

Grassroots

SPRING 2025



Community and Courage



Stephen Lewis
Foundation

"The SLF is facing the greatest crisis since the nightmare days of the spread of AIDS in the 1990s and 2000s. I refuse to disassemble or beat around the bush. With the suspension and cutbacks of foreign aid, the Trump administration's unhinged and random destructive acts put countless numbers of our projects in Africa, and the people they serve, at risk.

The uncertainty, the ambiguity, the wilful chaos have resulted in fear and confusion on the ground. As our Executive Director, Meg French, has said: "Lives will be lost." Our best contribution at this perilous moment is to attempt to replace the resources that Trump has expunged. Please give what you are able."



— Stephen Lewis, SLF Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Board and former UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa

Now more than ever, we need to take unified action to denounce rising hate and inhumanity. Community-led movements at the forefront of health equity, justice and human rights are under attack. We knew the Trump administration's "America First" policies would have a direct impact on our community partners across Africa, and we are already seeing the life-threatening effects of numerous executive actions in the months since the inauguration.

The fight for global justice, health and human rights is urgent. U.S. funding loss is upending life-saving community-led programs that have proven effective against the HIV epidemic. Other governments are also cutting their international aid programs further threatening decades of progress. At this critical time, we cannot thank you enough for your ongoing solidarity.

Inside this edition of Grassroots, we focus on courage and community. The SLF and our partners continue to challenge the status quo, just as we have since the foundation began. We are shifting power into the hands of community-led organizations, honouring their expertise and respecting their autonomy. Now more than 20 years on, as we face new challenges in the global response to HIV, together we will continue to mobilize to protect progress against AIDS.

Thank you,

The Stephen Lewis Foundation team

Anger and Optimism

Every day for the last month, I have been angry. I can't listen to the news or look at social media without being hit by the devilish acts of Donald Trump and his minion, Elon Musk. These men show no empathy for the impact of their actions, no compassion for the people left without medicines, food, education, or protection from violence. People are losing jobs, organizations are shutting down, and lives are at risk.

The anger I feel when I think about the AIDS pandemic resurging, people needlessly acquiring HIV and more people dying of AIDS-related illnesses makes me sick to my stomach and puts an ache in my heart.

But while I am angry, I am also optimistic. I believe in the good of humanity. I see that good, every day, in the activists running community-led organizations in Africa, in those who support the Stephen Lewis Foundation, and in my colleagues at the SLF.

Since Trump unleashed this horror that is upending decades of global cooperation, I have seen that same good in SLF partner organizations facing budget cuts of 70% whose staff are working as volunteers rather than shut down, organizations that are sharing antiretroviral (ARV) supplies and offering counselling to support communities coping with increased stigma and discrimination, all while planning for long-term changes.

The SLF has always been a progressive, feminist organization, and we are leaning into those values. Our anti-colonial funding model allows partners to use funds flexibly at this horrendous time to pay salaries, keep lights on, and continue services.

We are also raising additional funds to fill the gap caused by the aid freeze. Never have I been more grateful for the SLF's community of supporters.

Despite just finishing the traditional end-of-year giving season, those who can are giving again. Grandmothers groups are urgently organizing emergency fundraisers and raising the issue in the media and with their Members of Parliament.

In this moment of darkness, the good in the world still shines. It is this undaunted solidarity and collective refusal to surrender to the evil being perpetrated by Trump that keeps me optimistic even in my anger — because when good people come together, justice will prevail.

In solidarity,



Meg French
Executive Director
Stephen Lewis Foundation



The courage of survivors

To escape violence, women and girls need more than physical safety. They need a community that offers shelter, emotional support, financial resources and legal guidance to seek justice. In these communities, women begin to heal and courageously rebuild their lives.

Tina knows this firsthand. A single mother of two, she was forced to flee from her home when her abusive husband assaulted her daughter. *“I went with my child to the hospital for help, but I had no money for the bills. The doctors helped me and suggested going to the Musasa Project to seek help.”*

Musasa has been working to end gender-based violence in Zimbabwe for over 35 years. The community-led organization provides direct support to survivors, raises awareness about gender-based violence, trains law enforcement to respond appropriately, and advocates for policies and legislation that protect women.

The SLF funds community shelters through Musasa in rural areas where gender-based violence services are scarce. The shelters provide compassionate care to survivors like Tina who needed housing as well as support to visit her daughter in the hospital during her recovery. Tina’s daughter also received therapy, which helped her overall well-being, and skills training to prepare her to be self-reliant and to boost her self-esteem.

Tina and her family are among the many whose lives have been touched by Musasa. Musasa’s work has made immeasurable impact over the years. They operate 14 women’s shelters across urban and rural areas and mobile centres that provide essential education, reaching even the most remote communities. Musasa was instrumental in the passage of Zimbabwe’s Domestic Violence Act in 2007. They also played a key role in raising

the minimum age of marriage to 18 years old and introducing mandatory minimum prison sentences for rape.

Despite this heroic work, the communities Musasa serves face growing challenges. Severe drought, climate change, and inflation are pushing more women and girls into poverty, which puts them at greater risk of gender-based violence and acquiring HIV.

Without economic independence they may be forced to marry, leave school or engage in unsafe work. Funding for programs that address gender-based violence has always been inadequate, and now the U.S. funding loss will have devastating outcomes. Our SLF community remains committed to supporting Musasa’s efforts and amplifying their advocacy to secure the resources necessary to protect women’s rights and eliminate gender-based violence.



Musasa Project, Zimbabwe

A community of care

The Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign is a powerful example of global solidarity. The women leading this social justice movement remind us that the love families feel for one another and their hopes for safety, opportunity, and a healthy future are universal. Decades of mobilization show that a world where health and human rights are non-negotiable is built one community at a time, with vigilance and courage.

Cathryn Aune, a member of the Oceanside Grandmothers group on Vancouver Island, shares about her deep connection to the movement:

“ There are many needs and many organizations doing good work both locally and internationally. So why is it that I support the Stephen Lewis Foundation’s Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign?

Well, I’m a grandmother. A grandmother who doesn’t have to worry about my grandchildren’s education, access to health care, or the basics of life. I sometimes worry about other things, but never the basics of life. I know that my grandchildren will lead a relatively good life, with access to clean water and safe housing. I know they will have the chance to make choices related to all aspects of their lives.

This is my wish for all the grandmothers and grandchildren on planet Earth — that grandmothers have the same confidence that their grandchildren will have the chance to fulfill their potential. And that grandmothers will feel supported and upheld as they work toward a better future for themselves and their grandchildren.

The Stephen Lewis Foundation’s Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign is unique in that it is aimed at an often-forgotten demographic. The strength of women caring for children, whether their own or their

grandchildren, is a powerful force. And the results of this partnership have already made a difference. Together we can make so many wishes come true; wishes for education, health, clean water and safe housing. That’s why I support this program. I’m a grandmother too.



Cathryn Aune, member of Oceanside Grandmothers

Join the movement!

A group of like-minded women in your area are waiting for you to join them. Learn how you can get involved by emailing campaign@stephenlewisfoundation.org or visiting grandmotherscampaign.org.

Jenny Parsley reflects on community and courage

For two decades, Jenny Parsley has seen firsthand the impacts of the HIV epidemic as well as effective, community-led responses that save lives. As one of the SLF's seven field representatives, Jenny, who is based in Cape Town, South Africa, visits SLF partner organizations in African countries as a liaison between them and staff in Canada.

“ Back in 2003, the Stephen Lewis Foundation was founded to support inspiring and life-saving HIV responses carried out by dedicated community-led organizations. At the heart of these organizations is the vision, foresight, commitment and courage of staff, volunteers and community members who work alongside those they serve to tackle the profound challenges of HIV.

In the face of stigma, discrimination and systemic neglect, SLF-supported organizations offer spaces of belonging where people living with HIV can access peer support, mentorship and leadership opportunities. In these spaces, individuals become activists, challenging marginalizing policies and practices. Their courage has emboldened them to become role models and community leaders, demanding justice, treatment, care and support. However, many hard-won achievements are now under threat due to the withdrawal of international funding.

One of the most powerful expressions of community and courage is found in the grandmothers movement. Across Eastern and Southern Africa, grandmothers — many who lost their own children to AIDS-related illnesses — have become pillars of strength.

Despite personal loss and financial pressures, they have raised a generation of orphaned children, ensuring their access to education, health care, stability and love. These grandmothers draw strength from one another, forming networks that provide economic and emotional support and generate political power. Their courage is not only in enduring personal tragedy but in organizing, advocating and ensuring they and the children they raise have a voice.



Photo Credit: SLF

Jenny Parsley, SLF Field Representative

In many countries where the SLF works, LGBTIQ communities face criminalization, ostracization and threats to their safety. For LGBTIQ communities, courage often means bold and risky defiance in the face of violence and oppression. LGBTIQ leaders, peers and allies challenge unjust laws, confront state and community violence, and operate rapid response networks to address emergencies. Community-led organizations create sanctuaries of safety and affirmation — places where identity is celebrated, and healing is prioritized. Here, courage is not just about resistance; it is also about joy, love and pride.

SLF partners also support survivors of gender-based violence. Women seeking help for themselves and their children summon tremendous courage to escape danger, usually from the very people who

are supposed to love and support them. These organizations provide legal assistance, economic empowerment, shelter and trauma-informed care. Many survivors have endured unimaginable harm, yet through care and mutual support, some find the courage to share their stories, rebuild their lives and demand accountability.

At a time when the philosophy of *ubuntu* — I am because you are — is being abandoned by some global leaders, it is being upheld and nurtured by grassroots organizations. Courageous community leaders remain steadfast in their commitment to solidarity, dignity and justice. Now, more than ever, community-led responses remind us of our interconnectedness and sustain hope for a better future.



Jenny Parsley visiting SLF partner MATRAM in Mozambique.

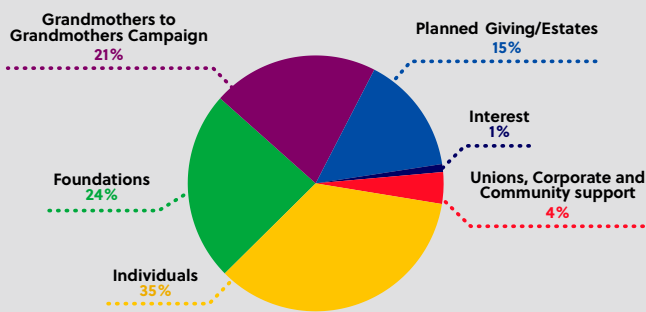
Stephen Lewis Foundation Financial Overview

From July 2023 to June 2024, the SLF raised \$9 million in support of 98 organizations working in 14 African countries.

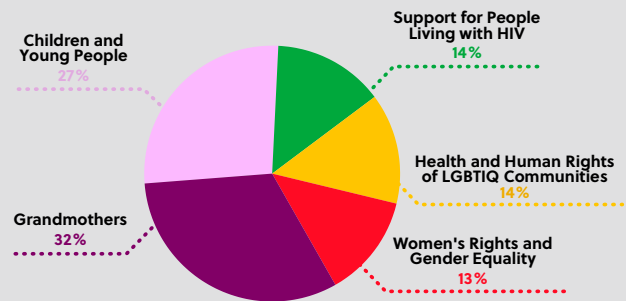
The Stephen Lewis Foundation's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. For a copy of the SLF's full audited financial statements and the link to our annual Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) charity returns, please visit: stephenlewisfoundation.org/who-we-are/financials.

Financial Overview 2023–2024

Where our support comes from



Our Program support by area of work



Monthly donors are a driving force for change!

Your sustaining gift ensures the SLF can maximize our impact in supporting grassroots partners across Africa. Monthly donations allow us to plan over the long term to support our partners through emergencies and threats. **Become a monthly donor today.**



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Foundation**

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