

Discovery House



2022-2023

Annual Report

TO THE COMMUNITY



A Message from our Executive Director and Board Chair

A theme that has emerged from the past year is “building.” Our staff and board have been learning, reflecting, and planning for the next three years – building a stronger future for Discovery House so that the organization is positioned to provide the best service possible to respond to the needs of families in crisis.

Starting almost a year ago, we engaged our entire community of clients, staff, board, donors, funders, volunteers, and community partners to revisit our mission and values, and set bold goals for the organization over the next three years.

We have evolved our thinking about values, leaned into our role in reconciliation and equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and have adapted our definition of family – all of which will strengthen how we work to prevent domestic violence. This new strategic plan captures the heart of our work and our hope for a safe future for families in the diversity of communities we serve. To read more about the strategic plan, visit www.discoveryhouse.ca.

With a new strategic plan in place, we have also begun a series of changes and improvements to help us better support families to build a life free of domestic violence. These changes have included new initiatives that will

strengthen partnerships with new and continuing research programs, renovations to our aging shelter, and so much more.

Supported by our dedicated donors and volunteers that contributed over 1,400 hours, Discovery House supported even more clients this year. In 2022-23, Discovery House was privileged to work with 179 mothers and 439 children on their healing journey. Discovery House staff also shared our expertise and helped to create change in the community. The team visited elected officials to share about the needs of our families and we were in the news throughout the year, bringing awareness of domestic violence issues to the public.

In the past year, we have been delighted to reconnect with our community face-to-face! Bringing people together again after several years of being apart has been a joy, from hosting a federal shelter funding announcement in

May 2022 to holding our first in-person AGM in two years, and finally, organizing our She Is... event on International Women's Day, which brought together almost 200 Calgarians for a moving program about the challenges and opportunities for women in our country.

We re-engaged in person with community members, donors, funders, and government partners who humbled us with their eager responses to invitations to tour our shelter! Thank you to those partners and supporters who took the time to visit Discovery House, seeing firsthand the many ways we work with our clients, and support their diverse needs.

While we have seen so much strength and growth this past year, it wasn't without challenges. The shortage of affordable housing, combined with an increase in demand for safe housing and services has resulted in higher wait times to access our programs for families that are leaving violence. This is an issue that we will continue to grapple with in the coming year as well. Another challenge we found last year was that recruiting highly skilled staff was particularly difficult in a competitive market for talent,

leading to longer vacancies in key roles. We invested in a review of our counselling team's structure and services, leaning into our specialization in trauma recovery and domestic violence issues.

Despite these challenges, your generosity and dedication has allowed 618 women, caregivers, and their children to start the transformation to a safer, healthier life free of domestic violence. Thank you for your commitment and support of the families we are privileged to work with every day.

We are so proud of the work our team does and are excited about the opportunities to do much more to bring about positive and lasting change in the culturally diverse communities we serve.

Thank you,



Leslie Hill
Executive Director



Simon Scott
Board Chair

2022-2023 Board Members



Simon Scott – Chair
Doris Hall – Vice Chair
Taylor Smith – Treasurer
Dr. Nicole Letourneau – Secretary

Busola Fagbodun
Carli Tyson
Esmahan Razavi

Michael Mauws
Susanne Huggard
Tom Whalen

Dr. Nicolette Little
Jagat Kaur
Leah Turner

Our Foundation



VISION

Our communities are free of family violence



MISSION

To end the traumatic cycle of domestic violence for families with children

OUR VALUES

Empowerment

All people have potential and can achieve great things. When people are safe and empowered, they recover, discover, and thrive.

Tenacity

We have grit. We get 'er done. We believe that every individual has the power and ability to make a positive impact, to bravely create change.

Inclusion

We believe that everyone belongs. We create safe spaces and foster inclusive community, warmly welcoming all people and actively working to remove barriers. We are committed to the long journey of reconciliation, anti-racism, and equity for 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.

Curiosity

We are inquisitive. We relentlessly learn and improve. We embrace flexibility, creativity, and innovation in order to stop the cycle of domestic violence.

Collaboration

To end domestic violence, we cannot work alone. We create meaningful connections, and strong teams, and work with others in order to go further than we could alone.

A family is experiencing domestic violence

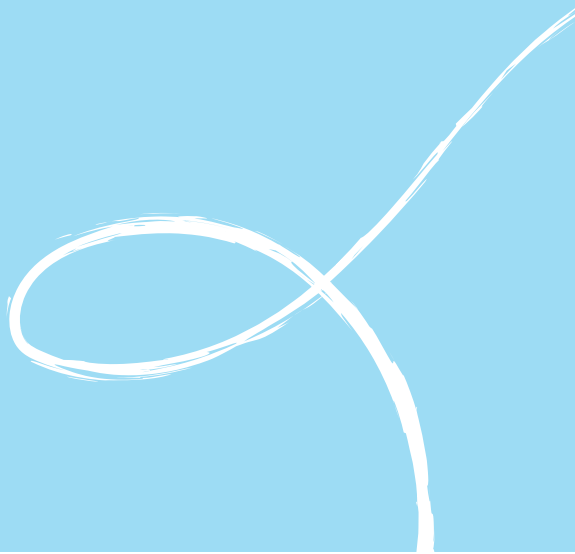
OUR WORK:
safe and affordable housing, counselling, parenting programs, case management

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

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

Theory of Change



OUR PRIORITIES

We have launched a new strategic plan at Discovery House for the 2023-2026 fiscal years. This new plan focuses on our work, resources, and investments so that the cycle of domestic violence ends for families with children. **The following four priorities will guide our efforts for the next three years:**

OPTIMIZE OUR IMPACT

BE THE BEST PLACE TO WORK

BE ADAPTABLE

**INCREASE COMMUNITY
LEADERSHIP & ENGAGEMENT**

For full details on our new strategic plan, please visit our website at discoveryhouse.ca/our-work/strategicplan



Our Clients

"I was able to find a shelter space and get out of the home when it felt unsafe because of the safety planning and information you provided to me."

- A Client

71%

of our clients
are children or youth



179

mothers

+ 439

children



Discovery House aims to serve over 600 individuals per year. This year, we are very proud that 618 clients, including 179 mothers and 439 children, received 12,000 hours of individualized supports.

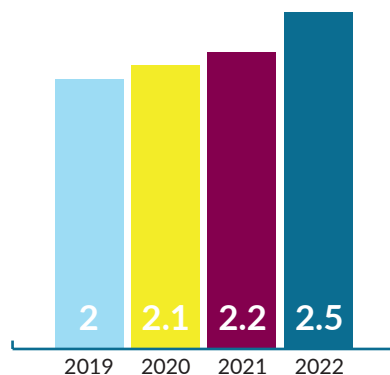
Each of these clients comes from different circumstances and backgrounds, and we continue to analyze data to strengthen our understanding of those we serve. This critical information shapes the programming, resources, and facilities offered to help families heal from trauma and rebuild their lives, free from domestic violence. This year, we learned the following:

Domestic violence takes many forms, including physical, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse: Families coming to Discovery House frequently experience multiple forms of violence, and leaving an abusive relationship is often the most dangerous time. Of the women accessing our Shelter Program, 96% were at increased, severe, or extreme risk of being killed by an abusive partner, with 52% of these women at extreme risk. Of the women accessing our Community Housing Program, 71% were at increased, severe, or extreme risk of being killed by an abusive partner, with 40% of these women at extreme risk of being killed.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN PER FAMILY

Families are growing:

On average, the size of the families we support has been steadily increasing over the last 4 years, to 2.5 children per family. This means that over the past few years, more and more of the clients we serve are children and youth, representing 71% of clients served this year.



Families from Diverse Communities: Over the last few years, Indigenous families and families from racialized communities continue to be over-represented at Discovery House. This is one of the many reasons our new strategic plan is grounded in reconciliation and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

TYPES OF ABUSE AT INTAKE

100%

Emotional/Psychological/Verbal

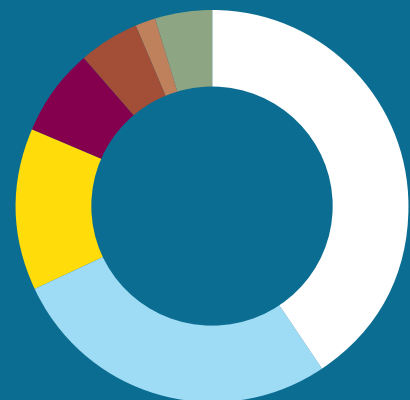
88%

Physical

54%

Financial

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS



- Indigenous (40.78%)
- White (27.37%)
- African (13.41%)
- Asian (7.26%)
- South American (5.03%)
- South Asian (1.68%)
- Middle Eastern (4.47%)



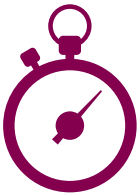
Our Programs

"I like the emotions board you created for my daughter. Now my daughter is pointing at emotions when she is upset. It has been very useful!"

- Mother discussing how her relationship with her child has improved

This year a total of **618 women and children** worked with Discovery House and of them, **78 women and 189 children** left our shelter and housing programs, having **developed skills, begun to heal, and built their resilience** to increase their safety and thrive.

Shelter & Outreach



In the 2022-23 fiscal year, families accessing our Second-Stage Shelter and Outreach Programs received

2,925

hours of care.

Discovery House's second-stage shelter provides critical long-term support for families who need time to heal and rebuild in a safe and secure environment. The shelter becomes home for families for up to one year, and they are provided transitional support for up to a year in our Outreach Program when they leave.

This year, 35 families, including 90 children lived at our 19-unit shelter, for a total of 125 people. Eighteen new families entered the shelter, and 18 families exited, 94% having met their goals and increased their safety. Our Outreach Program served 39 families, including 96 children, totaling 135 people.

Families have been staying longer over the past two years due to increased need, the complexity of issues, and challenges accessing affordable housing when a family is ready to leave. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of families able to access our space, as we have had fewer families transition out.

Families accessing the Discovery House Shelter Program by year

	Number of Families Accessing the Shelter	↓ Intakes	↑ Exits	Average Length of Stay (months)
2022-23	35	18	18	11
2021-22	34	16	17	10
2020-21	51	27	25	7
2019-20	43	33	35	6

Community Housing Program



105
families



252
children



90% client satisfaction

The Community Housing Program (CHP) supports families to find safe and affordable housing around Calgary and provides individual services to each family to achieve their wellness, housing, and financial goals. This year, the CHP team spent 5,583 hours supporting 357 people (105 caregivers and 252 children) through one-on-one meetings, liaising with landlords, resource referrals, and connections to the community. Consistent with our Shelter Program, CHP has seen an increase in the average length of stay in the program over the past few years, resulting in fewer families served when compared to our 2019-20 numbers.

Families accessing our Community Housing Program by year

	Families Served	↓ Intakes	↑ Exits	Average Length of Stay (months)
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

Child and Youth Program

The Child and Youth Program at Discovery House is designed to work with both parents and children to reduce the effects of trauma on brain development and strengthen parenting skills and attachment. This program provides access to one-on-one counselling and case management for children and youth, parenting programs, and specialized supports to help children achieve developmental milestones through our Child Development Centre.

"I don't like talking to people or interacting with people. I don't know how I have managed to open up to you so much."
- A client in the child & youth program





In the 2022-23 fiscal year, the Child and Youth program supported 140 children and youth, as well as 94 caregivers. These 234 people benefitted from 4,300 hours of one-on-one and group supports, referrals, parenting programs, and connections to the community. Fifty-one children visited our Child Development Centre for over 471 sessions.

We also had 84 children and youth participate in our Summer Camp: learning and growing while enjoying new experiences. The families we serve face so many challenges day-to-day and kids deserve to be kids. Thanks to our supporters, our children and youth did just that! They had a great time going to the zoo, petting baby goats, and enjoying fun in the sun.

100%
of parents who completed Parenting After Violence felt more confident as parents after the course

Another program families benefitted from was Parenting After Violence. This program helps caregivers with improving emotional wellness for themselves and their children, navigating single parenting, establish boundaries within their new family dynamics, and more. One-hundred percent of the mothers who completed our Parenting After Violence group program felt more confident as a parent and felt supported and comfortable discussing parenting throughout the group.

This year, we also began using the My Star tool with children and youth ages 6-18. We were excited to begin using this new tool to assess and support our younger clients as we felt that it better reflected their priorities and goals. The My Star tool is used to measure how young clients feel in different areas of their lives, such as safety, confidence, self-esteem, learning, friendships, and physical health. We completed a total of 45

assessments using My Star, and all clients surveyed either maintained or improved in all 8 of the areas described above. This really helps to highlight what great work they have done on their healing journeys.

In March 2023, Discovery House began renovating the Child Development Centre. The goal of this renovation is to create a space that is meaningful and safe for our families accessing the program, and that considers what they need to begin healing from the trauma they have experienced. It is exciting to have a new space that has been uniquely designed with the needs of our young clients in mind and we hope that it will greatly improve their experience.

73%
of clients maintained or improved their sense of safety

80%
of children and youth improved or maintained their friendships

Counselling Program



This specialized program provides one-on-one counselling and group programs for caregivers and children to understand the impacts of domestic violence, increase self-esteem, improve communication skills and relationships, and address the experience of trauma.

145 clients, including 63 children and youth, made use of the counselling program to help them on their healing journey. Clients received 1,655 hours of support through one-on-one counselling, group supports, resource referrals, and connections to the community.

OF THE WOMEN
WHO PARTICIPATED
IN THE PROGRAM:

64%

reported an improvement
in depression symptoms

71%

reported improvement
in anxiety

50%

reported a reduction
in stress

Financial Literacy and Empowerment Programs

FINANCIAL
COACHING

42

new clients
participated

Many of the families we work with are living on low incomes, and some women have experienced financial abuse. In the past year, 58% of families relied on Alberta Works for financial support and 72% relied on the Child Tax Benefit.

Our Financial Empowerment program provided families with financial literacy training and helped them grow their savings. Moms are empowered to build a financially stable future and to invest in post-secondary education for their children. We were also pleased to partner with Momentum to offer a Matched Savings Program.

MATCHED SAVINGS

9 families

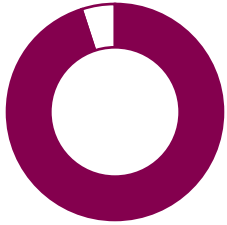
participated and learned how to save money for planned purchases

21

RRSP'S OPENED

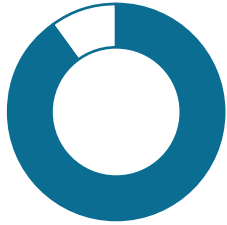
Client Satisfaction

An important measure of success for our programs is client satisfaction. In this fiscal year, of clients who completed a satisfaction survey:



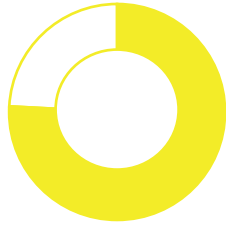
95%

of clients indicated that they were happy with the support services they received



90%

reported overall satisfaction with the program



76%

agreed or strongly agreed that they were in safe and appropriate housing



This indicator is down from **93% last year**, which reflects the challenges in attaining affordable housing in Calgary.

"I am grateful for all the support I have received during my stay at the shelter. I am so used to seeing you guys and feel like you are not only doing your job but you are a part of my family. My own family is far away and you guys feel like my family."

- A mother expressing her gratitude for Discovery House Staff

Empowerment Star



This year, we began using a tool called the Empowerment Star. Using this tool, our adult clients rate their current experience in 9 areas: Safety, Accommodation, Support Networks, Legal Issues, Health and Wellbeing, Money, Working and Learning, Children, and Empowerment and Self-Esteem on a scale of 1-10. While we continue to learn about how to make meaning of this new data, notable outcomes so far indicate that on average, client ratings increased in all areas at the one-year mark. The **top 6 areas** for improvements in client experience include:

33% increase in Working and Learning

26% increase in Empowerment and Self-Esteem

25% increase in Money

24% increase in Health and Wellbeing

21% increase in Accommodation

20% increase in Safety



Building a New Path

What we learned and where we are going...

Numbers are just a small part of the picture at Discovery House, but they do help to give us a breakdown of our efforts and how to best chart a path forward to better serve families with children. Here are a few of the things that we learned and how we are working to improve.

The length of stay in the Community Housing and Shelter Programs has been increasing over the past four years, driven in part by a lack of family-sized affordable housing options. Families are using our services for longer periods as the rise in the cost of living makes it more difficult to gather the resources needed to live independently in the community.

This is impacting families waiting to be housed. At the end of this year, a total of **108 families (including 213 children) were on the waitlist for second-stage shelter, and the average wait has increased from 54 days in 2021-22 to 103 days in 2022-23**. This is concerning considering that 67% of Discovery House clients were considered at severe or extreme risk of danger at intake.

This new dynamic, along with the analysis of 5 years of data on family sizes, is also informing our conversations with affordable housing providers, government, and other stakeholders. There is a need for larger housing units for families as they transition to independent housing.

Indigenous Reconciliation

We continue to work very hard to improve our efforts to move Indigenous Reconciliation forward. Our staff-led Indigenous Committee works closely with Elder Pam Heavy Head to ensure that our programs and spaces are better meeting the needs of Indigenous families. In addition to offering Indigenous-based programs and connecting families to culturally appropriate supports, Elder Clarence Wolfleg offers families an opportunity to participate in tobacco seed blessing and harvesting ceremonies.

To support staff with continuous learning to best serve Indigenous families, the Indigenous Committee launched a Lunch and Learn Series. As

discussed on page 7, this is especially relevant at Discovery House, where over 40% of adult clients identify as Indigenous. Some topics already explored included 'Working with and advocating for Indigenous children and families involved with Children's Services' and 'What does it mean to be an Elder?'. In February, our staff participated in the blanket exercise, an engaging and moving learning experience for everyone involved.

We are also pleased to share that, in partnership with the University of Calgary and the University of Manitoba, Discovery House is preparing to launch an Indigenous version of our Mom's Empowerment & Kids Club Programs, under the guidance of Elder Pam.

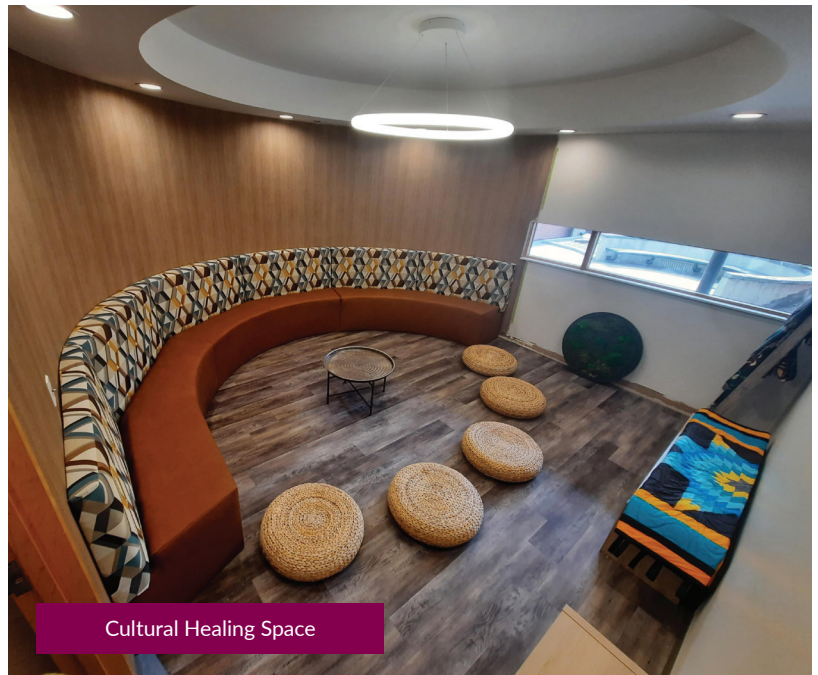


Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Last year, we created an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee with staff to ensure that we are better representing the diverse backgrounds of both clients and staff here at Discovery House. Our EDI Committee developed a strategy with tangible outcomes focused on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. This plan includes adjustments to programming and data collection, hiring practices, staff training, and policies. Focused on action, we have provided educational materials to staff about cultural events and holidays and completed organization-wide training on anti-racism.

An inclusive lens has influenced the transformation of spaces in the shelter. We co-created our new Cultural Healing Space with our Indigenous Committee and renovations have begun to create a space where all families can pause, reflect, and heal with access to cultural resources and traditional medicines. A welcome wall in our entrance using the top 30 languages spoken by our clients was installed. We developed plans to increase accessibility for people with physical disabilities, including an accessible apartment, automated doors, and an accessible washroom in our common space. We renovated our Child Development Centre to support children with sensory needs and to be a space that is designed to reduce stress and promote healing.

Over the coming years, we have many plans to continue to transform our policies, practices, and spaces to be more inclusive and welcoming.



Updating Our Space



Our building is over 20 years old and while it is still an excellent space, it has needed some major upgrades. Part of our goal during these upgrades has been to plan and design our space to include the latest on trauma-informed design so that our clients feel better supported.

This multi-year project will be completed as funding becomes available. The biggest upgrades this year were to replace malfunctioning windows throughout the building and (thanks to the generous support of the Calgary Foundation) we were able to implement crucial technology upgrades as well.

Building a Strong Organizational Culture

We are continuously working to strengthen our team and be the best place to work in the sector. Calgary's job market is highly competitive, but we attract and retain the best staff by providing fair compensation including health benefits, a flexible work environment, and professional development opportunities. Discovery House is proud that all our staff receive a living wage.

Knowing that employees may have stressful experiences with their clients, a pilot project to use trauma-informed supervision with frontline staff was launched. Trauma-informed supervision buffers the impacts of employees' painful experiences with clients by offering workers empathy, support, and care. As the results are evaluated, we hope to expand the project to include all our client-serving staff to help mitigate the risks of burnout and vicarious trauma.

Four leaders at our organization were recognized for their exceptional contributions to the community with the Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal. Elder Pam Heavy Head, board members Dr. Nicole Letourneau and Esmahan Razavi, and Executive Director Leslie Hill all received this medal at recognition ceremonies. We are so proud to be led by such amazing women.

Want to join our incredible team? Job postings are available online at: discoveryhouse.ca/about-us/join-our-staff/



As a social service agency, our staff is at the core of what we do. In November 2022 employees were surveyed to seek feedback on job satisfaction. Highlights from the anonymous annual survey include:

94%

of staff feel proud to be part of our organization

91%

of staff feel respected and supported by their team and the organization

82%

of staff completed the survey

"The atmosphere when you come to work is always lively, friendly, and engaging. I feel like everyone here cares about what they do and about each other. If I have a concern or an issue, I feel like management genuinely tries to improve things."

- Staff Member

Our Financial Picture

Throughout the 2022-23 fiscal year, our costs continued to rise, and we experienced financial pressure due to aging infrastructure, increased demand and inflation. As such, we are incredibly grateful for the continued and consistent support from our core funders at the Government of Alberta, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, and Family and Community Support Services - City of Calgary. The funding they provide is critical to our housing and programmatic supports for families.

We are especially grateful for the generous support of our donors who played an enormous role in sustaining our crucial services during the last year. Once again, we were astounded by the support we received from the community – especially in response to the 2022 Gift of Hope matching campaign sponsored by The Auxilium Foundation. In

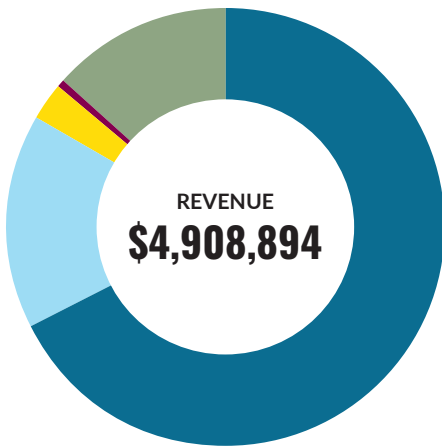
addition, the COVID-19 Response and Recovery funding we received from Women and Gender Equality in partnership with Women’s Shelters Canada was essential in allowing us to provide a consistent level of service to all our clients.

At Discovery House, we work hard to be careful stewards of your investments toward ending family violence in our communities. As such, we continually look for ways to create cost savings in our operations. In 2022-23, we were able to implement new payroll services, internet providers, and telephone systems that both reduced costs and improved efficiency. We also secured nearly \$100,000 in donated goods and services and made use of **over 1,400 volunteer hours – that is equivalent to more than \$21,000 in value!** Thank you to all our dedicated volunteers!

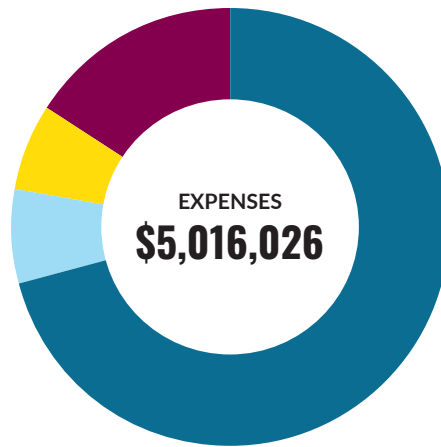
1,400 volunteer hours = \$21,000+



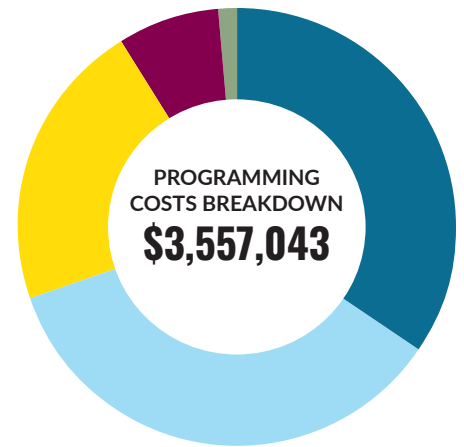
Volunteers from MC College ready to provide kids haircuts and backpacks for kids going back to school



- Grants (\$3,324,679)
- Fund Development (\$778,369)
- Rental Income (\$135,630)
- Bursary (\$24,231)
- Other (\$645,985)



- Programming Costs (\$3,557,043)
- Administrative Costs (\$357,657)
- Fundraising and awareness (\$312,024)
- Facility and Operations (\$789,301)
- Bursary (\$42,523)

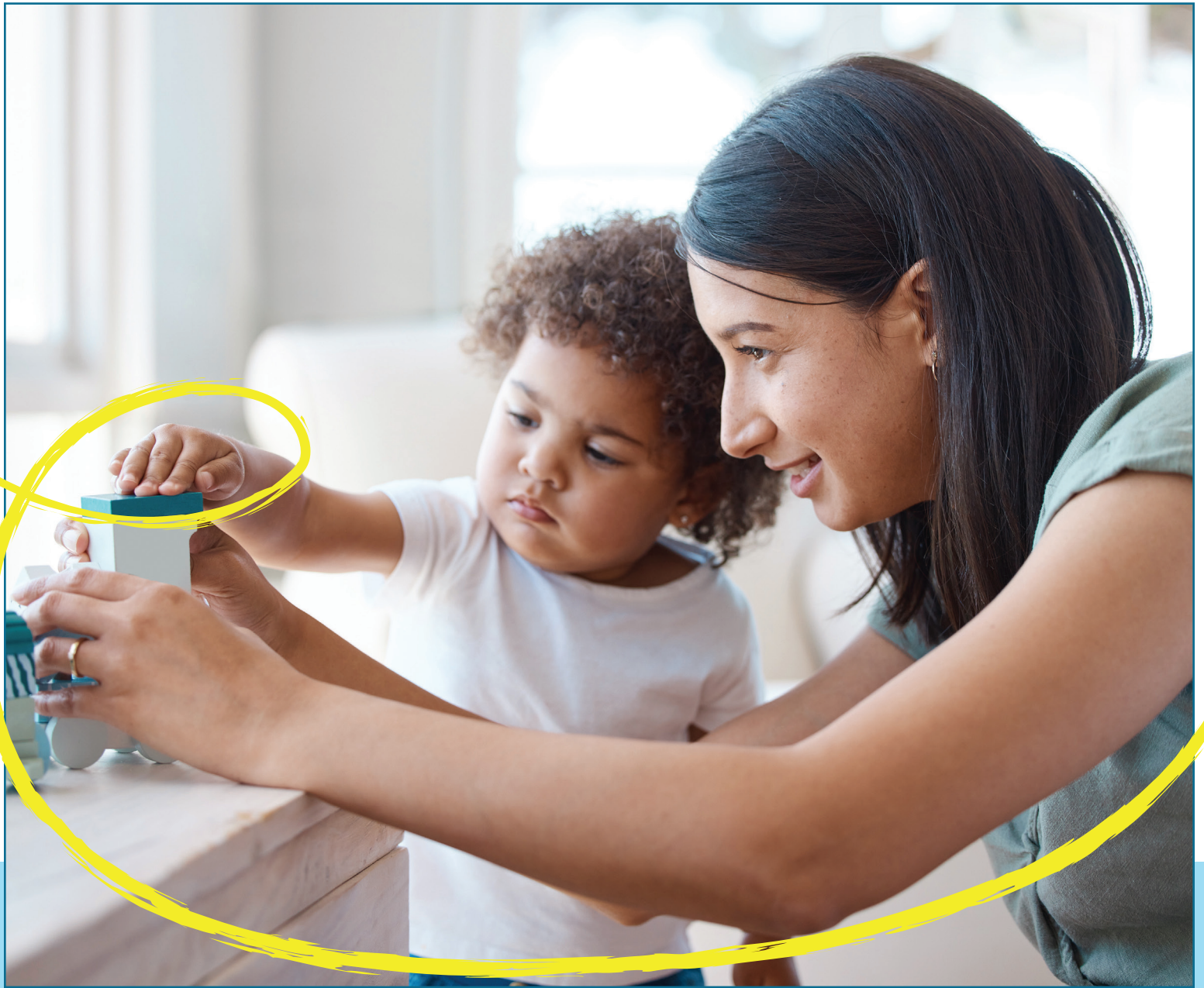


- Shelter and Outreach (\$1,234,299)
- Community Housing (\$1,249,511)
- Child & Youth (\$765,190)
- Counselling (\$265,521)
- Bursary (\$42,523)

Our Core Funders



For the fourth year running, Charity Intelligence named Discovery House as one of the Top 100 charities in Canada in 2022, with a 5-star rating and an A+ grade in results reporting (up from an A last year). This rating recognizes our financial transparency, impact, and efficiency. We hope all our supporters are proud that their investments have been used effectively to help women and children leaving domestic violence rebuild their lives.



Discovery House

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discoveryhouse.ca

    @discovery_house

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In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work, and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations (Bears paw, Chiniki, Goodstoney), the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.