

WORKING GEAR

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Working Gear is grateful to operate on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), the Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples.

As an organization, we are committed to supporting our Indigenous clients, community members and neighbors through our services, and we remain focused on embodying the principles of anti-racism and decolonization in all that we do.

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we reflect on the challenges and triumphs of 2023, I am filled with gratitude for the unwavering support and dedication of each and every one of you. Despite the tumultuous global landscape, Working Gear has remained steadfast in our commitment to serving those in need within our community.

Last year presented us with unprecedented obstacles, yet through our collective efforts, Working Gear continued to be a beacon of hope for many. I am proud to share that our Clothing and Safety Gear program experienced a remarkable 70% increase in clients served, a testament to the vital role we play as a safety net for individuals facing economic uncertainty and displacement. One of the most significant shifts we observed was the evolving demographics of our community, with newcomers to Canada representing 56% of our clients in 2023, compared to 14% in the previous year. This surge in newcomer clients has brought forth diverse and complex needs, prompting us to forge meaningful partnerships, such as the collaboration with The Independent Contractors and Businesses Association (ICBA), to better support our BIPOC clients and newcomers through specialized job fairs.

Working Gear underwent significant transformations in 2023. We bid farewell to esteemed board members, affectionately dubbing the year the “Working Gear Baby Boom.” The addition of fresh faces to our Board of Directors reflects the resilience and dedication of our volunteers. Additionally, thanks to the generous financial contribution from our valued partners at the Krogseth Foundation, we’ve expanded our team by adding a second staff member. This underscores our remarkable growth and evolving service landscape, enhancing our capacity to meet increasing demand and focus on strategic initiatives for long-term sustainability.

Our commitment to providing holistic support extends beyond tangible resources to include essential services like our barbershop program, which saw a doubling of capacity in 2023. The simple act of a haircut can instill a sense of normalcy and belonging, particularly for newcomers navigating unfamiliar terrain. Furthermore, our dedication to sustainability has led to significant milestones, including the reclamation of over 21,000 pounds of clothing and footwear in partnership with UBC, redirecting valuable resources from landfills to our clients in need.

As we navigate the complexities of an ever-changing world, it is clear that our work at Working Gear transcends beyond providing clothing and gear—it embodies the spirit of community, resilience, and compassion. Together, we are not only building a safer, more inclusive Metro Vancouver but also fostering a sense of belonging and support for those in transition.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to our donors, volunteers, and partners who continue to fuel our mission with their generosity and unwavering commitment. Your contributions, whether financial, in-kind, or through volunteer hours, are the bedrock of our organization’s success. As we embark on the journey ahead, let us remain steadfast in our resolve to uplift and empower those in need.

Together, we can create a brighter, more equitable future for all. With deepest appreciation,

Sarah Beley
Executive Director Working Gear

LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

It feels surreal to write my final letter as Board Chair, but the time has come to pass the baton. Being on the Board these last four years has been an absolute life highlight and while I might be stepping away from the Board, I'll still be involved with Working Gear for a long time to come.

Thinking back to where the organization was when I started volunteering in the community shop in 2019 to where things are at now is quite awe-inspiring. And the Board is a very small part of that story. Sarah Beley - where would we be without you? I could go on about all your amazing qualities for a long long time, but Working Gear is incredibly lucky to have such a strong, thoughtful leader guiding our operations.

This past year has seemingly flown by - but writing this letter always makes me appreciate all that has been accomplished with the organization. In January, the Board met with Sarah, as well as our part-time contractor, and community peers to facilitate a strategic planning discussion. Coming out of that meeting, we had clear goals we wanted to achieve this year: explore relationships with academic institutions to better understand Working Gear's community impact, connect with politicians to better communicate our story to decision-makers, and identify sustainable multi-year funding sources, plus a few other goals! We are an ambitious bunch.

While work is still underway on some of these initiatives, we are very proud of our partnership with UBC to make climate research accessible. This project has helped demonstrate the multi-pronged impact of Working Gear's services. By diverting clothing and gear that may be on the way to the landfill, Working Gear provides an alternative, sustainable option for clothing and gear to be reused.

This year has also felt like a turning point for Working Gear. There is growing demand for our services, and early numbers from 2023 demonstrate a significant

increase in total clients that have accessed the community shop program. With continual growth over the last few years, we are reaching a point where additional full-time staff are needed to sustain our operations. This is a challenge for small charities, but Working Gear is nimble and adept at securing new partnerships and exploring different funding streams. It is important that decision-makers understand the unique nature of our services - there are very few organizations that provide the services we do. Because of this, we are seeing clients from a larger geography across the Lower Mainland and beyond. Our model is distinct and warrants recognition from funding agencies and governments committed to reducing poverty and investing in sustainable, livable communities.

It's hard to summarize all that has been accomplished this year, but the Working Gear story continues to naturally evolve and unfold. It's been a privilege to be a part of this amazing organization and I couldn't be prouder of all that has been accomplished these last two years.

We look forward to all 2023/2024 brings to Working Gear and our broader community!

*Respectfully, your outgoing Chair,
Julia Bahen*

OUR IMPACT SNAPSHOT:

2024+ Clients were served in our shop and supported in their journey back into the work force

800+ Haircuts were given using our Community Barber Program

10.8 TONS Amount of clothing and footwear reclaimed

8+ POP-UPS Thanks to our partnership with City of Vancouver and the University of British Columbia

1747+ Attendees in total for 2023 pop-up events

2+ Job Fairs 140 attendees





WORKING GEAR

WHAT WE DO

Working Gear is a registered charity that runs a community shop program in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) of Vancouver. We have had the privilege of serving our clients since 2009. **Our mandate is to assist low income and marginalized individuals in their journey of returning to the workforce.**

Many temporary employment agencies and construction companies are reluctant to hire prospective workers if they do not own their own clothing, gear or equipment. Working Gear is a community-centered charity which helps remove this barrier to employment by providing work appropriate clothing and gear at no cost to participants.

Working Gear also runs barber and hair services on-site for clients to assist in preparing them to become work ready, build their self-worth, and reduce societal stigma they may face.

OUR MISSION

To relieve poverty by providing industry appropriate clothing, gear and supports at no cost to low income or unemployed individuals in search of employment.



OUR VALUES

We exist to improve lives by supporting our clients and the community. We treat everyone with compassion, respect, and kindness.

We strive to make a sustainable impact in the lives of our clients and the community as a whole. We recognize hard work and celebrate the successes of our community.

We recognize society's interconnectedness. We are committed to addressing social inequities and we use our voice to advocate for positive change.

Collaboration is the backbone of Working Gear. We aim to form long-lasting relationships and partnerships with our clients, referral agencies, volunteers, sponsors, donors, and advocates that are rooted in trust and integrity.

Staying curious is what keeps us on a continual path of learning and growing. We are committed to listening and learning from those around us, enabling us to innovate, adapt, and solve problems.

VALUES IN ACTION

Collaboration is truly the backbone of Working Gear. We work with over 73 referral agencies and are connected to over 580 social workers, employment counsellors, and case managers. These relationships keep us stay connected to the community and enable us to better serve our clients.

WHO WE SERVE

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2021, Working Gear began to distribute optional surveys to clients once they finished their appointments at the shop. The data from the 4,000+ client surveys we have collected helps us better understand our client base and ultimately improve our services.

16% Identify as women

25% Identify as Indigenous
(First Nations, Métis or Inuit)

42% Identify as BIPOC
(Black, Indigenous, People of Colour)

13% Are seniors (55+)

18% Have had experiences in the foster care system

55% Have recently moved to Canada

WE ASKED OUR CLIENTS WHAT THEY WOULD HAVE DONE *WITHOUT* WORKING GEAR'S SERVICES AND SUPPORT...

26%

Didn't know what they would have done

15%

Would have had to pass on their job offer

31%

Would have had to borrow money or save money to purchase their gear

24%

Would have worked unsafely

3%

Would have turned to criminal and/or illegal/dangerous activity



2023

HIGHLIGHTS



CANADA'S FASTEST GROWING SMALL CHARITY

In 2023, Working Gear witnessed an extraordinary surge in growth, solidifying its role as a pivotal support hub within the charitable landscape. The organization garnered significant accolades when it was spotlighted in a Macleans article, with Working Gear proudly hailed as the fastest-growing small charity in Canada, as supported by insights from the Veritas Foundation analysis. Notably, from serving 1000 clients in 2021, Working Gear's client base increased to 1,257 clients in 2022, and then further skyrocketed to 2,024 clients in 2023! This remarkable growth underscores the organization's unwavering dedication to its mission and its burgeoning impact on the community. Moreover, in addition to its distinction as the fastest-growing small charity, Working Gear also earned recognition among the top fastest-growing charities in Canada, as revealed by the same analysis.



COMMUNITY POP UP EVENTS

Working Gear has been fortunate to have a surplus of donations this past year. Surplus items are extra donations that are above and beyond what we need to run the shop programming. We have shared this surplus by hosting 8 community pop up events throughout the past year. Through these pop ups we can support individuals in our immediate community, as well as those in surrounding communities by working with partner organizations outside of the DTES. Over 1,700 people attended our community pop ups.

These pop-ups are made possible thanks to community partners, including the City of Vancouver, UBC Sustainability Hub and the Learning Exchange.





THE BARBER SHOP IS GROWING!

The Community Barber Shop now has seven barbers. This has allowed us to add an extra day to our services. Barber services are now available Monday - Thursday (times vary).

Our barbers are looking forward to another year of supporting our clients and community members to look and feel their best!

RAIN GEAR FUNDRAISER

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL MATCHING CAMPAIGN WITH WINGED ACHENE FOUNDATION

In November 2023, we had our annual rain gear fundraising campaign to provide Working Gear clients with rain gear and warmer clothing to see them through a winter of work.

This fundraiser is vital in terms of ensuring we can purchase rain gear during the wettest months in Vancouver. Rain gear is one of our most needed items and demand is often greater than our donated shop supply.

70 individual donors contributed:

\$40,675.26

Winged Achene Foundation
matched up to:

\$10,000

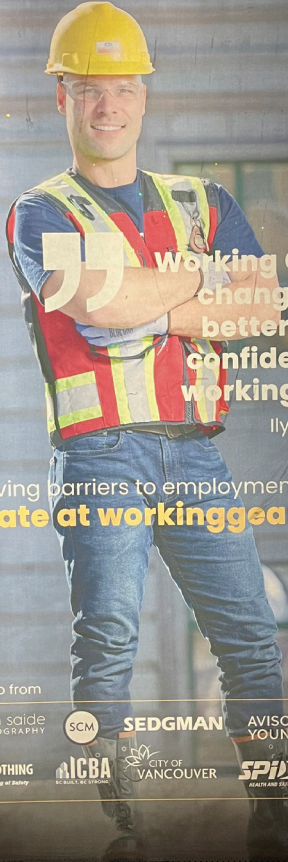
Total amount raised:

\$50,675.26

OUTFRONT / JCDcaux



WORKING GEAR



Working Gear helped me change my life for the better. I now have the confidence to start my working life in Canada.
Ilya, Construction Worker

Removing barriers to employment
Donate at workinggear.ca



With help from



AD CAMPAIGN WITH THE CITY OF VANCOUVER

Thanks to the City of Vancouver's Transit Shelter Advertising Program, Working Gear had digital billboard and traditional print shelter ads all around the city of Vancouver in November 2023.

These billboards highlighted some of our previous clients' successes and it was a great way to celebrate Working Gear and share our mission with a large audience.



CLIENT PROFILE:

STEVE

Steve is a firm believer in the saying often heard in sports: “If you look good, you feel good. And if you feel good, you play good. And if you play good, they pay good.” I initially thought I’d just be getting a pair of boots from Working Gear, and that would be the end of it. Little did I know, I’d receive so much more—exceptional service from Sarah, who is truly amazing.

Starting work in those comfortable boots made a world of difference to Steve. “It wasn’t just about the physical comfort; it was about the confidence they gave me. Working Gear became more than just a place to get gear—it became a part of my life.”

These days, Steve doesn’t find himself needing his work boots anymore. But Steve now volunteers at Working Gear. “It is my way of giving back to a place that made such a significant impact on my life. Working Gear will always hold a special place in my heart.”

CLIENT PROFILE:

ILYA

Ilya visited Working Gear shortly after his arrival in Canada from Ukraine. Back in his home country his experience was primarily in the hospitality industry. Ilya found myself starting anew, landing a job at a construction site as a worker.

“Working Gear holds a special place in my heart. When I first arrived in Canada, I left behind everything familiar—my home, my job, my friends—and embarked on a journey into the unknown. It was a daunting transition, but Working Gear became my guiding light. I remember stumbling upon their poster in the Work BC office and mustering the courage to attend a meeting. Despite my limited English proficiency at the time, they welcomed me with open arms, offering support and guidance in every possible way.”

During Ilya’s first rainy winter in Vancouver, he found himself ill-prepared for the dampness and chill. Working long hours on the construction site left Ilya constantly wet and uncomfortable. But Working Gear didn’t just provide him with practical assistance—“they offered me warmth and compassion during my darkest days”.

“To those considering donating, I want to express my deepest gratitude. Your generosity has the power to transform lives, and Working Gear is a testament to that. Your contributions don’t just provide clothing and gear—they offer hope and dignity to individuals like me, striving to build a new life in a foreign land.”

“And to anyone out there facing the daunting task of re-entering the workforce, I want to offer you a glimmer of hope. It may seem daunting at times, but with the support of caring individuals and organizations like Working Gear, you can overcome any obstacle. Keep pushing forward and remember that you’re never alone in this journey.”



“For us, Working Gear is family.”



CLIENT PROFILE: **ANDRII AND KATYA**

Andrii and Katya are a newly wed couple who recently married and bought a flat in Kharkiv, Ukraine, their hometown. Both were successful in their respective careers – Andrii as a massage therapist and Katya, as a film and fashion make-up artist.

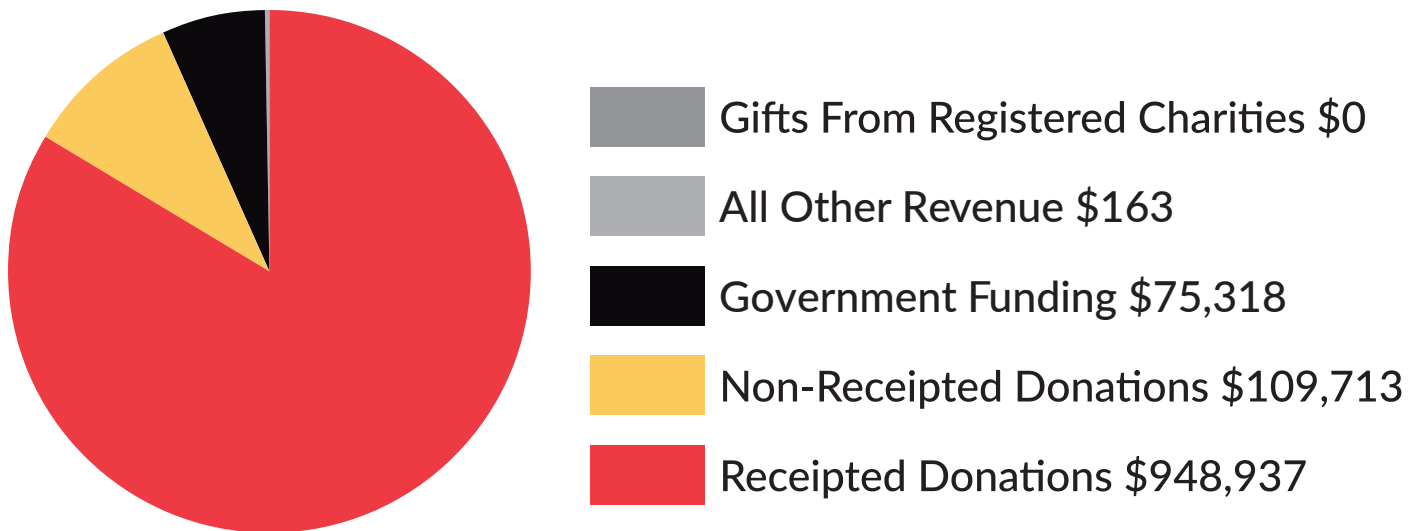
Their life completely changed in February 2022 as they were uprooted and forced to flee Ukraine. Andrii and Katya arrived in

Canada in July and have started their journey into the Canadian labour market. Both were referred to Working Gear to set them up with interview clothes. Since accessing Working Gear’s services, Andrii has started a new position in hospitality, with the hope he can eventually get back into massage therapy.

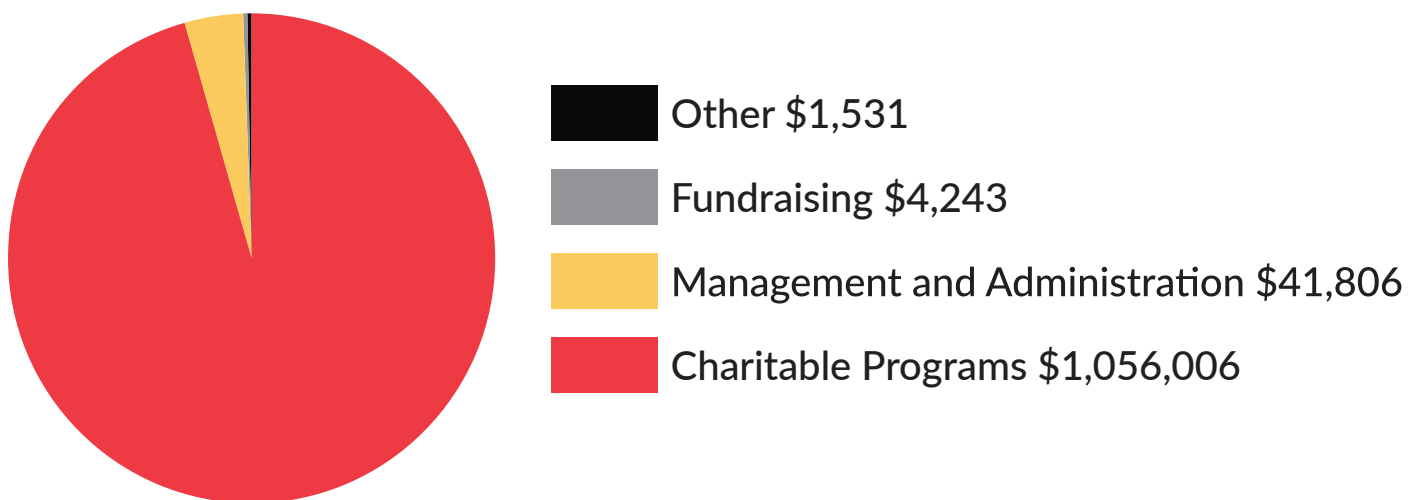
FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

96% of every dollar donated goes directly to programming

Revenue by Source (2023)



Expenses by Source (2023)



STAFF

Sarah Beley, Executive Director

Erich Saide, Photographer

VOLUNTEERS

Thank you to our 70+ volunteers who put in over 1000 hours this past year. We could not do this work without you!

BOARD MEMBERS

Julia Bahen, Chair

Joan Glover, Incoming Co-chair

Chris Adams-Brush, Treasurer

Jenna Hildebrand, Secretary and Incoming Co-chair

Sarah Mayer, Communications and Fundraising

Colleen Lamothe

Rome Benham-Parker

Ash Holmes

Thank you also to departing board members Julia Bahen, Garth White, and Chris Adams-Brush for your contributions this year.



Thank you to all our sponsors who are helping us give unemployment the boot!



INDOCHINO



VIBERG



Vancity



BN3TH



erich saide PHOTOGRAPHY

Krogseth Foundation



SEDGMAN

Bekar Family and Team



Winged Achene Foundation



LIKE WHAT YOU SEE?

Consider becoming a monthly donor to support us year-round.

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Facebook: facebook.com/workinggearsociety

Instagram: [@workinggear](https://instagram.com/workinggear)

Linkedin: linkedin.com/company/workinggearclothingsociety

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

