



2024

ANNUAL REPORT

2025

**Taking
Charge!**

Empowerment
Education
Employment
Empowered



What is Taking Charge!?

Taking Charge! Inc. was established in 1995 as a community-based, non-profit organization that serves single parents and women receiving Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) who face socioeconomic barriers to financial independence and self-sufficiency, such as poverty, mental health challenges, and other barriers that prevent their achievement of employment and educational goals.

Participants accepted into our program receive wrap-around support through the programs and services, including childcare, career counselling, personal

development, academic upgrading or completion of a mature grade 12 diploma. Access to our daycare at Taking Charge! breaks down a significant barrier for single parents because it allows them to attend full-time programming knowing their children are being cared for in a safe and caring environment.

Long term goals for our participants include advancing their education, becoming economically self-sufficient, and no longer requiring EIA support, which supports their and their families' overall well-being and self-sufficiency.

Message from the Board of Directors & Executive Director

Dear Taking Charge! Community,

Looking back at Taking Charge!'s past year, we are incredibly grateful for the team's hard work, which fueled significant change and revitalization to our programming model. This change directly benefited the community we serve, while strengthening our organization's services to remain effective, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of single women, parents, and families. Our programming model update was generously funded by The Winnipeg Foundation.

We are also grateful to have received a grant from Canada's Women and Gender Equality program, to further enhance our programming model with curriculum content to ensure cultural awareness and sensitivity, so that it truly meets the learning needs of our participants. We will also embark on building an advocacy strategy for our participants, to help improve their quality of life and raise awareness of key concerns they experience daily.

In December 2024, we said farewell to our former Executive Director, Stephanie Bevacqua. Stephanie brought with her fresh ideas and new perspectives to the organization, helping us to embrace change and move forward to better serve our clients and their families. We wish her well and success with her new opportunity.

The Board welcomes Lise Leflour as the new Executive Director at Taking Charge!. She brings a familiarity to her new role, having formerly served in the roles of Interim Executive Director and Office Manager at Taking Charge!. Her wealth of experience at Taking Charge!, supporting staff and participants while working with the board will be an asset to her new leadership role at Taking Charge! Her strong orientation towards the meaningful work that Taking Charge! does in empowering community members to feel respected will serve as a model for our participants and provide strong support to our staff.

Like our participants, our organization continues to grow, learn, and improve with the support of our staff, community and Board of Directors. Being responsive to the community we serve by being proactive with a commitment to expanding knowledge, skills, and capabilities. It's not just about acquiring new information, but also about reflecting on what's already known, identifying areas for growth, and actively seeking opportunities to improve. We look forward to accomplishing great things in the upcoming year together!

Board of Directors

Deb Radi *Chairperson*

Widny Pervil

Liz Bilton

Danielle Dorge-Rempel

Florah Manyimbiri

Mwaka Kaonga *(retired March 2025)*

Bobbi Taillefer *(retired June 2024)*

Land Acknowledgement

We are many nations within one nation. Taking Charge! acknowledges that we are located on the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Inineew, Anishinew, Dakota and Denesuline, and the homeland of the Red River Métis. We are committed to learning the truth in order to support reconciliation. Education is what got us into this, and education will get us out of it.

We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.

We acknowledge our access to clean drinking water sourced by Shoal Lake #39 & #40 First Nations of Treaty 3 Territory.



Lise Leflour
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Deb Radi
BOARD CHAIR

Taking Charge!

Programming

This year, we completed a comprehensive structural program review, which was generously funded by The Winnipeg Foundation. This review provided valuable insights and guided our program re-development.

As a direct result of participant feedback, staff consultation, and external stakeholder recommendations collected during our program review, we've successfully transitioned our programming to a modular format. This strategic change provides continuous intake, thereby increasing accessibility and ensuring our programs can effectively meet the ever-changing needs of our participants.

Here are the key updates and outcomes from the review:

Modular Programming: Our new modular format offers greater *flexibility*, allowing participants to choose programs that fit their interests and

schedules. This is especially beneficial for single parents and women on EIA, enabling them to balance responsibilities and engagement. New modules start every two weeks, creating a responsive environment and allowing facilitators to adapt to emerging needs.

Continuous Intake: We've removed traditional start dates, so participants can now join at their convenience. This *eliminates delays* (previously up to two months) and ensures individuals can begin their programs within two weeks of expressing interest, often with pre-program orientation starting the very next day. This "meet them

where they're at" approach capitalizes on their readiness to engage.

Supportive Community Space:

Our new participant lounge provides a flexible space for *community building*. Participants can connect, support each other, study, and access free Wi-Fi for both program and personal needs.

These changes reflect our commitment to a trauma-informed, participant-centered, and culturally safe approach, addressing both immediate and long-term participant goals while achieving our program outcomes.





Taking Care! Programming

At Taking Care!, we embrace each child's unique strengths, interests, and cultural backgrounds, creating an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

We believe it takes a village to raise a child, so we strive to create a collaborative approach to childcare by creating a partnership with parents to ensure that every child receives the support and encouragement they need to reach their full potential.

Taking Care! provides quality care to the children of Taking Charge! participants and single parents enrolled at Winnipeg Adult Education Centre. Our dedicated educators strive to create a home away from home for every child entrusted in our care. Through play-based learning, personalized attention and child-focused activity planning, we strive to empower young minds to explore their curiosity, develop essential skills, and build a solid foundation for future success. With over 110 children enrolled throughout the fiscal year, our educators are constantly observing and adapting their programs to better attend to the needs of the children and parents.

This past year, we focused on professional development for our educators, so they can better care for the children and support the parents that attend the centre. For the parents, we offer a connected parenting approach through workshops facilitated by our daycare supervisor. The Circle of Security (COS) workshop encourages being with children through all their emotions to help them learn self-regulation; and Guiding Children Using COS principles gives parents and caregivers real life examples and discussions on how to guide children while being with them in their feelings.

As we celebrate the successes over the past year, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated staff, supportive families, and the wonderful children who fill our days with joy and discovery.

109
participants
engaged in
programming

We cared for
110 children

We served
240 lunches
480 snacks

67% of
participants
who graduated
enrolled in
post-secondary

17% of
participants
who graduated
have plans to
enroll in the
upcoming year



Alyson's Story:

My name is Alyson. I'm 25 years old and a single mother to two beautiful children. This June, I'll be graduating with my mature student diploma.

A dream come true. I'm sharing my story in hopes that it might inspire someone else to take that first step. I know how hard it is to go back to school when life has already taken you in every other direction. But I'm proof that it can be done.

Growing up wasn't easy. I lived with both my parents, both of whom struggled with mental health and addiction. My father was severely mentally ill and abusive toward my mother. Some of my clearest childhood memories are of stepping between them, trying to protect her.

My mother, a daughter of a residential school survivor, turned to substances to cope with the pain she carried from her own upbringing. Trauma was passed down in my family like it was part of our DNA.

When I was nine years old, my father died by suicide. It broke something in our family. But for me, it was also a strange kind of relief—there was no more fear of violence in the house.

After that, we moved constantly, inner city, St. James, Downtown, Transcona, the North End. School became my

one steady thing. I'd take the bus for up to two hours each way just to stay with my friends. I loved that school. It felt like home.

Then, when I was 12, everything changed again. I had to transfer to a new school in a new area. I didn't fit in. There was no food at home. My mom was deep in her addiction by then, but nobody at school knew. I was just another kid falling through the cracks. My grades were terrible. My teachers didn't like me, but I somehow passed and moved on to high school—but I didn't stay long. I was there for maybe six months. With no support or structure, I simply stopped showing up.

When I was 16, I met my first boyfriend. He was the first person who truly made me feel safe. Being with him gave me a sense of stability I had never known. At 17, I got pregnant with my first daughter. That changed everything. I was scared, I didn't have it all figured out, but I knew I wanted to give her the love and protection I never had.

She was born on October 6, 2017, by emergency C-section due to a dangerously high heart rate. When she came out,



she wasn't breathing. They rushed her to the NICU. The next morning, doctors told me she had a rapidly growing brain tumor, and that she likely had only two to four days to live.

I've known heartbreak, but nothing compared to that moment. The pain was and still is indescribable.

Six months later, I got pregnant with my son. He gave me a reason to keep going. I tried enrolling in a few schools, but none of them worked out. Honestly, I didn't think I could succeed in school. My past experience with school made me believe that I wasn't smart, and that I would never graduate.

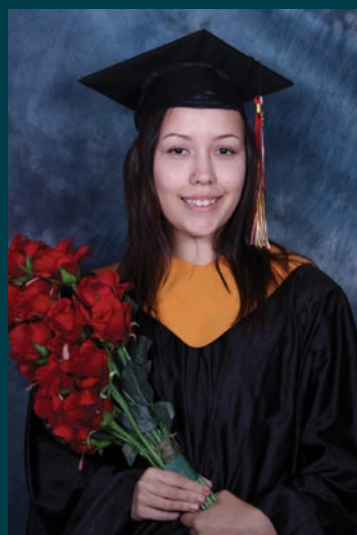
When my son was two, I got pregnant with my youngest daughter. I call her our missing puzzle piece. It was during that pregnancy that things finally began to change. I passed my road test after failing it twice, while she was still in my belly. Then, my EIA worker told me about a program called Taking Charge!

I didn't have high hope for it, but I looked into it anyway. The reviews were positive, so I gave them a call. The day I walked through their doors, everything changed. The energy there was different. It was warm and welcoming. And for the first time in a long time, I felt like people wanted me there.

I enrolled in the programs, nervous and full of doubt. I didn't know if I could really do it. But I kept showing up. I remember one day during programs a teacher there said, "You learn a lot better when you have a good relationship with your teachers." That really opened my eyes and made me want to keep going forward, especially because I had a good relationship with every single staff member.

Now, almost two years later, I'm graduating. A kid who barely made it through school the first time around. A young mom who thought she missed her chance. A woman who's been through more than most people will ever know. It's all I ever wanted and with a lot of hard work, I'm finally graduating!

I'm proud of how far I've come, but I didn't do it alone. Taking Charge! gave me the support I needed to keep going. They reminded me that my past didn't define my future. They were patient, kind, loving and caring to me. I'll forever be grateful for every single person at Taking Charge!



Through trial and error, fail after fail, I never gave up. And that's what I want people to take from this. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to take that first step. Put your foot in the door. You never know what amazing things could happen.

Alyson



Grants & Fundraising

We are incredibly grateful for our donors' generous support over the past year. Your contributions have profoundly impacted our programs and services, and we truly appreciate your dedication to our mission. Here's how your donations have helped:

THE WINNIPEG FOUNDATION:

- Your ongoing support has been instrumental in sustaining our programs.

CANADA'S WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY:

- You support us through our review of program content, policy review, and advocacy strategy for our participants' challenges.

TELUS:

- Provided our staff with laptops to make our job easier and more efficient, allowing us to focus on our participants.

NUMEROUS INDIVIDUAL DONORS:

- Thank you for choosing us with your generous support.

Thank you once again for your unwavering support.

Together, we are making a significant difference in our community and empowering individuals to achieve their full potential.

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