



# Empower Simcoe

BE • BELONG • THRIVE

ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023-24

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# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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PALLISTER**

Director

Hello, I'm **Valerie Scott, President of the Empower Simcoe Board of Directors**. This past year was truly memorable as we celebrated 70 years of excellence as one of the largest multi-service agencies in Ontario. We organized various events, including an Empower Simcoe signature wine launch, a fun-filled Celebrity Baseball game, and a spectacular 70th summer anniversary party at Rounds Ranch. These events made the year unforgettable and allowed us to honor and recognize our remarkable journey. Congratulations, Empower Simcoe!

2023-24 was also a period of significant transformation for Empower Simcoe. Through its Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion plan, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services is changing the funding model for the developmental services sector, however Empower Simcoe has already begun the work to prepare for this major reform to the supports and services we provide.

As we approach the final year of our current Strategic Plan, we are making great progress in advancing our agency in the strategic directions of Service Excellence, Our People and Culture, and A Strong Partner.

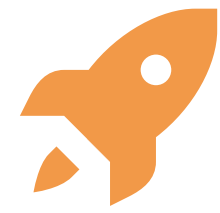
Despite the anticipated changes in the developmental services sector in the coming years, our ongoing efforts are paving the way for a bright and innovative future. We are positioning ourselves to continue to be a front runner in delivering the highest quality of supports and services for people and families in Simcoe County.

On behalf of my fellow Board members, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to CEO Dr. Claudine Cousins, the Senior Leadership team, and all Empower Simcoe employees for their unwavering dedication and tireless commitment. It is through their hard work and perseverance that we can evolve and innovate to support the people we serve so that they can Be, Belong, and Thrive for the next 70 years.

Keep up the extraordinary work, Empower Simcoe!

**Valerie Scott President,  
Empower Simcoe Board of Directors**





## DRIVEN

**2023-2024 was a record year for recruitment at Empower Simcoe** thanks to the incredible strides made in transforming Empower Simcoe into a more cohesive and empowered organization. Our dedicated People and Culture team diligently delved into researching the entire employee journey, from recruitment to onboarding, with the goal of creating an engaging and fulfilling experience for every new team member.

Through strategic partnerships with the Provincial Network Workforce Initiative and other developmental service agencies, as well as collaboration with educational institutions, we have developed a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy.

In our commitment to attracting top talent, Empower Simcoe actively participated in career fairs, engaging with students and highlighting the rewarding opportunities within the DS sector. Furthermore, our proactive approach of networking, attending industry events, and reimagining our job postings has allowed us to stay ahead in addressing talent shortages.

We are proud to report these efforts have led to a noteworthy decline in the use of external staffing agencies, a decrease in vacancy rates, and most importantly, the opportunity for every new employee to deeply understand the exceptional services and breadth of our entire organization.

**This solid foundation, built on Empower Simcoe's core values, is driving our organization towards even greater success for generations to come.**





# ACCOUNTABLE

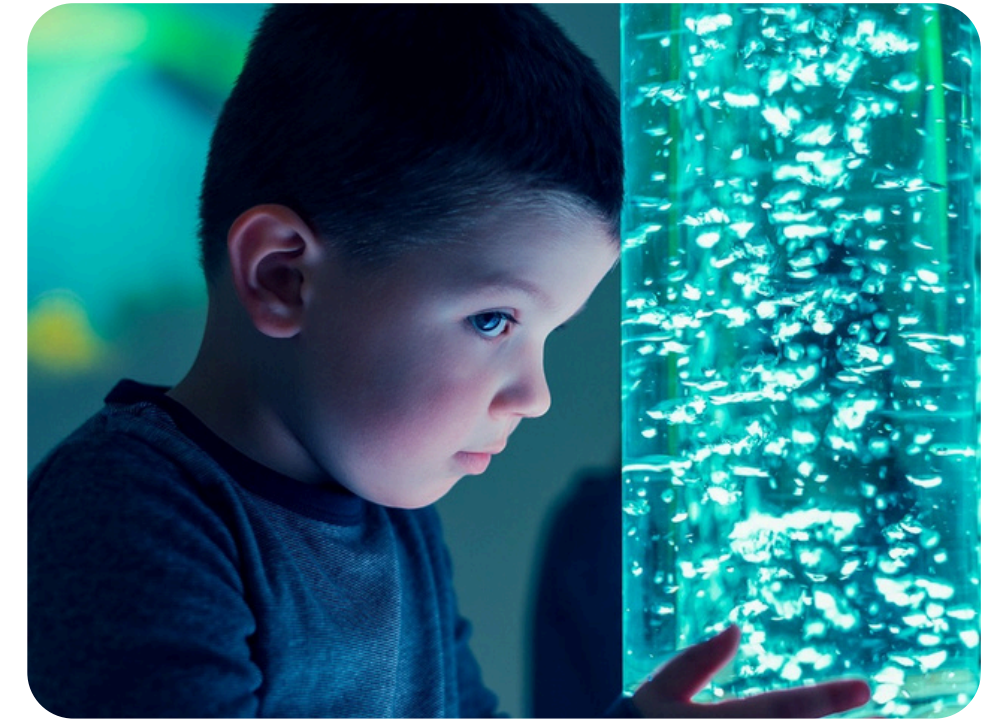
**The Cooking Up Capability program** is a shining example of Empower Simcoe's unwavering dedication to being accountable in providing outstanding and innovative services to the community.

Empower Simcoe's Fee for Service menu continues to evolve, featuring a diverse array of enriching programs including **Snoezelen light and sensory therapy** for adults and children, Express Yourself Dance and Motion, Skills to Thrive, Grow Your Own Way, SibShop, Youth Link, and more.

With an ever-expanding range of skill-building workshops, recreational opportunities, and educational and vocational training programs on the horizon, Empower Simcoe's Fee for Service future is brimming with exciting prospects for personal growth and development for people of all abilities within the community.



Empower Simcoe Grow Your Own Way participants



Snoezelen therapy for adults and children

**"There's also a social aspect to this," instructor and Community Participation Support Worker Kyara Casillas said. "Many of the participants look forward to seeing their friends. If somebody is a bit behind, they offer help."**



# COMMUNITY



**2023 marked Empower Simcoe's 70th anniversary** of providing supports and services to people of all abilities in Simcoe County. For the past 70 years, Empower Simcoe has continued to flourish and grow by responding to community needs through inclusive programming that improves the quality of all lives.

What began in 1953 as a small group of parents who wanted to offer their children with an intellectual disability an alternative to institutional placement has grown to become one of the largest multi-service agencies of its kind in Ontario, providing supports and services to 60,000 individuals and their families across Simcoe County on any given day.

**TO ALL OUR DEDICATED EMPLOYEES, COMMUNITY PARTNERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND DONORS, PAST AND PRESENT:**

We offer our heartfelt gratitude for 70 years of evolving, learning, and growing to support people of all abilities. 70 years of promoting quality of life and providing the tools and support needed for every person to live well so they can Be, Belong, and Thrive in our community.

**HERE'S TO THE NEXT 70 YEARS!**





# RESPECT

**From November 2023 to March 2024, five sessions, including Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion sessions,** were conducted in both Barrie and Orillia. Employees shared valuable (meaningful) insights, identified areas of positive feedback, and made valuable suggestions for change.

Transforming these insights into actions is shaping our agency's efforts to constantly improve the work environment at Empower Simcoe. At the same time, upcoming Listening and Connecting sessions are being scheduled so our organization can continue to listen, learn, and maintain an open dialogue with every Empower Simcoe employee.

Additionally, Journey to Belonging Customer Service Excellence sessions ensure that every Empower Simcoe employee has the information and necessary tools to implement Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' long-term vision for developmental services in Ontario.

**By respecting and putting people first while improving customer service,** Empower Simcoe is positioned to be at the forefront of this transformational shift in how responsive services are chosen by people and families in our community.



Empower Simcoe Grow Your Own Way participants



*In 2022, the Empower Simcoe Board of Directors approved our strategic plan, marking the beginning of an exciting journey for our agency. We are incredibly proud of the significant strides we have made in pursuit of our three key priorities: Service Excellence, Our People and Culture, and Strong Partnerships.*

### **Priority #1: Service Excellence**

Service Excellence has been the cornerstone of our unwavering dedication to providing quality customer service. We are thrilled to announce the completion of a specialized transition home in Orillia, designed to empower individuals in developing essential social and living skills. We've optimized our housing stock to align with the goals of those we support, and the launch of fee-for-service (FFS) programs has brought immense benefits to the people and families we support and the community alike. In 2024, our integration of Microsoft platform technologies like Power BI, Power Apps, Power Automate, and SharePoint has greatly improved our ability to track key performance indicators, streamline passport budget management, and enhance operational efficiency. In addition, the introduction of a content submission portal for employee engagement and the inclusion of profile photos on internal platforms have significantly elevated communication within our organization.

### **Priority #2: Our People and Culture**

The tireless efforts of our Empower Simcoe People and Culture team have led to the successful launch of a comprehensive orientation program for new employees, aimed at fostering a deep understanding of our services and strengthening our organizational culture and values. We are delighted to have offered diverse training programs, including Essential Skills for Today's Leadership, Direct Support Leadership, and Conflict Management. Furthermore, our listening and brainstorming sessions on customer service and equity, diversity, and inclusion have contributed to a more inclusive workplace environment.

### **Priority #3: Strong Partnerships**

At Empower Simcoe, we deeply understand the importance of forging strategic partnerships. Our collaboration with the Intentional Community Consortium and the Local Immigration Partnership is a testament to this unwavering commitment.

These partnerships have allowed us to advocate for supportive housing and the National Housing Strategy on Parliament Hill and present our services and job opportunities to newcomers in Simcoe County and beyond. In collaboration with developmental services agencies and experts in Simcoe County, we have developed an Emergency Management and Pandemic Response Plan for congregate care settings. This comprehensive plan, coupled with an annual tabletop exercise, plays a pivotal role in ensuring the safety and well-being of the people and families we support, along with our employees, during unforeseen circumstances. The extraordinary progress achieved over the past year serves as a testament to the unwavering dedication of Empower Simcoe's leadership team and employees. With one more year left in our strategic plan, our commitment has never been stronger.



## 2023-24 UPDATE



### Lacie Street Transition Home

Supporting individuals in developing social and life skills to enhance their independence. First resident moved into the new home in August 2024.



### Expanded Fee For Service Programs

New offerings include Cooking Up Capability, Express Yourself, Let's Meet, Skills to Thrive, and Snoezelen Therapy, tailored to individual needs.



### Microsoft Platform Integration

Implemented Power BI, Power Apps, and Power Automate for improved tracking of key performance indicators and streamlined passport budget management.



### Launch of Employee Content Portal

Increased opportunities for sharing stories, news, and achievements within our agency, fostering greater internal engagement.



### Agency-wide Employee Orientation

New comprehensive orientation program to build a unified workforce and reinforce our organizational culture rooted in shared values.



### Modernized Core Competencies Roll-out

Enhanced employee development through Surge Learning, focusing on continuous growth, engagement, and building organizational talent.



### Leadership and Development Training

Offered Essential Skills for Today's Leaders, Direct Support Leadership Training with Georgian College, and Conflict Resolution Management for senior leaders.



### Emergency & Pandemic Response Collaboration

Partnered with Simcoe County DS agencies to develop a response plan, ensuring best practices in IPAC for the safety of those we serve and our community



### Community Champion for #ITSTARTS Campaign

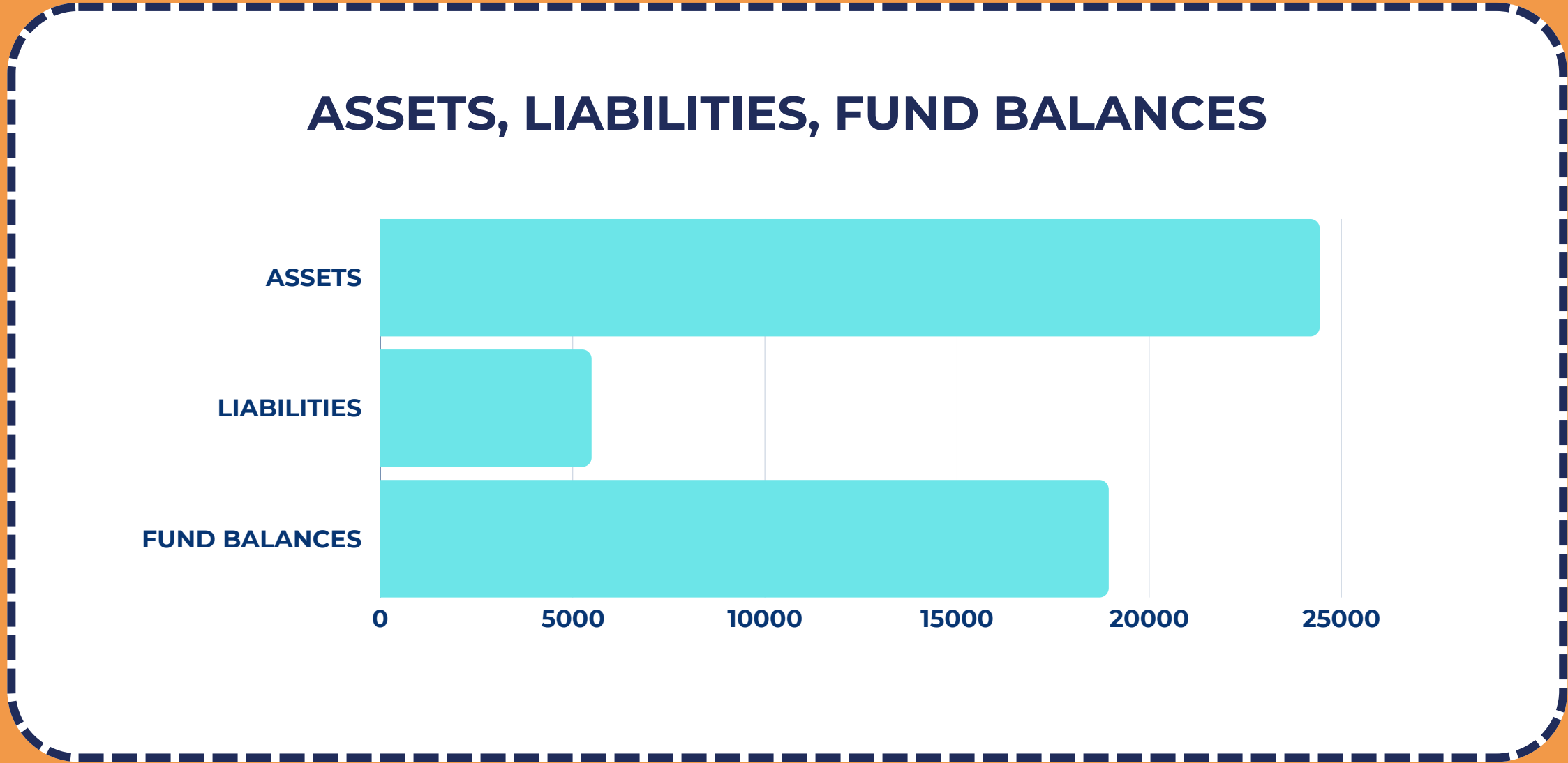
Leading efforts to promote equity and inclusion across Simcoe County through the #ITSTARTS initiative.



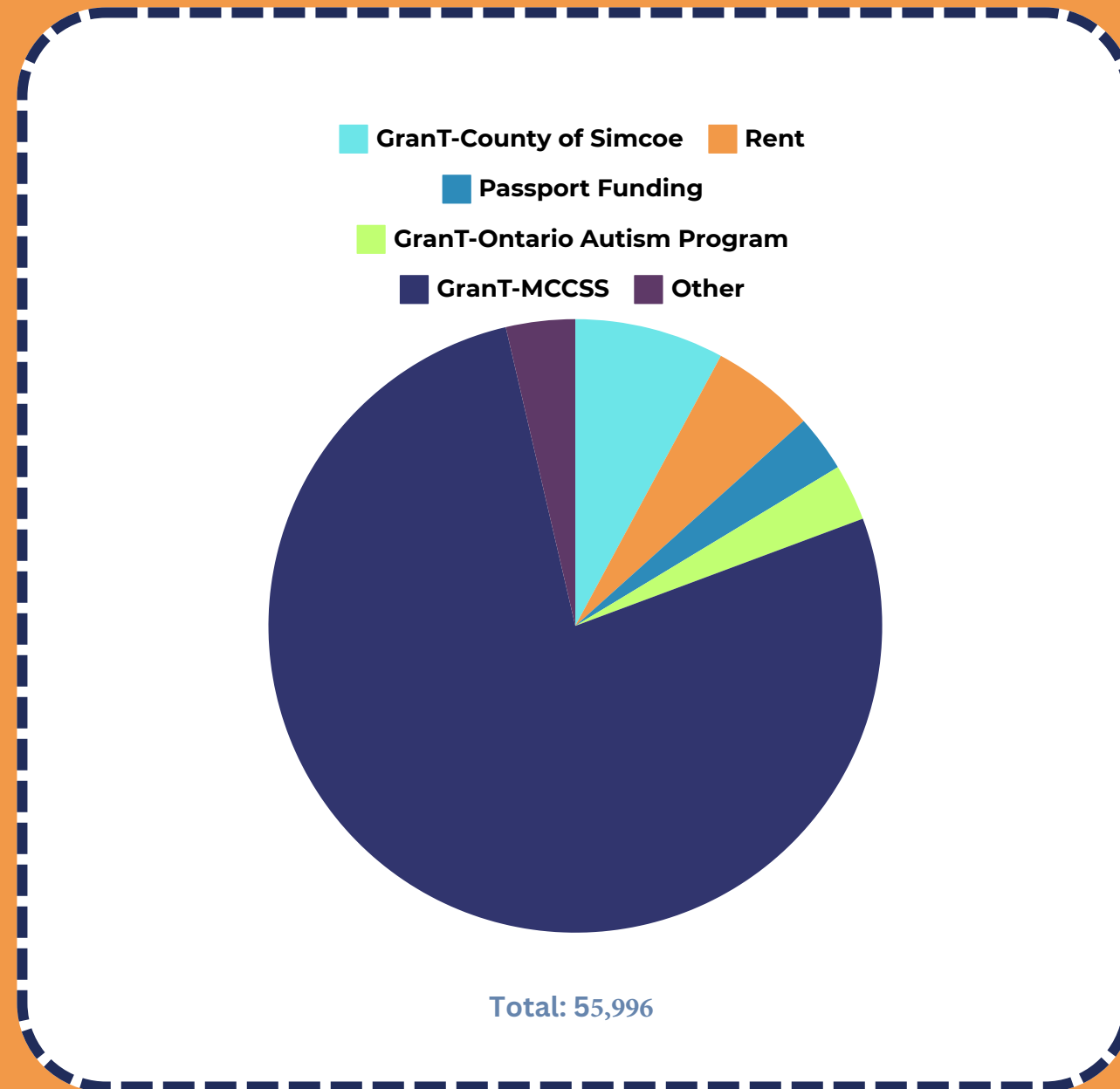
### Intentional Community Consortium Partnership

Advocating for increased supportive housing options for individuals with developmental disabilities through strategic partnerships.

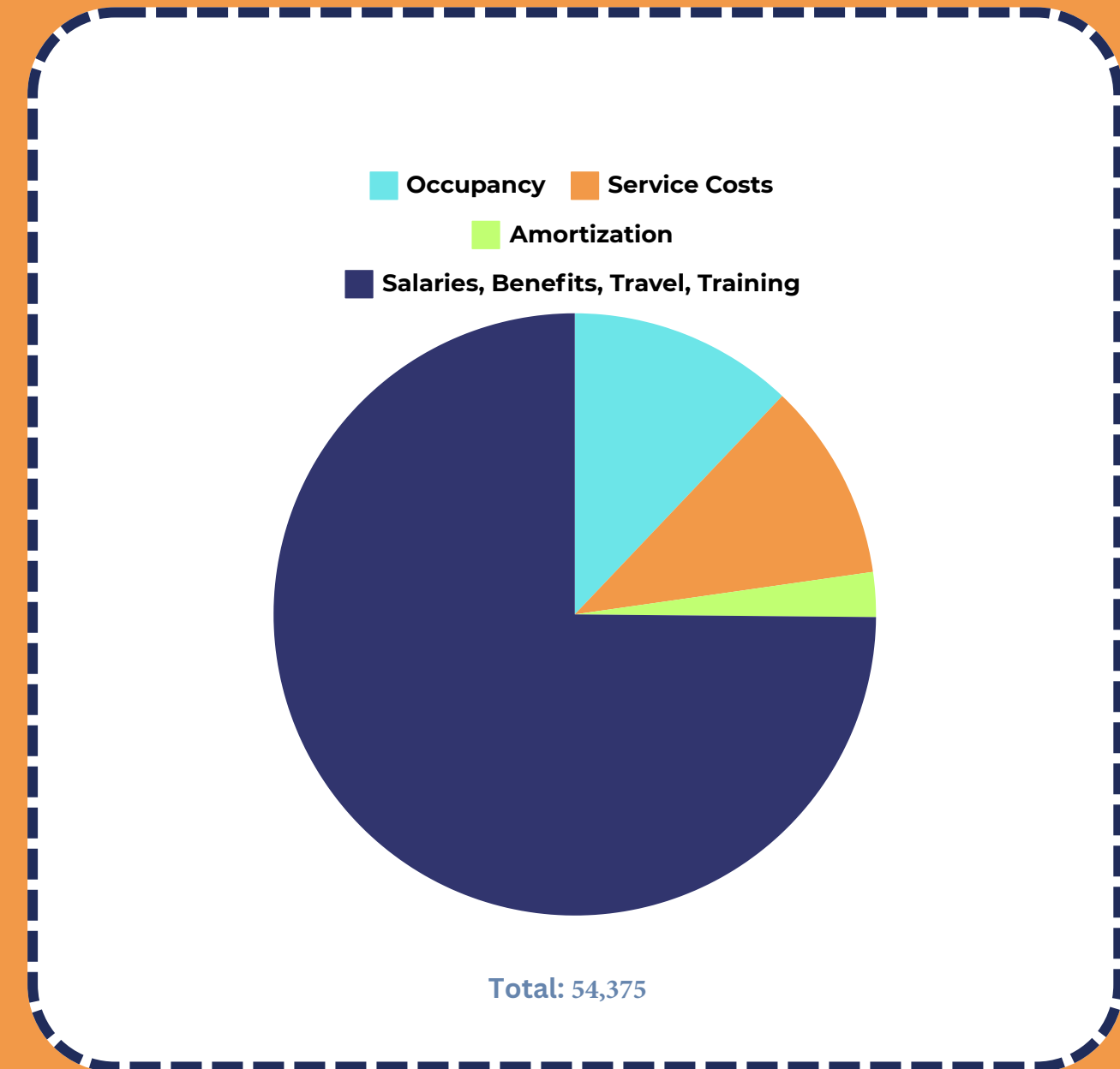
# EMPOWER SIMCOE FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS 2023-2024 (IN 000'S)



SOURCES OF REVENUE (IN 000'S)



EXPENDITURES (IN 000'S)



Trevor Knight knows how to rise to the occasion. Whether it's winning multiple medals earlier this year at the Special Olympics Winter Games in Calgary or proudly walking the runway at the 2023 Empower Simcoe Celebrating Community Champions Fashion Show, Trevor wholeheartedly embraces every opportunity to work, play, and volunteer in his community.

**Trevor was born with Down Syndrome in 1978**, and throughout his life, Empower Simcoe has been there to guide and encourage him to live his best life. "Empower Simcoe's Preschool program launched its Infant Development Program just before Trevor was born," said Kathy McCarroll, Trevor's Mom. "Trevor was the first baby into that program from the beginning. I don't know what we would have done without these services, the resources that were made available to us, and how to work with special needs."

As a toddler, Trevor joined Sunny Park Children's Centre, now the EarlyON Child and Family Centre. After graduating high school, Trevor started working with the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka and volunteered at a retirement home, folding laundry and assisting with cleaning.

As someone who's received services from Empower Simcoe his entire life, it was only fitting, during the agency's 70th anniversary year, that Trevor represent Empower Simcoe, by dropping the ceremonial puck at the 2023 Boots and Hearts Barn Burner Hockey Game. In front of a sold-out crowd at the Sadlon Centre in Barrie, hockey legends Darryl Sittler, and Barn Burner captains John Tavares and Gary Roberts joined Trevor at center ice. Trying on Darryl's Hockey Hall of Fame ring before the game was an unforgettable highlight for Trevor.

However, Darryl was more impressed that Trevor is a Dr. Frank Hayden Lifetime Achievement Award recipient from Special Olympics Ontario for his remarkable dedication to Special Olympics for more than thirty years.

**Congratulations, Trevor. We can't wait to see what occasion you rise to next.**



A LIFETIME OF MEANINGFUL ACHIEVEMENT

Helping people and his community just comes naturally to Jeff Czetwerzuk. As an Empower Simcoe Supported Independent Living Worker and Ward 3 Councillor for the City of Orillia, Jeff explains the parallels between the two positions.

**"It's really about helping and supporting people of all abilities in our community,"** says Jeff. **I'm passionate about that."**

Born and raised in Orillia, Jeff's commitment to community service started in grade six as a volunteer with Special Olympics bowling. "Many people I now support as a SIL Worker recognize me as that 11-year-old from bowling," says Jeff. "It's heartwarming to see things come full circle."

Following his roots, Jeff pursued a Child and Youth Care diploma from Georgian College, which was succeeded by an Honors Bachelor of Social Work degree from Lakehead University. His passion for politics flourished during his time as a student leader, having been elected to the Georgian College Student Association and the Georgian College Board of Governors.

Jeff's journey with Empower Simcoe began as a summer student, leading to being hired eventually as a member of the Empower Simcoe Supported Independent Living team. On any given day, he assists people with grocery shopping, attending doctor's appointments, cooking, support around one's home, banking, and accessing the community.

**"The people we support are so thankful to have an extra set of hands to help them with their daily lives,"** notes Jeff. **"They really appreciate the work we do."**

Elected to Orillia City Council in 2022, Jeff is committed to serving the citizens of Orillia, just like the people he supports at Empower Simcoe, by being involved in the community, being responsive, and being committed to creating positive change.



**AN UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY SERVICE**

There's a palpable focus and a sense of purpose from participants at the weekly Fibre Friends table at the Ramara Centre Library. As part of Empower Simcoe's Community Support Services program, this drop-in beginner's knitting class meets weekly to support and encourage each other at whatever stage they might be at with their knitting projects. This is a stitch and social where participants gather to laugh and share ideas and their love of knitting.

**Watching Hailey Mackie, one can't but be impressed and inspired by her determination and progress** as she skillfully loops a piece of colourful yarn around each peg of her adaptive loom. Due to a weaker right hand, Hailey originally had challenges maneuvering the knitting needles; however, thanks to the ingenuity of Empower Simcoe Community Support Services Support Worker Cortney Moreau, Hailey is now crushing it one stitch at a time.

Much research by Cortney went into finding an adaptive loom design that would best fit Hailey's needs. With the assistance of Cortney's handy husband, Mike, a knitting loom was thoughtfully custom-built and assembled to allow Hailey to knit on her own.

Now, Hailey is creating beautiful, knitted apparel she loves and building connections and a sense of belonging with other community members.

**"I like being around people," says Hailey. "Knitting is such a fun and relaxing thing to do."**

Hailey continues to learn new patterns and plans to sew her creations together to make a beautiful new patch blanket. She promises to share a picture with Empower Simcoe upon completing the project.

**"I'm excited to be working towards this goal,"** exclaims Hailey.

A heartfelt thank you to Cortney and Mike for their innovative and unwavering commitment to help Hailey lead a meaningful and inclusive life.

Keep shining, Hailey, and know that your inspiring journey brightens the lives of those around you.



**CRAFTING SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL ONE STITCH AT A TIME**



# EMPOWER SIMCOE FOUNDATION

Raising Funds to improve the quality of life for  
people of all abilities and foster an inclusive society



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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Board Member



**VALERIE SCOTT**

Board Member



**ROCH LANGEVIN**

Board Member



**KARL CADERA**

Board Member

Hello, I'm Mike Taylor, Chair of the Empower Simcoe Foundation. As I enter my first year in this role, I am honored to share this message on behalf of the Empower Simcoe Foundation Board of Directors.

What a year it's been for the Empower Simcoe Foundation. In 2023, the Empower Simcoe Golf Tournament returned to Orillia and Hawk Ridge Golf and Country Club's lush fairways and greens, raising an astounding \$55,000 for the Foundation. Thank you to all the golfers, sponsors, auction bidders and volunteers who helped make this event such a tremendous success.

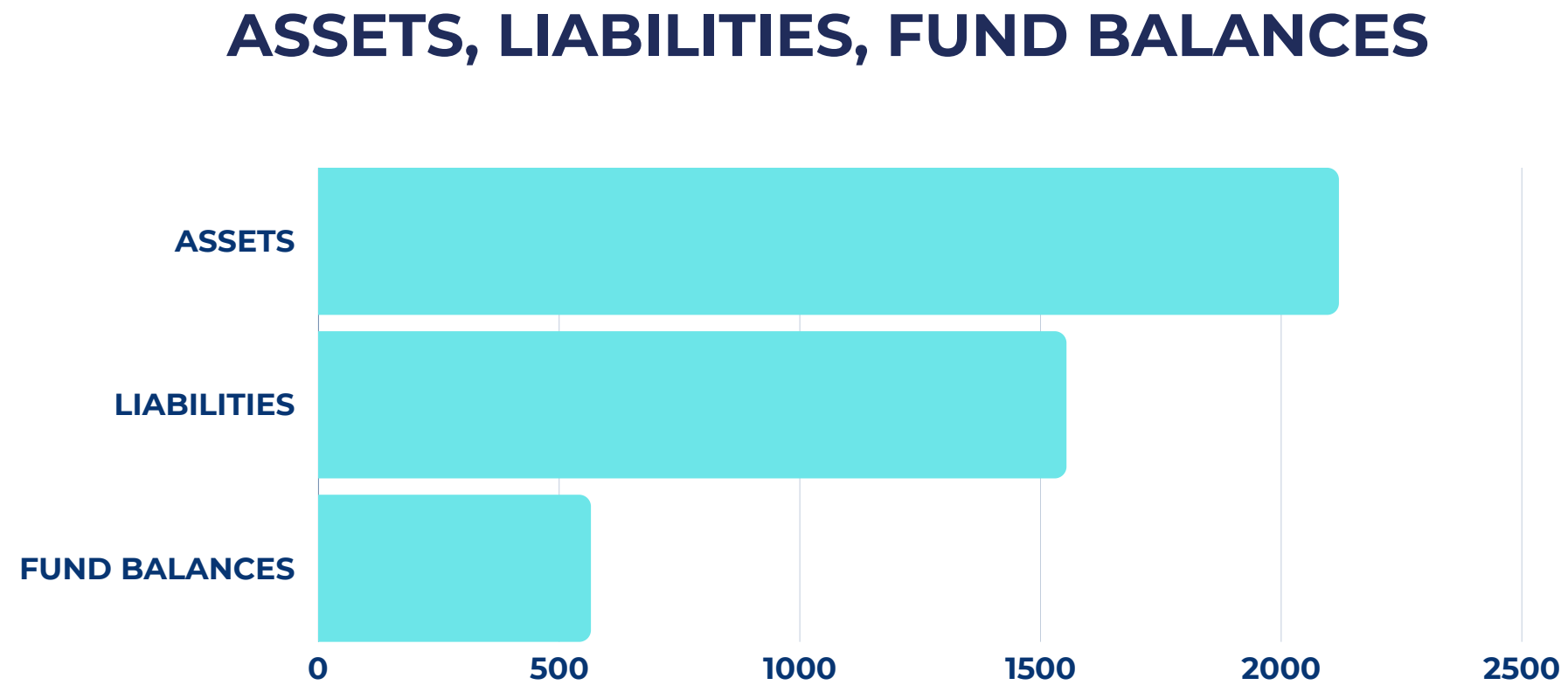
The 2023 Empower Simcoe Community Champions Fashion Show at the Heights of Horseshoe was one of our most successful shows yet. For nearly thirty years, this annual Foundation signature event has celebrated the people and families we support, while also providing an opportunity to recognize and applaud our generous community partners and volunteers in an evening filled with fun, fashion, and philanthropy. Proceeds from this event have assisted the Empower Simcoe Foundation to purchase items like specialized mobility equipment, bus passes, adult and senior recreation opportunities, youth skills development, much needed respite for caregivers, and so much more. Thank you to our Community Champions for making a difference in the lives of so many.

Also, in 2023, we launched our Hooray for Outdoor Play campaign with a goal of \$300,000 to build an accessible and inclusive outdoor playground for children and families at Empower Simcoe's EarlyON Child and Family Centre in Barrie. The Empower Simcoe Foundation is privileged to assist with this important playground expansion as a vital enhancement to the EarlyON Centre's mission of supporting families and children in their journey of growth and learning.

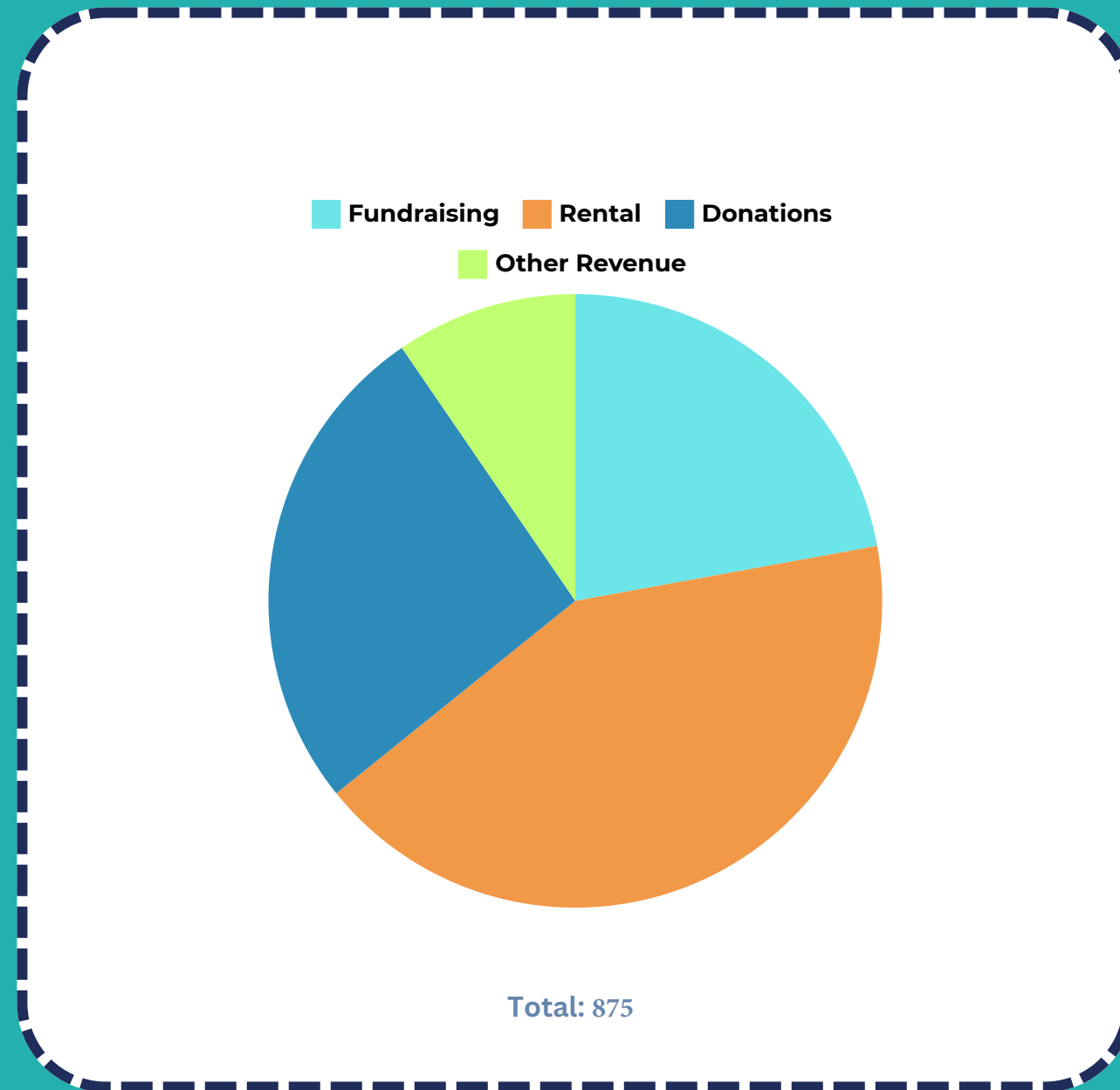
We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your incredible support of these meaningful Foundation fundraising initiatives, which are vital in generating funds and resources beyond government and other funding sources for the people and families supported by Empower Simcoe. We are deeply grateful to every donor, community partner, and volunteer for their incredible generosity and tireless efforts in support of the Empower Simcoe Foundation, enabling us to continue to respond to community needs and advance our mission to enhance the quality of all lives.



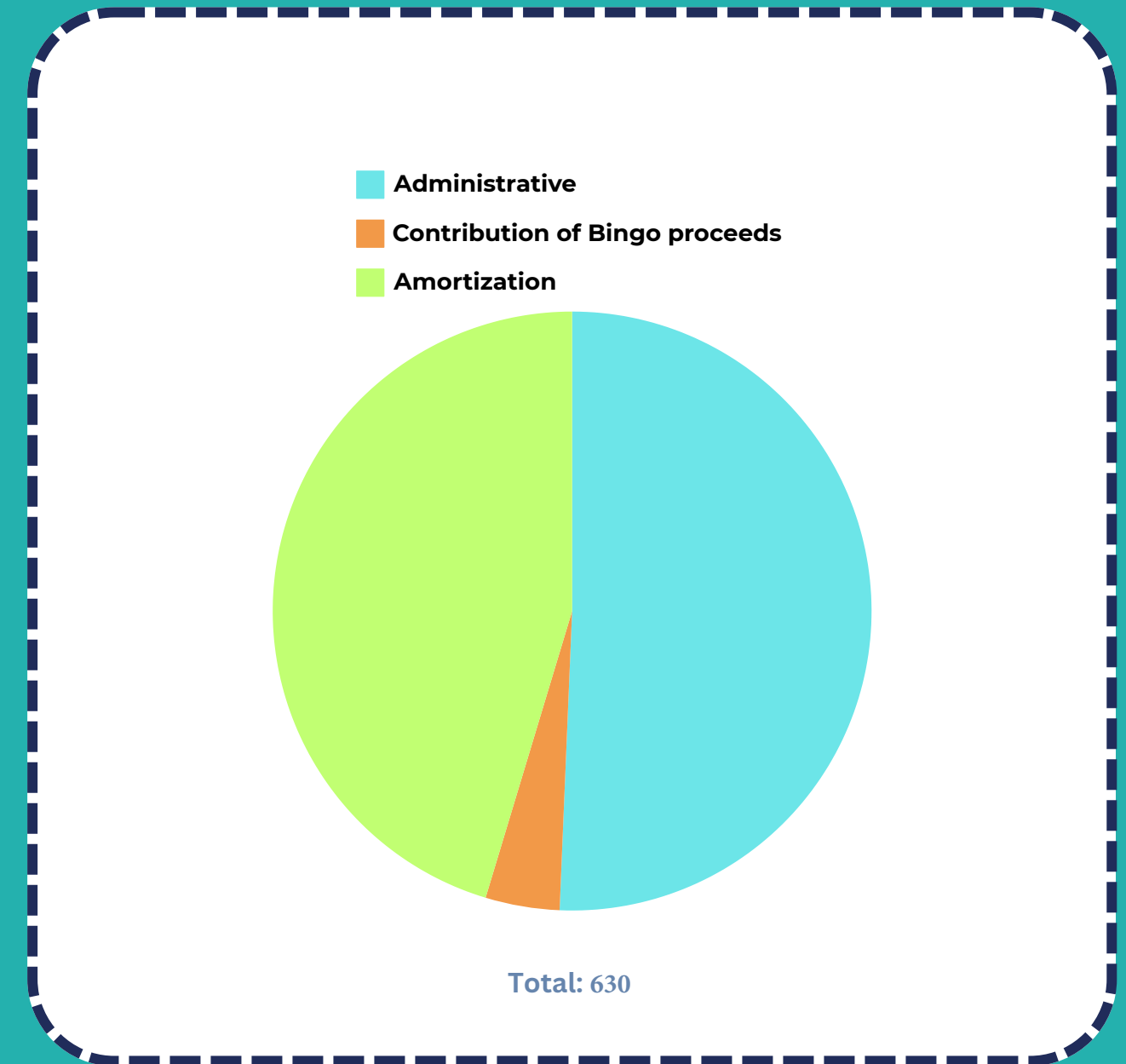
## EMPOWER SIMCOE FOUNDATION FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS 2023-2024 (IN 000'S)



SOURCES OF REVENUE (IN 000'S)



EXPENDITURES (IN 000'S)



**“I live by the credo that one should welcome every opportunity to welcome humanity,” says Surbhi. “We need to love people for who they are. That’s why I support Empower Simcoe.”**

Growing up in northern India, **Surbhi Warach learned as a young girl, the invaluable lessons of compassion, generosity, and the significance of giving back to others.** “I was taught from an early age to think of others in need, whether it was a gift of food, medicine, or our time,” recalls Surbhi. These values have been Surbhi’s guiding light throughout her life.

Her journey to Canada in 2011 presented new opportunities, leading to a fulfilling career in Information Technology, where she now proudly serves as a Quality Assurance Analyst in Toronto. Surbhi and husband Waiz, were overjoyed to welcome their son Chezian into the world in 2024.

Having discovered Empower Simcoe through a Google search, Surbhi was moved to find an organization that helps people of all abilities throughout Simcoe County. The sight of the Empower Simcoe sign while driving along Highway 400 further resonated with her. **“I loved seeing the word ‘empower’ and its positive message,” said Surbhi.**

As a dedicated monthly donor to the Empower Simcoe Foundation, Surbhi takes immense pride in knowing that her contributions are making a meaningful difference in people’s lives. She adds, **“I get immense satisfaction in sharing what I can with others. It brings me great joy.”**

The Empower Simcoe Foundation shares its heartfelt gratitude to Surbhi for the positive impact she’s making in the lives of those in need in our community.



## **A JOURNEY OF COMPASSION AND GIVING**

FOUNDATION

# Gift of the Heart Awards



For giving selflessly to improve the quality of life for people supported by Empower Simcoe, please join us in congratulating the 2022-23 Gift of the Heart Award recipients.







# FUNDING AND PARTNERS

