

Calgary Foundation Summer 2023

# spur



## Generosity in Action

Building a legacy  
of philanthropy

## Creative Connections

Supporting a vibrant arts  
and culture scene

## Green Dreams

Taking steps  
towards net-zero

# Reducing Barriers

Amelia Newbert connects 2SLGBTQIA+  
communities to the support they need





# Allyship

As we travel along the path of reconciliation and equity, we frequently bump into the word *allyship*. What exactly is meant by allyship?

- A** > Always centre those impacted
- L** > Listen and learn from those who live in oppression
- L** > Leverage your privilege
- Y** > Yield the floor\*

In everything I think, say and do, how can I be a better ally?

I can focus on building relationships based on trust. I can listen and learn how others who frequently face

\*ALLY acronym credit: @KaylaReed

discrimination are impacted by decisions our organization makes. I can stand authentically with those facing discrimination, in all its forms, in order to encourage positive change towards a more equitable world.

This issue of *spur* showcases the outstanding efforts of people and organizations that consistently work to address the inequities faced by many in our community.

You'll be introduced to three organizations – Skipping Stone, End of the Rainbow Foundation and Outlink – that serve, and advocate on behalf of, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. You'll discover three innovative arts organizations – One Voice Chorus, Inside Out Theatre and Calgary Animated Objects Society – that enable everyone to experience the arts by building safe and inclusive spaces.

You'll learn about The Summit, a new facility built to address the urgent mental health needs of young people. You will meet donors and volunteers whose contributions inspire our work at the Calgary Foundation. And you will discover what Alberta Ecotrust is doing to develop a local Green Economy Hub.

I hope these stories inspire allyship – it is meaningful work that requires flexibility as we learn and commit to doing better. As allies, we are in it for the long haul. ■

Eva Friesen  
President & CEO, Calgary Foundation

*In the spirit of reconciliation, the Calgary Foundation acknowledges 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.*



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**Safe Spaces > Supporting and advocating on behalf of Calgary's 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.**

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Calgary Foundation board member Narmin Ismail-Teja.

# Inclusion Matters

**Narmin Ismail-Teja helps make Calgary more inclusive and equitable**

By Lynda Sea • Photography by Erin Brooke Burns

**U**nderstanding the importance of belonging, Narmin Ismail-Teja has always supported newcomers and others. In her early 20s, Ismail-Teja was hired by what is now Calgary Sexual Health to provide sexuality and health education for newcomers and people with disabilities. When United Way requested its funded agencies work on “multicultural organizational change,” Ismail-Teja was asked to lead what’s now referred to as equity and inclusion work.

“I saw it as an opportunity to identify and address systemic barriers,” she recalls. “At that time, this work of diversity was being done by those experiencing inequity.” Since then, she’s witnessed evolution in equity work where many, especially those with privilege, now see their role as allies.

Ismail-Teja points out that it’s an ongoing collective journey that requires participation by everyone in strengthening our community.

In the mid-90s, Ismail-Teja started her own consulting firm, *impact@work inc.*, which offers training and consulting in equity, inclusion and leadership development in community spaces and workplaces.

“We have learned unconscious biases have often been built into our systems,” she says. “People want to do the right thing but just are not clear on how. I help organizations develop an approach to equity, inclusion and pluralism in a way that creates a space of belonging so we all can be

valued for our talents and not be judged because of the packaging we come in.”

Ismail-Teja is passionate about community-building. She immigrated to Canada with her family when she was nine. But she never uses the phrase “back home” to refer to East Africa. “Even though I was born elsewhere, Calgary is my home, it is where I have a sense of belonging and community,” she affirms. “As such, I feel I have a responsibility to continue to build and strengthen our community.”

She has served as a board member and chair for YMCA Calgary and Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, and currently serves as vice-chair of the board of trustees of the Canadian Museum of History. Three years ago, the Calgary Foundation approached her to join its Impact Investment Committee, which offers loans to community organizations and a year later, she was asked to join the board.

Now a member of the Governance Committee, she leads the board’s work on the Foundation’s racial equity statement. The document encapsulates the Foundation’s ongoing commitment to equity and inclusion work and was developed collaboratively in dialogue with stakeholders — staff, volunteers, donors and board members. “Where the work of equity and belonging starts to take life and have meaning is in how these influence conversations and decisions,” Ismail-Teja says.

Through the projects it supports, she says, the Calgary Foundation naturally takes a stance on issues and can influence systemic changes. The racial equity statement helps articulate that intent and guide the Foundation to build a more vibrant city that benefits all. ■

**“Doing the work to challenge inequity is about doing the right thing.”**

# Building a Legacy

Supporting the needs of community and shaping one family's tradition of giving

Story and photography by Jennifer Friesen

**A**fter serving as President of Western Electrical Management Ltd. for nearly 20 years, Ken Rickbeil and his wife, Frances, wanted to get more intentional about their philanthropic giving.

"We were acquiring enough wealth that we're saying, we need to do something with it — but what do we want to do?" recalls Ken.

Ken and Frances established the Rickbeil Family Fund at the Calgary Foundation in 2016 and have appointed their children as successor advisors. As Donor Advised Fundholders, they contribute a sum of money that is invested and managed by the Foundation to grow the capital of the Fund and increase the annual charitable disbursement.

Ken and Frances meet with their sons, Aaron and Todd, and their families, each year to thoughtfully consider which organizations they will support.

"The unique part of the Fund is that you have the capital of your Fund, and you get to give away some of the interest every year — over and over again," says Ken. "I think it's good for our kids and grandkids to see. They see they're making people happy, and it teaches good character."

Thanks to strong investment performance and regular contributions, the family Fund continues to grow while annually supporting community needs. Since being established in 2016, the Fund has granted a total of \$900,000 including nearly \$268,000 to support a variety of charitable organizations this past year.

Following their first grant to the Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids program, they received a letter detailing how the

lunches ensured no child went hungry.

"That program in particular made quite an impact on us," says Frances. "They were very explicit on how the funds were used and how many kids they fed. When you get responses like that and see how your money is impacting lives, it's amazing. You're not just putting a cheque in the mail and never hearing about it again. You see how it makes a difference."

By establishing this Fund, the Rickbeils are also creating a legacy for future generations of their family and helping to manage the transfer of wealth. Approximately 90 per cent of families lose generational wealth within three generations, but legacy planning through charitable giving is a vehicle to preserve that wealth for the benefit of the community and pass down family values.

Calgary Foundation also provides the Rickbeils with granting inspiration. Ken said it's been "a real eye-opener" to see the variety of charitable programming happening in the city.

Ken and Frances feel blessed to be able to share their legacy with future generations — a sentiment shared by their sons.

"Philanthropy was introduced to me by my mother and father," says Aaron. "It is an avenue to display which causes we believe in and leaves a lasting legacy for our family. Philanthropic succession planning is important to our family because we feel that values are not instilled with words or speeches. Actions are the best way to demonstrate the values of our family, namely empathy, caring and sharing." ■



“I think it's good for our kids and grandkids to see. They see they're making people happy, and it teaches good character.”

Ken Rickbeil

“It’s never the money that makes you happy. It’s what happens with it.”

—Al Osten



Al Osten (standing) and Buddy Victor playing the piano

# Sharing Good Fortune

The Osten-Victor Fund is one couple’s way of giving back

By Elizabeth Chorney-Booth • Photography by Jared Sych

Together, Al Osten and Buddy Victor have lived a life full of music and laughter. Now in their early 90s, the couple also have experienced good fortune, which they’ve generously shared with the communities and causes they’ve held dear for more than 50 years.

Osten and Victor met in the 1950s as members of The Rover Boys, an all-male singing group (or as Osten likes to call them, “a boy band”) credited with discovering Paul Anka. “We were in the business at the wrong time because boy bands now make a fortune!” Osten says with a hearty laugh and a twinkle in his eye.

Despite scoring a major hit with “Graduation Day” in 1956, the Rover Boys didn’t earn financial security. But in the late ‘60s, the pair took a chance bringing Weight Watchers franchises to Western Canada, a business that kept them very comfortable. Without children to inherit their assets, the two started building a legacy through philanthropy.

“When we sold Weight Watchers in 2013, we did a really good deal,” Osten explains. “That’s when the opportunities to give really began to happen.”

To effectively leverage their charitable donations, they set up two charitable Funds in their home province: the Osten-Victor Fund, overseen by Osten and administered by the Calgary Foundation, and the Victor-Osten Fund, overseen by Victor and administered by the Edmonton Community Foundation.

Their names figure prominently in both cities, appearing on the Osten and Victor Alberta Tennis Centre in Calgary

and on plaques at the Art Gallery of Alberta and Roozen Family Hospice Centre in Edmonton.

Osten says the decision to give was easy. They took care of their extended families’ needs and then supported community needs identified by a friend or Calgary Foundation representative, and charities that carry a personal connection.

In Calgary, recipients of the Osten-Victor Fund reflect

Osten’s dedication to the arts, Jewish heritage and empathy towards the city’s most vulnerable through organizations like Theatre Calgary, Jewish Family Services, One Voice Chorus Society, Inn from the Cold, the Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter (now FearIsNotLove) and many others.

Osten grew up with giving ingrained in him. “I come from a very poor family in Saskatchewan,” he says. “I never dreamt I’d have money to give to so many people. In the Jewish religion, there’s something called *tzedakah* where we’d drop coins in a box for donation. We always gave money to other people, even when we didn’t have any.”

Now, a long way from his modest roots, Osten lives with Victor in a beautiful apartment in downtown Calgary.

Osten still loves going to the theatre and dinners with friends, though Victor, who has Alzheimer’s, stays close to home with his caregivers. Osten faces his partner’s illness with good cheer and credits Victor’s ingenuity with setting them up in a position to put their generosity into action. “It’s never the money that makes you happy,” Osten says, flashing his contagious smile. “It’s what happens with it. And that’s what’s given me satisfaction.” ■



Osten with 1956 photo of Rover Boys



From left to right: Community leaders Amelia Newbert, Emma Ladouceur and Kelly Ernst

Regardless of ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, everyone deserves to live in a world free from discrimination.

Homophobia and transphobia have lasting harmful consequences.

Calgary Foundation is proud to support organizations that work tirelessly to support and advocate on behalf of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

by Amber McLinden (she/her) • Photography by Jared Sych (he/him)

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## Skipping Stone

**B**ooking a doctor's appointment or finding a place to purchase clothing are things most people don't give much thought to. But for transgender people, such tasks can be riddled with complications.

Enter Skipping Stone. Offering assistance such as peer mentoring or group programming, Skipping Stone connects trans and gender-diverse youth, adults and their families with trans-affirming legal, medical and mental health services. It also links people to income or housing supports.

"This world doesn't have a lot of space for trans and gender-diverse folks, and presents a lot of systemic barriers," says Amelia Newbert (she/her), director of communications and culture at Skipping Stone. "Our goal is to do the heavy lifting of navigating those barriers so that clients and community can focus on thriving as opposed to dredging through all these really harmful systems."



Transgender youth are 7.6 times more at risk of attempting suicide than cisgender youth.\*



A person's biological sex affects the kind of health care they receive, which presents many challenges for trans and gender-diverse people. From surgery to a hormone prescription, Skipping Stone makes connections to trans-affirming doctors who alleviate the painstaking process of navigating an often binary health-care system.

Newbert, together with co-founder, Lindsay Peace (she/her), came up with Skipping Stone to provide the kind of help that they found lacking while personally negotiating their way through various systems — experiences that can be fraught and dangerous for trans and gender-diverse people. Since its inception six years ago, the organization has supported more than 10,000 people across Alberta.

For Newbert, it's about connecting trans and gender-diverse people to the supports they need and deserve. "What really motivates me is being able to connect people to what they need to be their best, most authentic selves," says Newbert. "It's about not only showing them that it will be okay, it will be better than okay."

Learn more at [skippingstone.ca](https://skippingstone.ca).



“What really motivates me is being able to connect people to what they need to be their best, most authentic selves.”

—Amelia Newbert (she/her)

From left to right: Skipping Stone founders, Lindsay Peace and Amelia Newbert

### March 31

> **Transgender Day of Visibility**  
Celebrates transgender people by raising awareness of their struggles and triumphs.

### November 20

> **Transgender Day of Remembrance**  
Honours transgender, two-spirit and all gender-diverse lives lost to discriminatory violence.



## End of the Rainbow Foundation

Currently, nearly 70 countries criminalize consensual same-sex sexual relations between adults. For many queer and transgender individuals, it's almost impossible to obtain gender recognition, whether through access to affirming health services or something as simple as wearing the clothes they want. Many experience discrimination and loss of freedom, and are often victims of hate-motivated violence.

Kelly Ernst (any pronouns), president of the End of the Rainbow Foundation says, "Not only are they criminalized in a number of countries, but being identified as an 2SLGBTQIA+ person can be a death sentence."

It's what makes the work of the Calgary Rainbow Railroad Station, a project spearheaded by the End of the Rainbow Foundation, so important. The project helps individuals living abroad who face persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, escape harm. "In a great many cases, the people that we've moved, it's literally saved their lives," says Ernst.

Officially founded in 2017, End of the Rainbow Foundation's work includes facilitating the private sponsorship of 2SLGBTQIA+ refugees to Canada, specifically to Calgary. That involves helping with writing applications, creating sponsorship circles, and fundraising to cover the \$20,000 annual cost required for each application to be approved.

Alongside relocation services, End of the Rainbow Foundation collaborates with other organizations, including the Centre for Newcomers in Calgary to

“When we support newcomers over a period of time, they can truly set themselves up in the community and be successful and contribute back to the community.”

—Kelly Ernst (any pronouns)



provide support and services that help 2SLGBTQIA+ refugees get settled into their new homes. These partnerships build capacity to serve and provide better outcomes for shared clients.

The foundation also operates a donation centre in downtown Calgary, which assists any refugees in finding basic necessities such as clothes and furniture, including 1,400 newcomers in the past six months.

"It really is heart-wrenching to work with people that are persecuted

to such horrible degrees," says Ernst. But the results of their work inspire the team to keep going. "When we support newcomers over a period of time, they can truly set themselves up in the community and be successful and contribute back to the community," says Ernst. "That's our vision, that people, when they come here, will be contributing members of the society — that's really important to us."

Learn more at [endoftherainbow.ca](https://endoftherainbow.ca).



“It’s truly an honour to know that the work we’re doing is seen, appreciated, valued and wanted. And that people want to work with us and continue this work.”

—Emma Ladouceur (she/her)



From left to right: Outlink leaders Zak Dattadeen, Emma Ladouceur and Brie Vuong

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## Outlink

**A**s Calgary’s oldest 2SLGBTQIA+ service provider, Outlink is a one-stop shop for resources, information and connections within the city’s queer and transgender community networks.

Originally incorporated in 1984 as Gay Lines Calgary, Outlink’s roots date back to the 1970s through an organization called Gay Information and Resources Calgary that inspired several projects in the community. It is an integral part of Calgary’s 2SLGBTQIA+ history. “The thing that we do ultimately is connect community with community,” says Emma Ladouceur (she/her), Outlink’s director of operations and development.

Outlink provides one-on-one peer support, community groups, education, outreach and referrals to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and its allies. In addition, it can serve as a bridge, making connections to other resources ranging from affirming healthcare providers to social events. Outlink works with the entire community — from those just coming out to long-time community members to social workers and educators.

“Our community consistently shows up for us with volunteering, with donations, with all sorts of support,”

says Ladouceur. “It’s truly an honour to know that the work we’re doing is seen, appreciated, valued and wanted. And that people want to work with us and continue this work.”

Outlink continually engages with community members to ensure its services meet their needs. Recent feedback motivated Outlink to launch *You Matter*, a new phone, text and chat non-crisis peer support line for discussing gender identity, relationships, coming out, transitioning and sharing information on additional resources.

Outlink also launched a new peer support group and a mentorship program for racialized 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals and newcomers. Outlink volunteers receive training to assist newcomers, immigrants and refugees with creating community connections and accessing resources. To maximize its outreach and referral services, Outlink collaborates with other organizations including Centre for Newcomers and End of the Rainbow Foundation.

“I’ve seen firsthand how powerful community can be when we come together; when we look out for each other and hold each other in ways that this world isn’t always prepared to hold us,” says Ladouceur. “We can change lives in really profound, dramatic and big ways and also in little everyday moments.”

Learn more at [calgaryoutlink.ca](http://calgaryoutlink.ca).

## Learn the Letters: 2SLGBTQIA+

**2S** **Two Spirit.** A non-colonial term used by some Indigenous persons who identify with both masculine and feminine spirit to describe sexual orientation, gender identity or spiritual identity. To signify the importance of Indigenous communities, 2S is placed at the front of the 2SLGBTQIA+ acronym.

**L** **Lesbian.** Women attracted to other women (emotionally, romantically or physically).

**G** **Gay.** Anyone attracted to people of the same gender, but often used in reference to men.

**B** **Bisexual.** Anyone attracted to more than one gender.

**T** **Transgender.** Anyone who does not identify with the gender assigned at birth, including non-binary individuals.

**Q** **Queer.** Anyone rejecting labels of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. (Historically used as a slur, it’s now a positive or neutral identifier.)  
**Questioning.** Anyone exploring their sexuality or gender identity.

**I** **Intersex.** Anyone born with any of several sex characteristics that do not fit the binary.

**A** **Asexual.** Anyone who lacks sexual attraction to others.

**+** **Plus.** Any other gender and sexual orientation that may not be represented by the other letters.

**SOGIESC**  
Refers to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. Can include heterosexual and cisgender (anyone who identifies with their assigned gender at birth) individuals. ■



## Why Pronouns Matter

Pronouns are an important way to affirm and welcome gender-diverse individuals. Not making assumptions by using people’s chosen pronouns demonstrates respect for all gender identities.

# Resilience and Hope

Meeting the urgent mental health needs of young people

By Janice Francey

Mental health is the single-largest health problem facing young people today. With one in five Canadian children and teenagers struggling with issues such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders and schizophrenia, the need for services places demands on an already overburdened health system.

If left untreated, mental illness can lead to chronic health issues, joblessness, housing and food insecurity, with consequences that impact our health and justice systems.

Through a partnership with Alberta Health Services, the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation and generous donors, Calgary's first purpose-built mental health centre recently opened to provide kids, teens and families with greater access to timely assessments, intervention and therapy.

The Summit: Marian & Jim Sinneave Centre for Youth Resilience was named to honour Marian and her late husband Jim's commitment to community well-being by providing philanthropic support to organizations like the

Alberta Children's Hospital, facilitated by the Calgary Foundation.

"With thoughtful intent and compassion, it was important to the Sinneaves that this gift be truly transformational," says Eva Friesen, president and CEO of Calgary Foundation.

In a community-based, less-institutional setting, The Summit provides three new resources: the Owerko Family Walk-In Clinic, Tallman Family Treatment Services and the Ptarmigan Day Hospital, and is expected to help about 8,000 young people and their families every year.

- ➔ **Owerko Family Walk-In Clinic**  
Offers no-cost mental health support in a single session on a walk-in basis.
- ➔ **Tallman Family Treatment Services**  
Provides a step-up approach to treat escalating symptoms with a goal of preventing hospitalization.
- ➔ **Ptarmigan Day Hospital**  
Enables a gradual shift from around-the-clock care to eight to ten hours of daily intensive therapy.

**“With thoughtful intent and compassion, it was important to the Sinneaves that this gift be truly transformational.”**

—Eva Friesen, president and CEO of Calgary Foundation



The name The Summit reflects the journey and challenge of navigating mental health and encourages young people to seek help.

These services will help young people and families to better identify, develop treatment plans for and manage mental health issues before they escalate into crises.

In partnership with the University of Calgary, The Summit will also be one of the most research-intensive mental health facilities for young people in Canada with capacity to develop, test and refine new clinical interventions.

"By providing crucial new services and undertaking research, The Summit will greatly impact the lives of young people struggling with serious and urgent mental health needs, as early as possible," says Friesen. ■

➔ Learn more at [albertahealthservices.ca/summit](https://albertahealthservices.ca/summit).

# Working Towards a Net-Zero Future

Power of partnership to address Alberta's environmental challenges

By Karen Durrie • Photography by Erin Brooke Burns

Sometimes, great partnerships spring from the most unlikely of pairings. Such was the genesis of Alberta Ecotrust, which arose from conversations in the early 1990s between Rob Macintosh, the founder and initial leader of the Pembina Institute — a non-profit think tank advocating for clean energy — and Michael Robertson, then senior director of environment and safety at Petro-Canada. The unexpected allies discussed the increasing environmental concern in Alberta due to its growing industrial footprint and rising population.

“These two gentlemen realized they had a lot of shared values in terms of protecting the environment, and there needed to be a place where corporations and environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could work together and act as a trust fund for community-based environmental projects,” says Rod Ruff, vice-president of Alberta Ecotrust.

## Fostering cooperation

Since launching in 1992, the Alberta Ecotrust Foundation has built collaborative relationships with businesses from all sectors, government, and the non-profit and charitable sector, raising money annually from the corporate sector to support environmental initiatives. Primarily known as a grantmaker and capacity builder, the foundation has provided more than \$16 million to more than 800 projects.

Perhaps Alberta Ecotrust's biggest accomplishment is right in its name — building trust and decreasing polarization between environmental organizations and corporations. “Ecotrust's unique governance model and approach have achieved that objective. We do see a high degree of cooperation between environmental organizations and corporations in Alberta, which is unlike other jurisdictions,” Ruff affirms.

With Canada's commitment to the global goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, the foundation is looking for solutions toward a more sustainable future. “We've a huge role to play with respect to social innovation,” he says. To this end, it has hosted three social innovation labs. Project Blue Thumb was the first social lab in Canada focused on water quality issues, the Better Housing Lab discussed improving the environmental performance of affordable housing and the Taking Stock Lab tackled environmental policy and decision making in Alberta.

## Helping cities go low-carbon

In December of 2020, Alberta Ecotrust received federal funding for a \$40 million endowment and launched the Climate Innovation Fund as part of the Low Carbon Cities Canada initiative. The fund aims to accelerate urban climate solutions in Calgary and Edmonton by identifying, investing in and scaling up climate-positive interventions.

The foundation will preserve the endowment in perpetuity by keeping the principal intact while using the income from investments. It also aims to match the endowment within the next 10 years through corporate sponsorship and private donors.

Additionally, this summer, Ecotrust will launch the Green Economy Calgary Hub pilot project, offering local businesses an affordable way to learn about and participate in the low-carbon economy. The three-year,



Rod Ruff fly fishing along the Bow River in Fish Creek Provincial Park.

\$700,000 project includes \$125,000 from a Calgary Foundation grant along with contributions from the Climate Innovation Fund, Natural Resources Canada and the City of Calgary.

The pilot will operate on the model set out by Green Economy Canada, a national non-profit focused on accelerating Canada's transition to a net-zero future. A callout will be made for 30 local businesses to participate in the Green Economy Hub. They'll each pay a sliding-scale membership fee to access a support team that helps them understand their current greenhouse gas emissions and assists in developing a customized action plan to track and meet their own targets in reducing their carbon footprints.

Participating companies, which will become “green economy leaders,” will receive tailored strategies that align with their businesses and the opportunity to work with and learn from the other participants. The hub will address challenges businesses face in becoming more environmentally sustainable, including adequate knowledge, capacity, money and buy-in.

The pilot will demonstrate how much of a sustainable difference can be made by only a few and how that impact can grow exponentially when everyone gets on board. “When these businesses make this commitment to measure, reduce and report on their environmental impacts, they're going to raise the bar for all businesses to take action on sustainability here in Calgary,” says Ruff. ■

“We do see a high degree of cooperation between environmental organizations and corporations in Alberta, which is unlike other jurisdictions.”

Learn more at [albertaecotrust.com](http://albertaecotrust.com).

# Unity Through the Arts

**Bringing vibrancy and belonging to communities**

by Michaela Ream

Calgary Foundation's 2022 Quality of Life survey found that 62 per cent of Calgarians believe a strong arts and culture scene is key to creating a vibrant city. A flourishing arts and culture sector increases livability, encourages economic growth and tourism, and creates opportunities to experience, appreciate and connect with other perspectives and cultures. Here's a look at three innovative arts groups proudly supported by Calgary Foundation.

The cast of *100 Years of Darkness* (Deaf Arts); inset from top: Riki Entz and Maxime Beaugard in *Oh Clare*; Lara Schmitz, Karen Johnson Diamond and VIA participant, (VIA program); audience members at Relaxed Performance (Good Host Program)



## Inside Out Theatre

Founded in 1993 by artist Ruth Bieber, the Inside Out Theatre company was created for people living with disabilities to find community, connection and self-expression. Bieber, who is blind, initially worked in rehabilitation and theatre before incor-

porating the therapeutic power of the arts into her role as Inside Out's artistic director for 17 years. Today, the theatre company carries on her torch, producing and presenting plays that demonstrate the vibrancy of the Deaf, Disability and Mad culture and communities.





**“To have a project where everyone’s needs are taken seriously, and people are comfortable asking for what they need, was an accomplishment that we’re incredibly proud of.”** —Col Cseke

Mad culture or Mad Pride refers to people living with mental illness who often self-describe themselves as psychiatric survivors.

“Like other marginalized groups, Mad artists treat this as a reclaimed word,” explains Col Cseke, artistic and executive director of Inside Out Theatre. “Where previously Mad — or crazy, nuts, insane — had been used against them, now they’ve taken back the word with a sense of pride and to celebrate the unique way their minds work.”

Inside Out offers community programs that focus on using theatre and other art forms to bring people together to celebrate self-expression and find a place of belonging. The Village Improv for Alzheimer’s Club brings an innovative and arts-focused approach to providing care for people living with dementia; community programs offer a chance to learn, create and perform together in class settings; and the Deaf arts program showcases work by Deaf artists.

The diversity of the Inside Out Theatre extends beyond the artists; it’s also about welcoming art lovers and audiences from all walks of life. “With the Good Host program, we work to make theatre accessible, welcoming and enjoyable for audience members across the arts community,” says Cseke.

The Good Host program partners with local theatre companies and arts groups to facilitate accessible performances during regular run shows. This season, Inside Out plans to partner with 20 companies to host more than 70 accessible events, including ASL-in-

terpreted shows, live audio-described nights for Blind and visually impaired audiences, and relaxed performances for those with sensory concerns, people living with dementia or even parents with small children.

In 2022, the theatre company hosted its first big production since the pandemic began with the “Oh Clare” Accessible Community Celebration. The project helped bridge gaps, meet critical needs and support all sectors serving the community. Together with Springboard Performance, and ANANDAM, a Toronto-based arts organization, Inside Out hosted a circus takeover of Eau Claire Market.

“With the 13-person cast, we brought in people and experiences from just about all the communities we work with, including Deaf performers, Blind performers, Autistic people, dancers in wheelchairs, people living with chronic illness, and some amazing dancers and performers we at Inside Out Theatre hadn’t connected with at all before,” says Cseke.

The performance combined dance, aerial movement and circus performances to explore participation in public space, accessibility and how to collectively share spaces together.

“To see how this group of artists really grew together was amazing,” says Cseke. “To have a project where everyone’s needs are taken seriously, and people are comfortable asking for what they need, was an accomplishment that we’re incredibly proud of.”

 [Learn more at insideouttheatre.com.](https://www.insideouttheatre.com)



## Calgary Animated Objects Society



Puppets can transcend language, culture and age. The Calgary Animated Objects Society

(CAOS) capitalizes on this universal appeal, building community around the shared love for puppetry, masks, animated objects and, of course, fun.

“Fun is a big part of creating community,” says Xstine Cook, artistic director and founder of CAOS. “CAOS is dedicated to inspiring acts of radical creativity through the art of masks, puppetry and animated objects. We make live shows, movies, school residencies and unexplainable things.”

For the past 20 years, CAOS has built community through art by “inviting people into artistic processes and leaving judgment at the door,” says Cook. “CAOS teaches, creates, produces, presents and provides opportunities for people to experience the ancient arts of mask and puppetry in a welcoming, team-oriented space. Humans are storytellers, and masks and puppetry are some of humans’ oldest storytelling tools.”



**“Humans are storytellers, and masks and puppetry are some of humans’ oldest storytelling tools.”** —Xstine Cook



Left: A collection of Xstine Cook’s masks, photographed by Sean Dennie; Elk mask modelled by Kat Hansen; inset from top: Xstine Cook, Dolly Wiggler Cabaret, CAOS Blackfoot Language Animation, teaching mask making, Lilly in the Lab

Each year, CAOS hosts a range of projects, including the Dolly Wiggler Cabaret, which invites artists to create short-form pieces using masks and puppetry for an adult audience; Lilly in the Lab, an innovative scavenger hunt through an augmented reality app; and

the Disinformation Warriors, an online and in-classroom program developed during the pandemic to help middle-school students understand and identify disinformation. In 2020, CAOS and Blackfoot Language teacher Celestine Twigg

teamed up to create the Blackfoot Language Animated Project using a *Sesame Street*-approach of creating short animations to illustrate and teach Blackfoot words and concepts. Before founding CAOS, Cook co-founded the Green Fools Theatre





Spirit of White Buffalo sculpture

>>

and helped write, direct, perform, produce and create masks and puppets for the company for 13 years. When she founded CAOS, it was an opportunity to pursue the multidisciplinary aspect of her creative spirit.

"People ask, 'Why Calgary?' as a puppet epi-centre. I think Calgary embraces an entrepreneurial ethos in a way other places don't," says Cook. "There aren't really schools. It's largely self-taught, and you will need all an entrepreneur's creativity, tenacity and hustle to realize your artistic goals."

A year after CAOS began, the inaugural Festival of Animated Objects (FAO) was held in Calgary. FAO began as a celebration of masks, puppets and all things animated, and has since grown into a presentation of live shows, screenings, exhibitions and workshops by international and local artists, and presented to enthusiastic audiences every March.

In 2007, CAOS made a splash during the annual Calgary Stampede Parade with a giant 12-foot-tall kinetic

sculpture of a white buffalo mounted on a four-person bicycle. Known as Spirit of White Buffalo, the sculpture was inspired by the Lakota story of White Buffalo Calf Woman, which Cook explains is a sacred teaching about choosing a path of unity with beings on the earth. True to its symbolic meaning, the structure was built with the help of inmates from the Drumheller Institution, bike fanatics, a sculptor, a dancer, Wandering Spirit Native Awareness, pipe carrier Jack Van Hazendonk and many others. Spirit of White Buffalo won Best Western Theme and went on to tour Alberta parades, festivals and powwows.

Today, CAOS continues to concoct creative projects and share stories as a means of connection and community building.

"Puppetry is not just for kids anymore," says Cook. "People enjoy the imagination and creativity that goes into it. Mask and puppetry transport you into a child-like state of wonder."

Learn more at [animatedobjects.ca](http://animatedobjects.ca).



## One Voice Chorus



One Voice Chorus (OVC), a mixed choir for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit and queer singers and their cisgender allies, creates a safe space for its members through music.

"Choir is a team sport, and building trust and camaraderie is critical not only in providing a safe space but in creating musical experiences that are more impactful for both the choristers and our audience," says Cass Bessette, artistic director of OVC.

What began with four singers quickly grew to what OVC is today, with between 30 to 40 singers who share stories through song and create brave spaces for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and its allies. Jane Perry founded OVC in 2011 after moving to Calgary with her partner and learning that the city didn't have an all-voice queer choir.

In 2017, OVC embarked on a journey into truth and reconciliation, culminating in the collaborative concert, *Bridges*. The concert told the story of reconciliation and brought musicians from non-Indigenous and Indigenous backgrounds together in an evening dedicated to learning and community building. The concert featured local Indigenous guest artists and speakers Dwight Farahat, Michelle Robinson, Evans Yellow Old Woman and Chantal Chagnon, who focused on how non-Indigenous

"Choir is a team sport, and building trust and camaraderie is critical not only in providing a safe space but in creating musical experiences that are more impactful for both the choristers and our audience." —Cass Bessette



OVC's most recent concert, *The Great Clear Twilight* with Cass Bessette and the choir

Indigenous Canadians can be good allies to their Indigenous neighbours.

The experience, says Bessette, sparked the formal creation of OVC's Reconciliation & Relations Collective, which now meets every season to share knowledge, listen to one another and find ways to make the choir even more inclusive. At the end of its 10th season in 2020, despite the upheaval brought on by the pandemic, OVC continued its reconciliation work through a workshop series and online presentations about awareness, best

practices and how to support Indigenous peoples. OVC also worked with Gabe Calderón, a two-spirit author and poet, to create a unique Land Acknowledgement that represents OVC's commitment to truth and reconciliation.

OVC is undertaking more important work through its Music Bridges Community: Projecting Calgary's 2SLGBTQIA+ Voice in the Community project. This initiative will honour its commitment to truth and reconciliation and anti-racism to become a more inclusive and welcoming space for

everyone — a place where anyone can come and feel safe to be themselves.

"The word 'fearless' gets tossed around a lot in our community. While I appreciate what people mean when they use this word, I don't feel it's the best choice," says Bessette. "It's normal to feel afraid — I'm scared all the time, every day of my life, and the more I care, the stronger that fear is. So, my advice is to not let fear control you. Instead of being fearless, be brave." ■

Learn more at [onevoicechorus.ca](http://onevoicechorus.ca).

“All it takes is one person with an idea, and the stamina and the determination to see it through.”

—Carla Cumming Sojonky



# Lasting Support

**Charitable Organization Endowment Funds provide security and sustainability**

By Jennifer Friesen • Photography by George Webber

In the spring of 2005, Carla Cumming Sojonky and her husband, Frank Sojonky, took their beloved rescued German shorthair pointers to visit Bow River Veterinary Centre in Canmore.

Their vet, Dr. Dave Brace, was on the board of the Bow Valley SPCA (BVSPCA), which was fundraising to build a shelter. When Frank asked about the progress, they learned it was slow despite community support.

On the drive home, Frank looked at Carla and said, “You know, we really should do something to help.”

“That’s a terrific idea,” she replied.

Later that day, unbeknownst to Carla, Frank made a \$100,000 donation to the shelter, naming the building The Carla Cumming Sojonky Adoption Centre.

This marked the beginning of the couple’s longstanding and continuing support of the BVSPCA. Though Frank passed away in 2012, Carla carries on the couple’s support for the charity and other philanthropic endeavours.

In 2020, with the support of Ed Mrozek, treasurer of BVSPCA, Carla seeded a Charitable Organization Endowment Fund, administered by the Calgary Foundation, with \$20,000 to create a protected source of income for BVSPCA’s operations.

“The immediate result was the creation of a permanent endowment that will help ensure the long-term success of the Bow Valley SPCA,” she says. “And it’s going to help a no-kill adoption centre for dogs and cats.” Carla hopes that others will be encouraged to donate, which will build additional capital in the Fund, increasing the annual distribution to BVSPCA.

Endowment funds are established by charities to provide a secure annual source of income in perpetuity. Having this security helps organizations with long-term sustainability.



Left: Carla Cumming Sojonky with her dog Pixie. Above: The Bow Valley SPCA’s building, The Carla Cumming Sojonky Adoption Centre

Long an advocate for animal welfare, Carla also supports the Canadian Animal Task Force (CATF). The charity holds free on-site clinics, offering examinations, spaying and neutering services, tattoos, vaccinations and deworming services.

“Animal charities are often ignored and forgotten,” says Carla. “Unfortunately, as times get tougher economically for people, they become even more critical for animals. Animal surrenders increase, health care spending goes down, and abandonment goes up.”

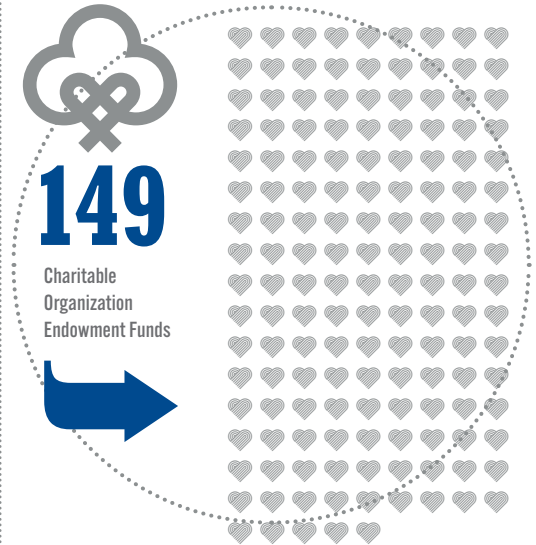
In 2021, Carla provided an additional \$20,000 to seed the CATF Charitable Endowment Fund at the Calgary Foundation, to foster a continuous source of income for the charity. “I really believe that endowment funds are important to responsible fiscal management,” she says. “I keep repeating to people that endowment funds are forever.”

“Carla’s generous contribution has created an opportunity to better support the sustainability of our organization and further our mission of helping both people and their animals,” says RJ Bailot, executive director of CATF.

“All it takes is one person with an idea, and the stamina and the determination to see it through,” says Carla. “You may not raise a million dollars, but you may raise \$1,000 or \$5,000. And if you’re careful about picking and choosing the charity, that donation can last. That’s a legacy, isn’t it?”

## Capacity Building

CALGARY FOUNDATION currently administers Charitable Organization Endowment Funds on behalf of 149 charities, a number that increases annually as organizations seek a trustworthy investment option to build legacies.



Allison Schulz, vice-president of capacity building at the Calgary Foundation, says these endowment funds are especially important in today’s economy. “Organizations are trying to fund their programs when philanthropic support can be unpredictable,” she explains. “To have an annual amount of money coming from an endowment Fund that can be used for programming, staffing or light bulbs – that’s a really great way to create sustainable revenue.”

Calgary Foundation also helps organizations access new sources of funding through incentive programs like Canadian Heritage’s Canada’s Cultural Investment Fund. To support arts organizations, the government provides matching funds – up to one dollar for every dollar raised from private donors – to create endowment Funds or to increase existing ones.

“We work with donors to make contributions to endowment funds held at Calgary Foundation; matching funds from this federal government program can be leveraged to grow the capital in a fund at a faster pace, which supports their long-term stability,” says Schulz. ■

For more information, contact [aschulz@calgaryfoundation.org](mailto:aschulz@calgaryfoundation.org).



“Everything we do is to help kids and their families feel like they belong to a larger community.”

Jean Claude Munyezamu, founder of Umoja Community Mosaic, at the Genesis Centre running the drop-in soccer program.

# Little Pieces, Big Impact

Umoja Community Mosaic weaves a warm welcome

By Elizabeth Chorney-Booth • Photography by Erin Brooke Burns

A sense of belonging is often developed through a series of small, seemingly insignificant gestures and connections. For racialized newcomers to Canada, those gestures might include access to familiar foods with a deep cultural significance, borrowed laptops to help facilitate video calls with family overseas or even a simple game of soccer in a public park. Umoja Community Mosaic specializes in taking small actions to build a larger picture of connectivity for youth and families who may otherwise find themselves feeling isolated and struggling to plant roots.

Founder and executive director Jean Claude Munyezamu started what would become Umoja Community Mosaic in 2010 as the Soccer Without Boundaries drop-in sports program. Munyezamu, who immigrated from Rwanda in 1998 and knows firsthand how difficult fitting into a new country can be, saw unrest among kids in his Calgary neighbourhood. He wanted desperately to help get them on the right track by giving them something to feel a part of. Recognizing that soccer can be a universal language, Munyezamu launched the program

to engage youth while simultaneously planting seeds of community ownership and belonging.

A decade later, when the pandemic hit, low-income and immigrant populations were disproportionately affected by the isolation and economic upheaval that came with it. Munyezamu knew that Soccer Without Boundaries had to transform into something bigger — that's when Umoja Community Mosaic was born, a fitting name as *umoja* means unity in Swahili. “We learned during the pandemic that human-to-human contact is very important in these communities,” he says.

On top of addressing the needs of kids stuck at home who had previously relied on school and the soccer program for socialization, and those with language and cultural barriers to understand and stay up to date on public health information, Umoja Community Mosaic now faced food security as a pressing issue. Accessing food banks is especially difficult for immigrants who are single parents with young children. Those who could get there often found themselves with bags of unfamiliar ingredients that offered little comfort. Munyezamu and his volunteers jumped into action, putting

together culturally specific food hampers for families who needed them.

At the peak of the pandemic, Umoja provided 1,000 families from different parts of Africa, South America, Mexico, the Philippines and other countries with food hampers stocked with products they knew, purchased from local specialty food stores. Even as pandemic restrictions eased, the need did not disappear — with rising food costs, Umoja continues to provide hampers to around 700 families, mostly referred via word-of-mouth or through kids participating in the soccer program.

“Food is an important part of culture and human existence,” Munyezamu says. “When we deliver people food they're familiar with but may not be expecting, they often cry. Food is part of belonging. If you cannot find the food that you recognize and find comfort in, it is very hard to feel like you belong.”

All of which is what ultimately drives Umoja Community Mosaic — using small pieces like soccer and food to create a larger mosaic of belonging. The organization has opened new hubs in Edgemont and Deer Run to complement its headquarters in Glenbrook. Its free indoor soccer programs run at the Genesis Centre and Foothills Alliance Church, plus there's an all-girls program in the southwest quadrant of the city. Add to that, it offers after-school programs, tutoring and mental health support. All of this in an effort to create a grassroots movement to empower people to find or invent their place in Calgary.

“We try to catch people before they fall,” Munyezamu says. “Everything we do is to help kids and their families feel like they belong to a larger community.” ■

Learn more at [umojamosaic.org](https://umojamosaic.org).





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