

# ANNUAL REPORT

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## 2021-2022

Employ to Empower Foundation

Created: July 2022  
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Prepared by:  
*Christina Wong, Zaida Rosario, Amanda Mah*



# **C**ontent

Opening Letter

Our Impacts

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Reflecting on this past year, three words come to mind: *Humility, Tenacity and Community.*

As we braved yet another year of the unexpected, we learned to get comfortable with showing humility and normalized not-knowing– which meant asking for support when we needed it.

One thing that our entrepreneurship community sought support for was growing their audiences and customer bases, especially digitally, seeing that in-person markets were not permitted during the pandemic. We took this feedback seriously and piloted the **Make Change Marketplace**, the first ever e-commerce store to feature our entrepreneurs' products. We launched in November 2021 and featured the products of nine entrepreneurs, generating \$526.94 in sales!

This year, our entrepreneurship community continued to demonstrate a drive to learn with the utmost tenacity. We made a big leap forward and supported triple the amount of entrepreneurs in our 10-week Business Planning Development Program and Mentorship Program. We found 97% of the community experienced an increase in self-confidence and belonging as a result of embarking in entrepreneurship.

As our community of entrepreneurs grew, our focus was to maintain the quality of support that entrepreneurs receive. We found a need to increase our capacity to support a higher volume of entrepreneurs and hired one part-time employee, Charissa Landicho, and two contracted staff, Truman and Amanda. We also brought on board member Darius Maze, who joined as Vice-Chair in November 2021 and offers expertise in board governance and fundraising.

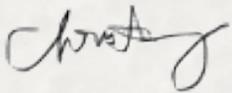
In August 2021, we launched EntrePEERneur Gatherings with the goal of creating a greater sense of belonging and community. At these community meals, entrepreneurs and mentors alike share lessons learned from personal challenges with their peers. These monthly meetings truly reflect the heart of what we do– using entrepreneurship to foster community and belonging. This ties to our deep belief that people have strengths, skills and assets to offer to the community.

# opening Letter

In that same breath, what brings me the most joy is witnessing 40% of the entrepreneurs believing in their capabilities and becoming a resource for incoming entrepreneurs in our program. This creates a ripple effect of change and a sustainable circular economy.

To end off, I'm sharing a wholehearted thank you to all of our volunteers, staff, board members and advisors who stood boldly by its commitment to help us cultivate community through entrepreneurship.

With gratitude,



Christina Wong  
Executive Director and Co-founder

## Our Impacts

**97%** increase in self esteem.

A total of **\$65,775.91** earned by entrepreneurs, **6.8x** more than last year!

**\$198,631** (1.6x more than last year) raised by our generous community of donors.

**\$4,759** distributed in loans, **3.5x** more than last year) with **0%** default.

# About Employ to Empower

Employ to Empower (ETE) is a local charity empowering people who face work and social barriers through entrepreneurial resources. We offer business fundamentals training, personalized mentorship, micro-loans and self-advocacy opportunities. Almost a quarter of Downtown Eastside (DTES) residents are striving to become entrepreneurs as an avenue to earn income, develop confidence, and contribute learned skills back to their communities. This creates a circular and sustainable economy in which participants who complete our programs re-engage and empower the incoming entrepreneurs.

We are more than just business and entrepreneurship. We believe success is measured in more than economic wealth, but the human experience. Our community considers belonging, community, supplementary income and self esteem as part of success. Learn more about our story on [Global News Live](#).

Entrepreneurship is viewed as a flexible and viable opportunity to earn income and make impact by low-income entrepreneurs. However, most low-income entrepreneurs have limited economic and social resources to launch or grow their business, as found by the Low-Income Entrepreneurs Needs Assessment Report published in 2017. This needs assessment also highlights the need for low-barrier and accessible programs for entrepreneurs in Vancouver's DTES to access new skills and expertise, gain supportive mentor networks, as well as access to loans and new markets. Further, programmatic investments are needed in order to facilitate and connect micro-entrepreneurs to the right resources in a person-centred and individualized way.

In 2019, we interviewed 22 artists and entrepreneurs learned that their greatest barriers are lack of access to: 1:1 mentorship, financial management, maker spaces and affordable loans. With this community research, Employ to Empower responded by developing experiential services to support entrepreneurs under our three core programs: Business Skills Building, Mentorship and Advocacy.

# L eadership Growth

As our entrepreneurship community grows, so does our leadership team. We hired Charissa as our second part time employee and onboarded a new board member, Darius Maze as our Board Chair. We doubled our community of volunteers at Employ to Empower as well!

## INTERNAL TEAM



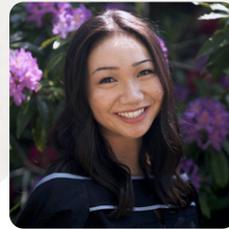
Christina Wong  
Executive  
Director



Charissa Landicho  
Advocacy Lead



Truman Wong  
Head of  
Development



Amanda Mah  
Brand &  
Marketing Lead

# Business Skills Building Program

## Three Successful Cohorts

As we continue to evolve, we facilitated three successful courses throughout 2021-2022. Throughout the year, we started meeting people who were interested in entrepreneurship but needed support in coming up with an idea. Taking this feedback seriously, we designed and piloted our Ideation Course in September 2021 with two entrepreneurs.

Starting April 2021, all of our cohorts resumed back to in person and supported a total of 18 entrepreneurs, 3x from last year.

We are very thankful to Christine from the Open Door Group Opportunities Fund and Kristi from Community Futures who helped make this become a reality.



## Learnings

We take feedback very seriously at Employ to Empower. Given the influx in volume of new entrepreneurs, we learned that we need a full time resource to support the program to help deliver a meaningful entrepreneur experience from end to end. The volunteer resources are not sufficient due to capacity, availability and ultimately, longevity.



## Additional Learnings

- We need additional training and development to support neurodivergent entrepreneurs and their unique requirements. Moreover, existing model of group showcase may not be sustainable with the growing membership at the organization and we will need to create a more sustainable way to host showcases. Lastly, more personalized support is needed for the transition between the course and the mentorship.
- We identified the need for a full time resource to support the program and help deliver a robust participant experience from end to end, onboarding to transition into the Entrepreneurship program.
- Volunteer resources are not sufficient due to capacity, availability, and, ultimately longevity.
- The existing model of group showcase celebrations with specialist panelist support may not be sustainable, as the program grows.



# Mentorship Program

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We had the beautiful opportunity to cultivate stronger relationships with existing entrepreneurs, and welcome 18 new entrepreneurs into our Employ to Empower family! Some wins to celebrate:

## Social & Economic Impact

97% increase in self esteem, self worth and sense of belonging.

6 entrepreneurs contributed back to the community by educating the 114 people from the broader Vancouver community about shifting the stigma.

7 entrepreneurs contributed back to their community and led workshops with 30+ Mulgrave Highschool students.

A total of \$65,775.91 earned by entrepreneurs (6.8x more than last year).

\$4,759 distributed in loans (3.5x more than last year) with 0% default.





# Meet the Entrepreneurs

## Julie Melanie

Enviro Bag Evolution

Julie Melanie is the creative mind and nurturing soul behind Enviro Bag Evolution. A trained seamstress, Julie Melanie creates hand-made storage bags for disabled people who use a variety of mobility aids.

[Read more about Julie's story on our blog!](#)

“*The inspiration behind my product comes from my personal experience as a walker and scooter user. I rely on these devices for mobility and daily activities - groceries, banking, and even laundry. They help me do my life errands and allow me to live a very independent life. However, my walker and scooter have one major shortcoming - they lack easily accessible space. And as they say... necessity is the mother of invention. The product I am creating is a storage bag to hold your water bottle, cell phone, glasses, keys or whatever you need at your fingertips.*

*Each Enviro Bag Evolution product is handcrafted from recycled fabrics to fit wheelchairs, scooters and walkers.*

”





## Meet the Entrepreneurs

# Yvonne Mark

Poet

Yvonne Mark owns 'Salmon Soup for the Soul' - a compilation of stories on recovery in the DTES neighborhood. As a self-taught writer, Yvonne documents her journey to sobriety with strength and resilience. Her unique perspective as a DTES survivor shines through in her a collection of short stories and poems that aim to inspire and empower others.

[Listen to Yvonne speak on the Cardboard Project Podcast!](#)

“ *It doesn't matter what age you are  
– never give up on your dreams.* ”





## Meet the Entrepreneurs

# Martin Haridge

Stick Artist

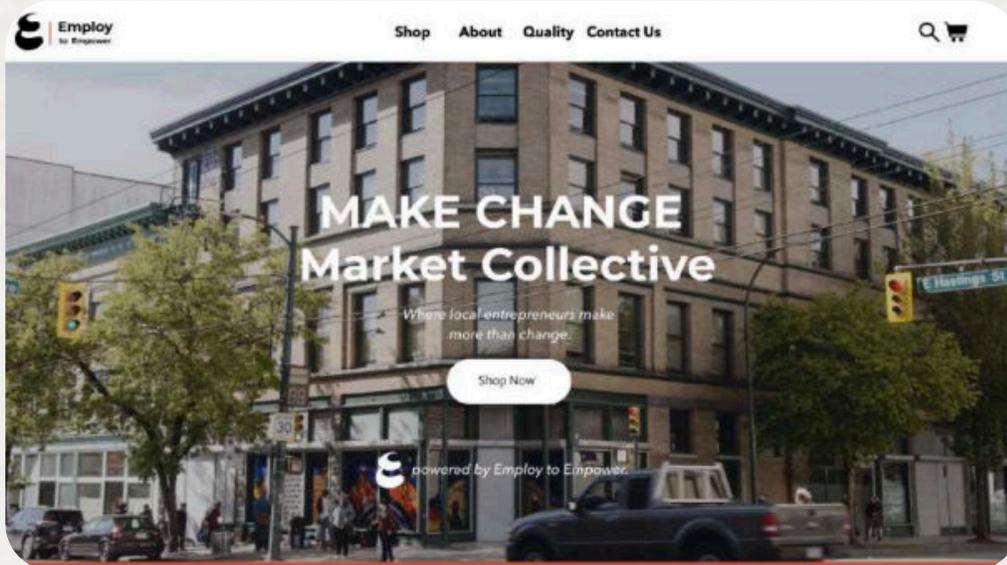
Martin Haridge is the owner and operator of The Walking Stick Dude. A semi-retired construction worker, Martin started making walking sticks while healing from a leg infection. Each stick is sourced from local wood, then hand-sanded and carved into a unique piece of functional art. Walking sticks make for excellent mobility aids, fashion accessories, hiking support or wall art.

[Read more about Martin's story on our blog!](#)

“ I like to take things from being throw-away, to being one-of-a-kind. ”



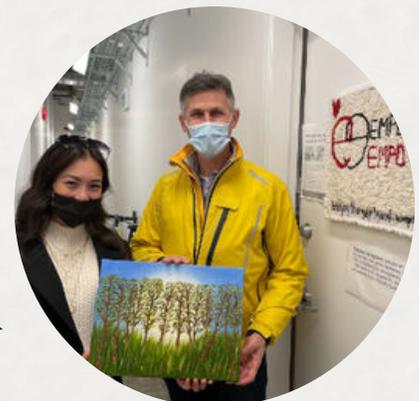
# Online E-Commerce Store Make Change Marketplace



With sales and marketing being a core challenge our low income entrepreneurs face, as part of our entrepreneurship program, we would like to expand our programming to include an online e-commerce store called Make Change Marketplace. The Make Change Marketplace is the first ever central platform that showcases art, business, and services led by entrepreneurs from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) community. With every purchase, 100% of proceeds are paid to the creators of their products — our own ETE program entrepreneurs. The online marketplace provides the opportunity for our DTES community to broaden their sales reach, making marketing more accessible. Big thank you to SFU External Relations Sobhana Madhavan for funding this pilot

We launched a pilot in November 2021 and a total of 9 entrepreneurs generated \$526.94 in sales across 26 customers!

[Check out the Make Change Marketplace!](#)



# Monthly EntrePEERneur Gatherings



It is our deep belief that our community of entrepreneurs have a plethora of skills, assets and strength to offer to the community. We see our entrepreneurship community as contributors, with lessons and wisdom to impart to empower others, creating a ripple effect of change. Every month, all entrepreneurs, volunteers, staff and board members gather to practice our pitches, share our wins and challenges and lessons learned.

The intent of our gatherings is to create:

- A sense of community and belonging
- A space for entrepreneurs to support one another with business challenges
- A safe space to share your wins, lessons and challenges



Our first  
EntrePEERneur  
Gathering  
August 2021



# Advocacy Program

## Cardboard Project 3.0: Connection in Social Isolation

In the midst of a historic moment in time, we have globally faced a year of social disconnect and isolation, challenging the way that we connect with others and shining a light on the importance of community. In 2021, we hosted a talk show with ETE entrepreneurs and talked about the question: What have you learned about community & connection? We collected 100+ responses from members of our Downtown Eastside community, as well as responses from the greater Vancouver community and all those participating virtually.



Our aim was to share the very human and real experiences this past year has brought. By hosting our event virtually, our entrepreneurs and community thought leaders will share the lessons, realities, and hopes that we have for community connectedness moving forward.

Jeannette and Alley sharing their cardboard responses.



## Podcast

We launched our first podcast generously funded by City of Vancouver Homelessness Action Grant with a goal of introducing an anti-stigma, awareness-building podcast series, with the goal of countering inaccurate stereotypes and negative public attitudes regarding the DTES. Three talented entrepreneurs were featured on the Cardboard Project Podcast in 2021.

[Listen & Subscribe on Spotify!](#)

## Insight Global Education

In May and June, Employ to Empower partnered with Insight Global Education, a program run at Mulgrave High School, to host community-based, educational programming on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals with their grade 7, 8 and 9 students. This initiative was led by our Advocacy Lead, Charissa Landicho.



Through this partnership, Employ to Empower had the opportunity to help entrepreneurs build relationships with high school students through mutually beneficial learning opportunities.

30 entrepreneurs collaborated with 7 Employ to Empower entrepreneurs to build a website and/or social media marketing for their business, along with learning about the stigma in the DTES community. Check out the final products of this collaboration!

[Deirdre Pinnock's Website](#)

[Crap Trapper Website](#)

# Partnerships & Engagement

## December 2021 - Street Store Vancouver 8.0

This year's Street Store was held in Oppenheimer Park, where we welcomed 493 shoppers! Over 600 hours and 132 volunteers later, 301 bags of donations totalling 6224 items were organized for the Downtown Eastside community to shop from. Everyone did their part to limit the spread of COVID-19 at another Street Store, masking up and sanitizing. Each guest showed us how essential opportunities like Street Store are, even more so under the circumstances we have faced.

Thank you- without your support, we would not have been able to serve up 700 meals or provide PPE to every single one of our 493 shoppers on event day! The season of gratitude follows the season of giving here at Employ to Empower



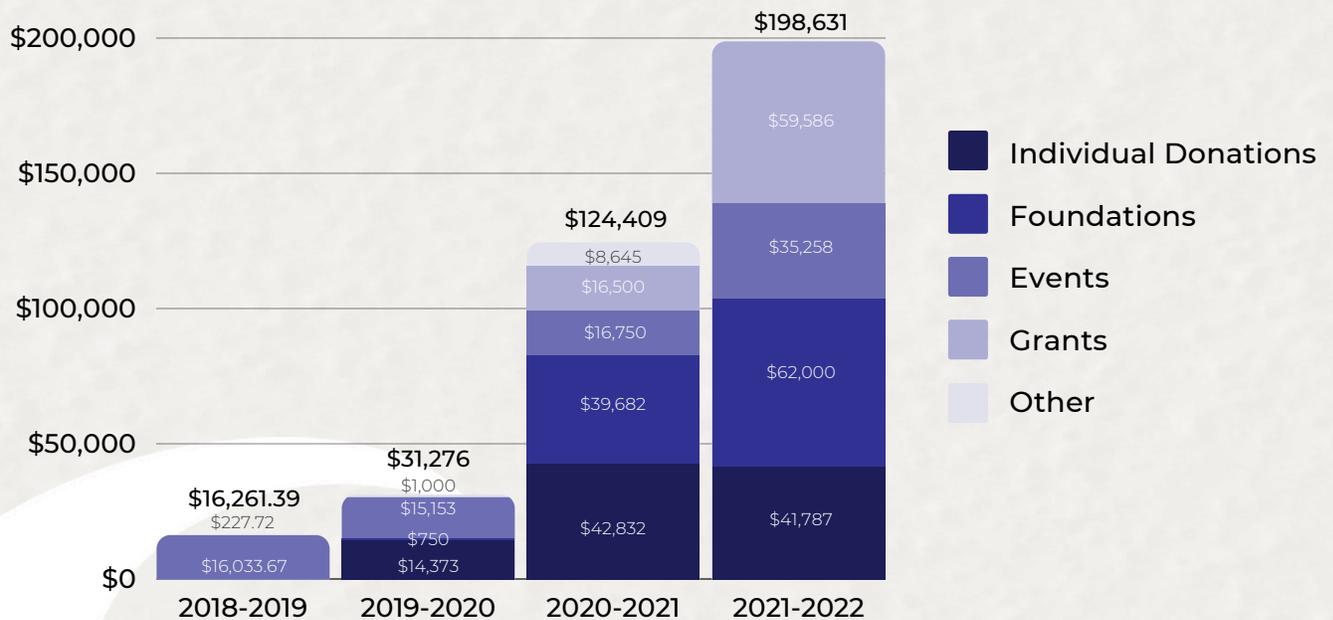
Re-live some moments from the Street Store and check out the photos live on our [Facebook page](#)!

A loyal group of volunteers from Britannia high school who have volunteered since 2014 led by Mitra Tshan.

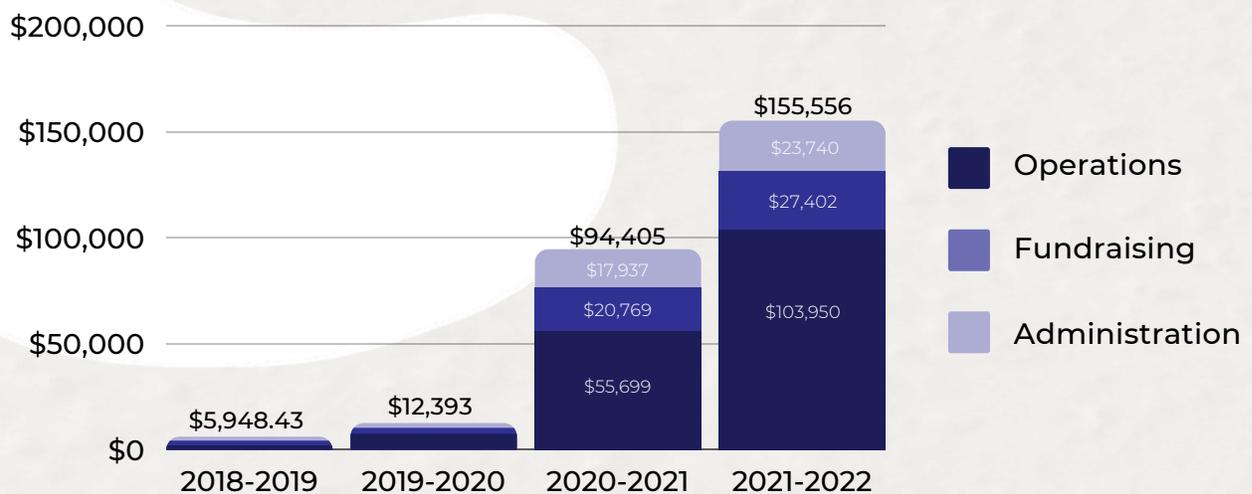
# Financial Overview

On this page is our revenue and expenses analysis from 2018-2019 to the current fiscal year. We continue to rely on our donors to deliver our services, nearly tripling year to year. Our expenses also grew in line with the entrepreneurs we support!

## REVENUES

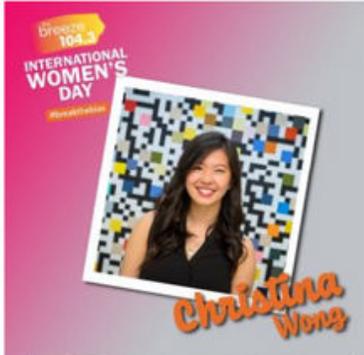


## EXPENSES



# Speaking Engagements & Competitions

## Speaking Events



**Christina Wong, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Employ to Empower (ETE)**

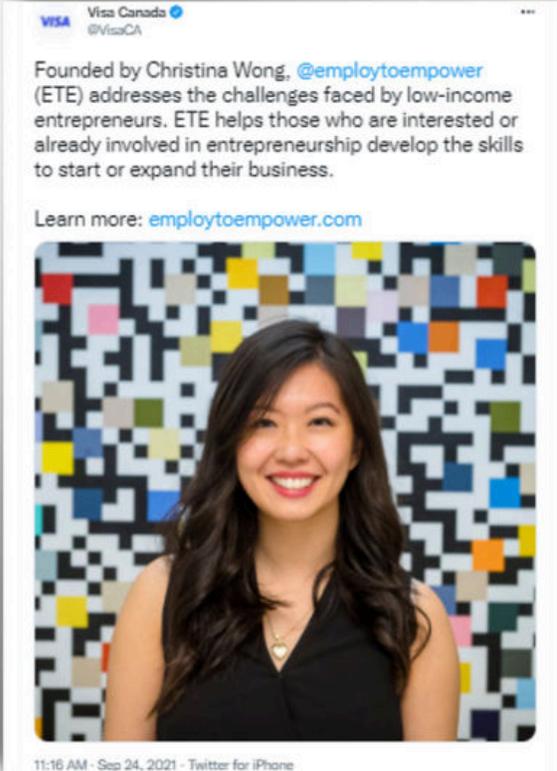
An organization that provides access to business development courses, micro-loans, mentorship, and self-advocacy opportunities as a bridge to foster self-confidence, community and contribution.

Recently, she was nominated for the 2020 YWCA Women of Distinction in the Non-Profit category and a recipient of the 2021 Globe and Mail's top 50 Business Changemakers in Canada.

*104.3 The Breeze International Women's Day Feature.*

## Competitions

In September 2021, our Executive Director was selected for the Visa She's Next Canada Grant Program amongst 1000 applicants across Canada.



11:16 AM · Sep 24, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

# Earned Media

We want to extend a wholehearted thank you to our partners in the media world in helping us to further share our story to the broader community.

## The Cardboard Project 3.0

May 2021

THE VANCOUVER SUN

News / Local News

### Cardboard Project's messages make 'human connection' amid pandemic in Downtown Eastside

*'I have learned how to love again,' wrote one community member in response to a question of what they'd learned during the pandemic*

Matt Robinson

May 12, 2021 • May 12, 2021 • 3 minute read • [Join the conversation](#)



Christina Wong is executive director of Employ to Empower, a registered charity that provides Downtown Eastside residents access to entrepreneurial resources. Wong conceived of the idea for the third annual Cardboard Project. PHOTO BY ARLEN REDEKOP /PNG

"Human connection is vital to surviving, and then thriving."

DailyHive

### Downtown Eastside residents share experiences in virtual art event

Daniel Chai | May 10 2021, 4:32 pm



Oli Dickerson @winokimedia/Submitted

LIVING

### Cardboard Project 3.0 highlights the pandemic's impact on Vancouver's DTES via a virtual talk show on May 15

by Steve Newton on May 10th, 2021 at 2:58 PM



EMPLOY TO EMPOWER

Check out Employ to Empower's other Events & Initiatives!

THE GEORGIA  
**straight**  
VANCOUVER'S NEWS & ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

# Vancouver Street Store 8.0

December 2021

**VANCOUVER IS AWESOME**

## Vancouver's Downtown Eastside pop-up wants your old clothes for a good cause (PHOTOS)

For the first time in history, this annual event does not have enough donations



Elana Shepert  
Nov 25, 2021 3:50 PM



**DailyHive**

DH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

## Vancouver Street Store to bring Christmas cheer to Downtown Eastside this weekend

Daniel Chai | Dec 6 2021, 11:32 am



Vancouver Street Store/Facebook

**Miss 604**

## DTES Street Store 2021 at Oppenheimer Park

by Rebecca Bollwitt

Tuesday, December 7th, 2021 — 1:29pm PST

Add a Comment



Employ To Empower will host the 8th annual DTES Street Store on December 11th. This accessible outdoor event, presented by BC Housing, provides a dignified shopping experience for those experiencing homelessness.



**Global NEWS**

**THE VANCOUVER SUN**

## Counsellor uses art and music therapy to access traumatic experiences

On UNESCO's World Art Day April 15, *The Vancouver Sun* profiles counsellor Iven Simonetti who uses art therapy to help people.

Kevin Griffin  
Apr 14, 2021 • April 14, 2021 • 3 minute read • Join the conversation



Iven Simonetti holds his branded flying disc and cards that the artist uses in his work as a therapist, in Edmonds Park in Burnaby on April 13. PHOTO BY MIKE BELL/FPNG



GLOBAL NEWS MORNING BC

## Downtown Eastside pop-up needs donations

Posted November 27 2021 11:57am

Christina Wong, Employ to Empower Executive Director, shares details of this year's Vancouver Street Store and why they need more people to donate clothes.

Employ to Empower Entrepreneur Iven Simonetti

# **ur Community** Partners and Funders



**Sheila Kern**

**purposefully**

In June 2021, our charity (Employ to Empower) was falling behind with our fundraising goals until we met **Sheila**. Sheila harbors a deep knowledge in leadership and fundraising and we're lucky she chose Employ to Empower as a grassroots charity to work with. With her dedication and support, we were able to increase our revenue 6x than where we started. Throughout our time with Sheila, not only has she strengthened our non-profit strategy with her expertise and knowledge, but she's also been instrumental in the Executive Director's growth, specifically in areas of relationship building with new donors and overall support with whatever is needed. What's unique about Sheila is that she really cares about making our community a better place and over delivers. We'd recommend Sheila in a heartbeat to strengthen your fundraising strategy as a non-profit.



**Carmen Ryujin**



**Carmen Ryujin** is a natural connector and genuinely cares about creating bridges between foundations and charities in Vancouver. Carmen has supported not only as a funder, but an active volunteer and advocate for our Street Store event for three years. She also lends her expertise in community giving and is supporting at-risk youth to access our business development course and mentorship



**Caleigh Amelio**



TELUS has been an active supporter since 2018 from donating cellphones to entrepreneurs to providing funding to support at-risk youth. We're humbled to receive \$19,000 in funding to support 11 at-risk youth in our programming.



**Tyler Davis**



We're grateful to BC Housing for supporting our Cardboard Project and Street Store event in 2021, which directly benefitted low income housing residents in the DTES



**Vanessa Tveitane**



Vanessa Tveitane is an all round champion for helping us fund new entrepreneurs to take our basic business fundamentals course. Thank you for giving an opportunity to members of the DTES community to build capacity during the pandemic.

# Acknowledgements

Our team is grateful for having the opportunity to work, play and live on the territories of the Skwxwú7mesh, xʷməθkwəy̓əm, and səliwətał.

## INTERNAL TEAM



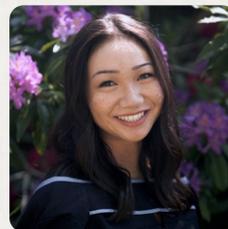
Christina Wong  
Executive  
Director



Charissa Landicho  
Advocacy Lead



Truman Wong  
Head of  
Development



Amanda Mah  
Brand &  
Marketing Lead

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Adam Lorant  
Treasurer



Scott Shaw  
Member at  
Large



Breanne Lehodey  
Secretary



Christina Wong  
Chair



Darius Maze  
Vice-Chair

# Acknowledgements

We wanted to take the time to put a spotlight on the entrepreneurs, whose dedication and effort inspires the incredible team of staff, volunteers, funders, and supporters Employ to Empower is fortunate to have in its corner. Additionally, we take this opportunity to honor the countless hours of volunteer hours from the following groups of individuals below:

## VOLUNTEER TEAM



Joanna Li  
Course  
Facilitator



Laura Hemmerling  
Course  
Facilitator



John Zador  
Course  
Facilitator



Mary Pullen  
Program  
Evaluator



Hosea Cheung  
Media Relations  
Coordinator



Dori Julian  
Events Specialist



Juliette Wong  
Events Specialist



Amy Hemmerling  
Co-founder of  
Cillema



Alex Beaucage  
Co-Founder of  
Cillema



Sarine Guerlian  
Digital Marketing  
Coordinator



Kenneth Chow  
Web Developer



Brenda Benham  
Course  
Facilitator

# Acknowledgements

At Employ to Empower, everyone on the team is their own leader and brings their own strengths to the team. We work WITH each other, not for each other, all towards a common and worthy goal of wanting people to make it in the long run. It's the people on the frontline below that make this all happen and we are truly humbled to have 30+ volunteers on the team who have donated 645 hours of their time to support the team with leadership, strategy, mentorship and workshop facilitation.

## ADVISORS



Timothy Ames  
Former  
Executive  
Director of PLAN



Alisha Maxfield  
Social Planner at  
City of  
Vancouver



Sarah Lubik  
Director of  
Entrepreneurship  
at SFU



Trish Mandewo  
City Councillor  
of Coquitlam



Janice O'Brien  
Director at SFU's  
Coast Capital  
Savings Venture  
Connection



Len Pierre  
Cultural Safety  
and Humility  
Advisor

# Acknowledgements

## ENTREPRENEURS



Iven S.  
Founder of  
Medicine Art



Mark D.  
Founder of Crap  
Trapper



Elwood P.  
Co-founder of  
Crap Trappe



Alley B.  
Co-founder of  
Back Alley  
Apothecary



Jeannette B.  
Co-founder of  
Back Alley  
Apothecary



Minah L.  
Founder of Art  
Action Earwig



Deirdre P.  
Founder of  
Deirdre Pinnock  
Designs



Michael C.  
Founder of  
Joharassit's  
Corner



Julie M.  
Founder of  
Enviro Bag  
Evolutions



Yvonne M.  
Founder of  
Salmon Soup for  
the Soul



Roy Y.  
Founder of Roy's  
Overalls



Mikaela F.  
Founder of Bring  
Your Own Vinyl



Paul H.  
Life Model



Barbara G.  
Founder of  
Senses

Patricia B.  
Founder of Blue  
Garden  
Apothecary

Serena C.  
Founder of  
Aneres Wholistic  
Wellness

Michael M.  
Founder of  
Eastside BMX

Sophia F.  
Founder of  
GoddessGangstar  
Coaching

# Acknowledgements





# Employ to Empower

## Stay Connected with Us



[Join our newsletter](#) to keep up to date with what's going on at Employ to Empower, like volunteer opportunities and special stories!

Follow us on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)  
@employtoempower!



[Like Employ to Empower](#) on Facebook for updates and news.

To Donate, visit our [Keela](#) page!



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