

Island Savings Community Endowment

2025 Grants



\$211,000 in 17 grants distributed through Impact, Capacity and SOAR grant streams

- \$161,000 in Impact grants awarded to 13 charities
- \$10,000 Capacity grant awarded to one charity
- \$40,000 in SOAR grants awarded to three charities

Multi-year commitments:

The following organizations are multi-year commitments, entered in 2024; both will conclude in 2025.

Salt Spring Island Farmland Trust (SSIFT), Salt Spring Island, \$15,000

Grow Local Collective is an Island wide community food growing and sharing mobilization. Grow Local Collective supports growers to crop-plan, organize growing work parties, build native edible plant gardens, and glean leftover food from orchards throughout the growing season. In 2024, Salt Spring Island Farmland Trust unified an Island wide harvest to rescue and utilize over 15,000 pounds of local food.



Take a Hike Foundation, Nanaimo, \$10,000

Empowering vulnerable youth to believe in their potential and achieve success, Take a Hike supports youth with full-time mental health clinical counselling and well-being programs integrated into their school curriculum; also included are outdoor wilderness trips and community engagement activities. Following completion of high school, an impressive 97% of youth plan to attend post-secondary education and 76% reported improved mental health and overall life satisfaction.



Impact Grant Recipients:

Impact Grants are unrestricted grants, investing in an organization's operations, programs, projects, or services. Eligibility criteria for Impact Grants include alignment to one of First West Foundation's six identified Sustainable Development Goals.

Circular Farm and Food Society, Victoria, \$15,000

The Regenerative Farmer Program is an incubator farm initiative designed to support new and young entrant farmers by providing access to essential resources, including land, infrastructure, tools, and mentorship. With six acres in production and eight farm businesses actively growing food on individual plots, farmers are unable to maximize production because of limited storage capacity. The grant will help install an 8'x12' walk in cooler. In 2024, over 24,000 pounds of produce was stored in the existing 8' x 10' walk-in cooler (operating at full capacity); the installation of the new cooler will allow for an additional 10,000 pounds of fresh locally grown produce in year one to supply school meal programs and community organizations.



Last year, 1,643 individuals visited, 576 were Kindergarten to Grade 12 students who participated in field trips facilitated through a partnership with the Growing Young Farmers Society.



Cowichan Valley Youth Services (CVYS), Duncan, \$15,000

Dedicated to providing counselling services and various mental health focused programs for youth and their parents/caregivers, in 2024 CVYS supported nearly 900 unique individuals (approximately 85% who are youth) through more than 12,000 counselling hours and various other group and service offerings. To fill an existing service gap, CVYS will introduce the evidence based “Connect Attachment Program” to the region. This program will provide approximately 24-45 parents/caregivers of teens with free access to a highly effective attachment-based parenting group to learn new strategies for relating to and communicating with their youth, managing behavioural challenges, and taking care of themselves in the process. The grant will support the staffing of the program, thus not adding pressure on current resources resulting in a positive impact on existing waitlists.

Crisis Intervention & Public Information Society NEED2, Victoria, \$10,000

The Youth Suicide Prevention project is designed to provide compassionate, person-centered support, providing safe space for youth to understand the importance of talking. NEED2's in-person suicide prevention programs equip youth with the knowledge to recognize and skills to support, someone experiencing a mental health crisis. In 2024, NEED2, provided suicide prevention workshops to over 5,000 students across South Vancouver Island. “Suicide remains the leading cause of injury-related death for youth 10-24 years of age. The youngest person reported to die by suicide in British Columbia was 8 years old; and we are seeing children as young as 4 years old exhibiting suicidal behaviour.” ~ *Sabrina Studney, Executive Director*

Greater Victoria Citizens’ Counseling Centre (GVCCC), Victoria, \$15,000

The Greater Victoria Citizens’ Counselling Centre assists adult community members in attaining social and psychologically satisfying lives by providing quality, accessible, volunteer counselling services. GVCCC operates an annual training program, whereby over a 10-month period, 18 trainees attend 160 hours of training from a registered Clinical Counsellor and two assistants. Upon graduation, each trainee embarks on providing at least 250 hours of volunteer, low-cost counselling to adults in the community with the means or opportunity to access counselling on their own. It is estimated that 375 individuals can access up to 11 sessions of counselling through this program. Counsellors are formally supervised by professionals contracted by Citizens to ensure quality and maximize positive outcomes. Over 81% of clients indicate a significant to moderate change in their well-being because of attending Citizens’ counselling.

Parkinson Wellness Projects (PWP), Victoria, \$15,000

PWP provides evidence-based exercise programs, counselling services and educational seminars for the Parkinson’s community on Vancouver Island. The fastest growing neurological disease with no current cure, in Greater Victoria an estimated 1,200 people are diagnosed with PD; a total that is projected to double by 2031. PWP seeks to increase their weekly programs, retain experienced instructors, counselors and community partners. Currently PWP has over 600 registered individuals.

The Men’s Centre, Nanaimo, \$15,000

Counselling services, crisis intervention, workshops, and the Boots to Suit program support men and help identify and address underlying mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety or trauma by providing coaching to improve coping mechanisms and enhance overall well-being. Various programs support over 1,400 men in Nanaimo and the Central Island Community.

Victoria Brain Injury Society (VBIS), Victoria, \$15,000

The Counsellor in Training program (CIT) provides free specialized counselling services to brain injury survivors, addressing a critical gap in mental health support for this vulnerable population. The CIT Program is a first-of-its-kind initiative at VBIS, designed to provide accessible mental health care while also fostering the development of future professionals in the field of brain injury counselling. The grant will provide impact beyond 2025 by creating a sustainable pipeline of future counsellors with expertise in brain injury care. In 2024, VBIS served approximately 634 brain injury survivors, providing a wide range of individual support services tailored to their unique needs.



The Circle Salt Spring Education Society, Salt Spring Island, \$15,000

Approximately 75% of the student population in School District 64 are impacted by The Circle Education's in-school programs. The grant will help support four key programs promoting healthy relationship skills. The Friendship Project K-2; The Empathy Project Grade 3-5; The Respect Project Grade 6-8; and the Trust Project grades 9-10. Approximately 1,200 unique individuals are served annually through in-class programs, after-school initiatives, and professional development training. The overall reach of The Circle's programs is estimated to be 7,679 students.

Peninsula Streams Society, North Saanich, \$10,000

Peninsula Streams works with 10 municipalities, six First Nations, over 15 community stewardship groups, and in 2024, volunteers contributed over 7,000 hours of service, engaging with more than 4,000 students. The grant will enable staff to plan and deliver education programming and workshops as well as contribute to the installation and maintenance of a demonstration rain garden at a local community hub. "Watersheds are vital as they supply drinking water, support ecosystems, and regulate climate. They capture, filter, and distribute water, impacting both human livelihoods and biodiversity. Protecting watersheds ensures sustainable water resources and environmental health."¹

Nanaimo Volunteer and Information Centre, Nanaimo, \$10,000

The Youth Network program empowers youth aged 11 to 29 to make a meaningful impact in the Nanaimo community through volunteering. Youth gain essential life skills and experience, build resilience and self-confidence, and form meaningful connections, all while giving back to their community. This program currently supports 75+ youth through mentorship, leadership, and volunteer opportunities.

Victoria Literacy Connection Society, Victoria, \$15,000

Reading Partners is active in two school districts (SD61 Victoria and SD62 Sooke), in 2025 VLC plans to advance the program to have a presence in SD63 Saanich schools, whereupon the program will cover Southern Vancouver Island, starting with the greatest need schools first. VLC provides one-to-one tutoring for children, youth and adults, tech tutoring for seniors, English language learning groups and an inter-generational pen pal club. In 2024 approximately 300 learners benefited from the program.

Capacity Grant Recipients

Capacity grants provide organizations with financial resources to pursue education, professional development, training, and infrastructure enhancements. Capacity grants are released as restricted funds. Grantees are not required to align with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Nanaimo Community Kitchens Society (NCKS), Nanaimo, \$10,000

The grant will support NCKS as it enters a phase of growth and expansion. As NCKS continues to grow, the demand for their programs has expanded significantly. NCKS is now serving more social housing buildings, schools, recovery houses and families than ever before. The capacity grant will enable NCKS to redevelop resources, invest in board development, create a strategic plan and strengthen infrastructure to meet the rising community demand. In 2024, Nanaimo Community Kitchens served over 700 unique individuals through various programs.

¹ [My](#) Water Earth & Sky

SOAR Grant Recipients

SOAR launched in 2023 to support and partner with those committed to equity deserving organizations, and racialized groups, including and not limited to people who identify as Black, Brown, Indigenous and/or as a person of colour in communities served by First West Credit Union.



Human-Nature Counselling Society, Victoria, \$15,000

The grant will support the promotion and enhancement of positive mental health outcomes amongst vulnerable Indigenous and non-Indigenous students struggling with social isolation. Through the Indigenous Ways of Knowing and nature-based practices, the Guam Guam Specums program is a unique program in partnership with School District 61. It aims to support mostly Indigenous students' social and emotional well-being and engagement in the school environment. Guam Guam Specums runs in three schools: Craigflower Elementary School, Shoreline Middle School, and Rockheights Middle School. School staff, HNCS facilitators, and students work together to determine which students will benefit most from the program as participants.

Raincoast Conservation Foundation, Victoria, \$10,000

The Salish Sea Emerging Stewards program provides hands-on experiential environmental science and stewardship education to Indigenous, racialized, and underserved youth ages 14-25 living around the Salish Sea. The program is offered free of charge to reduce socio-economic barriers to learning and access to nature. SSES partners directly with Indigenous Nations, schools and local nonprofits to deliver its programming while aligning with the BC curriculum for high school students (grade 9-12) in the subjects of sciences, social studies, geography and Indigenous studies in BC. Up to 76 youth participate annually in class-based and outdoor educational programs delivered by Raincoast.

Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS), Victoria, \$15,000

The Enable Program for Women, Children, and Youth program seeks to enhance education, emotional well-being, and social support for immigrant and refugee women, children, and youth. This program is designed to help participants achieve their goals, strengthen their sense of identity, belonging, and community, and reduce settlement-related barriers by increasing access to education, employment, resources, and services. VIRCS serves over 4,000 vulnerable clients annually through its various programs, providing essential support to immigrants, refugees and other newcomers as they integrate into Canadian Society.