

# 2023 YEAR-TO-DATE Progress Report



# Dear Friends of Stella's Place

As we write to you, the smell of home cooking is wafting through Stella's Place's new space, and it feels like we've come home again. With your help, 2023 has been a year of tremendous transformation. Thank you for supporting us.

- In March, we opened the doors to our new building;
- In April, we resumed in-person programming for the first time since the pandemic, following three years of remote programming;
- In-person community programs like The Awesome Music Hour and our Community Kitchen followed soon after, adding sights and sounds of life to our new space.

We remain on the forefront of young adult mental health, co-designing programs with peers and professionals to deliver the best the industry has to offer.

We are committed to embracing our participants' request to continue a hybrid model that blends in person and virtual services—a positive legacy of the pandemic.

Your generosity has made it possible for us to connect with more than 700 participants so far this year. I hope you enjoy reading about the impact of your gift on young adults at Stella's Place.

Sincerely,

*Nzinga Walker*

**Nzinga Walker** | Executive Director

Nzinga began her career at Stella's Place as our Director of Programs in 2020. In 2022 she became our Executive Director.

**Did you know** that Stella's Place is ten years old? During the past decade, we've supported thousands of young adults to find a better way forward with their mental health.

Executive Director Nzinga Walker and Assante Houghton, Peer Initiatives Consultant, prepare to speak onstage at Stella's Place's 2023 Get Reel Film Festival.



# Improving participant intake

At Stella's Place, young adults discover a set of holistic services not offered through their local emergency department or hospital outpatient services.

With our building now open, we are meeting more young adults in person at the start of their journey, even while virtual intake continues.

Our intake protocols have been redesigned to be more efficient, in order to build the best path forward for each and every young adult.

By taking more time at the outset to understand every participant and their individual needs, we can refer them to the right programs—or, address their most urgent needs in real time.



Graduates from our cooking program celebrate with our kitchen coordinator. Our research team is exploring and documenting the relationship between nutrition and mental health outcomes.



“ We've stepped up efforts on waitlists by engaging student interns to better welcome new participants. Plus, we're recruiting a Program Care Specialist to process applicants faster. Now, our goals are to connect with applicants 1-2 days after submission, and fully process their applications within seven days. ”

– Dana Peever

Dana is our Director of Human Resources; a net-new role introduced this year to enhance the experiences of staff and volunteers at Stella's Place.

# A cycle of program improvements

For the past ten years, Stella's Place has been fine-tuning low-barrier programs like Stella's Place Café, Drop-In Counselling, and BeanBagChat online.

The same team members that manage BeanBagChat now also manage Brief Counselling Navigation. This is intentional so that when a young adult is ready to transition from texting to virtual or in-person counselling, the same caring support they received anonymously is available to them with people who've already gained their trust.

Other drop-in programs and workshops co-designed and co-led by trained Peers are available with little to no wait time and no in-take process. These programs can change from time to time, depending upon the needs and interests of participants, and may include programs such as:

- The Awesome Music Hour
- Kitchen Life Skills
- Queer-run 2SLGBTQI+ drop-in
- MOSAIC BIPOC drop-in, which gives BIPOC youth the chance to safely share life experiences among peers

Young adults who drop in can also access free, healthy food in our café anytime they visit.

Stella's Place's Kitchen Coordinator leads kitchen workshops, prepares delicious snacks for participants, and makes sure that groceries and fresh produce are available to young adults through our partnership with Second Harvest. Our cooking program teaches young adults the basics about grocery shopping on a budget, making nutritious food from scratch, and meal prep.

Our new Brief Counselling and Navigation program provides immediate access to short-term services while we work through our waitlist.

97% of participants agreed the program helped them to make life changes.

“ Within two weeks of a participant's arrival at Stella's Place, we provide an average of four 60-minute one-on-one counselling sessions and fast referrals to relevant resources. Support occurs over a series of 1–6 contacts with young adults. ”

– **Rachna Chaudhary**  
Director of Program Operations

Rachna is a passionate advocate for innovation in healthcare.

“ With many young adults lacking access to a primary care physician, Stella's Place also provides free drop-in access to a general practitioner and a psychiatrist for consultations. That's one less hurdle to overcome. ”

– **Donna Green** | Founder and Board Chair | Stella's Place

# 2023 clinical achievements



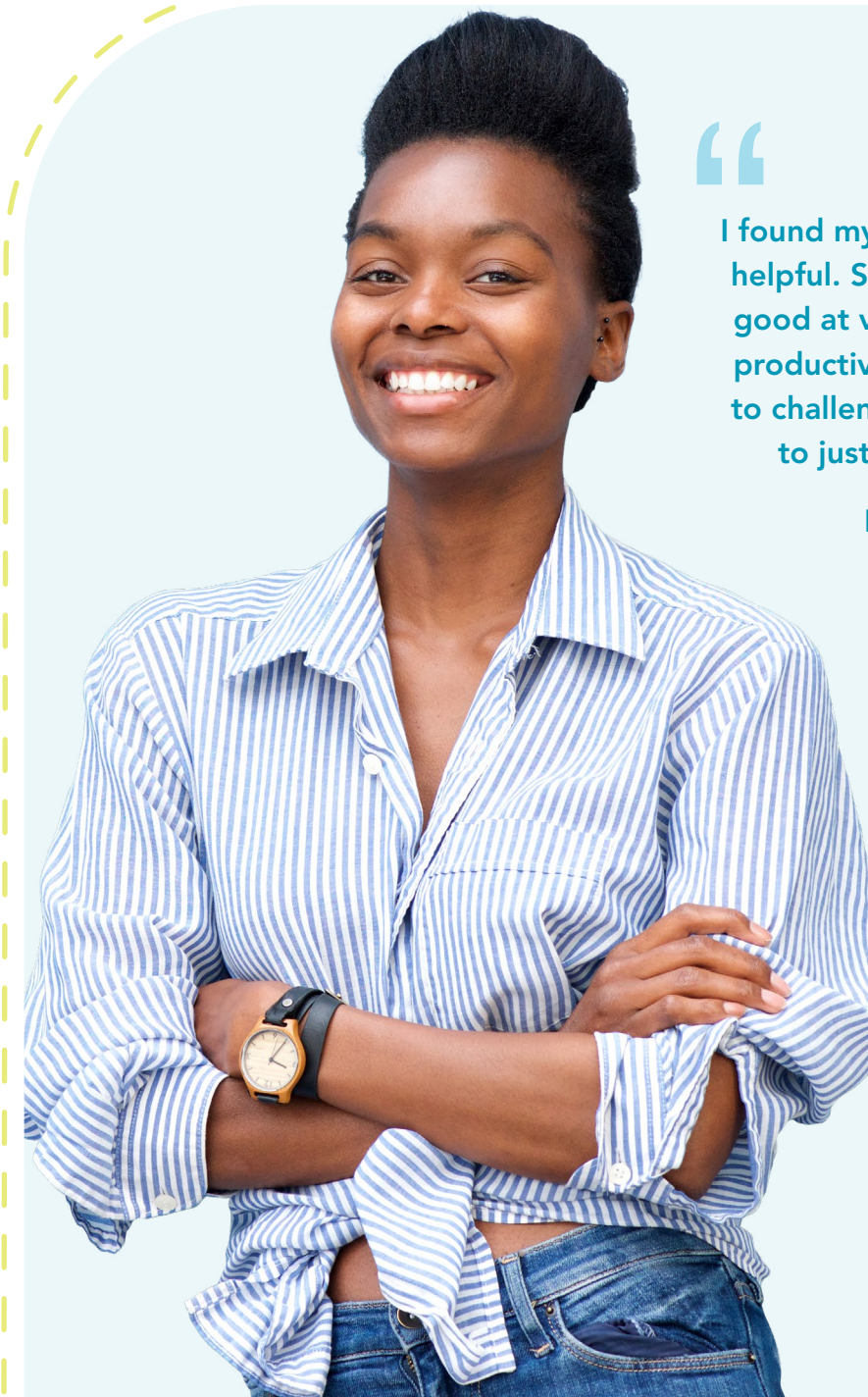
Stella's Place's evidence-informed clinical services are in high demand for good reason. Our rates of program retention, completion, satisfaction always exceed industry norms, with some rates being exceptional.



This year, our new hybrid social anxiety program had a retention rate of 80%, with a participant satisfaction rate over 85%.



Our Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) program retention rate is over 87%, with a participant satisfaction rate over 90%.



I found my therapist to be extremely helpful. She was a good listener, good at validating, and always had productive responses. She knew when to challenge my thoughts and when to just listen.

I always left sessions feeling better, even when I was dealing with difficult emotions. I have had sessions with counsellors outside of Stella's Place that left me feeling worse, but have never had this experience here. Everyone here is fantastic!



“ It was my first experience with one-on-one counselling, and the fact that it was free meant that there was a reduced pressure going in. I didn't have to know everything, I could start slow, let the sessions guide me, and figure out what I needed to talk about. It really helped me to get through a lot of overwhelming feelings. ”

We partner with Ontario post-secondary institutions to provide students with meaningful internships, equipping the next generation of social sector workers.

Stella's Place continues to be the organization of choice for master's level practicum students who work alongside our clinicians. We are proud to be advancing the learning of graduates entering the sector with hands-on experiences at Stella's Place.

## My Next Chapter

My Next Chapter" is a peer support training program designed to strengthen the capacity of young adults with lived experience who are interested in becoming a peer supporter.

Their very own "Community of Practice" provides ongoing professional development, recovery and wellness to young adults who are working as peer supporters. Peer supporters gain greater competency with ongoing training by learning from a community of leading experts, which increases their capacity to lead others. As they participate, they are also gaining skills to manage their own mental health.

## Our hybrid model is here to stay

The needs of young adults are constantly changing, and so are we. At Stella's Place, we embrace a cycle of learning and development to improve programs and yield better outcomes for young adults.

Each year, we draft an evaluation report, continuously using our findings to maintain programs, or adapt them to what works best.

Innovation delivers better outcomes for young adults, and you can find new ideas being put into practice in every corner of Stella's Place.

“ We understand that our participants value both in-person and virtual services. Participants appreciate both modes of delivery, and a high comfort level in both. Our hybrid model will continue permanently, as a result of this learning. ”

– **Laera Gattoni**

Laera is our Director of Research & Evaluation. She guides research at Stella's Place, contributing to a continuous cycle of program improvement.

## Warm and welcoming spaces

This year, we celebrate the opening of our new 11,000-square-foot facility at 54 Wolseley Street, near Queen and Bathurst. It is the first fully accessible walk-in facility of its kind in Canada, with every aspect of the space co-designed with, for, and by young adults.

- The building is state-of-the-art and energy-efficient, with fully accessible, welcoming spaces designed to foster the well-being of all who enter.
- Double the size our previous rented space, it features large and small group program spaces, a community kitchen, cozy nooks, and private counselling rooms, with ample space for staff.
- At its heart is Goldie's Café, a drop-in space offering food, drinks, and a safe space to work or just hang out. It's the first place where young adults learn how our programs work and where to access the right care.
- However a young adult expresses their identity, they are welcome in our non-judgmental space.

The space is fully accessible with ramps, braille, and guidance systems throughout. The ambiance is non-clinical with plenty of natural light.

Trained Peer Supporters greet participants, and provide safe and effective support to other young adults experiencing similar challenges.

Having "been there" themselves, a Peer Supporter can listen and respond from a place of true understanding to communicate hope and optimism.

**Donors are welcome in our space too!** Engage in a group or individual tour by emailing [development@stellasplace.ca](mailto:development@stellasplace.ca).



“ Our builder, Stantec Architecture, nominated Stella's Place for an international Design in Mental Health Award. Stacked up against much larger international institutions, we won first place as the Project of the Year in the Refurbishment Category! By inviting young adults to co-design our programs and spaces, the end result is ideally suited to them and their needs. ”

– **Donna Green**

Donna is the Chair of our Board of Directors, and the inspirational founder behind Stella's Place.

# Innovation in partnerships

Our program delivery models are scalable and have already been successfully piloted with community partners, in hospitals and at post-secondary institutions.

Stella's Place is especially proud of its partnership with the City of Toronto's Community Healing Project—which addresses the impact of violence on youth in marginalized communities. Since 2017, Stella's Place has been training young adults from marginalized communities as Peer Supporters to respond to trauma among youth in their community.

This program and other partnerships have given us the confidence to put a bold call to action out to the mental healthy community this year. This year we invited them to partner with us, with a series of full-page donated ads in the *Globe & Mail* newspaper. This effort yielded fruitful new conversations about future partnerships.

“ Everyone who makes a gift to Stella's Place is having a direct impact on the life of a young adult, while at the same time, investing in mental health innovation.

Reporting back to donors is a huge priority for us—we want you to know that your philanthropy is making a difference.

Stella's Place is almost entirely privately funded, with municipal partnerships historically providing a small percentage of funding. No matter the size of our gift, or how you gave it, your gift matters to us. ”

– **Maureen Lewis**

Chief Development Officer  
mlewis@stellasplace.ca | 416-346-4910

Maureen is passionate about raising support and building new partnerships for Stella's Place.

# In the news

Our *Globe & Mail* ads raised awareness with these sobering headlines:

**Young adults are in crisis. At Stella's Place, we envision a world where healthy, resilient young adults can live the lives they choose.**

# 30%

**of young adults cannot access the mental health care services they need**

# 40%

**of them feel like they're at a breaking point**



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