

## Briarpatch Annual General Meeting

Editor/Publisher Report

July 7, 2021

# Publisher

## Finance

Complete financial statements for 2020-21 (April 1, 20 to March 31, 2021) have been compiled by Iris Howden, and are available in a separate document. A few highlights are provided here:

	2019-20	2018-19
<b>Revenue</b>	\$264,000	\$211,979
Subscriptions	\$90,785	\$38,042
Advertising	\$26,170	\$28,832
Grants	\$33,128	\$31,930
Donations	\$99,541	\$102,190
<b>Expenses</b>	\$230,467	\$194,454
Salaries & benefits	\$94,924	\$91,849
Magazine production	\$99,479	\$67,895
<b>Net income (loss)</b>	<b>\$33,533</b>	<b>\$17,525</b>

The change in net income can be accounted for by a large increase in subscriptions. The additional expenses are due to higher printing and postage costs for the magazine (\$31,584).

## Circulation

Subscription levels for 2020-21 were between 1653 and 1498. Previously, circulation had been under 1600 since 2010, and was at its lowest in 2016, at 1218.

Issue	May/Jun	Jul/Aug	Sep/Oct	Nov/Dec	Jan/Feb	Mar/Apr
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<b>Circulation</b>	1479	1491	1646	2108	2274	2346
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Subscriptions picked up substantially both shortly before the September issue and continued growing from that issue forward. Next year's subscription numbers aren't likely to be quite as rosy, but this summer we are working on an appeal to try and entice new subscribers from last year into renewing.

Revenue from sales of subscriptions

<b>Year</b>	<b>Revenue (\$)</b>
2014-15	19,077
2015-16	30,577
2016-17	40,047
2017-18	32,491
2018-19	38,042
2019-20	90,785

## Advertising

While our numbers dropped slightly from 2019-20, new advertising by the Mackenzie Art Gallery and New Star Press, renewed placements from long-term advertisers, and returned advertisers have kept advertising numbers steady.

## Staff

Briarpatch operates with a core full-time staff of two: editor Saima Desai and publisher John Cameron.

We once again contracted about 100 people to write articles, make art, contribute photos, fact-check, copy edit, and proofread. This is slightly higher than normal, which can partly be attributed to the Land Back issue, a sixty-page issue featuring a greater number of contributors and editorial collective members.

In addition to our normal contracting, we have contracted Sara Birrell on an ongoing basis to produce the *Sask Dispatch*, a free print publication distributed to all Saskatchewan Briarpatch subscribers and (pre-COVID) in select locations around Regina, and the RWDSU *Defender* newsletter.

In the summer of 2020 (the 2020-2021 financial year) we hired a summer student, Xicotencatl Maher Lopez, for an eight-week period. This was financed by a \$3,088 grant from Service Canada's Canada Summer Jobs program. Xico performed several editorial tasks, including proofreading and writing articles, and publishing tasks, including drafting letters and producing advertisements for ad swaps with other magazines. We have hired Sophie Birks for the same grant-funded position over the summer of 2021.

## Fundraising

We continue to do two appeals per year to subscribers (except sustainers). The appeals raised around \$3,000 each. Due to COVID restrictions, we replaced our annual swimathon event with a skateathon this year, which raised a little over \$7,500 - up from the event's usual \$5,000. Our sincerest gratitude to the skaters, who worked hard to raise that money and worked even harder out on the ice!

An ongoing contract with RWDSU to produce the *Defender* newsletter continues to subsidize the production of the *Dispatch* by covering the costs of having Sara Birrell on contract.

As part of her work with IndieGraf's Indie News Challenge, Sara Birrell ran an online fundraiser for the *Dispatch* in October 2020. This fundraiser brought in \$11,049.95, allowing us to build a new website for the Dispatch and budget for more articles.

## Events

We are trying to focus on putting on events that: spark community organizing conversations that wouldn't otherwise happen, strengthen Briarpatch (visibility, subscription sales, donations, etc), and/or strengthen the political analysis around an issue. Due to the pandemic, we have put on a limited set of events in the past year.

Seven skaters raised around \$7,150 in the February 2021 swim-a-thon fundraiser in Regina, and a satellite skate-a-thon held in Ottawa by Briarpatch supporters raised an additional \$370.

As well, we held a number of webinars last year, most of which were outlined in our 2020 report. Our most recent webinar, "Labour for Defunding Police: Moving our Unions to Action," was held on April 22, 2021. For that event, we tried out a new attendance model, allowing free attendance with an optional donation. After speakers' fees and other expenses, Briarpatch received \$216 in revenue from the event, leaving us optimistic about the future of this model.

Finally, Briarpatch partnered with the Mackenzie Art Gallery to produce a publication in conjunction with the Mackenzie's *Human Capital* exhibit. This publication featured articles from our archives as well as newly commissioned pieces on immigration policy, migrant justice, and decolonial solidarity. Briarpatch also participated in the launch event on January 14.

There was no annual holiday party at Huston House, once again - this time due to COVID.

## Grant Applications

We applied for the next round of the Aid to Publishers grant in December and received notification in this fiscal year that we were approved for a total of \$29,434, with an additional 13% top-up arriving in August.

In the last fiscal year, we also received an \$1,100 grant from RPIRG for our annual Writing in the Margins contest, a \$3,000 bursary from Journalists for Human Rights supporting Indigenous contributors to our Land Back issue in September, and a \$2,350 partnership agreement with APIRG to produce the Land Back issue as well as the Oct 1. webinar with Victoria Fuentes. In the current (2021-22) fiscal year we have already received additional funding from JHR (detailed in the editorial report) for solutions journalism stories in the Dispatch.

## ECMF - Edna Curran Memorial Fund

(The volunteer board that owns and manages Huston House; both staff are members)

John and Saima sit on the ECMF Board. The building is almost fully occupied (3rd floor is vacant), and the ECMF is in good financial standing. There is over \$70,000 available for repairs to the house, which may be necessary soon - repairs to the roof still haven't been performed, and as the house has undergone an exterior heritage assessment recently the board has held off on authorizing new repairs or renovations.

As of 2021 our adjusted monthly rent is \$435. Briarpatch had previously been paying \$200 a month because we helped with administering the Huston House parking lot in exchange for a rent reduction, but we are no longer doing that. Unfortunately this means we owe back rent totalling \$3,232.47.

## Editor

### 2021 Briarpatch print content

#### [January/February 2021](#)

A six-page comic about Keep Your Rent's tenant organizing in Toronto; reporting on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation's history and colonial mandate; an explainer on Gender-Based Environmental Violence; reporting from the frontlines of the Anishinabe moose-hunting moratorium; how the Winnipeg Police Union protects harmful officers; Black Lives Matter in rural Canada.

#### [March/April 2021](#)

Winners of the Writing in the Margins contest; an investigation into Ducks Unlimited; China, the Canadian left, and countering state capitalist apologia; a baby book documenting the author's experience of pregnancy and motherhood while undocumented\*.

\* Saima published [a lengthy correction/retraction](#) for the baby book, as she later found out that parts of it had been fictionalized.

### May/June 2021

Pandemic work refusals; analysis of Canada's immigration system; an investigation into the history of a strike-breaking security firm; reporting on Saskatchewan's long-term care system; Ontario's Ring of Fire and Anishinaabay stewardship of the land.

### **July/August 2021**

Prisoner hunger strikes during COVID; Conversations with Filipino workers during COVID; Land defence reporting and white supremacy; Treaty Land Sharing Network; surveillance in social services in Montreal; Black & Indigenous history of mutual aid; 40th anniversary of the CUPW strike that won maternity leave.

### **September/October 2021**

Special Prison Abolition Issue, featuring writing and art by prisoners.

### **November/December 2021**

Labour Issue

## Editorial changes

Sara Birrell has become the editor of the Sask Dispatch, and is now handling most of the storyboarding and editing for that publication.

### Things we did well in editorial this year:

- **We won three magazine awards**, including Issue Grand Prix at the National Magazine Awards! It remains to be seen, but this will hopefully help Briarpatch with subscriptions, fundraising, grant applications, and the quality of pitches we receive.
- **Publishing more writers of colour, especially Indigenous writers.** The Land Back issue helped Briarpatch gain credibility and trust in Indigenous writers' communities, and we've published a number of great articles by Indigenous writers since.
- **Developed a strong template for working with an editorial collective on special issues.** Building off the success of the 2020 Land Back issue – which was a great model of respectful, efficient, and fruitful collaboration – that template has helped make the 2021 Prison Abolition Issue possible.
- **Communicating with other leftist indie publications.** This year saw increased communication between Saima and editors at THIS Magazine, the Media Co-op, the Resolve, and Rabble. Editorial collaborations have not yet come to fruition, but Saima hopes they will in future months and years.

- **Publishing more Saskatchewan and Prairie-focussed content.** We continue to strike a delicate balance between publishing Saskatchewan content in the Sask Dispatch and Briarpatch, but we published a number of great stories ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)) about Saskatchewan in Briarpatch this year.

### Areas of editorial difficulty are:

- **Paying contributors fairly.** \$100-\$300 isn't remotely close to fair, considering how much work many writers and artists put into their contributions.
  - Briarpatch should increase its contributor fees.
- **Publishing investigations.** Briarpatch readers have told us in reader surveys that they appreciate investigations, but Briarpatch doesn't have the budget to pay writers/researchers fairly for time-intensive investigations and to cover the associated costs (travel, FOI/ATI requests, database subscriptions, etc.).
  - Briarpatch should create a budget line for costs associated with investigations and communicate with writers that Briarpatch will cover these costs.
  - Saima should pursue professional development on investigative techniques and editing investigations
  - Briarpatch should develop a legal defence plan
- **Recruiting and training fact-checkers.** Fact-checking has been a little inconsistent this year because different fact-checkers have different levels of expertise and rigor; we've also had a number of fact-checkers resign because the workload was too high.
  - Briarpatch should pay fact-checkers more (right now we pay \$45/article)
  - Saima should hold more rigorous training plus a yearly re-training for fact-checkers
- **Engaging with readers online.** Our social media following and email newsletter subscribers have continued to grow, but without increased capacity for the editor to engage with online communities of readers. We're not using our online presence to fundraise, build community, or support grassroots media and struggles as effectively as we should be.
  - Briarpatch should work to hire a digital editor, and budget for better social media and email management tools

### Online-only

We have a budget of \$2,400/year for the blog, which allows us to publish 2 online-only articles per month at \$100/post. We should endeavour to increase this rate. In April, May, and June, Saima did not publish any blog posts because of a lack of capacity.

Blog posts are copy-edited and fact-checked by Saima. It seems to work ok for now, but it does establish an unspoken hierarchy between print articles (which are copy-edited and fact-checked by our team of contractors) and online-only articles.

## Contests

### Writing in the Margins contest

2021 was the 10th anniversary of Briarpatch's Writing in the Margins contest. The contest takes a massive amount of staff time to coordinate (an estimated 150 hours/year), brings in negligible revenue, and always nets the same number of entries (60-70). Briarpatch staff and board members are currently working to change the contest for 2022 to make it more sustainable and useful to Briarpatch's community; this may include funding/sponsorship, administrative support, and partnering with other creative writing or photography organizations.

### Andrea Walker Memorial Prize for Feminist Health Reporting

We have one more year of funding remaining for this prize, and have not successfully raised funds to continue the prize beyond that. We did not run the prize in 2021, and will run it for the last time in 2022.

### Northern Writing Prize

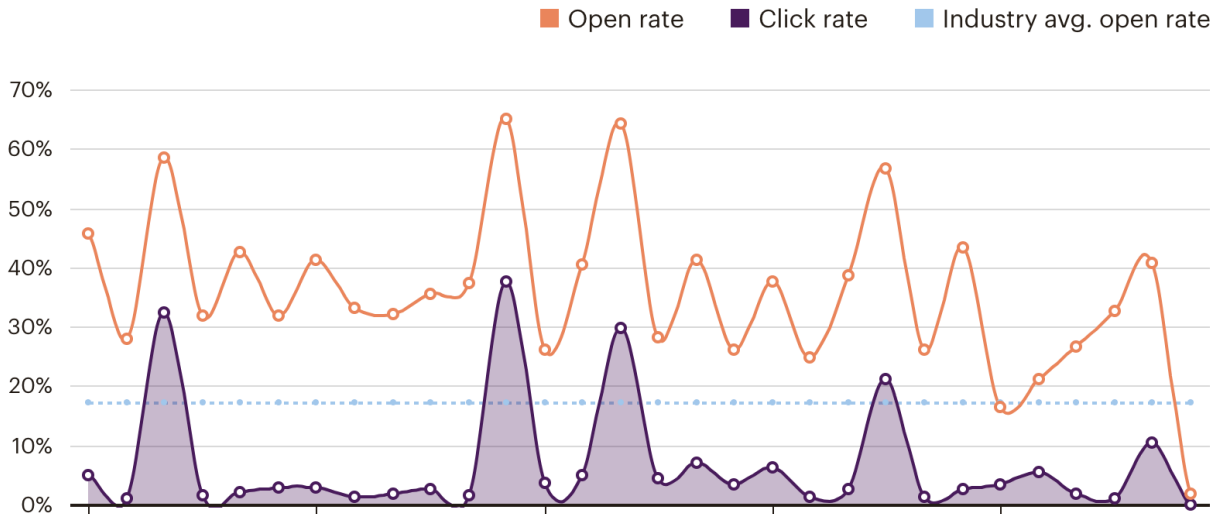
We continue to struggle to get the word out about the prize, and to receive a significant number of high-quality pitches. Even so, we published [an excellent prize-winning article](#) in 2021.

## E-newsletter

Our free Mailchimp account only allows us to send to a maximum of 2,000 addresses per day, and a paid Mailchimp account is too expensive. We are moving our email marketing platform to ActionNetwork within the next month.

Our audience continues to grow steadily, despite (or because of?) the fact that we send few emails. In Nov 2020 our total audience was 3,799 with 3,027 of them being active subscribers. In July 2021 our total audience was 4,352 contacts, with 3,460 of them being active subscribers..

**Oct 2020 - July 2021**



## Website

We don't have best-practices for accessibility on web or social media; Sophie (our summer student) is researching best-practices for accessibility on social media, and we'll be implementing her recommendations once she's done.

We've roughly doubled our website traffic over the past five years; most of that growth has happened over the past year. Other metrics – like the number of sessions per user, bounce rate, and session duration have remained constant.

### Pageviews

- 522,689 sessions in 2020-2021 (July 1, 2020 - July 1 2021)
- 367,131 sessions in 2019-20
- 295,881 sessions in 2018-19
- 269,673 sessions in 2017-18
- 275,407 sessions in 2016-17

### Other insights:

- 47% of people browse the site on mobile, 50% on desktop, and 3% on tablet.
- The top cities where people browse from are Toronto (10%), not set (7%), Vancouver (3%), and Regina (3%)
- We have an 84% bounce rate and an average session duration of 1 minute
- Most readers find the site through organic search or social media

## Social Media

All our social media accounts' follower numbers have been growing faster than in past years. The fastest rate of growth has been on Briarpatch's Instagram, where followers have roughly



doubled over the last year. The slowest growth has been on Briarpatch's Facebook, which only added a few hundred new followers in the last year.

#### Briarpatch social media

Facebook: 9,725 followers

Twitter: 11,548 followers

Instagram: 5,512 followers

#### Sask Dispatch social media

Facebook: 418 followers

Twitter: 844 followers

## The Sask Dispatch

We have been publishing a Saskatchewan-focussed news publication, the *Sask Dispatch*, for three years. It has allowed *Briarpatch* to maintain a national focus, while also dedicating more space to Saskatchewan issues in a publication that will reach a more targeted audience. Using the money from the RWDSU *Defender*, we are able to pay Sara Birrell (who produces the *Defender*) to work for 10 hours/week as an editor/reporter for the *Dispatch*. Sara has indicated she intends to leave the Dispatch in December 2021, and we should begin looking for her replacement.

This year, after surveying our readers, we launched a twice-monthly Sask Dispatch email newsletter on Substack, written by Sara, where she comments on timely developments in Saskatchewan. We also received a \$2,500 grant from Journalists for Human Rights to publish solutions journalism stories in the Dispatch; Sara is currently soliciting and editing those articles, which will be published throughout the summer and fall of 2021.

We are preparing to launch a dedicated website for the Sask Dispatch, which will hopefully increase our readership and funding. We have a \$200/month budget to pay writers for the Dispatch. We have no money budgeted for fact-checking, copy-editing, or artwork.

## The RWDSU Defender

In 2019 Briarpatch was contracted by the union that represents Briarpatch staff, SJB-RWDSU, to write and produce the RWDSU's newsletter, the *Defender*. Sara Birrell produces and lays out the Dispatch. It's been running pretty smoothly so far, and Briarpatch recently worked with the design group StrikePoster to design a new, better design template for the Defender.