



Discovery  House

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

to the Community



Why We Exist

Our Vision

Healthy thriving families, free from domestic violence

Our Mission

Empowering people who've experienced family violence with the space, supports, and skills to imagine and create a better life

Our Values

Empowerment
Tenacity
Inclusion
Curiosity
Collaboration

Almost 30% of women experience intimate partner violence at some point in their lives. For some women, this violence is lethal.

In 2024, 187 women and girls were violently killed in Canada. The rate of domestic violence has been on the rise across the country.

A woman is killed by her male partner, on average, about every 6 days in Canada.

Family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children.

Calgary Police Service reported that they had responded to more than 23,000 domestic violence calls in 2023. That's almost 3 requests for help every hour of every day of the year.

The trauma of domestic violence can have devastating and lifelong consequences.

For children, exposure to violence at a young age means they are more likely to use violence later in life. Trauma disrupts normal development in the brains of young children. Over time, this can lead to increased risk of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, and health problems such as heart disease and chronic illness. It impacts relationships, self-esteem, and the ability to communicate.

Domestic violence impacts everyone. In Canada, the total economic impact of domestic violence was estimated in 2009 to be \$7.4 billion.

But...

With the right intervention, at the right time, this trauma can be healed. This is where Discovery House steps in.

The brain is incredibly resilient, families are brave, and Discovery House offers the space, support, and skills to help people imagine and create a better life for themselves.



Theory of Change

A family is
experiencing
domestic violence

OUR WORK

safe and affordable
housing, counselling,
parenting programs,
case management

OUTCOMES

increased resiliency, improved
parent-child attachment,
increased protective factors
for children, long-term
life skills

THE IMPACT

the traumatic cycle of
domestic violence is
ended for that family

Our work is grounded in trauma-informed, client-centred approaches that are inclusive and culturally appropriate.

Our Priorities

OPTIMIZE OUR IMPACT

BE THE BEST PLACE TO WORK

BE ADAPTABLE

INCREASE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT



What Families Told Us...

“Discovery House has changed my life by not judging me for where I come from or what happened. They give me strength and honesty, and make me feel supported emotionally, mentally and physically. Having support changed my life. I still have battles that I deal with, but I have **NEVER FELT MORE HEARD** than I have with them. My worker is kind and honest caring and firm and looks out for my kiddos as much as I do. A lot of compassion. I wish I could give back to them as much as they have helped me.”*

“Discovery House has impacted my life immensely in a positive way. Because of (housing worker) I was able to get into my own house, and because of the rental support Discovery House provides, I have been able to have stable housing for the first time in my life. Without them, I would not be able to pay my rent and have finances to buy groceries. And being connected to the wonderful Elder Pam Heavy Head has profoundly changed my life.”*

“When I first came to Discovery House, I was a shadow of who I was before and even who I am now. I’m not sure where I would be if I did not have the support, encouragement, and help that they offered in every aspect of my life—they have seen me through so many trials and tribulations, ups and downs these past few years.”*



“Having a home, a space for my son and me, gives me great security and strength. I am grateful for this opportunity.”

“I’m getting out of my domestic violence situation and into my own place with my children... that alone feels amazing. I never thought I’d get to this point of freedom and being able to just be me and breathe. [The staff] have been an amazing support system for me and I don’t know what I’d do without their help, so thank you Discovery House... you gave me and my children a fresh start.”*

*edited for clarity

Families Served

At Discovery House this year, we had the privilege of working with 417 people, most of them children and youth.

The families often arrive with little more than a few bags of belongings, and are dealing with many different stressors. Some have been experiencing multiple types of violence such as physical, emotional, psychological and financial. Many are also living on low incomes, without access to their own money, without identification or a job, and members of the family may have health and mental health challenges. By providing long term support, we are able to take the time to help them stabilize, recover from trauma, dream of a new future, and rebuild a life that is rewarding, peaceful, and meaningful.

Upon admission, mothers in Discovery House programs reported:

48%



COGNITIVE OR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

36%



PHYSICAL HEALTH ISSUES

28%



SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES

92%



HAD AN AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME BELOW ALBERTA'S LOW INCOME THRESHOLD

56%



OF CLIENTS HAD A MONTHLY INCOME BELOW \$2,000

The average monthly income of the families at intake was \$1,923 or \$23,076 per year.

417

people were supported by
Discovery House this year.

42%

Indigenous

30%

Other racialized minorities

68%

of our clients were children and youth



2.1



2019-20

2.2



2020-21

2.3



2021-22

2.5



2022-23

2.4



2023-24

2.1



2024-25

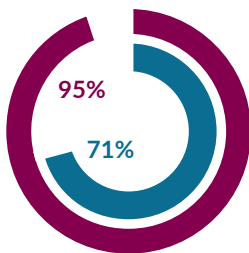
Average number of children per family

Levels of Danger



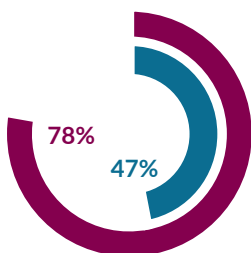
Discovery House provides support, space, and safety. Leaving a violent relationship is one of the most dangerous times for those experiencing abuse. When families arrive, one of the first things that happens is for staff to meet with the mother or caregiver and complete the Danger Assessment, a validated tool used to assess a woman's risk of being killed by a person who has used violence in their relationship. This helps the staff and client make a personalized safety plan.

People often think of domestic violence as physical harm, but the reality is that most of our clients experience multiple, overlapping forms of abuse. Many clients tell us that the emotional and psychological trauma they endure is just as damaging—if not more so—than the physical.



In the past year, women accessing our shelter:

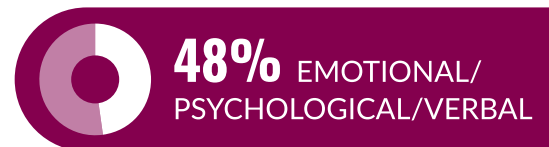
95% of clients who completed a Danger Assessment were at increased, severe, or extreme risk of being killed by their partner and 71% of these women were at extreme risk of being killed.



Of the women accessing our Community Housing Program:

78% were at increased, severe, or extreme risk of being killed by their partner and 47% of these women at extreme risk of being killed.

Types of abuse at intake:



48% EMOTIONAL/
PSYCHOLOGICAL/VERBAL



40% PHYSICAL



27% FINANCIAL

Supports & Services

In the past year, a total of **417** women and children worked with Discovery House. Of those, **62** women and **125** children left our shelter and housing programs having developed skills, begun to heal, and built their resilience to increase their safety and thrive.



Shelter and Outreach

Discovery House’s shelter provides important long-term support for families who need time to recover from violence while in a safe and secure home. The 19-unit apartment building becomes their home, and they can receive another year of support through the Outreach Program after they leave. This year 32 families (including 79 children) lived at the shelter, for a total of 111 individuals. In addition, 18 families (including 32 children) worked with our Outreach Team after leaving the shelter.



876 HOURS

of care were provided to families accessing shelter and outreach this year, in addition to counselling services.

	Number of Families Accessing the Shelter	Intakes	Exits	Average Length of Stay (months)
2024-25	32	19	19	10.5
2023-24	31	14	14	11
2022-23	35	18	18	11
2021-22	34	16	17	10
2020-21	51	27	25	7
2019-20	43	33	35	6

When families live in the shelter, they have convenient access to Rosie’s Place, our Child Development Centre, the playground and courtyard, counselling and community gathering rooms, and a variety of programs that happen throughout the year in these spaces.

A highlight for mothers this year was the opportunity to practice trauma-sensitive yoga with an amazing local practitioner who was brought into Discovery House. A client had this to say after her multi-week experience:

“Practicing yoga has been a truly transformative experience for me. It’s not just about physical movement — it’s a moment of peace where I connect with myself, release stress, and find balance. Through each breath and pose, I feel my body grow stronger and more flexible, while my mind becomes calmer and more focused.”

Community Housing

The Community Housing Program supports families by helping them find affordable, safe housing in any community in Calgary that meets their needs. This means that our staff support families beyond the walls of our shelter. These families receive customized services such as one-on-one support, help with budgeting, connections to resources, and more. In the past year, 84 families were in this program, with 173 children. The average length of stay in this program is now 22 months.

This year, the number of families accessing this program decreased from last year. This is due to increases in the cost of supporting each family through rental subsidies and damage deposits as a result of the housing and affordability crisis, limiting the number of families we are able to work with.

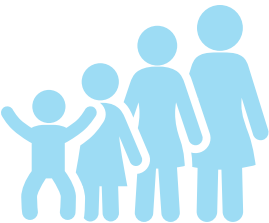


2,884 HOURS

of care were provided to families accessing the Community Housing Program, in addition to counselling services.

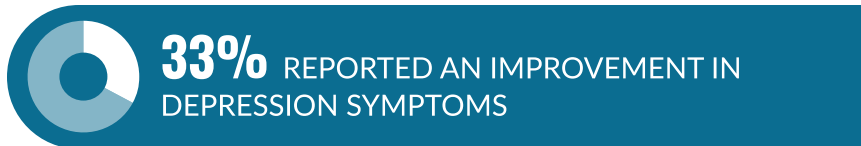
	Families Served	Intakes	Exits	Average Length of Stay (months)
2024-25	84	24	31	22
2023-24	95	25	35	24
2022-23	105	41	36	23
2021-22	100	25	36	21
2020-21	106	31	31	20
2019-20	123	48	49	18.5

257 INDIVIDUALS:
84 mothers
173 children

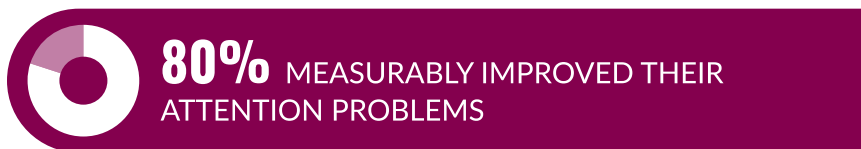


Counselling

Of the mothers who accessed counselling programs:



Of the children who were surveyed (ages 6-9) who engaged with mental health clinicians or child and youth case managers:



1,330 HOURS

of counselling was provided to **91 clients**. 36% were children and youth.



Child and Youth Program

Working with children and youth is an area of specialization for the Discovery House team. We know that the impacts of trauma can be healed with the right care, when the right approach is taken at the right time. Our Child and Youth team provide accessible one-on-one support and case management. Young children get special support in Rosie's Place, located in the heart of our shelter. Whatever that youth needs, our team strives to make it happen.

Throughout the year, special events such as holiday parties and lunches keep children engaged. Knowing that summers without the structure of school can present challenges, Discovery House Summer Camp for children keeps them active, engaged and working on social skills. This past summer, **49 children** attended Summer Camp, going on field trips, gardening, making crafts and more. This high-quality programming helps keep children focused on their physical and psychosocial development, healing and recovery—even during the summer months.



2,385 HOURS

of care provided to children and youth.

12 families participated in the Indigenous adaptation of Mom's Empowerment and Kid's Club, with a total of **21 children**

Mom's Empowerment and Kid's Club is an innovative program and research project that builds on the success of the past year, with the goal of helping families heal and be more empowered. The program is supported by researchers from the Universities of Calgary and Manitoba.

47 children accessed Rosie's Place for over **392 sessions** of support

Financial Empowerment Programs

Many families that come to Discovery House are living on lower incomes, and many have not recently worked. In the past year, 93% of families relied on Alberta Works or the Child Tax Benefit for their income. At Discovery House, every mother and caregiver are offered budgeting assistance to help manage financial resources.



Empowerment **STAR**

46% increase
in Accommodation

50% increase
in Support Networks

47% increase
in Children

47% increase
in Money

49% increase
in Work and Learning

The Empowerment Star has been used for three years and the data gathered helps us to guide our programming. Adult clients rate their current experience in nine areas: safety, accommodation, support networks, legal issues, health and wellbeing, money, working and learning, children, empowerment and self-esteem on a scale of 1-10. This year, an average of 45% of clients had an overall increase in each of the nine domains.

Empowerment Star numbers have gone up since last year, indicating that clients are experiencing even greater impact from our programs.



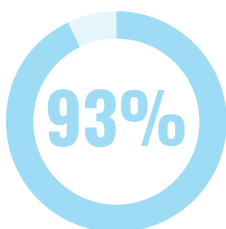
57
mothers
participated in at
least one financial
empowerment
program

55
mothers
participated in
financial coaching

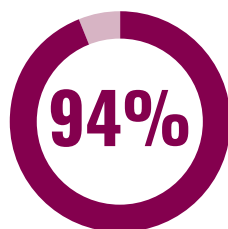


19%
increase in client
income, showing
improved stability

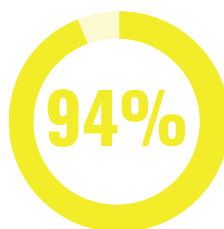
Families are given the opportunity to participate in a survey that helps us learn and improve. In the past year, of the clients who completed a survey:



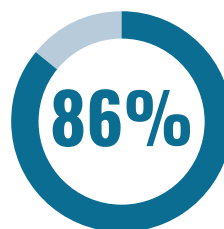
reported feeling safe



said they feel
respected,
encouraged and
supported



said they participate
in decisions that
impact them



have hope for
the future

Cultural Healing & Care

Discovery House has crafted an intentional and accessible approach to cultural care because many of the families we work with have never had or no longer have connections to their faith, rituals, and traditions. Accessing these special activities can be encouraging, inspiring, and provide a new sense of harmony and hope.

We have trusted relationships with Elders in the community who we are honoured to work with and learn from, including Elders Pam Heavy Head and Clarence Wolfleg. A full-time Cultural Liaison at Discovery House coordinates knowledge sharing and training sessions, events, and traditional activities. Throughout the year, individuals learned to bead moccasins, sew ribbon skirts, create prayer beads, celebrated Eid al Fitr with a feast, joined a Black History Month Book Club and more.

We are grateful to have a partnership with the Inglewood Community Garden that allows for planting, growing, and harvesting of tobacco for families to use to offer to Elders, and in ceremony.

In the past year, **37 clients** accessed a cultural workshop, registered program, had one-on-one support from the Cultural Liaison or Elder Pam for a total of **131 sessions**



41 staff attended a cultural workshop, program, or consulted with the Cultural Liaison or Elder Pam

Thank you to the Calgary Foundation for generously funding this work and helping us strengthen Indigenous-led practices.



Facilities & Operations



In addition to nineteen apartments, Kookonnooni cultural healing space, and Rosie's Place, the shelter and head office continues to support essential programming and services for families healing from domestic violence.

This year, several major infrastructure projects were completed to improve the safety, accessibility, and overall functionality of the well-loved building. Highlights included transforming a three-bedroom apartment and a staff washroom into fully accessible spaces, upgrading lighting systems, enhancing building controls such as the heating and air control systems, and replacing aging windows.

Trauma-informed design remains central to our multi-year capital planning and guides our renovations and upgrades.

In the year ahead, we will continue with apartment and art room renovations, finalize a comprehensive revision of our emergency response plan, and strengthen protocols for all building systems. We'll also undertake a full building condition assessment to ensure this vital space remains safe, efficient, and welcoming for years to come.

Flooding Impacts Families

In early 2025, Discovery House experienced two significant floods that impacted both residential and program spaces.

The first flood occurred on January 21, when a sprinkler pipe burst in the attic, affecting two residential suites and four staff offices.

A second, more extensive flood followed on February 3 caused by a frozen pipe that burst during a cold snap. Water damaged nine residential suites, four offices, and several shared spaces, including the main lobby, cultural room, boardroom, and two washrooms.

All families were safely evacuated to a warm indoor location and supported off-site until they could return. Thanks to coordination with community partners, two families who were unable to return to their apartments were relocated to other housing. Thankfully, no one was hurt. The damage was limited to the building and mitigation began immediately. As of the spring of 2025, all affected spaces are still awaiting repair, and we are actively working with our insurance provider to restore them.

Thank you to funders, donors and partners who reached out to help following the floods. Your encouraging words and actions truly made a difference.

In response, we've taken steps to reduce the risk of future flooding, consulting with vendors to implement pipe protection measures. We are improving internal processes to support early detection and prevention of similar issues going forward.

Lobby before flood



Lobby after flood





Our Team

Smart, caring and capable staff are at the core of our work. Discovery House's reputation as a great place to work helps us attract some of the best staff, and our training and learning opportunities help them grow and learn in their roles. In 2024, a diverse range of training opportunities were offered. From formal sector-specific and cultural inclusion training to innovative, staff-led workshops and wellness sessions, we fostered a culture of continuous learning, empowerment and support.

The Discovery House team is highly specialized and does high-quality work. Constant learning and improvement are steeped into the culture of the organization with post-incident reviews, debriefs and quarterly reviews integrated into processes. The team has a chance to offer feedback in an anonymous cultural survey every second year and can ask questions anonymously at regular staff meetings using technology available on their phones.

Staff can join organizational committees based on their personal areas of interest and curiosity. This committee work strengthens the organization by helping to apply equity, diversity and inclusion principles, create cohesion, improve safety and health, and grow skills.

We continue to focus on creating a healthy, supportive environment where people can do their best work. Recognizing that the nature of the work as a social service provider can be emotionally demanding, especially when engaging with topics such as Indigenous history or cultural sensitivity, Discovery House is deeply committed to fostering a culture of self-care and peer support. The mental health team is accessible to provide guidance and emotional support during and after challenging training sessions or critical incidents. This commitment goes beyond formal resources and is woven into our daily practices and team interactions. Staff well-being is a top priority.



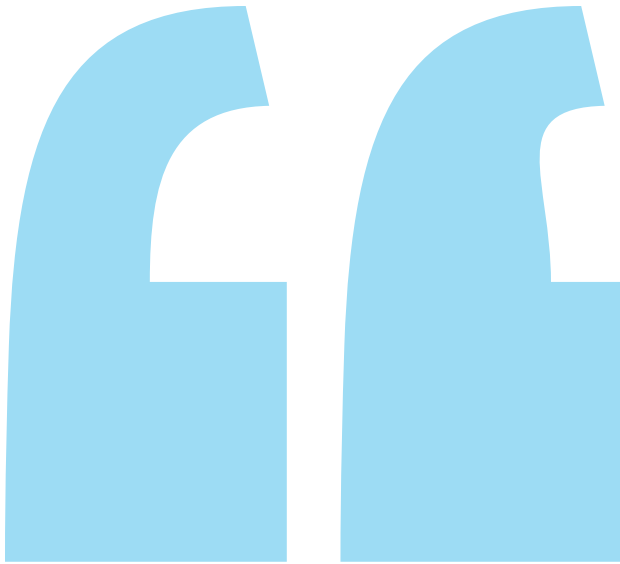
40%

of our client-serving staff are registered social workers, and almost **20%** of client-serving staff have a graduate degree in their field of study.



100%

of Discovery House staff agree that the organization has a culture of teamwork and cooperation and **96%** feel proud to work at Discovery House.



What our staff told us in an anonymous survey:



"I feel comfortable sharing ideas and knowing that DH has my back."

"I am so proud to be a part of a women empowering organization. I am always mind blown at the depth of talent we have on our team."

"I feel that DH and my work provides families and children an opportunity for support, growth, and learning in a way that is trauma informed and inclusive for communities. I feel my work makes a difference, and I feel empowered to do my job with the skills and training I have."

"I am deeply proud to be a part of the work we are doing for families in our communities, and the work we are doing to prevent domestic violence on a societal level, including our policy advocacy work. I really feel like our organization is making a real, lasting impact in the lives of women and children, and I see the dedication and compassion of our team every day. Our team members genuinely care about their work and it shows."

Our Community

Thank you to so many community members who raised funds for Discovery House in the past year:

The Traveling Teacups, COBS Bread Bakery Country Hills, Lil Empire Burger, Hardline Engineering Ltd., The Body Shop (Southcentre and Market Mall), Lola Lash Bar, Janeen and Gary Nissen, Wild Rose Brewery/Sleeman, Roger's Birdies for Kids, Big Al's Bar and Grill, Shoppers Foundation, The Texas Lounge, Rumble Boxing, Metta Hot Yoga Calgary, Christine Gillies, Big Canada Run, 60 North Run 2024, Brookline Public Relations, Inc., Tony Osman, Buncha Divas



“What an important gathering, I needed that more than I realized.”

- a She is... guest



This year, we exceeded our media target, helping grow awareness of the issue of domestic violence. This included two op-eds sharing commentary from our leadership team.

Learning and highlights from our cultural supports work were shared by our team at the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters Conference in Edmonton.

In the past year, approximately \$77,884 of goods were donated. This includes food, household items, handmade quilts, books, school supplies and more. If you are interested in donating new items, please see the list of essential items on our website.

Our organization was nominated twice for excellence; for a Calgary Award in the Advocacy category and an Inspiration Award in the Indigenous Leadership category.



Our She is... International Women's Day event in March was a sold-out success! Advocate, MMIWG2S+ speaker, and survivor Fallon Farinacci, joined us for an inspiring and empowering morning.

A new training offering called Domestic Violence 101 was developed and launched by our team this past year with positive feedback from attendees.

Our Volunteers

The talents and time from community and corporate volunteers grew this year. These dedicated individuals helped with summer camp, building furniture for apartments, setting up apartments for arriving families, stocking pantry shelves, thanking donors, cutting hair, taking photos and so much more.

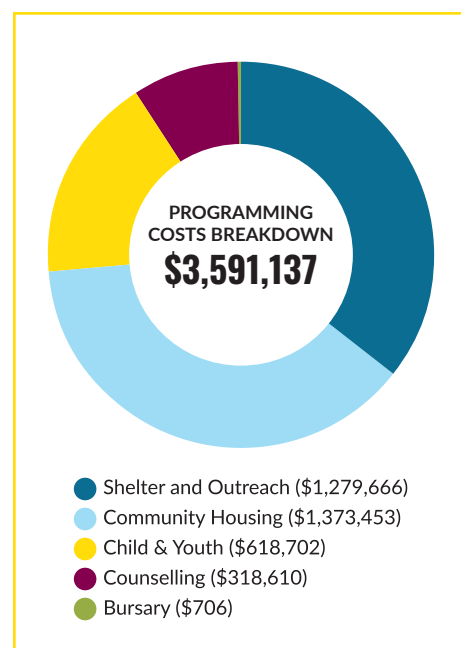
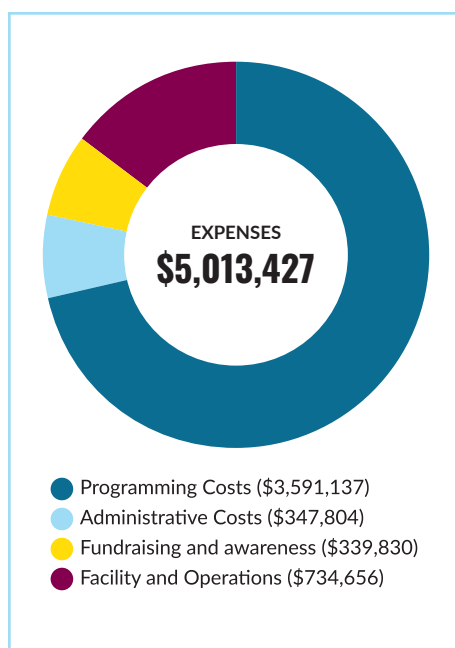
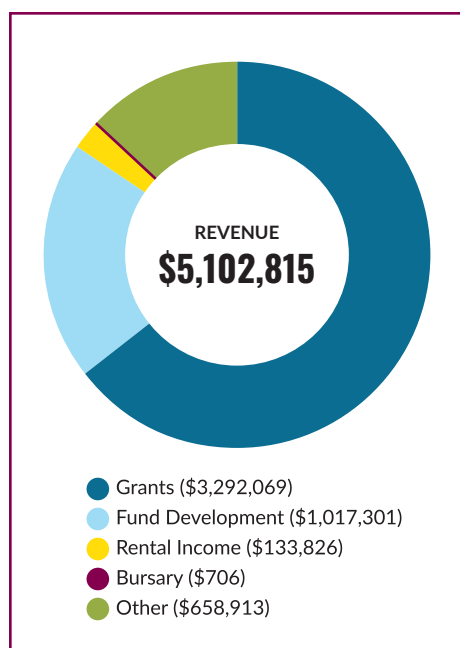


2,824 VOLUNTEER HOURS
= \$76,000+



The Financial Picture

Discovery House finished the 2024-25 fiscal year in a strong financial position, despite the challenges presented by flooding in our shelter and continued pressure from inflation. We are grateful to all of our funders and supporters who help us to enhance client experiences through our programming, research projects and improvements to our shelter, creating experiences that help clients to recover, rebuild and reimagine a better life.



Our Core Funders

We are grateful for the ongoing support of our core funders the Government of Alberta, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, and Family and Community Support Services – City of Calgary. With consistent and multi-year support, families are transformed.



Thank you to The Calgary Foundation for supporting our Cultural Liaison position, to CREB® REALTOR® Community Foundation and P.E.A.R.L. Foundation for your financial support for making building repairs and improvements.

Message from the Chair of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director

Oki, Âba wathtech, Danit'ada, Tawnshi, Tansi, and Hello

Discovery House has had an incredible year which brought continued momentum for the organization, alongside some unexpected challenges. Thank you to those who fund, partner, work for, or volunteer at Discovery House. Without you, the impact seen on the pages of this report is simply not possible.

Families are at the core of everything we do. We were privileged to work with 134 incredible families this year, down slightly from 148 last year. This continues to align with what agencies are seeing across the housing system with longer stays in housing-based programs and fewer openings. At Discovery House, this was compounded by the temporary loss of six apartments due to two destructive floods in our building in the early part of 2025. That said, engagement in some of our key programming areas has remained strong, especially in our Indigenous Moms Empowerment and Kids Club groups, which have continued to see steady participation and connection.

While we experienced operational disruptions due to the floods and pressure from the housing crisis, we also saw some incredible wins — from successful events and new funding to broader recognition of the work we're doing in the community.

On the community engagement side, we engaged positively with all levels of government, seeing some success in advancing the Coercive Control Bill (C-332) before Parliament was prorogued in early 2025. Our leaders advocated at the tables where decisions for the province's families are being decided, including committees organized by municipal and provincial levels of government.

Last summer, an exciting accessibility renovation to one of our 3-bedroom apartments was completed, meaning that families with a wheelchair-using individual have a safe place to go to when they most need it. Our first Impact Event in the fall brought together our supporters for an inspiring night of celebration and gratitude. Our She Is... event was a massive success again with an incredible featured speaker, a full room of caring individuals, and we even exceeded our fundraising target!

News media continued to report on the important issues of domestic violence and increasingly reached out to us directly for comment. Discovery House ended the year with 111 million impressions across media outlets, a level of reach that helps us raise awareness of the issues faced by families.

As we look ahead to 2025–26, there is a lot to be excited about. Thank you again for your continued support, and for helping families recover, reimagine and rebuild their lives.

Leslie Hill
Executive Director

Gabriela Gonzales
Chair of the Board of Directors

Board of Directors 2024-25

Chair: Gabriela Gonzales

Vice Chair: Doris Hall

Treasurer: Dale Brown

Secretary: Kristin Anderson

Directors:

Colleen Ham

Marcie Hawranik

Dr. Dawn Johnston

Candice Laws

Vicky Li

Krista Thompson

Carli Tyson

Tom Whalen



Leslie Hill



Gabriela Gonzales



Thank you
for supporting families and helping them start a better life!

Discovery House's commitment to reconciliation starts with acknowledging our immense honour and privilege of living and working within the Treaty 7 region. We acknowledge the traditional and ancestral territory and oral practices of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. This includes: the Blackfoot Confederacy, made up of the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations; the Iyârhe Nakota Nations (Bears paw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney), the Tsuut'ina First Nation. Calgary is also homeland to the Metis Nation of Alberta, District 5 & 6.

Discovery  House

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Learn more online at discoveryhouse.ca

   @discovery_house

Charitable Registration # 11882 3483 RR0001



For the 6th year in a row, Discovery House was honoured to be named a Top 100 Charity in Canada, with a 5-star rating and an A+ in results reporting. Being recognized as a Top 100 Charity by Charity Intelligence, even once, is a feat that takes a commitment to programs that make an impact, learning and growth, and efficient use of funds.