
Advocate,
Community Legal Clinic*

Vicky Law
*Supervising Lawyer,
Virtual Legal Clinic*

Samantha Davis
*Virtual Legal Advocate,
Virtual Legal Clinic*

Kelsey Borgfjord
*Legal Navigator,
Virtual Legal Clinic*

Stephanie Melnyk
*Program Coordinator,
Virtual Legal Clinic*

Brianne Fung
*Program Assistant,
Virtual Legal Clinic*

Rosanna Adams
Staff Lawyer

Gabrielle Clark
Staff Lawyer

Taruna Agrawal
*Lawyer, Family Advocate
Support Services*

Maggie House
*Lawyer, Centralized Legal
Services*

Andrea Bryson
Family Advocate Educator

Maayaa Quist-Adade
*Program Assistant, Family
Advocate Support Line*

Harpreet Kahlon
Education Manager

Amanda Hobbs
Articling Student

Kate Webster
Fund Development Manager

Ellie Ericson
Office Manager

Sarah Szymanski
Office Coordinator

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Letter from the Board President and Executive Director

Taanishi kiawow to our volunteers, members of our community, and supporters. As the Board President and Executive Director of Rise Women’s Legal Centre, we are pleased to present Rise’s 2022-23 Annual Report.

2022 was a year of continued growth for Rise, with new positions increasing our capacity to help women and gender diverse people throughout the province. **We saw a significant increase in people seeking services, and Rise was able to assist a record number, 2,172.**

Rise is a non-Indigenous organization made up mostly of settlers, we acknowledge that we have an obligation to remain deeply committed to decolonization. Our Board of Directors formed a decolonization and equity committee structured to include staff and community voices. They are dedicated to improving the way that Rise operates and delivers programming and challenges structures, and ensure that everyone at Rise continues to address colonization, racism, and is dedicated to learning and doing better. In the coming year they will review our progress, taking up recommendations of the decolonizing audit, assisting in shaping Rise’s human resources policies with staff, the Board governance committee, and with Harbour West Consulting. The committee will then create a Rise decolonization and equity multi-year plan. As an example of our commitment to ongoing education, staff receive training from Hummingbirds Rising, and are taught to respect and practice Indigenous law.

A highlight of 2022 was connecting with folks through regional meetings across BC, thanks to the support of Women and Gender Equality Canada. As pandemic travel restrictions lifted, Rise’s Virtual Legal Clinic was able to travel to 14 communities, re-connecting with some of our 53 community partners, and hearing directly from support and anti-violence workers. We heard that many communities in the same regions faced very different challenges, and that small communities often face unique challenges, even when located relatively near urban centres. The opportunity to engage in in-person community-based direct engagement and learning was invaluable for Rise. This work allows us to improve the ways we assist communities and clients. We look forward to more opportunities for our Virtual Legal Clinic team to travel and build relationships with the communities they assist every day.

We note that in the last year, Rise has seen the benefits of

increased investment in direct services for clients. We have increased the capacity of both our Virtual Legal Clinic and Community Legal Clinic by adding legal navigation and program assistants, as well as staff lawyers to our team who can provide summary legal advice to clients. This was made possible by funding from the Department of Justice, \$3.1 million over 5 years which began in 2021, with work really taking off in 2022.

Our continued, and significant, support from the Law Foundation BC also increased in 2022, with the creation of a new program: Centralised Legal Services. This program supervises advocacy programs in small communities and adds an additional virtual family law advocate position to our Community Legal Clinic. We look forward to the continued growth of this program in 2023 with the additional of an Indigenous Family Advocate Support Line. Thanks to Law Foundation support Rise also released the report: *Creating Safety in BC Courts* in November of 2022, focused on how to make courthouses and processes safer for survivors of family violence.

Consistently, approximately 80% of the clients Rise assists have experienced family violence. We acknowledge how much work is still needed to protect women and gender diverse people experiencing family violence, and to stop the murder and disappearances of Indigenous women, girls, two spirit LGBTQIA + people. We are proud to be on the frontlines of ensuring the safety of women and gender diverse people in BC and are grateful that, in the face of such grim realities, our ability to provide trauma informed care to women and gender diverse people continues to increase.

We are incredibly grateful to our staff, volunteers, donors, community partners, students, and supporters, without whom none of our work would be possible. We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve access to justice in BC.



Carly Teillet
Board President



Kim Hawkins
Executive Director

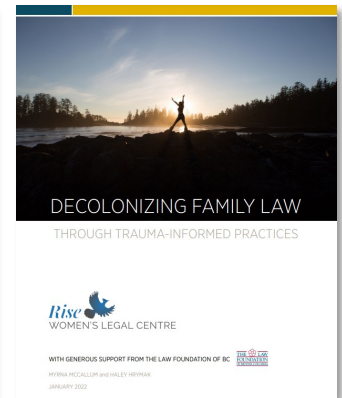
Research

2022 was a stellar year for Rise’s research. Rise continues to conduct research and release reports on improving legal systems and access to justice in BC. Our research looks at how we can create systemic change that will improve access to justice on a macro scale. We know that bringing real change to the legal systems requires input from the community. We want to start difficult conversations, amplify the voices of clients and support workers, and people who are directly impacted by the current legal system, and provide concrete and achievable recommendations for improving access to justice.

In January 2022, Rise released our report, *Decolonizing Family Law Through Trauma-Informed Practices*, co-authored by **Myrna McCallum**, a Métis-Cree mother, grandmother, lawyer, educator, and expert in trauma-informed legal practice, and **Haley Hrymak**, a settler and research and community outreach lawyer. The report looked at how to create meaningful access to justice for Indigenous people in BC, and how to address the colonial roots of the legal systems. Areas of improvement identified by nearly all experts consulted were “the need to expand the legal system’s understanding of family law to make room for Indigenous laws and concepts, the need for education, and the need for lawyers and other legal system professionals to engage in trauma-informed practice.”

In October Rise released *Creating Safety in BC Courts: Key Challenges and Recommendations*, authored by Haley Hrymak. This research was undertaken between April 2021 and March 2022, and included a literature review, interviews with 25 key informants, and surveys of 25 lawyers attending courthouses in smaller communities in BC. In this research, we asked: Is there a way to modify courthouses and court processes to make survivors less susceptible to violence by their abuser? The report details 25 recommendations for positive changes in courthouses in BC and has since been endorsed by the Canadian Bar Association of BC. Our findings were evaluated by lawyers, court users, and advocates.

Both of our reports were made possible thanks to generous support from the Law Foundation of BC.



Articling & Incubator Programs

Rise’s articling program continues to provide important support to clients here in BC. Rise takes one articling student at a time, an alumni from our Student Clinic program, who is supervised by Rise’s Virtual Legal Clinic supervising lawyer. Rise’s articling program is designed to build on the skills law students develop in their clinical externship, and focuses on providing representation to clients with more complex cases. **In 2022, our articling student, Tiffany Valeska, was called to the bar in August, and our next articling student, Amanda Hobbs, started in October. Rise’s articling students worked on 17 files in 2022.**

Ms. Valeska, alongside Student Clinic alumni **Jylle Carpenter-Boesch**, began as Rise’s incubator lawyers in September. Rise’s incubator program allows alumni to use Rise as a jumping off point for creating their own private legal practice.

Incubator lawyers are able to use Rise’s space and resources and are mentored by Rise’s supervising lawyers. They are able to take on Legal Aid files referred to by Rise’s intake workers and advocates, creating further support for clients.



Tiffany Valeska’s swearing in, September 2022. Pictured left to right, Kim Hawkins, Tiffany Valeska, Vicky Law, and Andrea Bryson.

FROM OUR ALUMNI...

"I'll always remember a phone call I had with one of my clients. I was relaying the good news of her divorce being granted by the Supreme Court. In tears, she expressed her fervent gratitude for all that Rise had done for her. She said that Rise made her feel as though she wasn't alone, and she could not have undergone divorce proceedings without the support of the clinicians who helped her over the years."

"I applied to Rise because it presented an invaluable opportunity to help women in need of legal guidance navigate the legal system... Rise was everything I expected and more. I was able to work with my clients while also receiving expert mentorship and guidance from my supervising lawyers... Working as a clinician at Rise took my oral and written communication skills to new heights. In the classroom we learn a lot about the 'law' side of practice, but not the 'people' side. Rise really teaches its clinicians how to develop a working relationship with clients. This requires developing a relationship of trust, making them feel heard, and placing them in the driver's seat of their file."

Student Legal Clinic

Rise's Student Legal Clinic takes up to 6 students a semester from UBC's Peter A. Allard Law School. The students are granted temporary articling from the Law Society and provide unbundled family law services to clients. There are three cohorts a year, and they receive hands on family law experience and trauma informed training, so that they are able to provide adequate care to Rise's clients, **80% of whom have experienced family violence**. Training the next generation of lawyers on how to effectively assist clients who have experienced family violence is critical to providing better support for women and gender diverse people here in BC. We believe that through our alumni we have the chance to transform the justice system by helping to train new lawyers to practice with a social justice ethic and provide client-centred care. Approximately 70% of our students go on to practice family law.

2022 was another successful year for our Student Legal Clinic. **Students worked on a total of 145 files in 2022, closing 59.**

Our 2022 students were supervised by our Student Legal Clinic supervising lawyer **Vandana Sood**, and **Kim Hawkins**, our executive director, both as adjunct professors at UBC. At the beginning of 2023 Vandana was honoured to receive UBC Allard Law's Adam Albright Adjunct Award. The award is nominated and adjudicated entirely by students. In their nomination, her students spoke of her mentorship, her insightful perspectives on social justice and the support she provides students in what is usually their first court experiences. It was a testament to Vandana's years of hard work and dedication to Rise and to the next generation of lawyers, and a special honour to have been nominated by student alumni. Vandana has been with Rise since our

inception, and has done, and continues to do, so much for women and gender diverse people here in BC. As of October 2023 she has overseen over 7 years of student cohorts, 22 in total.

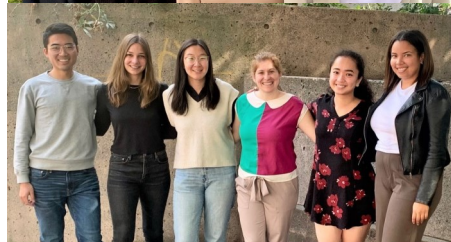
Hannah Goodridge, a student clinician from our fall 2022 cohort went on to win UBC's Ray Herbert Award for best all-round graduating student in 2023. Hannah was an exceptional student, and we are thrilled to see her being recognized in this way, and we can't wait to follow her career. In an interview with UBC, about her experience of Rise, Hannah said the instructors at Rise "always created space to talk through challenging moments" – and that the experience helped her become a more effective advocate for her clients.



Spring 2022 Cohort



Summer 2022 Cohort



Fall 2022 Cohort

Community Legal Clinic (CLC)

Rise's Community Legal Clinic (CLC) provides legal navigation and advocacy services for clients who live in the Lower Mainland. 2022 was a record year for the CLC, with 1,450 clients assisted.

CLC's Legal Navigator:

The navigator is the first-person clients speak to when they reach out to Rise for legal support. At the time of intake, the client is provided with legal information, referrals, or they are connected with internal programs. A great number of clients return to Rise to receive additional support, often times even when their family law issue has been dealt with. Over the course of 2022, there was an increase in the number of returning clients, who reached out for additional referrals or legal information for various legal issues such as criminal, immigration, and employment law.

Rise's case manager, **Andrea Bryson**, held this position until August 2022, when she transitioned to her new position as our family advocate educator. **Simona Panevska** took the reigns in January 2023, after some temporary coverage at the end of 2022 to bridge the gap.

Meet Simona: Working as a family law advocate since 2018 and with a bachelor's degree in criminology, Simona has been on the ground with self-represented clients navigating family law and related legal systems. Simona is continuously inspired by her clients strength and resiliency every day.

"Andrea was so kind and helpful. I actually had to take a second after the call to collect myself after feeling so much support and care. She was patient and thoughtful making sure I felt comfortable through the whole process. Thank you!"

CLC's Virtual Legal Advocate:

In 2022 CLC gained a new team member, **Courtney Poland**. After starting as a junior advocate, she transitioned into Rise's second Virtual Advocate at the beginning of 2023, focusing on providing services and support to clients in the Lower Mainland. The most significant accomplishment from the creation of this new role has been the increase in clients that the CLC is able to provide assistance to. Previously, the CLC mainly triaged files and provided navigation and referrals; with the addition of a full-time advocate we now have the ability to provide clients with more in-depth services.

Meet Courtney: Courtney first joined Rise as a practicum student for her Bachelor of Social Work from the University of British Columbia, before being brought on as an advocate. Courtney has always been passionate about fighting injustice in the legal system, and she feels honoured to work at Rise where she can help to mitigate that experience for clients.

"I felt very comfortable speaking with Courtney. Her supportive attitude really encouraged me to take action and explore the recommendations. Thank you."

"Just thank you. I've been doing everything since my partner left and I didn't realize how much it really was until I received help from Lily. Such a gift to have help."

Community Outreach Advocate:

Another brand-new position was created at the CLC at the end of 2022, thanks to support from an anonymous donor. The community outreach advocate role was created to further reduce barriers to access for Rise's services. Our advocate, **Lily Hsueh**, holds drop-in services and conducts outreach to local community organisation, assisting clients with accessing Rise's services, ID applications, police complaints, legal aid applications and advocacy, and more. The clients accessing Lily's drop-in services are significantly marginalised, often feel overwhelmed, and that the system is designed to fail them. Lily empowers

clients to feel in control of their issues, take action, and access justice.

Meet Lily: Lily is a skilled and passionate advocate, with experience working and connecting with marginalized folks, including women and gender diverse people with mental health challenges, sex workers, those in precarious housing situations, and those who are unhoused.

Virtual Legal Clinic (VLC)

Rise's Virtual Legal Clinic (VLC) provides legal navigation and advocacy services for clients who live outside of the Lower Mainland, primarily in smaller communities, where there are significantly less resources. **2022 was a record year for the VLC, with 362 clients assisted.**

VLC's Legal Navigator:

As with the CLC, the navigator is the first-person clients outside the Lower Mainland speak to when they reach out to Rise for legal support. The legal navigator, **Kelsey Borgfjord**, assesses eligibility and, not only refers clients internally, she also ensure clients are linked with community and legal resources in, or who serve, their local area

"The lady I spoke with was beyond beautiful and amazing. She gave me some hope for the first time..."

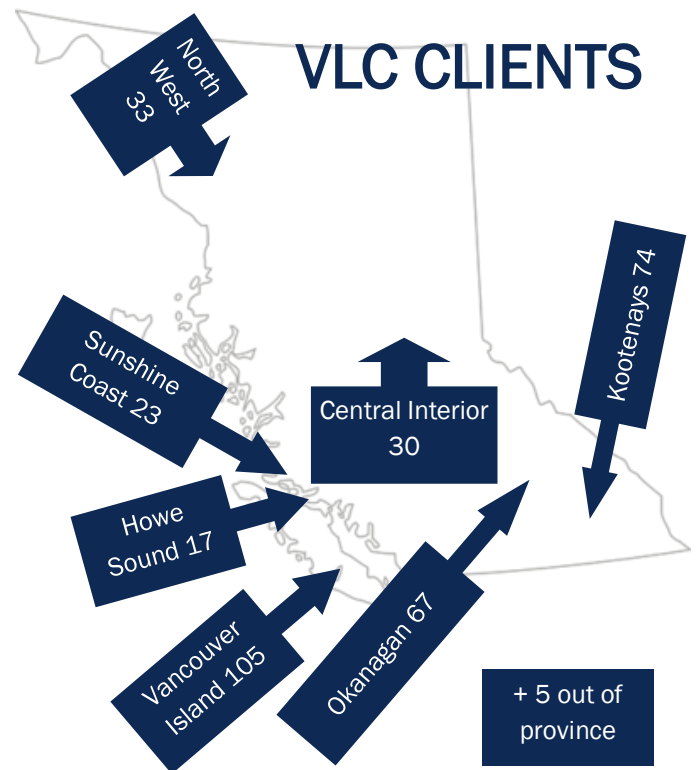
VLC's Virtual Legal Advocate:

The VLC is able to support clients directly with their legal matter through the virtual legal advocate. **Samantha Davis** worked directly with **70 clients in 2022**, helping clients maximize their legal aid hours with lawyers, and providing critical emotional support for clients who are self-representing. Samantha is able to take on more difficult and challenging client files than most advocates.

"Samantha is a breath of fresh air in [the] family court process. I'm eternally grateful for her. She's knowledgeable and supportive, mentally and emotionally assuring without sugar coating or victimizing. She's validating and speaks highly and directly to the needs of feeling heard, seen and not alone in a scary, uncertain, complex, exhausting system and process. Can't thank her enough..."

VLC's Community Partners:

The VLC uses a community partner model to provide wrap around services to clients in communities across BC, by working in partnership with support workers in community-based organisations. In 2022, the VLC strengthened its relationships with its **53 community partners**, and continued to provide information and resources to partners through its weekly meetings.



Regional meetings:

In 2022, thanks to the support of Women and Gender Equality Canada, the VLC team travelled to 14 communities across BC, connecting with community partners and support workers in smaller communities. These meetings were invaluable. Rise staff were able hear firsthand the challenges clients and support workers are facing, and the VLC team is currently drafting a report with recommendations for systemic change to family law supports in an effort to improve the system for women and gender diverse people. The meetings took place in: **Terrace, Smithers, Prince George, Dawson Creek, Salmon Arm, Revelstoke, Cranbrook, Grand Forks, Penticton, Duncan, Sooke, Courtenay, Port Hardy, and Sechelt.**

Photos from the Virtual Legal Clinic's regional meetings, courtesy of Stéphanie Melnyk

Family Advocate Support Line

The **Family Advocate Support Line (FASL)** is a Rise program for family law advocates, anti-violence workers, and support workers in BC, to help them better assist their own clients. Advocates are able to call the support line to speak to an experienced lawyer and receive fast advice on routine and complex cases. Rise is able to offer knowledgeable advice from a culturally sensitive, trauma informed lens, and ensures all advocate and support worker's clients receive the best possible care, advice, and access to resources. **In 2022 FASL provided over 600 hours' worth of information and advice services.**

FASL also provides ongoing, monthly training for support workers & advocates on family law matters, **with over 450 attendees in 2022.** These training sessions help advocates receive relevant, up to date information on how to best serve their clients. In 2022 our FASL lawyer **Taruna Agrawal** went on maternity leave, and services have been covered by **Frances Rosner**, a Métis lawyer who works as a sole practitioner, focusing on family and prison law. Over 2022 and 2023 Ms. Rosner has been working with Rise to help provide coverage FASL and to spearhead a new initiative to support Indigenous communities through providing legal information and advice.

Family law advocates provide free family law information, advocacy, and assistance to low-income people in British Columbia. This includes matters such as separation and divorce, limited property division, guardianship and parenting arrangements, child and spousal support and protection orders. Advocates support individuals in navigating the family justice system by providing legal information, assistance with court forms, court preparation and emotional support.

Centralised Legal Services

Rise proudly launched the **Centralized Legal Services (CLS)** program in June 2022 thanks to added funding from the Law Foundation of BC. Experienced supervising lawyer **Maggie House** provides direct supervision to 6 Law Foundation of BC advocates in smaller, unserved communities: **Williams Lake, Fort Nelson, Prince George, Fort Saint John, and Nelson.** Advocates are receiving ongoing training, weekly file reviews, one-to-one mentorship, and support developing consistent practice management skills. The CLS provides needed support and security to advocates, and the consistency the CLS

provides fills an important gap in current supports available to advocates.

Upcoming initiative... Late 2022 saw the beginning stages of the development of a pilot project, a partnership between Rise and Surrey Women's Centre. Maggie House laid the groundwork for the launch of the Jane Doe Clinic, weekly in-person clinical services in the areas of family law, child protection and civil mental health law. The Jane Doe Clinic launched in January 2023.

Family Advocate Educator

Another new position, **family advocate educator (FAE)**, was created in 2022 to provide further support to advocates in BC. The Family Advocate Educator **Andrea Bryson**, began her work in August, thanks to generous funding from the Department of Justice. The program is designed to provide coaching, mentorship and training to the Law Foundation-funded family law advocates.

In November 2022, the FAE launched its first initiative, Open Office Hours, which is a weekly standing informal meeting where advocates can engage in discussions on a variety of topics, share successes, and attend micro-trainings. We look forward to reporting on the success of this program as it finds its feet in 2023

Significant ongoing barriers in access to justice in family law in BC:

Rise continues to identify significant barriers in access to justice. While the list is long, and we are unable to capture it all in one page, we have highlighted a few challenges we navigated in 2022:



Lack of representation for clients:

Self-representation can be incredibly challenging, and especially impacts vulnerable women and gender diverse people who have experienced family violence, and who often require support in court. Rise's clients are low-income, making legal representation inaccessible in most cases.



Challenges accessing legal aid:

Clients are waiting as long as two to three months for approval on their legal aid applications. Even when legal aid funding is approved, it can be difficult to find lawyers who are willing to accept legal aid files.

Additional barriers in smaller communities:

Women in rural areas experience rates of intimate partner violence at almost twice the rate of women living in urban areas, and have lower access to employment, increased exposure to substance misuse, and access to significantly fewer local lawyers willing to take legal aid files.

Clients experiencing financial abuse:

There is a continued lack of services and supports for clients experiencing financial abuse. Rise has seen an increase in matters where the client has limited to no knowledge of family assets due to ongoing financial abuse, making legal recourses challenging.

Gap in local and wrap-around supports:

There is high turnover of staff in the anti-violence sector and this results in a loss of institutional knowledge and creates gaps in local and wrap around supports that can be crucial for clients experiencing violence. Turnover means there is a constant need for training to be available to new staff to ensure they have the skills and support to work with clients.

Clients with high barriers:

Unfortunately, for a number of people from targeted and oppressed populations, accessing Rise is still challenging as they do not have easy and safe access to technology. Clients in rural, remote, and northern communities often have poor, and in some cases no, internet connectivity, and unreliable cell phone coverage.

Lack of protection for vulnerable women:

Policing services do not reliably recommend charges when enforcing protection orders creating dangerous and unpredictable situations for those seeking protection from family violence.



\$3.1 MILLION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Beginning at the end of 2021, Rise received funding of \$3.1million over 5 years from the Department of Justice (DOJ). This funding has vastly increased Rise's capacity to support survivors of intimate partner violence. We are grateful for the support and the opportunity to collaborate with the DOJ on improving access to justice.

The funding allows us to provide direct access for women to legal navigators and lawyers who can provide trauma-informed assistance and independent legal advice; strengthens BC's network of support workers and anti-violence organisations through ongoing collaboration and training; and improves much needed outreach to Indigenous organizations in BC.

"This funding is having a huge impact on our ability to meet the needs of survivors of intimate partner violence, who often have limited access to legal supports, especially in small communities... With the Department of Justice's support, our staff are working hard to ensure that survivors of violence in BC have legal help during some of the hardest times in their lives." Kim Hawkins, Executive Director Rise Women's Legal Centre

Direct Client Services

Rise's two summary advice lawyers, **Gabrielle Clark** and **Rosanna Adams** were hired in March 2022, and began client work in late April. Thanks to funding from the DOJ, our new full-time staff lawyers take on eligible cases from our Virtual Legal Clinic (VLC) and Community Legal Clinic (CLC).

Clients receive on average 3 hours of appointment time with Rise's summary advice lawyers, and at least 5 hours of follow up on appointments (which could include research, and help drafting or reviewing documents), sometimes up to 10 hours. **Between late April 2022 and the end of the year, Gabrielle and Rosanna assisted 118 clients and provided 690 hours worth of services**, including meeting with clients, conducting file reviews, legal research, legal memo writing, and consultation on legal matters.

The addition of lawyers who can provide direct legal services to clients has been a game-changer for Rise. Our advocates and clients continue to struggle to find lawyers who will take pro-bono, low-bono, and legal aid files – a problem that is especially prevalent outside of the Lower Mainland. This program provides much needed added support to clients who are self-representing.

RISE 2022 SNAPSHOT:



2172

Clients assisted



1,600

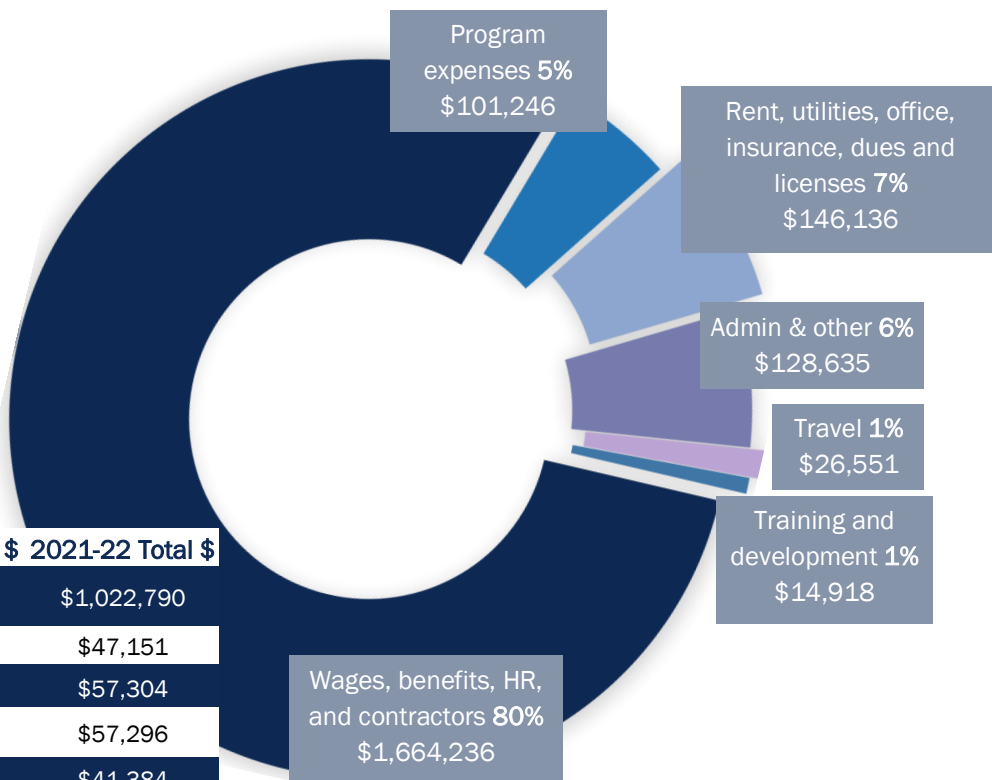
Support workers training attendees



2

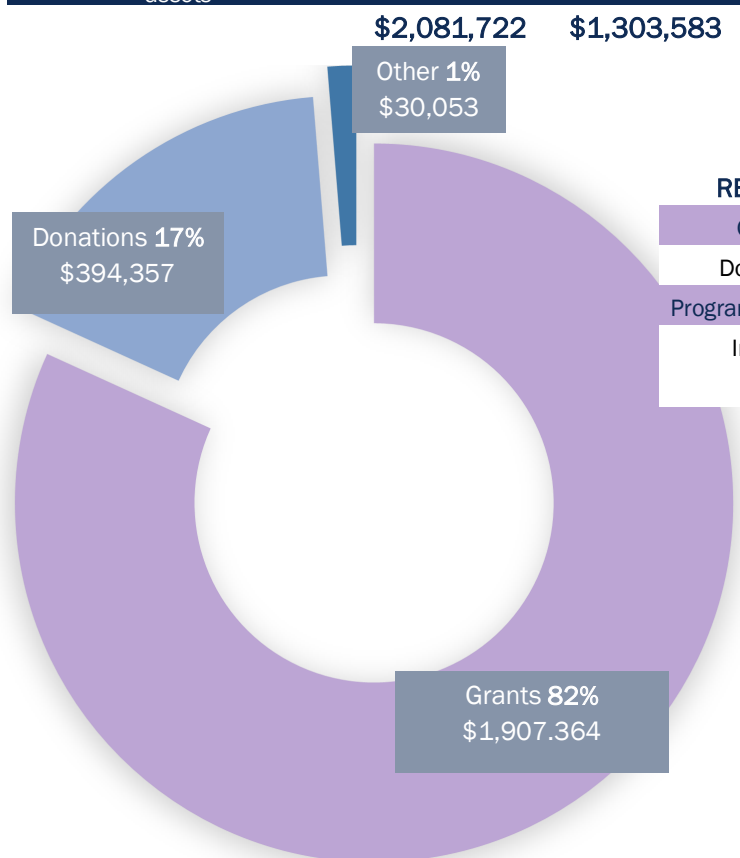
Reports released

2022-2023 Expenses



EXPENSES	2022-23 Total \$	2021-22 Total \$
Wages, benefits and contractors	\$1,664,236	\$1,022,790
Program expenses	\$101,246	\$47,151
Rent and utilities	\$60,983	\$57,304
Amortization of capital assets	\$93,866	\$57,296
Office and other	\$50,700	\$41,384
Travel	\$26,551	\$2,012
Dues and licenses	\$20,946	\$15,506
Training and development	\$14,918	\$17,422
Professional fees	\$16,670	\$14,395
Board and committee	\$14,325	\$9,632
Insurance	\$13,507	\$9,000
Interest and bank charges	\$3,774	\$4,038
Loss on disposal of capital assets	-	\$5,653

\$2,081,722 **\$1,303,583**



Funders, donors, grantors, supporters, and all those who help make Rise possible: thank you for standing with us on the frontlines of access to justice. Without you, Rise's work would not be possible, and thousands of women and gender diverse people across BC experiencing violence would have no where to turn. Thank you for your trust in our work, and for your advocacy.

REVENUE	2022-23 Total \$	2021-22 Total \$
Grants	\$1,907,364	\$1,128,983
Donations	\$394,357	\$434,756
Programs and other	\$18,945	\$3,023
Interest	\$11,108	\$504
	\$2,331,774	\$1,567,266

2022-2023 Revenue

THANK YOU

MAJOR DONORS

Lori Lothian
The Hon. Risa Levine
J. Scott Stanley

and Major Donors who have requested anonymity

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