



AVALON
SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

Preparing the Ground

Report to the Community for
the year ended March 31, 2020



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Avalon Sexual Assault Centre
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The Avalon Sexual Assault Centre is a feminist organization working to eliminate sexual assault/abuse, and to change the current socio-political culture that fosters sexism, social injustice and other forms of oppression.

1526 Dresden Row, 4th floor

Kjipuktuk, unceded Mi'kmaq territory

Halifax, NS. www.avaloncentre.ca

Design and illustration by [Patuo'kn Illustration and Design](#)





Preparing the Ground

Society's understanding of sexualized violence is growing: understanding of the pervasiveness of sexualized violence, of its causes and the pervasiveness of its causes, of sexualized violence as one of many intersecting oppressions, of the true cost of its impacts, and of the role of systems in enabling and protecting its harms.

This growing understanding has led to increased need for services for survivors, to increased demand for training and education, and to increased expectations for systemic advocacy.

Organizations working to combat sexualized violence and to support survivors of sexualized violence are discovering limits to the structures and supports that were established before need, demand and expectation exploded.

In 2019 and 2020, as in previous years, Avalon Sexual Assault Centre worked to reduce sexualized violence through education, training and advocacy; and directly supported survivors with Sexual Assault Nurse Examination and Sexual Assault Trauma Therapy. We also began to prepare the ground for new structures and supports we can see will be needed.



Message from the Chair of the Board

The September 2019 Annual General Meeting seems so far away now in light of intervening circumstances and unfortunate events. The former Board graciously ushered in a new slate of Directors with the challenge and opportunity of supporting Avalon through transformation. As a collective, the Board sees Avalon's transformation from a whole organization perspective, beginning with a realignment of bylaws and policies so that form can support function.

We are pleased with the revised bylaws and board policies that reflect Avalon's current and intended strategic direction, and create the structure for a diverse, inclusive and representative board with anti-oppressive governance practices. We have also undertaken work to establish an Avalon community with a new role for, and configuration of, membership. Staff were courageous and agitated for change to bring on a new board, now staff must similarly courageously look to transformation within.

Our [revised inclusion statement](#) was the beginning of changes Board and staff are making to ensure Avalon can realize its intentions. Avalon's work now shifts from Board level change to transformation within the organization, both operationally and in program/service offerings. We are hopeful for the conclusion of collective bargaining and a successful whole organization repair/restructuring process. In the coming year, staff will transition from "what was", through a current transitory state to a future organizational structure (and function) where day-to-day operations align with Avalon's intended strategic direction as expressed in its mission, vision and values.

One of the many unintended impacts of COVID restrictions that we have observed through virtual Board meetings is the change in connectedness and the nature of conversations. The social distancing and isolation coupled with mass protests and the unfortunate and heartbreaking events of Portapique have shortened the space between us. Our world of work has shifted significantly, and, like others, we have experienced benefits from increased checking in with each other. As a subscriber to Jennifer Campbell's system change videos, I recently listened to one in which she talks about isomorphy, saying: "understanding isomorphy means knowing that characteristics, phenomenon, and events in subsystems are also present in the bigger system." Likewise, if they are present in a subsystem then they are also present in the larger system. Recent protests have reignited the conversation on anti-black racism, including at Avalon.



This is an exciting time for Avalon and its community. Avalon will learn from what we have experienced and apply what it is telling us to the wider system and how we might meet emerging needs. The patriarchy, misogyny, trans-misogyny and discrimination that facilitates the perpetual violence experienced by women, trans women and non-binary people must be addressed, and Avalon will continue to bring its knowledge, leadership and energy to the shared effort to do so, with unwavering resolve.

It has been an honour to chair this Board for the historic year of 2020. I will not soon forget the people, the experiences, the lessons and the gifts of being a part of Avalon for this short time. Thank you to my fellow board members, Avalon staff and the wider Avalon community for trusting me with this responsibility. I wish all incoming Board members well, congratulations on joining an important and necessary organization working for safer spaces in our community and advocating for justice.

Louise Adongo
Chair of the Board



COMMUNITY VOICE

My initial hope was to find ways to cope with the trauma of 3 separate assaults, and to gather information should I decide to pursue legal actions. These hopes were met beyond expectations! I have learned more about myself and my strengths, counselling has educated me in regards to my experiences and relationships. I am finding the pieces of myself that were taken from me.





Message from the Executive Director

“What is Avalon Centre doing to caretaker the caretakers?” I was asked this question by a survivor and long time supporter of Avalon Centre just after we announced the need to close to new counselling clients in order to address the wait list for trauma therapy. She was aware that this decision, on top of the trauma and violence exposure Avalon staff experience, would greatly impact us. It was an important question for an organization that prioritizes acknowledging acute and vicarious trauma and secondary wounding. While putting some measures in place to support staff members over the years, last fiscal year, Avalon Centre faced the need for critical internal organizational examination and transformation.

In addition to exploding demand and limited supports, there is the expectation of system-based institutions and organizations that community-based advocates like Avalon will provide services the system-based institutions no longer (or never did) provide. This heightened sense of responsibility to address all needs takes a toll on organizations and on individuals. As the lone full spectrum sexual assault centre serving the largest and most diverse geographical and population base in the province, Avalon Centre for many years has felt the pressure of trying to address needs beyond its capacity on both a regional and provincial level.

The increase in demand has mirrored the increased profile of social justice movements like #meToo. We celebrate this profound public joining together of voices and protest against sexualized violence in all forms. During the past 24 years, we have closely witnessed the personally devastating impacts of this crime on countless individuals. This also includes the equally harmful secondary trauma caused by socially ingrained views that have served to deny, minimize, and overtly/covertly blame and shame those assaulted who predominately represent populations historically oppressed and marginalized in our society. We have also witnessed the tremendous strength, determination, wisdom and resilience of these individuals. We are truly inspired by so many meaningful ways we see people deeply manifest their healing into their lives, including lifting and supporting others and finding unique and creative avenues to further social justice.

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre has always been aware of the impacts of violence and trauma exposure on frontline service providers, advocates, and others involved in anti-violence



systems-based advocacy and working directly with victims/survivors of sexualized violence. However, the past fiscal year created an impetus for action to strengthen organizational governance, leadership, and infrastructure to not only address the challenges of our response through programs and services, but also to address the internal impacts of systemic oppression on staff.

Through 2019, Avalon undertook various organizational and governance measures to try to help address the unsustainable conditions that had been growing and affecting both service and working conditions.

Staff sought candidates for election to the Board who were more representative of the communities served by Avalon and who were more aligned with feminist, relational work, in hopes of gaining support for measures needed to stabilize service through sustainable work. The outreach to community was successful, and the newly elected board began revising governance structures to better support stabilization and sustainability efforts.

Employees unionized in order to be more effective in advocating for needed change in the organization to address unsustainable pressures on service delivery. Organizing with SEIU Local 2, the new unit began collective bargaining early in 2020.

At an operational level, teams began discussions around work design and philosophy, with the intention of establishing sustainable goals and expectations for service delivery, before analyzing structural, systems, role and resource changes that could achieve those goals. Work at the unit level during 2019-2020 set up organizational level work scheduled in 2020-2021, which will in turn inform strategic planning with the board.

Avalon began a review of organizational policies and practises to ensure alignment in governance and operations based on the shared purpose of board and staff.

The Therapeutic Counselling Program stopped intaking new clients in order to prioritize completing services with existing clients and to provide counselling sessions to people on the growing waitlist.



2019-2020 was challenging for Avalon, but a clarity of vision, a commitment to our communities, and a sharing of effort to prepare the ground for new shapes the organization must take enabled significant progress on that path. COVID-19, the NS mass shooting, and the need to address systemic anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism has added to the need for sustainable immediate support and trauma therapy services, and the need for radical organizational transformation. As Avalon continues to prioritize and strengthen programs and services we will continue to provide and lead societal/systemic change from within. We remain committed to collaborating with our community partners and centering the voices of survivors and our communities.

On behalf of Avalon Centre I extend gratitude and appreciation to the current staff and both current and outgoing board members, students and volunteers, including those who are no longer with Avalon Centre; funders, donors, and community partners for your contributions and commitment to addressing sexualized violence, effecting social and systemic change, and for standing with and believing survivors.

Jackie Stevens

Executive Director



COMMUNITY VOICE

I have seen over a dozen different support workers in the last few years and none knew more than Avalon. None helped me as much as Avalon or gave me half as many tools to help. I have far exceeded my own hopes for healing in large part due to Avalon. They are essential.





Reducing Sexualized Violence

Avalon works in and with community to

- *increase understanding of sexualized violence*
- *increase understanding that every individual has the ability to make change regarding sexualized violence in society, and*
- *build skills to support change in our communities, working with service providers, youth, and others.*

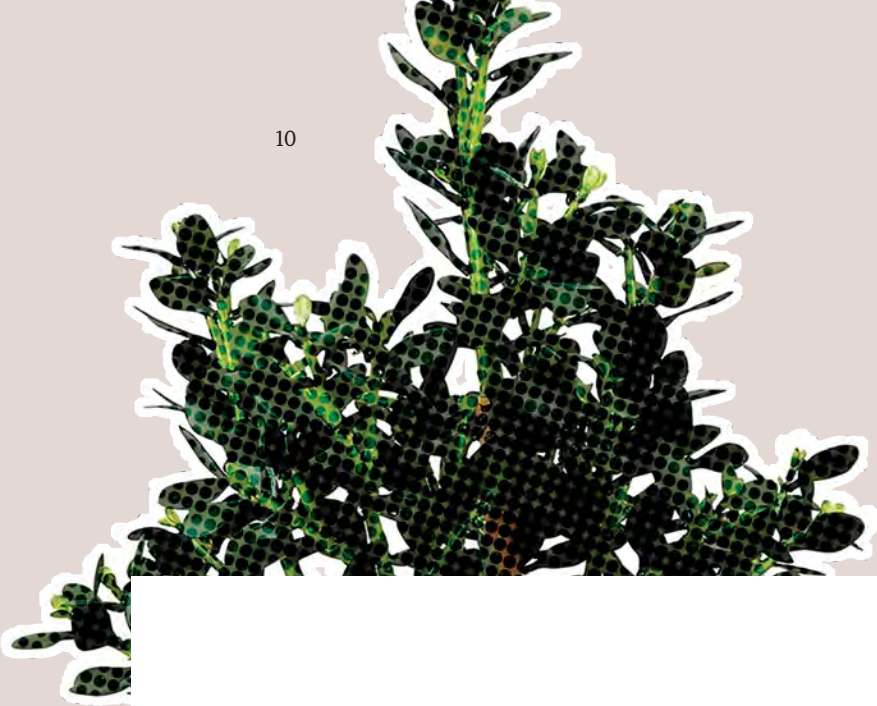
This past year Avalon Centre saw a steady demand for workshop facilitation in the community. Our requests ranged from topics on creating survivor centered spaces, legal information and court processes, bystander intervention, mitigating secondary wounding for helping professionals, trauma informed practice, consent-based education for youth, mandatory reporting, alcohol and consent, sexualized cyber violence, and trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Additionally, we have received an increase in requests for legal support and advocacy. We are in the process of restructuring our current program so that we can offer this for clients in a more sustainable way.

Over the year, Avalon Centre supported legal education and prevention programming for service providers, organizations, community members, and victims/survivors. Discussions on oppression, marginalization, supporting vulnerable communities, and improving response and access to the criminal justice system were central in our Community/Legal Education and Professional Training program.

MOMENTS

APRIL *Joined calls to end the two-year delay in Senate of Bill 337, passed unanimously in the House of Commons, to make sexual assault law training mandatory for lawyers who wish to become federal judges.*



The current political climate and high publicity regarding sexualized violence leads to community needs that change and grow. Limited organizational capacity and funding restraints have contributed to a restricted ability to respond to all requests for community/legal education and professional training, participate in all events/activities we are invited to, and provide consistent and sustainable programming that is accessible to everyone.

MOMENTS

MAY Joined in advocacy against changes to refugee law which would harm women escaping gender-based violence.

With the support of new funding from the Department of Women and Gender Equality, we are able to look at expanding our Prevention, Intervention, and Awareness program. We will build on our current Navigation program to offer a streamlined internal intake process and well as community outreach with a particular focus on marginalized communities. We are also in the process of restructuring the position of the Coordinator of Community/Legal Education and Training. With the development of online training options, time can be spent supporting clients through legal information, advocacy, and support sessions. This has been successful in the early implementation phase.

Due to COVID-19 and necessary work from home precautions, Avalon is embracing the adaptation of our services to be offered remotely. Initiatives through the Community/Legal Education and Professional Training program will continue, with the goal of reducing the barriers that victims/survivors of sexualized violence and non-offending parents/partners experience in accessing the criminal justice system.

MOMENTS

JUNE Promoted the final report of the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.



Direct Support

During 2019-2020, Avalon provided direct support to survivors of sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, and sexual harassment via

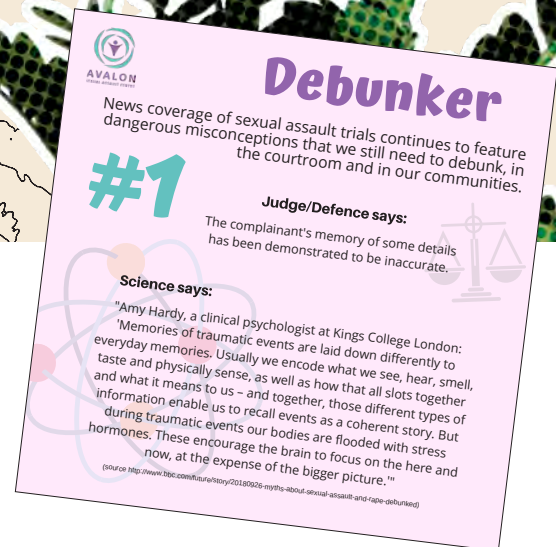
- *medical examination and forensic evidence collection, and*
- *therapeutic counselling*

The Avalon Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program provides medical examination and forensic evidence collection to people of all genders (including trans/Two Spirit/non-binary people) and all ages who have experienced a sexual assault in the past seven days. Now in its 20th year, the program responds to four health centres within Halifax Regional Municipality: QEII Health Sciences Centre, Dartmouth General Hospital, Cobequid Community Health Centre, and IWK Health Centre for Women, Children, and Families. The program is funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness through the District Health Authority (IWK).

MOMENTS

JULY *Debunker campaign features a downloadable series of posters debunking dangerous misconceptions about sexual assault being reported on in news coverage of criminal trials.*

The SANE Coordinator is involved in several community committees and chairs the Halifax Sexual Assault Response Team (HSART). This committee includes members from the Avalon Centre, Halifax Regional Police, RCMP, NS Public Prosecution Service, NS Department of Justice Victims Services, Halifax Regional Police Victims Services, RCMP Victims Services, CDHA Emergency Department and CDHA Forensic Sexual Behaviour Program. The committee has an established formal protocol for sexual assault response and works to address the issue of sexual assault through a shared goal of raising awareness and improving our response to persons who have been sexually assaulted.





Other on-going involvement of the SANE Coordinator includes: IWK Seastar Child and Youth Advocacy Centre Steering Committee, as well as active membership in the International Association of Forensic Nurses and Canadian Forensic Nurses Association. The SANE Coordinator also meets regularly with other SANE Coordinators across the province to support and strengthen practice, address concerns, and share ideas.

This report has looked at trends since the program's inception. Are we effecting criminal justice outcomes? Are we positioned to say that we are effecting any societal change with our programs and services? In one crucial area, we can say for certain that we are making a difference. Individuals who have experienced a recent sexual assault report that they feel listened to, not judged, and above all, believed when they report their assault to a SANE nurse. As such, we feel we are meeting our primary goal of ensuring that victims of sexual assault are treated with respect and compassion. It is no small thing when someone accesses the healthcare system following a sexual assault. Fear of not being believed, fear of judgment around the circumstances of the assault can all play a role in not wanting to disclose. As well, when the harms could be caused by a person in a trust relationship, or is someone you could never imagine doing such a thing prior to it occurring, the acceptance that this was a sexual assault and not a "date gone wrong" (for example), is not easy. The huge first step that an individual takes in accessing support should not be minimized as this initial engagement is the most crucial and can set them on a path to recovery.

At the conclusion of 2019-2020, the program faced a significant change in operating conditions due to COVID-19, however we were able to provide uninterrupted, unaltered service.



This was a year of significant transition within Avalon Centre's Therapeutic Counselling Program. A multi-year exceptionally high demand for our specialized sexual assault/abuse trauma counselling program had led to an excessive build-up on our waitlists. We also reached a saturation point in our small therapy team's capacity to take on new clients. As a result, the organization had to make the extremely difficult decision to close our waitlists to new clients. This was required in order to ensure ethical practice to those clients on our waitlists whom Avalon Centre had made a service promise to. Waitlists had risen to the highest level over the life span of our 23 years of the Therapeutic Counselling Program, reaching up to a two-year wait.

MOMENTS

AUGUST *For Victims and Survivors of Crime Week 2019, Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia featured a series of talks and videos on supporting survivors, including one by Avalon's Dee Dooley. Listen here: <http://avaloncentre.ca/how-to-support-a-survivor/>*

Research regarding trauma-informed practice clearly indicates that the top factor in mitigating the extent of longer-term emotional, psychological, sexual, physiological, social and spiritual harmful impacts of sexualized violence, is appropriate and timely supportive response. With so many more people now finally feeling safe enough to reach out for critical care rather than suffer in silence, we have an incredible opportunity and social obligation to respond ethically, which is in the best interests of these individuals, their families, our community and society.

MOMENTS

SEPTEMBER *Draw the Line campaign featuring campus-related scenarios shifts focus off the actions taken by victims and onto the actions of the accused, and demonstrates the role we each play.*



MOMENTS

OCTOBER *The Nova Scotia government released guidelines for the prevention of sexual violence at university and college campuses. Avalon is a member of the Sexualized Violence Prevention Committee. Over the years Avalon has worked closely with universities in NS on sexual assault response best practises, professional training, prevention and awareness campaigns, education for students, as well as providing front line services for students who have been sexually assaulted, and frames the release of the guidelines including this perspective: “While many universities have worked to improve the way they deal with sexual assault, university responses have not always met the needs of students who have been victimized and there have been perceptions of systemic failure, risk of personal and public safety and lack of accountability for people who are committing sexual offences.”*

During the year, a program review produced recommendations to address capacity with current staffing and resources while defining sustainable workloads. We were also able to create parameters for increased client capacity based on increased resources, if they were obtained. Part of the review was consultations with multiple sexual assault centres in Canada regarding request levels for therapeutic counselling within their communities. The programs which are based in urban areas strongly identified experiencing substantial resource challenges which led to waitlist build-up and difficulties in meeting client needs. It was clear that funding for sexual assault therapeutic counselling must reflect the population base. This is well substantiated by pre-existing research.



MOMENTS

FEBRUARY 2020 *Avalon lends support to Bill C-5 which would require judges to undergo sensitivity training before presiding over sexual assault cases.*

The fiscal year ended with the need to close our office due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, impacting the program on multiple levels, including delaying our capacity to re-hire two full-time open therapeutic counselling positions, along with the re-opening of the waitlist. The counselling team quickly transitioned to phone check-in sessions with current clients to ensure critical contact was maintained. We also began researching secure platforms for a video counselling session option that will meet confidentiality and privacy of information requirements of our professional regulatory Colleges. As well, work began on the safe redesign of face-to-face sessions for those clients requiring them, in keeping with public health requirements and professional College guidelines.

MOMENTS

MARCH 2020 *As a member of Ending Violence Association of Canada, Avalon jointly signed the national call for further details on the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence.*



Finance Report

The combined income recognized in 2019/20 for Avalon Sexual Assault Centre and the Avalon Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program was approximately 1.5 million. This is an increase from the previous fiscal year (approximately 1.1 million). The revenue sources include both new short term and multi-year project funding as well as ongoing program funding. Overall, Avalon had a funding increase of \$60,130 in 2019/2020 comparatively to 2018/2019. However, significant increases to salaries, professional fees, board and staff development, and membership fees contributed to the deficit. SANE has not received an increase in funding in over five years and received less donations in 2020, therefore experienced a slight revenue decrease from 2019. The salary line for on-call nurses was the most drastic increase that created SANE's deficit.

The deficit resulted in a decrease in Avalon's net assets in comparison to 2018/19 (net assets = equity). The 100K in the contingency fund is untouched from 2018/19 as this is restricted. The overall deficit of \$181K will be addressed through the unrestricted reserve. In recognition of the changes to reserve funding, preparations for changes within the organization due to COVID-19, ongoing and increased needs for programs and services, etc. Avalon Centre went into the 2020/21 fiscal year prioritizing organizational change and building toward developing cases of support for increasing long term sustainable funding.

Respectfully submitted,

Cara Pfeffer
Treasurer

Financial Statement

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

| Year Ended March 31, 2020 | 2020 | 2019 |
|--|---------------------|--------------------|
| Revenues | | |
| Law Foundation of Nova Scotia | \$ 45,661 | \$ 45,660 |
| Special projects: Province of Nova Scotia - Community Support Network Grant | 52,743 | 99,930 |
| Status of Women Canada | 146,012 | 30,000 |
| Province of Nova Scotia Funding | 773,561 | 773,561 |
| Canadian Women's Foundation | - | 23,000 |
| Donations, fundraising and other | 81,729 | 67,535 |
| Summer student | - | 5,890 |
| Administrative fees | 46,000 | 40,000 |
| | 1,145,706 | 1,085,576 |
| Expenses | | |
| Advertising and website | 1,038 | 5,916 |
| Board and staff development | 45,827 | 28,467 |
| Capital equipment and maintenance | 26,180 | 21,024 |
| Equipment rental and repairs | 2,874 | 3,000 |
| Fundraising | - | 763 |
| Insurance | 9,528 | 9,594 |
| Membership fees | 15,000 | 1,055 |
| Miscellaneous | 4,262 | 3,388 |
| Office | 14,841 | 12,568 |
| Professional fees | 20,155 | 19,604 |
| Rental | 99,227 | 89,499 |
| Salaries and wages | 1,010,036 | 912,434 |
| Special projects | 51,465 | 57,770 |
| Telephone | 10,939 | 11,104 |
| Travel | 5,743 | 3,524 |
| Therapy groups | 2,867 | 5,012 |
| | 1,319,982 | 1,184,722 |
| <i>Deficiency of revenues over expenses from operations</i> | (174,276) | (99,146) |
| Other income (Schedule 1) | | |
| SANE income | 378,572 | 380,828 |
| SANE expenses | (386,289) | (364,831) |
| | (7,717) | 15,997 |
| Deficiency of revenues over expenses | \$ (181,993) | \$ (83,149) |

Financial Statement

Avalon Sexual Assault Centre SANE

| Year Ended March 31, 2019 | 2020 | 2019 |
|--|-------------------|------------------|
| Revenues | \$ 372,800 | \$ 372,800 |
| Department of Health and Wellness | 5,722 | 8,028 |
| Donations, fundraising and other | | |
| | 378,572 | 380,828 |
| Expenses | | |
| Administration expense | 46,000 | 40,000 |
| Insurance | 9,451 | 9,594 |
| Memberships | 1,000 | 617 |
| Office | 5,266 | 4,120 |
| On call nurses | 166,901 | 147,418 |
| Salaries and wages | 136,000 | 135,618 |
| Telephone | 9,928 | 9,165 |
| Education and training | 7,454 | 14,360 |
| Miscellaneous | 2,527 | 2,532 |
| Purchased services | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| Transportation | 162 | 407 |
| | 386,289 | 364,831 |
| <i>Excess (deficiency) of revenues over expenses for the year</i> | \$ (7,717) | \$ 15,997 |



Donors 2019-2020

Government

Nova Scotia Department of Community Services
 Nova Scotia Community Support Network Grant
 Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness /
 IWK Health Centre
 Nova Scotia Health Authority
 Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE)

Grants

Law Foundation of Nova Scotia
 Medavie
 Sisters of Charity

Businesses, service clubs & community groups

Ballin' for Women 3 v 3 Basketball Tournament
 Coastal Brave Clothing
 Dalhousie Law Community Outreach Society
 Dalhousie Legal Aid Purple Ribbon Campaign
 D.G. Dunbar Financial Services Inc
 Dis/Consent Book Launch
 East Coast Specialty Hardwoods
 Fernwood Publishing
 Good Robot
 Good Shepherd Church
 Holy Roller Vintage
 Imperial Sovereign Court of Atlantic
 Nova Scotia Society
 Jampy
 Jazz Aviation

JuiceGirls Benefit Concert

Killam Properties Inc
 Ladies Beer League
 MedLife Dalhousie
 QueenPins
 Saint Mary's University Athletics Council
 Schulich OUTLaw Society
 The Society of Obstetricians and
 Gynaecologists of Canada
 United Way Halifax Annual Campaign

In kind donations

All Caps Design Inc
 David's Tea
 Jane Software Inc
 Lawtons Drugs Lower Sackville
 Nova Scotia Cross-Stitchers

This list acknowledges gifts made between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020. Please note that this list only includes some of our many incredible donors. To protect privacy, we do not list donations made by individuals.



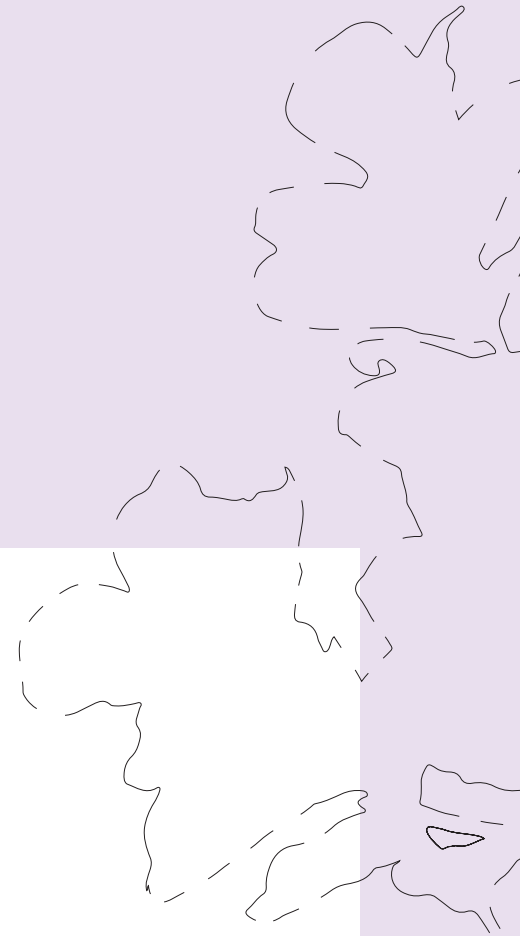
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COMMUNITY VOICE

My life was out of control, I didn't have the help I needed. But I came here, then after the last visit I knew how to handle my situation. What helped me most was that I wasn't treated like a victim, or as a helpless woman, but as a whole person. It gave me the tools to move on from what happened to me. The community needs this service. Because of Avalon, I can live a full and happy life.

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AVALON
SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

