

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**January 12, 2023**

**For Immediate release**

### **Opening of the New Aunt Leah's House Marks its 35th Anniversary**

*In January 2013, the newly rebuilt Aunt Leah's House is set to welcome vulnerable women and their babies once again.*

VANCOUVER, B.C. (January 12, 2023) – Aunt Leah's Foundation announced today the completion of its most recent social purpose housing project, the rebuilding of the original Aunt Leah's House. Operated by Aunt Leah's Place, since the 1980's, Aunt Leah's House has been a safe haven for young moms (often in foster care themselves) and their babies to ensure families remain together and not separated by the child welfare system.

Supported by [Aunt Leah's Place Thresholds Program](#), moms live in a safe, caring home environment where they can learn how to care for their baby with the guidance of staff and family support workers. "For 35 years this house has been dedicated to keeping families together," said Sarah Stewart, Executive Director of Aunt Leah's Place. "During this time more than 400 families have called Aunt Leah's house home and we are honoured to continue to serve our community in this way."

A former foster parent herself, Gale Stewart, Founder of Aunt Leah's and B.C. Medal of Good Citizenship Award recipient, saw first-hand the importance of "beginnings" as it applied to the bonding of mom & baby and how she could create a home where these young moms could enjoy the comfort of a lovely space, good food and intimate times with their newborns. The new purpose-built home will have four bedrooms with attached bathrooms, a large training kitchen, office space and a second stage self-contained suite that a mom can graduate into. "Together we will continue to provide comfortable beginnings for vulnerable moms and babies, helping to re-unite and keep families together," said Gale Stewart.

In 2020, pandemic restrictions and protocols limited the number of moms that could be accommodated in an aging house, and repairs and maintenance costs increased to the point where the original house was no longer operable. Aunt Leah's Foundation undertook the rebuilding of the original house. The project was funded in part by the Government of Canada's Reaching Home program, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's National Housing Co-Investment Fund and the Government of British Columbia's Community Gaming Grants Capital Projects program, as well as a number of generous private donors. "Despite the challenges of fundraising and executing a project during pandemic times, it was the critical support of our partners, government funders and donors who believed in its importance that made it possible," said Jacqueline Dupuis, Executive Director, Aunt Leah's Foundation.

"Every Canadian deserves a safe and affordable place to call home," said The Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion. Our government is proud to support the redevelopment of Aunt Leah's House, a home where mothers can rest, grow and regain their independence in a safe and secure environment. At Aunt Leah's, mothers will have the opportunity to rebuild their lives and access the critical support services necessary for them to emerge stronger. This is one way our government's National Housing Strategy is ensuring no one is left behind."

“Aunt Leah’s House provides a crucial service to those most vulnerable in our society. Its rebuilding ensures that more mothers and children will receive safe housing and services they need,” said Anne Kang, Minister of Municipal Affairs. “By funding important projects like this, the Province is helping support a brighter future for mothers, families and their little ones entering the world.”

### **About Aunt Leah’s Place**

*For over 30 years, Aunt Leah’s Place has been helping kids in foster care and young mothers achieve a better future. We do this by providing guidance, supported housing, job training and coaching on essential life skills. We believe every individual deserves to feel safe, cared for, and have a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, this is not a reality for many teens in the foster care system. When they “age out” of government care at 19, they find themselves completely alone. Aunt Leah’s often provides the only thread of care and continuity for youth whose lives are marked by abuse, neglect, abandonment and multiple foster home placements. Over the years, we have seen how support at this critical time can help these young people realize their potential while becoming resilient, independent adults.*

### **About Aunt Leah’s Foundation**

*In 2013, recognizing the need for more housing options, Aunt Leah’s Place launched a foundation for the purpose of building a social purpose housing portfolio that would provide safe, affordable housing for new mothers and young people leaving foster care. Today the Foundation has a portfolio of four shared-living homes and an 11-unit apartment building, housing 25-30 at-risk youth each year. Most recently the Foundation undertook a project to rebuild the original Aunt Leah’s House.*