

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

Christi Birchmeier, CEO



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Sheryl Bivens
A&D Home Health

Dawn Boucher
Mannor Group

Terri Carmichael
Wells Fargo Advisors

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

When survivors are safe, communities are healthier.



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**.



3

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**.



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**.





2025 HIGHLIGHTS

FROM CAR CAMPING TO SAFE HARBOR

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

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.



SEASON OF HOPE

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.



2025 HIGHLIGHTS



A PLACE FOR PLAY

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.





FROM SCROLLY TO SPARKLING

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 "scrolly 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.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS



HEALING BETWEEN THE LINES

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.



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



Legacy Giving

Your Lasting Impact

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 as part of financial or estate planning. These gifts may include bequests, charitable trusts, appreciated assets, life insurance, retirement plans, or real estate. These contributions help Underground Railroad sustain survivor safety, healing, and hope for a better future.



Learn more about our planned giving program

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

EXPENSES



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%
Total:	\$3,773,464	100%



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%
Total	\$3,779,562	100%



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%
Total:	\$481,126	100%



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%
Total	\$3,779,562	100%





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.

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.

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
 Brianne 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

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.

