

**2021/2022**

# Annual Report

Rural Development Network

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# *Creating a sense of community is the key to our work.*

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*In our latest year of rapid growth, RDN is proud to present 'a year in review' of what our team has been up to. Read on to learn more about how the team is growing, constantly adapting and learning new ways to work in a hybrid world.*

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# *A Message from the Board Chair*

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**KEVIN SHUFFLEBOTHAM**  
*President, Medicine Hat College*

"The Rural Development Network's rebrand proved to be the right idea at the right time."

There was no official launch of our rebrand, yet the growth has been phenomenal, and most importantly, organic.

The goal was to become a nationally recognized organization and we are well on our way to achieving this, as there was so much progress in the past year.

Our 2020 Rural and Remote Housing and Homelessness Symposium was postponed because it was the height of the global pandemic. However, this led us to have the 2021 Symposium online, which allowed us to be more accessible to those who would not have been able to attend an in-person conference.

This was a great learning experience for RDN. It opened up the idea of a hybrid model since the conference went well and enabled more people who wanted to learn and share information to attend. RDN now sees hybrid conferences are the choice

for the foreseeable future, as they attract people from far and wide, and result in a fairly smooth process.

The RDN's biggest focus in the past year was growth. From the employees, the geographic locations of our projects, and every single initiative - progress was made.

Moving forward, we will shift our focus to supporting the growth of the organization, so we can continue to grow in a manageable, sustainable way.

Where do we want to focus our efforts? Where are the opportunities? What are the factors that make us say yes or no to a project? How do we decide when it's a good idea to say yes (or no)?

These are the questions we will be concentrating on in the next fiscal year - discovering where the opportunities are, and what each one means for rural Canada and the RDN.

If you asked me a few years ago where RDN would be today, I would not have imagined the current scenario. With the phenomenal transition of our rebrand, I believe RDN in five years will be a truly national organization, with our work being recognized in every province and territory.

In five years, the Rural Development Network will

solidify its niche by recruiting even more talented staff, with representatives in nearly every province and territory. As our initiatives continue to develop, the Rural Development Network will truly become the resource that will help rural areas thrive. We will work with rural communities to create a new rural renaissance.



# *A Message from the Chief Executive Officer*

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**DEE ANN BENARD**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

"In the past fiscal year, the growth at RDN has been exponential. Not only in our projects and expansion across Canada, but our staff alone has close to doubled."

Within our initiatives, we had a focus on broadening our projects, rather than just creating new ones - meaning that we have put more people, and more focus into creating work that will create real change for our rural communities, and will continue to make a difference in the coming years.

RDN also was determined to expand our projects nationwide - and in the past year, RDN expanded in the Northwest Territories, British Columbia and Ontario, aligning with our goal of becoming a nationally recognized organization.

We are elated to share that the Rural Revitalization project reached fruition this year. Working with the township of Hornepayne, RDN was able to secure funding from the Ontario Government, which means that this project can finally begin to initiate change and transformation.

Additionally, in the past year we have the new Shelter Pulse project, a truly national project working in an area that is new to RDN - policy development for women's shelters. We are looking forward to seeing this project blossom over the next fiscal year.

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is another new project of RDN's, and one that also has the potential to be a truly national project, with the opportunity to engage the post-secondary sector while attracting both students and rural employers. WIL serves as a tool to build capacity in rural communities as its purpose is connection - students who are in search of real life work experience, and employers who seek fresh, new ideas and energy that students have in abundance.

A true testament to how valuable WIL is to employers is that in the past year, employers who engaged a student came

back wanting multiple students. This speaks to the impact of the project and the benefits to many sectors of society.

COVID-19 taught us a lot over the past couple of years. The most important lesson, however, was how being a flexible and accommodating employer attracts employees.

As RDN continues to grow, and many of our employees are outside Alberta, the traditional work environment has shifted. Since not everyone can make it to our office headquarters in Edmonton, we cannot foresee mandating in-person work again. Our team has navigated the virtual workspace seamlessly and are constantly coming up with innovative ways to stay engaged and connected to each other.

Learning and listening is what we've improved on the most in the last year. With growth, we quickly realized that our processes did not always scale up. We needed to educate

ourselves, be open, willing to learn, and listen to our staff when they came up with new processes and ways of conducting business. This has led to where we are at today - adjusted operations for an adaptive team of staff with strong collaborative skills on and offline. With the growth in the past year, it has also allowed us the opportunity to build capacity.

We have grown our Communications department from a single manager to a growing team that will continue to expand. With all the hiring, we also created a Human Resources (HR) team, which is truly exciting. The formation of new teams that provide much-needed support services for the whole organization has been instrumental in freeing up time and building capacity.

The Sustainable Housing Initiative has also really come into its own. COVID-19 was tough, but they were still able to expand, and community

initiative collaboration has really taken off - solidifying and boosting some of our other initiatives.

On another note, we are working on, and will continue to work on, the rural broadband issue, by supporting other people's work. We will continue to push and ensure that it stays front and centre in the provincial and federal governments' agendas.

I would also like to say that we have been so fortunate in this tight labour market, in attracting and retaining extraordinary employees.

We have had some turnover with long term staff but the caliber of people who have worked at the RDN is incredible. I also greatly appreciate the work of our board and our advisory board. Their help has been invaluable to making RDN grow and become better known amongst other sectors.

And finally, I am thrilled to announce that we have hired

RDN's first Indigenous Liaison, who has been instrumental in our organization and the work that we do. We look forward to continuing to learn, grow, and reflect on our past through Indigenous education and teachings.

This year was a life-changing one for RDN, and the potential is limitless. I cannot wait to see all the great things we will accomplish together in the next year. I am extremely proud of our progress and our teams and the impactful, significant projects they create.

LEARN ABOUT

# OUR INITIATIVES

After a year of exponential growth, the RDN is proud to present 'a year in review' of what our team has been up to.



HOUSING



RURAL  
REVITALIZATION



INDIGENOUS  
RECONCILIATION



ESTIMATIONS



IMMIGRATION



HOMELESSNESS



TRANSPORTATION



WORK-  
INTEGRATED  
LEARNING



HEALTH &  
WELLNESS



NETWORKS



SHELTER PULSE



AGRI-FOOD



## **SUSTAINABLE HOUSING INITIATIVE**

“Another year has passed and SHI is continuing to grow and expand. This year SHI successfully completed 25 projects across Alberta, Ontario, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Newfoundland and Labrador, and British Columbia.”

## **THE TEAM**



**ZAIN  
ABEDIN**  
*Director,  
Community  
Development*



**ASAD  
BHATTI**  
*Manager,  
Capital Funding*



**AZAM  
KHATTAK**  
*Analyst,  
Research &  
Programs*



**DANIEL  
MORIN**  
*Project Manager,  
Planning &  
Community  
Development*



**TREVOR  
HORNE**

*Manager,  
Community  
Development*



**JESSE  
TJEPKEMA**

*Planning &  
Research Analyst*



**KABIR  
SHAHANI**

*Research &  
Financial Analyst*



**NICOLE  
CRONKHITE**

*Planning &  
Research Analyst*

The pandemic magnified numerous issues facing communities across the country, especially housing - and made it clear that there is still a lot of work to be done in order to address the needs of people in Canada.

From last year's research focus, we shifted gears a bit this year - working on both adding affordable housing stock to Canada while also continuing impactful research that improves the overall housing space. This shift also made sense due to more communities wanting to develop more affordable housing units, many due to the need in their communities being brought to light due to the pandemic.

The Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI) is a division within the RDN that supports small rural, remote, Indigenous and Northern communities and organizations across Canada to complete pre-development work and acquire funding to

successfully develop affordable housing.

SHI also works in impactful research that adds key information to Canada's library of housing knowledge - for the benefit of every community and organization in the country.

We also work to redefine how affordable housing is viewed and built. In 2019, we created a Step-By-Step Guide for Developing Affordable Housing using our tried and tested process to navigate groups through the affordable housing development process.

However, we do realize that developing affordable housing is not an easy task and requires expertise and commitment. So for those groups, which are the majority of the communities we work with, the guide provides them the awareness of what goes into developing affordable housing.

We have created a team of experts with backgrounds in strategy, finance, data, and

urban planning that work with the communities on a one-on-one basis and provide them with the capacity needed to develop affordable housing on a cost-recovery basis. Our process has been proven to be a successful model and has helped us provide support to numerous organizations across Canada.

This year, the SHI worked on 28 projects, some continued from last year and some were new. 25 of these projects were with organizations from Alberta, Ontario, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Newfoundland and Labrador, and British Columbia.



#### Alberta

- Camrose
- Claresholm
- Edmonton
- Fishing Lake Métis Settlement
- Fort Macleod
- Fort Vermillion
- High Level
- Olds
- Pincher Creek
- Smoky Lake
- Stettler
- Whitecourt

#### Nunavut

- Iqaluit

#### British Columbia

- Lillooet
- Skeetchestn First Nation

#### Northwest Territories

- Inuvik
- Yellowknife

#### Ontario

- Brampton
- Hamilton
- Kirkland Lake
- Mississauga
- Tay Valley

#### Newfoundland & Labrador

- St. John's

## ***Step-by-Step Guide for Developing Affordable Housing***

Another project we continued working on in this fiscal year was the creation of the second version of our Step-By-Step Guide to Developing Affordable Housing. Since the launch of the Guide in 2019 the users of the Guide have identified a few gaps in the content, so we used this time to formally address them, create a scope of the second version of the Guide, and create a new National Advisory Committee to support us in the development of the new Guide.

All of these tasks were funded by the New Market Funds Society who will actively support us in the development of the new version of the Guide in the next couple of years. In this year, we secured funding from CMHC to draft updates to the Guide on many of the various gaps previously identified - as well as funding from FCM to engage an energy consultant who would work

on specific energy content for the revision. This funding allowed us to draft content for the second edition of the Guide, which we are hoping to release in the coming year! We continue to seek funding in order to digitize the guide in order to maximize utility.

Additionally, we continued delivering workshops on the Step-By-Step Guide for Developing Affordable Housing — this time for Indigenous communities in Alberta and the Territories. These workshops covered the 'Initiation' phase of the Step-by-Step Guide for attendees, where they learned how to move their projects forward from project conceptualization to acquiring funding.

As these workshops were targeted towards Indigenous communities, information particular to Indigenous housing development was included in the workshops, such as funding opportunities available for Indigenous housing development.

These workshops were very successful and as before, we are eager to explore the opportunity of sharing this knowledge on a continuous basis. If your community would like us to deliver a workshop then please reach out to our team.

### *Enabling Housing Choice*

The Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) Project work continued this year. EHC is a three year project funded by the Alberta Real Estate Foundation that aims to increase housing choice and diversity across Alberta. The project aims to provide insight on how Albertan municipalities can support growth in their communities and help provide more housing options and choices to their residents through local policy changes and capacity building strategies.

Phase 1 of the project was completed this year, where we conducted a robust environmental scan of the current barriers, pressures,

and demands on housing stock and development across the province.

We conducted a province-wide survey and heard from over 450 Albertans to understand the factors that impact housing development and perceptions of living in various types of communities throughout Alberta. This helped shape our conversations with our interviewees: economic development experts; academics; Indigenous leaders and former Band council members; planners from municipalities, planning commissions, as well as private consultants; developers; accessibility and diversity experts; and former politicians.

Six municipalities were selected as case studies across Alberta based on communities who had implemented changes in their policy, practices, and methods of public engagement to make positive change towards more housing choice and diversity.

At the end of March 2022, we began compiling these initial findings and discovered five major themes: equity seeking groups and housing; economic impacts of development; sustainability (economic, environmental, social); implementation and capacity; and engagement and community pushback.

### ***Affordablee***

Another project which saw development from last year is in partnership with Map Your Property, a data intelligence firm out of Toronto. They were successful in their CMHC Housing Challenge application and secured funding to execute their solution, Affordablee.ca, which is now in development. The platform will greatly reduce pre-development work for non-profit organizations and municipalities seeking to develop affordable housing by providing key information regarding potential development sites such as zoning and proximity to amenities.

SHI's role in this project will be in marketing and roll-out of the platform across Canada. Our activities will include info sessions, training workshops, conference presentations, and more. The plan is to continue marketing and dissemination for the next few years to ensure the benefit of the platform is brought to as many communities and groups as possible.

SHI will continue working in both adding housing units to Canada's affordable housing space as well as conducting impactful research through various projects. Our recent expansion and work has brought attention from regions across Canada - and we are continuing to find partners and communities to work with.

Housing need remains one of the most pressing issues for Canadian communities, and SHI's ultimate goal remains to address this need so that there is appropriate housing for everyone in Canada.

## HOMELESSNESS

"In 2021-2022, the Reaching Home program, the Government of Canada's homelessness strategy, concluded its third and biggest year thus far."

## THE TEAM



**SYDNEY  
STENEKES**

*Director,  
Homelessness  
Initiatives*



**ROBIN  
KYLER**

*Program  
Coordinator*



**JOLEEN  
CHIVAS**

*Financial Claims  
Analyst*



**TAMMY  
PFEIFFER**

*Program  
Coordinator*

## *Reaching Home*

RDN distributes \$1M annually in Reaching Home base funding to support rural and remote communities in responding to homelessness in Alberta. 16 projects received base funding this past year to continue to carry out projects that aim to support the operation of shelter and mat programs, homelessness prevention programs, housing placements and outreach.

The Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan resulted in additional investments to Reaching Home over the past couple of years to support communities in responding to the heightened need and increased demand for services as a result of the pandemic. \$1.8M was invested in 2021-2022 and projects were completed by the end of September 2021. In total, 53 projects across rural, remote and Indigenous communities in Alberta were supported through the COVID-19 funding.

In 2021-2022, COVID-19 funding supported a range of needs across rural and remote Alberta: COVID-19 temporary accommodations, prevention and shelter diversion services, emergency mat programs and shelter, housing placements and set-up, health and medical services (e.g., counselling services, prescriptions), basic needs (food, PPE, hygiene, cleaning/sanitation supplies, client ID and transportation) and staffing to connect clients with various services including housing, income assistance, employment and mental health and addictions.

Investments also led to the funding of 8 capital projects: the purchasing of a vehicle and renovations to develop a pet friendly facility in rural based women's shelters, the renovating and construction of transitional and permanent supportive housing in First Nation communities and Métis Settlements, who experience disparities regarding access to adequate, safe and affordable housing, the creation of two

transitional housing units to support women and children fleeing domestic violence in St. Albert and the development of emergency shelter pods in Edson.

The federal government's fall 2020 economic statement announced an additional \$299.4 million in investments into the Reaching Home program in 2021-2022. RDN was grateful to receive an additional \$1.8M in base

funding in 2021-2022 to distribute to communities in Alberta.

An open Call of Proposals was launched in September 2021 and 27 new projects were funded, 5 of which focused on longer term capital investments. Not-for-profits, municipalities, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), Native Friendship Centres, Indigenous led organizations, First Nations

## NEW PROJECTS FUNDED IN PART BY REACHING HOME:

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- *The Soaring Eagle Support Society (SESS) Homelessness and Community Engagement Strategy*
- *Slave Lake Reconciliation and Enumeration*
- *Sylvan Lake Housing First*
- *Lac La Biche County Homelessness and Transitional Housing Project*

and Métis Settlements received funding and projects prioritized responses to Indigenous homelessness, youth homelessness and domestic violence. According to Budget 2021, the Government of Canada announced an additional \$567.2 million for Reaching Home in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. As RDN waits to learn of the allocation amount, we are eager to continue working with project and government partners to generate and implement innovative responses to combat and bring awareness to rural, remote and Indigenous homelessness in Alberta.

### ***Fee for Service***

This last year brought new partnerships, challenges and huge growth. It also allowed us to strategically plan and shift the way we respond to the growing number of requests to assist communities in developing responses to homelessness and housing insecurity. The pandemic moved homelessness

and housing insecurity to the forefront and allowed for difficult conversations while developing individual community solutions.

We had the honour to work with Elders and Knowledge Keepers as they guided us when working with communities on the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls To Action, Reconciliation and Indigenous Homelessness. Finding a common ground when bringing communities together to talk about what homelessness and housing insecurity looks like in each community was some of our most challenging yet successful conversations.

### ***Integrated Solutions to Rural Homelessness***

COVID-19 has brought the spectre of homelessness and housing insecurity in Rural Alberta to the forefront and has left many rural communities without the capacity, experience and or knowledge to respond in a way

that is required. In response, thanks to funding we received from the Government of Alberta, we are developing a collective impact framework that will strengthen and build communities' capacity to respond to rural homelessness.

### ***Coordinated Access***

In Fall 2021, RDN partnered with graduate students at the University of Alberta's School of Public Health to explore coordinated access in rural and remote communities. This project's outcomes included a literature review and a service mapping project that drew on direct engagement with service providers in Lac La Biche County. One of the graduate students, Rachel Stefaniuk, continued to build off of the outcomes of this project and completed a practicum placement with RDN in Winter 2022. A survey, virtual engagement sessions and informal interviews were conducted with service providers from rural, remote and Indigenous communities in Alberta to

increase our understanding of the various strengths and challenges to implementing coordinated access in rural and remote Alberta. Research findings were analyzed and compiled into a report and will be shared with community partners in 2022-2023.

RDN is excited to see where this project leads next, as RDN has received a provincial and federal grant to continue to explore coordinated service delivery in rural, remote and Indigenous communities on a provincial and national level.

### ***Mat Program Guide***

Over the past decade through our work on rural and remote homelessness and affordable housing in Alberta and across Canada, we started receiving multiple inquiries from communities requiring assistance with developing temporary emergency shelters or mat programs.

In response, RDN was funded funded in part by

the Government of Canada's Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy and facilitated a Pan-Canadian research project, with the intent of developing a framework for communities based on best practices and reconciliation. Through this consultation, we heard that not only is there a need for the creation of an online resource to help groups establish mat programs in any rural or remote community, but a desire to spread the conversation across Canada and collaborate between communities in the development of a coordinated response to homelessness.

The intent of this Guide is to provide communities with clear and concise steps – based on research, best practices, reconciliation, and lessons learned – to go from conception to implementation of a mat program. Steps will include, but are not limited to, addressing issues and concerns that commonly arise during the creation of

mat programs; community engagement processes that align with the diversity across the country; addressing the limited capacity of communities; how to facilitate complex and difficult community conversations; and how to gain community and municipality support.

Often, rural and remote communities do not have emergency shelters or supportive/transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness. In addition, communities may be limited in the resources, staff capacity, trained volunteers, as well as the time needed to implement longer-term responses to homelessness, such as housing or shelter solutions, particularly prior to the onset of inclement weather conditions. Therefore, mat programs may be the only immediate response to homelessness possible for these communities, and can be especially necessary during the coldest months of the year.

## **RURAL HOUSING AND SERVICE NEEDS ESTIMATIONS**

"The Housing and Service Needs Estimations provide rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Canada with the opportunity to collect meaningful and relevant data on issues of housing and homelessness."

### ***Provincial Wide Estimations***

The provincial Rural and Remote Housing and Service Needs Estimation Project, funded by Reaching Home, was successfully wrapped up in 2021. All 24 communities' individual reports, as well as the overarching provincial report, are now available on our website ([www.ruraldevelopment.ca](http://www.ruraldevelopment.ca)).

## **THE TEAM**



**SCOTT  
TRAVIS**

*Director,  
Research &  
Programs*



**EMMA  
WALLACE**

*Project  
Manager, Rural  
Housing and  
Service Needs  
Estimations*

### ***Individual/Customized Estimations***

In 2021, we introduced the option of 'customized' housing and service needs estimations. The ability to customize the estimation process benefits remote and Indigenous communities as well as those with unique contextual circumstances. It allows us to support communities in designing custom surveys and survey administration

processes to allow for more culturally and contextually appropriate survey questions, recruitment processes, and overall encourage higher participation in the estimation process. After introducing the customized option, we began working on the following five (5) projects, spanning over twenty (20) communities.

Funded in part by Reaching Home, our team responded when Slave Lake council requested that a more in depth and collaborative estimation be conducted to ensure transparency and accountability. We were able to start and complete this project in 2021.

The Homelessness & Community Planning Department of the Government of Northwest Territories contracted RDN to coordinate and perform homelessness estimations for the communities of Hay River, Inuvik, Fort Smith, and Fort Simpson. Even though this project was impacted by

flooding in the Hay River, our team was able to pivot and complete the project in the three other communities.

Campbell River & District (BC) comprises 13 remote and Indigenous communities. To address the unique needs of their remote communities, we worked collaboratively with the Campbell River & District Coalition to End Homelessness to customize the housing and service needs survey and administration process. Part of the customization included renaming the project and survey to ***"Collecting Stories of Where You Live"***. Enumeration began on April 11th, 2022 and ran through May 11th, 2022.

In March 2022, we began working with Reflections Empowering People to Succeed and the Edson Homelessness Task Force on a customized estimation. March saw us work collaboratively with the community to design the housing and service needs survey and administration process. The enumeration

began on March 28th and closed on April 26th, 2022.

In early 2022, we began working with Métis Nation Region 1 on a new housing and service needs estimation pilot project. Métis Nation Region 1 is interested in better understanding what homelessness and housing insecurity looks like on Region 1 but wanted a more decolonized approach to

data collection. We worked in collaboration with Métis Nation Region 1 and our Indigenous Liaison to overhaul the housing and service needs estimation survey to emphasize story-telling, be more inviting, and focus on plain language. The survey we designed as a result of this collaboration is a pilot and the foundation for future community customizations. Enumeration began in April 2022.



## HEALTH & WELLNESS AND INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

"Community safety and well being is really the essence of the RDN Health & Wellness and Indigenous Engagement Team. The diversity of our growing team builds a strong foundation to inform and develop responses to social issues that empower communities to become more resilient."

## THE TEAM



**LINDA  
BERNICKI**

*Director, Health  
& Wellness and  
Indigenous  
Engagement*



**EMELE  
NEUFELD**

*Indigenous  
Liaison*



**MARY  
MCGUIRE**

*Project  
Manager, ABCD*



**CASSANDRA  
RASKO**

*Project Manager,  
Substance Use  
Awareness*

## ***Age-Friendly Community: Olds, Alberta***



**DIAHANN  
POLEGE-  
AULOTTE**

***Project Manager,  
Homelessness  
Integrated Solutions***

RDN was key in developing a model for making Olds an age-friendly community in partnership with the Olds Age Friendly Committee. This project was funded by the Federal Government New Horizons for Seniors.



**ERIN  
DICKINSON**

***Project Assistant***

The Committee, with support from RDN, has worked tremendously hard in collecting data and running focus groups to better understand gaps within the eight domains of age-friendly. As the fiscal year came to an end, the committee submitted their application to the Government of Alberta to be recognized as an Age friendly community.



**EMIKA  
PETERSON**

***Project Assistant***

On June 10th, 2022, The Honourable Josephine Pon, Minister of Seniors and Housing will be recognizing Olds for their commitment to becoming an age- friendly community. In addition, an age friendly roundtable discussion will be held to better identify the challenges in supporting



**JUSTIN  
REINKE**

***Project Assistant***

aging in community, and how the Government of Alberta can continue to support the development of age-friendly communities.

### ***Rural Cannabis Outreach Project***

The Rural Cannabis Outreach Project, funded by Health Canada, was created to educate rural youth about cannabis, including risks, effects, and different strategies to cope with stress and anxiety. Through an evidence-based mobile & virtual exhibit, we aim to increase awareness and knowledge of risks associated with cannabis use/misuse.

The virtual exhibit has been well received with support from the Schizophrenia Society of Canada. The physical exhibit is complete along with a communications plan to encourage communities to host the display. Though the project came to an end as per the funding agreement, our team is seeking out opportunities for sustainability

of this program.

### ***Keep in Touch***

The Keep In touch program, a project to reduce social isolation to rural Alberta seniors, was developed in partnership with Volunteer Lethbridge who received funding through the Government of Alberta COVID Mental Health Grant. Even during the pandemic, we saw five (5) rural communities sign up as pilot projects.

### ***You Know Me: Ageism Awareness***

Thanks to the Federal Government New Horizons for Seniors program, our team, in partnership with the Olds Age-Friendly Committee, created an ageism awareness campaign for the community of Olds.

The title of the campaign is “You Know Me” and highlights the value, strengths, and stories of older adults in the community. A series of interviews were conducted

with local older adults with questions focused on what ageism meant to them, the best things about aging, and if there were any pieces of wisdom they would like to share. Quotes from each interview, along with photos of interviewees, were featured on campaign posters and [www.youknowme.ca](http://www.youknowme.ca).

The campaign's goal is to create awareness about aging to improve relationships and inclusivity within the community. Through social media platforms, newsletter articles, and newspaper ads, businesses were encouraged to visit the You Know Me website, take the pledge to take part in the movement to end ageism in Olds. By taking the pledge, businesses receive resources on how to create a more age-inclusive workplace, highlight the positive attributes of older workers, and help the community identify other ways to engage with older people. Businesses also receive a sticker decal they can place at their storefront to

showcase their commitment to an age-inclusive space for all. By participating in the "You Know Me: Ending Ageism" campaign, local businesses can demonstrate their willingness to go the extra mile to support local seniors.

In March 2022, RDN requested an extension on the project which was approved by the funder.

### ***Awareness Builds Connection in Dementia Friendly Communities (ABCD)***

Funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada, RDN's Awareness Builds Connection in Dementia Friendly Communities (ABCD) project officially kicked off in September 2021.

The project is guided by three priorities aligned with Canada's national dementia strategy, A Dementia Strategy for Canada - Together We Aspire: dementia prevention, reducing stigma related to dementia, and supporting communities

to become more dementia-inclusive.

The purpose of the ABCD project is to work with five rural Albertan communities, with a larger senior population, interested in adapting an evidence-based, dementia-inclusive initiative into their community. Our approach is strengths-based, meaning that we understand communities are experts in their needs therefore selected pilot communities will lead their pilot projects, while RDN's role is to provide seed funding, assist with the planning and communication, and support community consultations as needed.

The overall objectives of the ABCD project is to increase awareness of dementia strategies and resources across rural communities, increase awareness of the stigma associated with dementia, increase the dialogue about signs and symptoms of dementia, and improve overall understanding of available

literature and environmental resources for effective dementia programs.

Throughout October to December 2021, the ABCD project team completed research for both a literature review and environmental scan. The literature review specifically focused on best practices, challenges, and lessons learned with respect to rural settings for dementia friendly initiatives, while the environmental scan focused on the collection of existing dementia-inclusive initiatives locally, nationally, and internationally. Both informed the ABCD Dementia-Inclusive Catalogue designed to support rural communities in their decisions of what activity would work best in their community.

The catalogue is now hosted on [www.rdndementia.ca](http://www.rdndementia.ca). The ABCD project team put out a call of interest to recruit ABCD Advisory Committee members in November 2021, purposefully looking to engage with those living with dementia, caregivers, and individuals

working in dementia-related fields. Twelve advisory committee members were successfully recruited and so far two meetings have taken place; the first one in January 2022 and the second in March 2022.

In February 2022, the Expression of Interest to rural Albertan communities was publicized on RDN's social media platforms and through outreach to existing partners and networks. In consultation with the ABCD Advisory Committee, five rural communities were announced to have been successful in their applications at the end of March 2022:

- Drumeheller/Drumheller Dementia Coalition: Drumheller Memory Cafe
- Spirit River and District/ Central Peace Health Complex Resident-Family Council: Musical Memory Cafe
- Region of Wheatland County/Town of

Strathmore, Family and Community Support Services: Dementia Friendly Connections (speaker series and Dementia Friendly Library initiative)

- Sturgeon County/ Sturgeon County, Family and Community Support Services: Dementia Dynamics, Learning the Story (environment assessment of public spaces, speakers corner)
- Town of Taber, Municipal District of Taber/ Barons-Eureka-Warner Family and Community Support Services: Establishing the FCSS Memory Café

During the month of March 2022, the ABCD Team has also worked closely with the Alzheimers Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories to develop two, half-day training sessions focused on dementia-inclusivity, support, and awareness. This training has been developed specifically for the pilot community representatives.

## **SHELTER PULSE**

“The goal of Shelter Pulse is to create a comprehensive database of policies that are trauma-informed, harm reduction-based, women-focused and culturally safe for rural Violence Against Women’s Shelters.”

Shelter Pulse has been made possible thanks to our partnership with Mountain Rose Women’s Shelter Association (Rocky Mountain House, AB) and their successful funding agreement with Women and Gender Equality Canada through the Feminist Response and Recovery Fund.

This national online tool will assist Violence Against Women and second-stage shelters to standardize their practices in order to ensure that women

## **THE TEAM**



**JULIA  
JUCO**

*Project  
Manager,  
Shelter Pulse*



**HAYLEY  
CRESSALL**

*Project  
Assistant,  
Shelter Pulse*

and children across the country have access to comparable levels of services no matter where they are, especially in rural or remote communities.

The Shelter Pulse team has accomplished numerous tasks in the project set-up phase. We have worked with Fresh Evaluation Consulting to develop a comprehensive and robust evaluation framework and we have engaged with Taproot Strategies as subject matter experts, who put

together the Shelter Pulse environmental scan.

Our team has developed a logic model, marketing resources and drafted a literature review that has informed our conversations with umbrella organizations across the country, government employees and experts in the field.

As our partners are working in a sector that often has meager budgets, high staff turnover and where need outweighs capacity, the team is continually adjusting engagement strategies to ensure Shelter Pulse is providing meaningful opportunities for our partners to participate in the project. We are looking forward to growing Shelter Pulse and seeing its potential flourish.



## IMMIGRATION

"This past year the Rural Immigration Initiative further expanded its work to support settlement and integration in rural communities. As a result our team grew to four full-time staff."

## THE TEAM



**JAYDE  
ROCHE**

*Director, Rural  
Immigration*



**ELNAZ  
ALIASL**

*Policy  
Researcher &  
Project Manager*



**ELAINE  
FLORES**

*Project Manager  
& Evaluations  
Coordinator*



**SOHEILA  
HOMAYED**

*Project Manager*

In 2020, RDN launched the Strengthening Rural Capacity to Support Newcomers project, in partnership with ASSIST Community Services Centre, funded by the Government of Alberta's Settlement, Immigration and Language Program. We worked closely with local service providers, members of municipalities and employers in the communities of Hinton, Kneehill County, Sylvan Lake, and Wainwright to build their capacity to support newcomers. We conducted research on the best practices for settlement in rural communities and a needs assessment survey across all 4 participating communities to better understand their needs. Working alongside an advisory committee, we delivered the first two out of four training series that were successful in knowledge translation, facilitating networking opportunities among different communities and stakeholders. The project will continue into the next year with the completion of training sessions and development of a toolkit.

Rural Immigration continued work with Hinton on the Welcome to Hinton: Rural Immigration and Community Inclusivity project funded by the Government of Alberta's Multiculturalism, Indigenous, and Inclusion Grant Program. The team conducted qualitative community-based research on barriers that immigrants in Hinton experience to full social participation through interviews and focus groups.

We then delivered anti-discrimination training to service providers to support inclusion in their community through a train-the-trainer method. The completion of the project saw an increased awareness of service providers on newcomers needs and further supported community knowledge on anti-discrimination and anti-racism.

In 2020 we continued our work with the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy (CCRL) on our project "Religious, spiritual, and non-religious understanding in rural Canada: A pilot project to

promote social and economic well-being through religious literacy”, funded by the Catherine Donnelly Foundation. This project aimed to improve the social and economic well-being of rural communities by fostering an understanding of religious, spiritual, and non-religious identities.

We worked in partnership with the Islamic Families and Social Services Association (IFSSA) in Edmonton, Alberta and the Keepers of the Circle Indigenous Hub (KotC) in Temiskaming Shores, Ontario. To achieve our goal, we engaged with key informants in Temiskaming Shores, Kirkland Lake, and Lac La Biche to conduct in-depth interviews with various stakeholders and community members.

In September 2021, we hosted a Sharing Circle with Elders and Indigenous youth, and delivered two in-person dialogues in Ontario - one in Temiskaming Shores and one in Kirkland Lake.

In November and December

2021, we hosted a three-part series of online training sessions in Lac La Biche; each training focused on the concerns raised from the interviews alongside the initial environmental scan. Upon completion of this project, we have continued to engage with partners for the second phase of the work.

In early 2022 we further expanded our work and partnerships through securing two grants under the WES Mariam Assefa Fund. The first, “Being proactive in rural Canada: Creating mechanisms for inclusive workplaces that support employers and employees”, is in partnerships with the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy (CCRL), Religious Freedom and Business Foundation (RFBF), and the Temiskaming Shores & Area Chamber of Commerce (TSACC).

The purpose of our project is to create programs that help employers better understand and create more welcoming

spaces for employees of different religious, spiritual, and non-religious backgrounds in the Temiskaming Shores & Area region by establishing faith-related employee resource groups (ERGs) and a faith-friendly workplace certification for rural employers.

The two year project started conducting research and interviews with local employers in March and April 2022.

The second project, “In Our Hands Project” is a two-year project in partnership with the British Columbia Co-operative Association (BCCA), Alberta Community & Co-operative Association (ACCA), and Women’s Economic Council (WEC). This project is a co-operative entrepreneurship (“copreneurship”) program that aims to facilitate the development of co-operative enterprises that meet the employment needs and entrepreneurial aspirations of newcomers to Canada through increasing accessibility to information, resources, and

support for navigating the process of starting and scaling co-operative businesses. The first phase of the project included a call for applicants for entrepreneurship participants.

Finally, the Rural Immigration team began to expand our fee-for-service work for communities and was contracted by Portage College to help develop an International Student Strategy. In January 2022, the team conducted an environmental scan report, which contained research on international students in terms of the national and provincial context, and a review of best practices and innovative approaches that rural colleges have taken to attract and retain international students. The RI team has done engagement sessions with the International Student Strategic Planning Committee and interviews with College support staff, current international students, a representative from its international recruitment partner, and other rural colleges. The information

gathered will be used to support the development of the International Student Strategy for Fall 2022 admissions.

Over the past year, we continued to expand our reach by presenting at various conferences including the 2021 AAISA Settlement and Integration Conference and Designs for Diversity & Inclusion: Service Provider Challenges and Solutions conference hosted by the Women's Economic Council. Our team was recognized as knowledge experts in rural immigration and were cited in various provincial and national

news articles, including the Toronto Star.

The Rural Immigration initiative also saw the launch of the Government of Alberta's two new rural immigration streams, Rural Renewal and Rural Entrepreneurship, for which we helped to raise awareness on the community needs and immigrant perspectives.



## TRANSPORTATION

“Many of the issues that rural communities struggle with are impacting transportation or being impacted by it. Over the past year we focused on deepening our data and understanding.”

Funded by the Alberta Real Estate Foundation, RDN in partnership with the Association for Life-Wide Living of Alberta created a year-long project that aims to find better solutions for rural transportation. This project will use significant rural transportation research, and data in the Battle River Region and beyond to:

- identify community-based ideas and solutions,
- assess their potential for use in rural Alberta,
- connect the “silos” of people working independently on rural transportation issues, and

## THE TEAM



**ELNAZ  
ALIASL**

*Policy Researcher &  
Project Manager*

- bring together Alberta stakeholders to share ideas, successes and challenges.

Following the environmental scan, news releases, and interviews in the last years, we held focus groups with for deeper understanding of the issues and discussion on the found themes. A survey was also distributed to collect the opinions of stakeholders and communities.

The final planned component of this project is an in-person gathering for information sharing. The event is an opportunity to share the findings of the project and reflect on intersectionality/ transportation in rural communities.

## AGRI-FOODS

"Throughout the past year, RDN has continued to explore the opportunity to support rural communities in the ever-growing agriculture and food sector."

The Covid-19 pandemic has accentuated the fragility of the food supply chain on a global level and has amplified existing challenges in the agriculture and food sectors in Canada. RDN is focusing on increasing agricultural literacy in an effort to shorten supply chains and strengthen small and medium enterprises.

In April of 2021, RDN started the FarmEd Project, funded by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership Youth Agriculture Education Program (CAP YAE). FarmEd is a place-based education project which includes the development of a guide or "toolkit" on how to

## THE TEAM



**CONNER  
PLATTEN**

*Project  
Manager,  
Agri-Foods*

start & maintain a small-scale school farm with adjacent curricular links, virtual training sessions for teachers, and school farm pilot projects.

Through this project we will work to enhance teachers' and students' understanding of agricultural practices, improve local food security, and increase public trust in Alberta agriculture. The project was started by creating an advisory committee of education and agriculture industry stakeholders and we have since toured school farms, facilitated focus groups with students in existing agriculture education programs, drafted the toolkit,

and have begun the process of implementing two pilot school farms.

Throughout the course of this project we have met with a number of schools and organizations who are working towards a similar goal which has led to partnerships and opportunities within agriculture and food education.

Aside from FarmEd, the Agri-Foods team has been working to initiate school food

programs with organizations across Alberta and British Columbia, as well as the development of a program to deliver business management and leadership skills to women in agriculture.

The Agri-Foods team will continue to build relationships and explore new opportunities to increase food security, strengthen the workforce, and advocate for the agriculture and food sectors.



## WORK - INTEGRATED LEARNING

"In partnership with post-secondary institutions across Canada, we're raising awareness of the benefits of WIL and creating opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in various types of experiential learning."

In October 2021, RDN received funding from RBC Future Launch, through the Business + Higher Education Roundtable, for a work-integrated learning (WIL) project. The primary goals of our WIL initiative are:

- Supporting system level strategies to create employment ready graduates; and
- Building capacity for rural and remote communities.

## THE TEAM



**DANIELA  
SEIFERLING**  
*Project Manager,  
WIL*



**HAYLEY  
CRESSALL**  
*Project Assistant,  
WIL*

In partnership with post-secondary institutions across Canada, we're raising awareness of the benefits of WIL and creating opportunities for undergraduate students to engage in various types of experiential learning, from internships to applied research projects. Our intention is facilitating 750 student placements by August 31, 2022.

Like other initiatives at RDN,

COVID-19 played a significant role in shifting goals and delivery for the program. While we weren't able to connect with our partners or attend in-person events as often as we would have liked, we were presented with a unique opportunity. The project was able to engage students in new and innovative ways. We expanded our partners outreach to communities outside of urban centres and increased available opportunities for employers to engage in virtual and course-based WIL projects.

Since the launch of the project, RDN has:

- Facilitated 693 placements across Alberta and Canada.
- Engaged 2,000 community partners and employers through direct (phone calls, meetings, presentations) and indirect communications (newsletters, social media, website) to raise awareness of WIL and its benefits.

- In partnership with post-secondary partners, supported over 50 employers in creating multiple WIL opportunities for students in their communities.

RDN is exploring new partnerships and funding opportunities to sustain this project beyond August 31, 2022. We're exploring opportunities to research best practices in creating WIL programs to inform a best practices guide for post-secondary institutions, we're working with the Agri-Food initiative to create placements for agri-based businesses, and exploring partnerships with Chambers of Commerce to create localized supports for economic development and recovery.

## **RURAL REVITALIZATION**

“Small communities in Canada often spend a great deal of time on planning. This is important but it can be time wasted if it doesn’t quickly and effectively lead to implementing positive, long term change.”

While it may seem simpler to approach each goal individually, what communities actually need is an overarching, actionable plan that will immediately begin to deliver tangible results - results that will excite the community to continue to move forward.

A meeting in Hornepayne, Ontario in 2020, between the RDN CEO, the Hornepayne Mayor (Cheryl Fort) and the CAO (Gail Jaremy), led to the development of an exciting and innovative new partnership. The Township of Hornepayne and the RDN are working together

## **THE TEAM**



**DEE ANN  
BENARD**

**Chief Executive  
Officer**

to create a model of rural community revitalization. RDN is providing expertise through planning, implementation, and capacity building. We are also actively seeking other small municipalities from across Canada to work with us and combine our resources to achieve our common goal of supporting efficient, effective rural economic and community development. The goal is to build and implement a truly integrated municipal revitalization plan in a phased approach that minimizes risk and maximizes return on investment.

This year our partnership was successful in obtaining matching funding from the Ontario government. In the next fiscal year, we will move forward with hiring a Coordinator position in Hornepayne. The Coordinator will focus on attracting new

businesses and workers, retaining and growing existing businesses, and creating a positive environment for business succession, and how that fits in with and impacts the Township's other plans.



## NETWORKS AND COMMUNITY

Here we discuss the ways that we facilitate dialogue, partnership, and resource-sharing among rural communities from coast to coast.

### *CRRHH Symposium*

The only national symposium of its kind dedicated to rural and remote housing and homelessness issues.

RDN partnered with the Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) to host the second Canadian Rural and Remote Housing and Homelessness (CRRHH) Symposium in Guelph ON, originally planned for May 2020.

The annual symposium provided rural Canadian communities with tools, training, and the expertise needed to address the unique and complex issues surrounding homelessness and housing in rural and remote Canada. It focused

on providing actionable tools and best practices that allow communities to make positive impacts, and was the only national symposium of its kind dedicated to addressing rural and remote homelessness and housing issues.

Due to COVID-19, RDN and ROI postponed the symposium and moved it to a virtual format, hosted from June 1-3 2021. It was an exciting new challenge to overcome the steep learning curve of planning a successful, fully virtual event. But we wanted to ensure we could provide this important platform for rural communities to connect and learn from each other, especially during this time of great change and new challenges.

We coordinated presenters, sponsors, and secured four incredible keynote speakers. The keynote speakers included Jesse Thistle (Indigenous Rights' Activist & Best-selling Author), Margaret Pfoh (CEO, Aboriginal Housing Management Association), Avi Friedman (Professor of Architecture), and Pamela Hine (Vice President, Partnerships and Promotions,

CMHC). The event was filled with meaningful presentations from presenters across the country, networking opportunities, and resource sharing. As we adapt to this format in the future, we hope the virtual format will lower cost and transportation barriers, and allow even more people to join in the conversation from all corners of the country.

## *The only national symposium of its kind.*

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*The bi-annual CRRHH provides rural Canadian communities with actionable tools, best practices, and expertise needed to address the unique and complex*

## ARCH2

The Alberta Rural Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ARCH2) continues to be a place for members to connect and share news, as well as strive for advocacy within their communities and beyond. The network has grown within the last year and is always looking for those interested in joining and adding their voice on behalf of rural Alberta communities. If you are interested in becoming a member, please contact us!

Why join the ARCH2? It's a space for people living and working in Rural Alberta to get together in the interest of increasing awareness around issues related to housing and homelessness. Through this connection, the group works together to identify barriers and share experiences for the purpose of advocacy and education. Also, members will receive information on potential funding opportunities, and updates to current RDN funded projects. Information

gathered at ARCH2 Network meetings can be shared with government and other funders in the interest of creating meaningful change.

Many of the conversations this past year were focused on the impacts of the pandemic on communities and services, funding opportunities and need, as well as recognizing that affordable housing and service accessibility is urgently needed within rural communities. We look forward to this next year and all the possibilities the ARCH2 Network has to offer.

## CARRHH

The Canadian Association on Rural & Remote Housing & Homelessness (CARRHH) was created after the initial Canadian Rural & Remote Housing & Homelessness symposium as a way to continue the conversation around the unique challenges faced by rural and remote communities.

The network provides a

space for individuals from rural communities across the country to connect and share their experiences. Network members provide valuable insight to the realities faced by those experiencing homelessness throughout many rural Canadian communities.

In the past year, the network has identified the increase in living costs as well as the lack of affordable housing as being significant barriers to rural Canadians accessing the housing they need. Members continue to work diligently and creatively to address the needs of their community while advocating for innovative solutions. The network allows members to discuss potential approaches to complex situations while seeking input and advice from one another.

CARRHH is a place for people to work collaboratively to develop solutions that directly address the housing needs of rural and remote communities across Canada.

## ***The Canadian Rural Collaborative***

Formed in late 2020, the Canadian Rural Collaborative (CRC) really began to coalesce in 2021. This group's formation was spearheaded by RDN, with the intent of bringing together like-minded, rural-focused organizations from across Canada.

The CRC's goal is to facilitate partnerships, information sharing, and capacity building between organizations working to address economic development and social issues in a rural context. This year, the CRC members focused on supporting and amplifying each other's work and advocating for rural Canada. The CRC has some exciting plans for the next fiscal year, so please stay tuned.

## **FINANCE & OPERATIONS**

"The operations and finance team regularly updates and maintains RDN's systems and policies, ensuring the staff and organization is well looked-after. RDN has many initiatives and manages full-time, part-time, and temporary staff."

## **THE TEAM**



**DEE ANN  
BENARD**

*Chief Executive  
Officer*



**LISA  
BELANGER**

*Director,  
Operations*



**SANDRA  
DI CESARE**

*Director, Finance*



**KELLY  
PETRASCHUK**

*Manager, Human  
Resources*



**HOLLY  
UDALL**

*Manager,  
Communications*

Well into the cycle of our new fiscal year end date, which was adopted in 2021, the RDN has experienced substantial growth over the past year. Along with many new initiatives & projects, we added 16 new positions to our team. This new growth has allowed us to establish a Reserve Fund to assist in

funding new RDN projects and capital acquisitions. Truly a dynamic organization, much work goes into ensuring that the structure of the organization is sustainable and effective. We at RDN are proud of our financial achievements this year and we look forward to continued growth.



## A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR MEMBERS

We could not do the work we do without the unwavering support of these post-secondary institutions that stand behind **rural**.



## A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS & FUNDERS

We could not do the work we do without the generous support of these organizations and municipalities that stand behind **rural**.



Community Housing  
Transformation Centre  
Centre de transformation  
du logement communautaire



CCRL The Centre for Civic Religious Literacy  
CLRC Le centre de litt  rat   religieuse civique



RBC Future Launch

## **RDN EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**KEVIN  
SHUFFLEBOTHAM**  
Medicine Hat College  
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University of Lethbridge  
*Vice Chair*

**ED PAJOR**  
University of Calgary  
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Portage College  
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Athabasca University  
*Secretary*

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**KEVIN VAN LAGEN  
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KIMBERLY WORTHINGTON**

## *2021/2022 RDN STAFF*

### **ASAD BHATTI**

Manager, Capital Funding

### **AZAM KHATTAK**

Analyst, Research & Programs  
(until December 3, 2021)

### **CASSANDRA RASKO**

Project Manager, Substance  
Use Awareness (until October  
29, 2021)

### **CONNER PLATTEN**

Project Manager, Agri- Food  
Initiatives

### **DANIEL MORIN**

Project Manager, Planning &  
Community Development

### **DANIEL WARING**

Research Assistant  
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### **DANIELA SEIFERLING**

Project Manager, Work  
Integrated Learning

### **DEE ANN BENARD**

Chief Executive Officer

### **DIAHANN POLEGE- AULOTTE**

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### **ELAINE FLORES**

Project Manager & Evaluations  
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### **ELNAZ ALIASL**

Policy Researcher & Project  
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### **EMELE NEUFELD**

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### **JAYDE ROCHE**

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Planning & Research Analyst

### **JOLEEN CHIVAS**

Financial Claims Analyst,  
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### **JONN KMECH**

Program Consultant  
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### **JUSTIN REINKE**

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### **JULIA JUCO**

Project Manager, Shelter Pulse

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### **MARY MCGUIRE**

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### **SANDRA DI CESARE**

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### **SCOTT TRAVIS**

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### **SOHEILA HOMAYED**

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Immigration

### **SYDNEY STENEKES**

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### **TAMMY PFEIFFER**

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### **TREVOR HORNE**

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Development

### **ZAIN ABEDIN**

Director, Community  
Development

## *2021/2022 INTERNS*

### ***COURTNEY NGUYEN***

Planning Student

### ***EMILEE UBELS***

Communications Assistant

### ***JESSICA PENA***

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### ***MARY POON***

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### ***SARAH SEREDA***

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**SEPTEMBER 2022**

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