

# THE ALEX

2017 / 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

## All together now



The Alex Board of Directors are proud to share our 2017-2018 Report to Community. This year marked a significant change in the way The Alex provides services to thousands of vulnerable Calgarians: the development of our 60,000 sq ft facility that brought together many of our health and housing programs, as well as our administrative team. The new Alex Community Health Centre is a physical expression of the growth this organization has seen over the past dozen years. By consolidating five individual clinics and offices, we have been able to save money, increase access to our programs, and provide a new home to over

200 dedicated staff. And a new building wasn't the only change we saw this year. Read our timeline inside to see the remarkable growth of our programs, including the grand opening of Prelude, our newest Permanent Supportive Housing unit, as well the official grand opening of our Community Food Centre and Garden in the heart of Forest Lawn. We also provided a direct response to Calgary's opioid crisis by applying our wraparound model of health care to at-risk individuals at our new Complex Care Clinic housed in our Family Health Centre. At The Alex we are creating a solid base

for our future through strong partnerships and collaborations with community agencies, funders, and government as well as the community of foundations, individual donors and corporations who support our work and invest in our success. Our strength is our people; the dedicated leadership team who ensure we are at the table when policies are developed and funding decisions are made; our Associate Directors who develop creative, sustaining ways to deliver cost-effective programs; and the team leads and front line staff who imbue their programs with passionate consideration for our community members. Of course, the people who walk through

our doors are our true reason for being. The thousands of Calgarians, from youth to seniors, who come to The Alex know we are an open door to health, housing and wellness programs. These programs meet not only their immediate needs, but also connect them with a loving, judgement-free community of caring staff who walk with them on their journey to wellness. I encourage you to read the stories of Mona, Reg & MaryAnn, Meto, Julie and Annette to hear in their words, how The Alex is changing health and changing lives.

**-THE ALEX BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Mona was afraid that she'd end up missing or murdered like thousands of other Indigenous women in Canada.		When Meto went to college he discovered he "didn't fit the mold."		Annette volunteers at the Seniors Space to reach those who are lonely or isolated.	
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Julie wanted the ability to offer to do something in return when she needed to ask for help.		For the first time in two decades Reg and MaryAnn have a safe place to live, rooms to call their own.		2017 marked a huge increase in services provided by The Alex as we moved into our new space.	

# Mona

by Sarah Weaver

*Mona is a Metis woman who was born in Sudbury Ontario. As the oldest of 4 children, and with little support from her mother, she did her best to raise her sisters. At the age of 27 and with 3 children of her own, a devastating fire left Mona's family with nothing.*

Homeless and without options, she was forced to make the heartbreaking decision put her own children up for adoption. Mona did everything she could for the next several years to re-gain custody of her children. Despite having housing, a part-time job, and a volunteering role, her children were never returned to her.

Devastated by the loss in court, Mona started drinking heavily. "I hit the bottle hard. Forgot about life. I didn't care about

life." Mona fled Ontario because of troubles with the law and moved to Calgary.

Homeless, she was sleeping on the streets, in abandoned garages, and in shelters. Mona was afraid every day that she'd end up missing or murdered like thousands of other Indigenous women in Canada.

"When you're walking with your life on your back, and you don't know where you're laying your head, you gotta hide all

the time," she reflects. Even in the shelters, Mona was scared. She and other women would hide in the washrooms for hours and take care of each other. "It was my only safety net."

Desiree, a community worker, attempted to get Mona connected with the Safe Communities Opportunity and Resource Centre (SORCe) to find her housing. "It went in one ear and out the other," she said. "I remembered that my friend got evicted from her place and I was like, why would I do this? Desiree looked at me and said, 'We don't care if you're drunk, just show up tomorrow at 8:00 am.'" At this meeting, Mona met Holly, a case manager with The Alex's HomeBase housing program.

Holly connected Mona with mental health supports, secured housing, and helped her move into her own place where she's now been living for two years. She's been doing great living independently, and has even reduced her drinking. She attributes it all to The Alex and to Holly.

"I don't have to worry anymore. I know that if anything goes wrong, I can pick up the phone and Holly is always there. She makes sure I'm never alone, never stuck or worried. They care. It's not just their job, they picked this job because they want to help people. The Alex is wonderful. I love these guys, I do."

Because of the support Mona has received from The Alex and all the work she has done to improve her life, Mona has finally been able to re-connect with her children after 25 years. Speaking about them now brings tears of joy to her eyes.

can ever do. "I've been here close to two years and I wake up every morning, look around, and I say 'Wake up! This isn't mine.' And I know it's mine, but it's so amazing. If I can do it, all my friends out there can do it. I always use to think, yeah right, it's not true. I was so wrong. Take that chance, take that leap because you will be so happy and changed. I've changed. Get out of the cold and talk to these people, they love you."



Housing First recognizes that people are not able to work through issues that contributed to their homelessness (like trauma, addiction or mental health) while they are homeless and unsafe. Our Housing First programs give people immediate housing and then attach a case management/clinical component that helps people access appropriate services and navigate complex systems such as health care and justice. Clients are housed throughout the city and we help with integration back into their communities either through work, volunteering or recreational activities. By reducing the high-systems costs of being homeless (emergency room visits, police and justice services), we save over \$100k per client per year, costing just a fraction of that to actually transform people's lives.

**STEVE GASPAR**

Associate Director of Housing Programs



**"I DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ANYMORE. I KNOW THAT IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG, I CAN PICK UP THE PHONE"**

Her father, who she says was never part of her life, now often visits for weeks at a time.

Mona's advice to those struggling with homelessness is to recognize that there's help out there and it's the best thing you

APRIL, 2017

2017 was a big year for The Alex

**CLERC JOINS THE ALEX**

The Alex and Children's Legal and Educational Resource Centre (CLERC) joined forces, with CLERC's team of in-house lawyers and a roster of volunteer lawyers continuing to deliver non-criminal legal services to Calgary's unrepresented and vulnerable youth under the new name Youth Law at The Alex.

# Meto

by Johanna Schwartz

*For Meto, his artistic spirit has always directed his path. After going to art school, it also became evident that there was more to his path than he had thought.*

“When I went to college I started discovering that maybe I didn’t fit the mold, and of course, you chalk it up to ‘weird artist’, but I started finding out that my gender identity wasn’t really aligning with me. It took a long time - two years into college - and I met a trans guy, my best friend, and he started talking about being transgendered. At first I was like ‘No no no I couldn’t be transgendered...I’m just weird.’ And it slowly dawned on me. [Earlier] I had broken my leg, went through a severe depressive episode, and tried to self-harm – it was quite an experience. After talking to my new best friend I realized that I was transgender. I got a referral to a psychiatrist specializing in transgender youth but it’s a three year wait, and I said I just can’t live with myself ‘til then after discovering the severity of my situation.”

Meto’s friend told him about The Alex Youth Health Centre, and Dr. Jane Dunstan, our in-house physician specializing in transgender health.

“I went in and it was [snaps fingers] like that. Jane just talked to me face to face. She was just so busy but she took the time, and she started me on my hormone therapy within 2-3 months.”

Throughout his sessions with Dr. Jane, Meto got to know the staff of the Alex Youth Health Centre and all of the resources available to him, including support for his official name change.

“I’m really glad that I got this opportunity. If I had tried to deny myself, it wouldn’t have been a possibility for me. Despite how much I love living my life, I don’t know how far I would have been able to go, which is a tough thing to admit. I think it’s sad that most people in my situation, they don’t have family to turn to, they don’t have the support. I love the Alex. There’s no amount of words or appreciative gestures that I could make that could actually communicate the sincerity and the depths of what The Alex has done for me.”



*Metonym | noun | A word, name, or expression used as a substitute for something else with which it is closely associated.  
Meto Nim | noun | A comic artist and illustrator who has been using his art to pointedly address hate and transphobia.*



Working in the Youth Clinic over the past three years I’ve come to see in action the value of healthcare and support services that allow LGBTQ+ youth to feel seen and respected. This care can mean specialized treatment - such as access to hormone therapy or other gender-affirming medical care - but it can also be as simple as creating a space for youth to express themselves in a way that feels best.

Support for little things, like using a chosen name and pronouns that fit best for that person instead of the name on their ID can be a huge help in making trans people of all ages feel like they’re in a place that respects them for who they are. Some youth are confident in speaking up about how they want to be treated from the start, but it can feel really scary to be assertive in a setting like healthcare, especially as a young person. Youth may feel unsure about whether they’re “allowed” to use a chosen name or feel worry about creating extra work by asking staff to use the pronouns that feel right for them. (For the record: This is always allowed, and never a problem!)

Not all youth have the opportunity to be treated in a way that’s gender-affirming for them at home or at school. Having healthcare as a place where LGBTQ+ youth can feel safe and seen to access medical services is incredibly important and means that youth are actually accessing these services and able to get the care that they need - whether that’s for gender transition, mental health, or just accessing general care. As a provider, it’s such a privilege to be able to support youth through the journey of transition and watch their confidence grow as they start to feel able to express themselves in a way that feels more authentic.

**DR. JANE DUNSTAN**  
Physician, Youth Health Centre

**MAY, 2017**

**PRELUDE OPENING DAY**

The Alex was selected by HomeSpace to manage a new 23 unit building in Radisson, adding Prelude to our group of Housing First programs. Operating on the principles of harm reduction, clients are supported with their mental health needs, addiction issues, and medical recovery, empowering them to reclaim their lives.

**JUNE, 2017**

**CFC GRAND OPENING / VINE CUTTING CEREMONY**

After a successful first year of programs and community meals, the Community Food Centre celebrated the opening of its community garden, welcoming everyone to grow, cook, share and advocate for good food.

# Annette

by Annette (as told to Sarah Weaver)

*I've been volunteering at The Seniors Space for just over a year. I'm usually here 2-3 days a week for programs. I come in, make coffee, and ask if anyone needs anything.*

I make a point of introducing myself if I see somebody sitting there, because I want people to get the schedule of our activities.

**I LOOK AT THE ALEX AS MY FAMILY, BECAUSE I WAS ONE TO ISOLATE, AND I DON'T DO THAT ANYMORE. SO IT REALLY MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE. THAT'S WHAT I WANT FOR THE OTHER SENIORS WHO LIVE HERE. I WANT TO REACH THOSE WHO ARE LONELY OR ISOLATED AND DON'T NORMALLY COME TO THE SPACE.**

The off-site excursions we've gone on as a group have been my favourite part of volunteering. We've taken bus loads of seniors to the zoo, a saskatoon berry farm, Heritage Park, the cat café, and more. We've also done activities with other groups, such as the Brown Bagging for Kids program. Recently we had a few kids from the downtown YMCA come in, and we had a fun day just playing bocce ball, tennis, and bean bag toss. The group also loves going to the Community Food

Centre on Wednesdays and Fridays. They get very excited wondering what's going to be for breakfast and lunch. I've found that as long as we have activities going

on, people will show up. And we have quite a number that come from the health centre downstairs. Even when seniors are isolated, they're usually still in touch with



**SOCIAL ISOLATION IN SENIORS**

As we age, it often becomes harder and harder to stay connected to your community. Family members move to new places, and friends move into assisted living homes, or pass away. Physical mobility becomes more challenging, and the ability to drive safely becomes an issue as well. Now imagine that all of these factors are in place, and you struggle with English as a second language; or you are struggling with depression; or you are living on a severely fixed income with nothing left over for social activities. A place like the Senior's Health Centre and Senior's Space social club not only provide a place for health and wellness, but for real human connection. Volunteering, meeting new people, and getting help navigating the health care system all contribute to having something to look forward to, making life feel meaningful.

**VAL RAINS**

*Team Lead, Seniors Programs*

their doctor or nurse.

My first doctor was with The Alex when it was on 9th Avenue in Inglewood, and I've been with them ever since. I lost my mom two years ago and that really hit me hard. The Alex was there to support me, which was great. I look at The Alex as my family because I was one to isolate, and I don't do that anymore. So it really makes a difference in my life. That's what I want for the other seniors who live here. I want to reach those who are lonely or isolated and don't normally come to the space.

I really enjoy volunteering. I wish I would have volunteered sooner. I never really considered it before, because I was always employed. And now I'm not so it gives me a purpose, you know?

**JUNE, 2017**

**PEOPLE'S GATHERING AT OLYMPIC PLAZA**

In celebration of Canada's 150th birthday, our annual celebration of Indigenous culture moved to Olympic Plaza, where we expanded our programming and fed almost 500 hungry Calgarians.

**JULY, 2017**

**ALL PROGRAMS MOVED INTO CHC**

Bringing our Family and Youth Health Centres and our Housing First programs together under one roof, the newly renovated 60,000 sq ft Community Health Centre in Radisson Park is a hub of health and wellness programs. With expanded space for more medical rooms and a bright and airy youth drop-in centre, the CHC continues to grow and change to meet the needs of our community members.

# Julie

by Christina Palassio

*When Julie first found The Alex Community Food Centre, she wasn't looking for someone to give her food—there were lots of places like that around her Calgary home. She wanted a place that gave her choice.*

At the time, she was on maternity leave, struggling with postpartum depression, and her partner had lost his job. The family of four was trying to survive on Julie's EI maternity benefits, but it wasn't enough to make ends meet. They had to ask for help. But Julie had trouble finding food programs that resonated with her as a mother of two looking to feed her family healthy food.

She heard that The Alex offered free classes where people could cook and eat together. She joined the International Avenue Kitchen program, got to know her fellow participants, and began to feel at home. She also got to know the staff, who wanted to know what she was interested in and if she'd like to help out.

The ability to offer to do something in return helps you maintain a sense of dignity and respect when you need to ask for help.

"When people are dealing with food insecurity, they want opportunities to give back—not just take," says Julie. "The ability to offer to do something in return helps you maintain a sense of dignity and respect when you need to ask for help."

Julie's worn many hats as a volunteer—from helping to shape the concept of a Fresh Food Market to cleaning up after meals. And she's not alone. 44% of program participants contribute their skills and leadership as volunteers. CFCs strive to eliminate barriers to participant volunteerism, and to create opportunities for people to pitch in the ways that make sense for them.

"At The Alex, people can give back on their terms. There are no expectations or obligations placed on you when you volunteer. You might only be able to help out for one day, or one meal, and it's great."

**"THE ABILITY TO OFFER TO DO SOMETHING IN RETURN HELPS YOU MAINTAIN A SENSE OF DIGNITY AND RESPECT WHEN YOU NEED TO ASK FOR HELP."**



## FOOD INSECURITY AND BASIC INCOME

Household food insecurity has less to do with food and much more to do with having a low income. When a person does not have enough money to cover their basic needs, life becomes a juggling act of priorities. Housing, medicine, childcare and other expenses all come first, and that leaves very little for good food. The impacts of diet-related illness on communities as well as on the health care system are immense, and current social assistance programs don't leave any wiggle room for a nourishing diet. The Alex Community Food Centre recognizes the value in not only increasing access to and improving skills around food, but also in advocating for better social support structures, including a guaranteed annual income. A just food system for all means putting adequate income into the bank accounts of all Calgarians.

### SYMA HABIB

Community Action Coordinator, Community Food Centre



#### JULY, 2017

##### THE SENIORS SPACE OPENS

The Seniors Space welcomes low-income seniors in the East Village to meet for social activities, like picnics in the park, crafting, Spanish lessons, thrift store shopping excursions and many more activities that help reduce isolation and bring people together.

#### SEPTEMBER, 2017

##### TOWN HALL ABOUT FOOD ACCESS AT CFC

During the 2017 mayoral race, a group of youth at the Community Food Centre hosted a town hall meeting where they invited candidates to join and share their platform on food security and food equity. With almost every candidate in attendance, the event put the spotlight on both the food issues at heart and the youth who are making change happen in their community.

# Reg & MaryAnn

by Johanna Schwartz

*If you come to visit Reg and MaryAnn at The Alex's Prelude housing program, you will be welcomed to MaryAnn's studio apartment on the ground floor (Reg lives in the wheelchair accessible suite next door). Her suite is cozy and kept very tidy, with a few favourite movies on her shelves sharing space with a framed photo of her brother, whom she lost to alcohol addiction.*

The story Reg and MaryAnn is a story of resiliency in the face of so many obstacles. This year will be their 20th anniversary of sharing their lives together, living in and out of shelters, and 'camps' under bridges and by train tracks throughout downtown Calgary. Their new homes in Prelude mark the first time in two decades that they have a safe place to live, rooms to call their own. The 23-unit building provides round-the-clock care from a team of case managers, registered nurses and support workers, who provide medical and social supports, as well as mental health and addiction counselling.

The duo will regale you with tales of their lives on Calgary's streets, with an incredible recall of names and dates. MaryAnn, through deep belly laughs, remembers how handsome the police officers were who would patrol the railyards in Inglewood where they would be camping. "They were 7 feet tall – and Native too!" she laughs, to which Reg roll his eyes and playfully groans.

Each wants to share different aspects of who they are and where they have been. MaryAnn graduated high school – a huge source of pride - and found work in offices after graduation, until her epilepsy made it too difficult to keep her job. She first came to The Alex for epilepsy medication and stayed connected with our medical team even as she found herself being drawn to street life.

Reg, like many people who have experienced chronic homelessness, has had a lifetime of addictions and the medical issues that can come from many years of alcohol use and rough sleeping. He emphasizes that he doesn't blame anyone else for the direction his life took, but also recognizes that living on the street can

impact how you see yourself, and whether you are "worthy" of a good life.

"You turn into an alcoholic. I'm not blaming alcohol on things, but it's what happens. You turn to drinks, and you turn to whatever. When you give up on yourself, you give up. There are people who really care. But you don't care for you."

Since arriving at Prelude, their lives have stabilized. Reg will come over to visit his "honey-bunny," and MaryAnn will have a

few cold beers for them to share. They will bicker and laugh and talk with the staff, who ensure they are getting the medical attention they need.

"It's lucky for us" says MaryAnn. "We like it here."

"We are thankful for someone who thinks about you...who cares" says Reg through some emotional tears. "How can you go wrong?"

**"YOU TURN INTO AN ALCOHOLIC. I'M NOT BLAMING ALCOHOL ON THINGS, BUT IT'S WHAT HAPPENS. YOU TURN TO DRINKS, AND YOU TURN TO WHATEVER. WHEN YOU GIVE UP**

**ON YOURSELF, YOU GIVE UP. THERE'S PEOPLE WHO REALLY CARE. BUT YOU DON'T CARE FOR YOU."**



## HARM REDUCTION

The practice of Harm Reduction is the understanding that, for many people, drug and alcohol dependency is a way to self-medicate against larger underlying issues such as sexual abuse, early childhood trauma or mental health symptoms. Only after addressing these other issues can we begin the process of healing, and once that journey has begun, we can start to work on plans to reduce drug and alcohol use. Requiring people to be sober before they are allowed to be housed, or to receive social supports, tells people that they are not worthy of care in their current situation. Meeting people where they are, and supporting their own decisions, gives people agency over their own bodies and their own plans for healing, providing dignity and self-worth, and increases the chances of success.

**NADINE ACHEMICHUK**  
Team Lead, Prelude Housing Program

SEPTEMBER, 2017

### ALEX JOINS CALL FOR REINSTATING FLUORIDATION

Our Dental Health Bus has seen first-hand the impact of non-fluoridated water on the teeth of our vulnerable children. The working poor are without any dental support system and their kids suffer the consequences. We were proud to stand as a signatory and voice on the issue, asking our Provincial and municipal leaders to reinstate fluoride, allowing all Calgarians access to this basic preventative dental care.

SEPTEMBER, 2017

### CACHC CONFERENCE

The Alex was proud to co-host the national conference of Community Health Centres, where thought leaders and clinical workers gathered to discuss mental health services and supervised injection sites, and shared how we are working with other agencies across the sector to improve support and care for Calgarians experiencing homelessness.

# The Solution Studio

*For Calgarians with physical disability or mobility issues, this will be a familiar tale. Many rely on Calgary Access to help with transport, but that requires lots of planning and advance booking (and a phone or internet to do so); too many sidewalks and crosswalks are still inaccessible.*

Not to mention how many places just don't have sidewalks or crosswalks at all, like the light-industrial neighbourhood where The Alex Community Health Centre is. These daily challenges increase risks of social isolation, and prevent people from getting care and connection. But what can be done to change it? That's why Dr. Christine Gibson is hosting a workshop of The Solution Studio with the topic of Mobility.

Dr. Christine Gibson, a physician,

program facilitator, and wellness expert with CommuniTree Wellness Centre at The Alex Community Health Centre, facilitates The Solution Studio workshops, giving community members the opportunity to approach complex personal challenges such as addiction, homelessness, mental and physical illness, and disability from a systemic perspective.

"It's very difficult for us as community supports to provide a program that addresses these struggles without having

experienced them ourselves. By empowering participants to use their own lived experience, the solutions are more likely to actually work," says Dr. Gibson.

The Solutions Studio workshop makes people feel heard and empowered. As a group they discussed idea that the lack of accessibility in Calgary is not an individual problem, and should be looked at as a systemic pattern of omitting people with disabilities from decision-making. After the Solutions Studio workshop, the group were so inspired by the ideas and perspectives shared, that the Mobility Committee was formed. They now gather regularly to advocate on a municipal level for improved accessibility and infrastructure in Calgary's public spaces. At the last Mobility Committee meeting, they called 311 as a group to push for a marked crosswalk on 2nd Ave in front of The Alex.



## THE PEOPLE THAT WALK

## THROUGH OUR DOORS ARE OUR REASON FOR BEING

I totally love The Alex they are so understanding and generous I wouldn't want to hang out or volunteer anywhere else!

**MELODY**

July 2018 - Facebook

It is such an amazing place, the doctors are very caring and help in every way possible. When I'm having a rough time they sit & listen and help me plan a good path to better my health & it's very nice they have food out for lunch.

**HAILEY**

January 25, 2017 - Facebook

omg i love the alex , how does 1 even explain?

**SABRINA**

March 14, 2018 - Facebook

The Alex basically saved my life. Kathy the receptionist is helpful and very nice. Dr. Singendonk is an amazing doctor, who will listen and help. The team here won't stop until u are healthy! If u have had trouble with other doctors or just need help. GO HERE.

**STEVE**

August 2016 - Google +

I can't begin to tell how this amazing organization has helped me. With the Alex's support, love, friendship, and services I would never have been able to be truly me. They gave me the tools and support to grow. From the bottom of my heart I say thank you.

**CHANDRA**

August 7, 2017 - Facebook

### NOVEMBER, 2017

#### COMPLEX CARE CLINIC GRAND OPENING

In response to the opioid crisis, The Alex partnered with Mosaic PCN and Alberta Health Services to open a clinic specializing in opioid addictions and treatments, and mental health supports. Providing the same model of wraparound care we use in our other clinics means more resources and a broader understanding of the underlying issues of someone's addiction.

### JULY 2017

#### OPTOMETRY COMES TO THE ALEX & MINT PHARMACY OPENS

Dr. Hazel Lema Delong became our resident optometrist, providing weekly visits for eye health and glasses. We also welcomed the opening of Mint Health + Drugs right in the heart of our Family Health Centre, integrating pharmacy services into the clinic so our patients have in-house access to medications, reducing extra travel time and costs or other barriers to aftercare.

THE ALEX IN NUMBERS

97%

of youth say The Alex Youth Health Centre has a positive impact on their health.

100%

of youth stated that The Alex staff treated them with courtesy and respect.

12065

healthy meals served at The Alex Community Food Centre.

93%

of people feel they belong to a community at their Community Food Centre.

538%

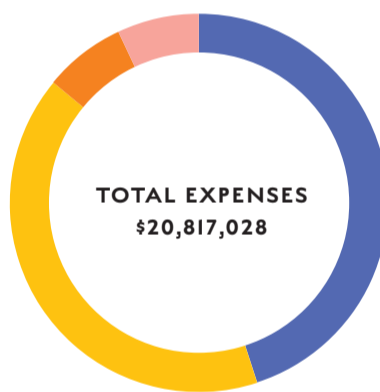
increase in youth accessing services at The Alex Youth Health Centre for transgender support in past year.

50

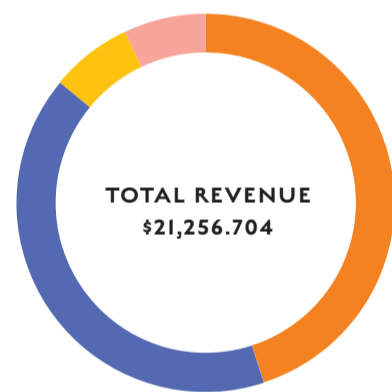
graduates from Housing First programs achieve independence and stability.

900

volunteers contributed over 7000 hours.



- Health – 42%
- Housing – 40%
- Support Services – 10%
- Wellness – 8%



- Calgary Homeless Foundation – 45%
- Alberta Government – 41%
- Community Contributions – 6%
- Other Contracts & Earned Income – 7%

*Full financial statements are available at thealex.ca*

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS!

To see the full list of donors and supporters, please visit [thealex.ca/supporters](http://thealex.ca/supporters). Together we are changing health and changing lives.

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