
WOMEN'S INITIATIVES FOR SAFER ENVIRONMENTS

2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Thank you to our funder
The City of Ottawa



www.wiseottawa.ca / +1 613-230-6700 / info@wiseottawa.ca

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MISSION STATEMENT	3
MANDATE	3
OPERATING PRINCIPLES	3
ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE	4
BOARD OF DIRECTORS	5
MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR	6
COMMUNITY RECOGNITION	7
WISE VOLUNTEERS	8
WISE PROGRAMMING	9
Community Safety Audits	
Personal Safety Workshops	
Heroes for Tomorrow	
Women On Wheels (WOW)	
Cyber Safety workshops	
Legal Education Workshops	
Building Women Up Workshops	
SIGNATURE EVENTS	14
Youth Art Event (YAE)	
Safety Walk for Women	
COLLABORATIONS	15
WISE COMMITTEE REPORTS	17
THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS AND PARTNERS	17

MISSION STATEMENT

Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments (WISE) is a community-based bilingual organization, established in 1992. We work directly with individuals, diverse communities, local government, and agencies to create safer physical and social environments in our neighbourhoods, parks, workplaces, recreational pathways, and schools.

We believe that if we make the community safer for women and other vulnerable groups, it will be safer for everyone.

Mandate

- ▶ To act as a catalyst to foster the creation and sustainability of safe social and physical environments.
- ▶ To organize and conduct public safety audits from a feminist perspective, including the perspective of the full diversity of women and other vulnerable people in society.
- ▶ A safety audit includes attending a site; assessing safety issues; creating an action plan to address deficiencies and then follow up with stakeholders to monitor and encourage implementation of recommendations.
- ▶ We work to accomplish this mission by working with local government, communities, agencies and those seeking to create safer environments.

Operating Principles

- ▶ We believe that violence against women is linked to women's inequality.
- ▶ Solutions to violence against women must be based in women's experience.
- ▶ We will work to make our organization and services completely bilingual.
- ▶ We recognize and respect the diversity of women's experiences and will work to make our organization and services reflect this diversity.
- ▶ All our work is developed in consultation with the community. We support other women's and anti-violence organizations. We will not duplicate the work of other organizations.

ORGANIZATION HISTORY

Embracing EDI and Intersectionality
In May 1990, a collective of women gathered in Ottawa-Carleton, united by a shared concern for women's safety in public spaces. This pivotal meeting marked the inception of the Women and Urban Safety Committee. Over two years, this initiative expanded to include a diverse group of over 200 community members, leading to significant funding from the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. This investment was a testament to the community's commitment to creating a safer environment for women. The initial grant supported an 18-month period of growth, and today, we continue to receive funding from the City and other sources to further our mission.







Incorporating the organization in 1992 posed the challenge of choosing a name that reflected our mission. The Women's Action Centre Against Violence (Ottawa-Carleton) was selected, highlighting our focus on combating violence and advocating for women's experiences. As we evolved to meet the changing needs of our community, we recognized the importance of a name that conveyed our mandate more clearly. In 2002, we became WISE, Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments, a name that embodies our commitment to promoting safety for all women and community members.

Over the past three decades, WISE has been at the forefront of creativity and productivity. Our staff, volunteers, and dedicated Board have consistently produced high-quality work. We have provided women and communities with effective solutions to address violence, and we remain dedicated to this cause.

As we look to the future, WISE is committed to incorporating principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and intersectionality into our work. We recognize that safety and violence are issues that intersect with various aspects of identity, including race, gender, sexuality, and ability.

Our approach is holistic, acknowledging the complex realities of those we serve and striving to create inclusive, equitable solutions that recognize the unique experiences of all individuals. WISE continues to be a dynamic force, adapting to the needs of our diverse community and ensuring that every voice is heard and valued in the pursuit of a safer environment for everyone.

CONTACT WISE AT:

-  205-211 Bronson Ave., Ottawa, Ontario
-  (613) 230-6700
-  info@wiseottawa.ca
-  www.wiseottawa.ca
-  @WISEOttawa
-  @WomensInitiativesForSaferEnvironm
ents

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Some amazing folks have helped guide this organization during the period covered by this annual report. We would not be able to do this work without your dedication and support. Thank you to all board members for your generosity of time and effort.

Current Executive Team

Alexandra Skutovich, **Chair**

Hailey DiCaita **Vice Chair**

Kristy-Lu Desrosiers, **Treasurer**

Serving Directors of the Board 2023-2024

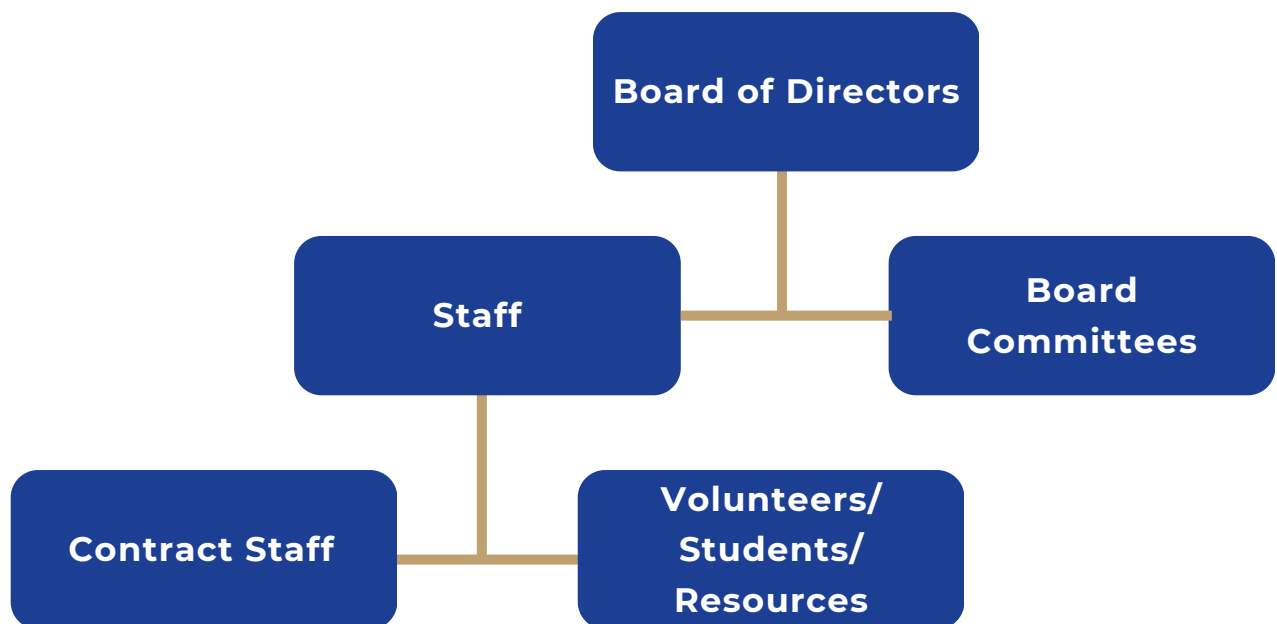
Caglayan Seray, Alana Couvrette, Taylor

Hanson, Jason McLinton, Fiona Purkiss

Sarah Scott, & Chloe Watt.

During early 2023, we said so long to Fiona Purkiss due to an overwhelming workload and Sarah Scott has taken a brief leave of absence for similar reasons.

Organization Chart



Dear Partners and Supporters,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present you with WISE's 2023-24 Annual Report.

2023 was a busy year for WISE, and we feel lucky to have engaged with so many people in the community to help make Ottawa a safer space for all.

As WISE continues to adjust to a post-Covid world, we were proud to have offered a number of programs and events in person. Most notably our Building Women Up, Women on Wheels, Paint Night, and Youth Arts Event; which were all enjoyed by so many in-person throughout the year. Our team also offered many workshops (virtual and in-person) across the city, such as: our Legal Education Workshops, Cyber Safety, and Personal Safety Workshops. As always, we were also very busy in the community conducting Community Safety Audits to improve safety throughout Ottawa.

WISE had the pleasure of engaging with our community, supporters, and valued partners throughout the year, which helped us drive greater visibility and awareness for WISE. For example, we partnered with our sister organizations on initiatives such as the December 6th Vigil and Take Back the Night, and partnered with the Ottawa Arts Council, Home Depot, Velofix, Kal Tire, and Ottawa U Legal Clinic, among others, on events and workshops. To shine a light on other organizations doing great things in the Ottawa community, the WISE board also started Partner Spotlights at meetings; with iSisters and CCGSD presenting to us in the last few months. WISE would never be able to accomplish as much as we do year after year without the support we receive from all our partners and supporters!



Equity and inclusion always remain at the forefront of WISE's mandate, and we worked extremely hard to support marginalized communities and be inclusive of all. WISE is currently in the process of examining our mission and content to be as inclusive as possible, and so that everyone feels welcome at WISE. To ensure our Board of Directors is representative of the community we serve, we are also actively working towards diversifying the Board.

WISE is extremely grateful for another successful year, with many exciting initiatives, events, and programming. We owe so much to our amazing staff members, Valerie Collicott and Elsy David, for their tireless work again this year, as well as our Board Members, students, and volunteers, who offer their skills and their time to help WISE continue its amazing work in the community. We are also ever thankful to all our funders, donors, and supporters; you are integral contributors to all the good we do in the community. I have truly appreciated and enjoyed working with all of you, and am excited for this next year as WISE continues to grow and accomplish even more within the community.

Alexandra Skutovich,
Chair

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION

For the second year running, WISE has received a certificate of appreciation during Non profit Appreciation Week from local MPP for Ottawa Centre, Joel Harden. WISE is very pleased to know that our work on community safety and the prevention of violence against vulnerable residents is recognized and appreciated.

Thank you Joel Harden.



WISE VOLUNTEERS

Our steadfast volunteers are a foundational rock for this organization. The Heroes for Tomorrow Team – Peter, Ivi, Hailey, Sarah, Jason, and now Daniel and Yoann, along with others like Maggie, Marta, Dora, Jolly, Andy, Farah, Jill, Emilee, Aalaap and all the volunteers who help out with community events are so valued and appreciated. Then, there is our Board of Directors who are a hard-working group and we really do appreciate what they do for us. All volunteers diligently volunteer their spare time, which we know is precious and we are so grateful.

What do volunteers do?

Volunteers take on various projects and programming responsibilities such as conducting Safety Audits, supporting Personal safety Workshops, researching and designing new exciting interactive workshop modules, redesigning and updating social media platforms, helping organize community events and fundraisers, and promoting programming.

Thank you to all of our wonderful students and volunteers!

Here are some of the ways you can contribute when you become a WISE volunteer:

- ▶ Join our Board of Directors
- ▶ Sign up and lead a Community Safety Audit in your neighbourhood
- ▶ Take part in a Personal Safety Workshop
- ▶ Promote the Heroes for Tomorrow Workshop for boys
- ▶ Help advertise and book a Legal Education Workshop for women
- ▶ Represent WISE at community meetings, fairs, displays, and public events
- ▶ Support WISE by promoting fundraising ventures
- ▶ Last but not least, help out with administrative tasks I.E. producing the monthly newsletter

Fill out a volunteer application from our website or call us to arrange YOUR opportunity! Once you sign up as a volunteer, you are eligible to vote at the annual General meeting.

WISE PROGRAMMING

1

COMMUNITY SAFETY AUDITS

WISE began our work in creating safer environments through the community safety audit program. In the last 30 years, we have worked with numerous groups from neighbourhoods across the city, to create safer parks, pathways, parking lots, transit stations, and new site developments.

Our audits have revealed many spaces where women, gender diverse folks and vulnerable groups have experienced feelings of fear and insecurity. Some of these spaces are common to our communities, such as small alleys, underground garages, recreational pathways, parking lots and tunnels.

If you're wondering where we do these Community Safety Audits and how you go about getting one done, simply send us an email or call us. Anywhere someone may be feeling unsafe in a public area is relevant. We'll work with you and any other residents or stakeholders in your area to make the space feel safer to use.



Please find below a summary of the audit work and types of workshops we have done with various groups over the past year.

Bronson Centre

Bronson Centre is an important community hub and workplace for the community. Close to 34 non-profit organizations work in the Bronson Centre, providing support to many members of our community. In addition, to running tax clinics, providing food hampers, reducing homelessness and more, the Bronson Centre also hosts prominent music and performing artists.

Safety and security are important considerations in a facility that hosts such a variety of clients and patrons.

The Centre has been undergoing extensive renovations over the past few years. Presently, our audit found that washrooms require more accessibility features and stalls require widening. Lighting on the third floor requires improvement in corners. The elevators are also older models that do not easily accommodate wheelchairs. The elevators also malfunction periodically which is a major barrier for those wishing to access public events in the building. It is our understanding that these concerns are under consideration in the renovation plans.



Primrose Pathway

WISE received a community complaint about a dark scary area on the pathway from Primrose leading to Pimisi Station. The community member expressed feelings of fear when using this space at night. Out of this Community safety audit, like many others, concerns raised and recommended actions have led to discussions on trimming and pruning overgrown shrubs and branches along Primrose Road leading to the pathway entrance leading to Booth Street and Pimisi Station. Installation of pedestrian lighting along the stairs and pathway leading down to Booth Street will help to provide better visibility for pedestrians during the autumn and winter months. Re-grading of sidewalks along Primrose will prevent falls and improve accessibility for people who use mobility devices.

Other Community Safety Audits are in the planning stages and we are working with community groups to set parameters, dates and meeting locations.

2

PERSONAL SAFETY WORKSHOPS

WISE conducted several personal safety workshops with women, youth and gender diverse folks to build confidence, learn safety planning strategies, and prevent gender-based violence. We work with several partnering agencies in the city such as IWSO, Carty House, Women's Emergency Shelters, and the Youville Centre to provide specific support to individual women in crisis who need additional assistance in safety planning.

Diverse personal safety workshops for women and vulnerable groups in Ottawa aim to look at strategies for increasing empowerment, safety, assertiveness, and awareness.

This year, we worked with partners such as Immigrant Women Services Ottawa (IWSO), Orkidstra, Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) premises, and Options Bytown to run workshops on personal safety planning for women at risk of GBV.

WISE offered a Personal Safety workshop to over 800 employees of the Canada Revenue Agency to promote strategies on personal safety and GBV awareness.

We also offered self defense workshops for women in response to requests from the community.



3

HEROES FOR TOMORROW

Heroes for Tomorrow, a program seeking to involve young boys in the alliance to end GBV, has been working hard at refining an online archetype of our in-person program. We have been testing the virtual platform, integrating feedback and inserting amendments to ensure that the program delivery is seamless and engaging for our youth. We have launched the first iteration of the game platform and will continue to build on the platform as the year continues. We thank the Ottawa Community Foundation for funding this initiative.

We are also hosting in person workshops again and welcome the opportunity to partner with you to present this program to young boys in the city.

4

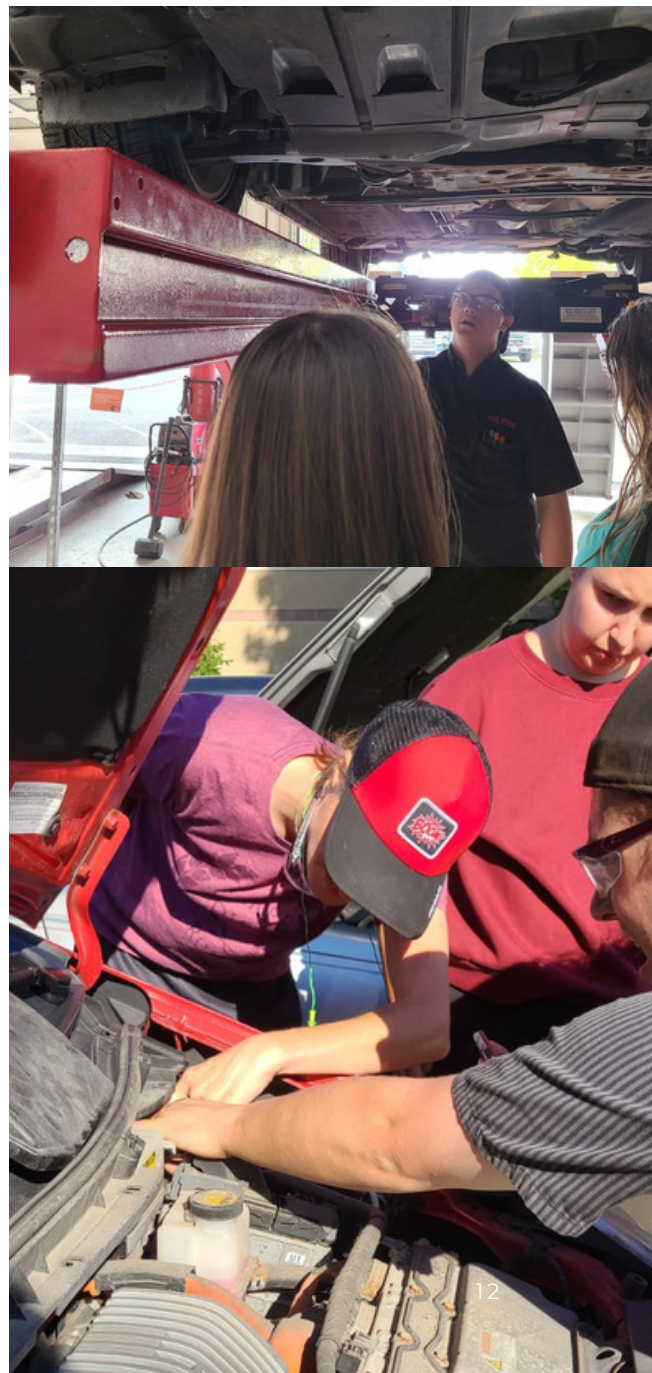
WOMEN ON WHEELS (WOW)

Women on Wheels, in partnership with the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council (OMVIC), received important helpful information for women on the topics of safe vehicle purchasing and negotiating service contracts.

We partnered with Full Cycle to offer two free Bicycle Safety and repair workshops. These workshops were a huge success as many of our clients turned out to learn hands-on techniques for changing tires, keeping all bicycle parts in good working condition, and riding safely. We thank our facilitators at Full Cycle for their generous spirit and wonderful facilitation.

WISE ran our car safety and mechanics workshop this year in partnership with KalTire in Kanata. Our clients learned about brake systems, changing flat tires, checking the wear on tires, changing window wipers, gauging wheel alignment, changing oil, charging car batteries and more.

We thank our excellent facilitators at KalTire for their generous time and dedication.



5

CYBER SAFETY WORKSHOPS

We hosted a workshop in partnership with ISISTERS Technology Mentoring which provided information on ways to remain safe while using the internet or social media. This would be particularly of use to seniors or first-time computer users who might not be familiar with the many obstacles and traps and barriers online.

6

LEGAL EDUCATION WORKSHOPS

This year we continued legal information webinars on family law for women who require information on issues related to separation and divorce, child custody, support payments and violence. We also ran workshops on other topics such as Housing and Tenant Laws in partnership with the University of Ottawa Community Legal Clinic.

7

BUILDING WOMEN UP

WISE, in partnership with the Gloucester Home Depot and Baseline Home Depot, offered our free empowering home renovation and safety workshops in-person to women in the Ottawa area. Once again, we were overwhelmed with the response from applicants interested in this program. Building Women Up allows participants to learn hands-on skills with a focus on safety, such as installing deadbolts, peepholes in doors, basic plumbing, patching drywall and painting, and the series culminates with the building of garden boxes. A draw at the end of each workshop series provided one lucky participant with her own toolbox of tools for home renovation. Congratulations to the winners.

We look forward to working in collaboration with all of our existing partners and forging new partnerships in the coming year to create relevant programs that foster resiliency and empowerment for our clients. If your neighbourhood or any public area makes you feel uneasy and would require a safety audit, or your group would like to book a workshop or seminar, contact us at WISE. It's that easy!



WISE SIGNATURE EVENTS

YOUTH ART EVENT (YAE)

Our 3rd WISE Youth Art Competition was held in 2023. A callout was made for youth to send in their entries on the topic of “survivor”. An expanded range of categories was available and we had orchestral groups, solitaire dancers, musicians, painters, and spoken word poets. An amazing plethora of talent! And wow were we impressed by the talent! We held a celebration to feature our budding artists which was a wonderful success thanks to the sponsorship from the Ottawa Arts Council.



Meet our winners:

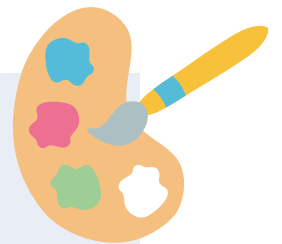
- North Movement – Dance category First prize
- Orkidstra – Music category First prize
- Hiba Fathima Nismi – Visual Arts category First prize

Other winners include:

- Darius Oommen – Dance
- Gayathri Binu – Dance
- Ishana Leo – Music
- Marwa Kabirzad – Visual Art
- Gabrielle Bailey – Visual Art
- Madeleine Gagne – Visual Art

Congratulations! We were all so impressed! We hope to see you all back in 2024 when we include an adult category which we were urged to include through popular demand.

Join us for one of our “Paint Nights” at which we invite community members to create a painting that reflects your feelings about “Survivor”. We are so looking forward to this very meaningful event in 2024.



SAFETY WALK FOR WOMEN

WISE designed a campaign to have residents walk their neighbourhoods to look to see what troublesome issues are present.

Are there conditions in your neighbourhood that make you feel uneasy? Take a walk and let WISE know what needs to be address. Important safety issues are highlighted when people start to notice and speak up. WISE will then follow up and do a community safety audit.

The Safety Walk for Women Campaign was started in 2022 as a fundraiser. We offered the opportunity for folks to walk and get sponsorships. Thanks for the contributions of those who donated to the campaign this past year.

Watch for the campaign again in 2024. It's your chance to have your say about any space that concerns you in Ottawa.



COLLABORATIONS

1

AMBASSADOR'S WORKING GROUP

WISE participated on this venture offering feedback on a proposed plan for the official plan that look forward to what Ottawa would be like in 2050. The plan was submitted to Council in 2022. It was an opportunity for us to bring community safety to the table and contribute to ideas such as the “15-Minute Neighbourhood”. We continue looking at various master plans at the city and bringing our feedback to that process.

2

OC TRANSP0 SAFETY WORKING GROUP

WISE is still part of the working group on Safety with OC Transpo and other women’s network partner organizations. However, this group’s work has slowed down since the pandemic onset and attempts to initiate meetings again this past year have not resulted in resumption of the work. WISE hopes we can get that started again. ing our feedback to that process.

3

WOMEN’S EVENTS NETWORK (WEN)

WISE is proud to continue to be part of the public education events organized by Women’s Events Network (WEN) including: the ClothesLine Project, Take Back the Night and the December 6th Vigil, Each event is designed to heighten public awareness about the issue of violence against women and how we all can work together to stop it



WISE COMMITTEE REPORTS

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

This committee is charged with the responsibility to raise awareness of WISE with community and partners; work on communication tools such as the WISE Brochure, logo, foundation documents, website and social media platforms; and establish effective connections with community and institutional partners.

This past year, the Communications committee continued to work hard to promote WISE programs and safety for all in Ottawa.

Our Instagram, Facebook and Twitter highlight our social media presence on campaigns such as the “Safety Walk for Women” and fund raisers underway.

The committee oversees the publication of our monthly newsletter “WISE Word on Safety” to all of our subscribers who sign up on our website www.wiseottawa.ca.

Some of our committee members and volunteers help out with publishing the newsletter each month and help out with poster design.

Thank you committee members and volunteers for all your hard work this year!

FINANCE AND FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

This year the Finance Committee has focused on grant writing in search of funds to allow us to expand to provide enhanced programming for 2SLGBTQI+ communities as well as the development of an investment policy for WISE.

It is this committee that spearheads any fundraising ventures such as the Neighbourhood Safety Walkathon which has taken place over the past couple of years.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Committee Mandate

To provide program support and advice to WISE by:

- ▶ Recommending innovative and sustainable programs to the Board that are in line with the strategic direction of WISE;
- ▶ Aiming to increase the public profile of WISE by strengthening and creating sustainable partnerships;
- ▶ Developing monitoring and performance indicators for programs to ensure efficient and effective program delivery; and
- ▶ Supporting the Communications Committee with regard to program outreach and advocacy for women, seniors, pedestrians, transit users and people with different abilities in our communities.

As the pandemic restrictions eased over the past 1.5 years, WISE continues to offer programming online and again in-person to our clients.

WISE has been very pleased to reconnect with many of our regular partners and clients during this past year and develop new connections with agencies that we look forward to partnering with in broader and more creative ways.

We enthusiastically look forward to the future, increasing our work with new partners in the community, continuing our involvement in the design and safety of new spaces within Ottawa and empowering women survivors in our communities, and working with partners in the sSLGBTQI+ communities in Ottawa.

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

WISE is fortunate to have some core funding from the City of Ottawa through a 5-year Contribution Agreement. We are very pleased to work with all Councillors and the Mayor to assist with anyone in the city who is feeling unsafe in public areas. We count on Councillors to spread the word that WISE is here and ready to assist. We thank our funding consultant, Ms. Camille Marcil-Ferland who is always ready to answer our questions and guide us through significant proposed changes to the funding model at the City of Ottawa. We are always seeking diverse sources for funding to assist us in securing our future.

Other sources of funding came from:

- The Occasional Teachers Association of Ottawa-Carleton
- The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario
- Egg Farmers of Canada
- Donors from the fundraising platform Canada Helps
- Individuals who identified WISE as a charity of choice through the United Way Campaign payroll program.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

In order to do our work effectively, it is essential that we have solid relationships with partners in the community.

WISE is fortunate to work with many partners in the community, ranging from interested individuals, VAW agencies and community centres, to institutions such as OC Transpo, Ottawa Housing, etc.

Over this past year, we have connected with a few new partners: Isisters, Technology Mentoring and the Ottawa University Legal Clinic, with whom we have provided some workshops on cyber Safety as well as Housing and tenant rights.

Partners are vital to our success and we keep reaching out to form new partnerships and enrich the connections in our community.



If you are interested in helping us do this worthwhile work, then join us as a volunteer, Board Member, or as a valuable donor. No matter how large or small your contribution, it all makes a difference.

The WISE Team