

Grassroots

FALL 2025



Solidarity and Strength



Stephen Lewis
Foundation

Letter from our Executive Director

Twenty years ago, Stephen Lewis delivered the CBC Massey Lectures, *Race Against Time*, calling for the world to act against the destruction being caused by AIDS. Over the last two decades, together with communities at the forefront of the epidemic, we have made remarkable, life-saving gains.

Today, the hope and determination that drive the global response to HIV face a test unlike any in recent memory, and it is more important than ever that we remain relentlessly on course.

In January, the U.S. administration issued devastating stop-work orders and brutally slashed funding, sending shockwaves through global health and HIV responses. Other governments followed, and hard-won progress against AIDS is at risk.

Amid this injustice, community-led organizations are holding the line against shrinking resources, anti-rights movements and discrimination, relentless in their pursuit of dignity and equity for all. They deliver care and prevention where others do not, ensuring that health is a right, not a privilege. When governments falter, communities rise.

This fall, we joined more than 20 allied organizations across Canada to urge our government to make a strong new commitment to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Since 2002, the Global Fund has helped save more than 70 million lives, but without renewed investment, millions are at risk. We urge governments and philanthropists to renew and increase their commitments.

We refuse to return to the days when so many were dying, and life-saving treatment and prevention were out of reach across Africa. The progress of the past two decades is too profound and our resolve is too strong.

With your help, we stand firmly with our grassroots partners. We continue to provide long-term, flexible support to help keep critical health and HIV services running. Every act of solidarity you take — advocating, fundraising or donating — helps safeguard the future that activists have fought so hard to build.

As I recently shared on CBC's *As It Happens*: "*Diseases don't know borders. We are one people.*" Global health is a shared responsibility. Lasting progress is collective progress.

And while that progress may be under threat, we will not relent until the promise of ending AIDS becomes a reality.

To all of you standing with us, thank you.



Meg French,
Executive Director
Stephen Lewis Foundation



Grandmothers United in Solidarity

Earlier this year, members of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign — a Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) initiative — and SLF staff travelled to Eswatini and South Africa. They met with leaders from 10 SLF partner organizations and their community members to learn about what makes local responses to HIV so effective, and what challenges they face today.

Laurie Wilson and Robin Scobie are two of the 16 Canadian Campaign members who took part in this *Grandmothers United in Solidarity* trip. Each participant has volunteered to make inspiring and informative presentations in communities across Canada. They are helping to raise awareness about the continuing HIV epidemic, its root causes and the expertise of remarkable grassroots organizations at the forefront of the response.

Laurie and Robin have shared insights and reflections on the trip, the leadership of grandmothers and grandmothers, and the power of local action, global solidarity and hope.

To find presentations near you, email campaign@stephenlewisfoundation.org or check the event calendar at grandmotherscampaign.org/events.

“A wonderful, thought-provoking experience,” shares Laurie Wilson, Victoria Grandmothers for Africa

I joined the Victoria Grandmothers for Africa in 2016 as a cyclist, participating in the group’s annual ride from Campbell River to Victoria, BC. In 2017, two grandmothers visited from the African continent to launch *Powered by Love* — a book about grandmothers in Africa who

held families and communities together in the face of the HIV epidemic — and I fell in love with our grandmother sisters. I enjoyed presenting about the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign to schools and community organizations over the next several years, but I had never been to Africa.



Grandmothers with Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust in South Africa gathered with Laurie Wilson and 15 other grandmothers and grandmothers visiting from Canada.

When the opportunity arose to join the *Grandmothers United in Solidarity* trip I jumped at it. It was a truly wonderful, full and thought-provoking experience. We were grandmothers and grandmothers from across Canada — movers and shakers, travellers and thinkers.

Every meeting with SLF partners was unique. We participated in group therapy sessions, exercise classes and a micro-finance meeting. Everywhere we sang and

danced, and it often felt as if the whole community had graciously turned out to welcome us.

These organizations work holistically and devotedly, with great awareness of and responsiveness to the needs in their communities. They expressed repeatedly how valuable flexible funding is for the scope of their work. The women we met, mostly grandmothers, were empowered, proud, wise, hopeful, joyful and generous. Like the members of our own grandmothers groups in Canada, they are also ageing and concerned about their grandchildren and the future.

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Meeting these women was inspiring and has absolutely cemented my commitment to keep going in my own work to act in solidarity with them.

— Laurie Wilson,
Victoria Grandmothers for Africa

One memorable visit was with Mamelani in Cape Town. They are a community and youth-focused organization that supports young adults transitioning out of Child and Youth Care Centres (CYCCs). Children go to CYCCs when it is not safe or possible for them to remain in their homes. When they turn 18, they age out of care and often have no support network waiting for them. Mamelani bridges this gap with a three-year program dedicated to improving outcomes around HIV, education, housing, mental health and social integration.

Assessments show that 90% of these young people are pursuing further education, starting internships or seeking employment — far above the average in South Africa — and 80% say they feel hopeful about their futures.

We spoke with current students and alumni. The honesty and clarity of their stories was spellbinding. Finding a place to belong through Mamelani was a recurring positive message. When asked to reflect about the day we spent together, one of the young men expressed surprise that women like us were still involved and doing good work. He said he thought that by our age most people would want to just “sit and chill.” That is clearly not the kind of grandmother or grandother that the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign attracts!

“Each grandmothers group demonstrates the strength of community,” shares Robin Scobie, VanGogos and One World Grannies

I was privileged to be one of the grandmothers and grandothers who participated in the *Grandmothers United in Solidarity* trip! It was the trip of a lifetime. The learning we each immersed in was powerful in every way. We connected with grandmothers in Eswatini and South Africa, with the amazing SLF staff who journeyed with us, with SLF partners and with one another. We spent time in cities — Manzini, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg — and travelled to beautiful rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal Province in

southeastern South Africa, an area with the highest prevalence of HIV in the country.

Wherever we encountered *gogos*, a Zulu word for grandmother, we were welcomed with singing, dancing and huge hugs. Despite language barriers, the connections we made during the visit offered profound lessons. With Grandmothers Against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA) in Khayelitsha, Cape Town’s largest township, we had the privilege to participate in their weekly meeting of representatives from 30 peer support and savings and loans groups for grandmothers.

Each grandmothers group demonstrates the strength of community. Together we exercised, sipped tea and beaded bracelets, which is one of many income-generating initiatives grandmothers have built. We shared stories and hugs and lunch, all the while deepening our sense of solidarity. GAPA's motto is "Together we are stronger!" This is true for grandmothers across Africa and Canada as well.

In 2006, when the International AIDS Conference was hosted in Toronto, Canada, grandmothers and other activists gathered in the city and drafted the Toronto Statement declaring: "We will not rest until they can rest."

In person, meeting the *gogos* who are the heart of their communities — caring for their families, earning incomes, growing food and advocating for human rights — it was clear their journey continues. The inequities they continue to face reminded me of the importance of global solidarity and renewed my own commitment to social justice and human rights.

On our last day we visited *dlalanathi*, an SLF partner in KwaZulu-Natal. *dlalanathi* means "play with us" in Zulu. It was a beautiful and powerful finish to our trip. *dlalanathi* was founded 25 years ago as a bereavement service for children and now offers a multitude of programs focused on emotional and mental health. Their programs continue to support children affected by trauma and loss, and address inequities in the context of HIV. In small groups, we visited programs for young families, youth and *gogos* and saw *dlalanathi*'s skilled and compassionate staff in action.

They work with individuals, families and communities, using play to nurture health and hope. *dlalanathi* gifted each visitor in our group a note that read, "Your compassion reaches across oceans and transforms lives ... thank you for standing with us and for understanding that play is not just joy — it is healing, connection and hope for the future."

I left with hope, grateful to learn from *gogos* and SLF partners, to stand with them, to amplify their voices, and to enrich our own life journeys together.



Joining MusicWorks staff at a school in South Africa, grandmothers and grandmothers like Robin Scobie were invited to participate in a music and dance session with students.

Race Against Time: *Twenty Years Later*

Twenty years ago, Stephen Lewis delivered the CBC Massey Lectures, *Race Against Time*. Confounded by the world's failure to adequately respond to the AIDS crisis in Africa, his lectures exposed the links between colonialism, inequalities, and the health and humanitarian injustices that continue today.

As UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa from 2001 until the end of 2006, Stephen witnessed staggering loss as well as remarkable courage and determination. Community leaders and

organizations emerged with experience and expertise but received minimal or no funding to adequately respond to HIV. As Stephen said at the time, "I cannot abide the willful inattention of so much of the international community." Today, as cuts to global health and HIV funding by governments around the world threaten an already underfunded global HIV response, millions of lives are again at risk.

Race Against Time remains a call to action. You can listen to one of the *Race Against Time* lectures at cbc.ca/radio/ideas in the Massey Lectures Archive, and the full series on iTunes. The book is available from publisher houseofanansi.com.



Photo Credit: Kellan Higgins

Global Fund advocacy in Canada and the power of grassroots campaigns



The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is the most vital global health funding in the world. Funded by governments and the private sector, it has saved 70 million lives since 2002. However, without new and bold pledges this replenishment year, as global funding for HIV continues to diminish, lives and futures are in jeopardy.

The SLF has been working with more than 20 allied organizations in Canada to advocate for the Canadian government to show leadership in global health and HIV responses by making a bold pledge to the Global Fund. More than 500 SLF supporters have emailed or called their Members of Parliament (MPs). Together with seven organizations, we launched a National Call-Your-MP Day, resulting in more than 150 calls to MPs in a single day. The SLF and the HIV Legal Network also sent an open letter to Prime Minister Carney in support of the Global Fund signed by 65 Canadian organizations and more than 150 international allies. Uniting across Canada and around the world, our collective voices are powerful.

As of going to print, the Government of Canada has not yet announced their recommitment to the Global Fund, but we are determined to continue to advocate for Canada's support for global health and human rights.

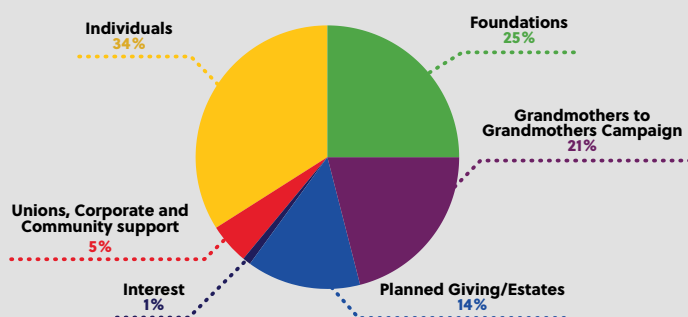
Financial Overview

With your support, the SLF raised \$9 million between July 2024 and June 2025 to fund 98 community-led organizations championing health and human rights in 14 countries across Africa.

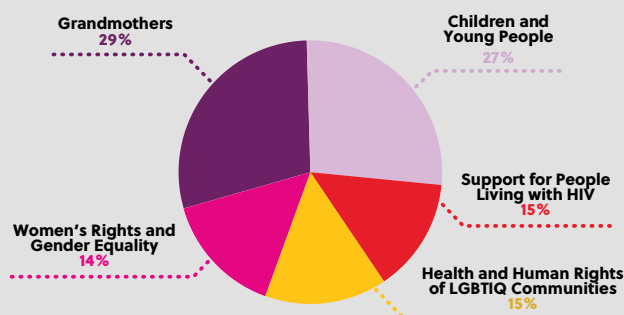
See our [audited financial statements](#) to learn more about how funds were allocated.

Financial Overview 2024–2025

Where our support comes from



Our Program support by area of work



What does it mean to Give a Day to end AIDS?

Give a Day is an impactful and simple way to champion health and human rights to end AIDS. Since 2004, each year we invite our SLF community across Canada to join us in commemorating World AIDS Day on December 1 by giving one day's pay in support of life-saving and life-improving HIV programs.

There are a few ways you can participate and help to raise critical awareness and funds. To make an immediate impact, simply calculate the equivalent of your one day's pay and make your donation at theslf.org/giveaday. You can also invite your friends, family and colleagues to get involved. Consider planning a fundraising event or challenge, in person or online. Every time you tell your networks about Give a Day, you increase your impact.

Together we can uphold health and human rights and protect decades of hard-won progress made against AIDS. Get started today! Visit theslf.org/giveaday or email community@stephenlewisfoundation.org.



Give the gift of solidarity this holiday season

Will you choose gifts that support health and human rights this holiday season? Tribute cards are beautiful, hopeful and impactful gifts. Simply make your tribute donation and select printed cards or e-cards to send to someone special in your life. We can mail cards on your behalf or send you cards to personalize and deliver yourself. Your contributions will support vital community responses to HIV by our grassroots partners in 14 countries across Africa.

Tribute cards and e-cards are available year-round and are a meaningful way to celebrate birthdays and other important milestones.

Order your holiday cards today at theslf.org/holidaycards2025



Monthly gifts from supporters like you are protecting gains made against AIDS.

For 41% of our community-led partners, the Stephen Lewis Foundation is their only or primary source of funds. Monthly gifts from supporters like you provide flexible and reliable funding that allows our partners to respond to the most urgent needs and priorities of their communities, and sustains their work over the long term, for even greater impact against the HIV epidemic.



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