

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD, INC.



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## A letter from the Executive Director



As we reflect on 2025, I am filled with gratitude and pride for what our community made possible at Underground Railroad. Every improvement we achieved this year was rooted in one simple belief: survivors deserve safety, dignity, and the power to make choices for themselves.

This year, we invested in our emergency shelter in meaningful ways. Our playground received major upgrades to making it a safe and joyful place for children to energize, move, and play. We also made an important shift in meal times at shelter, allowing survivors to prepare their own meals and store personal food items in their rooms, with access 24/7. This change was about far more than convenience. It was about restoring autonomy that violence and instability often strip away. It also directly addresses food insecurity for survivors who are experiencing homelessness and who rely on emergency shelter as their only safe option.

Healing also took a powerful and visible form this year through our inaugural Survivor Art Gallery at Studio 23. In collaboration with

Bay Area Women’s Center, Shelterhouse, Sexual Assault Center, and McDowell Healing Arts Center, survivors shared their stories through various artistic expressions. It was an honor to help create space where survivor voices could be seen and felt.

Looking ahead, we will continue this momentum. In the coming year, we plan a comprehensive overhaul of our emergency shelter, including extensive upgrades to the kitchen, dining area, bathrooms, and daycare. The upgrades focus on increasing efficiency, privacy, and accessibility for clients and staff. Playground improvements will also continue as we replace the rubber mulch foundation with artificial turf.

None of this happens in isolation. Every step forward is made possible by our community—by donors who give generously, volunteers who show up with compassion, partners who collaborate with purpose, and advocates who believe survivors deserve better. Thank you for standing with us. Together, we are building spaces where healing can begin and hope can grow.

Christi Birchmeier, CEO



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Sheryl Bivens**  
A&D Home Health

**Dawn Boucher**  
Mannor Group

**Terri Carmichael**  
Wells Fargo

**Stephanie Domina**  
Jolt Credit Union

**Ashley Getchell**  
Dupont

**Aeron Grigg**  
Flory Line Construction

**Angela Lund**  
Andrews Hooper Pavlik

**Mari McKenzie**  
Retired, Yeo & Yeo

**Kathy Moreno**  
Morley Companies

**Eric Neumeyer**  
My Member Insurance Agency

**Alycia Norton**  
Winner Fire Protection

**Jay Peplinski**  
Glastender

**Emma Rogers**  
Future Insurance Agency

**Darlene Stodolak**  
Wildfire Credit Union



## OUR MISSION

For almost 50 years,  
Underground Railroad has  
worked to empower survivors  
and create a culture of safety &  
respect in our community.

# Violence Prevention Is Health Prevention

## 1

### Maternal & Child Health - Safety is foundational to healthy families.

- The leading cause of death for pregnant women is **homicide**, most often by an **intimate partner**
- Violence during pregnancy is linked to **low birth weight, preterm birth, miscarriage, and maternal depression.**
- Children exposed to violence are at higher risk for **developmental delays, chronic stress, and future victimization.**

#### Our impact:

By providing emergency shelter, advocacy, and safety planning, Underground Railroad helps parents escape dangerous environments—supporting **healthier pregnancies, safer infants, and more stable childhoods.**



## 2

### Mental Health & Substance Use - Trauma and violence are deeply connected to mental health outcomes.

- Survivors of domestic and sexual violence experience **higher rates of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicidal ideation.**
- Survivors are **2–3 times more likely** to use substances as a coping mechanism.
- Early trauma is one of the **strongest predictors** of long-term mental health challenges.

#### Our impact:

Through trauma-informed advocacy, crisis intervention, and referrals, Underground Railroad reduces isolation, supports healing, and helps interrupt the cycle between **violence, untreated trauma, and substance misuse.**



When survivors are safe,  
communities are healthier.



### Obesity & Chronic Illness - Violence affects long-term physical health.

- Survivors of abuse have higher rates of **heart disease, diabetes, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, and obesity.**
- Chronic stress from violence increases inflammation and disrupts hormones that regulate **sleep, metabolism, and immune function.**
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including violence, are **strongly linked** to adult chronic illness.

#### Our impact:

By preventing ongoing abuse and connecting survivors to care, Underground Railroad helps **support long-term physical health and lower chronic disease risk.**



BWell Saginaw shines a spotlight on three significant health issues facing the people who live, learn, and work in Saginaw County.

Addressing domestic and sexual violence strengthens families, improves mental and physical health outcomes, and advances Saginaw's shared vision for a healthier future.





## 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

relax.  
respire.  
reflite.

# FROM CAR CAMPING TO SAFE HARBOR

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When Courtney first called Underground Railroad, she and her two young sons were sleeping in their car. They moved every day to a new location to stay hidden from her abusive partner. To keep her boys from being scared, Courtney called it “car camping.” Behind the fun language was a mother who felt exhausted, depressed, and close to giving up. Underground Railroad staff immediately made room for Courtney in emergency shelter, providing a safe place for her family to rest, breathe, and begin to regroup. In shelter, Courtney found not only safety, but people who believed in her and

worked together on her behalf. As she regained her footing, Courtney secured a third-shift job, and URR offered the flexibility and support she needed to balance work, parenting, and healing. Last Fall, Courtney’s Advocate collaborated with Housing Staff to help Courtney move from shelter into stable housing. Today, Courtney and her sons have a home. It’s a place to finally mend their spirits and rebuild at their own pace. Reflecting on her journey, Courtney shared that she now feels stronger, and that her faith in people has been restored—all because of Underground Railroad.



# COOKIN' UP SOMETHING NEW

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Each year we continue to reimagine our shelter to ensure it is a place of dignity, choice and healing. In 2025 we made new strides to a more survivor-centric space by adding a micro fridge unit to each shelter room, and increasing survivor access to the communal kitchen which includes requesting food items so they can prepare their own meals for themselves and their families. Giving survivors the ability to decide when and what they eat is a simple step to restore a sense of autonomy that

is essential for healing. This change allows survivors to honor their personal preferences, dietary needs, and cultural food traditions. Survivors take pride in sharing their own family recipes which fosters a sense of community. Creating this space for self-determination helps survivors feel more empowered as they reconnect with their independence and confidence. Survivor-centric spaces are about more than safety. They are about respect, restoration, and hope.



## 2025 HIGHLIGHTS





2025 HIGHLIGHTS

# SEASON OF HOPE

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One of the brightest moments this year was the incredible success of our Adopt A Family program. A record 71 families staying in our emergency shelter and housing programs were adopted for the holidays. The holiday season is always special at Underground Railroad, but this year was truly extraordinary. We witnessed the very best of our community, generous donors opening their hearts and families experiencing relief, dignity, and genuine joy during an otherwise difficult chapter of their lives. One mom

wrote, "I can't express how much this means to me and my family. After everything we've been through, the Christmas dinner and the gifts made me believe in kindness again. My kids were so happy when they opened their presents. It was the first time in a long time I felt like we could have a Christmas like we used to." Our community transformed the holidays for a record 71 families and reminded them that they are not alone. This generosity didn't just give gifts, it gave hope.



# A PLACE FOR PLAY

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With the help of Frankenmuth Morning Rotary Club, 2025 saw the first step of a playground upgrade completed at our 24/7 emergency shelter. After securing a match grant, the Rotary Club donated over \$30,000 in funding to upgrade the shelter's old commercial playground pieces. The project added a sunshade, benches, teeter totter, spring rider, bikes, and pod spinner to the grounds, as well as a new Gaga Ball pit. Rotary Club members also rolled up their sleeves and helped assemble the new equipment on-site, turning their commitment

into tangible impact for the shelter's residents. For their work, the group was honored as Volunteer of the Year at the 2025 Empowerment Dinner & Celebration, receiving a special plaque as recognition. The new playground will serve hundreds of children each year, offering a happy place to play and connect during their stay. Phase two of the project will begin in 2026, replacing the mulch foundation with artificial turf that is more durable, allergen and insect resistant, and much more accessible for children of all abilities.





## 2025 HIGHLIGHTS



2025 HIGHLIGHTS

# FROM SCROLLY TO SPARKLING

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Thanks to a generous sponsorship, one local elementary school had a Girls on the Run season full of growth, joy, and unforgettable moments. At the start of the season, Ramona seemed upset to be enrolled in the program. She needed lots of encouragement to even attend practices. One of the first sessions explored the idea of belonging. Afterward, Ramona quietly shared with one of our assistant coaches that she never felt like she belonged at school, and that no one liked her. It was a heartbreaking moment, but reaffirmed how important the space would be for her. Throughout the season, Ramona would often arrive to practice with a scowl, a look that was affectionately called her “scroll face.” But when the lesson began, Ramona’s frown would

fade, replaced by smiles and laughter as she talked with teammates. She gave honest, thoughtful answers during group discussions, and her teammates began to admire her for her truthfulness and strength. During the team’s Community Impact Project, they visited a senior assisted living facility and brought the residents flowers and handmade cards. Ramona was enthusiastic and fully engaged, chatting warmly with the residents and offering them flowers with the sweetest smile. The way she connected with them inspired both the coaches and her peers. Ramona went from a girl who felt unseen and disliked, to one who felt accepted, valued, and capable of making a difference in someone else’s day.



# HEALING BETWEEN THE LINES

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We have all heard the phrase 'a picture is worth a thousand words'. Art has the power to tell stories that words cannot do alone. This year, we were proud to co-host a first of its kind exhibit in the Great Lakes Bay Region that brought together artwork from survivors of domestic and sexual violence in our community. The exhibit helped to raise up survivor voices, gave our community the opportunity to see the impacts of these forms of violence, and witness healing through their art. By continuing

to expand the definition of 'fine art' to include these deeply personal creations, we were able to honor the resilience of survivors and also foster a more inclusive and compassionate community. The Survivor Art Gallery was a collaboration between Underground Railroad, Bay Area Women's Center, Shelterhouse, Sexual Assault Center, The McDowell Healing Arts Center, and Studio 23. The project was sponsored in part by Women in Leadership Great Lakes Bay Region.





2025 HIGHLIGHTS

# OUR CLIENTS

- 24/7 Helpline
- 24 Hour Emergency Response
- Emergency Shelter
- Counseling & Advocacy
- Court Support
- Housing Assistance
- Youth Services
- Safe Visitation & Exchange



## 2025 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

4,702  
crisis calls  
answered



14,011  
nights of  
shelter



2,011 hours  
of free  
childcare



78 families  
received housing  
assistance



5,368 hours of  
individual &  
group counseling



631 PPOs filed  
& 2,627 court hearings  
attended



117 families  
used Safeplace  
visitation & exchange



## 2025 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

3,853 K-12  
students learned  
about healthy  
relationships



372  
girls were  
inspired through  
Girls on the Run



122 people  
attended the  
Mid Michigan  
Human Trafficking  
Conference



2,323 downloads of  
the Touchy  
Subjects podcast



323  
community  
education & public  
awareness events



# OUR COMMUNITY

- K-12 Healthy Relationship Curriculum
- Community Awareness, Education & Training
- Mid Michigan Human Trafficking Task Force
- Girls on the Run Great Lakes Bay
- Touchy Subjects Podcast



# YOUR IMPACT

- Advocates for Change Luncheon
- Empowerment Dinner & Celebration
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Holiday Giving Programs
- Underground Railroad Resale



## 2025 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

567 volunteers  
assisted with  
projects



10,576  
volunteer hours  
were donated



206 adults & children  
were adopted  
for the holidays



\$101,195 was  
donated to  
annual fundraisers



Over \$450,000 worth of  
merchandise was  
donated to Underground  
Railroad Resale



\$66,507 worth of resale  
store vouchers were  
redeemed by clients





# REVENUES

## INCOME

**\$3,773,464**

Contributions	\$481,126	12.75%
Rent & Fees	\$41,925	1.11%
Grants	\$2,792,151	73.99%
Interest	\$49,390	1.31%
Special Events	\$82,242	2.18%
Store Sales	\$191,654	5.08%
Miscellaneous	\$134,976	3.58%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$3,773,464</b>	<b>100%</b>



## CONTRIBUTIONS

**\$481,126**

Businesses	\$65,517	13.62%
Churches	\$8,684	1.80%
Clubs / Groups	\$22,533	4.68%
Foundations	\$190,075	39.51%
Individuals	\$116,859	24.29%
In Kind	\$72,657	15.10%
United Way	\$4,801	1.00%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$481,126</b>	<b>100%</b>



# EXPENSES



## PROGRAMS & SERVICES

**\$3,779,562**

Shelter & Services	\$1,195,840	31.64%
Court Support Programs	\$458,915	12.14%
Transitional Housing	\$1,143,663	30.26%
Sexual Assault	\$73,442	1.94%
Fundraising	\$110,563	2.93%
Education/Outreach	\$133,453	3.53%
Management/General	\$356,478	9.43%
Resale Shop	\$307,208	8.13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,779,562</b>	<b>100%</b>



## OPERATING EXPENSES

**\$3,779,562**

Personnel	\$2,395,485	63.38%
Occupancy	\$279,635	7.40%
Office Expenses	\$253,851	6.72%
Specific Assistance	\$526,790	13.94%
Miscellaneous	\$49,224	1.30%
Interest	\$11,841	0.31%
Travel & Conferences	\$58,546	1.55%
Advertising & Recruitment	\$3,847	0.10%
Depreciation	\$188,321	4.98%
Membership Dues	\$12,022	0.32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,779,562</b>	<b>100%</b>



The Empowerment Circle is a special group of major donors whose annual support helps empower survivors and inspire change in Saginaw County. Members receive special recognition throughout the year.

**Inspiration Level**  
**\$2,000+**

Mary Sue Barry  
Tammy Bernier  
Warren & Anna Booms  
Mary Chris & James Church  
Leslie & Terry Duperon  
Martha & John Kaczynski  
Mari McKenzie & Jeffrey Roberts  
Jeanne Murphy Causley  
Annette Rao  
Jeannette Ruhl  
Amy Shaw  
Kristina & David Szarenski

**Partner Level**  
**\$1,000-\$1,999**

David & Jody Becker  
Julie & Peter Bender  
Letitia Bolt  
Louis & Karen Constan  
Thomas & Mary Damuth  
Brianna Evans  
Todd & Lumpeny Hall  
Linda & Howard Hollingshead  
Julie Johnson  
Mary Metzger  
Marcia Anne Pahr  
Dr. Babu Paidipaty  
Gene & Lori Pickelman

**Partner Level cont.**  
**\$1,000-\$1,999**

Sally Quaderer  
Jill Rodriguez  
Arleen Schrank  
Matthew & Emily Sczepanski  
Joyce Van Ochten  
Valentina Woodcraft  
David & Michelle Youngstrom  
Michael & Kimberly Zehnder

**Ally Level**  
**\$500-\$999**

Martin & Nancy Adrian  
Abdulaziz Al-Omair  
Kristi & Dave Bellsky  
Barb & Brent Boggess  
Julie Boyd  
Carol Champagne  
Jaime Cramer  
Sandra & Allen Dalton  
Brittany Dicken  
Tracy & Brian Dixon  
Cindra Finney  
Ashley Getchell  
Amy & Mike Grossi  
Janice Hennessy  
Sharon Hopper & Lee Latocki  
Jennifer Hutchison  
Shari Kennett & RJ Paullin  
Thomas Lane  
Kay & Steve List  
Suzanne & John Lozano

Underground Railroad 's Empowerment Circle is named for the philosophy that drives our mission and work. The list below reflects gifts made between October 1, 2024 & September 30, 2025.

**Ally Level cont.**

**\$500-\$999**

Betty Lou Marx  
Jeffrey & Tina McCulloch  
Andrew & Stephanie Mehl  
Thomas & Patricia Middleton  
Joanna Nelson  
Dimitrios & Jamie Nisidis  
Pat & Elvira O'Brien  
Jay & Denise Peplinski  
Susan & Robert Piesko  
Lynn & George Puia  
James & Beth Reindel  
Julie Ringley  
Elinor Saunders  
Christina Schian-Aldrich  
Joseph Sienko & Joan Hirschenberger  
Pat & Katharine Tessin  
Marcia & Darryl Thomas  
James & Verna Vandeveldel Trust  
Richard Waldman  
Edwin & Jill Wetmore  
Kristen & Adam Wuerfel

**Friend Level**

**\$250-\$499**

Paul Albosta  
John & Sharon Benson  
Holly Bostwick  
Jo Brownlie  
Dawn Cloutier  
Jimmy & Stephanie Greene  
Emily & Garth Gruno  
Katherine Guerra

**Friend Level cont.**

**\$250-\$499**

Jenny Hlavac  
Paula Holevac  
Stephanie John  
Judith Johnson  
Peggy Jones  
Carl King  
Barbara Klimaszewski  
Karen Lang Krause  
Carol McClellan  
Krisanne Mcconnell  
Kathy Moreno  
Eric & Carli Neumeyer  
Randall & Myra Norton  
Rachel Pappas  
Denise Reiling  
Denise Robertson  
Drewe & Larry Robinson  
Galileo & Judy Sarmiento  
Vickie Schmitzer  
Caroline Scott  
Kathleen Snook  
Mary & Joe Spadafore  
Mike & Darlene Stodolak  
Jeannie Talbot  
Janet Timbs  
Frederick & Sue Tobin  
Janice Van Dyke-Zeilstra  
John & Anne West  
Steven & Deborah Witt  
Zachary Yancer  
Drew & Tracy Zehnder  
William & Karen Zehnder



## LEAVING A LEGACY

Through a planned gift you can create your own philanthropic vision and make a meaningful impact in our community for generations to come. Planned giving is your intention to contribute a gift to an organization during or beyond your lifetime. These contributions help Underground Railroad sustain survivor safety, healing, and hope for a better future.

# Your lasting impact can be made through...

## **Gift in a Will or Trust**

Remembering Underground Railroad with a bequest is an excellent legacy for you and your family

## **Retirement Plans**

Tax-deferred retirement assets are attractive assets for charitable giving. Items include IRAs, 401k, 403b plans, pensions, etc.

## **Charitable Remainder Trust**

Receive stable and secure income for a period of years based on value of trust. When the trust terminates, the remainder passes to Underground Railroad

## **Charitable Lead Trust**

The reverse of the charitable remainder trust. The income from the trust is first paid to Underground Railroad (leading the way). After a specified number of years, the trust allows you to pass on the assets to your heirs

## **Life Insurance**

Name Underground Railroad as the beneficiary of your policy or donate an active, paid up policy

Contact Underground Railroad for more information,  
and consult your professional advisors to determine which gift is best for you.

