

# Second Opinion Society

304 Hawkins Street  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
Y1A 1X6

867 667-2037

## Annual Report

## A Journey through 2013-2014

# Second Opinion Society

Second Opinion Society (SOS) has been in existence in Whitehorse, YT since 1991. The organization was created as a self-help group for those who had experienced challenging interactions with the psychiatric community and were searching for access to holistic mental health and wellness services. Throughout the past 23 years, SOS has grown into an alternative mental health support, education, and advocacy agency available to anyone seeking an open, confidential and empathetic environment.

SOS offers a safe and accessible drop-in centre which promotes mental, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing. We work to create and nurture a community where everyone is equal, respected, encouraged and empowered to take charge of their lives.





# Our Guiding Principles

1. **Choice:** We believe that people facing mental health challenges have the right to define themselves, define what recovery is and how best to achieve it, and determine the direction of their own lives. Choice is about having access to non-bias information and being able to take ownership for the decisions one makes.
2. **Inclusion:** We aim to promote an environment that fosters a sense of connectedness, belonging, openness and non-judgment. We focus on ensuring that our community embraces and celebrates the uniqueness and diversity of all those who walk through our doors.
3. **Holistic Approach:** We believe in a holistic, non-medical, self-directed approach to emotional healing and in the power of individuals to change and recover as expressed in the recovery model. We emphasize the need for education and advocacy in establishing a safe space to explore one's next steps.
4. **Voice:** We believe that people facing mental health challenges have the right to be heard, validated and acknowledged for the experiences that they have had. We believe in honouring the history and stories of those who have been marginalized and stigmatized. We aim to ensure that all means of communication and expression are celebrated and that everyone feels empowered to share.
5. **Rights Protection:** We believe in social change, advocacy and education to safeguard the rights of all those who have experienced mental health challenges, to combat discrimination, and to make mental health care more responsive and accountable to those who use it.





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## A Message from the Board of Directors

By Pat Pelletier

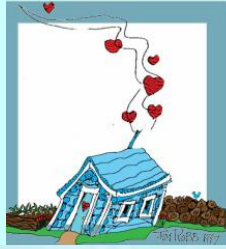
As most of us know, the founders of SOS were Gisela Sartori and Bruce Whittington starting the society over 20 years ago. At the beginning of the society, funding was limited and it was of pure interest and sacrifice that SOS has survived for all these years. Gisela went as far as to garnish her personal wages to go towards activities and support within the society. Gisela has been involved periodically since the beginning, offering workshops, training, and support for staff and any person who had interest or a need of these services through-out the years.

The Board's involvement has been a supportive role with various skills and knowledge to offer the Society. One of the most prevalent problems of the SOS board through the years was in keeping members for the long term. With the exception of Judy Johnny, (and possibly others), whom has been involved for many years, giving the Board a voice for First Nation's Culture, and Mental Health insight. For other members, we also give/gave our voice for Mental Health insight and offered skills towards the benefit of the Society.

In the past 4 years, the activity of SOS focused towards workshops, training, counseling, recreation, and the revision of the Mission Statement. The ongoing need for a Mental Health Advocate had staff working on yearly proposals and the possible start-up of a local CMHA chapter in the Yukon with SOS as a participating member kept the Society striving to improve services. The Peer Project, which was an initiation of Peer Training, gave the Society initiative to develop and offer training in this area. SOS continuously seek partnerships with various societies such as the Yukon Men's Society, Blood Ties, Kaushee's Place, New Yukon Police Council, and many others in the Yukon in addition to working with Health and Social Services. A lot of work and thought went towards the possibility of having affordable housing for those with mental health issues offering on-site support. Recently the focus and work went towards the implementation of a new Crisis Phone Line and training that extended to the communities. These are only a proportion of the many activities worked-on by staff and various Board Members.

This past year there have been major changes and activity within the Society. With the addition of new Board members and work done on strategic planning, the focus on growth, training for the board and moving towards a more collaborative and structured approach to decision making has given SOS new insights and voice for a more solid organization. It is a hope that with the recent interest of New Board Members and the Present Board Members will help shape The Second Opinion Society as a strong and inviting organization for all whom benefit from the society.



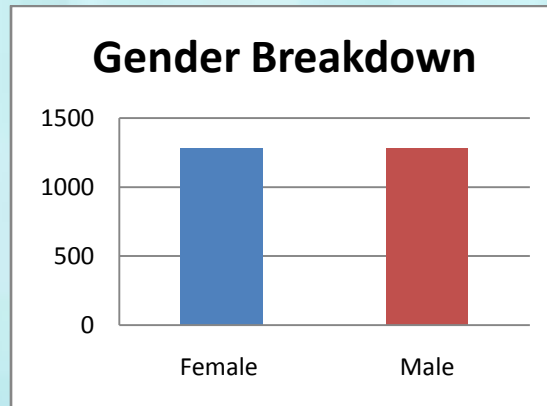


# Second Opinion Society

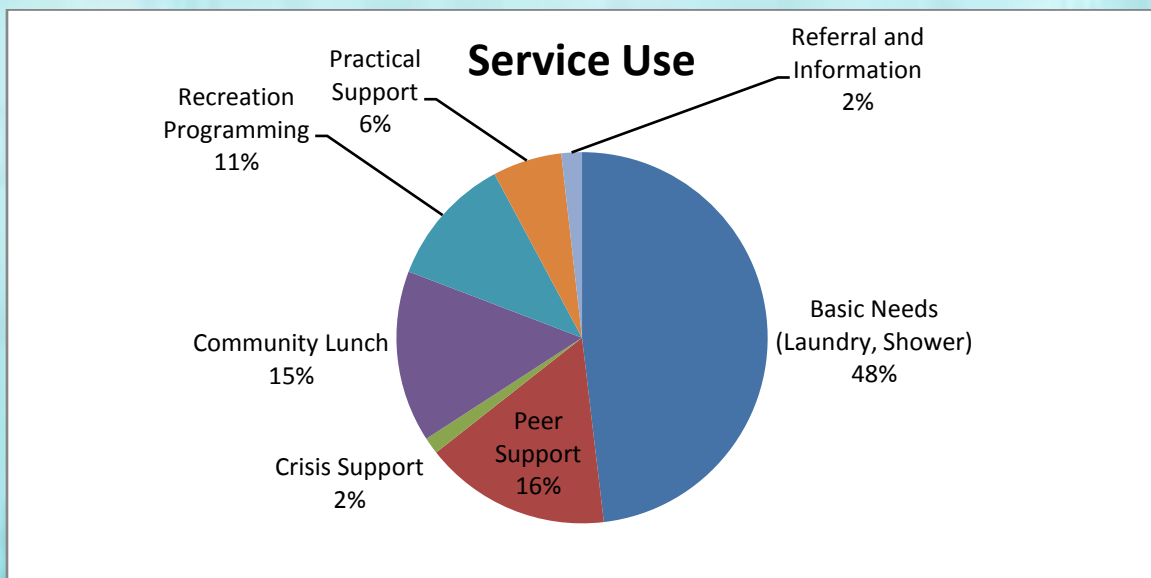
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## Who uses Second Opinion Society and Why?

Second Opinion Society (SOS) aims to serve a broad population who seek support around mental health.



In 2013-2014, SOS had an equal number of men and women accessing our services.



SOS aims to provide our members with a well-rounded selection of activities, resources and services. In 2013, 48% of people accessing our drop-in centre did so in order to make use basic needs such as shower, laundry and computer time. Support which is a main focus of our programming received 16% of our service use this year with our weekly community lunch bringing in 15% of members. Active, engaging and hands-on activities such as our practical support and recreational programming also made up a great deal of time spent at SOS. Assisting with crisis situations and providing information and referrals accounted for 4% of our service provision.

# The Mind, Body, Heart & Soul of SOS Programming



# Mind-Oriented Programming

**Practical Skills Program:** Second Opinion Society aims to provide members with valuable skills that will enable them to work towards their individual goals. Our practical skills program on Monday afternoons focuses on every day activities such as budgeting, how to complete various applications (ie: housing, post-secondary education etc...), landlord/tenant relations and many others.

**Workshops:** The Peer Support Training Program which was started in January 2014 has been offered both to members of SOS and community organizations. This series enables participants to learn about active listening, dealing with crisis, talking about suicide and self-care planning

**Education:** SOS facilitates education about mental health and wellness through guest speakers at our Community Lunch, discussions around current research and through our well-stocked resource library.

**Information/Referrals:** SOS provides members with information about the services available in the community through our local referral page on our website and through our extensive collection of organization pamphlets



# Body-Oriented Programming

**Second Opinion Society offers a wide variety of active and engaging recreational programs throughout the year. The aim of these initiatives is to focus on the importance of taking care of our body and the connection that our physical wellbeing has to our mental health.**

**In the summer months, Friday afternoons have been dedicated to hiking, canoeing, wiener roasts, fishing, outdoor yoga and long walks along the millennium trail.**

**During the colder seasons, day passes to the Canada Games Centre have been provided to interested members in order to ensure access to swimming, running, strength training and any other active pastime the facility enables throughout the winter.**

**In addition to fitness-based programs, SOS has also offered courses on nutrition through our partnership with both the Teen Parent Centre and Recreation & Parks Association Yukon. These classes have focused on healthy eating, dietary needs, food label reading, and meal planning.**

**Mindfulness, deep breathing and relaxation exercises are also a key component to our recreational programming as being present, grounded, centered and aware of our bodies can lead to decreases in stress and anxiety.**





# Heart-Oriented Programming

Second Opinion Society focuses on providing members with a safe, open and confidential environment to discuss their experiences with mental health.

A key piece of this programming is our one on one support which is offered by SOS staff and volunteers on an as needed basis. This opportunity to receive empathy, encouragement and work with someone to explore possible solutions is an essential component of SOS's mission to promote empowerment and acceptance.

In addition to individualized care, SOS also offers weekly peer support groups which enable discussion around various topics of wellness and provide some skills-based education. Subjects have included self-care, stress management, goal setting, boundaries, and self-esteem.

# Soul-Oriented Programming

**Basic Needs:** Second Opinion Society offers our members the ability to fulfill basic needs such as showering, doing laundry, accessing kitchen appliances and computer use free of charge. These daily activities can have a large impact on someone's quality of life and provide a sense of security, normalcy and self-confidence.

**Community Lunch Program:** SOS offers a Community Lunch every Thursday from 12pm-1pm. This lunch is our way of bringing together the SOS community for a meal by offering our members hearty food and good conversation. Our menu is created and prepared by SOS staff and often includes a main course, dessert, tea and coffee.

**Advocacy:** SOS was founded as means of promoting advocacy and rights protection for those who have experienced mental health challenges. Today, SOS continues to work with members who would like support when dealing with medical/hospital services, the justice/corrections system, child protection and family services, housing or other agencies that they would like assistance in navigating.



## Wellness Workshops

In 2013, Second Opinion Society in conjunction with professional facilitators designed a series of workshops to provide participants with an opportunity to develop skills in the areas of personal growth and relating with others.



The series encompassed 5 themes: dealing with anger, communication skills, building boundaries, handling grief and loss as well as promoting self-compassion. The first workshop provided an overview of all topics and an introduction into self-reflection.

All modules were created to have both a practical and theoretical component which would allow participants to reflect on their own situation and share their experience amongst the group. This process of disclosure helped to create a collaborative atmosphere of trust, and

empower all members to incorporate their new skills into their daily lives. The intended outcomes also included a stronger bond and collaboration between First Nation and non-First Nation participants as well as engagement from the communities in the Yukon.

A large proportion of those who attended the workshop series were First Nations peoples from various areas around the Yukon including but not limited to Old Crow, Dawson City, Watson Lake and Haines Junction.

Several Whitehorse and communities-based organization sent staff and volunteers to engage in these workshops as part of professional development. These agencies included Many Rivers Counselling, YTG Health and Social Services, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Kaushee's Place and Skookum Jim Friendship Centre.

The use of engaging and experience-sharing activities contributed to the self-reflective nature of the project and aided in establishing an open, non-judgmental and community orientated safe space for self-discovery. The use of breathing exercises throughout the sessions ensured that participants were given the opportunity to gain a sense of control over their situation and to feel present during the modules. Finally, self-disclosure from the facilitators encouraged honest communication and helped to building a comfortable environment where all participants were given a voice.

Overall, this project was very successful due to the participation rate and feedback from those who attended. As a result of the interest in continued education, SOS has since developed a Peer Support Training program to be offered to organizations and individuals consistently throughout the year.

"I liked the opportunity to connect with people in my own community without having to travel"

"It opened my eyes and my heart to see a new beginning. I will do my best to incorporate these new skills"

"Totally useful, I can use this in family settings, church setting, conflicting setting, work setting and more"

"Helped so much to learn to find my voice"



### Seeking Safety Project

In 2013, Second Opinion Society in association with Alcohol & Drug Services embarked on a project to provide men who have experienced trauma and substance abuse with three opportunities to participate in 10-week Seeking Safety group sessions.



The focus of this initiative was to ensure men were able to access a safe space for discussion and to learn more practical skills that may benefit their personal growth and recovery. Topics for these groups included post-traumatic stress, building boundaries, safety, anger management and self-care.

Each session began with a communal meal which was followed by two hours of group content. The meal set the stage for connection between members which ultimately assisted with trust building and support system development.

The first session which was held between April and June included the involvement of 6 participants. Those who attended expressed gratitude for the knowledge they had gained about post-traumatic stress and addictions as well as the value of the positive coping skills they learned to incorporate in their daily lives. In addition to the education piece, it stated that openness and willingness to share amongst the group was a result of the safe, encouraging and comfortable environment emphasized by the facilitators.

Due to staff changes, the project was put on hold in the fall of 2013. In early 2014, the Crime Prevention & Victim Services Fund granted SOS an extension allowing for the two additional sessions to be held in the spring and fall of 2014. This second phase of Seeking Safety will be a collaboration with facilitators from Many Rivers Counselling Services and will be hosted at the Whitehorse Correction Centre.





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Yukon lottery dollars helping in your community... one ticket at a time.

### Cross Country Ski Program



Physical activity, interaction with nature and support system building are all valuable components of self-care and wellbeing. In order to enable our members to engage in these activities during the cold months, SOS established a recreational cross country ski program with the generous funding of Lotteries Yukon. This initiative aimed to provide those who may not have had the financial resources to enjoy cross country skiing as well as those who experience

isolation and loneliness during the winter to get out of the house enjoy the beautiful northern landscape and be active.

The program ran from December 2013-March 2014 and was facilitated by ski-enthusiast and counsellor Gisela Sartori. Through Lotteries Yukon's Recreational Projects Program we were able to purchase brand new ski equipment and offer ski lessons to those who participated. SOS also supplied day and seasons passes for interested members. The group used the trails at Chadbourn Lake, Mount Lorne and the Ski Chalet on a weekly basis while also taking a day trip to the Skagway summit.

There were 8 members who were involved throughout the duration of the ski season. Five of them were women, and three were men all ages 35-60. Although this was a small group, those who were able to access winter recreation expressed that they would not have been able to do so without the help of this program.

The cross-country ski sessions not only provided attendees with ski lessons and a regular fitness routine but also ensured that they had an open and safe environment to seek support. Several members have stated that having a place to be every week kept them feeling excited for the new challenge and assisted them with getting through the cold winter.



### **A Safe Place**

*A Safe Place* was a joint initiative established by the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre (VFWC), the Yukon Status of Women Council (YSWC) and the Second Opinion Society (SOS). The project offered after-hours and weekend facilitated drop-in programming and a nutritious meal to women with an emphasis on supporting those experiencing precarious housing and food insecurity in Whitehorse. The skilled staff responded to the needs expressed by the participants and provided referrals to appropriate services, support and safety.

A Safe Place opened in December 2013 and ensured that women had access to a comfortable and welcoming space Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. The pilot ran for 4 months and served 101 women and 47 children on the weekends. The programming and oversight for this project was facilitated by two staff members per shift, with a total of 6 available staff. After receiving ongoing positive feedback from clients, an application for additional funding was submitted and accepted by the United Way which provided \$8,000.00 towards a three-month extension.





## **Summer Career Placement Program**

### **Nahanni Dynes**



As the summer student at the Second Opinion Society (SOS), I learned many things; not only about mental illness and the effects it has on people, but about what it means to be apart of a support group that offers a second family to those who need it. Although my time at SOS was short, the summer of 2013 proved to be a valuable time of learning for me. I met many amazing people along the way, and grew very close to some who shared their stories of hardships and pain, but also of their joys and accomplishments. I was there for people to lean on if they needed, but they were also there for me when I needed support.

The weekly activities that occurred at SOS were a great way for me to get involved with the entire group, and gave me opportunities to try things I had never been interested in before. Gardening, canoeing, hiking, baking and making lunches became a part of my weekly routine, and I especially enjoyed organizing the annual summer BBQ and silent auction. The communications workshop proved to be much more crucial for me than I had anticipated, and I was very grateful to be able to participate. My entire experience at SOS was extremely eye opening, and I truly believe that I ended the summer as a better person because of it. I would like to thank all the people that made my summer occupation less of a job, and more of a life changing experience.

## HEAD START PROGRAM



My name is Paulette Tremblay. I came to Second Opinion Society after asking Adult Services if there was a work program I could enter, providing job experience. I was placed into the Head Start Program funded by the Federal Government, coordinated by Ernie Fechner. SOS was thought to be a very good placement for me for six months.

This led me to a wonderful career change and the training I've received here at SOS has been great. Here, the hands on training, has helped me emotionally, mentally and physically. Helping people is what I've done all my life and I wanted to take the skills I had already learned in my life and help others. I've learned even more along this new journey.

Here at SOS I have learned about consistency and routines with the flexibility that staff has granted me. The people I work with who are served by SOS has shown me everyone faces different challenges and can be supported by a caring, safe and open environment. Being told I was good enough, and to hear this from those I was now working with was validating. Much of this growth came about from the workshops that Gisela Sartori held for SOS and its holistic approach to Mental Health.

I am able to practice using these skills every day, and my mental health has become stronger. SOS has been a safe place to learn naturally, and care for myself while working. It has been the best work experience I could have ever asked for. The pleasure of learning new skills to show others, use on my own, and become healthy has been more than expected. I'm not perfect and I do have bad days just like everyone on this planet, I now accept that that's OK.

I preform daily routines, making coffee, cleaning and laundry, communications, recreation planning, shopping, library maintenance, gardening, community gardening and teaching sewing skills. I help prepare and cook our Thursday lunches and assist in meal planning and baking. I've helped the people that come in, just listening to them and offering a little advice if they ask for it. I'd occasionally pass them on to other staff with more experience. I was learning peer support and didn't even know it at the time. Everything I do to help others also helps me.

My confidence has greatly increased and my mental health has done tremendously with this hands-on working experience. Everyone has helped in my achieving this success and fortunately, my contract has been extended for 8 months, until November 2014, and I can continue my personal growth at SOS.





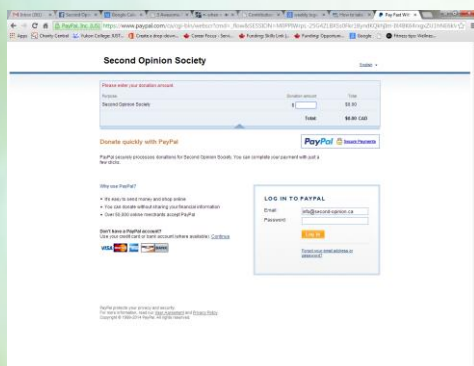
## Getting Technical in 2013-2014

### SOS Website



In 2013, SOS put extra emphasis on the importance of an online presence with a revamp of our website. You can now access our calendar, learn more about our services and who funds us, as well as a host of resources and local referrals.

### Using Paypal to Donate



As means of making fundraising easier and more accessible, we now offer potential donors an opportunity to pay by debit or credit directly on our website through Paypal.

### Facebook Promotions



As a way of connecting and engaging with a larger audience, SOS began its venture into social media through our Facebook page. You can now learn more about the programs that we offer, upcoming events to enjoy and read fascinating articles from around the world about holistic approaches to mental wellness.



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## A New Member of the SOS Staff Team Hailey Hechtman



In July 2013, my partner and I decided to move to Whitehorse after he received a job offer. At the time we were living in Ottawa where I was working both for a sexual health and a mental health agency. I really enjoyed the challenging and fulfilling aspects of my work with Distress Centres Ontario (DCO) and was excited to learn more about the agencies offering these services up North.

During the planning stages of my move, I began to look into the potential organizations that I could work with in the Yukon. When exploring mental health resources, I found the website for Second Opinion Society. Their description of a holistic, wellness-oriented support and resource centre really appealed to me as I have always valued groups that

promote empowerment and choice.

I contacted Leslie to see if they had any available positions to which she informed me that they would be hiring someone in an administrative capacity in the fall. When I arrived, I visited the house on Hawkins St. and immediately saw all the potential for growth, ingenuity and community building.

Once I had interviewed and started in my new role, I began to get to know the members of this close-knit society both on a group and on an individual level. I had a chance to speak to them about programming, see the wellness workshops facilitated by Gisela Sartori and get to know the landscape and history of this long-standing self-help home.

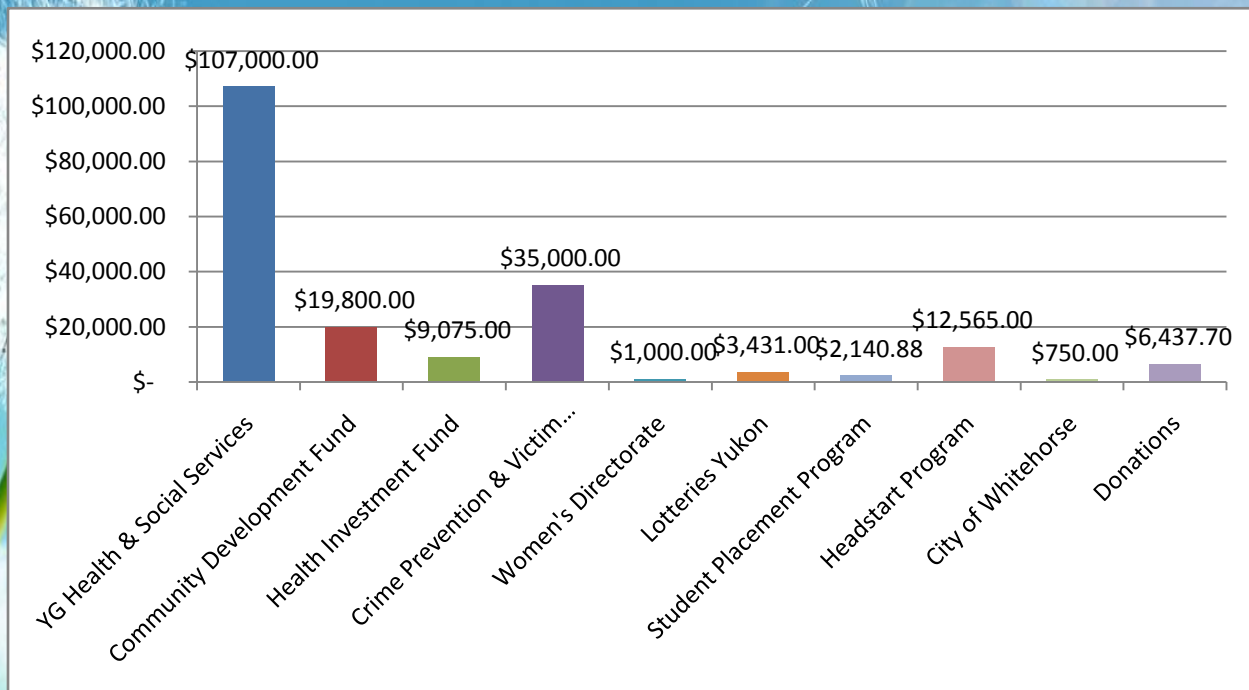
The past several months have been a great experience for me to learn the ins and outs of non-profit work in the Whitehorse community, contribute to the development of new programs and initiatives at SOS and recruit enthusiastic board members to our team. I look forward to continued collaboration, expansion and evolution of this wonderful centre in 2014.



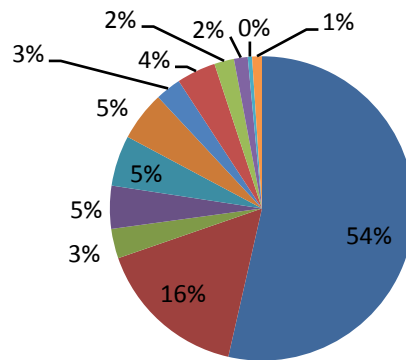
## Financial Breakdown for 2013-2014



### Revenue

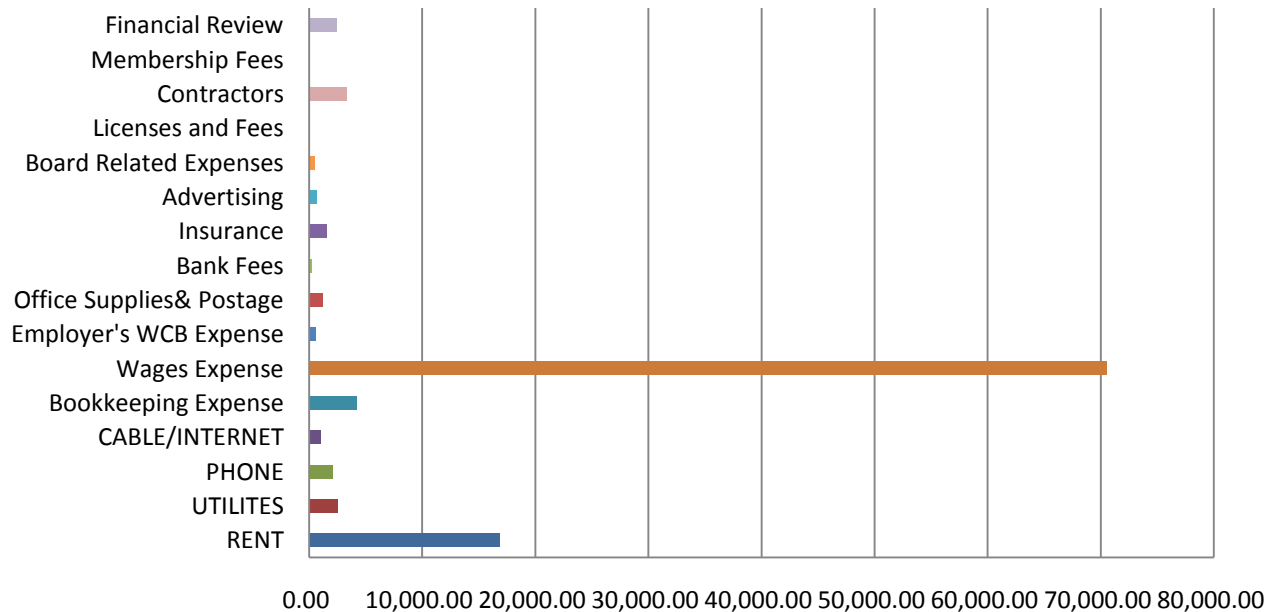


## Drop In Centre & Programming Expenses



■ Activities/Supplies ■ Recreation ■ Resource Material ■ Honorariums  
 ■ House Equipment ■ Gas mileage ■ Training Expense ■ Open House  
 ■ Transportation Fees ■ Equip. R&M ■ Printing ■ Building R&M

## COR Administrative Expenses





## Donor Profile



**Aaron Mones, Financial Advisor/Owner  
The Co-operators  
Donated \$5,000.00 to SOS in 2013**

“When Christmas time rolls around, it seems to ignite something in people. When December came last year I felt compelled to really try and make a significant difference in someone’s life or if not an individual, perhaps a local group or organization.

I talked it over with my staff and we all agreed that it would be nice to find an organization that could use a financial boost. Our receptionist at the time suggested SOS and though none of us were familiar with the group, it sounded like the perfect recipient for the kind of donation we were looking to make.

I set up a meeting with Hailey just to find out a bit more about SOS. I showed up at the humble downtown home which had been converted to a safe place for their clients and immediately felt a sense of warmth and care. There were a few clients relaxing involved in deep discussion, and a couple of ladies fixing a wonderful smelling dinner in the kitchen. Hailey turned out to be very passionate about her job and her clients. It wasn’t long before I knew this was the right place to make a donation.

One of the factors that helped make our decision was the absence of charitable status. As a businessman, I was aware that this lack of status could well result in SOS missing out on any corporate donations that would be made with a tax break in mind.

Here was what we, as an office, had been looking for. A local organization with its heart in the right place, run by truly caring people, and trying to get by with little funding. It was an easy decision!”

# Ways to Give

Second Opinion Society is comprised of a community of people throughout the Yukon who have experienced mental health issues, have worked in a supportive role or who have a keen interest in contributing to the promotion of holistic approaches to wellness. We as a group aim to create and nurture an environment where we are all equal, respected, encouraged and empowered to take charge of our lives and have access to a variety of options in addressing our self-care and mental wellbeing. There are many ways to help further the vital work that we do. Here are just a few ideas:

**Support our cause by placing a donation by cheque, cash or using our online PayPal account**

**Fundraise on our behalf by keeping an SOS canister at your place of business or by recruiting donations from people looking to give to a great local cause**

**Volunteer your time with one of our many programs**

**Help out with our community lunch by bringing a dish or donating ingredients**

**Host our Peer Support Workshop series at your business or agency**

**Participate on our Board of Directors or join one of our organizational committees**

**Advocate for greater funding for mental health programs throughout the Yukon**

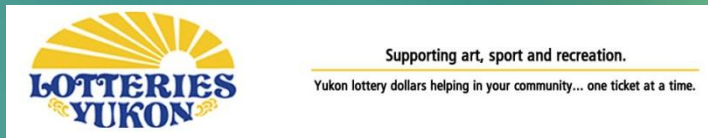
**Refer friends or clients that may seek our support to the SOS drop-in centre**

**Advertise our calendar on your website, Facebook Page or around your office**

**Sign up for our daily and evening programs to learn more about mental health**



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