**Annual Report 2018-19**

**Message from the Executive Director**

Deborah Gold

It has been a productive and fulfilling year at BALANCE; this brief report covers our major achievements in this fiscal year.

Organization:

1. In 2018-19, we received 3 foundation grants, having sent out 31 applications. One of these was to support Toronto’s first ever long form Self-defense course for persons who are blind, and we had 9 registered who have been attending the classes regularly during May and June. Last fiscal year was also a landmark one for grants as we successfully partnered with Cdn. Council on Rehabilitation and Work to write a grant for the United Way to support young adults who are blind, up to the age of 29, in THIS fiscal year, in their employment - existing experience program.
2. In July of last year, we achieved our Accreditation through Canadian Council on Accreditation (CCA). “Shout-out” to Chelsea Mohler, our Accreditation Lead, for leading us through the process and ensuring we were ready to be assessed.
3. In July of last year, we finalized our Fund Development Plan with the help of the fundraising firm The Good Partnership, and tabled it for the Board’s approval. The plan was good for one year, and involved several key ideas to consider. The first was our first ever Peer to Peer fundraising campaign.
4. The Because of BALANCE fundraising campaign asked BALANCE clients to talk to their relatives and friends about how BALANCE had helped them, and ask for their support in a fundraising campaign which would feature their stories online. In addition, for this first campaign, BALANCE staff stepped forward and participated as well, telling their own stories and seeking donations from their networks. In the second half of the one month campaign, an anonymous donor offered to match what was raised in the last 2 weeks of the campaign. The total amount raised was $15,644, and these funds are being used to enhance group programming and support professional development opportunities for staff.
5. BALANCE responded to client input received in 2017 and hired a Volunteer Coordinator in August, 2018. The program was designed and launched in December, 2018, and Anita Laurnitus began as our new Volunteer Coordinator in February. We have 4 Volunteer position descriptions on the go right now, and recruitment is ongoing. We are very proud to once again be increasing our bench strength in this way, so that we can be of greater service to our clients.

Program:

In this year we served 151 individuals and provided 2165 hours of service. We also had 91 participations in group programming to improve mental, physical or emotional wellbeing, and foster independence.

1. Group activity increase—East End goal achieved, found a location, now running 2 kinds of wellness groups successfully in the east end of the city at Woodbine and Danforth-Sharing Space Support Group, and a 12 week Yoga program.
2. Opera Atelier partnership resulted in an afternoon of opera education for our clients, at the Opera Atelier rehearsal space, and the opportunity for our clients to also attend a performance
3. Continuation and expansion of the BlindSquare training program
4. Continuation of iPhone classes
5. Continuation of our ongoing Strength and Stability program at Four Villages CHC
6. Balancing the Power women’s group continued, we ran it twice last year
7. We created and ran our first Anxiety and Stress Management course

This past year I’m also proud to report that BALANCE was host and educator to a high school student who assisted in the office, and 6 students working for placement credit in the office and with clients under staff supervision, from 4 post-secondary institutions, in 3 different fields of study. I want to take a moment to thank our clients for helping our staff members to educate these students about your needs and letting them into your lives in order to improve their education and shift their perspective about working with people with visual disabilities. BALANCE can now certainly claim we are a co-educator of college and university students who are training to work in health and human services.

I’d also like to thank our wonderful senior volunteers, the members of the Board of Directors, for your commitment to the BALANCE cause, and your unfailing support of our clients. It has been wonderful to work with you all this year, and I truly appreciate your energy, kindness and dedication. I look forward to another productive year, already well and truly begun with our new strategic planning process.

Finally, I wish to thank Mr. Bob Stark for his passion, commitment and excellent support of the BALANCE staff team, and my work as E.D., over the past 2 years as Board Chair. You have captained this ship with a steady hand. I welcome Michelle McQuigge as the new Board Chair, and look forward to working closely with you both in the year to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Gold

Executive Director

June 14, 2019