

We're celebrating twenty years of

Neighbour Grants.

Twenty years of supporting citizens in building a better city.



“Getting to know and care about our neighbours is a longtime practice of building community. From the very first peoples of the region to the newcomers joining the city, we all carry with us teachings about being neighbourly.”

– KRIS ARCHIE, Executive Director
The Circle on Philanthropy and
Aboriginal Peoples in Canada

Acknowledging the Land

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

Front cover features grassroots leaders from projects and groups who received a Neighbour Grant. (L to R): Sonja Sahlen, Tapisa Kilabuk, Alain Dupere, Brijbala Bakhshi, June Wong, Jacquie Aquines, Levi First Charger, Amber Cannon, Jean Claude Munyezamu
Back cover: Devon LeClair

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Northern Hills Community Association mural

Now is the time for neighbourliness.

We live in an era plagued by bad actors – people who speak and post messages with negative intent. Trolls, bots, or devil’s advocates – whatever you call them, their hurtful actions and words breed mistrust between people and divide us. Too often these bad actors take centre stage.

Instead, this magazine shines a light on people who build trust and connections in their everyday communities. In 20 stories, we’ll introduce you to some of the “good actors” we’ve had the honour of meeting over the first two decades of our Neighbour Grants program.



Photo credit: Jared Sych

The Neighbour Grants Advisory Committee being neighbourly. (L to R): William Dickson, Janet Lavoie, Dwight Farahat, Eileen Kwan, Murray Laverty, Mark Hopkins, Judy Lawrence, and committee chair Lisa Moore. Missing: Lili Bunce, Lisa Demers and Sue DePaul.

Neighbour Grants is built on the belief that a great community is not only possible, but inevitable when you encourage active citizenship.

We support projects led by people in their own neighbourhoods and communities – the kinds of initiatives that people usually undertake on their own time and dime. We fund projects that aren’t always perceived as being big or serious enough to merit a grant.

As you read these stories, we hope you see what we see: that money spent helping grassroots leaders welcome people into their communities is money well spent.

By sharing these stories, we hope to inspire people to rediscover or strengthen their spark for community life. There’s no better time to get involved than right now.

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”

– SIMONE WELL, PHILOSOPHER, 1909



Staff leads of the Neighbour Grants program: Cathy Taylor (1999-2003), Julie Black (current), Cesar Cala (2004-2008) and Janet Lavoie (2003). Missing: Steve Brewster (1999).



Thank you to the anonymous donor whose generosity seeded the Neighbour Grants program for the first 15 years, as well as the many donors who have since contributed.

Thanks to everyone who applied for a Neighbour Grant, entrusting Calgary Foundation with your ideas and efforts. Your seemingly small projects collectively make waves that reach all corners of our city and beyond, strengthening community life.

And thanks for the contributions of Foundation board, staff and the Advisory Committee volunteers over the past twenty years.

Neighbour Grants is and will always be a team effort.

“What does it mean to belong? I think often and with gratitude about what I learned from Siksika Elders Pam Sitting Eagle and Hutch Sitting Eagle this summer. It’s about knowing who you are and being in relationship with the land and with the stories.”

– JULIE BLACK
Calgary Foundation, Citizen Engagement Associate

“Civil conversation is dependent on people thinking the best of each other. When neighbours come together over small projects and get to know each other, it creates relationships that will help the community weather larger issues that come along.”

– CATHY TAYLOR

“Even in this age of seemingly limitless connections, it’s the day-to-day and face-to-face interactions we have with each other that make us neighbours and friends and help us in our constant yearning to belong.”

– CESAR CALA

“An anticipation of joy and celebration, the calming effect of a daily greeting, the knowledge there is help and sympathy at hand, feeling hope and confidence from shared accomplishments. Belonging comes from and grows from these things.”

– JANET LAVOIE

1999 - 2019 Neighbour Grants Program Impact

\$2.44M granted

500 projects



87,363 participants



2,341 citizen leaders

Neighbours build neighbourhoods.

PROJECT: Whispering Woods Naturalization Project, 2004

ORGANIZATION: Dr. E.W. Coffin Elementary School



When Brentwood Heights was developed in the 1960s, a small patch of prairie grassland, now known as Whispering Woods, was cut off from the area that would later become Nose Hill Park.

Since adopting the stranded land in 1995, the school's efforts to protect the natural ecosystem have provided valuable lessons to both students and community residents.

Prior to 2004, a chain-link fence divided the school grounds from the natural area. The school decided to extend the natural area into the school ground, explains Dr. Polly Knowlton Cockett, an area resident and environmental educator.

The community rescued a huge swathe of native plants from an area further north that was slated for redevelopment, and moved them into the Natureground. They reshaped what Knowlton Cockett calls "boring, flat playground grass" with mounds and basins, and planted native seedlings and grasses found in healthy, bio-diverse grasslands.

Their next project, Whispering Signs, provided a network of interpretive signage that combines art, poetry, science, and GPS information. 34 signs in total were designed by students, alumni, and community artists, and are still being maintained and appreciated.

"It really showed residents they could form visions for their neighbourhood and make them reality," says Knowlton Cockett.

"If you traced all the lines, I would trace it back to the year 2000 when I had no idea about grants. Somebody from Calgary Foundation said: 'Why don't you apply for a grant?' And there's the story," she says.

Breaking barriers to healthy living.

PROJECT: Korean Seniors Health and Wellness Fair, 2015

ORGANIZATIONS: Calgary Korean Scholarship Association, Calgary Korean Association, and Calgary Korean Seniors Association

When a community identifies an issue and thinks carefully about the people and resources it can mobilize to respond, the results are powerful.

Silvia Song, diversity liaison with Alberta Health Services, and several of her social worker peers were concerned by the number of Korean seniors landing in emergency rooms for health issues that could have been addressed sooner.

Korean culture values self-sufficiency, so asking for help is somewhat uncommon, Song explains.

"Many immigrant seniors come here late in life and have difficulty learning English," Song says. "It's tough getting involved in and getting around the community. They tend to wait until things are urgent, rather than finding resources to take care of themselves."

As Korean-Calgarians with deep roots in the community and experience running engagement projects, they decided to organize a culturally sensitive health fair for Korean-speaking seniors.

With the support of members of the Calgary Korean community

hundreds of attendees enjoyed everything from healthy food to free haircuts.

The Fair has grown into an annual event, offering more resources and serving people of all ages and cultural backgrounds.

"We have a community that is healthier and more understanding of what exists out there for them. And it's enriching our community as a whole."





Go local. Take action.

PROJECT: Take Action Grants, annually, 2005 to present

ORGANIZATION: Arusha Centre

Sometimes a little boost can make a big difference. Just ask Gerald Wheatley, manager of the Arusha Centre, a collectively-run, member-supported organization that has been providing social justice and environmental resources to Calgarians for 40 years.

One of the resources Arusha provides is money through their complementary currency system called Calgary Dollars.

This innovative currency allows people to purchase and sell goods and services that directly support the Calgary economy and local community. It's a model of

community economic development that is used globally.

Some of that Calgary Dollars currency helps fund Take Action Grants aimed at encouraging more Calgarians to get engaged in issues they care about.

To date, over 136 projects have received a combined total of \$244,000 in Take Action Grants. Funded projects include a schoolyard food forest, a documentary film about racism in Calgary, and an art exhibit by Indigenous survivors of what is known as the Sixties Scoop.

Take Action Grants was designed to make grants more accessible to non-profit organizations and informal groups of concerned citizens, and to introduce people to the Calgary Dollars community.



“In many cases, projects would never have happened without Take Action Grants.”

Arusha Centre garnered a national award for it, and regularly fields inquiries about their initiative from non-profit organizations around the world.



Using a creative lens to gain a better view.



PROJECT: 48-Hour Anti-Racism Film Festival, 2016

ORGANIZATIONS: Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation and Antyx Community Arts

How does racism exist in Calgary? What is its particular look and feel? How is it being challenged and changed? These are questions examined in the 48-Hour Anti-Racism Film Festival.

Fifty people from all ages and backgrounds accepted the challenge of making a short film – fast! They formed teams, engaged in discussions about racism, and used space and resources at the University of Calgary to collectively produce 15 short films in 48 hours.

“Every film shows diversity in terms of the different ways people want to tell their message,” says Iman Bukhari, founder and CEO of the Canadian Cultural Mosaic

Foundation. “One was more animated. Another was more of a group effort. There were youth from high school, a dad/daughter duo, and university students. It was a collaborative effort that offered a fresh new way to talk about the subject.”

The project culminated in a red-carpet screening aptly held on March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Over 400 people of all ages packed the John Dutton Theatre at the old Central Library where a panel selected the top three films.

The response to the films was overwhelmingly positive. Participants said using the creative lens of filmmaking to discuss racism was an eye-opening learning opportunity.

“Learning about other cultures and other people is the whole point of anti-racism work – to educate yourself and become part of a solution,” Bukhari says.

Since this inaugural event, the Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation has run the film festival in different cities across Canada with the support of local partners.





Growing grassroots engagement.

PROJECT: Haysboro Community Park, 2015
ORGANIZATIONS: Haysboro Community Association and Parks Foundation Calgary

An unconventional park in the city's southwest has played a key role in connecting a Calgary neighbourhood and bringing new people into community leadership roles. The park was the brainchild of parents whose children attended Haysboro Community Association's preschool program. They knew the aging playground was slated for replacement and wanted something better than a generic play park. They discussed features of their favourite play spaces with key community stakeholders and researched child development and playground design.

"Everyone treats it like it's their own backyard. It's been such a catalyst and spark for our neighbourhood."

"Top of mind was nature and getting kids back to playing in nature-based spaces," says Sonja Sahlen, community volunteer and revitalization project manager. To raise funds for trees and a central labyrinth gathering hub, the community held garage sales, silent auctions, and sold inscribed bricks that would be incorporated into the labyrinth itself. Natural materials such as wood and metal were used to create sliding surfaces atop hilly berms. Swings, rundlestone boulders for seating, a logjam climber, a food forest, and a kid-sized harvest table were also included. The park's success has spilled into the community in many ways, encouraging residents to steward, program, and promote additional community activities. The local seniors' group has taken to

organizing family-focused activities such as egg hunts and rock painting in the space. "People on the playground committee have moved onto the community board and are looking at other ways of grassroots volunteering, more than we've ever seen before," says Sahlen.



Photo credit: Dana Wheatley

Photo credit: Fahim Thobani

Fresh food for all.

PROJECT: Neighbourhood Food Security, 2012
ORGANIZATION: Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Association

Sharing a meal is a big reason why people attend community events and Hillhurst Sunnyside took this insight to a whole new level. As a leader in the local food scene, Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Association (HSCA) is well known for their weekly farmers' market and recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of their first community garden. Less known is that many community residents struggle to put a meal on the table, let alone a locally grown, organic one. To help understand community food needs, HSCA initiated a participatory research project to develop a neighbourhood food

strategy. Residents were engaged in developing a plan based on a sustainable funding model that helps everyone have good food to eat. The plan resulted in revenue from the farmers' market fueling their expansion into kids' cooking and gardening programs, food skills for adults, urban agriculture workshops, a collaborative learning garden, and a network that shares food security information with other Calgarians. HSCA never lost sight of the value of connecting neighbours.

"In the collaborative garden, community members meet every week or two to garden together, chat, and get to know each other," says Kate Stenson, Executive Director. "It's evolved from an informal invitation to stop in and pick a few carrots or snack on some beans, to a regular harvest of produce that is directed into our own food program," Stenson explains.

"We truly feel that neighbours are trying to feed each other, and there's nothing more neighbourly than that."



Speak up for safe spaces.

PROJECT: Safer Space Workshop Series, 2016

ORGANIZATIONS: Centre for Sexuality and the Society for the Advocacy of Safer Spaces

For volunteers Veronica Lawrence, Geneviève Dale, and their team, creating the Society for the Advocacy of Safer Spaces was an act of love. As patrons of the arts and culture scene, they understood how deeply these spaces matter to people, and how devastating it is when incidences of racism, homophobia, and/or sexual harassment and assault occur.

Partnering with the Centre for Sexuality, they initiated “active bystander” training. This equipped music venues’ staff with the tools and confidence necessary to safely intervene when met with situations of suspected or actual harassment and assault.

Topics included concepts of sexuality, sexual rights and abuse; the harmful results of crossing personal boundaries; the importance of a community approach to safer spaces; the role of bystanders; and how to be an ally. They also distributed coasters to raise awareness in venues and brought staff together to keep the conversation going.



“Our work was internationally recognized because members of our arts community were empowered to make their scene safer and more inclusive,” says Lawrence.

Several festivals and music venues have since requested training, and the Alberta Status of Women is funding the continuation of the program.

“Creating safer spaces is integral to inclusion,” says Pam Krause, president and CEO of the Centre for Sexuality. “It translates into people feeling safe and creating more community within the music scene.”



Setting the table: the community-building power of food.

PROJECT: Hungry for Change, 2017

ORGANIZATION: Alex Community Food Centre (Alex Community Health Centre)

A group of young people in Forest Lawn cooked up a big idea to prove they have the power and potential to drive social change.

Youth from the Cooking Up Justice club met weekly at the Alex Community Food Centre to cook, garden, create art, and discuss ways to make their community healthier. All this while learning about food systems, poverty, sustainability, and how the concepts intertwine.

“After the program, many expressed an interest in becoming civically engaged by hosting an event in advance of the 2017 civic election,” says Syma Habib, community action coordinator at the Food Centre.

They formed What Feeds Us YYC and worked with Antyx Community Arts on a rap music video. It was about food dignity, and the choices being made by and for people struggling to have enough to eat.

They organized a sold out event that brought together 120 community members and mayoral candidates to share a hyper-local meal and have real conversations about food insecurity.

They also raised awareness via #HungryForChange and ensured that people with lived experience of food insecurity had one-on-one chats with mayoral candidates.

“They’re aware of disparity and that current solutions aren’t working. They’re passionate advocates and innovators with a keen understanding of how important it is to vote and be engaged,” Habib says.

The event fueled the group’s enthusiasm to expand into other projects, including a book. As one youth said, “Let them know we’re not done yet! We have lots of work to do still and we’re going to make a difference.”



“They’re passionate advocates and innovators with a keen understanding of how important it is to vote and be engaged.”

Crumbling asphalt sprouts community.

PROJECT: De-Pave Twin Views Communal Garden, 2017

ORGANIZATIONS: Dover Community Association, Twin Views Garden Group, and Parks Foundation Calgary

Community gardeners are renowned for seeing neglected patches of land as blank-canvas possibilities. Even so, it takes a particularly gutsy group of gardeners to spend years bringing three crumbling asphalt tennis courts back to life.

They started small, with several raised garden beds to introduce their neighbours to the joys of gardening and garner support for their grander vision of a large in-ground and sustainable garden and food forest based on permaculture principles.

As community support grew, they partnered with Antyx Community Arts and Prospect Human Services to create a mural made from reclaimed wood donated by the members of the neighbourhood.



Next, they tackled the tennis courts. They rallied youth groups, area businesses, and community members to come up with the money and muscles. Over 100 community volunteers took part in the “de-paving.” Together they removed tonnes of asphalt and leveled space for a garden. Soil testing, remediation, and the planting of perennials such as rhubarb, berries, asparagus, and apple trees are now in the works.

Karen Begg, volunteer with the Dover Community Association, is

proud of the passion that drove the team to create a garden that serves as a local gathering space, source of nutritious food, and a place to enjoy the outdoors. She praises the garden’s accessibility to those with mobility issues, such as the many seniors in the area.

“The nice thing is that it’s communal, not plot-based,” Begg says. “That means if you volunteer for an hour a month – 15 minutes a week – we share our fresh produce with you.”



A pathway to learning from within.

PROJECT: Alex Munro School Labyrinth, 2017

ORGANIZATIONS: Alex Munro Garden Committee and Calgary Board of Education, Alex Munro School

Alex Munro School was named for a visionary leader who led the development of public parks in post WWII Calgary. This legacy served as the inspiration for students and staff to create innovative outdoor learning spaces.

Over several years, parents, volunteers, school staff, students, and their Huntington Hills neighbours transformed a grass rectangle of school ground into gardens, winding pathways, and a stone amphitheatre.

It was the Latin concept of solvitur ambulando – “it is solved by walking” – that inspired the final note of this ambitious project: the labyrinth.

“Ancient wisdom suggests that through a mindful walk, one can quiet the mind, find answers to the questions, and be able to move forward in one’s thinking,” explains principal Karen Campbell.

“If students aren’t emotionally regulated, they aren’t learning, and the people around them aren’t learning either. We have a strong stance on empowering kids to tell us when they need a break.”

The labyrinth’s shape echoes the school’s logo of a heart-shaped branch, and is used daily by students and community members.

During the summer, neighbours pitch in to help water the space. “It takes a village to water sod in the middle of a heat wave,” as parent volunteers Barb Olson and Robin McQueen like to say.



“It’s about starting a movement and a culture of community, helping people feel they are part of the story,” says principal Campbell.



A healthy lifestyle is child’s play.

PROJECT: Creating Coventry, 2017

ORGANIZATIONS: Northern Hills Community Association and Vivo for Healthier Generations

When Moraig McCabe, then executive director, Northern Hills Community Association (NHCA), learned that many of its neighbourhood playgrounds needed replacing, she and her team took a deep breath and rolled up their sleeves.

She formed a volunteer group and they created a comprehensive, community-driven research and design plan to better connect people and parks. The focus was on Coventry Hills, one of the neighbourhoods in North Central Calgary represented by NHCA, as its 14 playgrounds were built within ten years of each other and all faced a similar fate.

NHCA and Creating Coventry volunteers partnered with their recreation centre, Vivo, to train local seniors to monitor playground usage. They held workshops to learn what residents would like in the park spaces and hosted a community picnic to release the results.

“Both physical and mental health are improved by play,” says McCabe. “We want to get kids outdoors, make friends, learn to socialize, and increase the health and wellness of kids and adults in the community.”

The redesign included participation from Calgary Public Library Action Squads, a group of 8 to 12 year-olds who asked that recycled and natural materials, solar and wind power, and technology be used within the outdoor spaces.

The redevelopment plan has a 20-year timeline. Phase one is underway and includes a basketball court and skating rink, as requested by the area’s underserved teens. Future

plans include an inclusive playground, and an outdoor climbing wall.

Creating Coventry has sparked residents to take renewed ownership of their neighbourhood, McCabe says.

“It builds community and has so many side effects: you have eyes on the street, which makes it safer, and it has been wonderful to see it has started to change things already.”



The heartbeat of community.

PROJECT: Friendship Round Dance, 2007, 2008

ORGANIZATION: Miskanawah (formerly Pathways Community Services)

In Indigenous cultures, there are many reasons to hold a round dance. Whether it's to honour an Elder, commemorate a special event, or remember people who have passed on, extensive steps are taken to incorporate ceremony and proper protocols. Preparations include sweat lodge ceremonies and the learning of traditional songs that can be centuries old.

Round dances are healing gatherings for communities. They feature Elder-led prayers, a traditional feast, songs from various drumming groups, and a chance for everyone to join in.

In 2007, Miskanawah, a social service agency guided by Indigenous traditions that supports vulnerable children, youth, and families, organized their first friendship round dance. It took place in Bowness, where their main office

is located. People from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities came together to organize the event.

“Many things go on during a round dance – teaching, mentoring, coaching, role modeling, traditions, and languages. That’s what makes it so unique, valuable, and popular. It’s a gift to the community,” says Kirby Redwood, CEO of Miskanawah.

Thirteen years later, the annual Miskanawah Friendship Round Dance has become a significant event in the greater round dance circuit. Every January, it’s a destination for people coming from

other provinces and even the United States, to drum, dance, sing, and celebrate.

The event has since outgrown the Bowness Community Hall and is now held at the Genesis Centre to accommodate the thousands of people who attend.

“It’s about inclusivity, making friendships, and bridging gaps between cultures. We know when we can gather in peace, food, and song – this is an opportunity for people to learn about each other. Everybody is welcome,” says Redwood.





Photo credit: Janet Davie

massive public celebration that would connect people with and without disabilities, thereby raising awareness and normalizing disabilities in the wider culture.

“The community is vast,” van Vugt says. “Disability is not a fixed category and there is no universal definition. Many disabilities are invisible. We need to talk about it with each other and see each other.”

In 2018, the Disability Pride Parade lit up Stephen Avenue with food and cultural performances. It attracted over 1,000 people and has become an annual celebration of disability pride.

“The disabled community is a group that anyone can become a part of at any point in their life – and it has a culture that’s good for people to be aware of,” says van Vugt.

I am the perfect me.

PROJECT: Disability Pride Parade, 2018

ORGANIZATIONS: Disability Pride Alberta Foundation and Calgary SCOPE Society

One in five Canadians aged 15 years and older have disabilities that limit their daily activities. Canadians take pride in creating communities where everyone belongs, but for the 6.2 million people living with disabilities, changing society’s attitudes can be the real challenge.

According to Andrea van Vugt, who has epilepsy, people’s disabilities often make them feel invisible and even represent sources of embarrassment or shame. She decided that this needed to change.

After seeing a disability pride parade in Vancouver, she brought the idea to the people organizing speak-out events rooted in disability pride in her own city: Calgary SCOPE Society’s Disability Action Hall. Van Vugt envisioned a



We are more alike than we are different.

PROJECT: Taste of Congo, 2018

ORGANIZATIONS: Sharing our Stories Congo Foundation and Life of Faith Christian Church of Calgary

More than a decade ago, Ike Kenzo founded Sharing Our Stories Congo (SOS Congo) to build a sense of connection and fraternity between people of Congolese heritage and their fellow Calgarians.

More recently, Kenzo’s job in the Stoney Nakoda community of Morley got him thinking about creating connections between Congolese and Indigenous peoples.

“I was quite fascinated by the aspects of Indigenous culture that resonate with my African culture,” he says. “The dancing, the drumming, the respect for Elders and traditions,



I found it all so fascinating. And it was so cool that Indigenous people could hold onto their culture when immigrants try so hard to assimilate.”

He discussed his idea about bringing together Congolese and Indigenous youth to break down barriers with SOS Congo youth leaders and community partners. They then got to work creating an opportunity for the two communities to share their stories, art, music, and

food. Their goal was to dismantle the stereotypes that each group had absorbed about the other and to create connection.

In 2018, 250 people of all ages and backgrounds gathered at Rocky Mountain College for Taste of Congo Bridging the Gap. In addition to Indigenous performances, attendees enjoyed spoken word presentations and the first public performance of the SOS Congolese youth drummers. People talked, shared food and traditions, and uncovered commonalities like the pain and trauma experienced by the Congolese and Indigenous communities alike.

“It’s weird how colonialism works. You learn things from the dominant culture about every group. How about we hear directly from the people? It was really good for the youth to hear from each other,” Kenzo says.

Organizers were heartened by the community support for the event and Kenzo says SOS Congo is planning more collaborative events into the future.



Photo credit: Ruth Bergen Braun



“This project provided opportunities for conversation while respecting cultural boundaries.”

“Life in Canada is challenging for seniors adjusting to an urban lifestyle where families get busy with daily life challenges and don’t always have time for family relationships. This project provided opportunities for conversation while respecting cultural boundaries,” she says.

The sessions spurred discussions about the history of Canada and the roots of different ethnocultural communities within that history. Participants supported each other, learned to better communicate with their extended families, and strengthened their confidence in public speaking – all while building new friendships.

“Participation helped seniors overcome their introversion and sparked conversations of their experiences in life, how they struggled to be who they are, and how much they sacrificed for their families,” Bakhshi says.

Art speaks in every language.

PROJECT: Art Speaks a Thousand Words, 2018

ORGANIZATION: Hindu Society of Calgary

Wanting to help their peers move away from loneliness, a group of seniors spoke with Brijbala Bakhshi, vice-president of seniors at the Hindu Society of Calgary, about hosting a series of community events. Bakhshi responded enthusiastically and invited the community development organization, Action Dignity, to get involved as well.

Over the course of a dozen sessions, 360 seniors and 35 volunteers representing eight ethnocultural groups attended workshops on self-identity, oil painting, Chinese arts, and

Indigenous arts. The participants also went on field trips to Calgary arts and culture venues, including the Glenbow and the Military Museums of Calgary.

One intention of the project was that participants have a safe environment to express their feelings, Bakhshi says.



Building spaces together brings us together.

PROJECT: Courtyard Naturalization, 2018

ORGANIZATION: Calgary Girls Charter School

Community members, parents, students, and staff at the Calgary Girls Charter School (CGCS) worked together to turn an underutilized school courtyard into a space for learning and gathering.

With cracked concrete and wood chips that failed current fire code requirements, the courtyard had fallen into disrepair. Now, with new pathways, greenery, a stage with audience seating, and a basketball court featuring four-square game lines, the area has been transformed into a vibrant space for arts, sports, and community activities.

“It’s such a welcoming space to gather,” says parent volunteer and chair of the school council, Amy Care.

Over 50 CGCS students submitted design ideas that ranged from practical to fantastical. The school council spent two years fundraising for the courtyard, and everyone pitched in to spread dirt, lay sod, plant shrubs, and put finishing touches on the landscaping.

“Our playground was already well used by Lakeview area children,” Care says. “This project will significantly increase usage by nearby residents who will appreciate the shaded seating areas, enhanced safety, and availability of basketball courts and other features.”

The rebuilt site also lends itself to the school’s many gatherings, helping create a sense of connection.



“We know that the more we host these types of events, the more our community feels at home in our space.”

Creating a vibrant neighbourhood, indoors.

PROJECT: Art for Everyone, 2018
ORGANIZATION: Brenda Strafford Foundation

Creating homey spaces is important for people living in hospitals and long-term care facilities. Too often, common spaces tend to be clinical looking, generic and impersonal. For many, especially those living with dementia in secured units, these areas become the neighbourhoods where they can engage in camaraderie and enjoy a sense of place. The Brenda Strafford Foundation brought placemaking techniques into their dementia care facilities to see if residents would reap the rewards of feeling more connected to a place by playing a key role in its design. Thinking of the therapeutic value and joy of art, they began a participatory mural project for lounges in two of their facilities. The project connected local artists with residents and their families, as well as staff and the wider community members



to discuss potential ideas. The artists then developed concepts, invited feedback, and led communal painting exercises that have already resulted in three large-scale murals. The first mural is a playful nature scene featuring mountains and wildlife – a familiar landscape for Calgarians. Cathering Laing, manager of fund development at the Brenda Strafford Foundation, said that the time shared with artists and community members as the murals were being planned and painted had a positive impact on many residents. “In long-term care settings, isolation is a big factor for people living with dementia,” Laing explains. “They don’t have commonalities to talk about. These murals are in spaces where people gather, and they have conversations about the art without it feeling forced.”



“These murals are in spaces where people gather, and they have conversations about the art without it feeling forced.”

Art sparks a light.



“People who were once isolated now have a common goal, purpose, and a strong sense of belonging.”

Isolation to belonging: a neighbourhood living room.

PROJECT: Southview Garden and Wellness Space, 2018
ORGANIZATIONS: Residents of Southview Calgary Housing and Mustard Seed Society

How do you get to know your neighbours when you live in a multi-family housing complex without a common space to gather? That was the challenge of Southview Calgary Housing residents – one they set out to address. A dozen residents held regular meetings with staff at Calgary Housing Company who encouraged

and embraced their ideas. A small green space across from the complex was selected as an ideal location for a “neighbourhood living room” for everyone to use. The group asked neighbours how they would use the space and designed it accordingly. To encourage interaction, furniture was arranged in a circle. On building day, neighbours who were physically unable to help were invited to cheer on volunteers and plant mini flower pots to bring home – everyone was made to feel a part of the new space. Residents, friends, and supporters built and stained picnic tables, benches, planters, and a wishing

well. They moved dirt, planted flowers, and set up a birdbath. They stewarded the grant money so carefully that they were able to make a last-minute addition: a bench made from leftover cedar that would also store the table umbrellas. The space is exactly as the resident leadership group had envisioned. Tenants make use of the area in their everyday life and as a venue for birthday parties and visits with their grandchildren. They also report making new friends as a result of the space and the process of having created it together. “People who were once isolated now have a common goal, purpose, and a strong sense of belonging. They are interacting and supporting each other in ways they never had before,” Calgary Housing Company tenant liaison, Susanna Shenfield says.

Love is love.

PROJECT: Indigenous Pride Parade, 2018

ORGANIZATION: Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth (USAY)



Being seen and accepted as your true self is what everyone longs for. Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth (USAY) provides a space for Indigenous LGBTQ2S+* youth to talk about their identity, share their experiences of both inclusion and exclusion, and find ways to use creativity for self-expression and community change.

For USAY executive director LeeAnne Ireland, community has an important role to play in modelling the spirit of inclusivity. “It’s not enough to say, ‘We don’t care, you’re welcome here like anyone else,’” she explains. “We do care that you are two-spirited, and we want you to actively participate in the community so you don’t feel invisible.”

USAY staffers including Chaz Prairie Chicken invited two-spirited youth to work together on a visibility project to help them feel acknowledged, included, and encouraged to participate



in both Indigenous and Queer communities. The Pride Parade, Calgary’s largest gathering of LGBTQ2S+ individuals and their allies, was a great starting point for the group. Youth worked with artists and Elders to develop the art, clothing, and music that created a strong Indigenous presence as they walked in the parade together. They also created an augmented-reality poster to explain the gender identity spectrum.

Ireland came away with two clear learnings from this project. The first is that the youth want to invite more people into the next project, especially their friends who serve as their natural supports in their everyday lives. The second is a feeling of hope.

As Ireland explains, “They could see themselves existing in both the LGBTQ community and the Indigenous community. ‘There will be a time when people love me for who I am and love me for who I love.’”

* The 2S stands for “two-spirit,” a term used by some Indigenous people to describe their gender, sexual, and/or spiritual identity.

Failing to talk about climate change fuels it.



PROJECT: Climate Conversations, 2019

ORGANIZATIONS: Calgary Climate Club and Sustainable Calgary

Conversations about climate change are powerful when they take place within neighbourhoods. At this hyperlocal level, people can support each other in identifying issues and solutions to take individually and collectively.

Drawing from emerging research about productive community engagement in climate change work, this project brings trusted experts into conversations with local people.

“We’re getting evidence that this is something that needs to take place in conversations, and it has to be between trusted messengers and individuals as well as our neighbours and friends. It’s about having powerful conversations about our worries, questions, and experiences,” says Joe Vipond, co-chair of the Calgary Climate Hub and key project lead.

Topics include electric cars, food security, permaculture, renewable energy, and urban planning. Each event is followed by a second session a few weeks later where residents discuss plans for community action to sustain hope in the face of climate change.



“It’s about having powerful conversations about our worries, questions, and experiences.”



Organizers plan to hold more Climate Conversations in conjunction with community associations across Calgary and to document the results. And while their focus may be small and localized, their ambition is not. Each conversation and action adds to the cause and every engaged neighbour or neighbourhood is a welcome addition.

Neighbour Grants Funding by Neighbourhood

2003-2019

The Neighbour Grants program has reached far into neighbourhoods and communities across our growing region. And we aren't done yet.

If your neighbourhood is in the red or peach zones, Neighbour Grants are available to you! Belonging is an ongoing effort in every community.

If your neighbourhood is in the green, orange or pink zones, you've got some great things going on in your area. Get in touch for more grants!

If you're not on this map, but are in the Calgary and area community, Neighbour Grants are for you too! (Banff, Canmore, Rocky View County, and the municipal districts of Big Horn, Foothills, Wheatland, Kananaskis, and surrounding First Nations communities.)

Page 27 features grassroots leaders from projects and groups who received a Neighbour Grant. (L to R): Janyce Konkin, Julie Black (staff), Francia Bodosa, John Panchol, and Abuk Alier



- 10+ projects
- 7-9 projects
- 3-6 projects
- 1-2 projects
- Communities with no Neighbour Grants yet



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