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Black Community Network

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DESTA Black  
Community  
Network

2023

ANNUAL REPORT

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# NOTHING BUT

## Empowering Communities, Building Futures: A Year of Milestones and Impact

2023 has been a remarkable journey of growth, innovation, and resilience for DESTA Black Community Network. As we reflect on our accomplishments, we celebrate the collective efforts that have propelled us toward our mission of promoting economic empowerment, addressing food insecurity, supporting Black food sovereignty, advocating for social justice and wellness within our community. The unwavering dedication of our partners, staff, volunteers, and community members has been the cornerstone of our success, enabling us to create meaningful change and provide vital support to those who need it most.

As we continue into 2024, DESTA remains committed to expanding our initiatives and deepening our impact. From launching a Community Food Pantry to refining our employability programming to enhancing our social justice and wellness programming, we are poised to continue our work in empowering Black communities to overcome personal and systemic barriers.

Thank you for being part of our journey. Together, we will continue to build a brighter, more equitable future for all.

# MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

I am thrilled to share DESTA’s incredible achievements in 2023! This year brought its own share of obstacles, but DESTA not only adapted but soared to new heights in fulfilling its mission.

Thanks to Cassandra’s inspiring leadership and the team’s unwavering passion, we have launched and expanded several transformative programs that are making a profound impact on the social, economic, and mental well-being of our vibrant community.

Whether tackling food insecurity head-on with our Garden Share Program, empowering future entrepreneurs with the Food Business Incubator, or deepening the conversation around Social Justice with our award-winning podcast, “Stories from the Inside Out,” we know that our uniquely tailored initiatives are enriching the lives of Black people throughout Montreal.

Your steadfast support has been invaluable, and we are excited to continue our collaboration through 2024 and beyond, creating even more positive change together.

With sincere gratitude,

**Dexter Peart, Chairman of the Board**



“Your steadfast support has been invaluable, and we are excited to continue our collaboration through 2024 and beyond, creating even more positive change together.”

# OUR MISSION

Based in Little Burgundy and serving participants across Greater Montreal, DESTA offers access to a hub of services and partnerships that empower the Black, anglophone community in Montreal through programs rooted in social and economic justice. We offer holistic, individualized and collective services and advocacy to break down barriers and promote well-being and opportunity.

We offer programs and services in:

- Education
- Employability & Entrepreneurship
- Social Justice and Re-entry
- Food security
- Wellness



# OUR VISION

We envision a society where members of the Black community are represented, valued and their contributions celebrated in all spheres of life; a society; where Black community members can reach their full potential and thrive.



# OUR REACH

**400**

PARTICIPANTS SERVED  
ACROSS OUR PROGRAMMING

**750**

LISTENERS OF OUR PODCAST  
'STORIES FROM THE INSIDE OUT'

**3300**

INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS

**\$714K**

FUNDS RAISED FOR THE  
BLACK COMMUNITY

## CONNECTING BLACK YOUTH WITH OPPORTUNITY

Throughout the past year, Quebec's economic downturn has made it even more challenging for our community to thrive. Despite these challenges, DESTA Work continued its focus on employability by advancing key partnerships in growth industries with a marked lack of diversity – namely media, film, and video game production. Our focus on upskilling and mentorship opportunities enabled our participants to expand their networks and expand their horizons.

**209** PARTICIPANTS REGISTERED ON OUR ONLINE JOB BOARD

**87** PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED OUR SKILLS TRAINING COURSES

**15** PARTICIPANTS RECEIVED INDIVIDUAL COACHING FOR JOB SEARCH AND CV PREP

**15** ENTREPRENEURS SUPPORTED

**8** DEAL PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS (PROGRAM FOR ADULTS TO COMPLETE THEIR SECONDARY EDUCATION)

**5** MENTORSHIP PLACEMENTS

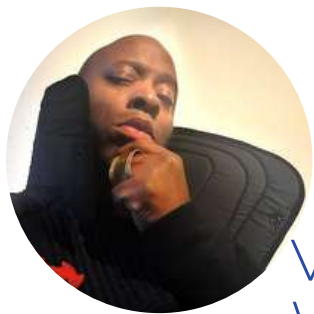


# PERSPECTIVES IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY WITH FONDATION DYNASTIE

In 2023, Desta partnered with Fondation Dynastie to launch a bilingual networking event and industry panel moderated by Tracy Paulotte, Head of Fondation Dynastie's Programming and Outreach. Established in 2017, Gala Dynastie amplifies Black personalities excelling in the media, arts, and culture industries in Montreal and Quebec.

Featuring guest panelists, Aicha Diallo (ReThink), Hager Namly (Telefilm Canada), Elya Myers (Vaco), and Nicole De Vrieze (Ubisoft), this event attracted 40 Black professionals who participated in an engaging discussion outlining pathways to career success and centering Black voices within the media – film, television – and video game production industries.





## VIDEO GAME PRODUCTION AND DESIGN WITH MISCELLANEUM STUDIOS

Working in collaboration with Lateef Martin, CEO/Creative Director of production house Miscellaneum Studios, DESTA offered a 4-part workshop guiding attendees through the ins and outs of video game development, best practices, industry challenges, and funding strategies for aspiring industry professionals in 2023.

## CONTENT CREATION AND PERSONAL BRANDING WITH HARVIN HILAIRE



DESTA also partnered with Harvin Hilaire, digital marketing and brand specialist at Clearsum, to offer a series of workshops covering personal branding, content creation, business content, and optimization techniques (establishing KPIs, goal setting) for Black youth interested in marketing careers.



# GUIDING BLACK ENTREPRENEURS THROUGH EVERY STAGE OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

In collaboration with the Ujamaa Initiative for Black Entrepreneurship (UIBE) and Concordia University's Community Service Initiative (CSI), Desta operates a comprehensive 12-week Black Entrepreneurship Business Readiness Bootcamp. This bootcamp equips aspiring Black English-speaking entrepreneurs and business owners with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the dynamic world of business by delving into every aspect of building and growing a successful business. Bootcamp participants receive insider knowledge on how to create a business plan, learn how to run their business and how to apply for funding opportunities.

## ***Growth Wheel Coaching***

DESTA's GrowthWheel Coaching platform offers Black entrepreneurs with advice and guidance on tactics, solutions and insights into 20 different areas including Business Concept, Customer Relations, Operations and Organization. In 2024, Desta will work with UIBE to look at ways to expand the platform to provide Black entrepreneurs with new opportunities to hone their business acumen and skillset.



## ***RebootX***

In 2023, Desta embarked on a new partnership with multi-talented serial entrepreneur, Femi Doyle-Marshall, founder of RebootX Academy Entrepreneurship Incubator. Through this partnership, DESTA was able to offer 3 workshops to empower Black entrepreneurs who were looking to elevate their brand and marketing strategies to attract clients and Black youth, interested in cultivating their entrepreneurial aspirations. Themes covered in the workshops included effective methods to grow sales, creating an outstanding customer experience, and tax compliance.

## ***High Performance Group Coaching***

In 2023, Desta, in collaboration with performance coach, Valeriya Patrei, introduced the Group Certified High Performance Coaching Program. This program was targeted to Black entrepreneurs ready to take their business and personal development to the next level. Spanning over 12-weeks, this program was designed to cultivate high-performance habits for long-term success and allowed participants to delve into mastering their psychology with a community of like-minded entrepreneurs.

## ***House of Strategy Entrepreneurship Guidebook***

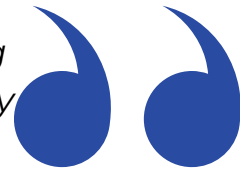
Designed for the aspiring Black entrepreneur, Desta collaborated with Tenisha Valliant-Irvin, CEO and Founder of House of Strategy, a leading strategic business consultant company, to develop a digital guidebook. This guidebook provides an introduction to starting a business, early-stage marketing strategies, and insights into financial planning. Building on the success of the guidebook, DESTA is planning to host a series of workshops in 2024, for Black youth aspiring to start their own business.

# WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT OUR WORK PROGRAM



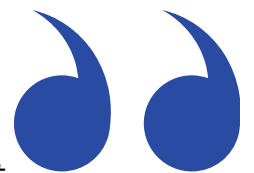
*I participated in DESTA's Black Entrepreneurship Bootcamp, a game-changer for my business. The program provided invaluable support specifically designed to meet the unique needs of Black Anglophone entrepreneurs in Montreal. The personalized coaching was particularly impactful, offering tailored guidance that helped me refine my business strategies.*

*Joining DESTA's Group Certified High-Performance Coaching (CHPC) program was a decision that significantly boosted my personal and business growth. The 12 bi-weekly live group sessions connected me with like-minded entrepreneurs and provided world-class tools to develop high-performance habits...The program's focus on developing high-performance habits has equipped me with the skills and mindset needed to sustain my success in the long run.*



*This was my introduction to Desta programming. The collaboration with CBC was one of the most informative and transparent events I ever attended. The choice of CBC employees was brilliant as each of them represent Black excellence in media. Covering career challenges in broadcasting at CBC, they were very generous with their time and offered valuable insight on how to navigate the industry, and their own professional journeys.*

*I have been turning to Desta for support and advice for almost 10 years. I know I can be a lot to handle, but they have always listened and been patient with me as I slowly sort out my life*



# ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN QUEBEC'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Building on our commitment to human rights and restorative justice in the Canadian carceral system, DESTA offered support services to 63 current and formerly incarcerated Black men, women, and youth in obtaining parole, employment, and housing, to successfully reintegrate back into Quebec society in 2023.

Additionally, the program was able to increase public safety and community wellbeing by reducing recidivism rates. Roughly 90% of DESTA's participants did not reoffend upon their release in 2023, representing one of the lowest rates of recidivism in Quebec and Canada.

754

LISTENERS OF  
'STORIES FROM THE  
INSIDE OUT'  
PODCAST

40

PARTICIPANTS  
RECEIVED PHONE  
SUPPORT

345

PARTICIPANTS IN 40  
PRISON WORKSHOPS  
THROUGHOUT THE  
YEAR

26

PARTICIPANTS  
RECEIVED PAROLE  
SUPPORT

63

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

12

PARTICIPANTS  
RECEIVED LEGAL  
SUPPORT



### ***DESTA Reentry Services Program***

DESTA secured over \$140,000 from the Federal government's Justice Partnership and Innovation Program (JPPI) to expand the program's offerings to more participants. This funding was used to provide a wide array of services and supports including legal representation for human rights complaints; legal aid to 26 Black participants to prepare for and successfully achieve parole in 2023; and to provide employment supports to formerly incarcerated participants. Notably, over 50% of the participants were able to secure gainful employment in the construction, hospitality, and fitness industries in 2023.

### ***Escorted Temporary Absence (ETA) Program: Reducing Recidivism in the Black Community***

In 2023, DESTA obtained certification as an official community partner organization with Correctional Services Canada (CSC) and became the first Black organization in Quebec to facilitate Escorted Temporary Absence (ETA) programs in two CSC institutions, assisting 10 Black offenders.

DESTA's ETA program provided an opportunity to serve through our partnership with Union United Food Bank, while providing personal development courses covering trauma-related care, financial literacy, meditation, and mental health support to aid in participants' healing and rehabilitation back into mainstream society.

## ***Canada's Black Justice Strategy***

In 2023, DESTA was invited to join Canada's Black Justice Strategy – the federal government's response to address anti-Black racism, systemic discrimination, and the overrepresentation of Black people in the criminal justice system.

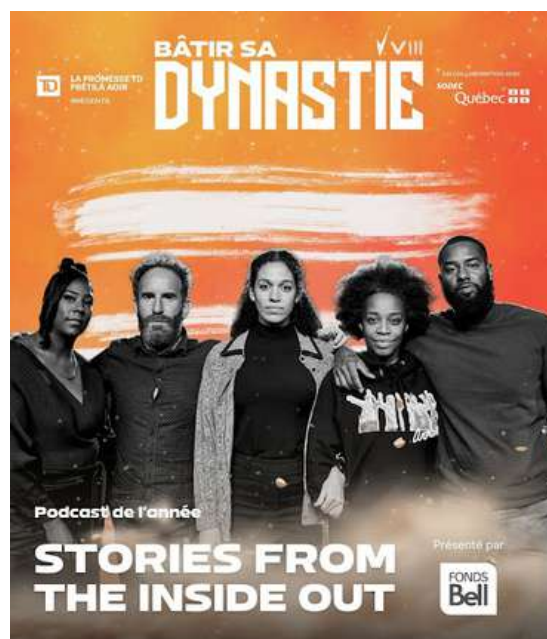
This led to a research collaboration (round table discussion, surveys) with the Black Community Resource Center (BCRC) to produce a landmark report outlining the negative experiences with law enforcement by Black people within the community and 4 CSC institutions.

## ***Correctional Services Canada (CSC) Workshops***

As an accredited partner with Correctional Services Canada (CSC), DESTA provided 40 workshops in 17 provincial institutions in 2023. These workshops covered our reentry services, therapeutic writing, an Afrocentric perspective of Black history in Canada, talent show, trauma-based care, Christmas choirs, and comedy performances that helped to create a positive, reaffirming environment to foster self-confidence.

## ***Stories from the Inside Out Podcast***

DESTA's groundbreaking podcast – Stories from the Inside Out – which explored the experiences of Black people in Canada's criminal justice system and featured eight experts reached nearly 800 listeners across platforms and was awarded podcast of the year at Gala Dynastie's media Gala awards in 2024. In response to the high demand for additional episodes, DESTA is currently developing season 2, for release in 2024/2025.

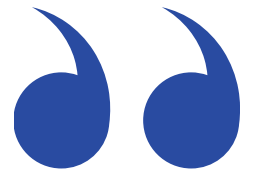


# WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT OUR SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAM



*Joining DESTA's reentry program was singlehandedly the biggest reason why I was able to achieve parole after more than 10 years incarcerated. Thank you to the DESTA team.*

*I have gone through my fair share of ups and downs while being incarcerated; however, upon being introduced to Desta, I have been able to pursue my dream of starting my own business thanks to the growth coaching program. While participating in this program I have been able to stay focused while having the necessary mentorship needed to guide me through various stages of developing a business including business plan development. Thank you once again.*



## SUPPORTING BLACK FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

With the rising cost of food and sustained inflation in 2023, food insecurity continued to be a major challenge for many within Little Burgundy's Black Anglophone community.

Since 2020, DESTA has partnered with Union United Food Bank to operate our Food Delivery Program. This program has delivered over 75,000 meals, to over 30 families, ensuring that they have access to healthy, nutritious meals every week.

In 2024, DESTA plans to launch a Community Food Pantry, located on DESTA's premises, to support more families within the immediate community.

**\$37,000** INVESTED IN BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

**19,000** MEALS DELIVERED TO 30 FAMILIES IN THE COMMUNITY

**300** KILOGRAMS OF FOOD PRODUCED WITH 13 GARDENS

**45** PEOPLE SUPPORTED THROUGH GARDENSHARE

**112** COMMUNITY MEMBERS SUPPORTED WEEKLY THROUGH FOOD DELIVERY

**18** PARTICIPANTS IN FOOD BUSINESS INCUBATOR



## ***Food Business Incubator: Building the Future of Black Food Business in Quebec***

In 2023, DESTA welcomed our 4th cohort of aspiring food entrepreneurs to our Food Business Incubator. With the guidance and support of 10 alumni mentors, the program offered mentorship and support to assist Black food businesses located in Montreal.

Through Incubator programs: ONYX Kitchen, Black Horticulture and Urban Agriculture (BHUA), and Food Industry Fundamentals, start-up food business owners were able to grow their talents in kitchen management, personal brand development, personal branding, content creation, and business development. Upon completion of the program, all graduates were provided with contracts to provide services for other members of the Incubator and La Maison Onyx events. Our 2023 graduates received a combined total of over \$10,000 in contracts.



## ***GardenShare: Boosting Black Food Sovereignty in Montreal***

The third stream of our home garden program – GardenShare brings together traditional African agricultural practices with urban agricultural principles for the benefit of English-speaking Black and Indigenous families. In 2023, DESTA installed 45 gardens in Black and Indigenous homes across Montreal and Kahnawake – our largest cohort to date.

Supported by mentors from our Black Horticulture and Urban Agriculture (BHUA) program, our GardenShare clients – including seniors or those living with mental health issues – are growing organic, nutritious food in their homes, on Black-owned farms or greenhouses. GardenShare merges community engagement with Afrocentric agricultural principles to respond to the dire issue of food insecurity, head-on.



## ***Black Horticulture and Urban Agriculture (BHUA) Program: Advancing Black representation in the Canadian Food System***

Further expanding the scope of the chef incubator and GardenShare, DESTA secured \$30,000 from Foundation of Greater Montreal (FGM) to launch the Black Horticulture and Urban Agriculture (BHUA) program in 2023.

Consisting of partnerships with Black farms in Montreal and across Quebec, the BHUA program supports aspiring Black farmers and agriculturalists to learn traditional African farming practices. It also changes the face of agriculture in Canada – preparing a new generation of Black agriculturalists and horticulturalists – many of whom are Black women and members of the LGBTQ2S community– to enter the Canadian food system, while simultaneously building DESTA’s in-house capacity to deliver food to the most vulnerable in our community.

Upon completion, program graduates are eligible for full-time employment on the farms in our network and the wider industry. Produce grown supports DESTA’s home gardens in GardenShare.



# WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT OUR FOOD PROGRAM

“

*GardenShare was my first experience growing food with my family, and although the gardening journey does take a bit of patience, it was an empowering experience that brought us closer. My family and I learned a lot about how to create and maintain a garden, and we can't wait to join again next year.*

”

*Starting a business, it's hard to find the tools for accounting, for marketing and for social media and branding. I found all those things through the DESTA Community Food program. The information and knowledge learned is something I can't even put a dollar amount on. It's been priceless.*



## CULTIVATING COMMUNITY, CONNECTION, AND JOY

Black Joy Sundays was launched in May 2022 in collaboration with Black Mental Health Connections Montreal and several Black wellness professionals around the city with the goal of bringing the community together in a safe space to create bonds, build trust and discuss topics around mental health in the Black community.. We held a total of 4 sold out events in 2023, culminating in our first ever Black Joy Sundays weekend retreat 'RESTORATION'.

**79**

PARTICIPANTS  
ACROSS 4  
WORKSHOPS

**30**

WEEKEND RETREAT  
PARTICIPANTS



## **RESTORATION: A BLACK WELLNESS RETREAT**

From April 21-23, DESTA hosted the transformative event "RESTORATION: A Black Wellness Retreat" at Le Couvent Val-Morin. This rejuvenating retreat brought together over 30 participants for a weekend dedicated to healing, connection, and empowerment.

Guided by six skilled facilitators, attendees engaged in a variety of activities designed to foster mental, emotional, and physical well-being. From mindful meditation sessions to invigorating yoga practices, each moment was crafted to support holistic health and wellness.

The serene environment of Le Couvent Val-Morin provided the perfect backdrop for participants to unwind, reflect, and recharge. Throughout the weekend, attendees built meaningful connections, shared their experiences, and embraced the spirit of community.

Participants left feeling inspired, supported, and equipped with new tools to incorporate wellness into their daily lives.

RESTORATION: A Black Wellness Retreat was a resounding success, marking a significant step in our ongoing commitment to promoting health and well-being within our community. We look forward to continuing this journey together and are grateful for the energy, enthusiasm, and openness of all who participated.



# WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT OUR WELLNESS PROGRAM

“

*This was great. I thoroughly enjoyed it and the food / catering is a nice touch. Food brings people together. I love this conversation piece at the end. I enjoyed it it was a nice experience and a good way to bring people together.*

”

*From the event coordination to delivery, all parties were professional, creative, fun, passionate, and impactful...The food was terrific, and I appreciated the conversations surrounding vulnerability among other attendees. It was a great way to meet new people as well.*

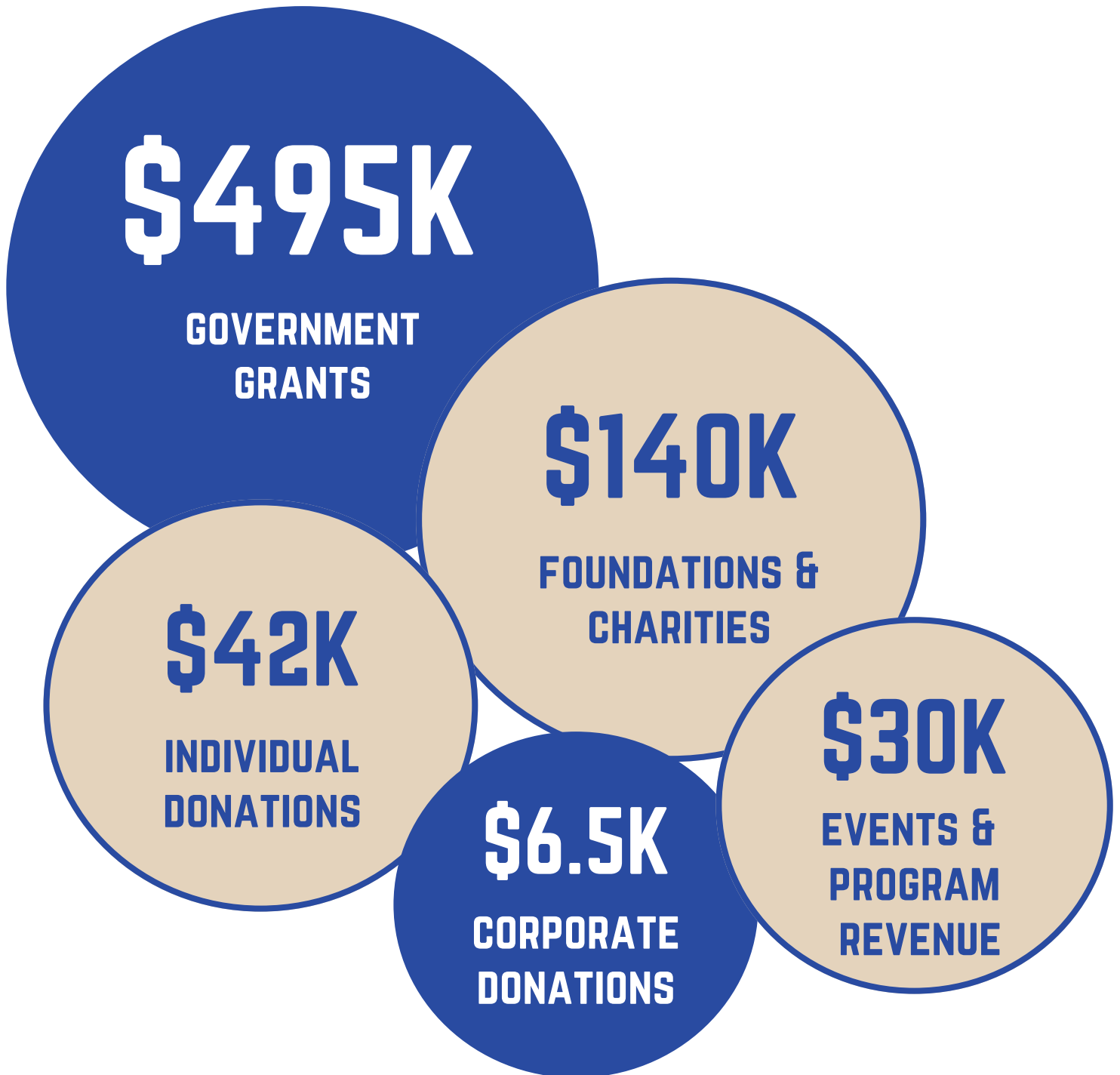


“

*I literally walked out of there feeling like I was walking on clouds!!*

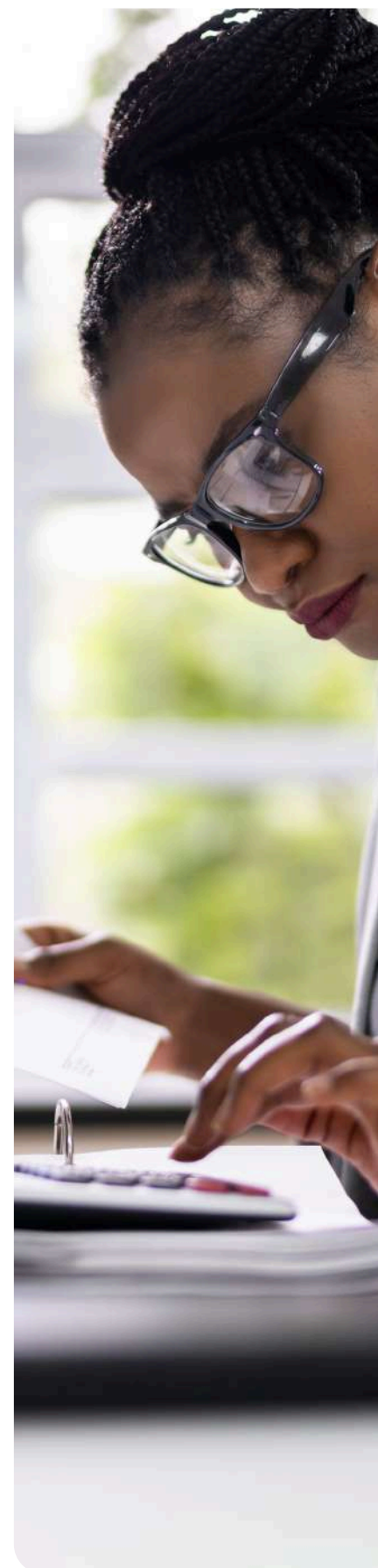
# FUNDING LANDSCAPE

DESTA continued to diversify its funding sources in 2023, resulting in \$714K of funds raised for the organization in the year!



# FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

| REVENUES               | 2023               | 2022              |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Fondations & Charities | \$139,908          | \$176,835         |
| Government Grants      | \$495,392          | \$462,495         |
| Individual Donations   | \$36,727           | \$94,335          |
| Corporate Donations    | \$11,480           | \$36,678          |
| Contracts              | \$9,075            | -                 |
| Other Revenue          | \$21,539           | \$5,659           |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>  | <b>\$714,121</b>   | <b>\$778,827</b>  |
| EXPENSES               | 2023               | 2022              |
| Salaries & Benefits    | \$518,420          | \$559,781         |
| Contract Services      | \$14,397           | \$34,952          |
| Office Expenses        | \$18,553           | \$12,883          |
| Accounting Fees        | \$34,042           | \$36,735          |
| Justice Program        | \$89,726           | \$5,807           |
| Food Program           | \$66,245           | \$76,470          |
| Work Program           | \$9,700            | \$15,273          |
| Wellness Program       | \$14,804           | \$11,482          |
| Special Events         | \$6,595            | \$2,802           |
| Publicity & Promotion  | \$4,579            | \$6,949           |
| Insurance              | \$2,330            | \$3,197           |
| Telecommunication      | \$7,784            | \$8,181           |
| Rent                   | \$24,000           | \$24,000          |
| Other                  | \$24,172           | \$19,195          |
| <b>NET INCOME</b>      | <b>\$(132,816)</b> | <b>\$(91,936)</b> |



# THE TEAM

We owe our incredible journey to our dedicated and passionate team. This dynamic and motivated group of community workers is the driving force behind DESTA's mission. Their unwavering commitment propels our organization forward, playing a crucial role in our growth and in the positive evolution of the community we serve. We couldn't be more grateful for their hard work and dedication!

## DESTA STAFF

December 31, 2023

### KASSANDRA KERNISAN

Executive Director

### ADAM BRIMACOMBE

Programs Director

### WANDA HUSKINSON

Office Manager

### SCOTT CLYKE

Education & Employability Counsellor

### AMANDA MAXWELL

Support Services Coordinator

### SVENS TELEMAQUE

Support Services Counsellor

### MILO JOHNSON

Project Coordinator & Operations Lead

### TAMARA CHANOINE

Marketing Project Manager

### BERLIN REED

Food Program Manager

### KYRISTAL ANDREWS

Business Development & Project Coordinator

### KAYLA FERNANDES

Assistant Food Program Coordinator

### ASHLEY MONTGOMERY

Program Administrator and Researcher



## DESTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

December 31, 2023

### DEXTER PEART

Chairman

### EVAN PITCHIE

Vice-chairman

### VINCENT WESLEY

Treasurer

### MARIA VARVARIKOS

Director

### BOLIKO EDJIDJIMO

Director

### OLIVIER NIGNON

Director

### SAMM REID

Director

### DAVID SIMONS

Honorary Secretary

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*We extend our deepest gratitude to our generous donors and partners. Your unwavering support and contributions are the lifeblood of DESTA's mission. Thanks to you, we are able to make a significant impact on the lives of many, fostering growth, resilience, and empowerment within our community. Together, we are building a brighter future. Thank you for believing in DESTA and standing with us every step of the way.*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Black Ecosystem Fund   | Concordia SHIFT                                     |
| Justice Partnership and Innovation Program (JPIP)                        | McGill Arts Internship Office                       |
| Anti-Racism Action Program (ARAP)  | Deloitte Canada                                     |
| Community, Support, Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism Initiative (CSMARI) | Morgan Stanley                                      |
| Correctional Services Canada   | Accenture   |
| Ville de Montreal  | Tank Agency   |
| Food Banks Canada  | CIELE   |
| Community Empowerment Literacy Initiative (CELI)                         | POP Montreal  |
| T.R.E.E. Foundation  | CBC Montreal  |
| Adair Family Foundation  | Restaurant Candide                                  |
| Infilise Family Foundation   | Metro   |
| Bronfman Family Foundation   | SponsorshipX  |
| Zeller Foundation  | Commetta Communications                             |
| Webster Foundation   | Probity Marketing                                   |
| Birks Family Foundation  | Ujamaa Initiative for Black Entrepreneurship (UIBE) |
| Hay Foundation   | Concordia JMSB, Community Service Initiative        |
| Jarislowsky Foundation   | Black Community Resource Center (BCRC)              |
| Fondation du Grand Montreal (FGM)  | Black Mental Health Connections Montreal (BMHC)     |
| Jewish Community Foundation  | When the Village Meditates                          |
| RBC Foundation   | Union United Church                                 |
| Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (BEKH)                              | Unitarian Church of Montreal                        |
|  | Nutritower  |