



Red Deer Native Friendship Society ANNUAL REPORT

April 1, 2023 - March 31, 2024

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
APRIL 1, 2023 - MARCH 31, 2024**

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Kelley Arnold:
Nanatawihowin Culture Programs
Coordinator

Donna Bishop:
Kokum, Knowledge Keeper

Christal Makokis:
Pimacihowin Housing Program
Coordinator

Tanya Lemon:
Community Development Researcher

Nadette Agecutay:
Director of Programs

Ashley Patterson:
Four Directions Family Support Program
Coordinator

Laurie Patterson-Leith:
Operations Manager

Lianne Hazell :
Executive Director



Executive Director's Report

Hello Friends!

I have very happily been a member of the friendship centre team now for twelve years. People have come and gone...and some have come back. It's a special place, Red Deer Native Friendship Society, made so by everyone who has worked and works here and by every community member who has come through our doors.

We continue to grow in the programs and services we are able to offer the community. Much of this growth comes from community input and funders who recognize that the friendship centre is doing good work and is responsive to community needs.

Our partnerships and collaborations grow, and we are always so grateful to have such positive relationships with other agency groups. I believe we have the best relationship we have ever enjoyed with the local RCMP...with plans for more collaboration on community activities.

Our final Pow Wow was an outstanding two days of Pow Wow magic! The event welcomed students the first day and all the community on the second day. We welcomed more than 3000 attendees...some growth for sure since our first Pow Wow that saw 500 attendees.

Our TALK (Truth, Awakening, Love and Knowledge) conference was a success with presenters we would love to welcome back to the community. As well, members of our staff team presented to appreciative audiences. We collaborated with CARE for Newcomers on a one-day conference held in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. At this conference, we had a staff member singing O'Canada in Cree, our Kokum giving the opening prayer, our youth worker on a presentation panel of youth experiences, and several staff members facilitating break-out sessions.

Our staff team continues to care for the community members with kindness and respect, the likes of which I have only ever experienced here at the friendship centre. We continue to have the best staff team, possibly in the province, maybe the country.

This is likely the last time I will pen this message as transition is inevitable and I am beyond excited that my long-time partner in crime (so to speak!) Nadette Agecoutay, will soon be moving into the position of Executive Director. Together, Nadette and I have overseen the complete operations of the friendship centre since 2016. Nadette is not a new name or new face in the community as she is well connected and has easily become the face of the friendship centre. Watch our socials for announcements of change!

As always, I am proud to be part of the Friendship Centre team.

Lianne Hazell

“Empowering Community Through Friendship”



Vision & Mission

In the spirit of Friendship, the Red Deer Native Friendship Society is committed to a community without need. We embrace and are guided by cultural wisdom and traditional teachings to provide a healthy and safe place of belonging for all people living in Red Deer.

The RDNFS is a charitable Aboriginal agency dedicated to building an empowered community through Asooahum cultural housing, community development and the Aboriginal Youth Centre for Success.

We are awakening Aboriginal cultural teachings and family preservation services that promote wellbeing and assist with the adjustment to life in Red Deer.

We strive to extend friendship and foster positive relationships to bring awareness of Aboriginal people and culture to all citizens of Red Deer.

CORE VALUES



Tipi Teachings, Medicine Wheel and the 7 Sacred Teachings

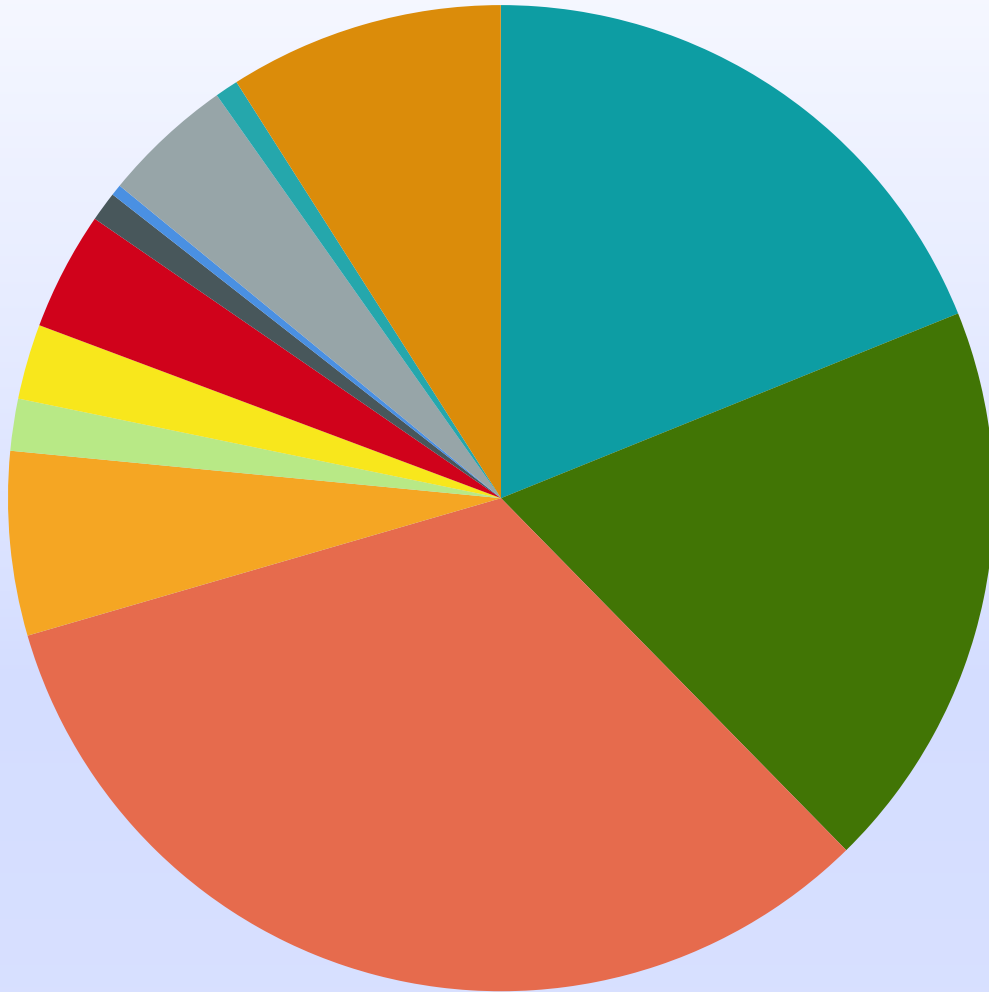
At RDNFS we strive to learn and grow as individuals, team members and community members following the tipi teachings, medicine wheel and 7 sacred teachings.

We believe that our Indigenous cultures are key to healing and growth and our commitment is to learn the teachings, model them, and include them in our programming.

Part of learning is making mistakes so we have a mantra here at the centre. You will often hear Kokum Donna encouraging us during morning prayer to yell out as loud as we can, "I AM WHO I AM, AND THAT IS ENOUGH!"

program funding

April 1, 2023- March 31, 2024



Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association (18.89%)	Children Services (18.77%)
Outreach & Support Services Initiative (OSSI) (32.85%)	Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) (6.02%)
National Association of Friendship Centres (1.7%)	Red Deer Public School District (2.48%)
Women and Gender Equality Canada (3.88%)	Government of Canada - New Horizons for Seniors (0.97%)
Canada Summer Jobs Grant (0.37%)	Federal Government - Capital Research (4.29%)
	Peter Gilgan Foundation (0.77%)
Alberta Health Services (9.01%)	

Total grants & contributions, donations, fee for service, interest
income and merchandise:
\$2, 514, 545.00



DID YOU KNOW?

RDNFS is an Indigenous Cultural organization but we serve all people.

Approximately 30% to 50% of participants in our programs at any given time are non-Indigenous.





DID YOU KNOW?

RDNFS has two social enterprises?

We have started the Friendship Shop which sells orange shirts and various items from local artisans.

Our amazing creative staff researched and created a haunted ghost walking tour that highlights local ghost stories and local Indigenous history.



CULTURE

Providing opportunities for cultural and spiritual connections for all citizens of Red Deer

HOUSING

Connecting participants to ceremony, healing and housing stability.

Program Priorities

FAMILY SUPPORTS

Promoting family unity, cultural pride and community connections.

YOUTH AND ELDERS

Increasing opportunities for youth and elders to connect and share cultural knowledge.

**Providing
opportunities
for cultural
and spiritual
connections
to all citizens
of Red Deer.**

Nanâtawihowin Connections to Healing Team

The Nanâtawihowin Team takes a lead role in providing Indigenous Cultural Supports to the staff at the Friendship Centre, our programs, partners, and community at large.

Program Deliverables



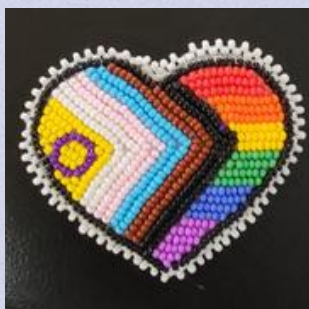
Youth Programs

928 youth were connected to a variety of youth programs this year including youth on the land, land based teachings, field trips, Spirit Seekers Paranormal Investigations, opportunities to connect with elders, and afterschool programs. The youth had many opportunities to participate and a large variety of programs to build their leadership skills, learn about culture and have fun opportunities to connect with other youth.



Two Spirit Project

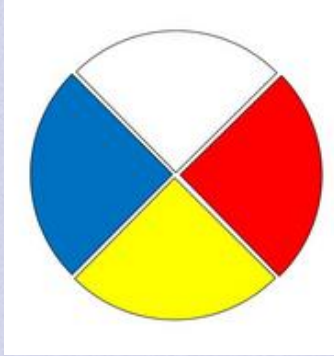
133 Indigenous Two Spirit and/or LGBTQIA+ youth were connected to their culture in meaningful ways. The project aimed to prevent suicide and promoted the overall wellbeing of youth including social, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects through various activities such as sharing circles and gatherings, cultural connection and reclamation, connection to knowledge keepers, crafts, ceremony, access to resources and referrals, education and awareness.



Gender Based Violence Prevention

Through the Gender Based Violence Prevention project our main goal is to improve our understanding of the gaps in supports and services for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. This project reached 850 youth and 450 adults through participation in focus groups, education and awareness and cultural supports.

Nanatawihowin Team Programs Continued



Community and Family Resource Connectors - In School

We have the community and family resource connectors working in the public schools to connect students with programming at the Friendship Centre, connect schools to elders and knowledge keepers and cultural education. Provides support to FNMI workers and CLW, support youth to stay in school and help families with school supplies and basic needs to support the overall wellbeing of the family.



Legacy Link - Seniors Programming

A range of intergenerational activities was achieved through excursions such as berry picking and spirit doll making workshops that fostered connections between youth and elders. Monthly visits to Parkvale lodge seniors home offered opportunities for smudging, crafting and companionship. At Christmas we hosted a heartwarming party complete with delicious dinner, gift exchanges and crafting. We offered a social event featuring merchandise bingo bringing joy and laughter to the seniors, and weekly programming included elders tea and crafting promoting cultural exchange. This program reached 253 people from ages 55-64, 20 people ages 65 and up and 10 people under 25.

Nanatawihowin Team Programs Continued



Cree Lessons

We started Cree lessons in November of 2023 as an unfunded program. We held classes weekly and had 43 classes from November 2023 to March 2024. There were up to 20 people in a session sometimes but the total ranged from 3 to 12 per class. Out of the participants there were 81% identified as First Nations, Metis or Inuit. 8% of participants were seniors, 10% were youth and 82% were adults. The program ended in June 2024 and we are actively seeking funding to continue this valuable program.



Blanket Exercise

The Blanket Exercise was created by KAIROS Canada and it is an experiential teaching tool that explores the historic and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. From April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024 the Friendship Centre delivered 13 blanket exercises reaching 214 people including 11 community organizations, RDP students and community members. 72% of participants were non-Indigenous and 28% identified as Indigenous.

Success Stories

Kelley Arnold, Nanantawihowin Program Coordinator, success story, "The Waskasoo Seepee Traditional Pow Wow was a success! The Red Deer Native Friendship Society hosting the traditional pow wow for 4 years in Red Deer, holds significant importance for several reasons. Pow wows are vibrant and culturally rich gatherings that serve as a way to celebrate and honor Indigenous traditions, heritage, and community.

Pow wows are an integral part of Indigenous culture and have been passed down through generations. They provide a platform for Indigenous people to express, preserve, and showcase their cultural traditions, including music, dance, regalia, storytelling, and arts and crafts. By organizing a Pow wow in Red Deer, the community actively participates in cultural preservation and ensures the continuation of these practices for future generations.

Pow wows foster a sense of community among Indigenous peoples and create opportunities for social interaction, connection, and solidarity. These events often attract attendees from various nations and tribes, allowing for cultural exchange and the strengthening of bonds between different Indigenous communities.

Organizing a Pow wow in Red Deer provides a space for individuals to come together, celebrate their shared heritage, and build relationships. It gives the opportunity for non-Indigenous people to learn about Indigenous culture, traditions, and history. By opening the event to the wider community, it promotes understanding, appreciation, and respect for

Indigenous ways of life. Red Deer, being a diverse city, benefited by fostering cross-cultural understanding and encouraging dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents.

Pow wows have a profound impact on the participants, as they serve as a source of empowerment and healing. For Indigenous individuals, attending a Pow wow can be an opportunity to reconnect with their roots, reclaim their cultural identity, and find strength in their heritage. By hosting a Pow wow in Red Deer, the local Indigenous community is provided with a supportive environment to heal from historical trauma and celebrate their resilience.

Overall, having a traditional Pow wow in Red Deer, is important as it promotes cultural preservation, community building, education, empowerment, healing, and economic development. It serves as a platform for celebrating Indigenous culture while fostering understanding and appreciation among diverse populations. Being part of the planning and delivery of this event was a great learning and blessing to me."

Thomas Martell, Cultural Helper/Youth Mentor: One of the stories I would like to share is our field trip/culture camp to Jasper Alberta. Youth on the land is a fabulous program bringing culture and ceremony to youth who might otherwise not have the opportunity to experience or connect with the community the way this program provides. The youth experienced ceremony while on this field trip, while bonding with other youth from their community and Elder J. Sinclair. We also had exercises to develop leadership skills while sharpening their ability to work as a team utilizing communication as a necessity to complete the exercise. We had the chance to Hike with the youth in mountain ranges while learning indigenous history on the land we were hiking on and, as well as cross country skiing appealing to the physical side of the medicine wheel. This camp was a huge success. The youth had fun and have all asked to return to do it again should we plan another trip. Memories were made, relationships and friendships ignited. I personally experienced time with the youth sitting by the fire, while eating meals, after activities and during free time speaking about their experiences while at the camp and how it benefited them. It made my heart sing to hear the positive impacts we were making with youth who were experiencing struggle and hardship either within their households or at school. We were providing confidence and self esteem, pride and joy to the youth that were chosen to attend the culture camp. Weeks after we returned from Jasper some youths were still feeling the positive benefits of all that we had experienced while at the camp.

Alicx Mitten-Kowalchuk, Community Resource Connector: I wanted to highlight being part of the Indigenous youth planning committee for grade 8/9 students are my success story this month. We have 6 different school districts within the central Alberta area participating in it this year, which jumped by 4 more districts than last year!! To me this is amazing as it is just the third year this has been put on and it is growing exceptionally fast. I cannot wait to see the outcome and how it has morphed from last year with what breakout rooms are offered/teachings are being share from our Elders! This is my success story because it attempts to show Indigenous youth that they too can be anything they want to be when they put their hearts and minds into their journey and that they can be the link that breaks away from the trauma of colonization. This conference offers hope and allows the youths to view themselves in another light possibly, fostering healing and community building.

Bee Henry, Gender Based Violence Prevention Project Facilitator: Overall, I've noticed that the community is aching for connection in three key areas: self, community, and culture. Breaking these down further, it is clear to see the trends in these areas over time. For example, participants who report low self-knowing are often more likely to report discomfort around boundary setting than participants who report high self-knowing, which indicates that individuals with low self-knowing may be at a higher risk of facing violence and abuse than individuals who know themselves well. Similar sentiments can be echoed across the areas of connection to community and culture as well. Individuals who report high connectivity in all three key areas- self, community, and culture- are more likely to report feelings of hopefulness, optimism, resiliency, and courage. I've noticed a subtle increase in high-connection reports over the course of my work, which is a very positive sign! Although the increase is slow and inconsistent, it is there, which means that as participants grow more connected through programming and other community engagement, the community as a collective takes steps towards kindness, love, and hope.

Shannon Humphrey, Two Spirit Program Keeper: This month's success story is one of personal growth. The personal growth and self awareness displayed by the participants in two spirit circle is a great point of pride for our program. One participant has been with us since day one and went from displaying concerning behaviour that bordered on duty to report self destructive behaviour to now expressing impressive self awareness and the importance of connection. The personal growth they have shown from pushing boundaries and being clearly uncomfortable with connection to telling us they missed us and spending two hours being genuine and talking about their feelings makes me very proud. They have also become more comfortable identifying the need for help and asking for it when necessary. Currently, they are struggling with food insecurity and voiced this at circle. They let us know how much they appreciate us providing them with snacks and even shared how hard it's been to communicate financial struggles. The awareness this individual displays and the trust they have placed in our community demonstrates the importance of creating safe spaces for people to be their most authentic self. This really validated that our program makes a difference and matters to the participants. I am feeling lots of love for our circle and pride in our program.

**Promoting
family unity,
cultural
pride and
community
connections.**

Four Directions Family Support Team

The Four Directions Family Support Program provides in-home and in office supports to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families and individuals focusing on prevention and intervention services that meet each family or individual's needs for parent/child development and cultural support.

Family Friendship Nights

Brings families together to share a meal, build fellowship, reduce isolation, and promote finding natural support networks. Engage in family friendly activities that foster belonging, meaning and purpose.

Wellbriety

The wellbriety circle follows 12 step curriculum rooted in the Medicine Wheel and Indigenous practice of kinship and interconnectedness. It provides a brave space for people who are struggling with substance abuse or trying to maintain their wellness through sobriety.

Youth Wellbriety

The program creates a transformative experience for the youth, leading to positive changes in their wellbeing, self-preception, and connection to their cultural roots.

Women's Wellness

We promote a safe space for women to interact, to explore women-focused Indigenous teachings, and life skill development. Participants have built themselves a community around the wellness of and for women.

Thunderbird Learners

A literacy program in partnership with the Library encourages family bonding, reading and critical thinking. The programs success lies in the ability to create space when children can thrive, make friends and develop literacy skills. Parents feel supported and encouraged to nurture their children's growth.

Little Paws

This program is a companion to womens wellness and parenting programs and held twice weekly. It has been effective in enriching children's cultural and social learning, with parents reporting significant improvements in their social skills

Wahkohtowin Traditional Parenting

The program bridges the gap between mainstream parenting and traditional Indigenous ways of child rearing. There are discussions about the roles of our ancestors, stories relating to teachings, and how we were raised.

These classes are held in Red Deer, Rocky and Wetaskiwin.

Family Support Case Management

Case managers support participants and their children, providing weekly in-home parental support using prevention and intervention strategies focusing on the medicine wheel. Support can include goal planning and achievement. Goals can include any area of life such as parental, spiritual, social, emotional, vocational, physical, marital or financial.

Celebrating Families!

Working with families to heal and stay together.

Celebrating Families! is a new program started in September 2023 and is an educational program that works with families that are having trouble because of substance and alcohol use. The program helps the family heal together through 16 facilitated sessions.

Celebrating Families Year 1 Impact

75%

of participants felt more connected to community and traditional knowledge keepers



75%

of families now feel confident in managing family challenges and reaching out for support

80%

of participants noted an enhanced sense of cultural identity



90%

of participants reported improved communication skills by the end of the program

53

unique participants served



90%

of participants felt more connected to family members

70%

of participants experienced significant improvements in their mental health



Connecting with my Family

This has become an important space where children and youth share their learnings with their parents, and the whole family engages in common activities.

Cultural Aspects

The camp includes activities that promote participant's connection with culture, such as: crafting, traditional games, medicine walk and tipi teachings.



Celebration!



Recognizing their commitment is an important part of the program. At the end of Celebrating Families! participants are part of a graduation where every member of the family receives a diploma.

"I liked the community. This program has helped me"

"Making the safe people posters helped me to know how and who to ask when I need help."

Participant stories

A key theme among participants was stronger family connections. One participant expressed appreciation for the program's focus on family, saying, "Being connected with my children was my favorite part of the program." This sentiment was echoed by others who reported improved communication and closeness within their family.



**Connecting
participants
to ceremony
and healing
and
supporting
housing
stability.**

Pimacihowin Aboriginal Housing Team

The Indigenous Housing Team provides case management and support to Indigenous individuals and families experiencing homelessness or who may be at risk of experiencing homelessness. Rooted in Indigenous culture these programs have a strong emphasis on connecting participants with ceremony, traditional practice, community and cultural activities in support of their healing journey and housing stability.

Housing Programs



Homelessness Prevention

76 Individuals/families were prevented from becoming homeless or having their utilities cut off.



Rapid Rehousing

37 Episodically homeless participants were supported.



Intensive Case Management

33 Chronically homeless individuals were supported.



Aboriginal Coordinated Entry

Through RDNFS' intake **101** participants were matched to a housing program within Red Deer's System's Framework for Housing and supports to meet their specific needs.



Total Participants Served

247 Participants were supported through our housing programs

Success Stories

My HPS participant who is a single mother (with 2 dependents) was successfully housed through the Pimacihowin Housing program and settling very well in their new neighbourhood. In addition, the participant just finished her vocational course at Delmar College and is now doing her placement at Tommy Guns. The participant told the writer that she might get hired at Tommy Guns after the placement. She intends to work there until she'll be able to attain the required hours and start the process of applying to be a Licensed Barber. The participant said that everything has been falling into the right place at this point. The participant feels really supported that the Pimacihowin Housing Program extended the assistance to transition into a new place that whole family can call home.

My success story is making in person connections with other agencies to give the wrap around support our participants need and deserve. We have made great connections with two social workers at the hospital and another staff member helping us look for supportive housing as one of our participants will be transitioned out of the hospital. Really working as a whole team all of us and on all the same page to let our participant be present and not overlooked, talked to not over (as in the past I have seen the trend of landlords, other agency workers talking to us over our participants and having to direct them back to talking to our participant as they are human). Another great connection is with Street Connect and one worker in particular. The worker brought a participant to a PPM, and you could tell has build a great rapport with this individual and with us all working together and including the participant in the decision to transfer them to Amethyst where they can try and work on their substance use and get life skills and use Amethyst as a positive stepping stone for this individual who has overcome so much trauma.

A success story for the month of August was wrapping up on a participant's end of life needs/requirements for their housing, next of kin concerns, etc. We were able to communicate with the landlord positively. Polar Bear Cleaning was hired to take care of necessary cleaning, and removal of garbage/paraphernalia. Housing case managers were also able to surrender participants' cats to the Central Alberta Humane Society to be rehomed. Case managers were invited to funeral and returned keys to landlord at the end of the process.

When I received a referral, I recognized the name right away (I worked with him at Safe Harbour). He remembered me (from detox). This made me feel good (sometimes, in the work we do, we wonder about the connections we make with individuals and whether or not we've made a difference in their lives). As we spoke, he told me his main interest was Wellbriety; during his stays in detox, he was permitted to attend Wellbriety circles. He wasn't overly interested in attending Christian based addiction support groups (AA, NA). He'd heard other detox guests speaking about Wellbriety and thought it may be something he'd be into. He was unsure as he left for his first circle, but when he returned, he told others (in detox) that his experience was a positive one. On the phone, He told me he loved that Wellbriety was based on teachings of the medicine wheel, the cycle of life and the four laws of change. The biggest thing that stuck out to him was that 'in order to be truly sober and healthy, one needs to be healthy mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually'. Wellbriety's principles really resonated with him and it's something he wants for himself in the future.

After being on the CAP list for over 400 days, a young non-Indigenous female was finally matched with a housing program. This young lady struggled with homelessness after being evicted due to not being able to pay rent after she received a \$300 rent increase. For over 400 days this young lady had to stay at the women's shelter and then after had to constantly couch surf. She endured hidden homelessness that made her mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health deteriorate. She was very excited and hopeful when told she was matched with a housing program!

During our outreach when we encounter anyone who is currently homeless and sleeping rough the intake bags that have water, boost, socks etc, really brighten up their day and seem to let them know that someone cares even if we can't immediately help them. Individuals are usually excited to receive the outreach packages and hear about housing programs in Red Deer.

Special Concerns Unit

This year we started a new program to help individuals and families who are struggling with accessing resources in the community due to; 1) systemic barriers, 2) required services not being offered, and/or, 3) the concern needs immediate action. One of the main goals is to fill some of the gaps in the systems to improve the overall wellbeing and the quality of living situation for participants accessing the program.

Some of the activities of the program include administering the United Way Lights on Program, helping participants fill out paperwork such as AISH and Income support applications, consider limited financial supports for those who can not access help elsewhere, and help with obtaining important identification needed to apply for services.

38

Families were supported

58%

Of participants were Indigenous

34

Individuals supported

Success stories written by Amabelle Bacuno, SCU Case Manager

A single mother of a 3-year old kid just got back to the workforce after a very long time since she needs to care for her child. Due to a very limited income, she was unable to catch up payment with their water bill. One day, when she got back from work and had to cook supper, she found out that their water was disconnected. She was so anxious knowing that water supply is substantial in daily living and on top of that she doesn't have any money to pay for the said arrears plus the reconnection fee. The participant reached out to the Friendship Centre and through the SCU program, the worker then coordinated with the City of Red Deer-Utilities Dept. as soon as possible and sent the confirmation email stating that SCU program will pay off their water bill balance/arrears. The water was reconnected within 2 hours from the time the family dropped by the centre. The participant was really thrilled for the speedy process of getting their water back on. This participant gave RDNFS a five-star rating in Google review.

A mother in a family of three (3) who are struggling with homelessness and at the same time infected with Covid-19 were referred to the Special Concerns Unit by Red Deer Catholic School District Counsellor. This is for a fact that no shelter would take them and the writer was told that they were already phoning almost all social service agencies in Red Deer but unfortunately, there's no emergency assistance available for this family. It was only a matter of an hour and their case was brought up to the Leadership Team and carefully assessed the current situation, then 1-week stay was granted. An arrangement with the hotel manager was made immediately for this family. It is through the SCU program that they were able to access immediate help and without the SCU program, this family would've ended up sleeping on the street in cold weather and the Child Family Service will be called since it involved a 10-year old child. During a week stay at the hotel and while recovering from Covid-19, the writer referred the family to RDNFS Homelessness Prevention Service for housing support. The family has conveyed their gratitude and said that without the support that they received from SCU program, there was a possibility that they might get separated from their child, which for them is one of the greatest nightmares that they could think of.



















Thank you!

Thank you to our Funders:

Government of Canada:
Reaching Home
New Horizons for Seniors

Canada Summer Jobs

Women and Gender Equality Canada

Government of Alberta:
Outreach Support Services Initiative
(OSSI)
Children's Services
Alberta Health Services

Red Deer Public School District

Alberta Native Friendship Centres
Association

National Association of Friendship
Centres

Other:
Peter Gilgan Foundation
Red Deer Community Foundation

Thank you to the following organizations for your partnership and/or support with events and programs:

CARE for Newcomers

Youth HQ

Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery

Red Deer Polytechnic

Red Deer Public School District

Red Deer Cultural Heritage Society

Urban Aboriginal Voices Society

The City of Red Deer

Red Deer Catholic School Division

Red Deer Public Library

YMCA

Outreach Centre

Street Ties

McMann

Amethyst House

Shining Mountains Community Living
Supports

Metis Local #492

Wetaskiwin Boys and Girls Club

Central Alberta Pride Society

Central Alberta Sexual Assault Support
Centre

Red Deer RCMP

Hearthstone Property Management

McMan Rocky Mountain House

Second Harvest

Mustard Seed

Telus Mobility for Good

Alberta Health Services

Red Deer Wellness Alliance

Red Deer River Watershed Alliance

Marvel College

Red Deer and District Community
Foundation

Ubuntu

Safe Harbour Society



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