

2017 - 2018
ANNUAL REPORT



**Alberta
Rural
Development
Network**

CHAIR'S MESSAGE

ARDN has become a champion for rural homelessness and has been responsive in identifying rural housing needs. This work has brought ARDN national recognition, delivered concrete results, increased community support and provided major administrative funding during the past year. We created new tools for communities to identify their homeless populations and form their own solutions to their challenges. In addition, ARDN anticipates opening the first of several community-driven demonstration housing units in fall 2018.

The success of our housing initiatives is undisputed and is expected to bear positive results for years to come. Addressing homelessness has become an anchor portfolio that is keeping ARDN financially safe in stormy seas and the means to power forward when there's calm. Our ability to manage complex initiatives like these demonstrates our abilities and capacity to collaborate with all three levels of government. Now that we have reached this point in our evolution, we should not be complacent. Success means looking back at our (second) mandate, looking around to see where we are now, and looking ahead to where we want to be. We are horizon seekers and we must be in this ever-changing world.

ARDN was never intended to be a one challenge or one issue organization, and we are certainly not a housing authority. Thought-leader, yes. Addressing homelessness has been our passion and will continue to be a part of ARDN's work. Imagine what would have been lost, the

unachieved social good now before us, if we had said 'addressing homelessness' wasn't in ARDN's mandate. Achieving a major goal now means we need to go back to our 'rural' roots and continue to ask, 'What is needed here?' ARDN must now seek new challenges and growth opportunities that connect us to our organizations' commitments to teaching and learning, and to the current and future needs of the communities we serve. In short, ARDN needs to diversify its services by responding to our stakeholders, the communities of rural Alberta.

Our Annual General Meeting will give us the platform to begin this strategic discussion. We did it before, but when facing the challenge of possible dissolution. Seeking change when enjoying prosperity and success is perhaps even more difficult! We want to hear from our original charter members, our current die-hard members, and our community and government partners. We need to find out what other issues need our attention and increase our scope of response. Throughout this discussion and the adoption of new goals and initiatives, we need to continue to foster meaningful dialogue and do an even better job of communicating with our owners and the public.

Thank you to the charter institutions who had the foresight to create ARDN; to the current nine institutions (Athabasca University, Grande Prairie Regional College, Keyano College, Lethbridge College, Medicine Hat College, Northern Lakes College, Portage College, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge) who have stayed engaged, involved and supportive; to our Board of

Directors for their unwavering leadership and commitment to rural Alberta and our core values; and to ARDN Executive Director Dee Ann Benard and her wonderful staff who have made so many people's dreams become reality.

Cheers,
Dr. Trent Keough
Chair, Board of Directors

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

In my 2012 annual report message, I wrote about maturity, the stage in life where you have gained enough wisdom and experience to share what you have learned, to lead and mentor others, and to set realistic goals with measurable objectives. At that time, I thought the Alberta Rural Development Network was there. I see now I was wrong. Hindsight shows how far we have come since then, down paths we never imagined. Factors shaping rural Alberta today – the economic downturn, homelessness, the affordable housing crisis, the opioid crisis, legal cannabis, the local food boom – were either non-existent or barely on anyone's radar.

Despite going in new directions and developing new priorities, what hasn't changed is ARDN's goal to share rural development research and best practices with Alberta's rural communities. ARDN continues to host the annual Creating Rural Connections conference, a pivotal event that shares information from and with a diverse group of stakeholders and that spawns new collaborations. This past year was spent planning the first ever national housing and homelessness symposium for October 2018.

ARDN continued to grow and generate support for existing projects and programs, while creating new services, such as our opioid awareness outreach program. ARDN has no core funding, but we continue to work to develop strategies to secure new opportunities for project and program funding, to increase our financial sustainability for the foreseeable future.

ARDN continues to learn how to focus and work better; to be more efficient and to truly act as facilitators; to have others set their direction while we help them to more effectively steer the course and navigate the barriers to enable their success.

I owe a deep gratitude to the board, funders and collaborators who have been open to ARDN's new directions, and to the staff, who enabled this growth. ARDN has accomplished much in the past year, starting and maintaining new, innovative projects while ensuring that the results are widely shared, of benefit and adoptable by anyone who wishes to use them. I continue to look forward to the future, which will undoubtedly be full of surprises and excitement.

Sincerely,
Dee Ann Benard
Executive Director

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**Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.**  
Winston Churchill



### **SUSTAINABLE HOUSING INITIATIVE (SHI)**

After another successful year, the ARDN's Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI) has far exceeded its original goals by raising more than \$30 million in capital investments for affordable housing. In this fiscal year, the SHI team grew from one employee to nine, including contract staff. Along with the Rural Homelessness Estimation Guide, the Sustainable Housing Initiative won ARDN a 2018 ROOPH (Recognizing Outstanding Organizations and People in Housing) award from Homeward Trust.

The SHI team continues to help organizations overcome barriers that prevent the creation of new affordable housing. We have refined our service offering to better meet the needs of communities, and our team of passionate and energetic professionals supports organizations through each step of an affordable housing development. We support them with:

- Project Planning & Research;
- Public Consultation & Engagement; and
- Securing Funding & Financing

This year, SHI received \$800,000 from Energy Efficiency Alberta to make

affordable housing projects more energy efficient, ultimately reducing operating costs and driving sustainability. We also received almost \$500,000 in federal funding to develop a step-by-step guide to building, managing, and operating all types of affordable housing, which draws on the knowledge of national experts through our National Advisory Committee. We continue to drive towards creating a sustainable model for building and operating affordable housing that does not rely on long-term government funding.

SHI's success is only possible through our partnerships and collaborations with municipalities and community organizations in Alberta and beyond. This year we worked with several rural Albertan communities, including: Banff, Coalhurst, Drayton Valley, Fort McKay, Fort McMurray, Fort Saskatchewan, Lac la Biche, Leduc County, Olds, Pincher Creek, Rocky Mountain House, Taber and Whitecourt. We worked with these communities to perform financial modeling, host community consultations, develop needs assessments and obtain funding for potential affordable housing developments.

### **HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY**

Our rural homelessness program funding remained at just under \$1 M this year; and up to 13 projects from 8 previously. The news that our funding would be maintained for the 2018-2019 year led to another Call for Proposals in fall 2017 for new projects. We received 31 applications for the funding, making it extremely competitive, much like last year, when additional funding was first



announced. The Regional Advisory Board ultimately chose to fund six new projects. Similarly to last year, close to a dozen excellent projects were not funded due to a lack of resources, once again highlighting the need for more resources for rural homelessness.

Of special note is the funding of the FCSSAA Alberta Rural Homeless Estimation Project. The fall of 2018 will finally see significant data collection on the scope and extent of rural homelessness in Alberta.

Our Rural Homelessness Wildfire projects, funded by Alberta Community and Social Services, also were completed in September 2017, with projects finishing up in Anzac, Lac La Biche, and Cold Lake. A request to the Province for an additional \$250,000 to fund projects that we were unable to fund through HPS, was unfortunately denied.

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy wraps up in March 2019, and we are optimistic about new funding as we look to the future. ARDN staff took part in the regional HPS consultations, and were able to give the Committee feedback on the increased need for rural and remote homelessness funding, both in Alberta and across the country. In June, the government announced its new Reaching Home program, which will be replacing HPS as of April 1, 2019.

## RURAL HOMELESSNESS ESTIMATION

It has been a year since the first version of our "Step-By-Step Guide to Estimate Rural Homelessness" was launched. The guide is available free of charge in both official languages to anyone who wants a cost-efficient and reliable way to determine the extent of homelessness in their community, allowing them to develop evidence-based strategies and targeted interventions to reduce and prevent it. This is the first guide of its kind. The estimation guide, along with the Sustainable Housing Initiative, won ARDN a 2018 ROOPH (Recognizing Outstanding Organizations and People in Housing) award from Homeward Trust.

After a successful pilot project, ARDN, in collaboration with FCSSAA, received funding to use our guide to conduct estimations in 21 rural communities across Alberta. In addition, to add value to the data collected using the guide, ARDN is providing rural communities with customized research and analysis capabilities to highlight trends and recommend solutions. Our guide has been specifically designed to work for rural communities all over Canada, and is expected to be used for the first time in BC in the fall of 2018.

Based on the learnings gathered from various applications and interactions with communities across Canada, ARDN is set to launch the second version of the estimation guide in 2019.



## OPIOID AWARENESS - RURAL COMMUNITY OPIOID OUTREACH PROGRAM

In the spring of 2018, Alberta Health announced \$1.4 million in grants to fund projects that use unique and creative approaches to reduce stigma associated with opioid use, and to increase overall opioid education in communities. In response to the opioid crisis and the alarming and growing number of emergency department visits and deaths in Alberta, the Province has placed funds into the hands of people and agencies who know their local communities best.

As one of 29 successful grant recipients, ARDN is working with 13 communities from all over Alberta to deliver the Rural Community Opioid Outreach Program (RCOOP) to conduct activities specific to increasing public awareness on opioids and the opioid crisis. Sessions are delivered through various formats, including: expert panels, community awareness events, training sessions, and community conversations. The overarching goal of these sessions is to increase public education and harm/stigma reduction training by raising awareness and providing research-based resources about opioids (fentanyl, oxycodone, heroin, etc.) and the opioid crisis.



## RURAL AND REGIONAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE (RRAJ)

Many people are aware of the challenges that rural Alberta communities face with the doctor shortage. However, these communities face similar challenges with lawyers. In fact, a whole cohort of rural Alberta lawyers is in the process of retiring, meaning that the communities they served will need new access to legal services

## RRAJ - ALBERTA RURAL LAW OPPORTUNITIES (ARLO)

The ARLO project wrapped up in 2018. This four-year project was instrumental in creating awareness of the excellent opportunities that exist to practice law in rural Alberta, as many law students do not consider a career in rural law. This project saw a website developed that was dedicated to placing law students in rural communities, and over 80 students participated in this. ARLO was able to place law students in summer and articling positions in several communities, including Saint Paul, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. We were even successful in placing francophone law students in official-language minority communities.

## RRAJ - THE JUSTICE BUS

One of the spin-offs of ARLO was the Justice Bus. Through late 2017 and early 2018, University of Calgary law students participated in the Justice Bus. They visited communities like Brooks, Jasper, Lloydminster and Grande Prairie to learn about practicing in rural Alberta and to offer free legal services.

The Job Shadowing Justice Bus was created by the ARDN as another way to raise awareness of rural opportunities through a short, but intense, hands-on experience visiting rural communities, lawyers and rural citizens needing legal advice. Students shadowed lawyers and office staff alike to gain hands-on exposure to the daily operations of a legal practice in rural Alberta. Law students gained new perspective and knowledge about how to successfully launch their legal career in rural Alberta.



## ANNUAL CONFERENCE PLANNING - CANADIAN RURAL AND REMOTE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS SYMPOSIUM 2018

Although we did not host a conference this fiscal year, we are proud to be planning the Canadian Rural and Remote Housing and Homelessness Symposium (CRRHH), with assistance from the Alberta Rural Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ARCH2).

The Symposium will be held October 24 - 26, 2018 in beautiful Canmore, Alberta, and is the first national symposium dedicated specifically to rural and remote housing and homelessness across Canada. This conference is being planned in response to the lack of information available for delegates from rural communities, as urban solutions often cannot be applied to rural issues. The CRRHH will provide an opportunity for delegates to share information, tools, training, and the expertise needed to address the unique and complex issues surrounding homelessness and housing in rural and remote Canada.

### FUNDING FOR ARDN IS PROVIDED BY:

Canada



Alberta

## ARDN STAFF

Dee Ann Benard, Executive Director  
Nurjan Watson, Operations Manager  
Joshua Bénard, SHI Project Manager  
Sandra Di Cesare, Finance Manager  
Roch Labelle, ARLO/ODAR Project Manager (Until December 2017)  
Jonn Kmech, HPS Program Manager  
Zain Abedin, Research & Strategy Manager  
Lisa Bélanger, Housing Program Manager (Since December 2017)  
Julia Juco, Opioid Outreach Program Manager (Since January 2018)  
Asad Bhatti, Research Analyst (Since December 2017)  
Shadi Merhej, Research & Business Analyst (Since December 2017)



## ARDN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair: Trent Keough, Portage College  
Vice Chair: Dietmar Kennepohl, Athabasca University  
Treasurer: Ann Everatt, Northern Lakes College  
Secretary: Susan Banskroft, Grande Prairie Regional College  
Director: Erasmus Okine, University of Lethbridge  
Director: Baljit Singh, University of Calgary

## OUR MEMBERS

Athabasca University, Grande Prairie Regional College, Keyano College, Lethbridge College, Medicine Hat College, Northern Lakes College, Portage College, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge

**THE ALBERTA RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK** represents nine Alberta public post-secondary institutions.

**OUR MANDATE** is to use the combined expertise of our members to support rural development and help rural communities grow through research and learning.

**OUR MISSION** is to create a model of rural community development through collaboration.

**OUR VISION** is a strong sustainable network that is the leading source of trusted rural development projects and information.

**Alberta Rural Development Network**  
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*Located in the ARDN office, this mural by Edmonton street artist AJA Loudon is inspired by our work on affordable housing and homelessness in rural areas of Alberta.*