



Garth Homer Society

20/21 Annual Review



Garth Homer
SOCIETY

A life, a home, and a place in the world

Message from the Board Chair

For the Garth Homer Society, as for all other organizations, the twelve months from the end of March 2020 to the end of March 2021 stand out as the year of COVID.

It is remarkable how quickly the pandemic came upon us. In preparing to write this report, I looked back through some of our board meeting records from just prior to the beginning of the fiscal. In February 2020 we had certainly heard a lot about COVID, but there was no mention of it in the records of our board meeting that month. As I recall, at that point the federal government was still telling us that COVID probably did not constitute a risk for Canadians.

Just one month later, the picture was completely different. The board minutes for March show that the pandemic was the main item for discussion that month.

It was an uncertain time. At the beginning, we did not know for weeks whether we could stay open or whether funding would continue. At one point we were told by local public health officials that we would be required to shut. We were unsure if we would be able to pay staff or if we

would ever have the capacity to reopen. We were facing a public health crisis for sure, but in those first weeks for GHS and other community living organizations, it seemed as we might be facing an existential crisis as well.

I would like to commend CLBC for working hard within Government to have services for people with developmental disabilities declared essential. This meant that that we could plan our crisis response in full confidence that our funding was stable and that we would be able to retain staff. More important, it meant that we would be able to provide continuity of services for those we support, even though services needed to change.

I cannot be prouder of the way our staff and management team responded to the crisis. Their actions were prompt, carefully planned, and in the end very effective. In fact, during our recent CARF survey a CLBC representative commented that the GHS pandemic response set the “gold standard” for pandemic response among agencies.

For me four things stand out.

First, was the rapid development and deployment of a comprehensive COVID safety plan for GHS, consistent with guidelines required by both CLBC and WorkSafe BC. The management team did this very quickly and assuredly. When WorkSafe came in to conduct a surprise audit of our plan, they made no recommendations for changes.

Second, was the implementation of a cleverly designed staff rotation system in the early days of the pandemic that ensured that there would always be a group of staff with no known exposure to COVID available to work with clients. The aim was to guarantee the continuity of services in the event of exposure within the organization.

Third was the rapid adaptation of services to accommodate social distancing requirements. Consequently we were able to accommodate the needs of most families with an innovative blend of home based, facility based, community based and remotely delivered services. One great example is the way our ArtWorks program reorganized itself to deliver materials and supplies to program participants at home, and then deliver instruction to them via Zoom.

And finally there was the launch of LifeStreams.ca, a new web-based service that has proven to be extremely popular. But I will leave it to our CEO to say more about LifeStreams.ca in his report.

I mentioned our CARF survey above, and cannot conclude this report without saying a little more about it. While our recent survey took place after the end of the fiscal year, so should perhaps not be part of this report, all the considerable work by our staff and management team that went into preparing for it was undertaken at the same time as they were managing in the midst of COVID. So it is even more remarkable that we received our three-year accreditation with no recommendations, something achieved in only 3% of all CARF surveys. I was present in the exit meeting when the surveyors said that GHS was one of the best organizations that they had surveyed in a very long time.

Thank you to all the staff and management who did exceptional double duty in the year of COVID. And of course thank you to the members of the GHS board who steadfastly provided their wisdom and insight through challenging times.

But above all, thank you to the families and caregivers who sustained their patience and trust in GHS through this most difficult of years.

- *Chris Lovelace, Board Chair*

Message from the CEO

As the Chair's report mentioned, fiscal 2021 was a largely defined by the impact of COVID. Before mentioning anything else about the year, I must express a heartfelt thanks on behalf of the whole GHS community to the local grant funders who worked so hard and effectively to get substantial emergency pandemic grants into the hands of front line agencies. In Victoria, we were lucky to have funds available both from the federal government's Emergency Community Support fund, and from the remarkable Rapid Relief Fund raised locally by the Victoria Foundation and the Times Colonist. Hearty applause to the Victoria Foundation, the United Way of Greater Victoria, and Inclusion BC for getting both local and federal funding out the door so promptly. Their efforts were extraordinary. Without them, it would have been difficult to cope as well as we did.

Because the emergency funding helped us to respond to COVID more effectively, it also gave us the breathing room to focus on other things unrelated to COVID. Despite the pandemic focus of the year, GHS made good progress in other areas as well.

One example is the continued growth in our community inclusion day programs. At the beginning of the pandemic, all new intakes to day services was stopped, quite reasonably. But that doesn't mean that the need for services went away and we continued to get inquiries from families needing supports. If nothing else, this showed us that the demand for services from GHS remains strong. Most interesting was that the new requests for service continued to reflect the long term trend at GHS in the growth of the services for higher needs individuals and particularly for individuals needing higher levels of behavioural supports related to autism. In the end, the majority of our new intake came in two programs, DREAMS and STARR, both of which provide higher needs supports.

The growth increased the pressure on GHS to find new space. Space at 813 Darwin was a challenge for us even before the pandemic, but

social distancing requirements made it more difficult. Even if the requirements may be relaxed as the pandemic is brought under control, my own view is that they will not be relaxed entirely. Our task has been to find new space for both expansion and safety after the full return to on-site services. Through the year staff did a tremendous job of reconfiguring our program spaces at 813 Darwin so that more individuals could be served, but at this point there is little room left. We looked at a number of promising new spaces for day services through the year and even made a lease proposal on one, but that did not work out. Looking ahead, space will remain one of our biggest operating challenges.

One thing that helped enormously with the space challenge is last winter's move of ArtWorks from the studio and gallery at 813 Darwin to a spectacular new studio at 1950 Government Street, on the northwest corner of Chatham. This was also one of the more exciting developments in our services over the year. From its inception nearly thirty years ago, the vision for ArtWorks has always included a move to a downtown storefront or other community location, the aim being both to create greater public awareness of the program and its artists,

and to better connect Artworks to the mainstream arts world in Victoria. The new location on Government is smack in the middle of Victoria's emerging new arts and innovation district, so the location could not be better. And as I said, the new studio and gallery are spectacular. If you haven't seen them yet you might consider dropping by.

Our thanks and appreciation go out to the Koerner Foundation for their support of the ArtWorks move. Without their generous contributions, the new studio would not have been possible.

Another great development in the year was the launch of our online learning platform LifeStreams.ca. Created as a means of supporting individuals, families, and caregivers navigating the challenges of the pandemic, we offered LifeStreams.ca free of charge to the general public - locally, nationally, and internationally. Launched in December, it has been visited extensively by people in BC, across Canada, and beyond. The website features extensive accessible content and industry-leading accessibility features, and an aesthetic design that is both welcoming yet age-

appropriate for adults with developmental disabilities.

The site was created with the input and guidance of nine Garth Homer Client Consultants. The 'Live Events' programming offers eight recurring weekly virtual events that offer people opportunities to connect, create, be active, share, and explore - as well as several non-recurring online events to fill out the schedule. These events not only provide engagement for visitors - they are also important employment opportunities for private contractors - mostly artists - whose livelihoods were directly impacted by the pandemic. A specific focus on employment supports for individuals whose livelihood was affected by COVID was an important element of our funding proposal for LifeStreams Online. LifeStreams Online also connects people with valuable community resources. For example, it has hosted two mental health webinar events with a local psychiatrist to address issues and answer questions around isolation and anxiety.

So in all, the year was one of tremendous contrasts – with limitations of the pandemic on one hand, but encouraging progress and new developments on the other. I will be retiring

shortly, but looking ahead, I see tremendous new opportunities for GHS to continue to innovate new programs and services. I'd like to thank the staff, management, and the GHS board for the hard work, imagination, and commitment that ensured our successes over the last year, and which indeed have made working at Garth Homer such an engaging and positive experience for the last ten.

- Mitchell Temkin, CEO

Treasurer's Report

Fiscal 2021 was a year full of uncertainty as it began just after the onset of COVID-19. With this impacting both our program delivery and financial security we forged ahead. The year brought about new challenges and new solutions in nearly all areas of our service delivery. Some of which have provided us with exciting new program delivery methods and growth, while others helped as we navigated through the pandemic. None of the successes we have achieved would have been possible without the work and commitment of our local community funders and grant providers. From the ongoing

support of our partnership with Community Living BC, to the remarkable funds raised through the Victoria Foundation, Inclusion BC, Telus, and the United Way. We recognize that without these key funders and our very many corporate and private donors, the year would have turned out very different.

We completed the year at March 31, 2021 on a positive financial note, with a surplus of \$111,844, before extraordinary expenses. Our Provincial contract revenue increased from \$5,738,202 to \$5,850,771, supporting our plan for current and future growth. We have had a strong recovery from past years and continue to move in a positive direction for the new fiscal year, assisting in our ongoing plan for growth and expansion across our program areas. We experienced declines in our fee for service revenue from \$442,867 to \$327,047, and in our rental income from \$139,016 to \$91,638, largely due to the pandemic response. It is expected these declines will subside and our new LifeStreams online learning platform will assist us in future growth potential in our fee for service delivery model.

During the year additional costs were incurred to meet the safety plan required by WorkSafeBC, CLBC, and the Vancouver Island Health

Authority. However, outside of these requirements our costs actually decreased by 5% from the prior year.

Our previous recovery plan is still on track, most notably by the decreased continued reliance on our established lines of credit. While there was an initial need to utilize these facilities early in the year due to the impacts of COVID-19, our improved cash management has eliminated the need for ongoing use. Some additional work on our cash reserves will be required to support our future growth plans, and despite the anomalies of the past year that impacted our initial timeline, the plan we had in place pre-COVID still remains as our targeted financial goal.

This past year has been full of new challenges which we have met with resilience and determination to achieve the Society's goals of growth and opportunity, where none were thought to be. I would like to thank the Board and Management for their commitment to solidify the ongoing success of the Garth Homer Society.

- Paul van Koll, Treasurer

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