



AUNT LEAH'S

Christmas Tree Lot

2020 Media Kit

———— auntleahs.org ————

PRESS RELEASE

How Buying a Christmas Tree Helps Provide Housing and Support for Homeless Foster Youth & Moms and Babies During a Pandemic

VANCOUVER-CANADA Aunt Leah's Tree Lot is a vital fundraiser for the Aunt Leah's organization, with money raised through tree sales providing housing for moms and babies and youth aging out of foster care.

It is estimated that half of BC foster youth will experience homelessness and during the pandemic foster youth have experienced even greater levels of housing and food insecurity. Aunt Leah's has been a lifeline for these vulnerable young people during the pandemic, offering financial assistance for rent, supported housing, meals, groceries and above all a supportive and compassionate adult to help them navigate these difficult times.

"For a mom who is 8 months pregnant with nowhere to live and limited community supports, the pandemic has created an even higher level of anxiety. For a young person about to lose their housing Covid has been beyond stressful. Throughout the pandemic Aunt Leah's has increased its effort to find housing and expand housing supports, as well as supporting new moms with their birth plans and post natal supports. Many young people coming out of foster care are suffering re-traumatization and mental health issues due to the uncertainty, financial hardship, and isolation that the pandemic has created. Aunt Leah's continues to provide those key connections that are often a life-line of hope for a young person on a day when hope is hard to find." says Sarah Stewart, Executive Director Aunt Leah's Place.

Aunt Leah's House provided sixteen-year-old Sherry with a home and the support she needed to take care of her infant daughter, Marcella. After some difficult years Sherry was able to regain custody of her daughter when Aunt Leah's provided her with stable housing in the Thresholds program. Now, in grade 5, Marcella is thriving and a top student in her class.

Throughout the pandemic Aunt Leah's has been there for Sherry and her daughter every step of the way, bringing them groceries, toilet paper and other essentials as well providing financial and much needed emotional support when needed.

Aunt Leah's started selling Christmas trees in the 1990s when government funding was cut. It has turned into a viable social enterprise and Christmas tree sales have grown every year. For many Metro Vancouver families an Aunt Leah's' Christmas tree is a cherished part of their Christmas tradition. This year, during COVID, families can feel confident continuing their tradition as we have extensive COVID safety measures in place at all our Tree Lots.

Aunt Leah's Place has been chosen by Charity Intelligence as a Top Pick in their survey of Canadian Charities four years in a row. Charity Intelligence researches charities to help donors decide where to direct their giving.

For location, hours, and up-to-date information regarding our response to announcements from Public Health Officials visit: auntleahs.org/trees

More information on page 10.

INTERVIEW CONTACTS

Sarah Stewart

Aunt Leah's Place, Executive Director



In December 2016 Sarah Stewart became the Executive Director for Aunt Leah's Place. Sarah has worked for Aunt Leah's Society for twenty years. She started off as a Support Worker, working primarily with teen moms. From there she took on coordinating Aunt Leah's Training Programs for five years during which she developed an employment-training program specifically for women. During her time as Program Director, she developed Aunt Leah's Thresholds Program, a supportive housing program for moms and babies and Aunt Leah's Link Program Link a social justice initiative for youth who have aged out of government care. Link and Thresholds aims to provide these young adults with a similar network of support to those given by mainstream Canadian families.

Angelina Oates

Aunt Leah's Place, Director of Social Enterprise



Angelina Oates is the Director of Aunt Leah's Trees. Over the past 10 years, Angelina has helped Aunt Leah's Trees grow into one of the largest charity tree lots in Canada, grossing over \$641,121 in 2019. Angelina also helps organize Aunt Leah's pre-employment training programs, which helps give youth in care the skills they need to obtain employment and transition to independent living. The Burnaby tree lot is the site of Aunt Leah's annual Retail Training program.

MEDIA CONTACTS

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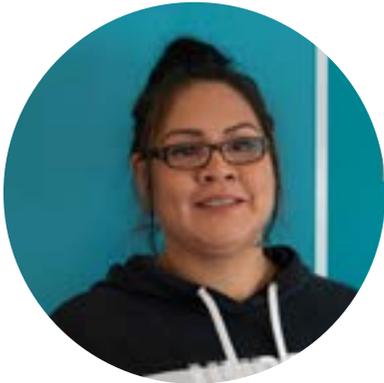
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INTERVIEW CONTACTS



Sherry

Sherry became part of the Aunt Leah's family when she moved into Aunt Leah's house at the age of 16 with her 3-month-old infant daughter, Marcella. Not only did Aunt Leah's provide her with secure housing, in a home for young women under 19 with babies, but they offered her vital parenting and life skills programs. In addition, Aunt Leah's provided financial and emotional support and helped Sherry get back to school. Fast forward and Sherry now lives with her daughter in an independent suite in Aunt Leah's Thresholds housing for mom's and kids.

COVID has added an extra level of stress to Sherry's already challenging situation. She had been accepted to the Native Education College and was planning to go back to school to become a family and community counsellor and an advocate for other young moms and former youth in care. However, due to Covid she has put her plans for further education on hold and is focused on helping her daughter get back to school and restarting her job as a flag person. Throughout the pandemic Aunt Leah's has been there for her every step of the way, bringing her groceries, toilet paper and other essentials as well providing financial and much needed emotional support when needed.

Despite the pandemic, Sherry and Marcella are looking forward to continuing their Christmas tradition by volunteering at Aunt Leah's Tree Lot (while following safety protocols of course!).

"Volunteering at the Tree lot puts us in the Christmas spirit, and it feel good to give back to Aunt Leah's after all they have done for us." - Sherry



INTERVIEW CONTACTS



Rain

Rain spent much of their young life in and out of foster care. They connected with Aunt Leah's in 2019 when their social worker connected them with the Aunt Leah's Branches AYA Life Skills program. This program supported Rain in going back to school and helped them create a schedule to manage school and work. In addition, Rain has participated in the Bootstraps program which helps youth build skills and find meaningful and sustainable employment.

Rain has given back to Aunt Leah's by volunteering their time in so many several different ways including co-facilitating an Art Therapy session for Aunt Leah's youth in partnership with Branches and Dan's Legacy. Rain has been so devoted to volunteering at Aunt Leah's that they would show up after their graveyard shift every Wednesday morning to help with the carrying and sorting of food donations. In recognition of their outstanding contribution, Rain was given the 2020 Leah Award for Unconditional Love and Support.

Despite struggling with depression and isolation during the pandemic, Rain has cared for their stepfather and continued to work a 60 to 80-hour work week as a security guard. Aunt Leah's has been there to help with the extra rent and living expenses that Rain took on when their stepfather lost his job during COVID. Picking up groceries at the Wednesday food distribution day was also chance for Rain to connect and have a real in-person conversation with someone that listened. This was particularly important in lessening the isolation that Rain felt during the lockdown.

"If Aunt Leah's hadn't been there, I think I would have been back in hospital" says Rain.

At the moment Rain is trying to stay positive as Aunt Leah's is helping them find a rental suite. They keep up their spirit by volunteering, talking to their girlfriend, and organizing online Dungeons & Dragons games.



INTERVIEW CONTACTS



Candy

Like so many foster youth Candy had a rocky childhood. After being kicked out of the house at 14 and living under the Patullo Bridge for 2 years, Candy was finally placed in a foster home at 16. And then, at the age of 18, they came to Aunt Leah's Place through a referral from their social worker. Candy joined the Support Link program, which provides semi-independent living for foster youth between the ages of 15-18.

Candy also participated in the Bootstraps program which helps with preparing for and finding meaningful employment. Candy has been very active in the young LGBTQA2S+ community, helping to found an LGBTQ2S+ youth advocacy group, Youth for a Change (youth4achange.com) and working with a Queer Elders group creating a textbook called Basically Queer: An intergenerational Look to LGBTQA2S+ Lives.

Candy has a flourishing Tik Tok site @Candy_fine with over 32.4K followers. Down the road Candy plans on continuing their education and becoming an ASL interpreter and work in schools, assisting those who are deaf or hard of hearing, or as an interpreter at concerts.

Candy is currently living in one of Aunt Leah's Supportive Housing Programs which provides safe affordable communal housing for former foster youth. They work for Dan's Legacy, an organization that provides counselling for youths and adults who have suffered trauma, and has been handing out food hampers during the pandemic. Like so many foster youth, Candy has struggled with depression and anxiety, which COVID has only intensified. Aunt Leah's has continued to provide Candy with support during this difficult time.

"By the time you are 19 most resources are gone. When I was homeless, I didn't have any healthy parent. Aunt Leah's has given me with the positive parental figure I never had. They help me with rent, laundry meals and support. Most youth in care don't have family to fall back on. Aunt Leah's is like family." - Candy





PROVIDING FAMILIAL SECURITY DURING A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

For three decades Aunt Leah's Place has helped prevent children in foster care from becoming homeless, and mothers in need from losing custody of their children throughout Metro Vancouver. Aunt Leah's Place 'Family Model of Care', aspires to mirror what BC families provide their own children through early adulthood.

To support them on their journey, Aunt Leah's provides support in these key areas: Housing; Life Skills, Food Security & Health; and Education & Employment.

Aunt Leah's works proactively at the 'entry' and 'exit' points of the foster care system.

First, by helping mothers in need to maintain custody of their children, therefore helping to reduce the number of children and youth coming into the permanent care of the child welfare system and keeping families together.

Second, by working with foster youth readying to 'age out', giving supports similar to what modern parents give their own children transitioning to adulthood.

The "[2020 Covid-19 & Youth Homelessness Special Report](#)" prepared by the BC Coalition To End Youth Homelessness (BCCEYH) confirms that the mission of Aunt Leah's Place is more relevant than ever:

"Youth are facing increased risk of homelessness and malnutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic and there is a lack of supports and housing inventory to respond to this need."

In response to the pandemic, Aunt Leah's proactively expanded their food programs, supported youth with technology and secured increased financial support for their Emergency Housing Funds Subsidy program that allows the Society to immediately house youth. Aunt Leah's has also been doing care packages and getting medications filled up to support youth.

TOP 10 IMPACT CHARITY

Aunt Leah's Place has been chosen by Charity Intelligence as a Top Pick in their survey of Canadian Charities four years in a row. Charity Intelligence researches charities to help donors decide where to direct their giving. Aunt Leah's is the only charity based in British Columbia on the list of Top 10 Impact Charities. "Top 10 Impact Charities deliver average returns of seven times on the dollar, compared with average returns of 1-2 times on the dollar." - Charity Intelligence Canada

HOUSING PROGRAMS

Aunt Leah's Place provides housing, rent subsidies and homelessness prevention for youth from care and families at-risk of losing child custody. Our programs target the entry and exit points of the foster care system, with a goal of providing supports, resources and opportunities similar to those provided by average Canadian families. The tree lot funds help to support these programs in particular" programs below:



Thresholds House

Thresholds House provides supported housing and services for new moms at risk of losing custody of their child. 93% of Thresholds mothers secure safe housing and maintain custody of their children upon exiting the program. While in the program these moms also made significant strides in their personal development, with each of them indicating heightened involvement in school and employment training programs.



The Link: Housing First

The Link: Housing First provides homeless participants immediate access to permanent housing and regular support services. After entering the program, many of these youth are now enrolled in education and training programs, or are employed and working towards independence.



Support Link

Support Link provides transitional housing for teens currently in foster care who want to live independently and develop essential life skills before aging out of care. During this past year, Support Link staff helped 11 youth prepare for their 19th birthday. 18% of these youth have completed high school, with another 72% who are on track to graduate, and/or are in a pre-employment program. Upon exiting the program, 80% of Support Link youth secured safe housing within three months after aging out.



The Friendly Landlord Network (FLN)

FLN is a Metro Vancouver-wide network of homeowners and property managers who rent suites to youth transitioning from government care, along with the support of 21 local youth-serving organizations.



Lale House & Supportive Suites

Lale House & Supportive Suites give safe, affordable communal housing for young people transitioning from foster care within a single-detached home. This beautiful new home fulfills two local philanthropists' innovative desire to provide children in foster care with housing after they turn 19.



Housing, Education, Link Program, Subsidy

The HELPS program provides housing subsidies to former foster kids so they may continue to pursue their education in a supportive space. Youth participating in HELPS can focus on their studies while making positive steps towards independence with the help of Aunt Leah's support staff.



AUNT LEAH'S TREES OFFERS SAFE WAYS TO BUY CHRISTMAS TREES AND GET INTO THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

There's nothing like the holidays to add some cheer during this time of uncertainty, and Aunt Leah's Trees won't let the pandemic get in the way of safely providing customers with the perfect Christmas tree! Aunt Leah's Trees has implemented new protocols to keep customers, volunteers, and staff protected.

Here are some of the things we've done to make it a safe holiday experience at the Tree Lots:

- Expanded Vancouver and Coquitlam Tree Lots to ensure physical distancing
- Set limits on the number of individuals inside lots
- Pre-screening for symptoms before entry
- Staff, volunteers and customers are required to wear face reusable/disposable masks to protect the public and each other
- Hand sanitizer will be available at the entrance/exit
- Customers, volunteers, and staff must be at least 6 feet apart
- Social distancing stickers and tape are provided on posts and signs are hung throughout the space while arrows to direct customer movement are also present
- High contact areas will be cleaned in the space multiple times daily
- Payment terminals will be sanitized after each use
- Plexiglas and partitions installed

Aunt Leah's is constantly monitoring current health and safety guidelines provided by the Provincial Health Authority and are committed to following their recommendations as they change.





AUNT LEAH'S TREES

Join The Tradition - Give Kids A Home

Aunt Leah's Trees is a seasonal social enterprise that sells quality Christmas trees in multiple locations across Metro Vancouver. All profits go towards preventing children in foster care from becoming homeless, and mothers in need from losing custody of their children.

2019 Tree Lot Sales Figures

\$641,121

Total Sales

6,210

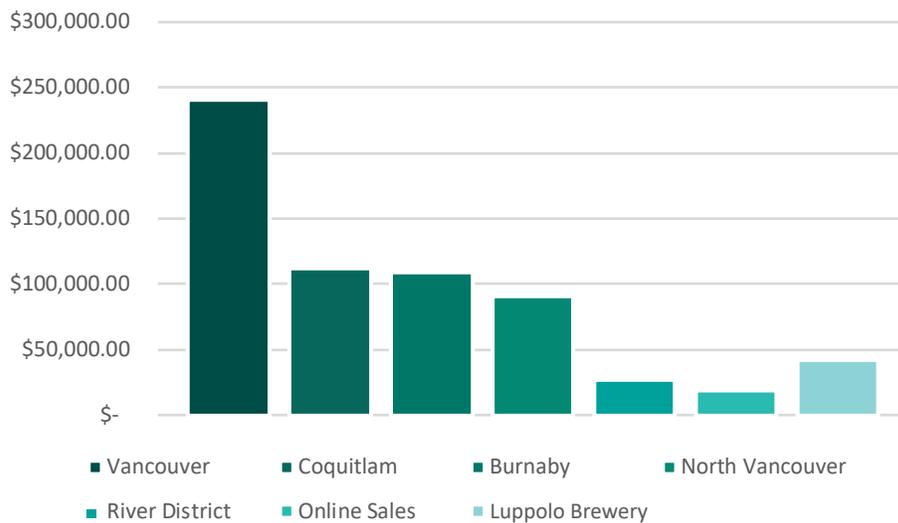
Trees Sold

657

Volunteers

3,893

Hours given by
Volunteers



2020 Tree Lot Locations

Vancouver - Kerrisdale/Marpole

St. Stephen's United Church
at 54th and Granville St

Opens Nov 26th

Coquitlam

Eagle Ridge United Church 2813
Glen Drive

Opens Dec 3rd

Burnaby

All Saints Anglican Church at Royal
Oak and Rumble

Opens Nov 27th

North Vancouver (Only for pick-up)

Lonsdale Quay Market East Plaza
123 Carrie Cates Ct

Open every Thursday and Sunday starting Nov. 29

Visit auntleahs.org/trees For location, hours, and up-to-date information regarding our response to announcements from Public Health Officials.

HOW TO CHOOSE A FRESH CHRISTMAS TREE

Not all trees are the same! When choosing a tree you need to think about many factors such as how early in the season you are getting it, the spot where you'll place it at home, your overall home decor style, the type and weight of ornaments you'll be using, the scent you like and of course, budget. But fear not, we have a guide for you with all our trees' attributes to help you pick the perfect tree.

For location, hours, and up-to-date information regarding our response to announcements from Public Health Officials visit: auntleahs.org/trees



Douglas Fir

- Needle length 2-4 cm long
- Needle retention average
- Dark forest green in colour
- The most popular and least expensive cultured (shaped) tree. Ends up in 60% of homes.



Noble Fir

- Best needle retention of all the firs
- Classic triangle shape and layered look
- Sturdiest branches
- Usually bluish green
- Classic tree smell
- Because this tree is much slower growing and requires a lot more work to get it to the required shape and size, the Noble Firs are always in short supply and more expensive
- If you want a tree that will look just as good in five weeks as the day you brought it home, pick a Noble.



Interior Douglas

- Also known as the Rocky Mountain Douglas Fir
- Uncultured (not shaped, sheared) tree
- Come from B.C.
- Open, layered, natural look.
- Unlike the Coast Douglas-fir, Rocky Mountain Douglas-fir foliage has no noticeable scent.



Grand Fir

- Lighter green in colour.
- Usually has a lower and greater girth.
- Does not have great needle retention, so if you plan to have your tree inside for more than two weeks and you don't want a lot of mess, this is not the best choice.
- The foliage has an attractive citrus-like scent, and is sometimes used for Christmas decoration, as well as for Christmas trees.



Fraser Fir

- Next best after Noble firs for needle retention
- Attractive slim triangular shape
- Upward curling branches
- Quite fragrant - woody
- Forest green colour with silvery undersides.
- Its fragrance, shape, strong limbs, and ability to retain its soft needles for a long time when cut (which do not prick easily when hanging ornaments) make it one of the best trees for this purpose.
- The Fraser fir has been used more times as the Blue Room Christmas tree (the official Christmas tree of the President of the United States's White House) than any other type of tree.



Alberta Spruce (Potted Tree)

- Excellent Needle Retention.
- Uncultured
- Layered, natural look
- Sturdy branches
- Strong minty smell



Nordmann Fir

- Good needle retention (needles do not drop out)
- Attractive foliage
- needles are not sharp



You can also use our selection of holiday wreaths, planters, and greenery to accompany your tree in other areas within your space!



5 TIPS TO CARE FOR YOUR TREE



Keep it Sheltered

Once your tree is home, keep it in a sheltered, unheated area such as a porch or garage, or leave it outside to protect it.



Make a Fresh Cut

If it has been more than two hours since your tree had a fresh cut off the base of the stem, cut at least 1 cm. Without this, the tree will not be able to absorb from the tree stand.



Put Your Tree in a Clean Stand

To protect the original cut on the stump from drying out, place the tree in a stand with a built-in water bowl. If you are reusing a stand from previous years, rinse it with a capful of bleach and some water before inserting the tree. This cuts down on microorganisms that can block the tree's ability to absorb water.



Water, Water, Water

The key to a beautiful Christmas Tree is making sure it's well hydrated. Remember, a litre a day keeps the vacuum away! A seal of dried sap will cover the cut stump in just a few hours if the water drops below the tree's base. Plain old tap water is all you need. Just remember to check its water level everyday.



Keep it Away from Heat!

Place all trees, real or artificial away from heat sources such as heating vents, fireplaces, radiators, television sets, wood stoves. Do not block doorways or exits.