



Vancouver
Botanical
Gardens
Association

EDUCATION BURSARIES

2025 project report



A photograph of three children from behind, standing in a lush garden. A girl with long blonde hair in a green dress is in the center, a boy with a braid and a tan cap is to the left, and a girl with long dark hair is to the right. They are looking at various plants and trees. A dark green rounded rectangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the table of contents.

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As VanDusen Botanical Garden turns 50, I have been reflecting upon half a century of education at the Gardens.

Many core elements have remained unchanged; children still peer into ponds to see what life stirs within, they watch and learn as bees pollinate the flowers, and they spend time outdoors making memories with friends.

The most striking change has not been in what we do, but who we do it with.

Outdoor learning was once seen as somewhat frivolous - a pastime, and not a serious academic pursuit. Today, with rapid urbanization and the rising impact of climate change, what the Gardens can teach us has become more relevant than ever.

Thanks to donor-funded bursaries, these lessons are now in reach for everyone, no matter their circumstances.

I am delighted to share this report, highlighting the impact bursaries have had on our community. If you are one of the people who made this happen you have my deepest gratitude. As you will read, you made an incredible difference for those who needed it the most, and have made this perhaps the greatest year for learning in our Garden's history.



Chantal Martin,

Director of Education and Research,
Vancouver Botanical Gardens Association

"The hands on experience really made the learning memorable. The students got to actively explore the woodland area. Cathy was great in teaching environmental responsibility and reminding students that even insects need habitat."

**- Grade 4 teacher,
Queen Elizabeth Elementary**



Overview

Following on from the success of 2024, this year has continued to be a period of excellence in education at the Gardens. Ongoing support meant that once again, no child in need was denied an educational experience at the Gardens.

This year, the security afforded to us by bursary funding allowed the VBGA to proactively reach out to promote bursaries, substantially increasing the number of people who were able to benefit from this program. Over the past 3 years, an average of 1,016 bursaries were administered annually. In 2025 that rose to an incredible 2,653 people, far surpassing previous records.

More than a thousand children (1,168) from low-income families participated in fully subsidized education at the Gardens. These are children face enormous barriers to green spaces, and are often the ones who benefit most from outdoor learning.

Children continue to be regular bursary recipients, however this was the first year where we witnessed a substantial increase in bursary support for seniors (1,159) and teachers (326), as a direct result of the unprecedented support of Canadian philanthropists.

2,653
Bursaries provided

105%
More bursaries
provided
compared to
2024

48
Unique schools
and charities
supported

7,318
Hours of fully
subsidized
education

100%
Of funding came
from the public

"They sat with their sketchbooks for long periods of time just taking in the lovely scenery and enjoying their time. The beautiful flowers, geese, ducks and the turtle were greatly appreciated by all!"

**- Grade 2 teacher,
Moberley Elementary**



Seniors, coming to us primarily from neighborhood houses, care homes, and charities, were able to take part in guided tours and activities designed specifically to meet their needs. We have long been aware of the value seniors have for the Gardens. After 50 years we are delighted to finally be able to offer subsidized education to any seniors who need it.

Teachers have been a regular sight at the Gardens for years, but this is the first year bursaries were offered to subsidize professional development costs to encourage teachers to bring the Garden inside the classroom. Donor support provided teachers more than 3,000 hours of fully subsidized professional development. With each teacher reaching 25 children or more every year, these fully subsidized courses are expected to impact more than 8,000 children annually

and sped up by the pandemic and rising inflation.

With the increasing number of people needing financial assistance to access education at the Gardens, and with the importance of botanical education growing steadily, it is imperative that public support continues to grow as well. 2026 is expected to be the first year in our history where more than \$100,000 is required to fully subsidize education at the Gardens – a number which will only be achievable if our community supports it.

While uncertainty is part of every plant-lover's life, and while I am not sure what the future will hold, I am confident that the VBGA, with the backing of our supporters, will continue to empower thousands of people for many years to come.

Growing need

Public support has greatly increased the number of Canadians who are able to learn and grow at the Gardens, however along with this growth, we have also seen a substantial increase in the demand for our services. The population of Metro Vancouver has exploded in recent years, with a staggering 17% growth between 2021 – 2024. The number of requests for bursaries has trended upwards every year in line with population growth,

"My child loves sharing fun facts about nature. They have always been fascinated by the hidden complexities of nature, from the tiniest seeds to towering trees. This camp's unique blend of exploring microscopic life and ancient, larger-than-life plants aligns perfectly with their love for science and storytelling about Earth's history."

- 2025 Bursary Recipient



Who benefitted from bursaries in 2025?

Thanks to the outstanding support of several key donors, the number of bursaries increased substantially, from 1,295 in 2024 to 2,653 in 2025. This growth was primarily in two key categories; seniors bursaries and teacher professional development.

Prior to 2024, bursaries were reserved exclusively for children. While 44% of bursaries continue to be designated towards youth, several major contributions given specifically to support seniors opened up hundreds of new opportunities.

From charities for the aged, to neighborhood houses, seniors were given opportunities to learn and engage with the Gardens at a time when many face social isolation and economic hardship. For several groups of seniors who were unable to make it to the Gardens, our team came to them, offering new educational activities tailored to suit the needs of the seniors. Each were given an opportunity to come together, learn, and relax at the Gardens thanks to donor support.

Teachers made up 12% of bursary recipients, and while the average cost per teacher was comparatively high (\$107.57), each teacher spent on average over 10 hours in education, for a total of 3,259 hours of learning (or 45% of all subsidized learning hours). Most courses were attended by teachers from Greater Vancouver, but hundreds of teachers attending our online education series came from across Canada.

By volume, youth bursaries were primarily in the form of school field trips (1,144, 98%). A further 24 children attended educational camps. Although field trips were the largest recipient of bursaries by volume, when you consider the hours of education provided, the gap is far smaller (1,505 hours for field trips versus 900 hours for camps). Children ranged from ages 3-18, with the majority in grades K-5.

Our audience came from a range of demographics largely representative of the local community (*note: for privacy reasons, we do not collect data on ethnicity or gender*).

"Thank you so much for the generosity and letting my students visit the Gardens. This was probably the first time they had ever been to a botanical garden."

**- Grade 4 teacher,
Lord Kelvin Elementary**



Trends & Learnings

There has been a growing interest in wellness related activities beyond purely educational ones

Our well established bursary programs for children continue to grow, but uptake is slower among adults. As a new program, this may take several years to establish

Teacher interest in free professional development was even higher than expected. Courses are operating at maximum capacity with long wait lists

Transportation costs have risen sharply and continue to be a barrier for schools

Children share that anxieties related to climate change are improved when they are given practical steps to support local biodiversity

As Vancouver continues to diversify, a multicultural staff is needed to ensure content is tailored to our audience

Our Learning Garden was a highly rated part of every experience, but more can be done during off-season periods

School groups are looking for additional learning opportunities before and after their visit. Offering additional virtual or remote resources to teachers could greatly expand the value of their visit

"I have 2 Indigenous children living with their foster sibling. By attending nature-based programs it allows them to connect to their land, and time in nature with each other is the best healer."

**- 2025, Parent,
Bursary Recipient**



Looking to the future

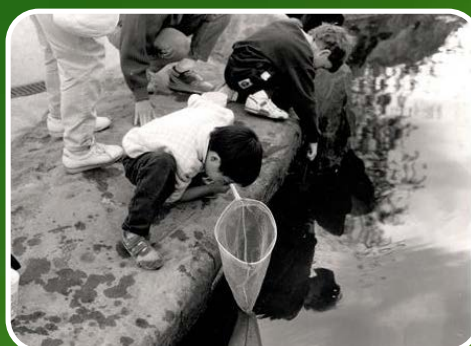
The need for bursaries will continue to grow. We estimate that the need will rise above the predicted rate of population growth (around 1% per year) and inflation (around 2% per year). Based on recent data, we predict a steady increase of between 5-8% per year between now and 2030 in the funding required to maintain full bursary coverage.

What we cannot be certain of is whether donations will increase at the same rate.

Philanthropy is always a somewhat uncertain field, and yet my conversations with our supporters gives me hope. The importance of education at the Gardens is well understood, and our stellar reputation, built over the past fifty years, has given our funders confidence that their donations will always be used wisely.

We move into 2026 with strong foundations. To meet the growing demand for education we are in the process of developing new classes for people of all ages, as well as a pilot project for a virtual field trip of Bloedel Conservatory which will deliver learning to children across Canada. A new indoor hydroponic garden will be installed at VanDusen to help educate visitors on how they can grow plants in any apartment, and we are considering expansions to the Learning Garden, should funding be available.

Thanks to the unwavering support of our donors, I am confident that we can continue to ensure any person with a love of nature and a passion for learning can find what they need here.





Final budget

Field Trips	\$22,475
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Transport Costs	\$5,090
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Nature Camps	\$11,634
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Seniors Bursaries	\$14,871
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Teacher Pro-D	\$35,070
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Associated Costs	\$8,898
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Total	\$97,876
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This budget states our current and upcoming expenditures. In-kind donations such as volunteer hours and donated plants & seeds are not included.

To learn more or to provide support for these areas in 2025, please call:

250 397 0390 or email: fundraising@vandusen.org

Thank you

There are many parts of my job that I love. I work in perhaps the most beautiful place in Canada, I work with some of the most passionate and knowledgeable people in the sector, and I get to share my love of nature with the next generation.

But being with people as they explore the Gardens for the first time, knowing that they have this opportunity because of the kindness of our community, gives me a sense of fulfillment unlike any other.

For thousands of people facing financial hardship, these bursaries have given a chance to learn, a moment of respite, and countless memories they will cherish for a lifetime.

If you have been one of the people who has made this all possible, thank you. Each moment in the Gardens that you have given to someone in need is a gift - one that has the power to educate, inspire, and create lasting change.

With deepest gratitude,

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Chantal Martin', with a large, stylized initial 'C' and a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

Chantal Martin

Director, Education & Research
Vancouver Botanical Gardens Association

I was absolutely shocked when I saw a full credit for the two camps we registered for. It brought tears to my eyes. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts. This bursary is above and beyond what we had hoped for and has helped us out immensely. Our oldest daughter has been attending your camps for many years and it has always been the highlight of her summer. And as she enjoys her final year, our youngest will have her first. Thank you for all the friends they have ^{made} and will make. Thank you for all the wonderful things they have learned, and will learn. Your summer camps amongst the magical gardens are truly something special. Thank you so much.

Special thanks to the following people whose generosity made this all possible.

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Linda Farrell

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