desta

Black Community Network
Réseau de la communauté noire

ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT



2025

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INTRODUCTION

Entering 2025, DESTA has evolved from a catalyst for change into a cornerstone of community resilience for Montreal's Black Anglophone population. Our work across justice, wellness, workforce development, and entrepreneurship was no longer just about overcoming obstacles; it was about creating an ecosystem where Black generational wealth became the goal.

Throughout the year, we saw our impact move from individual milestones to collective transformation. We watched as formerly incarcerated individuals secured meaningful careers, as young broadcasters found their voices, and as visionary entrepreneurs elevated their ventures from viable concepts into market-leading businesses. Our approach remains holistic: we nourished bodies through food security, healed spirits through immersive wellness, and built capacity through our incubator programs.

These achievements reaffirm our core conviction: that with the right access and space to lead, our community is unstoppable. DESTA is not just reacting to the needs of today; we are architecting the future of Black equity in Montreal, fueled by a commitment to dignity, innovation, and the power of community.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

In 2025, DESTA continued to make meaningful progress, even as our community faced real and persistent challenges. Through justice initiatives supporting re-entry and reintegration, food security programming, and investment in Black entrepreneurs, we've helped community members build greater stability and resilience in their lives and pursue new opportunities with dignity and confidence.

These contributions reflect the care and commitment of our team, supported by an engaged board. We are grateful to Kassandra for her many years of leadership in service of our community. We are delighted to welcome Charline as our new Executive Director and excited by the energy and dedication she brings to DESTA. We wish her every success as she leads this exciting next chapter alongside our team and community.

To our funders, donors, and partners, thank you for continuing to believe in DESTA and the people we serve. With funding pressures continuing, your support is essential to sustaining the services our community relies on. Looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, I invite you to renew that commitment and help us ensure more people have the support they need to build a stronger future.

Dexter Peart, Chairman of the Board

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

To our dedicated community,

Stepping into the role of Executive Director in October 2025 was a profound moment for me. While I only experienced the final quarter of the year firsthand, it provided a window into the incredible resilience and spirit that defined this organization throughout the past twelve months.

What I discovered was a team that doesn't just manage change, they embrace it. I've been inspired by their motivation and an eagerness to pursue our mission that is truly infectious. It is rare to find a group so deeply committed to evolving and improving for the sake of those we serve.

Of course, our progress is only possible because of you. We are incredibly fortunate to have a family of donors who believe in the core of our work. Your consistent giving provides the bedrock of stability we need to dream bigger and reach further. Whether you have been with us for years or joined us recently, your trust is our most valued asset.

As we look back on the achievements of 2025 detailed in this report, I am filled with gratitude for the foundation laid before my arrival and excitement for the future we are building together. We are energized, we are focused, and we are just getting started.

With gratitude,

Charline Florestal



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.



VISION

DESTA Black Community Network strives to empower the Black Anglophone community to overcome systemic and personal barriers to success and wellbeing through increased networks, resources and opportunities that will be achieved through:

- Increased accessibility to mental and physical health resources and activities, with a focus on self-care, self-love, self-acceptance and joy, by and for the Black community;
- Improved perception and influence of the Black community in the local and national ecosystem of Montreal and Quebec, and among themselves;
- Increased representation of members of the Black Anglophone community in underrepresented and high demand economic sectors in Montreal and Quebec









OUR IMPACT

$9.2K INVESTED INTO BLACK BUSINESSES

147 STUDENTS SUPPORTED THROUGH EMPLOYABILITY CLASSES

700 FOOD PACKAGES DISTRIBUTED

$751K REVENUE SECURED



DESTA WORK

BUILDING PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Throughout the year, DESTA's Work Program continued to support Black community members as they explored career pathways, strengthened employability skills, and advanced their entrepreneurial ventures. Through skills training workshops, career development support, industry-focused learning opportunities, and customized business coaching, participants gained practical tools to navigate an evolving labour market.

Programming covered a wide range of sectors including entrepreneurship, media production, real estate, health and wellness, and small business development. Recognizing the rapidly changing nature of work, DESTA also began repositioning programming toward emerging industries and future-focused career opportunities, including technology, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, healthcare, and creative industries.

Alongside group workshops, participants accessed individualized support through CV preparation, targeted job search assistance, and business development coaching. The program also deepened partnerships with organizations such as Futurpreneur, Concordia University's Community Service Initiative, and the Ujamaa Initiative for Black Entrepreneurship, creating stronger pathways to funding, mentorship, and business growth.
A key highlight of the year was the DESTA x UIBE Customized Business Training Program, which supported established Black entrepreneurs in scaling their businesses through personalized coaching, business planning, financial literacy, marketing strategy, and operational development. Participants made significant progress toward business expansion, loan readiness, incorporation, and long-term sustainability.

As participant needs evolved, DESTA adapted its delivery model by emphasizing more accessible, participant-centred programming, including shorter workshops and individualized coaching supports designed to increase engagement and maximize impact.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP SPOTLIGHT

DESTA x UIBE Business Scale-Up Program

- 10 Black-owned businesses enrolled
- Business planning and strategy development
- Marketing and sales coaching
- Financial literacy and projections
- Operational growth planning
- Access to expert instructors and mentors
- Participants secured financing, expanded operations, incorporated businesses, and strengthened market readiness

Future of Work

Preparing Participants for Tomorrow's Economy

In response to shifting labour market demands, DESTA began reimagining its Work Program around the future of work, helping participants explore opportunities in:

- Artificial Intelligence
- Media & Creative Industries
- Healthcare & Wellness
- Entrepreneurship & Innovation

This strategic shift positions participants to thrive in emerging sectors while continuing to build economic resilience within Black communities.



DESTA WORK IMPACT

80+ PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED

10 BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES SUPPORTED

8 INNOVATIVE WORKSHOPS

4 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

12+ CAREER CONSULTATIONS



DESTA JUSTICE

In 2025, DESTA's Justice Program continued to provide culturally relevant support to Black individuals navigating incarceration, community reintegration, and the complex barriers that often accompany re-entry. Through a combination of direct services, advocacy, referrals, and the ETA (Escorted Temporary Absence) Program, participants accessed critical resources that supported their successful transition back into the community.

The program offered individualized support across key areas including housing, employment, legal navigation, trauma-informed counselling, literacy support, and community connection. By addressing both immediate needs and long-term goals, DESTA helped participants strengthen their stability, build confidence and reconnect with support networks.

Throughout the year, the Justice Program remained rooted in the belief that successful reintegration requires more than access to services—it requires dignity, belonging, and opportunities to thrive. Through relationship-based support and culturally grounded programming, DESTA continued to create pathways toward healing, empowerment, and lasting community impact.

PRISONERS' JUSTICE DAY: BUILDING AWARENESS AND SOLIDARITY

On August 10, 2025, DESTA participated in Prisoners' Justice Day, an annual event dedicated to honouring the experiences of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals while raising awareness about issues within the justice system.

DESTA staff and participants contributed to event setup and takedown and participated in networking and community exchange activities throughout the day. The organization also provided materials and seating to support the event's operations.

The gathering brought together numerous organizations and community groups, including Prison Radio Show, QPIRG McGill, QPIRG Concordia, and ReCon. Through participation in this event, DESTA strengthened relationships across the justice sector and demonstrated its ongoing commitment to advocacy, community engagement, and supporting individuals affected by incarceration.



SUICIDE PREVENTION TRAINING: BUILDING CAPACITY FOR PARTICIPANT SUPPORT

On September 23, 2025, four DESTA team members—Amanda, Muna, Ashley, and Olivia—completed specialized suicide prevention training designed specifically for professionals working with individuals impacted by incarceration.

Delivered by a trainer from the Centre de Prévention du Suicide de Montréal (CPSM), the half-day training focused on understanding risk factors, recognizing warning signs, and developing appropriate intervention and support strategies. The trainer brought specialized experience working with incarcerated populations, ensuring the content reflected the realities faced by many DESTA participants.

All attendees successfully completed the training and received certificates of completion, further strengthening DESTA's capacity to provide informed, trauma-responsive support to community members.



CARTE PROXIMITÉ PROGRAM

The Carte Proximité Program is a Quebec-based food security initiative that helps low-income households access fresh, nutritious food while supporting local farmers and food businesses. Through a rechargeable prepaid card, participants can purchase eligible food products at participating markets and retailers.

The program promotes dignity and choice in food assistance by allowing individuals and families to select the foods that best meet their needs. At the same time, it strengthens local food systems by directing spending toward community-based producers and merchants.

In 2025, DESTA distributed Carte Proximité grocery cards to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, helping households access healthy food while reducing financial pressure during periods of increased need.

64 GROCERY CARDS DISTRIBUTED

$38,900 FOOD SUPPORT PROVIDED

2 DISTRIBUTION CYCLES

36 LARGE FAMILIES SUPPORTED

HOLIDAY DINNER CELEBRATION: HONOURING COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

On December 22, 2025, DESTA hosted its annual Reentry Holiday Dinner at Candide Restaurant, bringing together participants, staff, families, and community supporters for an evening of celebration and reflection. Approximately 20–25 people attended throughout the evening.

The gathering provided a welcoming space for individuals impacted by incarceration to reconnect with peers, share stories, and celebrate their achievements throughout the year. The evening featured a shared meal, music, games, and community reflections that highlighted the strength, resilience, and growth of participants navigating the reentry journey.

The event was coordinated by DESTA staff Amanda and Olivia, with support from Charline, Berlin, and Jamal from the Food Program. Catering support was also provided through community partners, helping create a warm and meaningful holiday experience for participants and their families.

The Holiday Dinner reflects DESTA's commitment to fostering belonging, reducing social isolation, and strengthening community connections for individuals rebuilding their lives after incarceration.

20–25 Participants & Family Members

Shared Community Meal

Music & Games

Staff, Participants & Community Together

Hosted at Candide Restaurant





JUSTICE IMPACT

4 CERTIFICATES ISSUED

WEEKLY INSTITUTIONAL OUTREACH VISITS

70+ TRAUMA-INFORMED SUPPORT SESSIONS

4 STAFF TRAINED IN SUICIDE PREVENTION



DESTA FOOD





BUILDING FOOD SECURITY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND BLACK FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

In 2025, DESTA's Food Program continued to evolve beyond traditional food distribution to create a more holistic approach to food justice, economic opportunity, and community connection. Through food entrepreneurship programming, community meals, food education workshops, and partnerships with Black growers and producers, DESTA strengthened pathways for both food access and economic development. The Food Incubator supported emerging entrepreneurs through mentorship, training, networking opportunities, and direct financial investment, while the Community Lunch Project transformed donated produce into nutritious meals and practical food education experiences.

The program also expanded its role as a leader in Black food sovereignty by participating in major research initiatives examining culturally relevant food systems, nutrition, and health outcomes within Black communities. These partnerships positioned DESTA as a key contributor to national conversations about food access, community health, and culturally responsive food education.

Throughout the year, DESTA activated new community gathering spaces, hosted workshops and cultural events, invested directly in Black-owned businesses, and secured significant new funding to strengthen food production, storage, transformation, and distribution capacity for years to come. Together, these initiatives demonstrate DESTA's commitment to building a food ecosystem that supports dignity, entrepreneurship, community well-being, and long-term food sovereignty.



FOOD IMPACT

$120K NEW FOOD PROGRAM FUNDING SECURED

25 FOOD INCUBATOR PARTICIPANTS SUPPORTED

9.2K INVESTED IN BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

15 MENTORS & INSTRUCTORS ENGAGED

COMMUNITY FOOD EDUCATION

The Community Lunch Project transformed donated produce into nutritious meals while creating opportunities for community members to learn practical cooking skills, reduce food waste, and build confidence in preparing healthy meals on a budget. Participants received free lunches while contributing to a broader effort to support food security within the community.

FOOD INCUBATOR

DESTA's Food Incubator continued to support Black food entrepreneurs through mentorship, training, networking opportunities, and direct financial investment. Participants gained access to experienced industry mentors, professional development opportunities, and resources designed to help them launch and scale sustainable businesses. The annual Incubator Photo Day also provided professional branding support through headshots and product photography, creating valuable assets for entrepreneurs as they grew their businesses.







RESEARCH AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

In 2025, DESTA strengthened its leadership in Black food sovereignty by participating in major research initiatives focused on culturally relevant food systems, nutrition, and community health. These projects positioned DESTA as a valued community partner alongside researchers, institutions, and organizations across Canada, helping ensure that Black voices and lived experiences remain central to conversations about food access and well-being.

Our Impact

- $65,000 Food x Funding
- 55,000 Ecosystem Extension Funding
- $120,000+ Secured for Future Growth

Supporting:

- Food Production
- Food Storage
- Food Transformation
- Food Distribution
- Entrepreneurship
- Community Programming







DESTA WELLNESS

COMMUNITY HEALING: THE 2025 EVOLUTION

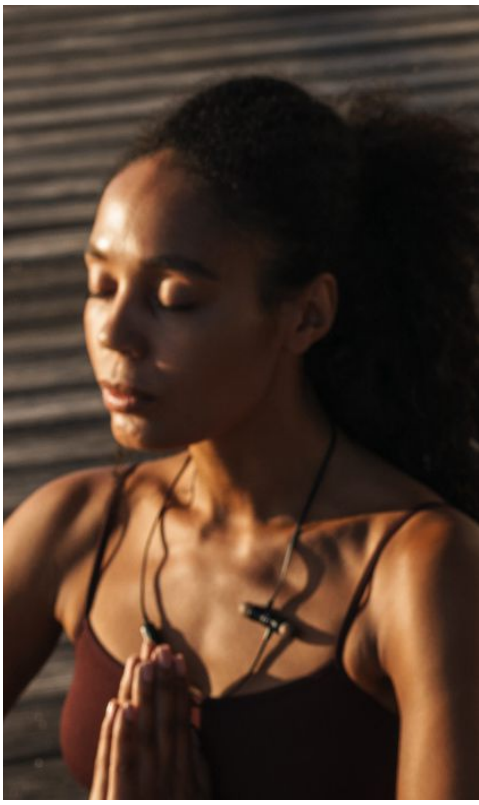
Following the successful 2024 relaunch of our Wellness Program, marked by the sold-out return of Black Joy Sundays in collaboration with BMHC Montreal , DESTA spent 2025 deepening our commitment to culturally grounded healing. Building on the momentum of those inaugural mini-retreats, we transitioned into more intensive, long-term programming designed to foster sustainable personal transformation.

A JOURNEY BACK TO SELF

The cornerstone of our 2025 wellness initiative was "A Journey Back to Self," a transformative series created exclusively for women. Recognizing that healing is both a personal and collective act, this program was structured as an immersive 8-week experience. Over the course of eight Sunday sessions, participants embarked on a guided path focused on:

- Self-Reclamation & Discovery: Providing the tools and intentional space for women to delve deep within and reclaim their personal narratives.
- Healing & Radical Self-Love: Cultivating emotional resilience, personal growth, and self-care through expert-led workshops and reflection.
- Sustainable Sisterhood: Building a foundational network of support, creating a sisterhood of women committed to growing and healing together long-term.

The success of the program was reflected in the profound dedication of our cohort. Starting with 25 participants, 22 women completed the full 8-week journey. This remarkable retention rate demonstrates not only the deep investment of the participants but also the vital necessity of these spaces.
By shifting to this immersive model, DESTA successfully provided a consistent sanctuary where women felt empowered to show up for themselves and each other, week after week.



25
WOMEN STARTED THE JOURNEY

88%
RETENTION RATE

8
WEEKS OF HEALING & GROWTH WOMEN STARTED THE JOURNEY

22
WOMEN COMPLETED ALL 8 WEEKS

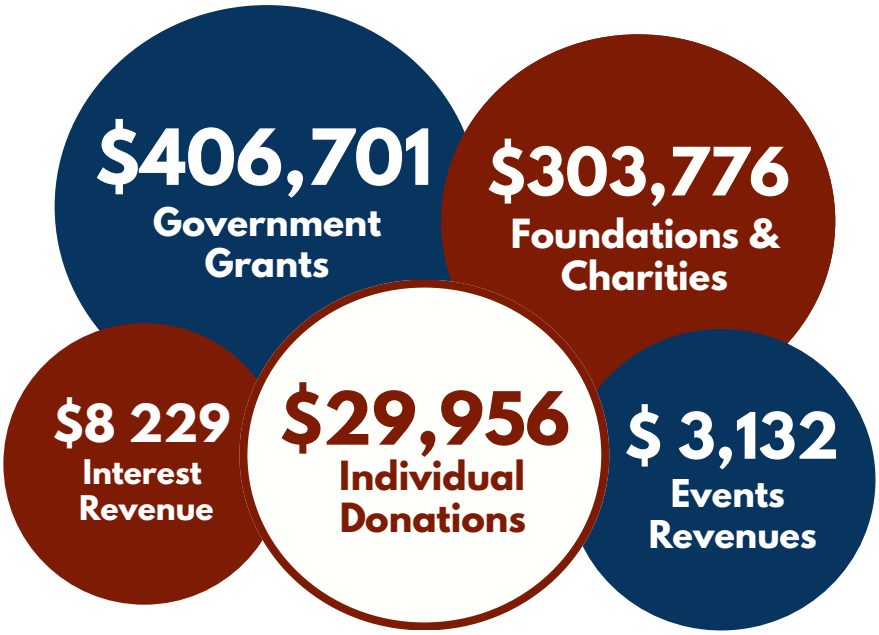
FUNDING LANDSCAPE

In 2025, DESTA secured $751,794 to support our programs, services, and core operations. While this represents a decrease from the previous year, the overall funding landscape continues to demonstrate strong public-sector confidence in DESTA's mission, with government grants remaining our primary source of support. This ongoing investment underscores the essential role DESTA plays in providing culturally relevant, community-rooted services for Montreal's Black Anglophone population.

The shift in revenue also highlighted an important organizational reality: our long-term sustainability depends on a more diversified funding model. In response, DESTA made a strategic investment in 2025 to hire a Partnership & Development Manager in 2026, significantly expanding our capacity to cultivate new relationships, strengthen donor engagement, and pursue private-sector, philanthropic, and earned-revenue opportunities.

With this dedicated leadership in place, DESTA is doubling its efforts to broaden our funding base. This includes deepening partnerships with private foundations, expanding individual giving, increasing corporate sponsorships, and developing more resilient revenue-generating initiatives. These efforts are designed not only to stabilize year-to-year funding but to position DESTA for long-term growth and innovation.

As we move forward, DESTA remains committed to building a balanced, sustainable funding ecosystem, one that preserves the stability of government support while unlocking new streams of investment that empower us to meet evolving community needs.



FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

Income	2024	2025
Revenues		
Foundations & Charities	$238,481	$303,776
Government Grants	$604,123	$406,701
Individual Donations	$26,949	$29,956
Event Revenues	-	$3,132
Corporate Donations	$10,000	-
Interest Revenue	$11,559	$8,229
TOTAL REVENUES	**$893,101**	**$751,794**
Expenses		
Salaries & Benefits	$493,127	$595,151
Contract Services (consulting)	$1,424	$7,500
Accounting Fees	$33,453	$32,768
Justice Program	$52,907	$38,909
Food Program	$54,373	$63,826
Work Program	$18,641	$22,854
Wellness Program	$6,064	$5,888
Special Events	$3,657	$5,343
Insurance	$2,315	$2,168
Telecommunication	$7,668	$8,937
Rent	$24,000	$24,000
Other	$148,272	$96,068
TOTAL EXPENSES	**$845,901**	**$903,412**
Net Income	**47 200**	**($151, 618)**

OUR TEAM

DESTA STAFF

KASSANDRA KERNISAN
Executive Director

CHARLINE FLORESTAL
(as of November 2025)
Executive Director

ADAM BRIMACOMBE
Programs Director

WANDA HUSKINSON
Office Manager

SCOTT CLYKE
Education &
Employability Counsellor

AMANDA MAXWELL
Support Services Coordinator

MILO JOHNSON
Project Coordinator &
Operations Lead

BERLIN REED
Food Program Manager

ASHLEY MONTGOMERY
Legal Administrator

KYRISTAL ANDREWS
Graphic Designer

NEELAM PATEL
Marketing Coordinator

Olivia Dumas
Reentry Social Worker

Muna Abdulfatah Ahmed
Justice Reentry Case Manager

GYTANA THEOBRUN
Social Media Coordinator

DESTA
Board of Directors

DEXTER PEART
Chairman

EVAN PITCHIE
Vice-Chairman

BOLIKO EDJIDJIMO
Director

MARIA VARVARIKOS
Director

RUTH KNOX
Director

OLIVIER NIGNON
Director

SAMM REID
Director

DAVID SIMONS
Honorary Secretary



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the heart of DESTA's work is community, and you are an essential part of that story. To our donors and partners, thank you for walking alongside us with such care, generosity, and belief in what we are building together.

Because of your support, we are able to create spaces where our community can gather, grow, and thrive. These are spaces where ideas are nurtured, resilience is strengthened, and futures are reimagined. Your contributions go far beyond funding. They are an investment in people, in possibility, and in lasting change.

Together, we are not only supporting our community. We are shaping what is possible for generations to come. Thank you for being part of this journey with us.

OUR SPONSORS AND DONORS

Adair Family Foundation
Ardene Foundation
Black Joy Sundays
Black Opportunity Fund
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Foundation for Black Communities
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