

# 2024-25

## ANNUAL REPORT



CALGARY  
**JOHN HOWARD**  
SOCIETY

Restoring Lives ■ Preventing Crime ■ Strengthening Communities

# A New Chapter

## Message from Board Chair Alex Laidlaw



The 2024-25 year marked a season of transitions and new horizons for CJHS—a time of sunsets and sunrises, of farewells and new beginnings.

### ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSITIONS

Following an extensive executive search, we bid a heartfelt farewell to Leslie, who retired after 24 years of extraordinary service. In her place, we welcomed Natalie Noble as our new Executive Director, bringing a wealth of experience, strategic vision, and a deep commitment to our mission.

This year, CJHS successfully completed the project to align its fiscal year-end with major funders, transitioning from a calendar year to a spring close.

Regretfully, we also faced the conclusion of the Adult Housing Reintegration Program. This eight-month transition of clients and staff required extensive planning and, most importantly, compassionate leadership. Despite unavoidable job losses due to funding shocks, CJHS prioritized clear, transparent, and respectful communication, handling every transition with care and dignity.

### INFRASTRUCTURE TRANSITIONS

We activated the first stages of a new facilities strategy focused on asset enhancement, risk mitigation, and long-term sustainability. A key highlight was the renovation of four Bedford House units into fully accessible homes for individuals who use wheelchairs or have mobility challenges. Additional improvements to the building and grounds have significantly enhanced safety and accessibility. These upgrades reflect our commitment to inclusion, ensuring that our spaces are welcoming and functional for all.

### INNOVATION TRANSITIONS

CJHS also launched HowieHub, a new internally designed data system. This innovative platform strengthens our capacity for data collection, storytelling, and impact measurement. By capturing more meaningful data, we amplify the voices of those we serve, enhance program innovation, and deepen our ability to advocate for the systemic change our clients deserve.

A special thank you to my peers on the board of directors for their dedication, including three members who have served their first year: Daniel Johns, Che Greywall, and Todd Nichols. Also, an acknowledgement and thank you for members who have completed their terms, Justin Smith and Roger Jaswal.

With new leadership in place and a continued drive toward our vision, CJHS is poised to expand its reach and deepen its impact. The future holds immense promise, built on the dedication, resilience, and integrity of those who have carried us to this point.

We thank our staff, leadership team, community partners, and funders for their support. Together, we are building a stronger, more inclusive future—one where dignity, opportunity, and justice are within reach for all.

Alex Laidlaw, Board Chair

## Message from Executive Director Natalie Noble



This year has been one of profound appreciation and reflection as I stepped into the role of Executive Director of CJHS this past January. Beginning a new chapter in this position, I have felt deeply the responsibility and privilege of building upon the dedication, wisdom, and leadership of those who came before me.

I was incredibly fortunate to transition into this role with the support of Leslie. Her generosity in sharing her knowledge, insights, and steady guidance has been a gift I will carry with me always. Leslie’s leadership, and the foundation laid by Gord before her, have shaped CJHS into the resilient, compassionate, and courageous organization it is today. I hold their legacy with reverence, and I am committed to honouring it as I move forward.

Every day, I am moved by the incredible staff who bring heart, curiosity, and determination to their work. Their commitment to our clients and to our mission is nothing short of extraordinary. I am equally grateful to our board of directors, whose vision ensure that CJHS continues to grow with strength and purpose. To step into this community of leaders—staff, board, and partners—is humbling, and it fills me with hope.

While I carry big dreams for CJHS as I lead us into our next era, I first want to pause and celebrate what has already been built: a legacy of service, a culture of care, and an organization rooted in the belief that every person deserves dignity, hope, and opportunity.

Together, we will continue to protect this legacy and carry it forward. It is a journey I am honoured to walk with each of you.

Natalie Noble, Executive Director

Calgary John Howard Society  
Board of Directors:

**ALEX LAIDLAW, CHAIR**  
Impact Investment Associate,  
Calgary Foundation

**ROBERT NICHOLS, VICE-CHAIR**  
Business Consultant and Facilitator

**ASHNA HARJAI, TREASURER**  
Lawyer, Legal Aid Alberta

**MONETTA BAILEY, PH.D.**  
Associate Professor, Social Science  
Department, Ambrose University

**TODD NICHOL**  
Detective, Calgary Police Service

**DANIEL JOHNS**  
Project Manager, Benevity

**CHE GREYWALL**  
Donor Stewardship Officer, Nature United

# WHAT WE DO

We provide housing, education, employment programs and support for at-risk youth and adults, and those involved in the justice system. These programs help to reduce incidents of crime and provide alternatives to those at risk of offending — creating safer communities for all.

1

## CRIME PREVENTION

We provide support and mentorship to youth at risk of criminal involvement, helping them address challenges at home, school, and in the community. By offering healthy alternatives to crime, we create opportunities for youth to build more positive futures, making Calgary a safer city for everyone. Case workers help youth with:

- ✓ Conflict resolution
- ✓ Gang exit
- ✓ Counselling
- ✓ Housing
- ✓ Employment & education
- ✓ Cultural connections
- ✓ Justice system intervention
- ✓ Financial support
- ✓ Recreation opportunities
- ✓ FASD supports



2

## REINTEGRATION

Reintegration support helps people leaving jail successfully transition back into the community, lowering the risk of reoffending. After release many struggle with lack of housing, limited education opportunities, and difficulty finding work because of a criminal record. These challenges can lead to a cycle of crime, homelessness, and repeated incarceration. CJHS supports with:

- ✓ Housing
- ✓ Skill development
- ✓ Employment
- ✓ Transition planning
- ✓ FASD supports

By addressing these barriers, reintegration reduces reoffences and contributes to safer communities for everyone.



3

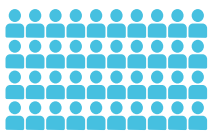
## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative Justice gives victims a meaningful voice in the justice process, creating a collaborative space for healing and resolution while encouraging offenders to take accountability. Victims generally feel more satisfied with this approach than with traditional court processes. It has also been shown to reduce recidivism rates.<sup>1</sup> We support this through:

- ✓ Victim–offender dialogues
- ✓ Restorative action plans
- ✓ Crime impact sessions
- ✓ Apology letter writing
- ✓ Reflective essays
- ✓ Mental health support
- ✓ Understanding harm



40



This funding cut eliminated 40 spaces from Calgary's homeless serving system of care

# A Significant Loss

## Housing Program Funding Cut



68%

Savings when placing a person in CJHS's housing program over incarceration

In May 2025, CJHS faced a devastating funding loss. The Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) reduced our funding by \$887,630, resulting in the full closure of the Adult Housing Reintegration Program (AHRP). This decision was not performance-based. Our program outcomes were strong, and CHF consistently recognized the dedication of our staff and the success of our participants. Unfortunately, with no increase to their own funding in several years and rising costs across the sector, CHF was forced to make difficult financial decisions, including eliminating four scattered-site housing programs in Calgary: AHRP among them.

This cut represents more than the end of a program. It means the loss of 40 housing spaces designed specifically for people leaving incarceration and at risk of homelessness. The ripple effects are significant, touching not only our clients but also the broader justice and housing systems in Calgary.

AHRP was the only justice-focused program of its kind in the city, providing access to safe, stable housing along with intensive, wraparound supports. Participants received case management that addressed complex needs such as addiction, mental health, employment, and community reintegration. This approach was proven to work:

- 88% of participants remained housed.
- Of those with criminal activity, 81% reduced their criminal involvement.
- Participants were nearly twice as likely to access addiction services compared to those without housing.

Stable housing was the foundation. When individuals exit custody with nowhere to go, no plan,


and no support, they often return to the exact environments that contributed to their criminal behaviour in the first place. This fuels a cycle of addiction, violence, and social disorder that places unnecessary strain on police, EMS, emergency shelters, and the justice system. CJHS works to stop that cycle. With a roof over their head and consistent support, participants were more likely to recover, find work, and avoid reoffending.

The financial argument is equally strong. Incarcerating one person in Alberta costs \$70,445 annually,<sup>2</sup> compared to roughly \$22,000 to support that same person in the community through AHRP. When reduced hospital visits, shelter stays, and future justice involvement are factored in, taxpayer savings increase further.

CJHS staff worked tirelessly to ensure every AHRP participant had a safe transition plan before the program ended. We developed personalized paths forward, advocated fiercely for client needs, and arranged warm hand-offs to new housing providers.

This is a setback, but it does not define us. It is a reminder of the vulnerability non-profits face when reliant on a single funder. Looking ahead, CJHS is committed to diversifying our funding, building a more stable future, and continuing to deliver the programs that reduce recidivism and strengthen community safety.

Housing saves lives, creates safer communities, and saves taxpayer dollars. The loss of AHRP is significant, but our goal remains the same: to ensure people leaving incarceration have the support they need to safely reintegrate back into communities. ♦



*It devastated me.  
And I didn't even  
notice until it was  
too late.*

— Abel on his drug use

# Abel's Story

## Through trauma, addiction, and recovery

Abel doesn't shy away from the darker parts of his story. He tells them the way they happened, raw and unpolished, because that's the truth.

He was born in Liberia during a civil war. His mother immigrated to Canada first, before bringing him over. When he was not yet three years old, Abel made that journey alone. He doesn't remember the trip itself. What he knows comes from what others have told him: that he stayed with immigration services for a short time before being reunited with his mother a couple of weeks later.

But safety didn't follow.

As a little boy, Abel would sometimes be found wandering the streets at night, alone, until police picked him up and brought him home. He moved between relatives' houses, never settling long enough to feel rooted anywhere. At school, teachers noticed he often arrived dirty or late. By the age of ten, he was permanently placed in foster care.

His first foster home lasted three months. In his second, he cried himself to sleep for weeks. "I'd stay up all night, apparently crying for weeks on end," he remembers. That placement ended after a month.

Much of his childhood is a blur. "It's like a slide show... like still frames," Abel says. He pieces together the gaps from old photographs or from what others have told him.

What he does know is this: those early years carved deep scars. The constant moving. The losses. The violence. They left him with a fear of abandonment so strong it would shape much of what came after.

Statistics tell the same story over and over again. Children who endure unstable homes, abuse, or time in foster care are far more likely to end up in the justice system or struggling with addiction.<sup>3</sup> Abel fits that pattern. He recalls his grandfather as a "disciplinarian," but others

would call it what it was: child abuse. In Canada, half of incarcerated men report being neglected or abused as children.<sup>4</sup>

Abel kept in contact with his mom, but she often broke promises, and made no attempt to get him back when she had the chance. "She's my mom. She gave birth to me. But I never had that maternal feeling of safety, love and trust."

By almost every measure, Abel was failed by family and by the adults who were supposed to protect him.

And yet, there were moments of light. One foster home lasted eight years. The woman who cared for him there is still in his life today. In a childhood full of chaos, she was one of the few steady things.

### ADDICTION

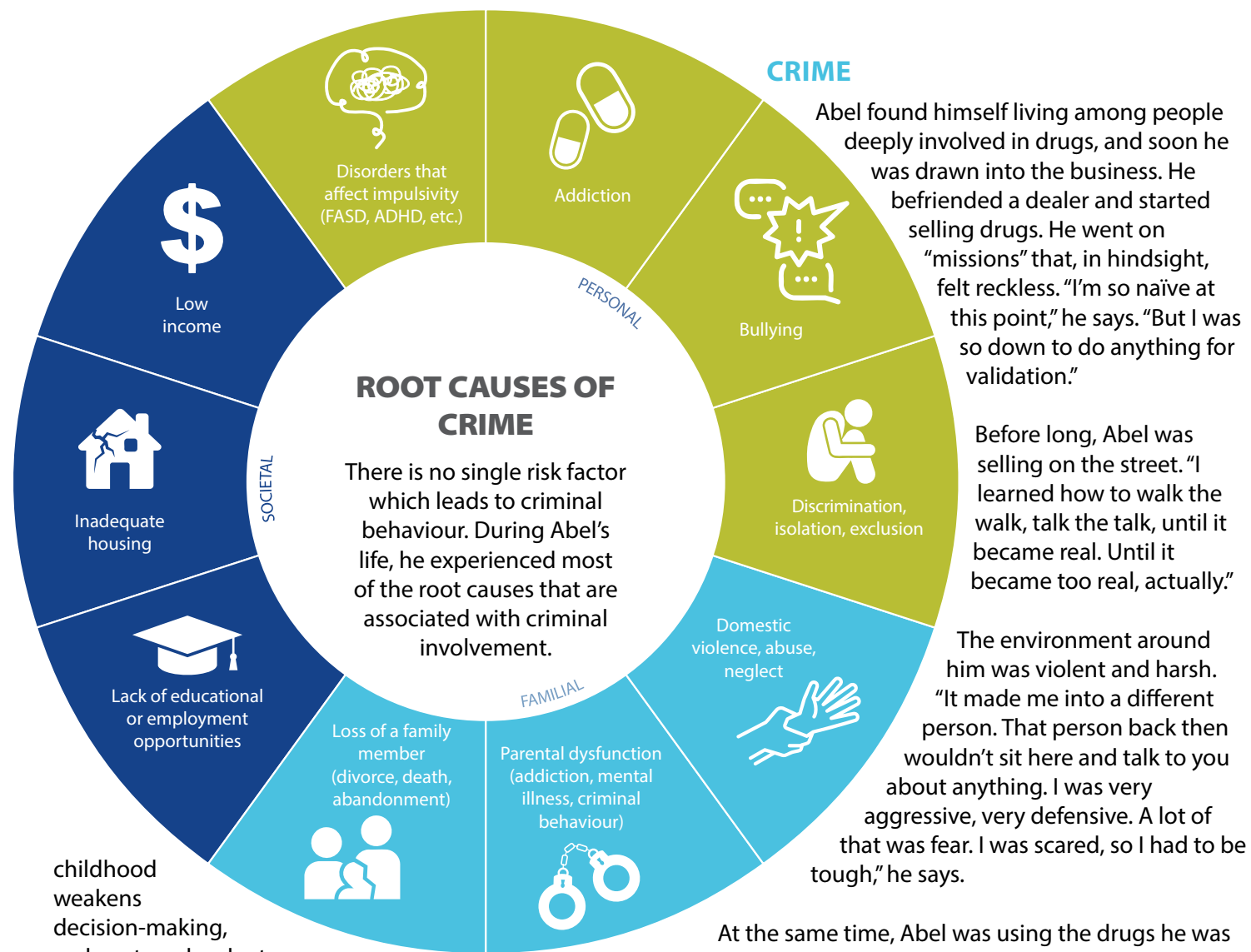
Addiction doesn't happen overnight. It's a gradual process shaped by early trauma, mental health challenges, and exposure to addictive substances over time. Abel checked many of those boxes. As a child, he was diagnosed with ADHD and struggled with clinical depression and generalized anxiety disorder, conditions that often overlap with substance use.<sup>5</sup> Life was so lonely at times that he attempted suicide on three separate occasions.

He was introduced to drugs at 17 by a foster brother.

"Substances were never in my life prior to this," Abel says. "I think I was living in that innocence. I wasn't socially adept; I wouldn't pick up on social cues... I was just so unaware."

So when his foster brother offered him marijuana, Abel tried it.

What might look like a choice from the outside is often the result of how trauma rewires the brain. Trauma in



childhood weakens decision-making, makes stress harder to manage, and leaves fewer tools for healthy coping.<sup>6</sup>

Abel liked the way he felt when he was high. "I was laughing, acting silly, getting attention. It felt great." For someone who always wanted to fit in, that feeling was powerful. "It wasn't just a recreational drug for me. It was a way to fit in. It took away all the anxiety and stuff. I didn't feel anything."

Things escalated when Abel turned 18 and was moved out of foster care. "I didn't really look for work, didn't really have groceries. All I cared about was my weed."

New friends introduced him to ecstasy, meth, cocaine, and eventually crack. Each step pulled him further in.

"I always graduated to more and more substances," Abel says. "I thought I was cool. I was like, 'finally I found my people. I belong somewhere, like this is it,' but it really wasn't. I was an outsider trying to fit in. I always felt like that."

## CRIME

Abel found himself living among people deeply involved in drugs, and soon he was drawn into the business. He befriended a dealer and started selling drugs. He went on "missions" that, in hindsight, felt reckless. "I'm so naïve at this point," he says. "But I was so down to do anything for validation."

Before long, Abel was selling on the street. "I learned how to walk the walk, talk the talk, until it became real. Until it became too real, actually."

The environment around him was violent and harsh. "It made me into a different person. That person back then wouldn't sit here and talk to you about anything. I was very aggressive, very defensive. A lot of that was fear. I was scared, so I had to be tough," he says.

At the same time, Abel was using the drugs he was selling. His addiction deepened. He recalls how, at his lowest, he stopped seeing people as human. He witnessed things that no longer shocked him. "That's why people keep using it, because we're trying to forget all that," he says.

Everything worsened when he started using crack, a chemically processed form of cocaine that is known to be more addictive. "It devastated me. And I didn't even notice until it was too late," Abel recalls. "I couldn't even smoke weed anymore. I didn't want to do any other drugs. All I wanted was to use. Nothing else mattered."

## RECOVERY

Things changed for Abel after he was evicted and moved into a "traphouse," a house where people were constantly using and selling drugs. It was there he tried to quit for the first time. "The people around me were all actual addicts, just like me ... I just didn't want to end up like the guys I was living with."

A turning point came when Abel saw a friend post online about his own sober journey. "That kind of kickstarted it all. Seeing that there was hope," Abel recalls. His friend

helped him sign up for Alberta Works and referred him to the Calgary John Howard Society.

Recovery was not easy. "I started going to meetings while still living in a traphouse where people are still [using drugs]. Trying to quit while being in an environment like that, it makes it so hard."

Abel's challenges are common: long delays for treatment, unstable housing, and the absence of supportive networks all increase the risk of relapse. Recovery isn't just about abstaining from drugs. It requires safe housing, strong supports, and access to programs.<sup>7</sup>

Eventually, Abel was paired with Marcy, a CJHS support worker. She helped him access housing and treatment and stayed by him through many ups and downs. "It was kind of upsetting for me, having her see me at my lowest," says Abel. "She's really stuck a leg out for me and continues to support me, even though I was going through a lot and didn't even know which way was up."

For Marcy, the distinction was clear. "I've seen both sides of him. I know that's the addict, it's not the actual person," she says.

Abel's lowest point came when he was homeless and moved in with his biological mother, who he hadn't lived with since childhood. "When I was with my mom, I didn't really talk to Marcy or anyone that much ... I started breaking those connections very quickly."

Without stable housing and social supports, relapse followed.

Still, Marcy was there, waiting until Abel was ready to try again. Eventually he reached out, and she drove him to detox. "Detox really helped me have that clarity for the first time in a long time ... it gave me that brief taste of my real personality," says Abel.

This time, it stuck.

## SOBRIETY

This past August, Abel celebrated one year sober. "Finally now I have a year sober and I'm taking my medication for anxiety and depression, and ADHD, and things are going quite well for me. I have a nice place, I got a new job. I'm doing quite good."

Abel asked Marcy to introduce him at his one year sober ceremony. "It has been so rewarding seeing the changes in him as he grows," says Marcy. "He's done all the hard work. I've just kind of held his hand along the way."

Still, Abel admits it takes constant effort.

"It kind of feels like when you're on a treadmill and you don't want to keep going, but the treadmill's still going so you've got to keep walking. That's kind of how life feels right now ... it gets tiring, but I'd rather be here than where I was."

Through CJHS and his own determination, Abel has built stability: housing, work, and healthier routines. "Even those little things, like taking time to go see a doctor and making appointments. I'm trying to build some kind of stability in my life."

What has made the difference is having someone in his corner. "I felt like I had an extra pillar of support that I could go to if I needed help or just someone to talk to and ground me."

Today, Abel recognizes sobriety is a choice he must make every day. "I'm stable. I'm comfortable. I'm safe. I'm still figuring out who I am. I'm doing it sober now and I don't know where I'd be if I didn't get help and reach out. I'd probably be dead, homeless, or in jail."

Abel leans back and groans when you ask him what advice he'd give other people going through similar things. Almost embarrassed, he answers. "If you want help and you know you want the help, it's out there. But you've got to be willing to go get it. That's the scary part. It was the hardest part for me asking for help, but once you do, it gets easier." ♦



Abel (left) with Marcy (right) at his one year sober ceremony.

**79%** WOMEN **75%** MEN

More than 70% of people in Canadian prisons meet the criteria for at least one mental health disorder<sup>8</sup>

**2-3x**

Mental illness is 2-3x more common in Canadian correctional facilities than in the general population<sup>10</sup>

# Expanding Access to Mental Health Support

An innovative partnership brings student counsellors to CJHS, giving more clients access to care

When people come to the Calgary John Howard Society, they often carry heavy experiences of trauma, addiction, and mental illness. For many, the path forward requires more than housing or employment support; it requires someone who will listen, guide, and help them build tools to cope and heal.

“We know that mental health support is one of the biggest factors in helping people change their lives,” says Payton, CJHS’s Certified Canadian Counsellor. “But the reality is, there’s just one of me, and the need is so much greater than I can meet alone.”

That need shows up every day in CJHS’s waitlists for counselling, and in the limits of Payton’s role. Her position is funded through a grant that has specific eligibility requirements. This leaves many people CJHS serves without onsite mental health supports and the system has few affordable options. “It’s heartbreaking,” Payton explains. “We could be doing really great therapeutic work, but the funding is limited.”

To help meet this gap, CJHS approached Insight

Counselling and Therapy Centre with the idea of placing master-level student counsellors at our agency. We knew there were many clients who needed support but couldn’t access it due to age restrictions, program eligibility, session limits, or long waitlists.

“It wasn’t enough to just see the problem, we needed a solution,” Payton says. “What’s so exciting is that we

didn’t just add low-cost counselling spots, we created a system that helps our clients and helps prepare the next generation of counsellors at the same time.”

This partnership reflects what makes CJHS unique. We don’t just provide programs; we look for gaps, seek out solutions, and

bring partners together to make change happen.

“We had our first student start in May, and already the difference is clear,” Payton says. “People who have never had the chance to try counselling are sitting down with someone who can help. And because we’ll have more students joining us, the number of people we can support keeps growing.”

Of the youth clients referred to CJHS’s counselling services:

- 72% have a confirmed mental health diagnosis
- 61% have experienced suicidal ideation or thoughts of self-harm
- 56% have experience with substance use addiction, with 25% of those individuals in recovery



Calgary John Howards Certified Canadian Counsellor, Payton Butterwick, works with clients under the age of 25 to improve mental health outcomes and reduce involvement in the criminal justice system. Photo provided by Chelsi Holliday.

The students who provide counselling are closely supervised by the Insight Centre and supported by Payton, ensuring clients receive high-quality care while also helping the next generation of counsellors build their skills. The model has already led to powerful moments of change for our clients, from breakthroughs in communication to gaining new tools for coping with stress and trauma.

The stakes are high. More than 70% of people in Canadian prisons meet the criteria for at least one mental health disorder.<sup>8</sup> Without timely, ongoing counselling, those struggles often contribute to re-offending and poor outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

“If we’re thinking about changing criminality,

reintegrating individuals back into society, how are we supposed to change behaviour if we have no insight into why that behaviour happened?” Payton says.

But when people get the right kind of mental health support, it changes everything: they learn to recognize triggers, manage emotions, and build healthier lives.

For Payton, the vision is bigger still. “If it were up to me, we’d have a whole team of counsellors here. Men, women, people from diverse cultures, specialists who can do assessments, because the need is that great. Every day I see people who would benefit. And every day I think: if we only had the resources, imagine what we could do.” ♦



Meaningful employment and education are two of the most successful ways for an individual to move out of poverty and avoid becoming involved or re-involved in criminal activity.

## EDUCATION MAKES AN IMPACT

In Canada, more than 70% of people entering federal custody have not completed high school,<sup>11</sup> making educational gaps one of the strongest predictors of incarceration.

Involvement in education while incarcerated reduces recidivism by 20–30%, and participation in post-secondary education can lower it by 45–75%.<sup>12</sup> Education also increases the likelihood of securing and maintaining employment upon release,

reducing the risk of returning to crime as a source of income.

The Calgary John Howard Society provides a range of employment and education programs designed to build skills, boost job prospects, and lower the risk of reoffending. By equipping adults with the tools to succeed, these programs strengthen communities and support individuals in becoming responsible, contributing members of society.

*“Working with the John Howard Society has been profoundly positive. With their knowledge and expertise, I have been able to acquire the necessary tools, knowledge and attitude to become employable once again. They are a service and people like no other.”*  
—Kevin

Of our literacy and learning clients:

**100%** used skills outside of class

**96%** made progress towards their goals

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%



**70** clients were employed at 30 days

**194** clients received one-on-one employment support

Numbers from Apr 1, 2024 – Mar 31, 2025

## Launching a New Career Path

Rebecca gained the confidence and skills she needed to start a new career

When Rebecca first connected with the Calgary John Howard Society, she was at a low point.

After leaving an abusive relationship, she wasn’t sure how to re-enter the workforce after 13 years of raising her four children. An unresolved assault charge meant she had to disclose it on job applications with no chance to explain, creating another barrier to moving forward.

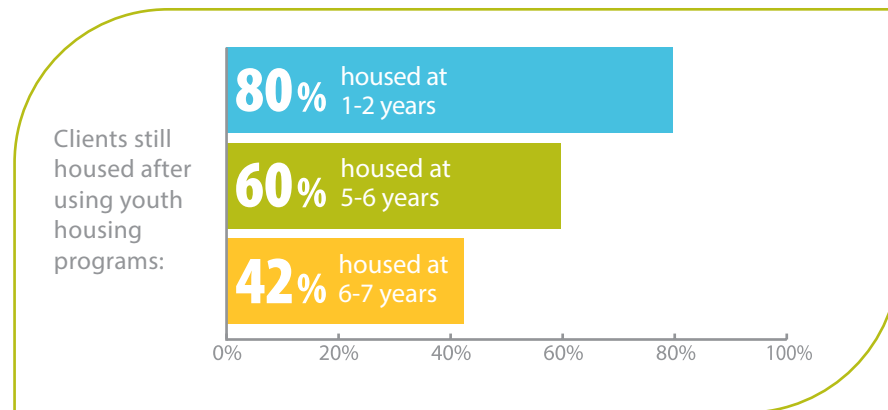
“Rebecca came to us with so much untapped talent and determination, but she needed support to clear the roadblocks and rebuild her confidence,” said Fiona Fairley, Employment Developer with CJHS.

CJHS helped her update her resume for online applications, funded a digital marketing certification, and connected her to free training to expand her creative toolkit. She was referred to Dress for Success, where she received professional clothing, and benefited from a free haircut through CJHS’s partnership with MC College.

“It’s amazing what something as simple as a new outfit or a fresh haircut can do. You could see her confidence grow almost overnight,” said Fiona.

Rebecca was encouraged to attend career planning workshops with Career Hero and TalentPool Society and worked with a CJHS specialist who introduced her to an executive coach looking for digital marketing support. She secured an internship, a learning opportunity that fit her schedule and aligned with her long-term goals.

“Rebecca’s story really highlights the impact of wraparound support. When different resources come together, like employment coaching, skills training, community partnerships, even small things like clothing or haircuts, it can transform how someone sees themselves and their future,” said Fiona. ♦



# A Place To Call Home

New study highlights the success of CJHS's youth housing programs

This year, the School of Public Policy at University of Calgary released a major study looking at the success of Calgary's youth housing programs funded by the Calgary Housing Foundation, including those provided by the Calgary John Howard Society (CJHS). The findings reflect what we witness every day: when young people have safe housing and the right supports, they can find stability and a successful future.

The outcomes of this study are especially impressive given the extraordinary challenges faced by the youth served in these programs. Participants reported high rates of mental health issues, substance use, and involvement with the justice system—factors that typically reduce the likelihood of long-term housing success. Yet, despite these barriers, the programs delivered strong, sustained results. What sets this study apart is its scope: it tracked youth for up to seven years, far beyond the standard 24-month window used in most similar research.

The results revealed that nearly 80% of youth remained housed after one to two years, and remarkably, about

60% were still stably housed even after seven years, outcomes that meet or exceed those seen in other Canadian cities serving less complex populations.<sup>13</sup>

"This is not a controlled experiment. This is real life. You're dealing with challenges like outside influences, landlords, and budget constraints," says Dr. Ron Kneebone, one of the authors of the study. "Not everyone is going to succeed. And yet for the Calgary youth programs, we're still seeing great success. To me, that is remarkable."

The programs give youth something many have never had: a real chance. Many grew up in poverty or the child welfare system, and struggle with mental health challenges and childhood trauma with little to no family support. Usually, they have never lived on their

own or learned basic life skills. At CJHS, we pair youth housing with wraparound supports like goal planning, counselling, employment preparation, and skill development to give them the opportunity to build independence and a future.

"The biggest return on investment is keeping kids alive. How do you put a price on that?" says Dr. Kneebone. ♦

***This is not a controlled experiment. This is real life.***

# Lethbridge Project Helps People Leave Gangs

One year into the program, the results are clear

In September 2024, CJHS launched a two-year pilot in Lethbridge to support adults who want to leave or avoid gang involvement.

The program works with people both inside custody and in the community, providing intensive, person-centred support the moment they are released. Participants are connected to housing, recovery, employment, and pro-social networks so they don't fall back into the environments that fuelled their criminal behaviour.

This work is not easy. Many participants have long histories of trauma, violence, and distrust of systems. Inside custody, few are willing to openly identify as gang-involved because of safety risks, which makes engagement slow and delicate. Once in the community, participants face enormous pressures from old networks, financial insecurity, and the stigma of a criminal record. Each step forward—whether securing housing, reconnecting with family, or considering a different future—represents significant progress in a context where change is incredibly difficult and often resisted.

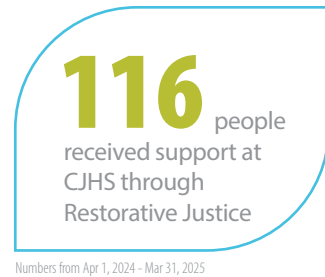
This work fills a critical gap that government services cannot address alone. CJHS provides the continuity, accountability, and wraparound supports that make reintegration real. ♦

**6**  
participants successfully exited gang life

**10**  
participants avoided reoffending during the reporting period

**85%**  
IMPROVED THEIR HOUSING SITUATION

**86%**  
STAYED ENGAGED AFTER RELEASE



# Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice has been around since the 70s, but to many people, the concept is a new one

Restorative Justice is a complex, careful process that gives victims something the traditional justice system rarely does: a meaningful voice. Instead of being limited to a victim impact statement read by lawyers, victims in Restorative Justice can choose how they want to engage—whether through a facilitated dialogue, an exchange of letters, or simply receiving information about the offender.

Restorative Justice, which gained traction in the 1970s, is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing. Its core principles, such as community involvement, accountability, and healing through dialogue, reflect practices Indigenous communities have used for generations to address harm.

“It’s very victim-led,” says Narda Robillard, Restorative Justice Coordinator at the Calgary John Howard Society. “We ask what they need, and then we move at their pace. That might mean direct contact, or it might mean no contact at all. The important thing is that they have a voice.”

Research shows that victims often feel more satisfied with Restorative Justice because they can tell their story, ask questions, and make choices about the process, often getting the closure they need.<sup>1</sup> As Narda explained, “Victims tell us over and over that it felt good to be heard. Sometimes they just want to have their experience acknowledged.”

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

Cases come to our program through referrals from the justice system, community organizations, or even victims themselves. In Calgary, youth diversion cases

involving sexual harm are referred by the Calgary Youth Justice Society to a collaborative partnership that includes the Luna Child and Youth Advocacy Centre, Centre for Sexuality, and CJHS. Together, we provide Restorative Justice services focused on education, healing, and accountability—giving young people the opportunity to learn, grow, and, when appropriate, avoid a criminal record that could otherwise derail their future.

Participation is voluntary, and people must come to the process willingly and open to work. That means before entering the program, offenders must take responsibility for their actions. Without that, the process cannot move forward.

Once referred, facilitators meet with participants, ensuring they feel safe and ready. “These cases are extremely complex,” Narda explained. “We move at the victim’s pace, even if that means months of preparation.” Each case is different and a variety of tools and processes are used to ensure the experience suits the needs of those involved.

“We’re always looking for the right supports for each person. That could mean connecting them with other programs within our organization, setting them up with counselling, or referring them to other community resources. Whatever the path, our goal is to help address the root causes of the crime,” says Narda.

Participants may write essays, letters, or engage in a dialogue with each other. For victims, this opportunity to ask questions can be very impactful on their healing.

“When you don’t have information, you fill in the gaps,

and it’s always worse than you think,” says Narda. “Having answers to some of those unknowns can help them move past the crime, giving them a sense of closure.”

Restorative Justice has been shown to reduce recidivism because it helps offenders understand the harm they’ve caused and take steps to change.<sup>14</sup> “People often don’t connect the dots between what they did and the harm it caused until they hear directly from those impacted. That realization changes behaviour,” says Narda.

For offenders, participating in Restorative Justice requires taking accountability, often for the first time. “Facing the impact of your actions and committing to change is far harder than just sitting through a court proceeding,” says Narda.

## SEXUAL HARM CASES

In 2023, CJHS began accepting sexual harm cases, making us one of the first Restorative Justice organizations in Alberta to do so. This work is still very new, and we approach it with humility—there is much to learn. In some provinces, sexual harm cases are not even allowed to go through restorative justice, and very few organizations in Canada are taking them on.

Why does this matter? Few instances of sexual assault are reported to police, and only a fraction of police-reported sexual assaults result in charges and convictions. Only 36% of reported sexual assaults result in charges, and even fewer go to court.<sup>15</sup> And when cases do go to court, the experience is often retraumatizing. Victims can feel sidelined, doubted, or pressured to relive their trauma on the stand.

Restorative justice gives the victim another option. “It offers them a safe way to be heard, believed, and supported,” says Narda.

At CJHS, these cases involve extensive safeguards. Offenders are required to take accountability for the process to move forward, and we partner with organizations like the Centre for Sexuality to provide mandatory education on consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships. This ensures the process is not only about accountability for the past, but also about preventing future harm. “Not all victims want punishment for its own sake,” Narda explained. “Many just want to know it won’t happen again.” ♦

# Indigenous Youth Programming

Indigenous youth represent approximately 8% of Canada’s youth population, yet they account for nearly 50% of admissions to youth correctional facilities.<sup>16</sup>

This stark overrepresentation reflects the ongoing impact of Canada’s colonial legacy, which has created intergenerational cycles of trauma, poverty, and disconnection from culture. These systemic harms contribute to increased mental health challenges, substance use, and instability, all of which are linked to higher involvement in the justice system.<sup>17</sup>

Research shows that culturally responsive programs reduce recidivism rates among Indigenous individuals. Youth who participate report feeling more valued, supported, and connected, factors that reduce the likelihood of continued justice involvement.<sup>18</sup>

At CJHS youth are offered culturally informed programming that provides opportunities for young people to reconnect with their culture and community. ♦



# Thank you.

The work of CJHS could not be done without the generous support of our donors and funders. Your contributions allow us continue our work, making our communities safer.

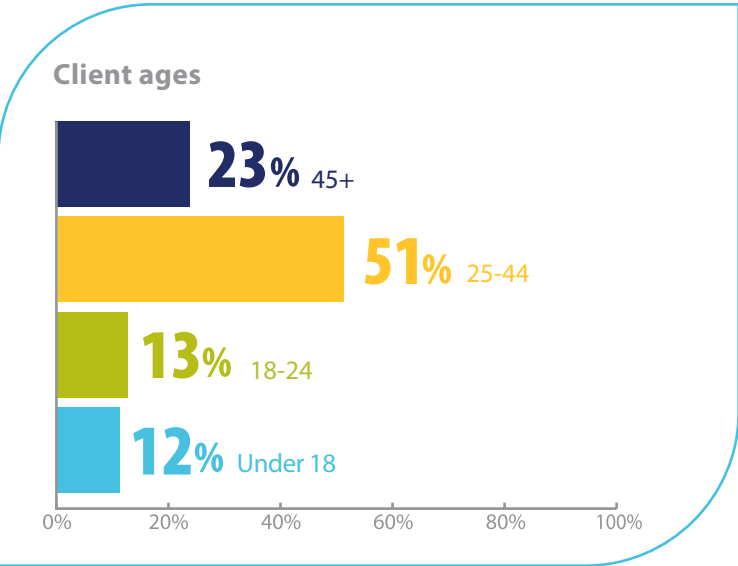
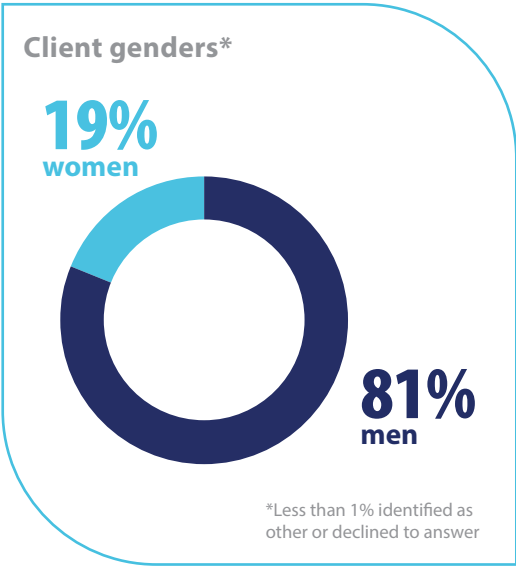
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Every effort has been made to ensure this list is accurate. If we have missed you, please accept our sincerest apologies and contact us at 403-266-4566.

In 2024-25, your support enabled us to help

1,202

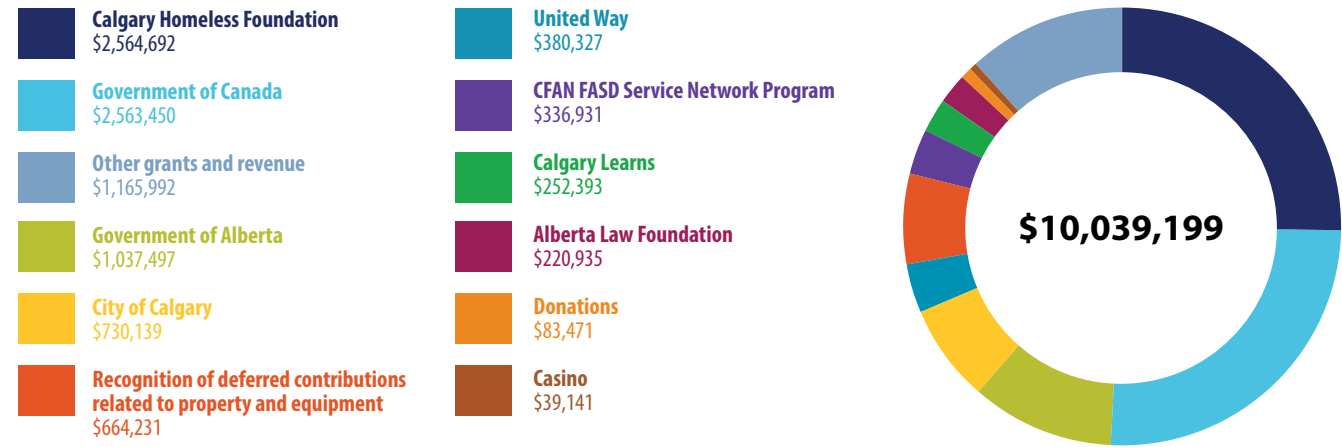
youth and adults make positive changes and move away from criminal behaviour



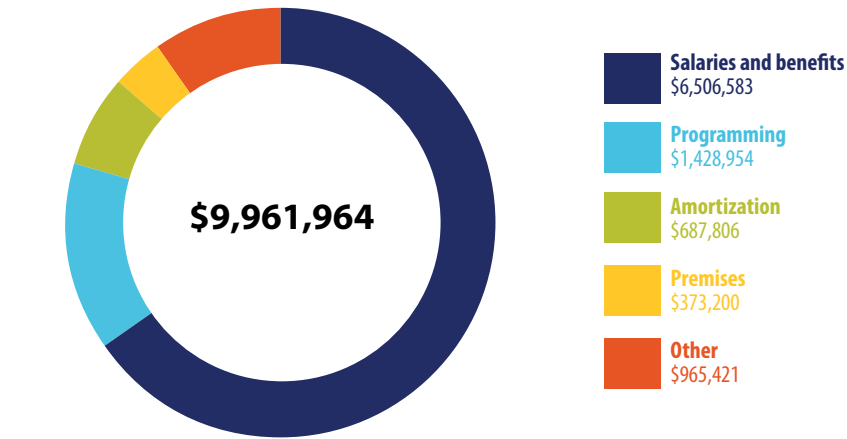
All data reported is from April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025 in alignment with our fiscal year

# Financial Statement

Revenue for the year ended March 31, 2025



Expenses for the year ended March 31, 2025



For a full copy of our audited financials, visit our website at [cjhs.ca](http://cjhs.ca).

The Calgary John Howard Society operates in Treaty 7 Territory. This is the traditional and ancestral lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Otipemisiwak Metis Government of the Metis Nation within Alberta Districts Five and Six; the original keepers of this land belonged to the Kainai, Siksika and Piikani Indigenous First Nations which included Tsuut'ina of the Dene Nation, Bearspaw, Chiniki and Wesley Bands of the Stoney Nation. The traditional names for the City of Calgary are "Mohkintsis" (meaning Elbow in Blackfoot), "Otoskunee" (meaning Elbow in Cree), "Wincheeshpah" (meaning Elbow in Stoney Nakoda) and "Kootsisaw" (meaning Elbow in Dene -Tsuut'ina). Today and every day we acknowledge all the elders and knowledge keepers of this land.



## Calgary John Howard Society

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