



Christmas Tree Lot
AUNT LEAH'S
2021 Media Kit

— auntleahs.org —



PRESS RELEASE

How Volunteering or Buying an Aunt Leah's Christmas Tree Helps Provide Housing and Support for Young Moms and Babies During a Pandemic

For folks looking for some Christmas cheer this year, purchasing a fresh, locally sourced Aunt Leah's Tree or volunteering at an Aunt Leah's Tree lot is the perfect way to safely get into the holiday spirit and give back by helping support vulnerable foster youth and young moms and their children during this uncertain time.

Aunt Leah's Tree Lots will open in Vancouver on November 25th, and in Burnaby, and Coquitlam on November 26th. The tree lots will be following stringent BC Health protocols including social distancing, masks, and sanitization to keep customers, volunteers, and staff safe.

The Aunt Leah's Tree sales are a major source of revenue for the housing and programs Aunt Leah's provides for vulnerable foster youth and young moms and babies. This year the need is more urgent than ever. It is estimated that 50% of BC foster youth will experience homelessness and during the pandemic young single moms have experienced even greater levels of housing and food insecurity. Aunt Leah's has been a lifeline for these young people, providing housing, food hampers, living essentials and a supportive and compassionate adult to help them navigate these challenging times.

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 emotional support when needed.

Sherry became part of the Aunt Leah's' family when she came to Aunt Leah's House as a homeless teen mom at risk of losing her baby to the child welfare system. Sherry, who is Wet'suwet'en, was herself part of the Indigenous majority of kids in foster care in B.C. With Aunt Leah's support, however, Sherry was able to break this cycle and keep her baby. In addition to providing housing and financial support, Aunt Leah's staff helped Sherry learn parenting and life skills and offered employment training.

Fast forward and Sherry now has a union job as a flag person and lives with her daughter in an independent suite in Aunt Leah's Thresholds housing for moms and kids. Marcella has just started middle school and Sherry is focused on providing a happy, healthy home for her daughter and herself.

Despite the pandemic, Sherry and Marcella are looking forward to continuing their Christmas tradition by volunteering at Aunt Leah's Tree Lot.

"Volunteering at the tree lot is one of our favourite activities. It puts us in the Christmas spirit, and it feels good to give back to Aunt Leah's after all they have done for us."

Aunt Leah's Place has been chosen by Charity Intelligence as a Top Impact Charity in Canada four years in a row. According to Greg Thomson, Director of Research at Charity Intelligence, "Social impact is primarily about changing lives and Aunt Leah's is very cost-effectively changing lives in two main ways. First, it breaks the cycle of foster care by supporting young mothers and preventing their babies from going into foster care. And second, it helps bridge the gap for kids who "age-out" of the foster system with housing and finding jobs.

Aunt Leah's started selling Christmas trees in the 1990s when government funding was cut. The Christmas tree sales have increased every year and the Tree Lots have become Aunt Leah's most successful fundraiser raising over \$640,000 with 100% of the profits from tree sales going to support its programs. For many Metro Vancouver families buying an Aunt Leah's' Christmas tree is a cherished part of their Christmas tradition.

To learn more, go to www.auntleahs.org/trees.

To volunteer sign up at auntleahs.org/treelotsignup or contact Hope Rayson at 604-525-1204 (Ext. 252) or email hgrayson@auntleahs.org.

For more information about Aunt Leah's Tree Lots or programs or to request an interview contact Mairi Campbell 778-885-5300 mairi.campbell@telus.net

INTERVIEW CONTACTS



Sarah Stewart

Aunt Leah's Place, Executive Director

Sarah has been executive director at Aunt Leah's Society since 2016. During her almost three-decade career working with foster youth, Sarah has focused on creating programs and services designed around equity for youth in and from care and in keeping moms and their children together. Starting off as a support worker at Aunt Leah's, Sarah went on to become Program Director where she has developed a number of groundbreaking programs including Aunt Leah's Thresholds Program, a supportive housing program for moms and babies, and Aunt Leah's Link Program, a social justice initiative for youth who have aged out of government care. The impact of her work has enabled young mothers to maintain custody of their children, thus breaking the intergenerational cycle of foster care, and has provided family-like support to youth aging out of care resulting in increased access to permanent homes, education, and financial security.

Sarah is also a founding member and current co-chair of the BC Coalition to End Youth Homelessness (BCCEYH), which was founded with the purpose of leading the development of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness in BC. The BCCEYH seeks to magnify the voices of young people with lived expertise to inform this plan.



Craig Lenske

Aunt Leah's Place, Social Enterprise Manager

For over 20 years, Craig has supported youth leadership and life skills in various non-profit roles in Canada, USA, India, and Europe. He has been the Social Enterprise Manager at Aunt Leah's since February 2021, leading the Social Enterprise Team that supports Aunt Leah's Thrift Store, On-line store, Donation Centre, and Aunt Leah's Christmas Tree Lots. Craig also leads Aunt Leah's employment training programs; teaching youth in care the skills they need to obtain employment and transition to independent living. The Burnaby Christmas Tree lot supports this employment training program.

MEDIA CONTACT

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INTERVIEW CONTACTS



Hope Rayson

Aunt Leah's Place, Volunteer Coordinator & Fundraising Specialist

Hope Rayson has been the Volunteer Coordinator for Aunt Leah's Place since 2016 during which time she has worked with more than 3,000 volunteers. Volunteers are the backbone of the Christmas Tree Lots and are crucial to the success of this Social Enterprise. The Christmas Tree Lots are Aunt Leah's biggest fund raiser and proceeds support essential programs for foster youth, moms, and babies. It's been one of her greatest privileges to witness and facilitate families, friends, and community groups coming together during the busy holiday season to volunteer for such a meaningful cause.



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 moms 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. 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.

Sherry has recently found a job in a union position as a full-time flag person. She is glad to have the stability and regular paycheck that a union position offers. Marcella has just started middle school and Sherry is focused on providing a happy, healthy home for her daughter and herself.

Despite the pandemic, Sherry and Marcella are looking forward to continuing their Christmas tradition by volunteering at Aunt Leah's Tree Lot.

"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



Dianna

Dianna is a former Aunt Leah's Place participant, and a real success story. She came to Aunt Leah's House as a single teen mother with her six-month old baby and is now living independently with her son Adrian.

Coming to Aunt Leah's was a turning point for Dianna. In addition to providing housing and financial support Aunt Leah's staff helped Dianna learn parenting and life skills and encouraged her to return to school and complete her high school diploma. It can be challenging enough for any teen to keep up with their high school course work never mind juggling childcare, attending young parent programs, and learning the necessary life skill to take care of herself and her young son. But Dianna was determined, and, with Aunt Leah's help, she was able to graduate and move into independent housing.

Nine years later Dianna and her son Adrian are flourishing. Adrian currently attends a francophone school, participates in soccer, and is growing to become a thoughtful person who is her pride and joy. "He reminds me that life is great." says Dianna.

While Dianna is independent and thriving, she remains connected to Aunt Leah's. "It's really supportive, and the environment is really welcoming and warm. I continue to come because it's a family." She attends Aunt Leah's Tuesday's Cooking club and is primed to become a mentor and role model showing other young people what their future can be. Dianna is planning to become an education assistant and her ultimate dream is to become a social worker for children and families *"I want to help young moms because I've been there."*

Dianna is especially proud of winning an award at Aunt Leah's for being a good parent.



Natasha

Natasha was a young mom who had just got out of a bad relationship when she first connected with Aunt Leah's. With Aunt Leah's help, Natasha was able to get into affordable housing with BC Housing. In addition, Aunt Leah's provided her with financial help for day care costs, bus passes and other expenses enabling her to return to school and upgrade her courses.

While the financial support was essential it was the community and connection to other young moms that was a real life-line for Natasha. She immediately joined the Aunt Leah's moms and babies group and, through this group, she has been able to meet other moms like her and has found emotional support, mentoring and advice. It can be lonely being a single mom with young kids but at Aunt Leah's she feels part of a family. Her kids love going to the Aunt Leah's office where everyone knows them, and she is now able to mentor other young moms who may be struggling. One of the things she has learned is that it is OK to rely on people. *"I've always been kind of stubborn and wanted to do everything on my own, but Aunt Leah's makes it easy. They are there for you and don't judge. They try and get you whatever you need from a gym pass to soccer lessons for your kids. It's like a family."*

Natasha has just completed the Responsible Adult course and is looking forward to finding a position as a childcare worker. Once she starts working, she plans to look for ways that she can give back



INTERVIEW CONTACTS



Cynthia

Cynthia was on her own working and going to school when she first put in touch with Aunt Leah's in 2019. It was a struggle, as a young person, to go to school and support herself with no family to fall back on. At Aunt Leah's she found the family-like support that she needed.

She joined the Supporting Education for Foster Youth (SEFFY) program and a retail training program, which gave her some marketing and retail experience. But most importantly the staff encouraged Cynthia's entrepreneurial spirit and her dream of becoming a makeup artist and going into the beauty business for herself. With help from SEFFY she was on the way to achieving her dream, completing her program at the Blanche MacDonald school of Makeup, when the pandemic hit. Cynthia developed a serious chest infection and then became ill with Covid and had to take a leave from school. Thanks to the help she got from Aunt Leah's and her own determination Cynthia recovered and went back to school and was able to graduate in August 2021. Cynthia is now looking for work in her field and dreams at some time of having her own business and being financially stable enough to hire other youth who might have been in foster care or have challenges. Cynthia is the recipient of the 2021 Rona Award in recognition of her kindness, strength, compassion, and pride. She exemplifies a key Aunt Leah's core value in her using her entrepreneurial spirit to give back to the community. She says *"Aunt Leah's has been with me every step of the way. They truly care about you and boost you and push you to do your best."*





INCREASING CONNECTIONS AND EXPANDING HOUSING PROGRAMS 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 also expanded their supportive housing programs for families and youth who have or are aging out of care. In addition, Aunt Leah's moved their Vancouver office into a larger space that has allowed them to almost double the number of appointments and visits for youth and families in the area. Aunt Leah's is anticipating an increased need for service that has become even more apparent during the last half of the pandemic and is hiring more staff to be able to respond to the need of increased connections and support.

5-STAR RATED IMPACT CHARITY

Aunt Leah's Place has been rated by Charity Intelligence as one of the highest rated charities in 2021. 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 At-Risk Youth & Youth Social category.



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 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.



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.



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.



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.



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 safety measures to keep customers, volunteers, and staff as safe as possible.** We want our customers to have a safe holiday experience and keep family traditions alive by choosing a tree in person at one of our lots in Vancouver, Burnaby or Coquitlam.

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

- Expanded Vancouver and Coquitlam Tree Lots to ensure physical distancing as much as possible.
- We ask customers, staff and volunteers to not enter the lot if experiencing flu like or COVID symptoms – Fever, cough, difficulty breathing, headache, sore throat, chills, body aches, nausea, loss of smell or taste.
- Staff and volunteers will wear reusable/disposable face masks to protect the public and each other. We recommend customers wear a mask while at the Tree Lot. Masks will be available at Tree Lot entrances.
- Hand sanitizer will be available at the entrance, exit and Point of Sale table.
- We encourage customers, volunteers, and staff maintain physical distancing of 6 feet where possible.
- High contact areas will be cleaned multiple times daily.
- Payment terminals will be sanitized after each use.
- Plexiglas and partitions installed for cashiers

Aunt Leah's monitors health and safety guidelines provided by the Provincial Health Authority and WorkSafeBC; and we follow these recommendations.





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.

2020 Tree Lot Sales Figures

\$646,829

Total Sales

6,164

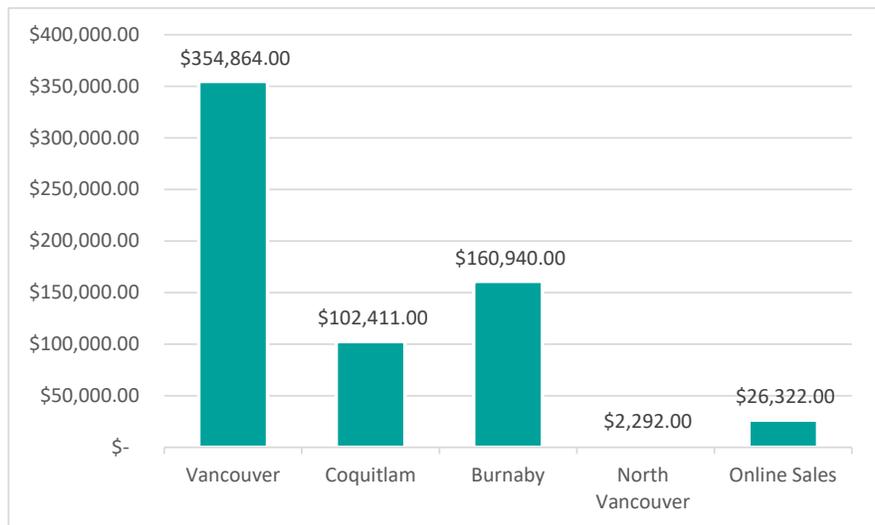
Trees Sold

350

Volunteers

2,100

Hours given by
Volunteers



2021 Tree Lot Locations

Vancouver - Kerrisdale/Marpole

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

Opens Nov 25th

Coquitlam

Eagle Ridge United Church 2813
Glen Drive

Opens Nov 26th

Burnaby

All Saints Anglican Church at Royal
Oak and Rumble

Opens Nov 26th

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 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.

