



**Bereaved Families of
Ontario - Toronto**

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Bereaved Families of Ontario - Toronto

2024 Annual Report

Table of Contents

1	<i>Chair & Executive Director Message</i>
2	<i>Organization Overview</i>
3	<i>2024 Financial Report</i>
5	<i>2024 Impact Report</i>
6	<i>2024 Events</i>
7	<i>Thank You Notes</i>
9	<i>What's in Store for 2025</i>
10	<i>Volunteer Opportunities</i>
11	<i>Support BFO Toronto</i>
12	<i>Sharing Our Impact</i>





Chair & Executive Director Message

Dear BFO-Toronto Community and Supporters,

As we reflect on 2024, we are filled with immense gratitude for all that our community has accomplished together. This past year, Bereaved Families of Ontario – Toronto continued to honour its long-standing commitment to providing compassionate, peer-based grief support across Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area.

Since our founding in 1978, BFO-Toronto has served as a vital source of connection, understanding, and hope for individuals and families experiencing the profound impact of loss. In 2024, we deepened this legacy by continuing to centre empathy, accessibility, and community in all that we do.

Throughout the year, our incredible team of staff, students and volunteers responded to the growing and evolving needs of those we serve. Through our one-to-one peer sessions, support groups, and growing calendar of community events and partnerships, we created meaningful opportunities for people to feel seen, heard, and supported.

Looking ahead, we are guided by a shared belief: that no one should have to navigate their grief alone. Together, with your continued support, we will keep building a community where connection and care are always within reach.

To our donors, volunteers, partners, and supporters—thank you. Your generosity, time, and trust have made it possible for us to walk alongside hundreds of people this year. Because of you, our mission lives on in every story shared and every step forward.

With heartfelt thanks,

Sarah Garcia-Heller

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Benjamin Thorek

CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Organization Overview

Our History

BFO-Toronto is the founding affiliate of Bereaved Families of Ontario, a provincial charitable organization, established in 1978 to support the grief a person, family, or group experiences from the death of a loved one. Now one of 10 affiliates, BFO-Toronto offers support within the city of Toronto.

Our Mission

Inspire hope and healing for those in grief through peer-to-peer support.

Our Vision

Create a community of support in the city of Toronto where no citizen is alone in their grief.

Our Report

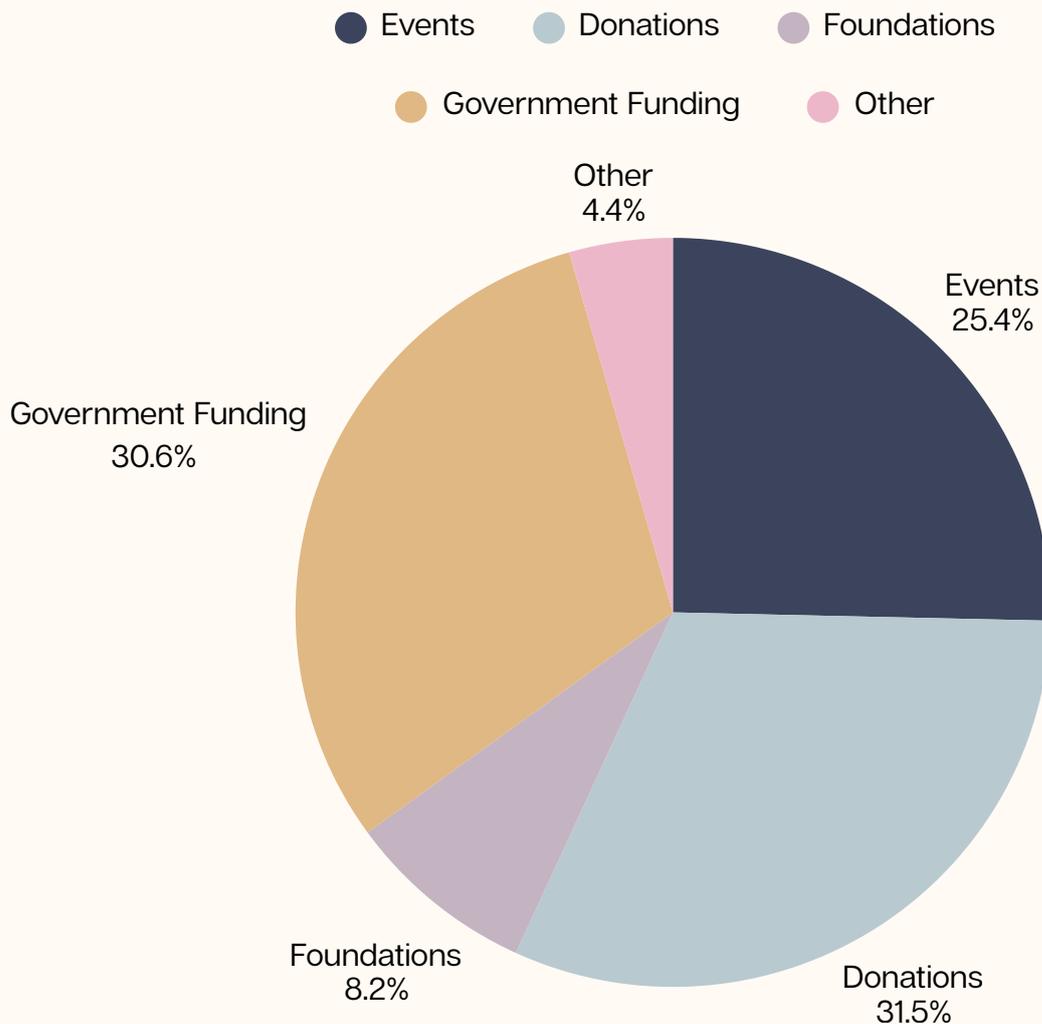
This report documents BFO Toronto's work and impact through 2024. For more information about BFO Toronto please visit our website: www.bfotoronto.ca

Financial Report

The following information explores the revenue and expenditures of BFO Toronto in 2024

Total Revenue: \$328, 800

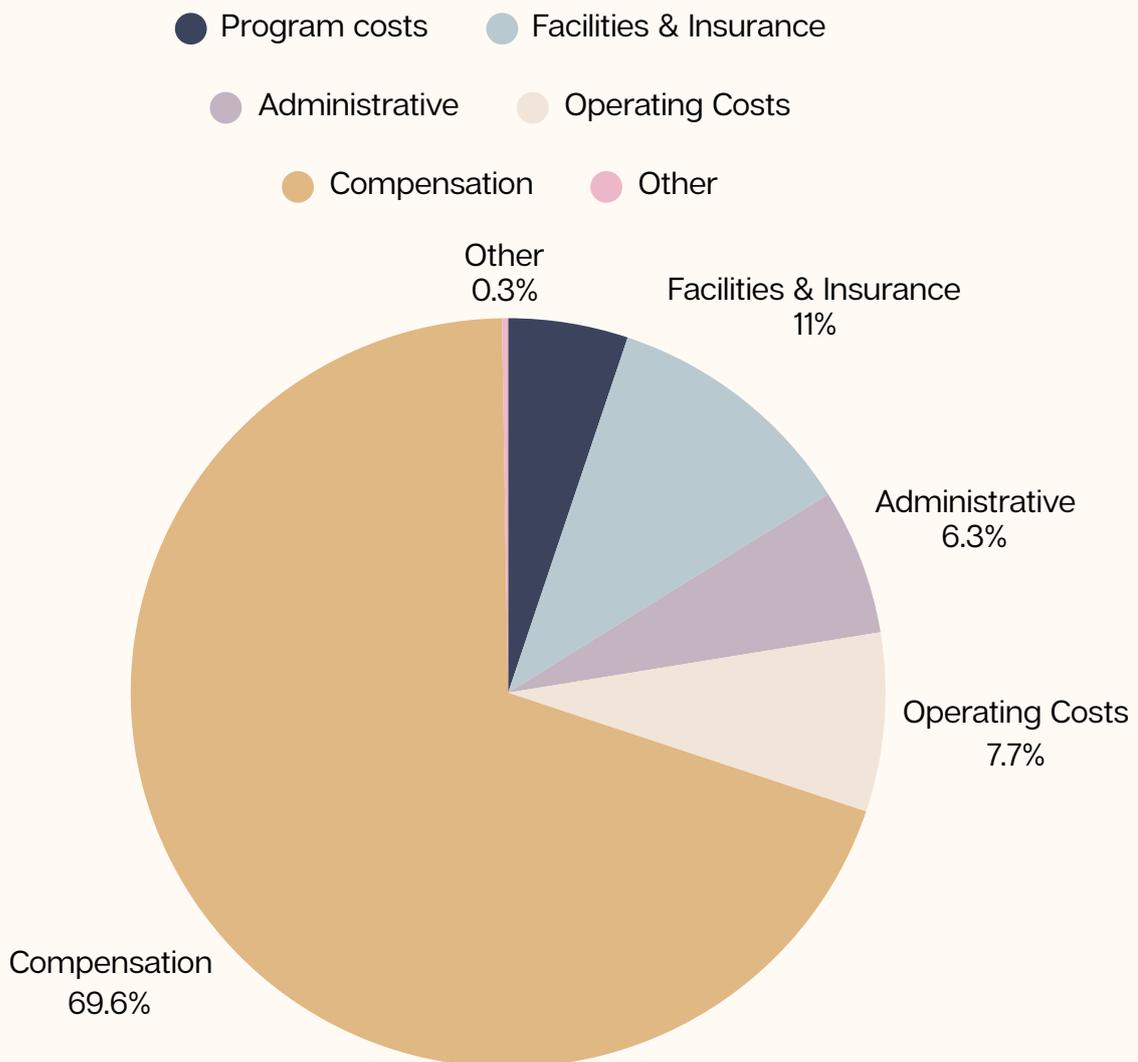
BFO Toronto was successful in maintaining revenue levels in 2024 and a resilient financial position. We continued to have generous support from both corporate and individual donors. Community and fundraising events contributed significantly while other income streams, including grants from municipal and federal governments helped provide us with a solid foundation. Overall, the revenue is well-balanced and healthy providing stability and a good financial foundation for our organization.



Financial Report

Total Expenditures: \$ 232,409

BFO Toronto had the support of several students and staff (permanent, contract) over 2024 to help to meet the demand for programming, community and administrative support. Our rent increased slightly over this last year and we expect that to continue for the duration of our lease and the signing of a new one in 2025. Being part of the City Wide Commons has allowed for partnerships and collaboration that have reduced our program, administrative and facilities expenses as well as the continuation of delivering programming online.



Impact Report

Over the course of 2024 we saw many shifts and changes such as staff and student turn over. We met these changes as best as possible but at times, paused intakes and worked with our community partners to ensure access to grief support. BFO-Toronto continued being part of the City-wide Commons, a network of community organizations collaborating to strengthen mutual aid, shared learning, and collective care across Toronto. Through this continued partnership, we deepened our connections with like-minded groups, amplifying our commitment to accessible, community-led grief support.

To nurture and empower our volunteer community, we continued with quarterly Volunteer Brainstorming Nights, collaborative spaces where facilitators peer supporters could come together to share insights, surface challenges, and co-design innovative ideas. We rolled out targeted professional-development sessions on topics such as Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), complicated grief, suicide bereavement, and skills-refreshers. Beyond our internal circle, BFO-Toronto expanded its footprint in the wider community: we presented to over 100 additional service providers and community volunteers, and established a visible presence in public venues like the Young People's Theatre and the Good Mourning festival, where we engaged attendees in conversations about grief and peer support and our organization. These initiatives have strengthened our volunteer network's capacity, deepened our collective expertise, and elevated awareness of peer-led bereavement care across Toronto through the development and delivery of a new peer support training for those in public spaces/ events.



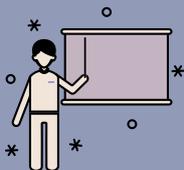
730+
Intakes
Received



1000+
Inquiries for
support from
our community



10
Community Events
& Trainings Held



13
Facilitators Trained



111
Community Members
Reached through online
& in-person sessions



960+
Program Participants

BFO Toronto Walk to Remember and Silent Auction

The fifth annual Memorial Walk and Silent Auction took place on Saturday September 21, 2024, at Lakeside Park in Mississauga, once again in partnership with the Centre for Grief and Healing (BFO Halton-Peel). On a beautiful fall day, over 200 community members gathered for the 5K Walk to Remember to honour loved ones and support those grieving. The event featured a raffle, face painting by volunteer Alicia, stunning wire art by volunteer Tom S., & yoga sessions, and a silent auction. Thanks to the incredible efforts of individual walkers, teams, and an increase in corporate sponsorship—reflecting a growing belief in and commitment to our mission—we raised \$38,000 to sustain our peer-based grief support programs.



Trees of Light



2024 marked our 33rd Annual Trees of Light, once again held in the City Hall rotunda—a space that continues to hold deep meaning for our community. Gathering in person made the evening especially powerful as we welcomed both long-time and new BFO-Toronto community members, along with generous sponsors. The event featured a heartfelt candle lighting ceremony, sharing of personal stories and moving musical and performances, and the unveiling of our 2024 Tree of Life and Light. Together, we raised \$20,000 in support of our grief support programs. The trees remained on display through the first week of January, drawing visitors who returned to find and reflect on the tags bearing the names of their loved ones.



Thank you to our Financial Supporters

BFO Toronto's vision is to create a community of support so no Torontonian is alone in their grief. To move towards this we need to provide a diversity of programs that are free of charge and accessible to all residents. This would not be possible without the support we received from foundations, government, corporations and generous individuals. We thank every one of them for their contribution this past year.

Platinum (Over \$20,000)

Darren Farwell and the Farwell Group - Scotia Wealth Management
Parklawn Corporation
Ontario Trillium Foundation
City of Toronto

Bronze (Under \$1,000)

Every dollar donated contributes to the work we do. We are fortunate that there are too many individual donors to be named here. We thank you all!

Gold (\$5,000-\$20,000)

Bereaved Families of Ontario
Jay Branton and Dignity Memorial
Government of Canada
RBC Foundation
Dignity Memorial
Cormark Securities Inc.
National Bank
Canaccord Genuity
Allan Cole and McKinnon and Bowes
Lesley Parrott and Family
Estate of Audrey Watson
Estate of James Moore

Silver (\$1,000-\$5,000)

Arbor Memorial Inc
BMO Nesbitt Burns
Allan Cole & McKinnon and Bowes
Evergreen Crematorium
Waratah Capital Advisors
Linden and Associates
Deeks Financial Group
Oppenheimer & Co
Mt. Pleasant Group
Catholic Association of Funeral
Karima Joy
Benjamin Thorek
E. Ann Westlake
Raymond James Ltd
Judy Fantham



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Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario





Thank you to our Staff, Students and Volunteers

Thank you to our staff, students & volunteers for their tireless work and dedication over the course of this last year

STAFF:

Ashley Mathew
Eve Kasakevich
Sairah Khan
Sarah Garcia-Heller
Sophia Yang
Taya Mikado

Brendan Burke
Cammie Szorady
Cari Ferguson
Carmit Kordov
Charise Jewell
Charlyn W
Christine Raissis
Bryan Kuwahara

Jen Poule
Jenn Soutar
John Bacon
Judith McCaffery
Judy Kane
Judy Fantham
Julia Hu
Julian Greer- Oullette
Juno Zavitz
Karen Crowell-Neufeld

Michael Loader
Michael MacKenzie
Michael Chiu
Michelle Grace
Monica Vera
Moody Shabeeb
Myrna Talbot
Nancy Shortell
Nadine Evans

STUDENTS:

Angelica Greaves
Arshiah Ali
Avni Agnihotri
Deevonie Gardner
Kari Lee
Krishna Goswami
Makaela Burton
Martha Robertson
Shannon Jansa

Cari Ferguson
Charise Jewell
Christina Lisinska
Claire Nyiti
Cynthia Fell
Dan Rotstein
Dana Kousman
Dana Dodge
Daniel Faziluddin
Derek Seguin
Diana Colangelo

Karima Joy
Kat Carnevale
Kathleen Bush
Kathy Bell
Kayla Gumiran
Kelly Broadhurst
Kevin Chen
Khadija Ismail
Larry Konyu
Laura Durrant
Laura E
Laura Foran
Laurie Taniguchi
Lee Failes
Lesley Parrott
Leya Kiloh
Lily Leung
Lisa Bontje
Lish Francoeur
Lori- Ives-Baine
Lynn Humphries
Lystra Singh
Magdalena Diaz
Margot Marcus
Margherita Decesare
Marigold Kingrey
Mark Uusitalo
Marlee Novak
Martha Kryvonis
Mary Muir
Maya Koven
Mena Kamel
Meredith Adolf
Michael Lum

Natalia Rotondo
Natasha Berger
Natasha Eck
Neeru Sekhon
Nikita Dhawan
Nicole Farrel
Nikola Myhre
Oonagh Reeve
Patricia Daykin
Patrick De Belen
Peggy-Gail DeHal Gunraj
Peggy Shukdha
Philip Jessop
Qaid Silk
Rachelle Allen
Rebecca O'Toole
Rena Arshinoff
Ryan Kram
Sandra Turner
Sanjay Yagnik
Sany Guest
Sara Peat
Shauna Pandit
Shervin Zeinali
Shetuji Daulah
Shelley Challenger
Sophie Blaikie-Sloan
Suzanne Rolling
Tanya Barbon
Tara Zhou
Taya Mikado
Tayler Middleton
Tom Shields
Tyler Mathers
Wendy Horning

VOLUNTEERS:

Afsaneh Shafai
Aimee Bruner
Allan Cole
Alyson Robertson
Amanda Giacomazzo
Amy MacFarlane
Abigail D'Souza
Ali Wise
Alyssa Kryger
Allison Earl
Alina Tsimbaliouk
Amy Manisov
Andaleeb Iftikhar
Andrea Prescott-Cornejo
Andrew Chunoo
Anne Chan-Wong
Andy Wong
Antonietta Gutierrez
Aaron Nielson-Belman
Ariane Reid
Arielle Sugarman
Ashley Mathew
Barbara Gill-Lazroe
Barb Thompson
Benjamin Thorek

Donald Eckler
Douglas Grynol
Ed Shawl
Elana Lewis
Emily Fu
Emma Foran
Eric Blais
Erin Eller
Farah Choudary
Geoff Sicilia
Grace Duong
Gilda Akler- Sefton
Gretchen Bingham
Georgette Marsh
Greg Douglas
Greg New
Gulshan Singh
Hana Snir
Hannah Manohar
Heather Thompson
Heather Hewitt
Heather Medhurst
Helene Vosters
Hermenia Fitzpatrick
Isabelle Malavoy Mundle
Jane Smart
Janet Shacter
Jason Smith

Dana Colangelo
Donald Eckler
Douglas Grynol
Ed Shawl
Elana Lewis
Emily Fu
Emma Foran
Eric Blais
Erin Eller
Farah Choudary
Geoff Sicilia
Grace Duong
Gilda Akler- Sefton
Gretchen Bingham
Georgette Marsh
Greg Douglas
Greg New
Gulshan Singh
Hana Snir
Hannah Manohar
Heather Thompson
Heather Hewitt
Heather Medhurst
Helene Vosters
Hermenia Fitzpatrick
Isabelle Malavoy Mundle
Jane Smart
Janet Shacter
Jason Smith

Khadija Ismail
Larry Konyu
Laura Durrant
Laura E
Laura Foran
Laurie Taniguchi
Lee Failes
Lesley Parrott
Leya Kiloh
Lily Leung
Lisa Bontje
Lish Francoeur
Lori- Ives-Baine
Lynn Humphries
Lystra Singh
Magdalena Diaz
Margot Marcus
Margherita Decesare
Marigold Kingrey
Mark Uusitalo
Marlee Novak
Martha Kryvonis
Mary Muir
Maya Koven
Mena Kamel
Meredith Adolf
Michael Lum

What's in Store for 2025

Looking ahead to 2025, Bereaved Families of Toronto is building on significant progress—particularly over the past six months—guided by our emerging three-year strategic plan, *Thickening the Ice*. Rooted in our Fall 2023 strategic retreat, the plan focuses on strengthening our foundation through enhanced volunteer engagement, streamlined operations, financial sustainability, and deeper collaboration with BFO affiliates to share best practices and amplify impact. We are committed to a strategic, needs-driven approach to programming informed by environmental scans to avoid duplication and protect staff capacity, supported by clear performance metrics and a stronger, more connected Board that fosters relationships with staff, our Professional Advisory Committee, and donors. Grounded in stability, innovation, and community care, we are energized and ready for the year ahead





Volunteer Opportunities

BFO Toronto consistently receives recognition from participants and funders alike, who acknowledge our remarkable impact, especially considering our size. The driving force behind this success lies in our dedicated volunteers. Our volunteers derive fulfilment from their contributions and foster a sense of community among their peers. While the role of a volunteer facilitator is often highlighted, there are numerous other opportunities available! We welcome individuals who are eager to join our team and lend their talents and invite you to reach out to us.

Board Members

BFO Toronto has a working Board of Directors. Our Board are made up of individuals with a variety of professional skills and personal experiences who roll up their sleeves and help take fundraising, events, and programs forward. The Board meets monthly and each member is part of one of our core committees. We are often looking for new members so if this interests you, please keep an eye out for opportunities via our newsletter or reach out to our Board Chair for more information.

Event Volunteers

Our two flagship events allow over 500 people to honour their loved ones and come together annually. This year they are targeted to raise over \$60,000, allowing us to deliver our services free of charge. There is always a team of volunteers behind these events to make them a success! Get in touch to find out more about everything from finding sponsors to event planning to mailing out packages.

Volunteer Facilitators

Peer volunteer facilitators participate in a 25-hour training program that provides information on grief, mental health and self care, as well as exercises to develop skills in active listening, conflict management, and communication. Our trained facilitators provide one-to-one support and group facilitation. To ensure that we can effectively support grieving Torontonians we welcome peer volunteers with lived experience.

Committee Members

Our Committees are made up of individuals with a variety of professional skills and personal experiences who support the strategic direction of our organization. Our current and future committees are the Professional Advisory Committee, Finance, Governance, specific events and DEI. Committees meet monthly and expected to work in between. We are often looking for new members so if this interests you, please keep an eye out for opportunities via our newsletter.



Support BFO Toronto

BFO Toronto is able to provide its service free of charge in large part due to financial support that comes from our community and we are so incredibly grateful for those that consider giving in one of the following ways :

- **Monthly donation to help us plan for the years ahead**
 - **One-time donation through our website or by phoning the office**
 - **Workplace matching donation programs**
 - **Purchase a dove tag in honour of your loved one(s) for Trees of Light**
 - **Start a team or sponsor someone for our annual Walk to Remember**
-

Participate in our Walk to Remember

Participate on your own or start a team in memory of your loved one. It is a beautiful day with friends, family or coworkers and the BFO-community at-large. This has the added bonus of letting more people know about BFO Toronto!

Donations In-Kind

BFO Toronto welcomes donations that can either be prizes at events, part of our silent auction. This could be a gift card from a favourite local business, a product that has been purchased or procured through a workplace, or a service that can be donated. Programming & office supplies and snacks are always a welcome addition as well.

Introduce Us!

BFO Toronto is keen to build sustainable corporate support. This might be through donations, sponsorships or partnerships. If you work for, or have a connection with a company that you think might be interested, please consider making an introduction. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Sarah Garcia-Heller at sarah@bfotoronto.ca.

Engage with Us Online

Follow our social media accounts and engage with us online to spread information about our organization and events!



Sharing Our Impact

“BFO helped me get in touch with my feelings of grief. Being part of a group helped me understand that grief isn't something to hide, it's a universal response to the loss of someone important.”

“I cannot explain the inner changes that occurred within this group. It was one of the best groups that I have ever had the privilege to meet. I feel like I healed while I was in this group and that is the best explanation I can provide”

“Hearing people share similar experiences/feelings etc. helped with isolation and feeling connected/community”

“It's incredibly helpful to talk to people who have gone through something similar, to share your experiences, your feelings. To be accepted by people in this way, to be recognized for how hard it is for just some of the smallest things. Having discussions on topics that I maybe wouldn't have the courage to explore on my own, but in the group setting, can try to. Hearing other peoples thoguhts on experiences or situations you have faced or are currently facing and seeing them from that different perspective can be incredibly helpful.”

“I'm still deep in my grief, but there was comfort in knowing others feel the same and in sharing my thoughts and feelings.”



Thank you for reading the

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