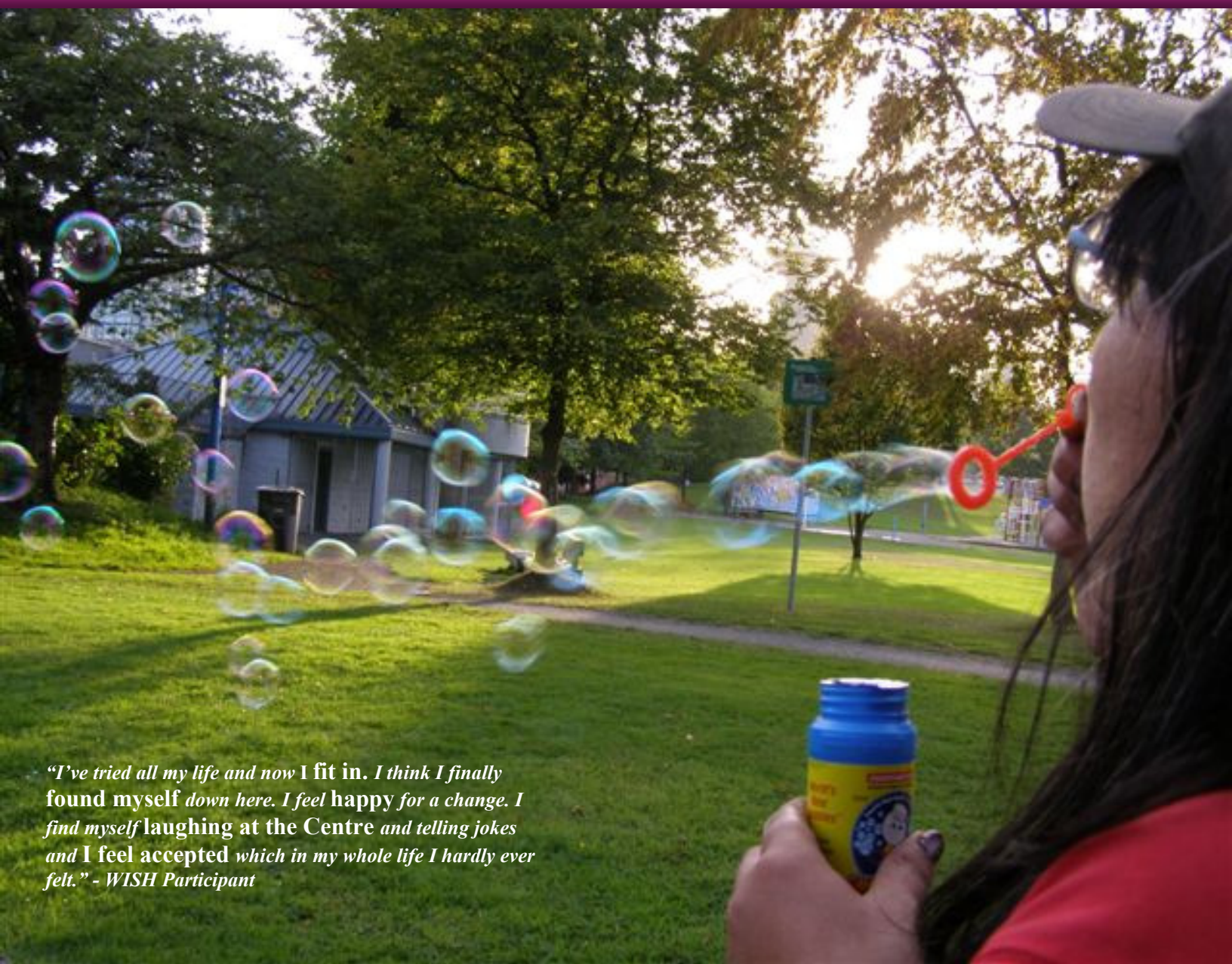




**WISH**  
Drop-In Centre Society

# WISH Drop-In Centre Society Annual Report 2012-2013



*"I've tried all my life and now I fit in. I think I finally found myself down here. I feel happy for a change. I find myself laughing at the Centre and telling jokes and I feel accepted which in my whole life I hardly ever felt." - WISH Participant*

# WISH Drop-In Centre Society

## Mission

To increase the health, safety and well-being of women who engage in Vancouver's survival sex trade.

## 2012-2013 Board of Directors

Roberta Robertson *Chair*  
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Jen Olson Lund

Kate Gibson *Executive Director*

## About the WISH Drop-In Centre Society

**WISH Drop-In Centre Society (WISH)** is a **registered charity** (#87047 5563 RR0001).

**The mission of WISH is to improve the health, safety and well-being of self-identified women who engage in the street-based sex trade to survive.** Women who come to WISH are **resilient, creative, caring** individuals who find themselves in challenging circumstances. Many face **extreme poverty, homelessness, illness and violence**. Over 50% of WISH participants are **Aboriginal** women, who are over-represented in the survival sex trade and who live with various afflictions related to **colonization, systemic racism and the residential school experience**.

WISH helps to relieve some of the **trauma and isolation** our participants face by operating an **overnight drop-in centre**, located at 330 Alexander Street, where women can access:

- **Hot, nutritious meals and healthy snacks**
- **Safe, clean washrooms and showers**
- **Clean clothing and personal care items**
- **Educational activities in an on-site Learning Centre, operated in partnership with Capilano University**
- **Aboriginal cultural activities**
- **Nursing care in an on-site clinic, staffed by nurses from the BCCDC Street Nurse Program and Nurse Practitioners from BC Women's Hospital**
- **Overnight street outreach by the Mobile Access Project (MAP) Van**
- **Supported employment and volunteer opportunities**
- **Friendship, conversation, social activities**



WISH Program Assistant Elsa Berland and Executive Director Kate Gibson at Fair in the Square, May 2013. Photo credit: Central City Foundation

Services at WISH are offered **without judgment**. The vision of WISH is to maintain a place of **respite and safety**, where women are supported in making **free, positive choices**.

The WISH Drop-In Centre runs on the tireless efforts of staff, volunteers, participants and community partners. Our work is funded by donors from all **three levels of government, foundations, corporations, places of worship, community organizations and generous individuals**. WISH is deeply grateful to all who have supported us this past year.

*Thank-you for making WISH happen!*



## WISH Is Open Overnight!

On December 17, 2012, Commissioner Wally Oppal presented his report on the Missing Women's Inquiry. This report contained a number of **recommendations** to help improve the safety of vulnerable women who are engaged in street-based survival sex work. In the report, he strongly urged the provincial government to provide funding for **existing centres that provide emergency services to women to enable them to stay open overnight**.

Attorney General Shirley Bond decided to enact this immediate measure and, to that end, WISH was given an annual commitment of \$750,000 to increase our opening hours. **As of March, 2013, WISH went from being open five hours (6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.) to seventeen hours per night (6:00 p.m. to 11:00 a.m.), seven days a week.** *This means that we can now offer women a safe place of refuge in the small hours of the night, when they are most vulnerable.*

While WISH is very grateful to be able to offer respite to women overnight, **we remain deeply saddened that so many women's lives had to be lost** before this could come to be.

WISH remains as committed as ever to improving the health, safety and well-being of our participants. We have been serving **healthy snacks** overnight as well as **nutritious breakfasts** in the morning. We are delighted to report that the Drop-In Centre has been getting **busier and busier** overnight and in the mornings as the word gets out. With the new hours, WISH has been meeting many women who are **new to WISH**, who work late at night and for whom the previous opening hours were not convenient. This means that we are able to **reach out to more women** and offer them some **stability and support** in their often chaotic lives.

WISH has come far since its early days, when a group of **committed, tireless volunteers** served 5-6 women sandwiches in a small room generously provided by First United Church! The move to our current facility at 330 Alexander Street (where **400-600 individual women** are served annually) in 2008 was made possible through the outstanding generosity of Vancity, the City of Vancouver, BC Gaming, the BC Women's Hospital Foundation and the Central City Foundation. There have been so many individuals, foundations, businesses and community groups who have helped bring WISH to where it is today and we are so grateful. *We are also thankful for the many participants, community partners, staff and volunteers who have contributed to making the WISH Drop-In Centre the very special place that is today.*

We hope you will continue to stand by the women of WISH as we move forward. **Great things are ahead of us!**

### Women's Wishes

The women in WISH are special to me  
I hope it will help you understand where we've been

Some are tired, and haven't ate much  
Despite our hard cover, we have a soft touch

Most of us feel that WISH is our home  
When we're not out working, we won't be alone

Try not to judge, what most may not know  
We're all beautiful women, our heads to our toes

We form a strong bond, when nobody else  
Asks how we're doing, and if we're in good health

In closing, I'll say, we women have pride  
Don't judge by the covers, rather beauty inside

- J.C.



*Drum by B.L.—2013 Aboriginal Culture & Creativity  
Program Participant*

## Note from the Board Chair

Another full and eventful year for WISH has passed already!

This past year, of course, was a **momentous** one for WISH because, thanks to the **Ministry of Housing**, WISH received funding to **open the Drop-In Centre overnight**. This means that, for the first time in the 29-year history of WISH, we finally have the stable core of funding we need to keep our doors open through the night, when women who engage in the sex trade are **much in need of a safe place of refuge**. Starting in March, 2013, the Drop-In Centre went from being open five hours a night (6:00 p.m.—11:00 p.m.) to **seventeen hours a night** (6:00 p.m.—11:00 a.m.).

This turn of events came about at the urging of Commissioner Wally Oppal, who, in his report on the **Missing Women's Inquiry**, recommended that the Provincial Government provide funding for **emergency services** for women engaging in survival sex work. WISH is truly grateful that the Province of BC has enacted this **immediate measure**. At the same time, we feel a profound sense of **grief** that so many women's lives had to be lost to get to this place. Going forward, WISH will remain strong in its commitment to improving the health, safety and well-being of women who are **marginalized, isolated and who engage in sex work to survive**.

Also, in May of 2013, the City of Vancouver approved a grant of up to \$400,000 so that WISH can move its operations **under one roof** and create a **dedicated space for our Aboriginal Health & Safety Project** and other programs. This **one-time grant** will be instrumental in making WISH **sustainable** well into the future, as we will no longer have to rent office and program space off-site. WISH is grateful to the **City of Vancouver** for this generous commitment.

It has indeed been a year of **growth and expansion** for WISH. However, it should be said that WISH would never have gotten to where it is today without the commitment of our donors, supporters and community partners. Recent funding from the Provincial Government is for the purpose of keeping WISH **open overnight**. The funding from the City of Vancouver is for the purpose of **moving and consolidating** our operations. **The fullness of programming, the quality of the meals WISH serves and the degree to which we are able to provide services that help women stabilize their lives will still depend on you.** *We hope you will stay with us as we grow and move forward into the future.*

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to all the many **individuals, businesses, foundations and community groups who donated to WISH this past year!** Your generosity means the world to WISH participants, staff and volunteers, because you make our work happen. I would also like to extend a warm thank-you to my colleagues on the **WISH Board of Directors** and the many other **volunteers** who selflessly give of their time and energy. **WISH Executive Director Kate Gibson** and all the **staff of WISH** also deserve recognition for their **tireless, compassionate and non-judgmental service**.

Thank-you also to all who ran and walked for WISH in the **2013 Scotiabank Charity Challenge!** At the time of print, they raised almost \$10,000 by running a half marathon or 5K and collecting pledges from friends and family, which were donated to WISH. This was our second year participating in this event, which has been a hugely successful fundraiser for us. Our thanks go out to **Scotiabank** for sponsoring this event and the **Canada Running Series** for all the hard work they put into its logistics. Keep an eye on our **facebook page** ([facebook.com/WishDropIn](https://facebook.com/WishDropIn)) or follow us on **Twitter** (@WISHWellness) for information about next year's run.

I hope you will enjoy reading this year's Annual Report! As you will see, all programs at WISH are going strong. Also, in 2012, WISH was chosen as a **Top Pick** by Charity Intelligence, an organization that ranks charities based on their ability to achieve measurable results and practice sound fiscal management. This makes the second year in a row that WISH has received this honour.

We have a lot of work ahead of us and many fantastic opportunities to make an impact on women's lives. I am certainly looking forward to 2013/2014 and another exciting year of service to WISH!

Roberta Robertson—Board Chair



*WISH Board Chair Roberta Robertson at the 2013 Scotiabank Charity Challenge media launch with S.C.C. Honourary Chair Mason Raymond.*

## WISH in the Community

In 2012/2013, WISH continued to participate in community initiatives that contribute to the health, safety and well-being of women who are marginalized, including:



MAP Van Coordinator Mary Shearman and WISH Administrative Assistant Emily Groundwater at the 2013 Women's Memorial March on February 14, 2013

- Sisterwatch
- DTES Literacy Roundtable
- AESHA Community Advisory Board
- Women's Memorial March Committee
- VPD Sex Work Policy
- Community Mapping Project
- Living in Community
- SAFE in Collingwood
- Homeless Connect
- Under One Umbrella
- City of Vancouver Homeless Count
- Fair in the Square
- City of Vancouver Report on Sex Work Task Force

### WISH is Moving!

On Tuesday, May 28, the City of Vancouver approved a **one-time grant** of up to **\$400,000** to **consolidate its operations** by **moving its administrative offices** (currently at 119 West Pender Street) to the building that houses the drop-in centre (at 330 Alexander Street).

This is excellent news for WISH, as maintaining operations at **two different sites** is costly and only getting more expensive.

"As...the years go by, the **rent goes up substantially**, and (our current office space) just isn't big enough to accommodate us. We can't take on any more space or rental cost" said WISH Executive Director Kate Gibson. "(Moving our operations under the same roof) will give us some **more space** and we'll be able to take the rental money and **apply it to programs**"

WISH estimates that the move will take place within the space of a year, as there are modifications and renovations that need to be done to the structure of the building at 330 Alexander. We are very **grateful** to the City of Vancouver for allowing WISH to make this **much-needed move**, which will ultimately make our organization much more sustainable. **Thank-you, City of Vancouver!**

### Aboriginal Women Build Sisterhood at WISH

A **majority** of WISH participants are **Aboriginal women** from various Nations. WISH offers **culturally relevant** programming for Aboriginal participants that is **delivered by Aboriginal women**.



Drums by 2012/2013 participants

At the heart of this programming is the **Aboriginal Health & Safety Project**, which offers women opportunities to **build self-confidence, develop skills and create supportive peer networks**. Through twice-weekly, hands-on sessions, women learn **traditional arts, songs and cultural practices**. They also learn about **wellness** from an Aboriginal perspective and are supported in making **free and healthy choices** regarding their own well-being. By regularly attending the group, women build **sisterhood** and a positive community.

Many **community partners**, including the **Indian Residential School Survivors Society**, the **Aboriginal Diabetes Prevention and Awareness Initiative**, **Kathleen Walters** and the **Aboriginal Wellness Program** helped make this program a success in 2012/2013.

*"I am learning a great deal from this course. It has helped me in all areas of my life: Spiritually, emotionally and my self-esteem. Doing the artwork has been so rewarding. The teachers are super, as are the women in our group"* - B.L., 2013 Participant



Handmade vest by 2012/2013 participant A.M.

*"I have appreciated the services of WISH. It has given me a birthday present when I felt everyone has forgotten about me. I love the hot meals, the clothing room and the beauty counter."* - R.



## WISH Program News 2012/2013

### ABORIGINAL HEALTH & SAFETY PROJECT

- Over 50% of WISH participants are Aboriginal Women, who are over-represented in the street-based sex trade.
- A core group of 8-10 Aboriginal women with experience in survival sex work meet twice weekly at WISH to learn traditional arts and cultural practices.
- Aboriginal evenings activities at the WISH Drop-In Centre are open to all.



2012/2013 AHSP Program Elder Brenda Wesley (right) & family members supporting her at her Farewell Feast, which was prepared and organized by AHSP Program Participants in May 2013

### PEER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Many women who come to WISH are curious about **employment choices** other than sex work. Often, these women face many **barriers** to more mainstream forms of work. These barriers can include a **lack of experience, homelessness** and challenges around **mental health** and **addictions**. Each year, the Peer Volunteer Program offers women **opportunities to volunteer** at the WISH Drop-in Centre. In exchange for an honorarium, women are **trained, supported and encouraged** to take on regular duties such as **preparing meals, staffing donation rooms and assisting program staff during drop-in hours** in a variety of ways. The Peer Volunteer Program is often a **stepping stone** to the Peer Safety Patrol (supported employment program).

### MOBILE ACCESS PROJECT (MAP VAN)

- Operated in partnership with P.A.C.E and funded by the Province of BC and the City of Vancouver
- Runs 7 nights a week from 10:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m.
- Staff includes women with experience in sex work
- 14,373 contacts made around Vancouver in 2012/2013
- Tens of thousands of harm reduction supplies handed out annually



### PEER SAFETY PATROL

Through WISH, women engaging in survival sex work are **trained, hired and employed** as **Peer Safety Patrollers**. They in turn maintain a **safe zone** for WISH participants, staff, volunteers and neighbours around the WISH Drop-In Centre. They also do **peer outreach** around the Centre, providing **harm reduction supplies, basic first aid, referrals and support** to their peers.

In 2012/2013, the **Peer Safety Patrol** distributed **8,288 condoms**, provided basic **first aid related services 1,002 times** and provided **peer support services 2,035 times**.



*"All I can say is I love being on the Safety Patrol! I love everything! When someone tells you you're doing a great job, it makes me feel so good, and I'm proud of doing it...I look forward to coming to work every week." - V.M.*

# WISH Program News 2012/2013

## VOLUNTEERS

**In 2012/2013 almost 100 volunteers provided 7500+ hours of service! Thank-you so much!!**

WISH loves volunteers—they are an integral part of what we do. In its formative years, **volunteers built WISH** and established it as an essential point of contact for women involved in survival sex work.

At WISH, volunteers help prepare and serve meals, staff donation rooms and generally act as a friendly, approachable presence at the Drop-In Centre. If you are interested in volunteering at the Drop-In Centre, please email [dicoord@telus.net](mailto:dicoord@telus.net) to learn more about the process of becoming a volunteer at WISH.

WISH is also grateful to the **corporate teams** (such as RBC in 2012/2013) who choose to volunteer at WISH for their days of community service.

WISH gratefully acknowledges the efforts of those volunteers who help outside of the Drop-In Centre. The **WISH Board of Directors** meets monthly and contributes hours of time, energy and expertise to the organization's governance each year. In addition, so many people in the community put on **fundraisers for WISH**, **collect and deliver clothing donations** as well as **gifts during the holidays**.

*We are very thankful to all of you!*

## WOMEN HELPING WOMEN

Programming at WISH is **participatory** in nature, and **informed by the women we serve**. There are three ways that women in survival sex work who use WISH can become **involved**:

**WISH Board of Directors:** There are **three** seats on the WISH Board of Directors that are **reserved** for women who **access WISH services**.

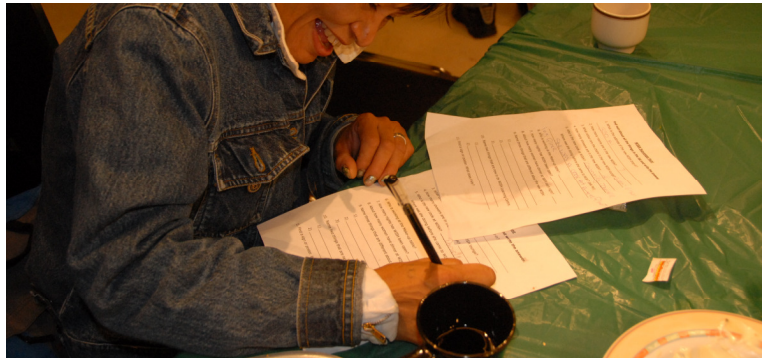
**Women's Advisory Group (WAG):** The WAG is open to all WISH participants and **meets monthly** in the WISH Learning Centre. Through the WAG, women can bring their **comments and concerns** about WISH programming forward and these are then brought to the WISH Board of Directors for consideration.

**Emerging Voices (EV):** EV is a participant-driven group of women who **organize social activities** at the WISH Drop-In Centre. Christmas, Thanksgiving...these can be lonely times for the women of WISH. Being able to **attend celebrations** with their community, and having **opportunities to organize them** through EV, can be a great source of comfort.

## WISH DROP-IN CENTRE

A safe, non-judgmental space open from 6:00 p.m - 11:00 a.m. seven days a week where women involved in the survival sex trade can access:

- **Hot, nutritious meals (Almost 27,500 dinners served in 2012/2013 as well as over 9,400 snacks!)**
- **An on-site clinic staffed by Nurses from BCCDC's Street Nurse Program and Nurse Practitioners from BC Women's Hospital**
- **Clean clothing and personal care items**
- **Safe, clean showers and washrooms**
- **Aboriginal cultural programming**
- **Referrals to community organizations that provide specialized services (i.e. help finding housing, detox, treatment)**
- **Weekly visits from the VPD Sex Industry Liaison, who provides assistance to women who request it**
- **Community, friendship, safety and respite**



## WISH LEARNING CENTRE

- Located **on-site** at the WISH Drop-In Centre and open **three nights a week**
- Average of **15 learners** per evening
- Offers **literacy** programming as well as **learning and skills development activities**
- Instructors from **Capilano University** provide **guidance and support** for women who wish to **pursue their GED and other opportunities for formal education** outside WISH.
- A partnership between WISH and **Capilano University** for the past 12 years
- In 2012, Learning Centre instructors took women on a fun and **educational day trip** to Sechelt, where they enjoyed time in nature.

*“I remember WISH some many years ago, in through the side door to the United Church on Hastings was our safe haven. I just wanted to thank you for all that you do. Without organizations like you giving the women like I was kindness, care and compassion, I wouldn't be where I am today. For in those small gestures of kindness, a simple shower, a warm meal and most of all, showing that I and others like us are still human regardless of the seemingly inhuman world that has enveloped us; in showing me this, it is people like you who gave me the reason to believe I could fight for a better life. “*

- Anonymous (Former WISH Participant)

WISH is a registered Canadian Charity (#87047 5563 RR0001).

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