2022/2023
ANNUAL REPORT

Rural Development Network

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

RDN acknowledges the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

We recognize our role on this land in advocating with Indigenous communities for better funding and opportunities. We are committed to connecting our programming to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as guiding principles for our Reconciliation journey.

We acknowledge that we are all Treaty People. This means we all have a responsibility to uphold and respect the Treaties signed to affirm our commitment and responsibility to improve relationships between nations and improve our understanding of the vast differences between the many Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and their own unique cultures.

We share this acknowledgement to reaffirm our responsibility and commitment to reconciliation. We also recognize that this land acknowledgement is just that, an acknowledgement; it is but one step in our journey.

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LOOKING BACK:
A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

DEE ANN BENARD
Chief Executive Officer

This year, RDN experienced significant growth. As we entered our first year 'post-COVID', we expanded our team from 37 to almost 50 employees, and we now have staff located across Western and Central Canada. Like most organizations, we faced challenges due to the tight labour market and stagflation (inflation and a slow economy); however, the tenacity, optimism, and innovative approaches of our Senior Leadership Team and staff ensured we made positive impacts and show promise for another successful year in 2023-24.

One of RDN's key areas of focus over the past year was rural revitalization and using a holistic approach to community

development. We have been testing out how our different initiatives can better work together through cross-initiative projects, breaking down silos and increasing efficiencies. With growth came the need to find ways to streamline our work, and identify what we should focus on and what to say no to.

Additionally, we increased our focus on working with Indigenous communities, adding a First Nations data collection team and seeking out projects to improve Indigenous data collection. We recognize the importance of Indigenizing data collection work, and we have improved our engagement with Indigenous communities, providing a more authentic and meaningful experience.

Our newer projects such as Shelter Pulse, Work-Integrated Learning, First Nations Data Collection, and Rural Revitalization have been instrumental in building capacity in rural areas, increasing connections with the post-secondary sector, increasing the scope of our policy related work, and helping us work more effectively with Indigenous communities.

Over the past year, our operations team has worked diligently to refine our internal processes, scaling them up or developing new processes to match our organization's progress. Overall, the growth and headway made by RDN over the past fiscal year demonstrates our continued commitment to our vision, mission, and mandate.

I am extremely grateful for the work of our executive board and our advisory board. Their help is invaluable in helping us continue to make an impact, to expand, and become better known throughout Canada.

I am proud of the impact we have made this past year and I look forward to all the great things RDN will accomplish in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

OUR
INITIATIVES

Learn about what the Rural Developmet Network has accomplished this year through all of our initiatives and projects.

INDIGENOUS RECONCILIATION

HOMELESSNESS

HOUSING

BROADBAND

SHELTER PULSE

HEALTH & WELLNESS

AGRI-FOOD

IMMIGRATION

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

NETWORKS & COMMUINITY

TRANSPORTATION

RURAL REVITALIZATION

THE SUSTAINABLE HOUSING INITIATIVE

The Sustainable Housing Initiative's (SHI) mandate is to support municipalities and community groups who lack the capacity or expertise for developing affordable housing. Our work includes assisting groups with housing pre-development work on a cost-recovery (fee for service) basis by developing needs assessments, business cases, financial analyses, and more. In addition, we help groups access funding through various agencies, for both pre-development and capital purposes, and support them throughout the entire process. We also work with communities to strategize how to best approach the housing challenges they face through the development of housing strategies and action plans.

The SHI is dedicated to knowledge building in Canada's affordable housing sector. Our Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Affordable Housing, available for free, outlines the entire affordable housing development process from start to finish, and is an excellent resource for any group unfamiliar with the process. The SHI aims to develop and make available impactful research, so there are more resources available to those working in the affordable housing sector.

ZAIN ABEDIN
Director, Community Development

ASAD BHATTI
Director, Housing

TREVOR HORNE
Manager,
Community Development

KABIR SHAHANI
Manager,
Capital Funding

JESSE TJEPKEMA
Manager,
Research & Planning

NICOLE CRONKHITE
Project Manager, Planning & Community Development

JANISE SOMER
Project Manager, Special Projects Implementation

ALYCE WICKERT

Project Manager, Planning & Community Development

SEAN ADAMS

Planning Specialist

KIERAN FRAME

Research & Financial Analyst

JORDYN KNICKLE

Planning & Research Analyst

DANIEL MORIN

Planning Specialist

JADE MOUSSA

Community Development Assistant

COURTNEY NGUYEN

Planning Student

ENABLING HOUSING CHOICE (EHC)

One of the ways the SHI works to support diverse, sustainable, and equitable housing development in Albertan communities is through its Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) Project. This project is made possible through funding and support from the Alberta Real Estate Foundation (AREF).

The EHC project will drive long-term policy change that will benefit Alberta's real estate industry by addressing policy, bylaw, and process barriers that realtors, housing developers, and municipalities often face when trying to improve housing choice and diversity. It will bring together key stakeholders to address capacity issues and achieve common goals that improve housing diversity in each of the partner municipalities, as well as create a guidebook for other municipalities to use.
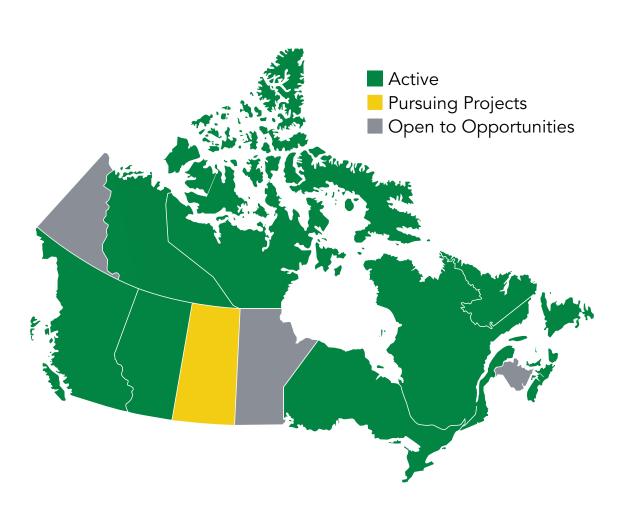
As a three-year research project, EHC began in November 2021 and is slated to be complete by the end of 2024. The project has three phases. Phase one aimed to understand the various needs, opportunities and existing practices related to housing choice and diversity at a province-wide scale. Phase two consists of partnering with Albertan municipalities to identify their housing needs and provide informed policy solutions (in progress). Phase three will involve compiling key project findings into a comprehensive guidebook that can be used by other municipalities to further enable housing diversity.

The EHC team completed phase one in May 2022, which was to conduct research and a province-wide survey to understand the factors that impact diverse housing development in Alberta municipalities. The team then compiled the findings into five major reports which are available on the SHI website: Housing and the Economy, Housing and Equity, Housing

The SHI works with communities and groups across the country to support the development of affordable housing. Below is a map showcasing all the communities SHI has worked in this past year.

Active
Pursuing Projects
Open to Opportunities

and the Environment, Housing and Nimbyism, and Housing and Capacity.

Phase two of the project began in June 2022, where we partnered with six Albertan municipalities to examine their current housing issues and develop solutions that respond to their unique needs while encouraging housing diversity. We are working actively with the Town of Bow Island, the Town of Trochu, the Town of Pincher Creek, the Town of Mayerthorpe, the City of Airdrie and the Town of Claresholm - who are all in various stages of research and analysis.

After the completion of phase two, we will move into phase three, where we will begin compiling our key findings and research into a final guidebook that will help other municipalities further enable housing diversity and choice in their communities. This guidebook will be promoted and shared through conferences, workshops, and webinars and will be made readily available on both RDN's and SHI's websites.

VERSION 2.0 OF THE STEP–BY–STEP GUIDE

In 2019, we released the Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Affordable Housing, and over the years we have received great feedback on how the Guide could be even better. We learned that more information on accessibility, energy efficiency, funding, and more would make the document an even stronger resource for groups looking to develop affordable housing.

To make these changes and other key improvements, the SHI partnered with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), and New Market Funds to publish a second iteration of the Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Affordable Housing. To support the development of this new iteration, we assembled a new National Advisory Committee to provide expertise on emerging developments in

Canada's housing sector.

The original Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Affordable Housing is available in both French and English, has over 900 unique downloads across Canada, and won CMHC's Gold Roof Award for Housing Research Excellence in 2020. We are striving to reach even more groups with this new iteration so that groups looking to develop affordable housing have a key resource they can refer to and trust.

The second iteration of the Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Affordable Housing will be available in June 2023, in both French and English.

STEP–BY–STEP GUIDE: ONLINE COURSE

As part of our dissemination of the Step-by-Step Guide to Developing Affordable Housing, we often host workshops where we guide participants through the 'Initiation phase' of the pre-development work. These workshops have been very well received as an excellent opportunity for groups to get more insight into the various stages of affordable housing development. To extend the Guide's reach and its learning opportunities to groups across Canada, the SHI is developing an online course that is based on the Guide.

Funded in partnership with the CMHC, this course will provide knowledge related to the development of affordable housing in Canada to a wide array of groups including non-profits, community developers, municipal governments, and more. The course will cover key topics in development, from start to finish, including project initiation, planning, construction, and operations.

This asynchronous course will cover the lessons of the Step-by-Step Guide in detail, giving learners a greater understanding of the various aspects of developing

affordable housing, which is also accompanied by expert insights in key areas such as how to navigate financial feasibility modelling.

The course will be delivered online in a flexible format for learners to access course content and key information on their own schedules and at their own pace. In the end, the course will also provide a better understanding of affordable housing project development and will impart lessons that will help groups move their affordable housing endeavours forward. The course is currently in development and is planned to be released in mid-2023.

PLACEMAKING FOR INCLUSION: COMMUNITY–BASED TENANT INITIATIVE

The Placemaking For Inclusion Project aims to understand how affordable housing developments can reduce stigma and foster social inclusion through tenant-informed improvements to the affordable housing space. The project is broken into three phases: securing partnerships with affordable housing providers, securing funding to create tenant-informed improvements, and a final phase to compile and publish learnings from the project in the form of a toolkit. This project, which began in May 2022, is funded by the Community Housing Transformation Centre's Community-Based Tenant Initiative and is slated for completion by the end of 2023.

In the first phase of the project, RDN partnered with two affordable housing residences, Norfolk Housing Association in Calgary and La Société des Manoirs Saint-Joachim et Saint-Thomas (LSM) in Edmonton, to discover placemaking solutions that will serve to integrate each residence and their tenants within their broader community.

We then worked to secure capital funding for the two

groups through various agencies and in February 2023, we were successful in procuring approximately $25,000 through the New Horizons for Seniors Program (Community-Based Projects) to coordinate and host a community tile-mural painting event at LSM in June 2023. This event will allow community members and Saint-Joachim tenants to come together and collectively create a mural that symbolizes community, inclusiveness, and social cohesion in their neighbourhood.

To support this event, in March 2023, SHI conducted a focus group with senior tenants at LSM to gather potential ideas for the community mural concept, which will be prepared by a local Francophone mural artist. A subsequent survey was prepared and released by SHI to all 152 residents at Saint Joachim to understand tenants' preferred mural concepts and considerations for the event's activities.

After the completion of phase two, we will move into the final phase where we will develop a toolkit that contains best practices for community engagement and affordable housing inclusion projects. This resource will be a guide for future affordable housing projects across Canada, allowing developments to increase community buy-in and foster a welcoming atmosphere for affordable housing residents.

CMHC HOUSING SUPPLY CHALLENGE: PRE-DEVELOPMENT STREAM

The SHI was awarded preliminary project funding in the first round of the CMHC Housing Supply Challenge: Pre-Development Stream for a project focused on closing housing data gaps in rural communities.

In most affordable housing developments, proving and understanding housing

needs in the community is an essential step of the process and is used to make key decisions regarding the project. Understanding housing needs requires detailed levels of analysis, such as describing the communities' housing demand and supply, as well as determining the corresponding housing gap. All of this work requires housing data to complete.

The issue for many rural and remote communities is that the available housing data is often lacking – and in some cases, it can be extremely limited. This is sometimes due to data suppression, and sometimes because small communities are excluded from certain surveys collecting housing data. This lack of data makes it much more difficult to complete the kinds of analyses and work described above – meaning that understanding and proving housing needs also becomes more difficult. Compounding this issue is that many of these communities must rely on data

that is published at different times, sometimes several years apart.

The Rural and Remote Communities - Housing Data for Pre-Development Progression project aims to tackle this problem by empowering rural and remote municipalities to assess critical housing needs at the local level. The project works to achieve this by capturing and aggregating real-time data from local housing providers and residents of the community. This data will be made available through a "Rural Housing Hub", a secure, self-service web-based portal optimized for use in low-bandwidth and low-fidelity contexts.

Through this interactive hub, municipalities will be able to craft questions for their residents that are tailored to the community's context, and then retrieve and present the data they need to get support that makes sense for their

unique circumstances. This hub ensures it is straightforward for communities to both administer and use it to collect data, giving them the agency to achieve success for housing projects that meet their needs.

The SHI is working diligently to secure funding to move this project forward, beyond the preliminary planning stage.

If you feel like your community could benefit from this project, please connect with us.

CAPITAL FUNDING

SHI is working closely with rural, remote, urban and Indigenous communities to secure capital funding for their affordable housing projects. Many capital programs such as the CMHC Co-Investment Fund provide grant and/or loan funding to support shelter, transitional, and affordable housing projects.

Using these funding streams is essential for affordable housing

developers, and is the next step once pre-development activities for a project are complete. The SHI is working with multiple communities and organizations to secure funding for their projects through CMHC's newly issued Co-Investment contribution-only stream.

The contribution-only stream provides grant funding for up to 40% of a housing project's capital costs. The SHI has successfully supported Lil'wat Nation in British Columbia in securing funding through this stream for homes on-reserve. As a result, this new stream has allowed the SHI to present more financially feasible funding options for affordable housing developers.

The SHI works actively to help groups access and acquire funding to support their affordable housing developments including developing unique solutions tailored to specific projects. If your organization needs help in

accessing or acquiring funding for affordable housing, please connect with us.

Airdrie Housing Limited: East Lake Apartments

Through our capital funding work, SHI secured $1.4 million for Airdrie Housing Limited (AHL) from the Government of Alberta's Affordable Housing Partnership Program. This funding will allow AHL to convert a vacant hotel into 38 new affordable housing units. Importantly, this project includes a supply of studio units which currently do not exist in the City of Airdrie. The target demographic for this project is low-income households in Core Housing Need (as defined by StatCan and CMHC), who are spending more than a third of their income on rent. Prospective tenants will also be below the Core Needs Income Threshold (as published by the Government of Alberta) for the City of Airdrie.

The project, called East Lake Apartments, will provide affordable housing to those most in need, supporting them through partnerships with the City of Airdrie and local social service providers. The SHI is also continuing to work with AHL to secure additional funding for the project, to ensure it can achieve all the goals AHL is working towards.

CMHC Rapid Housing Initiative

SHI worked closely with seven communities and organizations to submit funding applications to the CMHC's third round of the Rapid Housing Initiative. The combined funding ask of $57,622,307, if successfully awarded, would go to:

- Affordable rural off-reserve housing for Indigenous peoples.

- Affordable on-reserve housing for First Nations peoples and Elders.

- Affordable net-zero housing on a Métis settlement for families and seniors.

- Transitional urban housing for lung transplant patients and their caregivers.

- Affordable rural housing for low-income households and women and children.

- Affordable rural housing for priority populations in need of homes.

- Black-led urban housing for newcomers and Black Canadians in need of homes.

The SHI has worked diligently on these projects to support the creation of 158 new affordable housing units and 30 new transitional housing units, which (if successful) would house over 200 people in critical Core Housing Need. Funding decisions are expected in mid-2023.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

Access to affordable housing is an issue across Canada - one that stems from and connects with other challenges communities face. SHI strives to present holistic solutions that respond to or connect with multiple aspects of a community's needs, by collaborating with other teams & initiatives within RDN.

This past fiscal year, the SHI worked collaboratively with other RDN initiatives to develop a Social Needs Assessment for the Town of Claresholm. This Assessment analyzed the social needs of the Town, using both primary and secondary research methods, and made recommendations on how Claresholm can best ensure the community has the social programming needed to thrive. This Social Needs Assessment combined with a

Housing Needs Assessment fed into the Claresholm Affordable Housing Strategy - a strategy which makes recommendations and provides a plan for how Claresholm can approach and resolve their local housing challenges.

The SHI also collaborated with other RDN initiatives on an innovative strategy for the Township of Tay Valley, for implementing the Township's plan for becoming age-friendly.

The document discusses how to achieve an age-friendly community through cohousing, communication, and inclusion. The strategy was able to highlight the needs of seniors and how to best accommodate those needs through a variety of mechanisms.

The SHI is always ready and eager to work with other RDN initiatives to present holistic, all-inclusive solutions for communities.

HOMELESSNESS

RDN's homelessness initiative aims to support rural, remote, and Indigenous communities with responding to homelessness. While RDN administers the federal government's Reaching Home funding to rural and remote communities throughout Alberta, the initiative also offers support to communities across the country through data collection, community conversations, the development of tools, and community action plans in the form of fee-for-service work.

The Housing and Service Needs Estimations program addresses data gaps in rural communities and provides a more comprehensive understanding of homelessness, housing security, and service needs.

The data collected aims to empower communities and governments to make data-informed decisions with regards to homelessness and service provision. Over the past couple of years, the homelessness team has also engaged in research which supports the implementation of coordinated access in rural and remote communities.

The homelessness team continues to expand its scope of work as community needs emerge. We encourage any community who may be struggling with responding to homelessness to connect with our team to discuss how we may be able to support your community's next steps in developing a meaningful response.

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REACHING HOME

RDN is the Alberta Rural & Remote Community Entity (CE) for the Reaching Home (RH) program, which is the federal government's homelessness strategy aimed at reducing and preventing homelessness across Canada. RDN has spent the past ten years supporting rural Alberta communities to respond to homelessness.

We are now in the fourth year of the current five year program. Federal Budget 2021 committed an additional $567.2 million in RH funding to the program for 2022-2024, and RDN received an additional $1.2 million in incremental funding, to be distributed annually in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. In total, $2.1 million in funding was allocated to projects in 2022-2023.

Working alongside non-profit organizations, municipalities, First Nations, Métis settlements, nations and our Regional Advisory Board, RH funding was distributed to approximately 42 communities this year. Of the 42 communities that received funding, eight Indigenous communities and organizations were allotted funding to support members in their home communities who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. In the spirit of reconciliation, the RH team committed to improving application and reporting processes for Indigenous communities and organizations, which included creating a letter of intent and oral application process. The team is grateful for the guidance of RDN's Indigenous Liaison and the feedback that was generously shared from Indigenous partners as we continue to work to decolonize our approach to administering funding.

Overall, RH funding is used to support service provision, including the operation of shelter and mat programs, homelessness prevention programs, housing placement, outreach, and the development of emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing. RDN has supported over 100 unique projects with RH funding since the current program's launch in 2019. In 2022-2023, funding contributed to the development of various innovative responses including the establishment of Drayton Valley's shelter pods and Changing Horses' Indigenous-led supportive housing complex for members of the Kainai Nation.

This past year, RDN's homelessness team was invited to present to a number of networks and events, including the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta conference in November 2022. It is evident that communities and organizations across the province and country

are increasingly recognizing the need to respond to homelessness, and many are interested in coming together to discuss and share solutions. RDN continues to build partnerships with communities, First Nations, researchers, networks, and governments to combat rural, remote, and Indigenous homelessness.

RDN currently distributes Reaching Home funding to organizations in the following Alberta communities:

- *Athabasca*
- *Banff*
- *Bigstone Cree Nation*
- *Blackfalds*
- *Camrose*
- *Canmore*
- *Cochrane*
- *Cold Lake*
- *Conklin*
- *County of Grande Prairie*
- *Drayton Valley*
- *Edson*
- *Fort MacLeod*
- *Chard Métis Nation*
- *Fox Creek*
- *Hinton*
- *Hythe*
- *Jasper*

- *Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe)*
- *Kikino Métis Settlement*
- *Lac La Biche County*
- *Lloydminster*
- *Métis Nation of Alberta Region 1*
- *Municipcal District of Greenview*
- *Olds*
- *Peace River*
- *Rocky Mountain House*
- *Slave Lake*
- *Spruce Grove*
- *St. Albert*
- *Stony Plain*
- *Strathmore*
- *Sylvan Lake*

- *Taber*
- *Vegreville*
- *Vulcan*
- *Warburg*
- *Westlock & District*
- *Wetaskiwin*
- *Whitecourt*

Sylvan Lake: Housing First Project

The Town of Sylvan Lake contracted RDN, funded through RH, to develop a customized Housing First approach to reduce homelessness and those at risk of being homeless based on the Housing First philosophy.

The project wrapped up this year with the following completed deliverables: a detailed literature review and environmental scan, facilitation of six community engagement/education sessions, development of a community services map, development of a case management intake/assessment form, and a report and guide that was presented to Council.

The Housing First in Rural Communities Guide,centred on Sylvan Lake, showcases how Sylvan Lake can collaborate with nearby rural communities to provide a clear path as to how a Housing First model and best practices can be implemented in rural communities. Collaboration is the key to a successful and sustainable Housing First model. Being able to provide wrap-around support and a multitude of resources for individuals and/or families who are experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness is crucial for these communities to move forward with sustainable housing.

The Town of Sylvan Lake was successful in an additional RH grant to implement the findings and recommendations, along with hiring a Housing First Navigator who is working one-on-one with families and individuals, using the newly developed Housing First Guide. The navigator is providing ongoing case management to ensure that clients are connected with the appropriate agencies, programs, and services they require to establish and maintain safe and affordable housing in Sylvan Lake.

Lac La Biche: Homelessness and Transitional Housing Project

In preparation for the development of a transitional housing project in Lac La Biche, RDN was contracted by Lac La Biche County FCSS, funded through RH, to engage the Mayor and Council, Town Administration, community members, service providers, and individuals experiencing homelessness in the spring of 2022. The purpose of these engagement sessions was threefold:

1. To provide the general community with a better understanding of homelessness and what it looks like in Lac La Biche;

2. To highlight the importance of providing shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness in Lac La Biche; and,

3. To gain community support for a transitional housing project.

RDN engaged impacted parties through in-person and virtual town hall-style sessions, as well as an online mixed methods survey. These sessions were designed to be collaborative, conducted with a human-rights approach, and guided by our commitment to reconciliation. Upon completion of the engagement sessions, RDN developed a What We Heard report summarizing the results of the data collected during the engagement sessions and from the survey responses collected. The report was accepted by Lac La Biche County Administration in September 2022.

BRIDGING THE RURAL-URBAN HOMELESSNESS DIVIDE: IMPLEMENTING COORDINATED ACCESS IN SMALLER COMMUNITIES

This national project is funded by the Government of Canada's Community Capacity and Innovation Stream of Reaching Home. The project aims to build capacity in the homeless-serving sector by creating a Coordinated Access system model and processes that address the unique challenges faced by service providers in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

Coordinated Access systems provide streamlined services for individuals or families who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. These systems reduce barriers to accessing services by pairing service users with the most appropriate service(s) offered in the community.

Our goal is to develop a Coordinated Access system model and training materials in the four core elements of Coordinated Access: access, assessment, prioritization, and matching/referral in a rural-specific and Indigenous-focused context. We intend to create an adaptable Coordinated Access system model that can be scaled nationally and can be adjusted for community and organizational capacity.

Deliverables completed in the 2022-23 fiscal year included the hiring of project staff, a detailed literature review and environmental scan, and the facilitation of 15 national focus groups with 38 unique service providers attending across available sessions. As we move into the first phase of the 2023 fiscal year, we will be hosting focus groups for those with lived and living experience. The

outcomes of these sessions will inform the creation of a toolkit to help build capacity and empower the homeless-serving sector.

INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS TO RURAL HOMELESSNESS

RDN received a Community Initiatives Program grant (2022-2023) from the Government of Alberta to develop a framework to strengthen and build rural, remote, and Indigenous communities' capacity to respond to homelessness.

Research and a literature review informed the development of the quantitative and qualitative data required to create the framework. Using a collective impact lens based on reconciliation, trauma-informed care, and a strength-based approach, allowed RDN to create an interactive survey and discussion questions that were culturally responsive and rooted in principles of equity.

The literature review examined prevalent issues surrounding homelessness, including the systemic causes of homelessness. It explored how an evidence-based framework is needed to address and reduce homelessness. The research supports using a Collective Impact Model to show another way of thinking as an intentional way of working together and sharing information for the singular purpose of solving a complex problem. Using approaches towards the same problem(s), with attainable and tangible goals and measurements of evaluation, will expand communities capacity to respond to homelessness collectively and collaboratively, not with singularity.

Early feedback sessions with communities indicated that addictions, mental health, housing support, migration, and gaps in services are the primary challenges that individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

are experiencing. We then engaged with 300 service providers that attended the Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA) Conference in 2022, to identify what homelessness looks like in their FCSS region. Overall, the most frequent manifestation of homelessness identified was "Spending over 30% of income on housing" followed by "Couch Surfing," "Sleeping Rough," "Housing Needs Major Repairs," "Emergency Sheltered," and "Severe Overcrowding."

The final document walks communities through the steps of collective impact and how a project logic model can funnel the overwhelming amount of information into a concise and streamlined direction.

HOUSING AND SERVICE NEEDS ESTIMATIONS

The Rural Housing and Service Needs Estimation program works collaboratively with rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Canada to provide housing and service needs estimations that are contextually and culturally relevant to each community.

The purpose of these estimations are to:

1. Provide a comprehensive picture of housing instability and homelessness in the community, including demographic information on who is experiencing homelessness, which services are being accessed, and any identifiable gaps.

2. Develop recommendations and next steps for service providers and all levels of government on housing and service needs.

3. Elevate and incorporate the voices of people experiencing homelessness into the solutions to end homelessness.

The Step-by-Step Guide to Estimating Rural, Remote, and Indigenous Homelessness was reviewed in 2022-23 by community leaders, service providers, people experiencing homelessness, and academics across the country. The guide and survey tool were updated to reflect current understandings of homelessness and the contexts within which communities are operating.

The results coming out of these projects have supported communities in accessing greater funding for housing and homelessness projects, influencing housing policy, and facilitating meaningful community conversations on issues of housing and homelessness.

2023 ALBERTA PROVINCIAL HOUSING & SERVICE NEEDS ESTIMATION PROJECT

In late 2022, RDN was awarded $100,000 through Reaching Home to conduct the third iteration of Alberta's Provincial Housing and Service Needs Estimation. In December 2022, after putting out a call for expressions of interest, we partnered with 22 organizations representing 45 communities across the province to conduct an estimation in each of those communities.

After supporting communities with recruiting participating service providers to administer the survey, and training service providers' staff on how to administer the survey, data was collected in each community from March 1-30, 2023. The next steps include analyzing the data collected from each community and drafting community reports.

CUSTOM HOUSING & SERVICE NEEDS ESTIMATION PROJECTS

In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, we continued to build on our customized housing and service needs estimation offerings, working with six individual communities to provide fully customized estimations that are contextually and culturally relevant to each community.

Town of Edson (AB)

RDN was contracted by Reflections Empowering People to Succeed and the Edson Housing and Homelessness Taskforce to conduct a customized estimation in Edson. We worked with the Reflections team and the Housing and Homelessness Taskforce to develop a customized survey tool and survey administration method suited to Edson's unique needs. After training participating service providers' staff to administer the survey, data was collected in the community from March 28 to May 3, 2022.

We received 435 usable survey responses during the five-week data collection period. In our analysis, we identified 163 respondents as housing insecure with an additional 53 dependents and 92 adults sharing their living conditions. In total, 308 people were identified as living in housing insecure situations in Edson. After producing a community report which detailed several opportunities the community can undertake to address housing insecurity, the report was presented at a Town of Edson Municipal Council meeting and was well received.

Métis Nation Region 1 (AB)

RDN was contracted by Métis Nation Region 1 to conduct a customized estimation in their community. We worked with them to pilot a highly unique, custom survey tool that focused on storytelling and decolonization. After spending

several months developing and testing the survey tool with approval from Métis Nation Region 1, data was collected in the community from March 25 to April 30, 2022 and from June 1 to June 30, 2022.

We received 86 survey responses during the two data collection periods, of which 58 individuals were identified as being housing insecure. An additional 46 dependents and 128 adults were identified as sharing living conditions with the 58 housing insecure respondents for a total of 232 housing insecure individuals in Métis Nation Region 1, though we also acknowledge that this number is likely much higher within the Region.

Strathcona Regional District (BC)

RDN was contracted by the Campbell River and District Coalition to End Homelessness (CRDCEH) to conduct a customized estimation in the Strathcona Regional District.

We worked with the CRDCEH and service providers across the region to develop a customized survey tool and survey administration method suited to their needs. Data was collected across the region from April 11 to May 11, 2022.

We received 427 usable survey responses during the 30 day data collection period, with responses coming from Campbell River, We Wai Kai (Quinsam), Wei Wai Kum First Nation, SRD Area D, Cortes Island, T'oq (Klahoose First Nation), Quadra Island, the Outer Islands, Gold River, Tahsis, Tsaxana, and Sayward.

In our analysis, we identified 311 respondents as housing insecure with an additional 304 dependents and 311 adults sharing living conditions with them. In total, there are at least 801 people living in housing insecure situations in the Strathcona Regional District. Upon completion of the report, the results

and recommendations were presented at the Strathcona Regional District Regional Board Meeting and at the CRDCEH Community Meeting.

Tri-Region: Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and Parkland County (AB)

In September 2022, the Tri-Region Partnership, including the Town of Stony Plain, City of Spruce Grove, and Parkland County, contracted RDN to conduct a semi-customized estimation in their region. Working with the Partnership, we administered the survey in the region from October 1 to 31, 2022.

We received 428 usable survey responses during the four-week data collection period; 114 from Stony Plain, 221 from Spruce Grove, and 93 from Parkland County. Through our analysis, we identified 396 respondents as housing insecure. Additionally, those 396 respondents share their living conditions with 450 dependents and 287 adults, bringing Tri-Region's total number of housing insecure community members to 1,133.

Westlock (AB)

In late November 2022, Westlock & District FCSS contracted RDN to conduct a customized estimation in their community. We worked with the FCSS office and their Housing Taskforce to develop a customized survey tool and survey administration method suited to their needs. After training participating service providers' staff to administer the survey, data was collected in the community from February 13 to March 31, 2023. The next steps include analyzing the data, drafting a community report highlighting the findings, and supporting Westlock & District FCSS in developing a Community Action Plan to address housing insecurity moving forward.

Vegreville (AB)

In early December 2022, Vegreville FCSS contracted RDN to conduct a customized estimation in their community. We worked with the FCSS office and their Housing and Basic Needs Taskforce to develop a customized survey tool and survey administration method suited to their needs. After training participating service providers' staff to administer the survey, data was collected from March 1 to April 30, 2023.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

The Rural Health and Wellness Initiative aims to promote and sustain healthy, thriving communities in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. Our goal is to understand and support rural health and wellness activities, end social isolation and loneliness, and create strategic and effective programs that address substance use awareness, harm reduction, mental health, and age-friendly activities including anti-ageism education.

These programs have been created thoughtfully, considering all issues in a rural context with an extensive focus on health policies. We have expertise in a variety of areas that can be tailored to suit specific regions: research and relationship building, facilitation, project management and coordination, financial administration, and creation/distribution of communications materials.

We also provide research and data-gathering programs to help identify various community needs, including social and community needs assessments, to add to our diversity of skill sets.

DEMENTIA STRATEGIC FUND: AWARENESS BUILDS CONNECTIONS IN DEMENTIA–FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES (ABCD)

This project, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, continues to raise awareness of actions

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that can be taken to help prevent dementia, reduce stigma, and encourage and support communities to be more dementia-inclusive. In April 2022, the ABCD pilot communities began the planning and implementation of their dementia-inclusive initiatives. Those communities included Drumheller, Strathmore/Wheatland County, Spirit River, Taber, and Sturgeon County.

During this time, the ABCD team hosted two half-day information sessions facilitated by the Alzheimer Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories, where the pilot communities learned more about dementia, what it means to be dementia-inclusive, understanding dementia from an Indigenous perspective, and person-centred approaches when supporting those living with dementia. The ABCD project manager presented the ABCD project at the Dementia Learning Summit in May 2022. This was a two-day virtual conference where those living with dementia, caregivers, and professionals working in the area shared stories and knowledge about dementia care and inclusivity.

The ABCD project team focused on the ongoing development of the ABCD website, which houses the dementia-inclusive catalogue of initiatives adaptable to rural settings and updates about the initiatives being implemented by the pilot communities. The catalogue was informed by the research from the ABCD environmental scan on dementia-inclusive initiatives locally, nationally, and globally. Throughout the project, the ABCD project manager engaged in a Dementia Friendly Working Group hosted by the Canadian Dementia Learning and Resources Network (CDLRN), dedicated to the sharing of innovative tools, resources, and approaches to enhance the well-being of people living with dementia.

To facilitate the storytelling of the ABCD project, the team worked with Two Canoes Media to produce a documentary highlighting the remarkable work of each pilot community and the meaningful impacts of each initiative. Simultaneously, the step-by-step guides of each initiative were developed in partnership with the pilot communities, to share with other rural communities looking to become more dementia-inclusive. Wrapping up the project, the ABCD virtual exhibit took place in March 2023, where a screening of the documentary took place, a live Q&A with the pilot communities was hosted, and the step-by-step guides were introduced.

NEW HORIZONS FOR SENIORS (AGEISM)

RDN continued to work closely with the Olds Age-Friendly Committee in the promotion of the You Know Me (YKM) ageism awareness campaign hosted through the You Know Me (YKM) website. Alongside the Committee, the YKM project manager supported the planning of a visit by the Minister of Seniors and Housing, Josephine Pon, to Olds, AB. During this visit, the project manager participated in a round table discussion on aging in rural Alberta with the Olds Age-Friendly Committee, community leaders and Minister Pon. After the round table discussion, an event took place where Minister Pon awarded and recognized Olds as an Age-Friendly Community, and the YKM project manager facilitated a slide presentation on the You Know Me campaign, highlighting the value, strengths, and stories of older adults in the community.

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, & INUIT ENGAGEMENT

EMELE NEUFELD
Indigenous Liaison

TAYLOR SPARKLINGEYES
Project Manager,
Indigenous Data Collection

TEGAN NELSON
Project Coordinator,
Indigenous Data Collection

RDN'S commitment to reconciliation is embedded in our values and throughout the work we do. We are honoured to have an Indigenous Team that is focused on uplifting First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, and supporting them to thrive through creating and sustaining Indigenous-led initiatives. Our goal is to ensure that this engagement centres the perspectives and lived experiences of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples.

RDN believes that Reconciliation is a key to the prevention of homelessness and poverty reduction. Our work in Reconciliation is guided by many people and sources, including: the RDN Indigenous Liaison, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's

94 Calls to Action, "Seven Principles for Leadership & Inclusion of People with Lived Experiences of Homelessness from Nothing About Us Without Us," The Ten Principles of Reconciliation, Pathways to Reconciliation, and Theory of Change.

These people, tools and resources inform our projects and allow for a deeper understanding of Indigenous issues rooted in abusive colonial practices of our past. Only through continuous learning and understanding can we support Indigenous communities to face and overcome these systemic injustices. In our commitment to becoming allies we understand that initiatives and changes must be Indigenous-led. We commit ourselves to developing capacity for Indigenous-led projects.

RDN's desire to meaningfully engage First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples has finally taken shape, and is demonstrated by our commitment to employing a full-time, in-house Indigenous Liaison and a First Nations Data Collection team. As RDN continues to grow, we will seek to find more ways to work authentically with Indigenous Peoples across Turtle Island.

FIRST NATIONS DATA COLLECTION (FNDC)

The Indigenous-led First Nations Data Collection (FNDC) Initiative began in the Fall of 2022, funded in part by CMHC. In March 2023, the initiative received additional funding from the Government of Canada's Community Capacity and Innovation Stream of Reaching Home. FNDC seeks to develop a decolonized data collection tool to support the planning and implementation of appropriate, affordable housing, and community development projects in First Nations communities, ultimately reducing Indigenous homelessness.

During the initial phases, we have worked extensively on building relationships with First Nations communities across the country. Our team has conducted in-person conversations in one community thus far and is working with other communities to schedule in-person visits to help inform the development of the data collection tool. Our team has also created an Indigenous Advisory Board to provide wisdom and guidance for the duration of the initiative. Our work is being guided by an Elder to ensure the team is approaching the work through an Indigenous lens. The Elder will provide guidance and support to the FNDC team throughout the project.

Currently, we are conducting virtual sharing circles focusing on service providers in First Nations serving organizations whose perspectives will inform the creation of the tool. The FNDC team is also cross-collaborating with RDN's Coordinated Access team to gather rural and urban perspectives of First Nations Peoples as research has demonstrated high levels of migration of individuals between on and off reserve. In an effort to conduct this work in a positive and beneficial way, the FNDC team meets regularly with the Alberta First Nations Data Governance Centre to help ensure our work meets the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP®).

In the upcoming months, we will be creating a rough draft of the data collection tool and giving it back to partnering communities to have them review and provide feedback as part of the collaborative process. The finalized tool will be distributed to communities in Fall 2023 for data to be collected and subsequently analyzed.

INDIGENOUS LIAISON

With guidance from our Indigenous Liaison, we are learning together and understanding how the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (TRC), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) connects to our projects, to provide a base understanding of our connectivity with Indigenous communities.

Teachings and education on the topics of pronunciation, land acknowledgements, protocol, basic language greeting, and understanding of historical traumatic events have a direct impact on our relationship building. This has informed our way of engaging with Elders, identifying and respecting the unique and sacred cultural traditions within individual communities, and emphasizing the need for ethical research practices.

Through RDN's Indigenous Liaison's guidance, we have been able to be more intentional in our learnings. The RDN Indigenous Liaison continues to provide historical analysis on a nation-to-nation basis as well as possible suggestions for whom to connect with from each Nation. The Indigenous Liaison also assists at Chief and Council meetings and with connecting RDN Teams with Elders.

Increasing our level of education and understanding allows us to build awareness and knowledge and to be more intentional in our individual reconciliation journey and when building external relationships.

SHELTER PULSE

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Project Manager,
Shelter Pulse

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Shelter Pulse

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Research & Policy Analyst,
Shelter Pulse

In partnership with Mountain Rose Women's Shelter Association (MRWSA), the Shelter Pulse project is creating a centralized database for trauma-informed policies and practices for Canadian women's shelters. Shelter Pulse moved into its second project year, fully engaging shelter partners in the collection of their policy manuals, which were reviewed and collated by the Shelter Pulse team.

Five Masters students from the School of Public Health at the University of Alberta were engaged to complete a policy and gap analysis of the shelter partner's policies and provincial/territorial standards. Within the first few months, we developed shelter partner training to build capacity and confidence in policy knowledge. With the support of subject matter experts, we were able to complete an

engagement strategy, a What We Heard report, and begin the policy drafting for the database.

The Shelter Pulse team worked closely with a web design company to design and develop the Shelter Pulse website and build out the beta version of the policy database. The website officially launched in October 2022 and training sessions for shelter partners took place. Training sessions focused on intermediate foundations of violence against women practice, harm reduction, 2SLGBTQIIA+ trauma-informed care, and preventing and responding to violence against older women.

Throughout November, a successful awareness campaign took place with the purpose of: 1) spreading awareness of rural Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and the gaps in care; 2) spreading awareness of the Shelter Pulse project; and 3) disseminating the Violence Against Women (VAW) shelter national survey to rural shelter executive directors. During this time, an additional national policy survey was circulated to shelter staff involved in policy work. The next phase of the project will include testing the Shelter Pulse database in preparation for the upcoming shelter partner policy review.

TAHIUQTIIT WOMEN'S SOCIETY PROJECT – TUNGASUGIT (WELCOME): REDEFINING SHELTER OPERATIONS FOR INUIT WOMEN ESCAPING VIOLENCE

In September 2022, the Shelter Pulse team began a new project partnership with Tahiuqtiit Women's Society (TWS), based in Ulukhaktok, NWT. The two-year project, titled Tungasugit (Welcome): Redefining Shelter Operations for Inuit Women Escaping Violence, is funded by Women

and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE). The goal of the project is to build capacity for TWS to structure and model an Inuit-centred shelter for Inuit women and 2SLGBTQIIA+ people in their community.

This past year, RDN partnered with TWS to help them launch the project. RDN's role included supporting the development of a formal work plan, staff recruitment, and financial administration. The key components of the project include conducting a needs assessment, engaging individuals with lived experience, developing Inuit-centred policies and practices for women's shelters, and disseminating learnings to other women's shelters.

RURAL IMMIGRATION

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Rural Immigration

The Rural Immigration Initiative aims to take a holistic approach to support the settlement and integration of newcomers in rural communities. Over the past year, the team has focused on capacity-building projects for service providers, newcomers, and employers. Many of the communities we have worked with are participating in rural immigration programs or intend to.

Through our work, we engage with rural communities and immigrant communities to better understand their needs and issues, focus on capacity-building efforts with rural communities to support settlement and integration, such as training, and coordinate efforts to create welcoming communities.

EMPLOYER PRACTICES: INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES

"Being proactive in rural Canada: Creating mechanisms for inclusive workplaces that support employers and employees" is one of the projects funded by the WES Mariam Assefa Fund and is in partnership with the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy (CCRL), Religious Freedom and Business Foundation (RFBF), the Temiskaming Shores Chamber of Commerce (TSACC), and the City of Temiskaming Shores.

In November of 2022, the project team expanded to include Keepers of the Circle (KotC) to have Indigenous voices and perspectives

in this work. After a series of consultations with employers and employees in Temiskaming Shores and Area, we started piloting the "Interbelief Employee Resource Group (I-ERGs)" in January 2023. I-ERG is a workplace initiative designed to support employers, staff, and local communities of diverse religious backgrounds. It is a monthly community-building and professional development opportunity that employers and staff attend together. The purpose is to learn about and connect with religious, spiritual, and non-religious groups and individuals, and provide a way for employers to show staff that they welcome and value all identities.

We also piloted the "Working Together: Engaging Faith and Belief at Work Certification Training," a four month program that started in March 2023. The Certification is a credential that demonstrates an employer's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, specifically for employees of all religious and belief identities.

IN OUR HANDS

"In Our Hands" is a co-operative entrepreneurship ("co-opreneurship") program that aims to provide resources and training to increase the accessibility of the co-operative business model to immigrants. This is another project funded by WES Mariam Assefa, and is being developed in partnership with the BC Co-op Association (BCCA) and the Women's Economic Council (WEC).

Since our call for applicants in April 2022, 22 individuals have completed the Co-ops 101 introductory course. Our team regularly promotes the program by providing info sessions to newcomer-serving organizations based in rural areas, and by attending newcomer-focused events and conferences. To date, the project has supported the

creation of four co-operative development initiatives:

1. A worker-owned co-op specializing in translation, interpretation, intercultural events, and multilingual professional services. This group was incorporated in March 2023.

2. An artisans co-op for traditional beauty product makers from across the Arabic-speaking world.

3. A co-operative network set up to support newcomers across Canada to start/grow professional practices and advance their careers through professional development, networking, and collective marketing.

A community-owned commissary kitchen enabling newcomers to easily start and operate food businesses in cities/towns, where renting commercial kitchen space and equipment is a barrier.

READI: RURAL EMPLOYERS' AWARENESS ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The Rural Employers' Awareness on Diversity and Inclusion (READI) project is funded by the Government of Alberta's Settlement, Integration and Language Programs and conducted in partnership with Lethbridge Family Services (LFS) and ASSIST Community Services. This project is a capacity-building initiative that supports rural employers in north, central and southern Alberta to increase their capacity to attract, integrate, and retain newcomer employees.

This year we began the initial phase of the project, which included conducting an environmental scan on rural workplace attraction and retention. The project team then conducted recruitment initiatives to register 23 rural

employers to participate in the project. These employers are small to medium-sized businesses (SMEs) that have various knowledge levels regarding attracting and retaining newcomer employees. The industries represented in the project include: agriculture, healthcare, childcare, hospitality, farming, economic development, landscaping and rock products, manufacturing, and the food industry.

The project team also conducted one-on-one interviews with each employer, HR manager, and/or business owner to determine their organizational gaps and challenges when trying to attract and retain newcomer employees into their businesses. The data collected from these interviews was used to create a six-part training series for employers to gain more knowledge and skills to support newcomers. Once the training is complete in 2023, the information developed

for the training will be used to create a toolkit to provide additional capacity-building and resources for employers across rural Alberta.

MULTICULTURAL HEALTH BROKERS (MCHB) MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

The Multicultural Health Brokers launched a province-wide program to advance family well-being among diverse cultural groups throughout the province of Alberta. This program provides culturally responsive counselling for individuals and families at no cost. The program was launched to ensure that diverse families are supported holistically and optimally as part of the family resource network (FRN) development - an Alberta Children's Services early intervention strategy.

RDN's role in supporting this project was to identify

organizations and networks in rural communities that have connections to different ethnocultural groups and newcomers to Canada. We achieved this by connecting the MCHB to various stakeholders in rural communities across the province who work directly with newcomers or who work with organizations that support newcomers. We also used our networks, newsletters, and other platforms to promote and support the project.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY PROJECT

The Strengthening Rural Capacity to Support Newcomers project was done in partnership with ASSIST Community Services Centre and was 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 researched the best practices for settlement in rural communities and completed needs assessment surveys across all four participating communities to better understand their needs. Working alongside an advisory committee, we delivered four training series that were successful in knowledge translation, facilitating networking opportunities among different communities and stakeholders. Once the training was complete, the project team developed a toolkit with the information presented through the training, in addition to other resources and information to support service providers. The toolkit was also translated and printed in French and circulated to rural communities across the province through RDN's networks and partner organizations, including ASSIST and AAISA.

CANADIAN RACE RELATIONS FOUNDATION: NATIONAL ANTI-RACISM FUND

The goals of this three-phase research and development project, funded by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF), is to design, develop, and test a new framework specifically for well-being in small, remote, and rural communities with populations of less than 40,000. No such framework currently exists to support rural communities of this size, though this is where resources are lacking most often, local culture is deeply rooted, and Indigenous communities exist alongside but separately.

The project began in February 2023 and we are working with three project partners that will contribute equally to the project and take shared responsibility in carrying out project activities: the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS), the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy (CCRL), and Keepers of the Circle (KotC).

PORTAGE COLLEGE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT STRATEGY

The Rural Immigration team completed the development of an International Student Strategy for Portage College in May 2022 in time for the College's Fall 2022 admissions. The Strategy document provides concrete actions to address identified goals and implementation strategies set by the College in its Strategy 2025 in relation to increasing international enrolment. The information in this document builds on the two reports previously developed – the environmental scan and the gap analysis reports. This document is meant to be built upon and has been presented in such a way that Portage College can expand on it for its multi-year strategy.

UKRAINIAN SETTLEMENT PROJECT

The Increasing Community Understanding of Ukrainian Evacuees project is funded by the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA). It is a partnership with the Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative (MCHB) and Action for Healthy Communities (AHC) to deliver four workshops from February to May 2023, to build the capacity of all interested and affected parties supporting Ukrainian evacuees in their communities. The four topics are based on the needs in the settlement sector that rural communities have identified. Each workshop is delivered twice – one is a morning session and the other is an evening session – so attendees can choose one that fits their schedule. Each session is 2.5 hours. The workshop series is being delivered as follows and consists of the following topics:

Conducted in this fiscal year:

- February – Providing a Context for Settlement: The Crisis in Ukraine and Canada's Response – Safe Harbour

- March – Supporting Ukrainian Evacuee Settlement through a Social Inclusion Lens

Planned for the next fiscal year:

- April – Understanding Trauma-informed Care and Rural Settlement of Ukrainian Evacuees

- May – Systems Navigation: Supporting & Creating Effective Referral Networks

STEP IMMIGRATION ANALYSIS

RDN was contracted by St. Paul and Elk Point Economic Development Alliance (STEP) to gauge the state and opportunities around rural immigration within the St. Paul Elk Point region. The project first began with an environmental scan to identify the needs of newcomers to Canada in a rural setting and identify best practices on rural settlement and integration.

The next phase of the project involved conducting a high-level community gap analysis to: (1) identify the existing organizations and resources available in the community to address newcomer needs; and (2) identify organizational or resource gaps in the community which need to be filled in order to address newcomer needs.

Finally, we provided STEP with a document outlining policy recommendations to support newcomers to smaller communities and steps for the community to move forward in attracting and retaining newcomers. Since the project has been completed, the County of St. Paul, the Town of St. Paul, the Town of Elk Point, and the Summer Village of Horseshoe Bay have been designated under the Rural Renewal Stream (RRS) of the Alberta Advantage Immigration Program.

RURAL TRANSPORTATION

ELNAZ ALIASL
Project Manager, Rural Transportation

The rural transportation project, Finding Better Solutions in 2021 and Beyond, was completed in 2022. RDN was contracted by the Association for Life-wide Living (ALL) of Alberta to deliver this project, funded by the Alberta Real Estate Foundation (AREF). The project goal was to gather and leverage significant rural transportation research, actions, and outcomes in the Battle River Region and beyond. The project team identified community-based ideas and solutions and assessed their potential for use in rural Alberta with a view to connecting the "silos" of people working independently on the Rural Transportation issue. The project culminated in May 2022 with the gathering of stakeholders from across Alberta to share information, ideas, success stories, and challenges. RDN helped host the Rural Transportation Gathering in Camrose, AB, which was the final project deliverable.

AGRI-FOOD

CONNER PLATTEN
Project Manager, Agri-food Initiatives

RDN continued to explore opportunities to support rural communities in the agriculture and food sector. We focused on increasing agricultural literacy to shorten supply chains, strengthen small and medium enterprises, and build relationships between communities and food service organizations.

With funding from the Canadian Agricultural Partnership Youth Agriculture Education Program (CAP YAE), we completed our work on the FarmEd project. The goal of FarmEd was to enhance teachers' and students' understanding of agricultural practices, improve local food security, and increase public trust in Alberta's agriculture sector. As of January 2023, RDN launched a completed toolkit, distributed the toolkit and promotional materials to over 700 secondary and junior high school educators across Alberta, and supported the implementation of two pilot school farms, in Irvine and Picture Butte.

Although funding for this project has officially ended, we continue to share the toolkit and associated resources with educators and agriculture organizations.

WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

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ROBIN KYLER
Employer Engagement
Coordinator, Work-Integrated
Learning

DEBORAH MOVORIA
Communications & Event
Planning, Work-Integrated
Learning

In 2021, RDN launched a Work-Integrated Learning Initiative (WIL) to strengthen and support system-level strategies for creating employment-ready graduates and building employer capacity in rural and remote communities.

In partnership with the Business + Higher Education Roundtable and with support from the Government of Canada, the WIL team raises awareness of the benefits of WIL, engages students in practical learning experiences, and strengthens relationships between employers and post-secondary institutions. We continue to expand our outreach efforts using innovative tactics such as podcasts, video posts, and paid advertising campaigns on social media.

RDN is finding success through creating WIL opportunities outside urban centres, developing more opportunities for innovative WIL (e.g. virtual placements or course-based projects), and strengthening relationships between employers and post-secondary institutions.

Since April 2022, RDN has:

- Facilitated over 1,000 placement opportunities across Canada in partnership with post-secondary institutions;

- Engaged more than 3,000 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;

- Launched a new platform to streamline matching between students, employers, and post secondary institutions; and,

- Supported over 75 rural employers in creating multiple WIL opportunities for students in their communities.

RDN is exploring ways to grow and sustain this project, including conducting research on WIL best practices, creating a best practices toolkit for post-secondary institutions, working with Rural Immigration to expand WIL offerings for new Canadians and international students, exploring opportunities to grow WIL in secondary schools across Alberta, and exploring partnerships with Chambers of Commerce, Community Futures, and Innovation Hubs to create localized supports for economic development and recovery.

RURAL REVITALIZATION

TRISHA HAMPTON
Rural Revitalization Coordinator

RDN's Rural Revitalization Initiative partners with communities to help create frameworks that are easier to implement and that work in tandem with other community plans. We work with smaller municipalities to create strategies that simplify and coordinate local planning, with the aim of increasing efficiency and sustainability, and improving community safety and well-being.

To ensure the success of community planning, it is vital to identify existing community assets, understand community needs, strengths, and weaknesses, formulate community-specific strategies that mesh with existing plans and create new ones to address gaps, and develop and maintain strategic partnerships.

These strategies help ensure the successful implementation of community plans and result in better outcomes for economic development, including housing, infrastructure, and retaining

and attracting businesses and residents. RDN's ultimate goal is to take what we learn to develop a toolkit to aid municipalities.

Since the inception of this initiative, we have been exploring fee-for-service and grant opportunities, including in municipal strategic planning, tourism, agriculture, and food sovereignty, along with assisting communities to identify how responding to community needs, such as affordable housing and homelessness, will result in more positive economic outcomes.
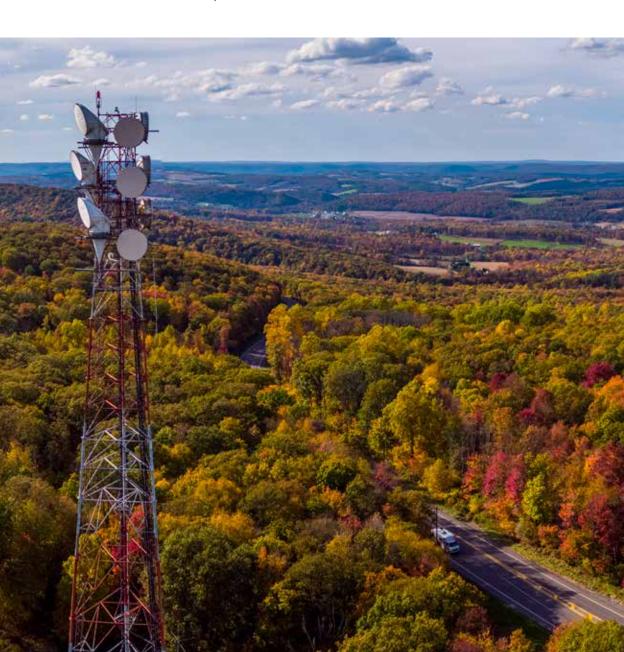
RURAL BROADBAND

JULIA SIEBEN

Research Assistant, Rural Broadband

RDN, in collaboration with the University of Alberta through the Mitacs Accelerate Program, began a rural broadband project in May 2022. This project aimed to assess connectivity and broadband initiatives across Alberta and enable effective policy recommendation development through the triangulation of data from four main sources: recent national broadband policy studies, previous Alberta-based material, comparative cases from Canada, the US, and internationally, and a systematic grey literature review of Alberta community-based materials.

The information gathered from the above research was used to update and revise the existing Understanding Community Broadband. The new toolkit will be launched in 2023. Other outcomes included the dissemination of research findings at Canada's Rural & Remote Broadband Community Western Canada 2022 Conference and the drafting of an article to be submitted to a relevant academic and policy journal.

With the success of the Alberta toolkit, RDN is exploring opportunities to enable further collaboration with the University of Alberta to develop a Canadian Community Broadband Toolkit, which will be a national resource to provide information about options for smaller community-oriented broadband solutions and to contribute to community broadband conversations nation-wide.

NETWORKS & COMMUNITY

A key aspect of RDN's work includes facilitating dialogue, partnership, and resource-sharing among rural communities and community based organisations from coast to coast to coast.

Aside from these networks, many of RDN's projects and initiatives create opportunities for people to connect and participate through webinars, focus groups, surveys, and other community engagement opportunities, such as the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal celebration, which recognized several outstanding rural Albertans.

RDN also hosts the bi-annual Canadian Rural and Remote Housing and Homelessness Symposium, a national conference to elevate uniquely rural and remote and Indigenous approaches to tackling homelessness and housing. This event took place in 2018, 2021, and will also take place in 2023.

The following are the various networks which RDN facilitates.

ALBERTA RURAL COALITION ON HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS (ARCH2) NETWORK

The Alberta Rural Coalition on Housing and Homelessness (ARCH2) was established in 2016, and continues to be a place for members to connect, share information and resources, and engage in advocacy, education and capacity building around rural and remote housing and homelessness issues. Moreover, the primary goal of the coalition is to bring communities together to address issues and share solutions regarding responses to creating affordable housing and tackling homelessness in rural and remote communities in Alberta.

Over the past year, the network added several new members. We are inspired by ARCH2 members' resilience and commitment to serving those experiencing homelessness. In the last year, it has become apparent that rural residents are facing unique challenges in accessing mental health support and there is increasing burnout across the sector as a result of the pandemic and housing crisis, specifically among service providers.

The ARCH2 network strives to offer a safe space for communities and community based organisations, including service providers, to share their experiences working across complex systems and discuss barriers that impact service provision. Important information learned through the network continues to strengthen advocacy efforts, as it is shared with various levels of government and funders.

We are always looking to welcome new members. **Please connect with us if you are interested in joining the network.** We'd love to have you join us in navigating these complex issues together.

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION ON RURAL & REMOTE HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS (CARRHH) NETWORK

The Canadian Association on Rural & Remote Housing & Homelessness (CARRHH) is a national network that was created in 2019 after the initial Canadian Rural & Remote Housing & Homelessness Symposium, as a way to continue collaboration and bring attention to the unique needs and challenges of rural and remote residents when it comes to housing and homelessness.

The CARRHH network brings communities and community based organisations together to share experiences, including what is and is not working when addressing and developing responses to housing and homelessness issues. CARRHH aims to prevent communities from working in silos, encourage collaboration and facilitate resource and information sharing among members working in the housing and homelessness sector in smaller communities across the country.

We continue to look forward to engaging with new and existing members to discuss the future goals of the network and to advance advocacy efforts. As the housing crisis continues to evolve and worsen, CARRHH is crucial to understanding the challenges and solutions at the smaller community level across rural Canada.

THE CANADIAN RURAL COLLABORATIVE (CRC)

The Canadian Rural Collaborative (CRC) was established to foster partnerships, facilitate information sharing, and build capacity among organizations working to address economic development and social issues in rural areas. Spearheaded by RDN, the CRC aims to bring together like-minded organizations from across Canada that are committed to supporting the sustainability of rural and remote communities. The CRC connects organisations working towards addressing social issues, economic development, and revitalization in rural Canada.

The ultimate goal of the CRC is to have representation from every region of Canada. This year, members of the CRC met periodically to discuss challenges and opportunities, share ideas and updates about their work, and explore ways of working together. The group also discussed opportunities to establish a more formalized structure, which would allow them to access funding opportunities and streamline their efforts. To this end, the CRC created a Governance Subcommittee to work on recommendations for a more formalized governance structure. The group is also working to narrow down strategic focus areas that members can address together, enhancing the work already being done by rural organizations and filling any gaps.

By bringing together organizations with a shared commitment to rural sustainability, the CRC is poised to make a significant impact on the economic and social well-being of rural communities across Canada as it continues to evolve, strengthen and grow.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II'S PLATINUM JUBILEE MEDAL

The Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal (Alberta) was created to mark the 70th anniversary of Her Majesty's Accession to the Throne as Queen of Canada. To celebrate this historic event, the Medal program recognizes outstanding service from Albertans who, like the Queen, have dedicated themselves to family, community, and country. In December 2022, the Rural Development Network was honoured to help award five worthy rural Albertans with medals:

- Olimphya Adriana Hermosillo de Elizondo - Chestermere, Alberta

- Casey Szmata - Peace River, Alberta

- Marc Boychuk - Peace River, Alberta

- Edith Harris - Blackfalds, Alberta

- Doray Veno - Hanna, Alberta

The awards were presented at the Edmonton Public Library on December 9th, 2022.

Congratulations to all the recipients and thank you for making rural Alberta a better and stronger place through your public service.

Pictured (left to right) - Dee Ann Benard, CEO of the Rural Development Network, with the recipients of the 2022 Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee Medal (Alberta): Olimphya Adriana Hermosillo de Elizondo, Casey Szmata, Marc Boychuk, Edith Harris, Doray Veno.

FINANCE & OPERATIONS

Under the guidance of the senior leadership team, the RDN regularly updates and maintains its systems and policies, ensuring that the staff and organization are well looked after. RDN has many initiatives and projects and manages full-time, part-time, temporary staff, interns and volunteers.

Much like last year, RDN continued to experience substantial growth over this past year. This growth saw the addition of 11 new staff positions, bringing the year's total staff count to 48. Understandably, RDN has also had to strategically plan and pave a new path to successfully navigate these changes and ensure we remain financially stable. We have been truly fortunate that we continue to experience much success with all our new initiatives and projects.

As a growing organisation, extensive work goes into ensuring that the structure of RDN is sustainable and effective. We continue to look forward to supporting our clients and partners across Canada through our important projects and initiatives.

DEE ANN BENARD
Chief Executive Officer

LISA BELANGER
Director, Operations

SANDRA DICESARE
Director, Finance

KELLY PETRASCHUK
Director, Human Resources

HOLLY UDALL
Manager, Communications

JOY VONK
Senior Manager

KATERYNA LEVANENKO
Events Coordinator

JESSICA PENA
Project Assistant,
Human Resources

SARAH SEREDA
Project Assistant, Operations

BRYN TAYLOR
Executive Assistant

EMILEE UBELS
Communications Assistant

ADRIENNE VANSEVENANDT
Communications Coordinator

A YEAR IN REVIEW

$4.12M

PROVIDED BY
SPONSORS AND
GRANTORS

$2.72M

SPENT ON ALL
PROJECTS AND
INITIATIVES

$1.34M

RECEIVED BY
MEMBERS AND
CLIENTS

48

STAFF
POSITIONS

2022/2023 STAFF LIST

ZAIN ABEDIN
Director, Community
Development

SEAN ADAMS
Planning Specialist, SHI

ELNAZ ALIASL
Project Manager, Rural
Transportation

LISA BELANGER
Director, Operations

DEE ANN BENARD
Chief Executive Officer

LINDA BERNICKI
Director, Health & Wellness

ASAD BHATTI
Director, Housing

JOLEEN CHIVAS
Financial Claims Analyst

HAYLEY CRESSAL
Project Manager, Shelter Pulse

NICOLE CRONKHITE
Project Manager, Planning &
Community Development

SANDRA DICESARE
Director, Finance

ERIN DICKINSON
Evaluations & Project Assistant,
Rural Health & Wellness

ELAINE FLORES
Project Manager & Evalutions
Coordinator, Rural Immigration

KIERAN FRAME
Research & Financial Analyst

TRISHA HAMPTON
Rural Revitalization Coordinator

KASHEEN HELSTROM
Project Assistant, Health &
Wellness

SOHEILA HOMAYED
Project Manager, Rural
Immigration

TREVOR HORNE
Community Development
Manager

SABAH HUSAIN
Research & Policy Analyst,
Shelter Pulse

JULIA JUCO
Project Manager, Shelter Pulse

JORDYN KNICKLE
Planning & Research Analyst

ROBIN KYLER
Employer Engagement
Coordinator, WIL

BREANNE LEMAITRE
Project Assistant, National
Coordinated Access

ADAM LETAL
Project Assistant, Reaching Home

KATERYNA LEVANENKO
Events Coordinator

MARY MCGUIRE
Project Manager, Dementia-
Friendly Communities

EMILY MERKLINGER
Project Coordinator, National
Coordinated Access

DANIEL MORIN
Project Manager, Planning &
Community Development

JADE MOUSSA
Community Development
Assistant Intern

DEBORAH MOVORIA
Communications & Event
Planning, WIL

TEGAN NELSON
Project Coordinator, Indigenous
Data Collection

EMELE NEUFELD
Indigenous Liaison

COURTNEY NGUYEN
Planning Student, SHI

JESSICA PENA
Project Assistant, Human
Resources

EMIKA PETERSON
Evaluations & Project Assistant,
Rural Health & Wellness

KELLY PETRASCHUK
Director, Human Resources

CONNER PLATTEN
Project Manager, Agri-food
Initiatives

**DIAHANN POLEGE-
AULOTTE**
Program Manager, Homelessness
Initiatives

GWEN PRICE
Project Assistant

SUSAN REAY
Project Assistant, Reaching Home

JUSTIN REINKE
Project Assistant, Health &
Wellness

JAYDE ROCHE
Director, Rural Revitalization &
Immigration

DANIELA SEIFERLING
Program Manager, Work-
Integrated Learning

SARAH SEREDA
Project Assistant, Operations

KABIR SHAHANI
Manager, Capital Funding

JULIA SIEBEN
Research Assistant, Rural
Broadband

JANISE SOMER
Project Manager, Special Projects
Implementation

TAYLOR SPARKLINGEYES
Project Manager, Indigenous
Data Collection

SYDNEY STENEKES
Director, Homelessness Initiatives

BRYN TAYLOR
Executive Assistant

JESSE TJEPKEMA
Manager, Research & Planning

EMILEE UBELS
Communications Assistant

HOLLY UDALL
Manager, Communications

ADRIENNE VANSEVENANDT
Communications Coordinator

JOY VONK
Senior Manager

EMMA WALLACE
Project Manager, Community Dev
& Homelessness Estimations

ALYCE WICKERT
Project Manager, Planning &
Community Development

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Medicine Hat College

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DENA MCMARTIN
University of Lethbridge

VICE CHAIR

ED PAJOR
University of Calgary

VICE CHAIR

NANCY BROADBENT
Portage College

TREASURER

GILBERT PERRAS
Athabasca University

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ADVISORY BOARD

MARC BOYCHUK

NANCY GREEN

MIKE LEATHWOOD

MITCHELL RHODES

KEVIN VAN LAGEN

LESLIE WARREN

KIMBERLY WORTHINGTON

OUR FUNDERS

Canada

Alberta

ALBERTA REAL ESTATE FOUNDATION

CMHC ◆ SCHL

FCM
FÉDÉRATION CANADIENNE DES MUNICIPALITÉS
FEDERATION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES

aaisa

BUSINESS + HIGHER EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE

WES
MARIAM ASSEFA FUND

Community Housing Transformation Centre
Centre de transformation du logement communautaire

OUR PARTNERS

RURAL ONTARIO INSTITUTE

PORTAGE COLLEGE

Mountain Rose Centre

SSC SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF CANADA

ASSIST Community Services Centre

Hinton Employment & Learning Place

Keepers of the Circle

CHRA ACHRU

ACCA ALBERTA COMMUNITY & CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

ACTION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES IN ACTION

MCHB Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative

tsacc TEMISKAMING SHORES & AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

ALL OF ALBERTA

Lethbridge Family Services

BCCOOP

ballad

WEC Women's Economic Council | Le conseil économique des femmes

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM & BUSINESS FOUNDATION
FAITH & BUSINESS BUILD A BETTER WORLD

CENTRE FOR CIVIC RELIGIOUS LITERACY | LE CENTRE DE LITTÉRATIE RELIGIEUSE CIVIQUE

OUR MEMBERS

LOOKING FORWARD:
A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

KEVIN SHUFFLEBOTHAM
Board Chair

As the Rural Development Network continues to grow and become a nationally recognized organization, we will focus on filling gaps in rural Canada by connecting with more organizations across the country and building more partnerships to collaborate in finding solutions for all. In the next five years, we hope to become a leader in growing connections between organizations and rural, remote, and Indigenous communities by reducing competition through increased collaboration.

To achieve this, we will continue to streamline and strategize our operations using a holistic approach. We plan to develop more cross-initiative projects and strengthen our engagement with Indigenous communities through our Indigenous-based projects. We also hope to increase our community development and outreach by providing more learning events and resources as a means of information sharing and offering more fee-for-service options.

Despite the challenges we faced in the past fiscal year, we remain optimistic about our organization's future and its role in supporting rural development across Canada. I would like to thank our board, staff, and funders for their continued support and hard work to make the Rural Development Network a leading resource for all rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.